



A Short History of the Shadow (Essays in Art and Culture)

By Victor I. Stoichita




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In this investigative tour de force, Victor I. Stoichita untangles the history of one of the most enduring technical and symbolic challenges to beset Western artists – the depiction and meanings of shadows. The representation of shadow, and especially of cast shadow, is as old as art itself, for according to classical writers art was born when the outline of a human shadow thrown onto a wall was first traced out in order to capture it in the form of a silhouette.

But the history of the shadow is properly the history of light versus dark, for in addition to indicating relief and volume or the times of day, shadows can intimate subtler interior realities – from states of mind to the state of the soul. According to J. C. Lavater in the 18th century, for example, it was the shadow of the face, not the face itself, that was the soul's reflection. More recently Andy Warhol, in his Shadows canvases, and Joseph Beuys have in turn explored the idea of the shadow as the hyper-realized revelation of utter human emptiness and as the self's awesomely powerful Doppelgänger.

Stoichita's compelling account of the shadow and Western art, which draws on texts by Renaissance artist-authors like Vasari and Cennini, folk tales, fairy tales and classical myths, works by van Eyck, Poussin, Malevich, De Chirico, Picasso and other masters, German Expressionist cinema, photography and child psychology, is a wholly original incursion into a subject that for centuries has challenged the very meaning of art as representation.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In what could be called a meticulous dissection of Robert Louis Stevenson's "I Have a Little Shadow," Stoichita (history of art, Univ. of Fribourg, Switzerland) examines the artistic and intellectual concepts of the "dark spot" and of their effects upon our view of reality. In exhaustive if not exhausting detail, he ranges from Pliny to Plato, from Piaget to photography, from wall painting to Warhol. Black is both the absence of light and all the colors of the rainbow; in comparison, the shadow contains both the reflection of the image and its essential nature. Apart from its philosophical terminology, this is a difficult book; few sentences escape from parenthetical insertion, and one wonders whether this is a reflection of the original or the imposition of the stylistic shadow of the translator. Also, it is surprising that such a scholarly book should lack an index. Still, it seems that what the shadow knows, Stoichita knows as well, and his work will be useful in academic and art libraries collecting for a graduate level. Paula Frosch, Metropolitan Museum of Art Lib., New York

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Review

"Stoichita surpasses his predecessors with his discriminating, inspired interrogation ... dazzling analysis" --
Marina Warner, Tate Magazine

About the Author

Victor I. Stoichita is Professor of the History of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jessica Bradburn:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even a problem. What people must be consider when those information which is inside the former life are difficult to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is appropriate to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you get it as your main information we will see huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take A Short History of the Shadow (Essays in Art and Culture) as the daily resource information.

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