ABSTRACT

Perspective has often been much too quickly restricted to particular problems of representation, such that its significance in each case for the different art forms of painting and architecture have frequently failed to have been distinguished. Indeed perspective also operates in the much broader scope of everyday discourse. In language, when one talks about having a 'perspective' on something, it means having an opinion, or point of view on it.

This metaphor of the "point of view" (in the cultural context of the western world), much in use and taken for granted, relates to the broader notion of the "world-view", a concept directly indebted to the discipline of perspectival construction.

Yet even as perspective made inroads into common usage in language, its application, indeed its very survival in its original birthplace, in Art, was being called into question. About the middle of the 19th century, with the advent of Impressionism and Photography (which granted an even handier and surer yardstick for the depiction of visible reality, than any projective geometrical construction ever could), the role of perspective in painting seemed to be on the decline.

The first notable systematic denials of perspective are found in the still lifes of Cezanne. And by the beginning of the 20th century, with Cubism and Futurism, the rejection of perspective took on an openly polemic character.

With the above overview in mind, this present study had as its objective, a re-examination of the discipline of perspective, to get "a better picture" of it. This was done by focusing on the artistic expression from the period of the Renaissance, in particular the paintings.

By way of introduction, the significance of perspective to the culture of the Renaissance, specifically its paradigmatic nature (through its association with the discipline of geometry), is elaborated.

The second chapter proceeds with the analysis of five selected paintings. The purpose here is to use the paintings as a foundation or platform for explorative inquiry, as it is believed that the reconciliation of stylistic and scientific concepts of perspective can be studied only with reference to the artworks themselves.

In the third chapter, certain recurrent motifs present in the artworks are extracted from the previous analysis, and briefly discussed.

In the conclusion (postscript) this understanding would leave, then, perspective as such: as a privileged technique of representation of space that was discovered once, became a subject in its own right, and that still serves successfully to investigate some important spatial conditions in art and architecture, although now in the Postmodern world, its relevance in the artistic and symbolic representation of space, is in crisis.

In the end this essay itself should be seen as an attempt to "paint a picture" of perspective, from a particular and hopefully valid "point of view".