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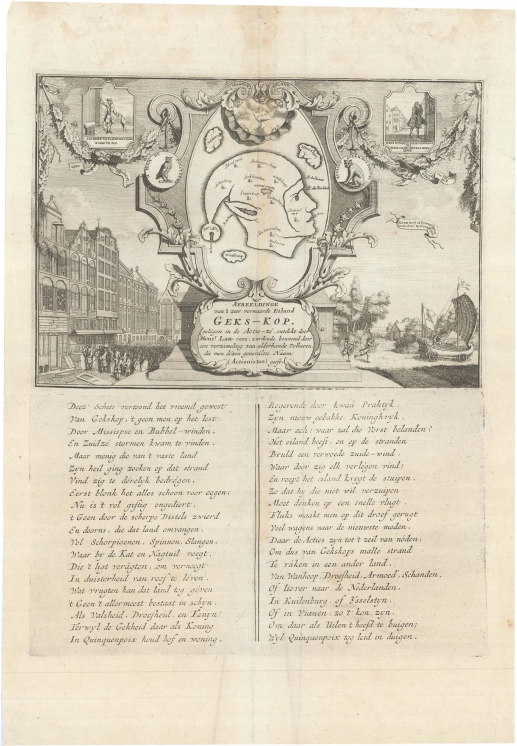

A satirical map on the Mississippi Bubble

Anonymous.
Afbeeldinge Van't Zeer Vermaarde Eiland Geks-Kop.

Amsterdam, 1720, 290 x 230mm.

£700

A map of the island of 'Geks-Kop' (fools cap) from 'Het Groote Tafereel Der Dwaasheid' (The Great Mirror Of Folly). The title translates as 'A representation of the very famous island of Mad-head, lying in the sea of shares, discovered by Mr. Law-rens, and inhabited by a collection of all kinds of people, to whom are given the general name shareholders'. At the centre of the image is a map of an island depicted as the head of a Fool wearing his traditional cap; the place names include Blind Fort, Bubble River, and Mad House, surrounded by the islets of Poverty, Sorrow, and Despair. Around the map are scenes including a crowd stoning the headquarters of the Compagnie and a creditor fleeing his investors in a land-yacht. This satirical engraving of the Mississippi Bubble is one of the most famous cartographic curiosities. It represents the collapse of the French Compagnie de la Louisiane d'Occident, founded by the Scottish financier John Law in 1717, which was granted control of Louisiana. Its plans to exploit the resources of the region (the 'Mississippi Scheme') captured the popular imagination and people rushed to invest: share prices opened at 500 livres, but rapidly rose to 18,000 livres. At this point speculators indulged in profit-taking, causing a run on the shares. Confidence collapsed, causing a run on the company's capital and the company went bankrupt, ruining many, not only in France, but throughout Europe.

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As a consequence of this failure, confidence in many colonial schemes collapsed, forcing many companies into bankruptcy, including the English South Sea Company and a number in the Netherlands, prompting this satire.

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