In his latest publication, author Samuel Edgerton synthesizes forty years of his life’s work in the history of the art and science of linear perspective in western Renaissance art. Edgerton, the Amos Lawrence Professor of Art History Emeritus at Williams College, is the author of two related works, The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective (1975) and The Heritage of Giotto’s Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution (1991). He views this monograph as an update and a sequel to his earlier publications.

Expanding on his 1975 book, Edgerton adds evidence on the intellectual interest in “spiritual and moral implications” of geometric optics in early fifteenth-century Florence and demonstrates how linear perspective’s “reality” in religious paintings might reinforce faith in God and Christianity after the disasters of the 1300s. He then explains how this concept was “secularized” by Alberti’s work.

Although interesting, the last chapters feel “tacked on.” Edgerton’s work on Galileo, found in other scientific and art venues, is presented again in this book, focusing in particular on Galileo’s “perspective tube” (telescope) and 1609 moon observations. Well-trained in disegno, Galileo’s drawings clearly communicate his discoveries. Edgerton also notes the importance of perspective in technology, for example, how 2-D drawings of machines rendered with perspective can show 3-D functionality problems before building expensive prototypes. He connects Alberti’s grid-window to the electronic pixel-grid cameras on telescopes that record light from stars in deep, ancient space.

Related titles on a basic shelf of perspective books include Martin Kemp’s The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat (1990); Michael Kubovy’s The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art (1986) and James Elkins on The Poetics of Perspective (1994). David Summers in Vision, Reflection, & Desire in Western Painting (2007) discusses the philosophical aspects of perspective. In fact, these publications cover more optics and mathematics and a wider time span than Edgerton’s. That said, in The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope, accessible content is written in the clear style of a relaxed, seasoned professor. The bibliography, index, notes, preface, and illustrations list are all useful, with recent citations. The reviewed paperback is printed with murky black and white images that appeared in the author’s earlier books, but overall, the book is recommended.

Mary Catharine Johnsen, Special Collections Librarian & Design Librarian, Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, mj0g@andrew.cmu.edu