

Chapter 4 considers Rembrandt's corpus of landscape drawings in the context of the gentlemanly recreational practice of making plein air sketches that often served as records of the private retreat (*otium*) obtained from escapes from the pressures of commercial life (*negotium*). In Rembrandt's oeuvre, landscape drawings thus occupy a discrete category outside the bonds of the commercial market and constitute a sort of "symbolic capital" (356) for their recipients because they left the artist's hand as gifts.

Chapter 5 delves into Vermeer's visually and poetically complex painting practice via the analogy between the connoisseur's love of art and the Petrarchan conceit of the (heterosexual) male pursuit of the elusive female beloved. Zell argues that this recasting of collecting as desire played an important role in Vermeer's relationship with his long-time patrons, the couple Pieter Claesz van Ruijven and Maria de Knuijt, whose support enabled him to paint at his own slower pace and innovate in his choice of subjects. This practice is contrasted with the production of *fijnschilders* such as Gerrit Dou, who, while successful, calculated their prices by time, produced many more works, and invested many more hours into completing them.

Zell effectively describes a network of belonging and mutual respect designed to draw together likeminded lovers of art and validate their knowledge and status. In his descriptions of this panoply of artistic relationships, Zell raises fascinating and ongoing questions about what constitutes a gift in Dutch artistic and elite circles of the time and demonstrates the highly nuanced, fruitful thinking this new direction enables. As such, this book encourages a broader reconsideration of the various contexts in which artworks hold value, by whom they are valued, and why.

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Sculptural Seeing: Relief, Optics, and the Rise of Perspective in Medieval Italy.
Christopher R. Lakey.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018. xii + 226 pp. \$75.

Sculptural Seeing will be welcomed by medievalists across disciplines. Analyzing a select number of questions in the light of material history, medieval science, optics, and Augustinian theology, it will contribute to further interdisciplinary explorations of relief sculpture as a historically specific genre. Richly illustrated, Lakey's book opens new opportunities for integrating these histories with integral issues of time, chronology, and successions of form and style.

The author focuses on examples from Duecento to Quattrocento Italy (North and Central), especially the famous Pisa and Pistoia pulpits by Giovanni and Nicola Pisano, and sculpted programs on the cathedrals of Ferrara and Modena, with further examples from Aosta, Fidenza, and Verona. "Relief, Optics, and Medieval Perspective" introduces

the five chapters, presenting a new definition of “Embodied Seeing” (including Augustine’s theory of three visions and discussions of medieval science’s approaches to vision and cognition) and “The Iconology of Sight.” Visual analysis is set into relationships with crucial texts, e.g., Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, commentaries on Aristotle by Albertus Magnus and Aquinas, and Alhacen’s *De aspectibus*. The chapters on “The Geometry of Vision” and “Optical Aesthetics and the Problem of Looking Right” are followed by a more experimental exploration of a wider variety of material objects and media. Finally, the author traces later art theory right up to Alberti (“Words for Relief [*Rilievo*]”); however, this important section seems too short to fully explore the selected artworks and monuments with their extensive bibliographies.

Lakey’s illuminating descriptive survey of medieval sculptures reconstructs some of the viewing conditions of surviving *in situ* architectural relief sculpture. The author further engages his chosen sculptural reliefs with contemporary painterly solutions to issues of spatial organization, scale, figural conditions, perspective, and relief in wall painting. Lakey does not simply shift perspective (as defined by Panofsky, with Dürer) earlier on a conventional timeline. Nor does he merely confirm the nature of perspective as a development (Damisch); or simply retrace some of the more distant philosophical stakes of relief (from Herder to Merleau-Ponty). He instead models a multilayered approach that fully explores his chosen objects’ intended viewing conditions. His case studies demonstrate how much Romanesque and Gothic works benefit from a similarly careful descriptive integration. Starting with the Modena facade program by Wiligelmus, the strength of Lakey’s analysis is particularly palpable in the trajectory of chapters 2, 3, and 4, which host a series of less well-studied works, all presented in a dialogue with relevant manuscript sources.

Many of the ways in which medieval relief supports or undermines perspective with its own properties and potential have been obscured by the overwhelming impact of Adolf Hildebrand’s *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst* (1893) and his preoccupation with classical reliefs (and his own neo-classical production). Remedies were provided (but not always fully appreciated) in works by Adrian Stokes, John Pope-Hennessy, and Michael Podro, among others. The spatial and perceptual complexities of medieval and Renaissance relief have since received increasingly more nuanced attention since, including innovative approaches by Whitney Davis, Geraldine Johnson, Jacqueline Jung, Luca Palozzi, David Summers, and others.

With its focus on medieval conditions of making and seeing, Lakey’s project positions itself in the context of a new generation in sculpture studies that interweaves the layers of contemporary evidence—archaeological, architectural, contextual, textual, visual, and theoretical—to answer distinctly modern questions. Naturally, this wide panorama includes theological iconology and political iconographies. In this way the book contributes to the many future answers that scholarship will have to provide in response to the big challenge of Hubert Damisch’s account of the origin of perspective as involving “a whole perceptual, sensory body of previous knowledge, from which it constructed a new departure” (Yve-Alain Bois et al, “A Conversation with Hubert Damisch,” *October* 85 [1998]: 5f).

With its select, narrowly focused set of questions and examples, the book offers important new case studies to exemplify how this new departure began generations before the typically cited moment in early Quattrocento Florence.

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The Absent Image: Lacunae in Medieval Books. Elina Gertsman.
University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. xx + 232 pp. \$124.95.

This is, as the author says in her acknowledgements, a book about nothing. This book is really about the concept of nothing and is more specifically about the potential of blank space to be a site of meaning-making. The central claim of the book—that spaces of nothingness in medieval books are deeply implicated in intersecting discussions of mathematics, theology, philosophy, and material culture—is compelling.

Gertsman argues that scholars have concentrated for too long on the teeming mass of presence (sometimes called *horror vacui*) in medieval books, and that this preoccupation has led us to miss the potentially profound meaning of blank space, broadly defined here as spaces outlined but not completed, erased images, or the literal absence of material, as in holes cut into the parchment. In taking this capacious view of emptiness, Gertsman argues that these visual lacunae are not simply evidence of incompleteness, deficiencies, or accidents of material history but rather are sites of inherent meaning, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their creation and existence. As such, these blank spaces have profound implications for the interpretation of medieval books.

Unfolding over four chapters bookended by an introduction and a coda, Gertsman explores many possible readings of emptiness pinned to several primary case studies, organized roughly chronologically from the late thirteenth through the late fifteenth centuries. Each example serves to explore the ways in which visual gaps could prompt readers to participate in the creation of a text's meaning. The book's first chapter situates lacunae in the context of late medieval conceptions of nothingness, especially the thirteenth-century developments in theology and mathematics that fashioned nothingness as tangible ideas, including the development (and deep discomfort with) the mathematical notion of zero. This chapter is a particularly strongly argued and multifaceted examination of a particular empty space: a curiously and conspicuously uninhabited roundel in a large initial *I* otherwise packed with Creation images that begins Genesis in the late thirteenth-century Kaisheim Bible (Munich BSB, Cod. lat. 28169, fol. 51). Its "aniconic" nature (3), in Gertsman's hands, becomes a site for richly layered meaning, drawing on thirteenth-century debates of Aristotelian philosophy and questions of divine creation from nothingness (*ex nihilo*). This framed emptiness thus becomes a presence, a way of representing the very idea of nothingness.