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Review of: Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience by Kathryn R. Barush

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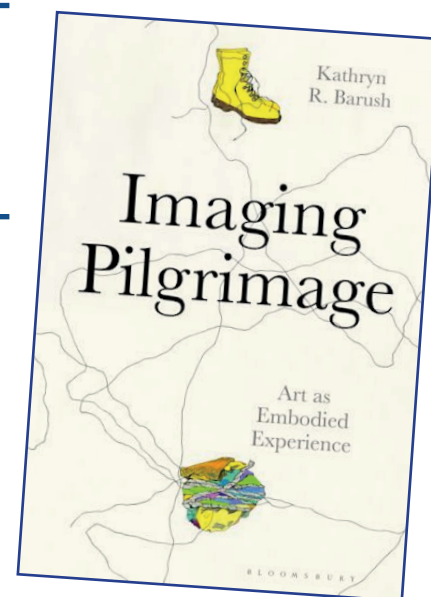
Review of: *Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience*

Barush, K.R. (2021) *Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience*, Bloomsbury, London. 261 + xiv pages, £88 (Hardback) ISBN 978-1-5013-3501-3.

Barush has achieved a wonderful synthesis of interdisciplinary investigation and observation to provide a commentary to carefully chosen ‘journeys’ of places and in the minds of religious travellers. I think the approach and style of the volume are pretty well unique. This book follows on from her earlier (2016) *Art and the Sacred Journey in Britain, 1790-1850* (Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travel and Tourism).

Overall, this is a remarkable book and I believe it will stand out in the field for many years to come. Indeed, there can be few academic books which take the reader from Gerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, to William Blake, to Joseph of Arimathea and much more. Perhaps even more of a feat is that the text keeps a sense of logic and coherence throughout. The journey mixes visions of history and historical accounts with a vibrant insight into contemporary Christian pilgrimage, imaged through the lens of the artist. The result is an intriguing and informative travelogue to demonstrate the rich connections between poetry, literature, song, image, people, and their places. Delving deep into current and past practices of pilgrim journeys, of objects, and special, sacred places, Barush explores connections and connectivity in time, space, and the psyche with, for example, ‘virtual’ explorations of real sacred places but removed to a new locale and experienced or shared in that place.

The author introduces us to the founders and mission of the British Pilgrimage Trust; leading the way to re-visit historic and sacred landscapes today and the places associated with seminal artists and writers from the past. Guided by pilgrim routes and re-visioned maps from the past, the reader connects with matters of Celtic spirituality but also for instance, with the power of the experience of visiting William Blake’s home at Felpham. Journeys experienced mix those seeking spirituality, Christian pilgrims, and non-believers simply interested in history and heritage, and more. Exploring Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’



(set to music by Sir Hubert Parry in the early twentieth century) but through lens of rewilding provides a very eco-contemporary context to the discussions.

Furthermore, the book comes at a time of perhaps unprecedented global crises, worries, and concerns. The writing resonates with complex inter-related issues of worldwide ecological disruption, of pandemics, and of human conflicts. The book reads as if the author is taking you on a journey of discovery of what I would describe as the ‘eco-cultural’ world – the complexity of human existence inter-meshed with nature and our own histories. In doing this, the volume helps draw the history and heritage of ‘ritual’ into a modern and contemporary context but with an eco-critical eye both observing and questioning. The whole approach is highly refreshing and it succeeds in establishing and developing the relevance of pilgrimage to a thoroughly modern sense of being.

Barush explains that ‘Rewilding can be understood as both a returning of a cultivated environment to its natural state, or, more broadly, as a returning to ancestral ways through remembrance and a return to the senses’. This is a fascinating, thoughtful, and thought-provoking text particularly when considering song, poetry, and landscape in the round. I heartily recommend this volume to interested readers but, as always, many will wish to await a low-costs paperback edition! Also, at the price of £88 for the hardback edition, I do think the author and the readers deserve a little bit of colour imagery.

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