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Linda King and Elaine Sisson’s edition of thirteen new scholarly essays addresses Irish design’s sometimes-fraught relationship with twentieth-century modernism. The book brings together work by an authoritative group of visual culture scholars from diverse academic disciplines to investigate how Irish visual culture both reflected and influenced the development of Ireland as an independent state in the twentieth century.

The free state’s impact on twentieth-century Irish design and vice versa is something just beginning to be studied and described in design history. Modernism in Ireland has been examined much more widely in literary studies (the recent Irish Modernism in the Reimagining Ireland series (Peter Lang, 2010), for instance, explores similar themes with some material culture but mainly from the more usual textual perspective). Here, King and Sisson’s book contains several essays on graphic design that examine politics via book covers, posters, and advertising, and generally fewer investigations into other traditional design fields like furniture, fashion, and industrial design, although there is one chapter on the Kilkenny Design Workshops. Instead of including work on well-documented instances of Irish modern design (such as the designer and architect Eileen Gray), Ireland, Design and Visual Culture concentrates on newer avenues of material culture research: new coinage, street parades, and Irish Catholic memorial cards. The international modernist influence in Ireland, a more familiar theme, is also covered in essays on theater design in the 1920s (for the German Expressionist influence) and later—twentieth-century architecture (for the American modern influence).

The book itself, a nicely produced hardcover with jacket, can also be seen as an example of the international design’s community’s influence in Ireland today. Some might find the bright, neon-orange-on-white layout distracting or difficult to read; others will appreciate this aspect as part of the book’s overall high-concept design, which was created for Cork U.P. by the design firm Atelier David Smith. Depending on their subjects, some essays are more heavily illustrated than others, but the illustrations included in the volume are all high quality images produced in full color and easy to study in the book’s generous 9½” x 7” trim size.

Ireland, Design and Visual Culture will best serve advanced visual/material culture scholars; it is not a general or introductory-level text, and a basic understanding of Irish political history will also aid its readers. There is a detailed bibliography and supporting notes section, and an extensive index. Although art museum or general fine arts libraries may not find it an essential purchase, this title proves a welcome addition to the multi-disciplinary fields of material culture, design, and Irish studies, and is strongly recommended for all academic libraries that support history of design programs and visual or material culture departments.

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