
This is solid, scholarly writing that would be suitable, in many cases revelatory, for students at any level of college as well as established art and art history scholars, curators and those in many other historical disciplines. Ms. Kromm’s concise and clear introductions, at the beginning of each of the book’s seven subject sections, as well as her general introduction, contextualize the rather broad—and occasionally disparate—subject material and will guide instructors and students alike through the readings.

Top notch scholarship and a general clarity of purpose characterize most of the writing herein. A few of the essayists do get rather bogged-down in thick, erudite jargon and complex sentence structure but even that is discernible with a careful reread.

As the subtitle indicates, the historiographical aspect of this book spans three hundred and eight years of retrospective re-interpretation of the role of the image in the cultural history of the world. A History of Visual Culture is not a formal but implied history through episodic example. The editor, in her introduction, describes visual culture in broad terms ultimately avoiding a concise definition, as does N. Mirzoeff in his well-known An Introduction to Visual Culture (Routledge, 1999). It is more accurately a history of the world and its visual manifestations (by extension, the history of visual culture goes back to Lascaux and beyond).

All 120 of the black and white illustrations are of clear image quality and purpose. One does wish that some were in color but this lack does not diminish their illustrative purpose (the paperback edition was provided for this review, but the hardcover version has the same black and white illustrations).

Each essay is followed by bibliographic notes and citations. The number of citations and their quality indicate a serious depth of research on the part of the writers. The four and a half page index seems satisfactorily comprehensive, yet the rather important term “Bertillonage” does not appear, only the entry, “Bertillon, Alphonse” the concept’s author.

A durable, well bound textbook that opens flat, printed in a fair sized Roman font on a bright white matte-finish paper (thank you Berg) is eminently readable.

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