



# Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture

By Stuart Clark

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**Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture** By Stuart Clark

*Vanities of the Eye* investigates the cultural history of the senses in early modern Europe, a time in which the nature and reliability of human vision was the focus of much debate. In medicine, art theory, science, religion, and philosophy, sight came to be characterized as uncertain or paradoxical--mental images no longer resembled the external world. Was seeing really believing?

Stuart Clark explores the controversial debates of the time--from the fantasies and hallucinations of melancholia, to the illusions of magic, art, demonic deceptions, and witchcraft. The truth and function of religious images and the authenticity of miracles and visions were also questioned with new vigor, affecting such contemporary works as *Macbeth*-- a play deeply concerned with the dangers of visual illusion. Clark also contends that there was a close connection between these debates and the ways in which philosophers such as Descartes and Hobbes developed new theories on the relationship between the real and virtual.

Original, highly accessible, and a major contribution to our understanding of European culture, *Vanities of the Eye* will be of great interest to a wide range of historians and anyone interested in the true nature of seeing.

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#### Review

"Clark's analysis should prompt historians of early modern art, religion, philosophy, and science to a new appreciation of how central concerns over seeing were in all these areas. Far from being a 'historian of witchcraft' or now a 'historian of vision,' Clark is one of our preeminent historians of the rich interconnectedness of early modern intellectual culture."--Michael D. Bailey, *American Historical Review*

"Wonderfully subtle exploration of how, from the 15th to the 17th centuries, people developed a complex understanding of the relationship between what was seen and what was known."--P.D. Smith, *The Guardian*

"An impressive and authoritative contribution to the cultural history of sight...Clark's book is a powerful argument that any scholar who has an interest in images and image making, in their production and circulation, must give attention to the nature of vision itself, and to the many interlocking factors that determine its cultural construction." -- *Renaissance Quarterly*

#### About the Author

Stuart Clark is a Professor of History at University of Wales Swansea.

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