



Loh, Maria H. Titian's Touch: Art, Magic and Philosophy

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Volume 43, numéro 1, hiver 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070205ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34125>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Henry, C. (2020). Compte rendu de [Loh, Maria H. Titian's Touch: Art, Magic and Philosophy]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(1), 254–257. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34125>

Even more complex illustrations, like those on pages 88, 89, 96, 98, and 99, are carefully and clearly reproduced, which makes it easier to understand their role in a text but also makes them enjoyable to look at as visual traces of each of the scribes' drawing skills.

Klaassen has made an arcane subject appealing and easy to read for a modern reader. He has given both scholars and students a book that is a joy to read and hold—full of fresh insights and nicely synthesized familiar points that enable us to locate these books in their context. He has provided both historical and literary scholarship with a book that may fine-tune extant arguments about familiar texts. For instance, how do these two texts help readers of Christopher Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus*—written somewhere between the dates of the two texts presented in this edition—understand some of Doctor Faustus's ritual as falling somewhere between Marlowe's creative imagination and an actual knowledge that was recorded in script at roughly the same time? What new evidence about magic does this edition offer to anyone studying the subject of magic in early modern drama (which is full of magic)? Klaassen has provided a highly reliable book with some of the answers to these questions. The publisher must also be commended for high quality production and layout.

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Loh, Maria H.

Titian's Touch: Art, Magic and Philosophy.

London: Reaktion Books, 2019. Pp. 288 + 82 colour ill. ISBN 978-1-789914-082-8 (hardcover) US\$22.50.

In this engaging and compact biography, part of the Renaissance Lives series, Maria Loh presents Titian as a philosopher whose powerful tool of investigation was his paintbrush. She ties his evolving technical style to a philosophical quest for the essence and meaning of nature, supernatural phenomena, human nature and the body, and various forms of stuff and matter. She posits that Titian, much like his older contemporary Leonardo da Vinci, based his artistic practice in the close and exhaustive sensation of personal experience and the physical world around him. Indeed, one of the strongest contributions of the book is

Loh's initiative to contextualize what Titian saw, heard, tasted, and touched, and to explain how historical objects, materials, systems, and practices—from marking musical time, to wearing kidskin gloves and gemstones, to practising falconry—were conceptualized during his life.

Pursuing a method loosely in the tradition of Aby Warburg and Michael Baxandall, and admitting the speculative nature of her endeavour, Loh seeks to recharge these painted materials, objects, and practices with meanings they possessed and responses they triggered for Titian and historical beholders of his paintings. She bolsters her thesis regarding Titian's proclivity to "philosophize with the brush" (33) by emphasizing the phenomenology of his painterly practice, thus building on a rich vein of scholarship initiated by David Rosand and fruitfully pursued by Mary Pardo, Nicola Suthor, and Jodi Cranston among others. In reminding her readers of Titian's habitual procrastination, direct oil technique, and abandonment of preparatory drawings, and, via Boschini, of his ruminative, critical approach to the pictorial process, Loh presents the act of painting as Titian's way of understanding the world around him. While Titian has been presented in art historical discourse as a poet, dramatist, superhero of sensory perception, and magician with painterly materials before, Loh's emphasis on his practice as a profound philosophical engagement with the nature and meaning of things marks a new direction in Titian scholarship.

At the outset, Loh promises to "show the reader how to look at works of art for a long time" (10) and guide a non-expert audience to think *with* Titian's paintings in the engaged manner of the many later and modern artists, poets, and critics she quotes from throughout the book, from W. H. Auden to Gerhard Richter and Lucian Freud. Thinking with paintings is exactly what Loh herself does in this extended, thematically-arranged exercise in close looking and speculative interpretation. The book is arranged in loose chronological order and proceeds by grouping a small number of paintings from a discrete period of Titian's career around the exploration of a particular conceptual or material theme. The result is a happily eclectic survey of Titian's life in painting that encompasses most of the major areas in which he worked—portraits, altarpieces, religious narrative cycles, devotional paintings, allegories, and mythologies. Throughout the book, Loh moves between succinct synthesis of previous scholarship on well-known paintings and evocative sketches of original interpretation. At times she ruminates on the essential strangeness of a lesser-known work like the partially veiled *Portrait of Archbishop Filippo*

Archinto (ca. 1558), while at other times she zooms in to ponder the world of meaning unleashed in previously overlooked details, such as the flowers portrayed in the foreground of the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–23).

Given the book's focus on close looking and ekphrastic description, Titian's important lost paintings and pictorial cycles do not play much of a role, with the exception of the *Death of St. Peter Martyr* altarpiece (1527–29), which survives in several high-quality copies, one of which Loh reproduces. This biography also largely leaves aside Titian's graphic production, apart from a few preparatory studies for paintings. Almost as present as Titian are his patrons and several of his friends and associates, most notably his sensitive interpreter and ambitious promoter Pietro Aretino. However, strangely absent are Titian's many artistic interlocutors—those who inspired his vision, nourished his pictorial intelligence, and fueled his ambition—such as Bellini, Mantegna, Sebastiano, Giorgione, Dürer, and Raphael. In fact, the book does not reproduce a single artwork by one of his contemporaries. While the approach fosters a more intimate and continuous narrative, this reader dearly missed the presence of the other artists who helped form Titian's world. To take just one example, Loh offers a new, intriguing identification of Titian's *Portrait of a Lady* (ca. 1510–12) in the National Gallery, London, as *La familiare*, the artist's mistress, housekeeper, and later wife, Cecilia Soldani. In discussing the painting's original composition (visible in x-rays and infrared reflectograms), which shows the woman possibly holding a dish, Loh reaches to Giotto's personification of *Charity* in the Scrovegni Chapel by way of comparison, rather than to Titian's close collaborator Sebastiano's *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist*, painted around the same time as his portrait.

Overall, the close looking bears wonderful fruit of descriptive prose, particularly in the chapters on Titian's mythologies for Phillip II. Some readers may find it overdetermined in places, as when a muted streak of blue paint visible from the underpainting of the London *Portrait of a Lady* becomes a jugular vein in Loh's reading. This reader's objections arose only when the dramatic, colloquial narrative style came at a cost to the subject, as when Lucretia in Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* (1571) is described as “flailing and wailing” (211) rather than attempting to resist her attacker. Beyond this, a few instances of misidentification, perhaps intended to shake up the existing parameters of interpretation, risk leading the reader's close looking astray, as when Loh suggests that *The Bravo* (ca. 1515–20) might depict a poet or

musician reaching out to defend himself against his armed assailant with a musical instrument. Rather, the shining, golden object the protagonist draws with his right hand is plainly the pommel of his sword. Such instances are rare however, and over the course of the biography Titian emerges as philosopher, dialectician, and exquisitely empathic dramatist, whose closest parallel in Loh's account is Shakespeare.

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Luther, Martin.

The Essential Luther. Ed. and trans., with an intro. by Tryntje Helfferich.

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018. Pp. xlvii, 311. ISBN 978-1-62466-694-0 (paperback) US\$18.

Following the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, Tryntje Helfferich presents a new compilation of Luther's work that speaks skilfully and compellingly to multiple audiences. From students who are encountering Luther for the first time to scholars of the early modern period, readers are guided through Luther's life via his works, and vice versa. Maintaining the shape and sense of Luther's original writings while rendering, in her English versions, the language more readable and accessible for a modern audience, Helfferich's work provides a readable reference guide to Luther's key texts and ideas. The volume is not exhaustive but instead represents all of Luther's key beliefs and ideas; it constitutes an ideal starting point for undergraduate students and non-specialists. Although some readers might feel the lack of parallel text, preferring to have the opportunity to compare the translations with their sources, the footnotes often include references to Luther's original texts, detailing, for example, mistakes he made in copying references or the meanings of specific terms as he would have used them, thus providing us with some sense of Luther's writing processes.

Two methods of organization shape the collection: the chronological contents page and the overall organization of Luther's works allow readers to see how his life and the events of the Reformation fed into his writings, and how his opinions on key theological topics such as Free Will and the