

## BOOK REVIEW

### **SHOW PEOPLE PAINTED**

A Catalogue of 18th and 19th Century Paintings  
Depicting Magic Lantern and Peepshow Performers

*Mike Smith*

LMH Smith, 2019

Hardback, 108 pages (£30)

A companion volume to *Show People Sculpted* (see TML 11), this is another superbly illustrated book bringing together, for the first time, known paintings of itinerant magic lantern and peepshow performers. Most date from the 18th and 19th centuries although there are a few 20th- and one 17th-century examples. Many are from Mike Smith's own collection and others from public and private collections including those of Dick Balzer, Jacques Prenez, John Townsend and the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Italy.

In his fascinating introduction David Robinson makes the point that these paintings – particularly those from the 18th century – mark a social and cultural revolution, depicting the time when detailed and coloured images reached the great majority of people, not just the privileged few. Before the show people took their peepshows and lanterns on the road, most of the population had only seen images in church windows and on inn signs. This began to change in the 17th century with cheaper printed books ('chapbooks'), the development of peepshows and finally magic lanterns. Judging from the paintings the shows were very popular, although one painting shows a rival street entertainment – the 'Punch and Judy' show – also drawing the crowds.

Another clear theme emerging from the book is the extent to which artists copied, or even cheekily plagiarised, other artists' images in this area. In the book the pictures derived from the same source are carefully grouped and whenever possible the earliest is identified. Perhaps the best known example is Edmé Bouchardon's 1737 depiction of a female lanternist with a musical box from *Études Prises dans le Bas Peuple ou Les Cris de Paris* ('Studies of the Lower Classes or the Cries of Paris') (see TML 16, p.1) – but ironically she is also the only female lanternist so far found in this medium. Another example is *Der Guckkastenmann* by French artist Nicolas Lancret (1690-1743), a student of Watteau, showing a group of women viewing a peepshow. Copies from the 18th and 19th centuries are shown



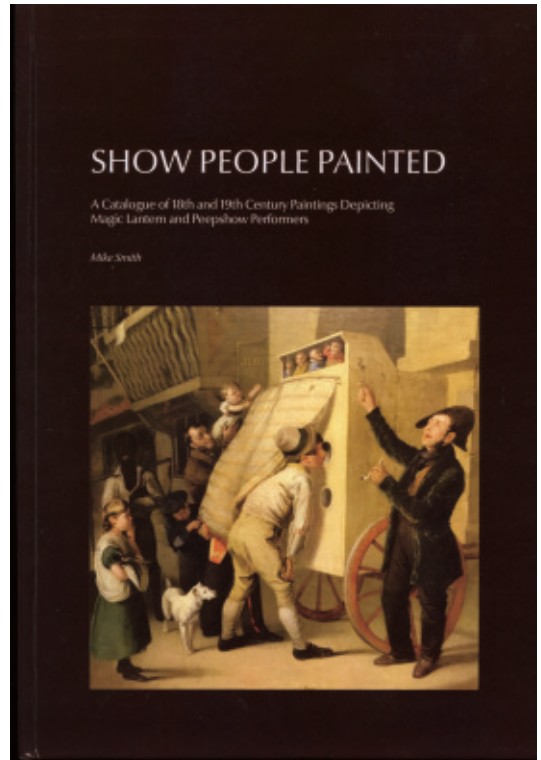
*Boy with magic lantern by Jans Josef Horemans the Elder (1682-1759), c.1740, copy of a Jacques-François Delyen painting from the 1730s*

alongside the original. In another group, just the showman and his peepshow from a street scene called *The Peepshow* by British artist Joshua Cristall (1767-1847) appear in two very similar studies by Charles T. Gale in the 1890s and Henry Gillard Glindoni around 1900.

Thanks to a noteworthy piece of research the peepshow presenter shown on the book cover has been identified. The painting was restored after being found in Stourbridge Library (West Midlands of England) in a poor state. A label on the back and an 1837 survey revealed that the showman was Joseph Shallcross, landlord of the Foley Arms and a well-known local character. This is one of a number of useful and interesting descriptions and explanations included throughout the catalogue. Wherever possible dates and attributions are also included as well as information about the painting itself.

Most of the paintings are by artists from mainland Europe and the UK, with a few from the USA, two from China and even one from Vietnam – these last three are painted on rice paper and from the Dick Balzer collection. At the end of the book Mike has included depictions of some other image shows, such as shadow puppets and optical instruments like the camera obscura.

The book contains over 130 full colour images, some showing detail from larger canvasses and 'busy' street scenes. The price represents very good value for this quantity and quality of reproduction. Mike's own collection has been photographed by Carol Morrison and the book has been expertly designed and produced by Dennis Crompton. The price is £30.00 which includes post and packing to anywhere worldwide. You can order direct from Mike Smith only, by email to kime1944@gmail.com.



*La Lanterne Magique by Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre (French, 1714-1789), c.1750*



*Peepshow with peg-leg showman – no further details known*