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land masses. In all medieval cartography, both continents and oceans were depicted as large, oblong forms that extended eastwards, all enclosed within a circular frame whose form was dictated by religious beliefs. Of course, it would be the need for ships to sail the Pacific that would lead to developments in this vision of the earth's hydro-geology, as the inadequacies of the philosophical-religious model became apparent and knowledge was no longer bound by such premises. The final chapter aims to link the range of knowledge that emerged thenceforth with the very contemporary crisis of water shortages, arguing a link between present and past. This interpretative juxtaposition, however, seems rather forced when compared to the very detailed and convincing argument developed in the preceding chapters of the book.

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Steinberg, Leo.
***Michelangelo's Painting: Selected Essays.* Ed. Sheila Schwartz.**
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. xiv, 382 + 246 ill. ISBN 978-0-226-48226-2 (hardcover) US$65.

Sheila Schwartz has done a service not just to Leo Sternberg but to us all in bringing out volumes of his works, including this beautiful one. In the Preface and Acknowledgements, Schwartz describes the genesis of the project: Leo Steinberg thought about "the republication of about a dozen of his most important Old Master essays in a single volume, a companion to *Other Criteria*, his 1972 compendium on modern art," and as he grew older, he also gathered unpublished work and hoped to write new material. In 2011, two years before he died, a new project emerged: the posthumous publication of his essays and unpublished lectures, which he hoped Schwartz would edit (vii). As I have already reviewed the first volume, *Michelangelo's Sculpture: Selected Essays,* in this journal, I will try to emphasize different elements here. Schwartz says, "I leave to Alexander Nagel an *explication de texte,* addressing instead the biographical origins of Steinberg's art-historical method" (vii). Nagel's Introduction specifies Steinberg's contribution.

As an undergraduate, Nagel read Steinberg's *Other Criteria* and realized later that the voice "was unusual" as "it seemed to belong to a world that existed before scholarship came to be domesticated in the form that we know it, before literary writing and academic writing had become divorced. In later years he once asked me, 'When did pleasure cease to be a central part of scholarship?'" (xi). About Steinberg's style, to which Schwartz also alludes, Nagel says that it reminds him of Erasmus, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and James Joyce, under whose tutelage he said he learned English, possibly "as a model mosaicist of older literary voices" (xi). Steinberg's style had some detractors, especially from British "historians of Renaissance art, who have recoiled from essays that seemed overly given to figurative language, rather too clever, strangely enjoyable—by implication, too self-regarding" (xi). Others admired Steinberg for the very qualities that his critics saw as faults. Nagel conveys Steinberg's distinctive strengths. His aims are "traditional ones of remaining accurate to the historical intentions and functions that actuated a central tradition of European art" (xi). Having been trained as a fine artist and then having taken a doctorate in art history, Steinberg offers "an embedded argument for the existence of a certain figurative language and style of reference at work in the art" (xi) and his practice and study of modern art helped him to make distinctive interpretations of Renaissance art (xii).

Steinberg was independent from High Iconography, formalism, social history of art, and Continental theory; he "remained committed to unfolding the complexity of visual rhetorical structures" and "elucidated the multideterminacy and open-ended reception of works of art in terms native to Renaissance art and culture" (xii). Rather than see Steinberg as oppositional, Nagel maintains that "his approach was notably consistent in its methods, independent minded rather than subversive, offering fresh pathways across the battle lines as they were drawn and redrawn" (xii). For Nagel, as past academic battles fade, readers can take Steinberg for what he was: "a well-trained art historian who distinguished himself by asking basic but extremely difficult questions, and then proceeding to answer them by carefully walking his reader through the most relevant evidence" (xii). This method, I would add, has resonance for critics of all the arts as well as for scholars generally.

One such question that Steinberg asks, in relation to Michelangelo, a poet and painter, is How do visual forms of meaning differ from literary ones (xii)? Steinberg explores "the figural and rhetorical structures of the works

themselves" (xiii). For Steinberg, exegesis—or biblical interpretation—reads sacred events in history as containing a "figure" or *figura* (emblem) and he applied this textual approach to works of visual art, which had its own poetry (xiii). According to Nagel, Steinberg sought "a truer understanding of the work" (xiii) and his scholarship on Renaissance art, as that on modern art, has insights whose implications others can "take in startlingly new directions, without doing what he does" (xiv). Steinberg's own words fill out the volume.

In "Disconnections: The *Doni Madonna* and Leonardo's *St. Anne,*" Steinberg begins with Heinrich Wölfflin's *Classic Art* (*Die klassische Kunst*) (1899) dedicated to the memory of Jacob Burckhardt, which sets out a "competition-piece" theory between Michelangelo and Leonardo in these works, and which leads, among other things, to Steinberg's memorable observation: "Painting was declared a spectator sport whose main objective must be the downing of an antagonist" (4). Part of Steinberg's method is to examine problems and controversies in the interpretation and history of art. He opens "The Sistine *Deluge*: A Fresh Start" in this fashion: "Among all the attractions of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, the *Deluge* fresco is, by common consent, the hardest to see and the least inviting to look at" (20) because it is too small and has too many figures in a scattered and disjointed composition, a portion of which was lost because of a nearby explosion in 1797. Steinberg says he is not being perverse in examining the part of the ceiling that is least familiar and least loved, but it is most likely to reward the three questions he wants "to address to the picture" (20): where he began, his first religious narrative painting, and the occasion for "self-confession" (20). Here, Steinberg concludes in a typology of then and now, the strange and the familiar:

> It seems to me a strange fact—strange to modern habits of thought and feeling—that this most heroic achievement in the history of individual artistic expression begins in a renunciation of private ambition, at the risk even of personal failure. But perhaps this is what makes Michelangelo a profoundly religious artist. (69)

Michelangelo is a paradox.

At the end of "Who's Who in the *Creation of Adam*: A Chronology of the Picture's Reluctant Self-Revelation," Steinberg observes:

> Remember how long it took before anyone spotted our cherished Eve. Until 1871, she was just one in a crowd. And the outsize boy at her knee did not get singled out until four years later, so that Christ entered the picture—or entered our picture of it—exactly 365 years after the fresco was painted. (87)

Seeing can take a long time. In "All about Eve," Steinberg aptly says: "What is astounding in Michelangelo's Ancestors series, and quite without precedent, is the revision he brings to the sacred text" (88). "Why Michelangelo Huddled Those Ancestors under That Ceiling" includes Steinberg's view: "For me it is the images that determine the relevance of texts" (127). "The *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy" opens thus, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco, unveiled on October 31, 1541, opened like a hit show" (130), but mentions this detail: "Only two groups kept cool. Artists and connoisseurs paid homage with informed admiration—marveling especially at the way the *scorti* (foreshortenings) had been handled" (130). "A Corner of the *Last Judgment*" explores Michelangelo's ineffability: "The work of which the following essay discusses the lower right corner is still beyond us. It resists our grasp and confounds our notions, and it beggars the discipline whose task is to cope with it" (161). Art makes criticism speechless as it speaks.

Wonder and vision are also part of "The *Last Judgment* and Environs," which asks: "does the fresco relate to the architecture and the space of the Sistine Chapel?" (195, see 193). "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting" "continually pits copies of little intrinsic merit against their awesome originals" and does so because "they constitute a body of criticism more telling than anything dreamt of in contemporaneous writing" (213). "Michelangelo's Last Paintings" discusses Michelangelo's life, the criticism of the Paolina frescoes, and the frescoes themselves (235). Steinburg prompts us to think about and see Michelangelo in new ways and enriches our understanding of him—a poetic artist and an artistic poet—and of Renaissance art and life. This book is as accomplished and scholarly as it is gorgeous.

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