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Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture (Radical Perspectives)

By Lara Kriegel



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With this richly illustrated history of industrial design reform in nineteenth-century Britain, Lara Kriegel demonstrates that preoccupations with trade, labor, and manufacture lay at the heart of debates about cultural institutions during the Victorian era. Through aesthetic reform, Victorians sought to redress the inferiority of British crafts in comparison to those made on the continent and in the colonies. Declaring a crisis of design and workmanship among the British laboring classes, reformers pioneered schools of design, copyright protections, and spectacular displays of industrial and imperial wares, most notably the Great Exhibition of 1851. Their efforts culminated with the establishment of the South Kensington Museum, predecessor to the Victoria and Albert Museum, which stands today as home to the world's foremost collection of the decorative and applied arts. Kriegel's identification of the significant links between markets and museums, and between economics and aesthetics, amounts to a rethinking of Victorian cultural formation.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, including museum guidebooks, design manuals, illustrated newspapers, pattern books, and government reports, Kriegel brings to life the many Victorians who claimed a stake in aesthetic reform during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The aspiring artists who attended the Government School of Design, the embattled provincial printers who sought a strengthened industrial copyright, the exhibition-going millions who visited the Crystal Palace, the lower-middle-class consumers who learned new principles of taste in metropolitan museums, and the working men of London who critiqued the city's art and design collections—all are cast by Kriegel as leading cultural actors of their day. *Grand Designs* shows how these Victorians vied to upend aesthetic hierarchies in an imperial age and, in the process, to refashion London's public culture.



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Editorial Review

Review

“For those nostalgic for the days when imperialism reigned and the museum was not yet a domineering manifestation, Kriegel’s book casts an interdisciplinary perspective onto the enlightened richness of Victorian design while sidestepping more traditional interpretations that once held these industrial products to be merely rashly conceived and poorly executed.” - Jennifer Ferng, *Leonardo*

“[A]n ambitious, important book that studies the design reform movement of the mid-nineteenth century, giving special attention to questions of industry and labor. . . . [T]horough and imaginatively conceived.” - Kate Hill, *Victorian Studies*

“In this fascinating interdisciplinary study, Lara Kriegel has woven strands of nineteenth-century economic theory, design history, social developments, and cultural events into a richly textured portrayal of how aesthetics were contemplated and manipulated by various audiences. . . . In a well-written, engaging narrative that flows easily among the various disciplines that inform this study, Kriegel has produced a significant and substantive addition to the literature on nineteenth-century design. The content will be intriguing to scholars of design, social/cultural history, and economic history.” - Marilyn Casto, *Enterprise and Society*

“[A] bold and focused monograph. The book is a successful grand design itself, as the author buries for the foreseeable future myths about Victorian indifference to the many facets of creating and displaying the beautiful and useful, and its attendant association of the nineteenth century with ugly melodramatic statues and equally hideous painted iron bridges. . . . [An] artfully illustrated and skillfully researched study. . . .” - Peter H. Hoffenberg, *American Historical Review*

“The book is well illustrated and is an excellent addition to both historical studies of design and social histories of labour?two worlds that rarely intersect in academic discourses but have been made to do so with wonderful deftness by Kreigel.” - Deepika Ahlawat, *Journal of Design History*

“Kriegel’s *Grand Designs* is an important addition to the study of museums as they developed and operated culturally in the nineteenth century. . . . The great triumph of the book is to take seriously the mid-Victorian reformers’ concern to improve the labouring and artisanal classes through education and to examine the means by which they undertook this task.” - Bruce Robertson, *Social History*

“Lara Kriegel has produced a sparkling narrative which presents a new story about the emergence of mid-Victorian design in which laboring men and their allies take center stage, and also a new way of thinking about the property of skill, a theme which has been central to labor history. *Grand Designs* is written with real zing. Kriegel combines fascinating detail with an important (yet lightly worn) theoretical perspective

which challenges the current orthodoxy.”—**Anna Clark**, author of *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*

“Too often, debates about design reform, about artisan and fine art education, and about the development of museums, have been allowed to stand as separate narratives. The brilliance of Lara Kriegel’s account lies in her use of new evidence to synthesize these separate stories into a broad cultural history, locating them all in relation to the development of market capitalism. *Grand Designs* will change not only the way we think about industrial design and education but also the way we teach British cultural history and art history.”—**Tim Barringer**, author of *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain*

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From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Lara Kriegel is Associate Professor of History at Florida International University.

Users Review

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Jessica Kelly:

This Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture (Radical Perspectives) usually are reliable for you who want to be considered a successful person, why. The key reason why of this Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture (Radical Perspectives) can be among the great books you must have will be giving you more than just simple looking at food but feed anyone with information that might be will shock your prior knowledge. This book is definitely handy, you can bring it all over the place and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed kinds. Beside that this Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture (Radical Perspectives) forcing you to have an enormous of experience like rich vocabulary, giving you test of critical thinking that we understand it useful in your day activity. So , let's have it and enjoy reading.

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