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Kim, David Young.
***Ground Work: A History of the Renaissance Picture*.**
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Rarely have art historians interpreted Renaissance paintings with a focus on the background or substructure. David Y. Kim's clever and erudite text, *Ground Work: A History of the Renaissance Picture*, transfers the reader's attention away from the depicted human figure to the space that surrounds and lies beneath. Kim examines artworks by a selection of Italian artists from Trecento to Seicento, including Duccio, Gentile da Fabriano, Paulo Uccello, Fra Bartolomeo, Ghirlandaio, Taddeo Gaddi, Sodoma, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Giovanni Bellini, Mantegna, Palma Vecchio, Dosso Dossi, Rosso Fiorentino, Parmigianino, Tintoretto, Titian, Vasari, Giovanni Battista Moroni, Jacopo Bassano, and Caravaggio, among others. Kim's analysis of the picture goes beyond evaluating formal elements and ground-figure relationships; he addresses foundational theories that have permeated the understanding of the visual arts. From Pliny the Elder's assertion that painting began by tracing the outline around the shadow of a man, followed by Leon Battista Alberti, who described painting as a similitude of Narcissus enchanted by his own reflection on the surface of a pool, Kim lays out metaphysical origins from which the ontology of ground arises.

Kim identifies three meanings of "ground." The first being the substrata, such as gesso, which provides the support and can either be light or set an undertone with brown or grey. The second refers to foreground, which allows the viewer to enter into the picture and leads to the middle ground where the figures often stand. Finally, third is the background, which can be distant views or darkness. The different types of grounds are explored from early Byzantine-inspired gold leaf, to landscape views and interior architecture, and finally to the obscure greys and dark tenebrism of late Renaissance and Baroque paintings. Multidimensional interpretations of grounds are augmented by the inclusion of writings by theologians, artists, and literati.

While discussing the analogy between gold ground and heavenly space in chapter 2, "Possibility: Angels in the Ground," Kim reflects upon St. Thomas Aquinas's description of the movement of divine beings through infinite space. He points to Gentile da Fabriano's transparent golden angels who appear

to float in and out of the picture, depending on the point from which they are viewed. This effect is explained by Cennino Cennini who described how stippling is made by pricking the soft gold ground, which creates a scattering of light, sparkling "like millet grains" (63). As the text weaves effortlessly between theological foundations and technical bravado, the reader begins to understand the complexity of the ground-figure relationship.

In the chapter 3, "Metamorphosis: Rockland, Fissure, Marshland, Cave," the water spout above a crevice in the lower-left section of Giovanni Bellini's *Sant Francis in the Desert* conjures the undulating topography of lava flow discussed in Pietro Bembo's *Aetna* (1496). Kim informs his reader that in this landscape the motionless St. Francis exists in communion with nature, just as St. Bonaventure communicated in his biography of the saint. The painting's background includes stone formations, desert, cracks, shallow pools of water, and mud banks, thus giving Mt. La Verna a transcendent appearance in which the "stone moves between and passes through quasi-geological cycles of fragmentation, liquefication and solidification" (123). In this way the artist portrays the saint's mystical experience reflected in the ground that surrounds him.

Chapter 4, "Articulation: Walled Figures, Figured Walls," highlights the paintings of Giovanni Battista Moroni, who often used grey grounds, monochromatic colours and shallow architectural spaces to bring his figures close to the viewer. Kim argues that this technique is not simply used as a way to highlight the sitter, rather there is an "interplay" between the figure and the ground in which they become "walled figures" or "figured walls" (133). In Alberti's treatise on architecture, *De re aedificatoria* (1485), he explains that buildings function to contain the figure in a painting. Not to leave religious or political context unexplored, Kim relays that the Medici antagonist, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, was supported by a group called the Bigi (Greys); and therefore, the colour grey could symbolize "restraint, self-abnegation, and withdrawal from the world" (139). This hue, then, creates a cold, aloof sense about the sitter.

Finally, in chapter 5, "Transumption: Echoes in the Darkness," Kim uses Narcissus, the mythological figure who appears in a painting attributed to Caravaggio, as a metaphor for how the dark ground creates a space in which the figures appear, yet hide the past. In Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo, the boy rejects the love of the nymph, punished by Hera to repeat herself. Narcissus instead becomes enchanted with his own reflection in a pool of water. The shadowy background in the painting suggests that which Narcissus refuses to

behold. Echo still exists but she is hidden. Giambattista Marino, a poet and friend of Caravaggio, wrote *Eco* (1614) in which the nymph flees the sunlit world to hide in the darkness. Kim also explores Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Jupiter locks the wind, Aeolus, in a dark cave. The trope of the grotto invites the reader / viewer to form their own meaning, to see in the shadows their own invention. In Caravaggio's *The Supper at Emmaus* (1601), the strong contrasts between light and dark, chiaroscuro, allude to past and future events. The scene depicted is when Christ is recognized with the breaking of the bread, but the next moment He disappears. Kim, following the interpretation of Mitchell Merback, sees the dark ground as slowing down the epiphany, freezing the action, suspending it as it merges into the blackness. Caravaggio's early biographers, Mancini and Bellori, sometimes criticized the artist's use of dark grounds. By doing this, Kim suggests that they neglected to see what was concealed. Therefore, as in the myth of Narcissus, viewers may refuse to see anything beyond themselves, beyond the frame or beneath the surface. In contrast, David Young Kim invites his reader into the deeper recesses of Renaissance art-making and provides profound multilayered insights into an oft-neglected subject. The book is an intellectual tour de force and will be seminal for future studies in the field.

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