

## Book Reviews

important study and obligatory reading for anyone looking at portraits of doctors and scientists.

**Christopher Lawrence,**

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**Julie V Hansen and Suzanne Porter,** *The physician's art: representations of art and medicine*, Durham, NC, Duke University Medical Center Library and Duke University Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 141, illus., £37.00 (hardback 0-9672946-0-6), £19.95 (paperback 0-9672946-1-4).

*The physician's art* is the catalogue of an exhibition of over 100 images and other objects from the collections of four North Carolina medical schools. In a finely-judged Preface, structured around specific examples shown, Martin Kemp points out some of the historical issues involved in the study of medical imagery and artifacts, beginning with the problem of what "realism" means in the context of anatomical illustration. "No image ever exists within a purely neutral field, no matter how hard its originators may think they are trying." Kemp argues for the central interest of the "period style", or "look"; by attending to *how* things are represented (or decorated), as well as *what* is represented, we are better able to appreciate the political, professional, and philosophical currents that gave the "social fields" of production their dynamism, and grant the art its active, not merely illustrative, participation within the fields. Inevitably, some of this subtlety is then discarded in Hansen and Porter's catalogue entries, which, covering as they do a very wide historical and geographical range, cannot assume much knowledge on the reader's part: they have to explain a lot, and do so neatly if not infallibly. That (cat. 17) on Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), for example, seems uncertain whether

acknowledging the book as a "thinly disguised offering to . . . King James" (meaning Charles) disqualifies it from a similarly active rôle in subsequent anatomical investigations, but the royal interest scarcely hurt the scientific cause in the lively social field that was Restoration England.

The exhibition was organized in five categories: 'Art and anatomy', 'The surgical arts', 'The doctor's practice', 'Obstetrics and gynecology', and 'Non-western medicine'. Such categories cannot, of course, be definitive or mutually exclusive, but the rationales for this organization (or for the ordering of exhibits within it) are not immediately clear from the catalogue: an English domestic medicine cabinet (c. 1830), for example, appears as part of the "doctor's practice", though one might think it a testimony to lay practice. A section devoted to childbirth makes sense given the ingenuity historically devoted to demonstrating its mechanisms, but by implication obscures pregnancy's prominence in representations elsewhere in the show—we begin to suspect that, like the BaKongo of the Congo (cat. 54), Europeans are ritually inclined to classify medical concerns two ways, into reproductive ones, and the rest. Such speculations are prompted by an elegantly designed and beautifully illustrated catalogue; but catalogues cannot be read as free-standing studies might.

**Christine Stevenson,**  
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**Michael J A Howe,** *Genius explained*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. ix, 221, £35.00, \$54.00 (hardback 0-521-64018-0), £12.95, \$19.95 (paperback 0-521-64968-4).

In this ambitiously-titled book, Michael Howe takes on one of the great unanswered, perhaps unanswerable,