

*Architekturen des Sehens Bauten in Bildern des Quattrocento.* Johannes Grave.  
Eikones. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015. 400 pp. €54.

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Architectural imagery is ubiquitous in the backdrops of early modern paintings and prints. Scholars have long explored its significance in case studies. For example, Yona Pinson's work on Temple of Jerusalem imagery has greatly aided our understanding of visual exegesis in the seventeenth century. Until the publication of the book under review, however, architecture appearing in Italian Renaissance art had not received a sustained, synthetic study. While author Johannes Grave claims Quattrocento painted architecture as his subject, he does address Trecento examples as well as his topic's theoretical aspect. Despite his book's ambitious scope, it is surprisingly concise, clocking in at just under 400 octavo pages.

Grave has parsed his topic thematically. Four parts address what he deems his field's big concerns: the intersection of architectural representations and pictorial theory, the

symbolism of painted architecture, the frame's determining role for pictorial space, and distinctions between the pictured and the real. This interpretative structure mostly facilitates incisiveness, allowing Grave to build on each concept in succession. But repetitions do creep in. For example, we find numerous similarly worded passages pointing out the "pictorial ambiguities" in the images he analyzes.

Not surprisingly, Grave's first part, addressing theory, begins with Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti. For Grave, Alberti's treatise builds on the pictorial implications in Brunelleschi's discovery of perspective, at once pictorial and architectural, "to exploit the potential of perspective beyond architectural representation . . . to preserve the unity of the image" (44). Intrinsically, this does not feel revelatory, but it is important for the book's remainder. Grave's analysis of Nicolas Cusanus's thoughts on the imaging of God in *De Visione Dei* is part 1's real contribution. He focuses on a passage in verse 39 of Cusanus's chapter 9, where the theologian writes that he has found God in "a place surrounded by coincidence and contradiction . . . the wall of paradise." Grave situates this passage within Cusanus's notion of sacred vision and Albertian notions of sacred art. Cusanus's differentiations between the real and the vision are analogous to the beholder's space before the picture and the picture itself, as important as Brunelleschi's vanishing point or Alberti's window for understanding the meaning of Quattrocento sacred imagery's spatiality.

In parts 2–4, Grave turns to specific images. He first elaborates his notion of their "internal ambiguities" (77), contradictions, and elisions between the meaning that pictured spaces can generate, on the one hand, and their sacred figural or narrative content, on the other. Three chapters analyze Masaccio's *Trinity*, Jacopo Bellini's famous architecturally laden drawings of sacred narratives, and images by his followers in the subsequent generation of Venetian painters, respectively. Grave points out the *Trinity*'s tension between "earthly" spatiality and sacred content, concluding that it elicits in viewers a "reflexive vision" (99). Turning to the Venetians, Grave seeks the allegorical properties of their painted architecture, emphasizing examples resistant to closure due to a lack of a universally determined allegorical significance.

Part 3 tackles what Grave terms the frame's "interference" (147) with the picture. An especially rich topic here is Piero della Francesca's *Saint Anthony Polyptych*. For Grave, the altarpiece's spatial polysemy — its status as a group of pictures bearing disparate spaces — not only undercuts its illusionism, but underscores its materiality, its status as furniture comprised of interrelated painted wooden panels. Grave moves on to resituate the Gemäldegalerie's *Ideal City* panel within Vitruvian notions of the theatrical *scenae frons*. Part 4 brings the book's first three parts to bear on examples suggesting the dissolution of the perceived barrier between the pictorial and the real. Grave brings us to refectories where Domenico Ghirlandaio composed sacred images to suggest closer contact with their audiences. He then examines what he terms Filippino Lippi's "parergonal aesthetic," the artist's knack for composing paintings affecting a "continuous oscillation" (243) between architectural frame and painted architecture.

The book's small illustrations will disappoint — only fourteen are color plates. Moreover, one would hope for more attention to painted architecture's relation to built examples, and to early Cinquecento examples — Sieneſe painter-architect Baldassare Peruzzi receives no attention. However, Grave achieves a full-fledged opening up of painted architecture's implications for the reception of Italian painting before the Bramante-Raphael circle. His use of images from beyond the Quattrocento canon is laudable; it reveals his topic's pervasiveness and variety, imbuing its production and consumption with the historical weight it deserves.

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