Lorenzo Pericolo, ed. *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art.*
Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010. xvi + 257 pp. index. illus. bibl. $114.95. ISBN: 978–0–7546–6493–2.

As Nagel and Pericolo state in their provocative introduction to *Subject as Aporia*, "between 1400 and 1700, several significant and simultaneous shifts were occurring that affected the very basis and conditions of art-making" (2). The list of conditions is by now both long and familiar: new formats, new genres, new subjects, new techniques, new contexts for viewing, and an expanded vision of people and places founded on New World exposures. There is no dearth of excellent scholarship addressing the effects of these conditions, essays and books focusing on the aesthetics of paradox and indeterminacy, masking, identity, and the "play of the signifier," ipseity and alterity, interiority and exteriority, and the like. Nagel and Pericolo contend that these studies presuppose an aesthetic stability or system that did not yet exist. What did exist, they say, were aporetic works of art, which by reason of the very condition of all of this newness, interface with the past and the future, the known and unknown through reconfiguration, reinstallation, and recontextualization. Certainly many of the works of this period are confounding, compelling us to confront contradiction and discernment in much the same way that Socrates in Plato's *Apology* recognizes the acquisition of knowledge through its

disavowal. This process of inquiry, which spawns a desire to investigate the impasse resulting from inconsistent yet equally plausible premises, informs the content of *Subject as Aporia*. When is a portrait a portrait and not an icon and vice-versa? When does a preoccupation with opticality slide into one with tactility causing the dissolution of a distinction between surface and depth, figure and ground? When does the fragment constitute the whole, making visible what lies hidden? When is absence presence and omission inclusion? And when do artists make non-resolution part of the solution? Do we know or don't we know, or is the point that we have stopped to pose the question and ponder possible answers? With varying degrees of success, the nine essays in this volume, including contributions by each of the editors, test the validity of an aporetic methodology for the examination of artworks within this period. The composite can perhaps be characterized as an elenchus that itself ends in aporia. While I was not always persuaded that aporia provided insights otherwise unafforded by existing ways of looking at and talking about images, I am convinced of the value of the conversation and, hence, of the book's contribution.

The complexities of the arguments advanced by the nine contributors to the volume deservedly demand the reader's concentrated time. Because of its initial breadth and subsequent focus on a single work, Giorgione's *Three Philosophers*, Nagel's contribution was well placed as chapter 1. Stephen Campbell's application of the metaphor of grafting as it was set forth by Baldesar Castiglione adds elasticity to theories of imitation and opens the door for a nuanced rereading of dichotomies of genre, gender, and sense perception. In very different contexts and with different aims, Patricia Emison and Ashley West focus on the medium of prints. Looking at Hans Burgkmair's multi-block woodcut frieze of the native inhabitants of the coast of India and Africa, West attempts to go beyond the artist's borrowing of canonical figures to make the unfamiliar accessible to the artist's visual manipulations suggesting disjunction, fact, and fiction. Emison builds her essay around a question particularly appropriate to a medium that erased boundaries between local cultures. Might an inability to decode an image "also have been experienced by its original publics" (71)? Suffice it to say, that her answer makes her contribution one of the most germane to the book's proposed subject. Jeanette Kohl, who examines fifteenth-century Florentine portrait busts, and Lorenzo Pericolo, who focuses on Rembrandt's *Danae*, address imaging emergent identities in shifting genres and within and against established dynamics of desire. Cammy Brothers applies aporia to the puzzling dialogue between structural member and decorative element in Michelangelo's Medici Chapel and Laurentian Library. Her analysis of a preparatory drawing for the Medici Chapel, which foregrounds the creative process, is particularly insightful. Christopher Heuer looks at images that confound secular temporal logic by re-siting the devotional aura of distant, sacred spaces. His inclusion of pilgrimage badges in the discussion was welcomed. I have saved for last what was for me the most successful; Aneta Georgievska-Shine's discussion of Velázquez's *Spinners* as a work that through its layered references to assimilation claims that it is "at once complete, in the process of its making, and continuously

repairing itself." Here and throughout the book, we come to recognize how much we don't know and to value the challenges of the inquiry.

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