



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

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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