

Reactions to the Collections: Albrecht Dürer's Response to Viewing Aztec Gold (1520)

Abstract

In this diary entry, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) expresses his fascination with a wondrous collection that he viewed while visiting Brussels—an assortment of objects and clothing brought back from the “new land of gold” (Mexico). While he mentions the foreignness of these objects, he does not elaborate further, leaving the us-them distinction implied and subordinate to the feelings of wonder and curiosity evoked by the objects.

Source

27. August 1520

[...] At Brussels is a very splendid town hall, large and covered with beautiful carved stonework, and it has a noble, open tower. [...] I saw the things which have been brought to the King from the new land of gold, a sun all of gold a whole fathom broad, and a moon all of silver of the same size, also two rooms full of armor of the people there, and all manner of wondrous weapons of theirs, harness and darts, very strange clothing, beds, and all kinds of wonderful objects of human use, much better worth seeing than prodigies [myths, fairy tales]. These things were all so precious that they are valued at 100,000 florins [guilders] All the days of my life I have seen nothing that caused my heart to rejoice as much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art, and I marveled at the subtle *ingenia* [character] of men in foreign lands. Indeed, I cannot express all that I thought there. [...]

Source of English translation: Albrecht Dürer, *Diary of His Journey to the Netherlands, 1520-1521*. Introduction by J.-A. Goris & G. Marlier. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971, pp. 53–54.

Source of original German text: Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß. Autobiographische Schriften; Briefwechsel; Dichtungen; Beischriften, Notizen und Gutachten; Zeugnisse zum persönlichen Leben*. Berlin: Deutsche Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1956, p. 155. Available online at: <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/rupprich1956bd1/0161/image>

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