



The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat

By Martin Kemp

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In this pathbreaking and richly illustrated book, Martin Kemp examines the major optically oriented examples of artistic theory and practice from Brunelleschi's invention of perspective and its exploitation by Leonardo and Durer to the beginnings of photography. In a discussion of color theory, Kemp traces two main traditions of color science: the Aristotelian tradition of primary colors and Newton's prismatic theory that influenced Runge, Turner, and Seurat. His monumental book not only adds to our understanding of a large group of individual works of art but also provides valuable information for all those interested in the interaction between science and art.

"This beautifully made volume . . . shows us the unity of the visual study of nature—the exalted mutual task of Renaissance science and art."—*Scientific American*

"[A] wonderful book. . . . Martin Kemp has convincingly demonstrated that even the most diverse styles of Western art from the Renaissance to modern times remained ever enthralled by scientific optics. . . . [A] handsome volume."—Samuel Y. Edgerton, *American Scientist*

"An extraordinarily ambitious, even daring, enterprise. . . . The book leaves us in no doubt about its author's expertise in both fields. It includes the most comprehensive account of the development of perspective theory and practice I know."—Thomas Puttfarcken, *Times Higher Education Supplement*

"Kemp has performed a valuable service. . . . His style is lucid and he emerges as an honest broker who judiciously weighs the historical evidence. He has an impressive command of the literature of both art and optical science across much of Europe and over a span of four centuries. . . . Kemp's thesis is amply illustrated with several hundred plates, including many of his own line drawings. . . . The reader is led gently through the history of art and the details of optical science to appreciate their interrelationship."—Geoffrey Cantor, *Oxford Art Journal*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a volume filled with some 570 illustrations, Kemp discusses European painters' imitation of nature through the sciences of perspective and color.

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From Library Journal

This work, one of the most lucidly written art history books in recent memory, addresses a topic of inherent complexity and great recent interest. Kemp (Univ. of St. Andrews), who has written on Leonardo, discusses perspective and optic theories as they related to the central problem of European painting for half a millennium, the verisimilar depiction of nature. The first part of the book discusses perspective theory and practice and the use of devices that led toward photography. In the second part, Kemp explores optic theories derived from Aristotle and from Newton and their theoretical and practical impacts on painting. The only minor cavil is the unclear order of the select bibliography; otherwise, this is a superb and thoughtful book, with a level of writing to which few can aspire. Highly recommended for general as well as special collections.

- *Jack Perry Brown, Ryerson & Burnham Libs . , Art Inst. of Chicago*

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From the Back Cover

For almost five hundred years the central goal of European painting was the imitation of nature. Many artist and theorists, believing that imitation must be based on scientific principles, found inspiration or guidance in two branches of optics--the geometrical science of perspective and the physical science of colour. In this pathbreaking and highly illustrated book Martin Kemp examines the major optically orientated examples of artistic theory and practice from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.

Users Review

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Bernard McLaren:

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