

With its select, narrowly focused set of questions and examples, the book offers important new case studies to exemplify how this new departure began generations before the typically cited moment in early Quattrocento Florence.

Henrike Christiane Lange, *University of California, Berkeley*
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The Absent Image: Lacunae in Medieval Books. Elina Gertsman.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. xx + 232 pp. \$124.95.

This is, as the author says in her acknowledgements, a book about nothing. This book is really about the concept of nothing and is more specifically about the potential of blank space to be a site of meaning-making. The central claim of the book—that spaces of nothingness in medieval books are deeply implicated in intersecting discussions of mathematics, theology, philosophy, and material culture—is compelling.

Gertsman argues that scholars have concentrated for too long on the teeming mass of presence (sometimes called *horror vacui*) in medieval books, and that this preoccupation has led us to miss the potentially profound meaning of blank space, broadly defined here as spaces outlined but not completed, erased images, or the literal absence of material, as in holes cut into the parchment. In taking this capacious view of emptiness, Gertsman argues that these visual lacunae are not simply evidence of incompleteness, deficiencies, or accidents of material history but rather are sites of inherent meaning, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their creation and existence. As such, these blank spaces have profound implications for the interpretation of medieval books.

Unfolding over four chapters bookended by an introduction and a coda, Gertsman explores many possible readings of emptiness pinned to several primary case studies, organized roughly chronologically from the late thirteenth through the late fifteenth centuries. Each example serves to explore the ways in which visual gaps could prompt readers to participate in the creation of a text's meaning. The book's first chapter situates lacunae in the context of late medieval conceptions of nothingness, especially the thirteenth-century developments in theology and mathematics that fashioned nothingness as tangible ideas, including the development (and deep discomfort with) the mathematical notion of zero. This chapter is a particularly strongly argued and multifaceted examination of a particular empty space: a curiously and conspicuously uninhabited roundel in a large initial *I* otherwise packed with Creation images that begins Genesis in the late thirteenth-century Kaisheim Bible (Munich BSB, Cod. lat. 28169, fol. 51). Its "aniconic" nature (3), in Gertsman's hands, becomes a site for richly layered meaning, drawing on thirteenth-century debates of Aristotelian philosophy and questions of divine creation from nothingness (*ex nihilo*). This framed emptiness thus becomes a presence, a way of representing the very idea of nothingness.

The second chapter explores this idea further, turning to an examination of the ways in which emptiness could constitute presence, especially where frames could generate a social and culturally conditioned, if unpredictable, imaginative filling. In her third chapter, Gertsman examines erased and effaced images, concentrating especially on the act of erasure as both performative and devotional in nature. The resulting effect of the erased image is twofold: its absence calls attention to itself, and in so doing creates new opportunities for the insertion of imagined images. The final chapter engages the idea of literal absence in the form of parchment holes, those created both accidentally and on purpose, that physical subtraction of material opening new possibilities for knowing and experiencing.

Gertsman's rhetorical delight in describing and examining the elastic concepts of emptiness, nothingness, absence, presence, imagination, and creation is evident, and this book, with its engagement with the theoretical implications of emptiness, is an example of highly creative thinking in the field of medieval art history. Its greatest strength lies in its meticulous close reading of images (or rather, the lack thereof) in conjunction with analyses of medieval intellectual, theological, philosophical, and devotional debates and practices.

Gertsman situates the objects of her study in their temporal moment while also allowing them to engage with contemporary theoretical approaches. She often employs a semiotic methodology, eliding questions of intentionality, readership, patronage, and when and by whom empty spaces or erasures were created in a manuscript's material history, instead foregrounding their potential meanings throughout time and as they exist to us today. Innovative but at times theoretically dense, this book will prove generative for scholars interested in thinking experimentally, especially art historians and those in the fields of religion and philosophy. It provides a model for engaging with thorny questions of phenomenology and materiality, opening new avenues for thinking through the complex visual culture(s) of the medieval book.

Larisa Grollemond, *J. Paul Getty Museum*
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The Legend of Veronica in Early Modern Art. Katherine T. Brown.
Routledge Research in Art and Religion. New York: Routledge, 2020. xvi + 162 pp. \$155.

Katherine Brown states that the purpose of her study is to examine the nature of images of Veronica and the ways in which early modern artists adopted her character and cloth relic as subject matter. Chapter 1 is dedicated to Veronica in legend and literature. Brown starts by explaining the meaning of Veronica as both the name of a saint and a swath of cloth. In the first century, Eusebius of Caesarea mentioned her in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*; in the fourth century, one Byzantine and one Western legend