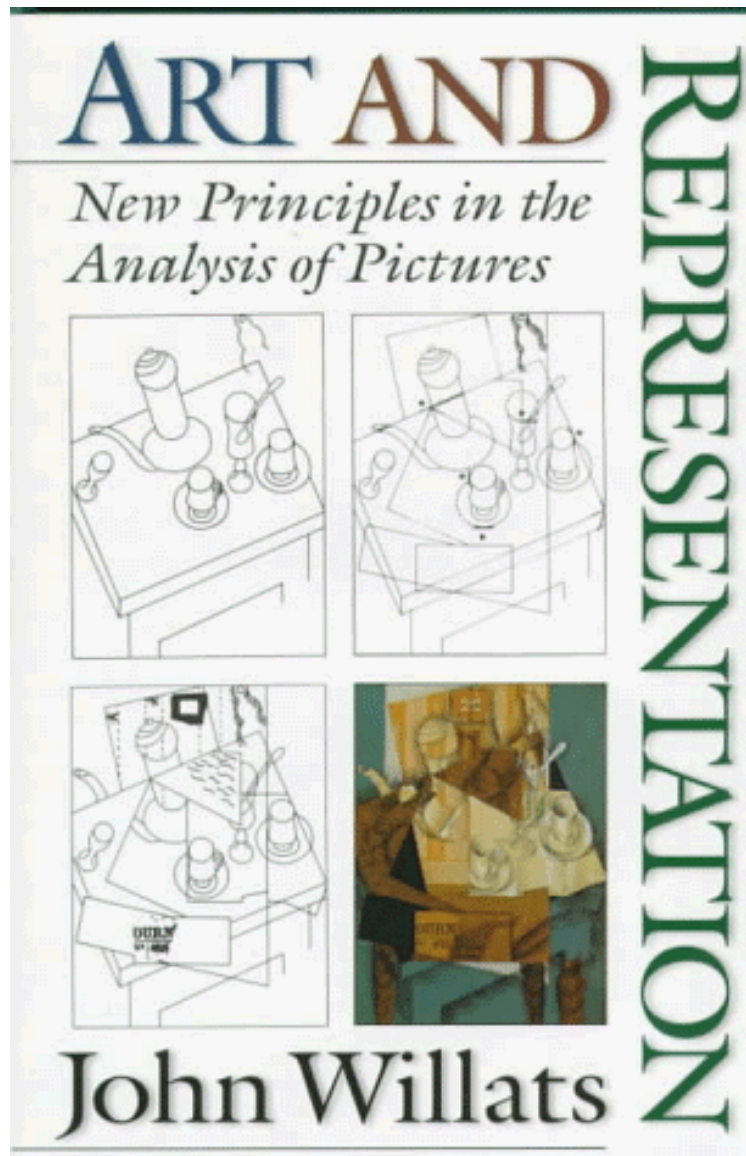


## Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures

John Willats

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#880104 in Books Princeton University Press 1997-04-14 Original language: English PDF # 1 1.24 x 6.40 x 9.591, 1.73 #File Name: 0691087377392 pages | File size: 50.Mb

**John Willats : Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Changed my life. By si happened upon this book during the research period of my BFA thesis year. It changed my life as a beginning illustrator. I only wish Willats' "Making Sense of Children's Drawings," whose subject matter is frequently brought up here, could be found on for a similar price. 19 of

20 people found the following review helpful. A multidisciplinary masterpiece on visual representation By Fredo Durand Good multidisciplinary studies are rare, but this one is a masterpiece. Willats presents a systematic study of images, which allows to describe in a unified framework not only artworks from all periods and locations, but also technical drawings, children drawings, etc. This solid framework then allows very coherent and relevant description, comparisons and studies of evolution. His main thesis is the separation between drawing systems (exact perspective, naive perspective, orthographics projection, etc.) and the denotation system (line drawing, silhouette, optical representation, etc.) He includes recent advances in computer vision, art history, children psychology and human vision to ground this classification. This book is of high interest for all those who are interested in images and representation: art historian, critics, artists, illustrators, psychologists, computer scientists, etc. I had loved *Art and Illusion* (Gombrich) and *Art and Visual Perception* (Arnheim), Willats' book is their natural complement.

In *Art and Representation*, John Willats presents a radically new theory of pictures. To do this, he has developed a precise vocabulary for describing the representational systems in pictures: the ways in which artists, engineers, photographers, mapmakers, and children represent objects. His approach is derived from recent research in visual perception and artificial intelligence, and Willats begins by clarifying the key distinction between the marks in a picture and the features of the scene that these marks represent. The methods he uses are thus closer to those of a modern structural linguist or psycholinguist than to those of an art historian. Using over 150 illustrations, Willats analyzes the representational systems in pictures by artists from a wide variety of periods and cultures. He then relates these systems to the mental processes of picture production, and, displaying an impressive grasp of more than one scholarly discipline, shows how the Greek vase painters, Chinese painters, Giotto, icon painters, Picasso, Paul Klee, and David Hockney have put these systems to work. But this book is not only about what systems artists use but also about why artists from different periods and cultures have used such different systems, and why drawings by young children look so different from those by adults. Willats argues that the representational systems can serve many different functions beyond that of merely providing a convincing illusion. These include the use of anomalous pictorial devices such as inverted perspective, which may be used for expressive reasons or to distance the viewer from the depicted scene by drawing attention to the picture as a painted surface. Willats concludes that art historical changes, and the developmental changes in children's drawings, are not merely arbitrary, nor are they driven by evolutionary forces. Rather, they are determined by the different functions that the representational systems in pictures can serve. Like readers of Ernst Gombrich's famous *Art and Illusion* (still available from Princeton University Press), on which *Art and Representation* makes important theoretical advances, or Rudolf Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception*, Willats's readers will find that they will never again return to their old ways of looking at pictures.

From *Library Journal* Willats holds degrees in mechanical sciences and psychology and has trained as a sculptor at the Royal College of Art, giving him a special expertise in perception, the formal structure in painting, and their application to artificial intelligence. While this book is well written and avoids the jargon of semiotics and deconstructivism, the five-page glossary will often need to be consulted. Definitions of "picture primitives" and "scene primitives" are of note along with the interesting and significant comments on children's drawings. As a treatise, it is a highly technical addition to Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (Oxford Univ., 1960. reprint, 1988) and Rudolf Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), but with more limited appeal; it is not for general readership. For larger academic collections. ?Mary Hamel-Schwulst, Towson State Univ. Lib., Md. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. "In sum, Willats offers clear applications of his ideas to an immense diversity of pictures from various sources. His tour de force will be the jumping-off point for most picture-perception researchers in the near future. . . . It will shape debate about drawing development for many years."--John M. Kennedy, *Nature* "Art and Representation contains many important distinctions between the various types of drawings made in the history of the world and their different functions. It is the most synthetic attempt I know of to describe precisely what elements actually constitute a drawn line. . . . Willats' insistence on looking very precisely at seemingly the most scattered and accidental marks in children's art, will make the charming drawings on your refrigerator seem at times like highly elaborate encoded signs, which indeed they are. One of the benefits of Willats' dogged cataloguing is that you will never be able to look at a child's drawing, or perhaps any drawing, the same way again."--Mark Andres, *The Boston Book* "Willats's original and subtle approach to the complexities of visual representation should topple some sacred cows and generate lively discussion."--Choice From the Inside Flap" John Willats presents a new approach to the methods artists use to depict the world. . . . All art historians and critics as well as psychologists interested in drawing or painting will need to become familiar with Willats's approach. *Art and Representation* will create a considerable stir and will change the way both critics and the public think about art."--Stuart Sutherland, Professor Emeritus, Sussex University "We have for too long known elaborate attempts to 'explain' pictures of things rooted in the thinnest conceptions of how to 'describe' pictures. In *Art and Representation*, Willats not only recognizes the problem but also accomplishes much of the job of solving it, based on his rare combination of abilities as an artist, engineer, and leading researcher in the cognitive psychology of children's art. Through revealing discussions of a diversity of well-illustrated

graphic forms, from Greek vase painting and Byzantine icons to cubism and photography, from children's drawings to technical design drawings, Willats provides a systematic, clear, and nontechnical language that would greatly benefit anyone writing about pictures."--Patrick Maynard, University of Western Ontario