

Marcia B. Hall. *The Power of Color: Five Centuries of European Painting*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019. ix + 293 pp. + 210 illus. \$45. Review by LIVIA STOENESCU, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.

This comprehensive study of color in a survey of five centuries of European painting marks Marcia B. Hall's return to a topic that she made it her own with *Color and Meaning* (1992), her first foray into this examination. Expanding on the role played by color in the Italian Renaissance that was her focus in 1992, Hall takes a sweeping approach to techniques, materials, media, and theories that positioned color at the center of modern art practice. The main takeaway is that color emerged free of art theoretical prejudice and of the competing claims between painting and sculpture only in times much closer to contemporary art, times in which the art community was prepared to rise above misconceptions and, according to Joseph Beuys, able to function as a means of evoking a world at odds with prevailing realities.

The book comprises of an introduction and six chapters, each devoted to the artists' response to color over a century beginning in the 1400s. A postscript concludes the book, returning the reader's attention to the Renaissance and Baroque painters, Titian, Caravaggio, and Rembrandt whose interest in advancing color inspired countless generations. A salient point is Hall's discussion of the painter's effective practice with color, a medium by definition optical, immaterial, non-containable, and non-tactile. Hall focuses on the contribution of color to define the tinted layer below the paint, called *imprimatura* (4). Used as an expressive device to enhance the composition's tonality and to add unity and atmosphere, *imprimatura* ceased being of interest for the Impressionist painters who relied to an unprecedented extent on color and thus returned painting to the unprimed canvas. Equally important is Hall's examination of the materials with which painters mounted their colorful compositions. From the supports in wooden panel, canvas, or wall, to the binders in egg, oil, or water; the pigments and mineral, earth, and organic dyes; and the brushes made from animal hair, the painter's using all these materials added to the final composition a sense of invisible, yet penetrating, materiality inherent in the liquid nature of color.

A careful discussion is devoted to the peculiarities of dark *imprimatura*, which both Tintoretto and Caravaggio evolved from the teachings of Sebastiano del Piombo and Giulio Romano, the latter synthesizing the experience he accumulated in Raphael's studio (97). Michelangelo's own *imprimatura* varied from dark reddish browns to dirty browns to almost black. The fruits of an extensive practice with dark *imprimatura* are visible in Caravaggio's technique of painting directly on the dark primed canvas, with the model posing before him (99). Chiaroscuro, achieved with the dark *imprimatura*, would remain the popular means to manipulate light and to create a sense of drama right up until the rise of Impressionism in the mid-nineteenth century (101). Hall remarkably illustrates a creative approach to the disposition of light and shadow that led seventeenth-century painters to come up with dead coloring, a new invention on variations of tonality (125). Whereas tinted *imprimatura* was used for the colored under-painting, dead color became a medium of excellence for the monochrome sketch. Hall exemplifies dead color with Rubens's unfinished *Henry IV in the Battle of Paris* (1624-26) in which the optical effects were not achieved by direct painting with color.

The idea that reliance on color precludes drawing has become a mainstay of art historical discussion, not in the least because of Titian and Rembrandt who worked directly on the canvas without any preliminary drawings. Rembrandt used a rough texture to make things appear close and a smooth surface to recede, and on occasion applied a thick impasto with the palette knife, the latter responsible for his realization in the *Return of the Prodigal Son* (c. 1668) of bright red tonalities that push the father forward while drawing the viewer to him (129). In a distinct manner, another outstanding Netherlandish master, Rubens, made his oil sketches with the goal to prepare for the final composition and to test the possibility for synthesizing chiaroscuro, tonality, and composition to enthrall his patrons who requested to see the painting in progress.

Hall tackles the relative merits of color when compared to drawing, stressing the quintessential role played by Italian man of letters and theorist of painting, Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568), in defending the properties of color to describe human flesh and object surface (154). This theoretical discussion is, however, kept brief and limited

to the common refrain that “color ends up being only the means to verisimilitude, whereas drawing is capable of capturing the essence of things and depicting the ideal” (154). An undisputable feature of Hall’s book is exhaustiveness at the expense of relevance. To highlight the significance of color for painting is to evaluate the specifics that constantly elevated the use of color in painting over sculpture in a range of art historical debates that took momentum just in the duration from the fifteenth- through the nineteenth-centuries covered by Hall’s book. One such important debate referenced Quatremère de Quincy’s apologia for polychromy in the dawn of the nineteenth-century, an apologia that coincided with the Italian Renaissance tradition becoming the model. In the ensuing debates over the relative merits of painting and sculpture, the former maintained leadership but at the same time the loosening of the formal injunction against color in sculpture became a truism. In this respect, an examination of Degas as a painter cannot overlook the innovative aspects of his modelling of *Little Dancer of 14 Years* (1880–81). In this work, color combined with wax, bronze, and garments and became inseparable from the realism of modern writers. Color thus evoked comparisons with the novels of Zola, whose work, just as Degas’s, was of course more than a medical and scientific reproduction of contemporary life.

Mary Jo Muratore, ed. *Molière Re-envisioned: Twenty-First Century Retakes/Renouveau et renouvellement moliéresques*. Paris: Hermann, 2018. 633 pp. 36.00€. Review by STEPHEN H. FLECK, EMERITUS, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY LONG BEACH

This laudably ambitious bilingual volume seeks to “re-envision,” or at least to “renew,” Molière for our century: no small objective for a playwright with over three and a half centuries of critical examination by fellow writers, scholars, and theater professionals. Comprised of work by thirty-one contributors, some very well-known, many less so or even apparently new to this field, the volume has an inevitable range of significance across articles, and in this case a considerably more-than-typical range. It is divided into five sections: “Introductory Essays,” “Historical/Philological/Linguistic Studies,” “Studies