Leonardo da Vinci: Self, Art and Nature. François Quiviger. Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Books, 2019. 222 pp. $22.50.

This book presents a compact and pleasurable overview of the Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), attending to his painting, social milieu, and scientific pursuits. Quiviger sketches out Leonardo as a person as very much a part of the communities he inhabited, an individual possessed of considerable skills in his capacity as a courtier, and one with a mind very much oriented to nature as a site for persistent intellectual inquiry. In this way, Leonardo is as embedded in his varied social spheres as he is an attentive observer of the natural world; he used his fullest abilities to negotiate prestigious appointments and undertake work interesting to him.

This story is told, in part, as the singular life trajectory of a country boy who rises to dizzying heights, ending his career in the employ of Francis I, the king of France. These events amount to what midway through the book is referred to as the remarkable social ascension of the artist (109). This arc is not without its misfortunes, including the famously abandoned project of the *Adoration of the Magi* and the deterioration of the *Last Supper*, among others. Indeed, it is against the background of these unsatisfactory commissions that Quiviger sees the lack of major artistic commissions for the artist in his last decade. While Raphael and Michelangelo were fulfilling some of their most significant commissions at the Vatican, Leonardo was left without a patron in Rome. Painting is understood to be the primary means for the artist's engagement with all things—his core discipline, which allowed him to research and represent nature. Leonardo's didactic writings on how to paint are mined for how they instruct the development of the mind as well as the hand. The book offers a sense of how Leonardo produced his paintings, primarily through description of the artist's workshop practice, such as how he produced cartoons that were worked up as paintings by his assistants, which were then touched up by the master himself. Such a procedure is described in the production of the *Salvator Mundi*.

Well-placed insertions orient the reader to how our own contemporary mores clash with Leonardo's. For example, Quiviger interprets the never completed *Battle of Anghiari* commission against the backdrop of the artist's recent stint as an engineer in the employ of the warlord Cesare Borgia. The vortex of action coalescing in the scene of the Fight for the Standard is a triumph in the genre of battle painting, not representative of early modern warfare's manifestations through the deployment of ballistic artillery. While exposing this duality, the author simultaneously acknowledges the inherent oddity for today's viewer to understand the rich and complicated imagery of the art of war.

The book also functions as a serviceable primer on Renaissance culture. For example, included among observations on Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci is a discussion of Platonic love and social constraints on the lives of women. A discussion of Leonardo's

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early commissions, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* and *Saint Jerome*, are followed by the artist's own critical remarks about the cultic veneration of images. The religious wars of the early sixteenth century are made vivid through mention of how the artist, even if only in his private writings, voiced criticisms most famously articulated by Martin Luther in the early years of the Reformation.

The notes are spare and the bibliography tightly edited. This book is most suitable to those interested in a digestible overview of the artist that deftly draws together analysis of his major artistic projects while signaling at the myriad sources and preoccupations that so drove Leonardo's restless mind.

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Titian's Touch: Art, Magic, and Philosophy. Maria H. Loh.
Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Books, 2019. 288 pp. $22.50.

This short book makes a very delightful addition to the literature on Titian. Loh's chapter headings immediately suggest her playful approach: "Abracadabra," "Touch Me! Touch Me Not!" and "Babies and Fur" set the tone, while "Lightness and Weight" can serve as a paradigm for Loh's manner of address throughout the entire book. Loh keeps her prose light, though this does not compromise the depth or weight of her analysis. She brings a dazzling array of sources to bear on Titian's paintings. In one passage devoted to Titian's marvelous portrait of the two-year-old Clarissa Strozzi, she adduces, in quick succession, the words of Sir Joshua Reynolds, W. C. Fields, and Sigmund Freud, then caps it all by allowing the provincial judges of a dog show in 1930s Lille to have the final say (117–20). They decided that the dog featured in Titian's painting should provide the ideal pedigree standard for the breed. Elsewhere we hear that the portrait known as *La Schiavona* was Titian's *Citizen Kane* (27). But such popular-culture references do not grate, given Loh's cleverness at integrating them into her narrative.

Loh constantly varies her methodological approach to reflect the visual particularity of each of Titian's works. And her narrative is enlivened further by her very lack of insistence about the theories she puts forward. Her evident ability with theory-inflected ideas suddenly gives way to gossipy biography on Titian's patrons, which can, in its turn, transmute back into a telling interpretation. The execution of the father of Laura Bagarotto, the woman perhaps pictured in Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* (a work commissioned on the occasion of her marriage to one of his accusers), becomes the main thrust of Loh's feminist reading. We can't really know whether the stresses and strains of Laura's tormented history were actually played out in Titian's painting. But, on the other hand, Loh does not insist too strongly on her own arguments.