from the period. Art historians, scholars of early modern political culture, and those interested in monarchy studies will find this book well worth their time.

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*Painting as a Modern Art in Early Renaissance Italy*. Robert Brennan.
Renovatio Artium: Studies in the Arts of the Renaissance. London: Harvey Miller, 2019. 362 pp. €125.

Perhaps it comes as little surprise that the definition of modern painting in fourteenth-century Italy held different connotations than those that were famously penned by Giorgio Vasari in the Cinquecento. In support of this claim, Robert Brennan’s book contends that, beyond displaying the effects of naturalism, modern painting in early Renaissance Italy was also characterized as a technical achievement, one that was first rationalized in the art of Giotto. To support his thesis, Brennan begins the first of his three lengthy chapters by closely analyzing several textual passages from Cennino Cennini’s handbook on painting. Brennan pays particularly close attention to a single sentence in the treatise, in which Cennini claims Giotto as being the first painter to modernize the art. According to Brennan, Cennini considered Giotto as the one who technically restructured the medium, returning painting to its state of perfection that was only last established in classical antiquity. More specifically, Giotto set the foundations for modern painting, as his style both streamlined as well as codified the medium. Consequently, Cennini’s handbook, which instructed painters on how to properly draw and color through a series of instructions, was the very result of Giotto’s own artistic achievements that were made a century prior.

Chapter 2 turns to another Florentine author’s considerations of modern painting, this time found in a novella by Franco Sacchetti. In the tale, Sacchetti has a number of painters and sculptors gather together and debate who the finest painter of all time was, aside from Giotto. One sculptor, Alberto, contends that the title belonged to the contemporary women of Florence. These ladies deftly painted over their displeasing features with cosmetics, surpassing any painter alive in their artistry! This speech, Brennan hastens to assert, was meant to be taken ironically by its readers. While Sacchetti’s story seems to praise the cosmetic skills of the Florentine ladies, he was in fact criticizing the moral decay of Florence and its women. In his clever analysis of the text, Brennan demonstrates how Sacchetti’s women, who applied cosmetics to themselves, closely mimicked the work that present-day painters were performing. These artists were often commissioned to touch up Byzantine icons, repainting them in the more modern style that Giotto had earlier instituted. Ultimately, Sacchetti’s text again
proclaims the preeminence of this artist, arguing that the only kind of painting that could surpass Giotto’s artistry was comparable to that of a lady’s use of cosmetics.

Brennan’s final chapter jumps slightly forward in time to the mid-fifteenth century, analyzing the writings of Michele Savonarola. Although the author asserts that Giotto was the first modernist painter, he also criticizes the artist’s work in part. Namely, Savonarola believed that Giotto’s figures lacked the idealized and regimented proportions that ancient sculptors had long perfected and implemented in their own works. Rather than rely solely on the experience of an artist’s intuition, then, Savonarola recommended that an artistic canon based on objective, measured proportions would further rationalize modern painting, bringing the medium even closer to perfection. One such artist who followed these proposed scientific methods in their own work, Brennan argues, was Andrea Mantegna. By using linear perspective and consistent proportions in his art, Brennan affirms that Mantegna, like Giotto, ultimately advanced the art of modern painting.

In these three densely researched and richly illustrated chapters, Brennan proposes a convincing argument that he supports with a bevy of sources, drawing upon treatises and texts from disciplines such as music, philosophy, medicine, and preaching. As such, the book should serve as a captivating read for scholars, especially those in the fields of art history and literature. While some who are less versed in these subjects might find the content a bit arcane at times, the author does attempt to guide the reader with helpful translations of texts as well as ample footnotes for further commentary. Through its combined analysis of word and image, Brennan’s book will surely be a useful case study for those who wish to further investigate the ties between art and language in early Renaissance Italy.

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Representing from Life in Seventeenth-Century Italy. Sheila McTighe.
Visual and Material Culture, 1300–1700. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 252 pp. €109.

Representing “from life” was first identified as an important topic several decades ago by scholars of early modern Netherlandish art, notably Joaneath Spicer and Svetlana Alpers. The questions this raises are fundamental and often perplexing. Why were depictions that were clearly based on popular prints sometimes designated using terms such as *ad vivum* or its vernacular cognates, which imply an origin in life or nature rather than in an antecedent image? Did period beholders distinguish between realistic, fictive, and idealizing modes of visual representation as readily as we do? What are we to make of Caravaggio, an artist who was criticized for his overreliance on real-world