

Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip: Kunst und Theorie des Helldunkels 1300–1550. Claudia Lehmann, Norberto Gramaccini, Johannes Rößler, and Thomas Dittelbach, eds.
Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018. 426 pp. \$80.99.

It is a truism that European art saw an advancement of techniques to create the illusion of three-dimensionality in two-dimensional media over the course of the late medieval and Renaissance periods. One of these techniques, often tied to the era's focus on natural observation and its scientific development in the field of optics, is what we now term *chiaroscuro*, the contrast of light and dark that serves to model forms on a flat surface. But is naturalistic representation for its own sake the only reason an artist during this era would explore the possibilities of light and dark and the spaces between? This volume, the proceedings of a conference held in Bern in 2016, investigates that question not by focusing on the metaphysical and symbolic associations of light versus dark, but by approaching *chiaroscuro* as evidence of theoretical considerations and by analyzing its aesthetic effectiveness.

Claudia Lehmann argues in her introductory essay that *chiaroscuro* operates as a paradox: while its use is especially suited for imitating other materials and creating a vivid sense of presence, such mimesis concurrently alienates the viewer, producing a disquiet that stems from the intermedial confusion between three-dimensionality and two-dimensionality. "It is between these coordinates that *chiaroscuro* delivers a work of art the viewer is able to aesthetically perceive and appreciate" (39), Lehmann writes, and it is likewise between these coordinates that the book's individual articles situate themselves.

The eighteen essays that follow Lehmann's introduction—which gives an overview of the historical meaning of the term *chiaroscuro* during this time period, and provides synopses of the individual articles in the book—cover topics overwhelmingly sourced from Western European art. (One essay briefly considers Italian painting of the early Trecento and its Byzantine forerunners before focusing on lighting effects in Chinese painting produced before about 1300—a fascinating excursion but one that nonetheless seems somewhat out of place among the other contributions.) Most are essentially case studies of artworks or treatises that foreground light and dark as a key aesthetic component. Eleven of the entries are in German, seven are in English, and one is in French. Since all the articles presuppose thorough familiarity with the artistic conventions of the era, this volume is primarily intended for scholars of late medieval and Renaissance art history, although upper-level undergraduates and graduate students in art history would also find certain essays useful.

The book is organized around four themes; this is explained in the introduction but is not self-evident from the table of contents. The first section looks at grisaille artworks and the second at the contexts of *chiaroscuro* and *rilievo* (meaning both relief sculpture and the illusion of relief on a two-dimensional surface) examined through contemporary

art historical writings. The graphic arts are the focus of the third part of the book, particularly how they relate to other media such as painting and sculpture. The volume concludes with three essays on the use of chiaroscuro in mural painting. There are eighty-six black-and-white illustrations printed alongside the essays, and thirty-five color plates in an appendix. Given the subject matter under discussion, the black-and-white reproductions can occasionally hinder a complete understanding of some of the arguments, especially when the contrast of monochrome and color constitutes crucial visual evidence (such as Jean Pucelle's pairing of grisaille figures with brightly colored backgrounds in the *Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux*). For the most part the authors attempt to overcome this limitation by including detailed descriptions in the text, and especially inquisitive readers will be able to find color images of most of the artworks fairly easily on the internet.

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The Art of Sculpture in Fifteenth-Century Italy. Amy R. Bloch and Daniel M. Zolli, eds.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiv + 444 pp. \$99.99.

After thinking about Italian fifteenth-century sculpture for more than five decades, what I most want to do is to get inside the heads of sculptors as they listened to patrons and as their vision evolved. I want to better understand their daily lives and the movements of their hands as they manipulated their media, minute by minute. This book of twenty essays brought me closer to this admittedly unattainable goal.

The editors set out to create a volume that would treat Italian fifteenth-century sculpture “comprehensively,” encompassing “works created throughout the peninsula, key materials, and practice” (ix). The essays fulfill the latter expectations while simultaneously demonstrating that the range of Italian fifteenth-century sculpture is so great and the creativity of its patrons and practitioners so impressive that no single volume could be comprehensive. Bloch and Zolli’s introduction hints at the inexhaustible variety of sculpture produced during this period.

The emphasis on materials and process brought me closer to my goal with, for example, essays by Yvonne Elet on stucco, Lauren Jacobi on bronze techniques, Catherine Kupiec on della Robbia glazes, Lorenzo Buonanno on “Sculptural Audacity.” In addition to fulfilling patrons’ needs and acquiring tools and materials, sculptors must also have worried about unmaking. Studying the precious remains of antiquity reminded sculptors of the fragility of all sculptural media and the cruelty of history. Ghiberti wrote poignantly of the German artist Gusmin’s dismay when he “saw his work unmade [disfare]” (136). The potential of damage must always have been in