The experience of war, "mediated by images" was the subject of the 2009 Houston exhibition from which this catalog is derived. James Clifton, Director of the Blaffer Foundation, and Leslie Scattone, Assistant Curator, drew on the Foundation’s holdings to present seventy prints from the era that witnessed as many as sixty conflicts in each of three centuries among (and within) European powers. Seismic struggles between empires and dynasties can be tracked in the Blaffer holdings. Allegories of war and peace face pages bearing portraits of historical figures who worked concretely one or the other. In the catalogue, Clifton considers the "paradigm for viewing” and notes how violence within the images is “implied, potential, or past.” Scattone offers an opening frame on the relationship between art and war. Larry Silver is the ideal author of an essay and entries on soldiers and soldierly life in the 16th century. Emine Fetvaci keeps readers mindful of how pictures informed by the "Muslim Ottoman empire as nemesis to Christian Hapsburg empire.”

The array of prints includes semi-documentary records of battles, fortifications, weaponry, vignettes of military life (and soldiers’ effect on the citizenry), commercial opportunities in wartime, and early conferences on peace. Prints of topics like jousting, record “both the chaos and pageantry.” Callot’s Miseries and Misfortunes of War and Goya’s Disasters of War will be familiar. The tone is largely pessimistic, but satire and sardonic amusement come to fore in some. Only two out of the seventy are reproductive prints; the book constitutes a study of the variety of technique within these few media.

Kant writes that the “natural state among men” is one not of peace but of war. Whatever the truth or usefulness of his observation, the Houston exhibition and catalogue represents an example of high curatorial professionalism. Clifton led eight contributing authors through a collection wisely developed and assembled, then thoughtfully exhibited and explained. They wrestled meaning out of a small but focused portfolio, and brought imagination to presenting objects and their ideas in an elegant format.

The useful bibliography may be tilted to Anglo-American, but most of the images are taken from Central Europe. As prints (chiefly engravings and etchings, with a sprinkling of lithographs and an aquatint and woodcut), the images lend themselves well to reproduction—though no one should confuse the illustrations with handpress-printed sheets. The book blazes a path for more study, and will find an audience among students of European, military, and art history—as well as practitioners, one hopes, of diplomacy.

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