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Wydział Filologiczny

Kleur. Colours of Maastricht. Maastricht 2018.
Team Programma & Innovatie,
Gemeente Maastricht (eds.)
(published in Dutch and English, paperback, 116 pp.)

From June 2 to November 18, 2018, three cultural institutions of the municipality of Maastricht (Limburg province, the Netherlands), co-operated in order to develop a joint exhibition on the theme of colour (*kleur* in Dutch), both in nature and in present-day society. These institutions are Centre Céramique (municipal library, cultural heritage, and archaeology), Natuurhistorisch Museum Maastricht (geology, palaeontology, and biology) and Kumulus (music, dance, creative writing, theatre and more). A range of colours, background photographs and captions were used for both the Dutch and English versions of the book to reflect diversity in the concept and interpretation of colour(s). From the start, the main idea was to present collections held by these three institutions in a totally different way and, in doing so, to strengthen the ties between them.

Naturally, the question “What is colour?” is a good starting point. Particles, waves, sunlight, visible light, ultraviolet (and beyond), infrared (and beyond) and how light is experienced are all explained in the introductory part of this booklet. The next portion, on biology, focuses on eyes and eye structure (rods and cones and chromacy) and how our brains deal with this input. In addition,



the difference between light and pigment is outlined, presenting various types of pigment and distinguishing these from structural colours, such as are seen in beetles and butterflies. Next are interaction (between plants and animals), body function (determining colours), reproduction, camouflage, deterrence, and mimicry, all illustrated by typical examples from present-day nature that everyone can relate to.

The next chapter present “fossil colours”, first explaining pigments and their preservation in extinct animals and plants (biochemical fossils) and then outlining whether or not original colour and pigments patterns in fossils can be reconstructed. Examples are taken from a wide range of prehistoric birds (feathers!), dinosaurs, fish and mammals, but also invertebrates such as beetles and molluscs of various types. To stay close to home, and to the type area of the Maastrichtian Stage (72.1-66 million years ago; www.stratigraphy.org), examples from amongst molluscs (oysters), echinoderms and crustaceans are selected to illustrate the (rare) preservation of colour markings. Also considered is the countershading of mosasaurid squamates (reptiles), the apex predator in the subtropical seas during the Late Cretaceous, and the rather dull dark back and light belly of the animals, where one might have expected bright colours instead.

The next section, on archaeology, outlines Roman coloured glass (green, blue), pottery (terra sigillata, terra rubra and varnished pottery) and lists also gold, silver, copper and amber. Industrially manufactured ceramics and glass are considered in the one-but-final section of the book, with boerenbont, Maastricht blue, and Bellefroid amongst plates, cups and saucers and other ceramic products. All home turf, and close to the heart. The bibliography section, finally, lists and illustrates a number of 15th- to 18th-century-books held in Centre Céramique with hand-coloured images of flowers and fruits, animals, battlefields, and parading troops.

In conclusion: a picture is worth a thousand words, and a coloured one even a million.

Postscript:

in case of interest in this publication, please contact museum@maastricht.nl