

Sunday Herald (Glasgow, Scotland)

August 29, 2004

Distorting lens

SENAY Boztas's story "Hockney pet theory challenged" (News, August 22) describes the recent work of two computer scientists who analysed a modern painting by Nicholas Williams and a 1434 painting by van Eyck, computed 8% for one as opposed to 12.6% for the other, and offer the difference in these percentages as "proof" that David Hockney is wrong in his contention that early Renaissance artists used optics.

Unfortunately, these scientists misunderstand the nature of the visual and optical evidence.

Artists since the time of Alberti (after van Eyck) have been trained in all aspects of perspective, and since the time of Fox Talbot have viewed countless photographic images projected by lenses. Because of this, the fact a modern artist can paint an object in decent "optical" perspective is neither evidence for nor against the contention that Renaissance artists used optics.

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