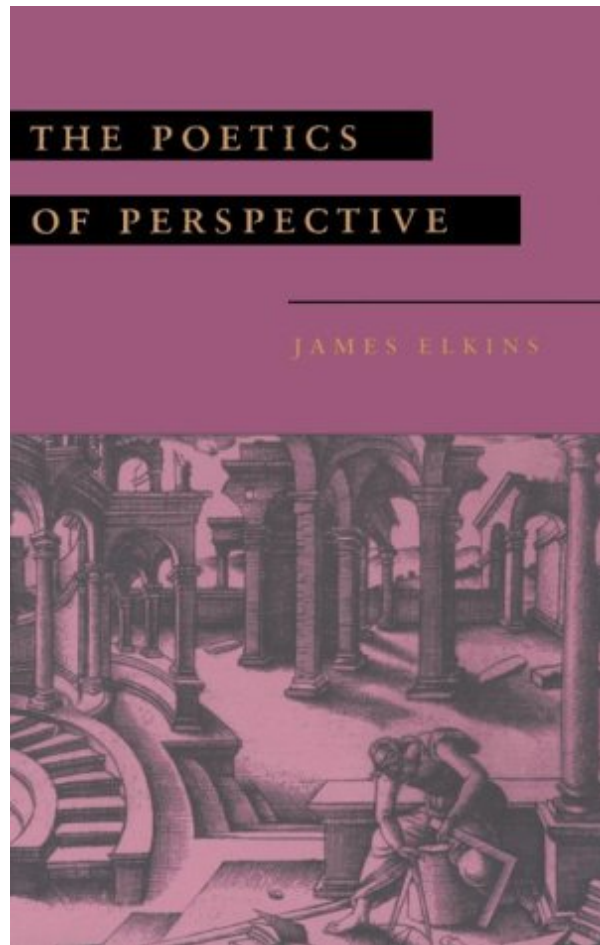


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## Review

"I have rarely read a book as illuminating as this. . . . With great tact and inventiveness, Elkins offers two basic correctives to what has been taken as the foundational procedure underlying Italian Renaissance painting and, by extension, Renaissance culture: (1) Perspective was referred to not in the singular but in the plural?not a perspective, but perspectives; and (2) it was not about drawing a unified pictorial space, but about drawing objects?not a way of unifying a picture, but an often playful fashioning of the objects in a picture."?Svetlana Alpers, Key Reporter

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# THE POETICS OF PERSPECTIVE BY JAMES ELKINS PDF

Perspective has been a divided subject, orphaned among various disciplines from philosophy to gardening. In the first book to bring together recent thinking on perspective from such fields as art history, literary theory, aesthetics, psychology, and the history of mathematics, James Elkins leads us to a new understanding of how we talk about pictures. Elkins provides an abundantly illustrated history of the theory and practice of perspective. Looking at key texts from the Renaissance to the present, he traces a fundamental historical change that took place in the way in which perspective was conceptualized; first a technique for constructing pictures, it slowly became a metaphor for subjectivity. That gradual transformation, he observes, has led to the rifts that today separate those who understand perspective as a historical or formal property of pictures from those who see it as a linguistic, cognitive, or epistemological metaphor. Elkins considers how the principal concepts of perspective have been rewritten in work by Erwin Panofsky, Hubert Damisch, Martin Jay, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and E. H. Gombrich. *The Poetics of Perspective* illustrates that perspective is an unusual kind of subject: it exists as a coherent idea, but no one discipline offers an adequate exposition of it. Rather than presenting perspective as a resonant metaphor for subjectivity, a painter's tool without meaning, a disused historical practice, or a model for vision and representation, Elkins proposes a comprehensive reevaluation. The perspective he describes is at once a series of specific pictorial decisions and a powerful figure for our knowledge of the world.

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5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

academic, but worth the effort

By jumbojay

Apparently condensed from a multi-volume doctoral dissertation, this book is both over and under inclusive. Elkins displays encyclopedic knowledge of his field in order to support the important and worthwhile point he makes in the introduction, but also leaves out much of the very technical detail that would have been needed to convince his fellow PH.D.s. One could just read the intro and the envoi to get the lesson Elkins hopes to teach, but I'm glad i stuck with it for the long haul through the intervening chapters. A book for those who are serious about the history of western culture.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A Model of Inquiry

By Eugene Kupper

I first read this book for the information I thought it might contain, and as a validation of the investigations in perspective that I was - and still am - pursuing. Recently, I picked up this book again, and now see that it is a model of skillful inquiry. Elkins may or may not have solved my previous puzzles of perspective, but he has provided me with an insight to rhetorical strategies - used to discuss "perspective" as a concept or practice - but has created a chaotic literature.

We have all encountered the cross-section of half-complete treatments of subjects in the arts; it would seem that obscurity is the preferred norm. It is meant to add mystery and dignity to its favorite topics. This is the entry "Into the Maelstrom of Metaphor" that Elkins invites us. He carefully lists three alternatives, and chooses the middle path of "critical rationalism" for his book. This serves well to simultaneously preserve the ambiguities that history has provided and to catalog some of its graphic and methodological products as regard perspective. This is not just a balanced approach, but also a model of thinking that makes us feel more intelligent and fair as readers.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Not about the Renaissance view of Perspective in Art

By Matthew Simon

Rauschenbach writes as a physicist, and as is often the case, scientists have major deficits when dealing with art. The deficits are not few nor minor. Perspective was viewed as being of major significance when informed by performative rhetoric. Perspective, as with architecture, was influenced by Platonism as well as the philosophical views of the Pythagoreans. For example, room sizes had to be harmonically correct (length, width, height), not only deal with perspective alone. Photography (optics) may have a scientific way to deal with focal length to obtain optimal similarity, scale and depth with one-point linear perspective, but "horned" perspective with two- or even 3-vanishing points introduces additional considerations. Use of anamorphisms in painting, as in the famous painting "The Ambassadors" by Holbein cannot simply be forgotten (deliberate distortions of linear perspective). Lastly, perspective was used in perspective-theatres, causing problems as well As a book dealing with optics in photography, this book is fine, but a reader should not confuse this by thinking the book deals with art.

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