



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

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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