

**James Beck.** *Leonardo's Rules of Painting: An Unconventional Approach to Modern Art.* New York: Viking, 1979. 104 pp., illustrations. \$10.95.

**Reviewed by Dona Schwartz**  
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In the first paragraph of the preface to his book Professor Beck reveals his intention:

Leonardo da Vinci's ideas about painting have significance for modern and contemporary art, although the statement may seem improbable. My purpose in this book is to demonstrate the connection by selecting a number of Leonardo's statements about art and setting them beside paintings and drawings by modern artists. The juxtapositions, which essentially speak for themselves, confirm for me the premise that the observations Leonardo made at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth have relevance and validity today.

The volume, however, is not primarily about Leonardo's art theory. Instead it points to a broader topic of interest to those concerned with visual communication. As Beck's argument unfolds, the reader can discern a range of problems which the painter must solve as he translates three-dimensional reality into two-dimensional representation. The book demonstrates the historical continuity of these problems and the evolution of pictorial solutions.

In the introduction Beck briefly characterizes Leonardo and places him in historical context. Those who influenced Leonardo, his "intellectual sources," are suggested, and Leonardo's own sphere of influence is sketched, particularly with regard to three other Renaissance luminaries: Giorgione, Raphael, and Michelangelo. According to Beck's thesis, Leonardo's work, both painted and written, continues to influence painters. Obvious visual references to Leonardo's art made by modern painters are cited as partial evidence. The author notes that the direct influence of Leonardo's *ideas* is "less easy to ascertain" (p. 23), although this is to be the thrust of his argument. Each chapter focuses upon a topic of concern to picture makers. Beck presents Leonardo's views and his advice to painters, and the juxtapositions follow, providing the link between Leonardo and the modern era. In general one set of juxtapositions consists of a quotation from Leonardo which addresses a topic broached in the text, one sketch by Leonardo, and one or two modern drawings or paintings.

At the outset Beck discusses "creative invention," the means and conditions by which the artist is inspired. Here we find that Leonardo has suggested a method for stimulating the imagination: the artist is to contemplate stained walls, clouds, and the like, discovering therein missing or problematic components of pictorial compositions. The idea is not novel. Beck notes references made by Pliny (concerning Protogenes) and by Botticelli to similar practices. This method is contrasted with the more traditional approach in which the artist (exemplified by Michelangelo) has "the final compositional entity in mind from the start" (p. 30). One wonders whether Professor Beck wishes to exclude Leonardo from the latter approach to pictorial conceptualization, if indeed the two are separate. Leonardo's views concerning the working conditions of the painter are presented here as well. A question is posed: In which situation is the artist more productive—working alone or in the company of others? We encounter no conclusive answer. Beck quotes responses recommending both. We do learn that Leonardo's advice instructing painters to work among others may derive from suggestions made by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise *On Painting*, which in turn draws upon the work of Pliny the Elder.

Painters continue to contemplate the picture-making process, as Beck demonstrates visually in two of the more intriguing juxtapositions. Paired with Leonardo's statement that the artist must work alone, we find Édouard Vuillard's *Self-Portrait of the Artist in His Studio*. The painting is private, introspective: the painter, seen reflected in a mirror, studies himself as he works. On the opposite page, Picasso's version of Velazquez' *Las Meninas* appears with a quotation suggesting that artists work in the company of others. This image has significance, reminding us that artists *always* work with others because each new picture issues from a tradition of image making. As a painter works, he is accompanied by all the painters who precede him; they serve as his "reference group."

Other chapters touch upon specific problems that painters must address: how to portray the human figure, what subjects are appropriate to represent, and how color and perspective are used to depict nature accurately. The juxtapositions enable us to compare the array of solutions which the history of art affords us. We find Matisse's study of figures in motion, *Dance*, accompanied by a Leonardo sketch of the twisting torso of a man; a van Gogh landscape neighboring one by Dali; a Leonardo sketch of a battle scene adjacent to Picasso's *Guernica*. Readers discover a dynamic expansion of the artist's pictorial vocabulary.

Even though Beck has chosen to spotlight Leonardo, emphasizing his legacy, the reader must see Leonardo as one in a procession of artistic inventors. Readers can readily accept Beck's thesis because Leonardo's observations emanated from an artistic tradition within which painters continue to operate. Leonardo's advice has relevance today because the problems which concerned him



are fundamental to picture making. Beck's volume seems most meaningful when we consider Leonardo as a point of entry, leading us to a broader subject, the evolution of pictorial language.

A final point remains. Beck attempts to argue his thesis by visual means. However, no consistent principle structuring the presentation of the juxtapositions is presented. The illustrations enhance the text; often they vividly illuminate points made elsewhere verbally. But the juxtapositions do not demonstrate Beck's premise because he has not made them do so. An argument presented visually demands the same attention to structure as one presented verbally. Beck has failed his audience in this respect.

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**Donald Spoto.** *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures.* New York: Doubleday, 1979. 523 pp. + xv illustrations. \$8.95.

**Reviewed by Paul Messaris**  
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Aside from descriptions of the physical appearance of performers, the writing of many film critics rarely contains any evidence that the medium they are dealing with has a visual component. With most commercial movies, this critical blindness is of little consequence, since camerawork and editing are typically nothing more than devices for recording performances. The movies of Alfred Hitchcock, however, are so prominent an exception to this rule that any book about them which is at all discerning is bound to be of interest to an audience concerned with the specific characteristics of the visual mode of communication. Donald Spoto's analysis of Hitchcock's films is more than simply adequate in this respect, and the recent appearance of his book in paperback is a good opportunity for readers whose primary interest may not be in film itself to become acquainted with his writing.

*The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* is a chronologically arranged analysis of almost every one of Hitchcock's more than fifty theatrical motion pictures. Although there is no overview of Hitchcock's work apart from these discussions of individual films, cross-referencing abounds throughout the text, and the reader is treated to detailed expositions of the development of various Hitchcockian devices or "themes"—such as Hitchcock's almost obsessive repetition, over a series of many films, of the association between birds and chaos which finally erupted into feature length in *The Birds*. Throughout the book, Spoto's discussion of the films is intelligent, appropriately eru-

dite, and in impeccable taste. Most important—from the perspective of this review—there is evidence throughout the book of analysis based on repeated close viewing of the films, and in these passages the reader is confronted with illuminating examples of the working of visual intelligence—both the filmmaker's and the critic's.

A good example of the nature of Spoto's concern with visuals is his practice of tracing the use of a single device over the course of a film's entire structure. He does this with image brightness, in the case of the black-and-white film *Rebecca*, for instance, in which the progression in the heroine's emotional condition is carefully matched by changes in lighting, the color of costumes, and so on. In the case of *Rope*, Hitchcock's celebrated experiment in no-cut cinematography, Spoto notes that the film's sense of increasing "psychic" confinement and isolation is accompanied by corresponding reductions in the sweep and speed of camera movement. Camera movement is also a prominent subject in Spoto's very long analysis of *Vertigo*, his favorite Hitchcock film. He points out that, for example, the direction of movements in this film's second half reverses the directions of the first half, as the motive force behind the film's events reverses direction. Spoto also lists in detail the impressive variety of visual manifestations which Hitchcock was able to give to the film's central metaphoric image of the spiral: It appears, according to Spoto, in various aspects of *Vertigo* such as camera movements, the apparent direction of action in the camera frame, and architectural forms.

As these examples may make clear, what matters to Spoto in a film's visuals is rarely the presence of pretty pictures—and the same goes for Hitchcock. In fact, Spoto convincingly demonstrates that one of Hitchcock's prettiest sequences is actually a satire on that kind of filmmaking: It occurs in *I Confess*, in an overly gorgeous flashback of reminiscences by a character who would be expected to think of the past in lushly overdone images. Even in the case of authentically exquisite visuals, such as the overhead shot in *Topaz* in which a collapsing woman's long gown spreads out about her body like an opening flower, Spoto is careful to point out the narrative integrity of the image—in this case, its emphasis on the fact that the woman, doomed to die, has been spared the disfiguring tortures which accompanied the deaths of her comrades. In fact, there are times when Spoto may seem to be trying a little too hard to fit one or another feature of the film's visual devices into an integrated, rationalized pattern. This is particularly true of some of his claims about Hitchcock's colors; for example, he maintains that the on-screen presence of red objects, such as clothes, books, and flowers, in *Torn Curtain* is a deliberate suggestion of the fires of hell, with which the film's heroes are faced behind the Iron Curtain. In fairness to Spoto, however, it should be said that there is abundant support, in accounts of Hitchcock's working methods as well as in the films themselves, for this kind of assumption about