

**Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies: Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspectives** / Lyle Massey.--University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, November 2007.--192 p. : ill.--ISBN: 978-0-271-02980-1 (cl., alk. paper): \$55.00.



Many scholars have argued that Renaissance artists used perspective to rationalize the relationships between optics, space, and the visual arts. Lyle Massey, assistant professor in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University in Montreal, contends that this is incorrect. By looking carefully at what theorists and Renaissance visual artists wrote and did and by carefully considering technical achievements, such as anamorphosis---the perspectival distortion of an object to make it viewable only from a certain angle, such as in Holbein's well-known painting of *The French Ambassadors*---drawing machines, and printed diagrams, Massey highlights examples in which theory and the artist's and/or the viewer's viewpoint fail to mesh. She discusses how these "failures" were eventually embraced by theorists.

Massey asserts that Renaissance and early modern theorists, as well as artists, often demonstrated a disconnect between the ideals expressed through geometrical forms and their practical applications in their work. Furthermore, she argues that in certain cases painters exaggerated this disjunction, thereby emphasizing the irrational. The Cartesian formula that

later scholars have tended to impose upon Renaissance and early modern theorists and artists is simply not justified and the historical development that actually occurred did not actually conform to a standard account of scientific events.

In recent years the subject of Renaissance perspective has received significant attention with the 2001 publication of David Hockney's controversial book, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (New York, NY: Viking Studio). This study, reviewed widely (e.g., [New York Review of Books](#) and [Nexus Network Journal](#)) and discussed at several well-attended and publicized symposia, represented a collaboration between artist Hockney and scientist Charles Falco, who provides further explication of the scientific evidence on his excellent [website](#). Arguably, the most thorough treatment of the subject prior to Hockney's study, was John White's *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, now in its third edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987). Massey cites White, but not Hockney in her bibliography, perhaps because her scholarly focus is more narrow than Hockney's.

The illustrations are relatively few, but well-chosen; the endnotes are copious and excellent; and the bibliography and index are comprehensive. Well produced and reasonably priced, this book will be a fine addition to any art history or art school collection.

Jeffrey Weidman, Senior Librarian, Public Services & Collection Development, Spencer Art Reference Library The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, [jweidman@nelson-atkins.org](mailto:jweidman@nelson-atkins.org)