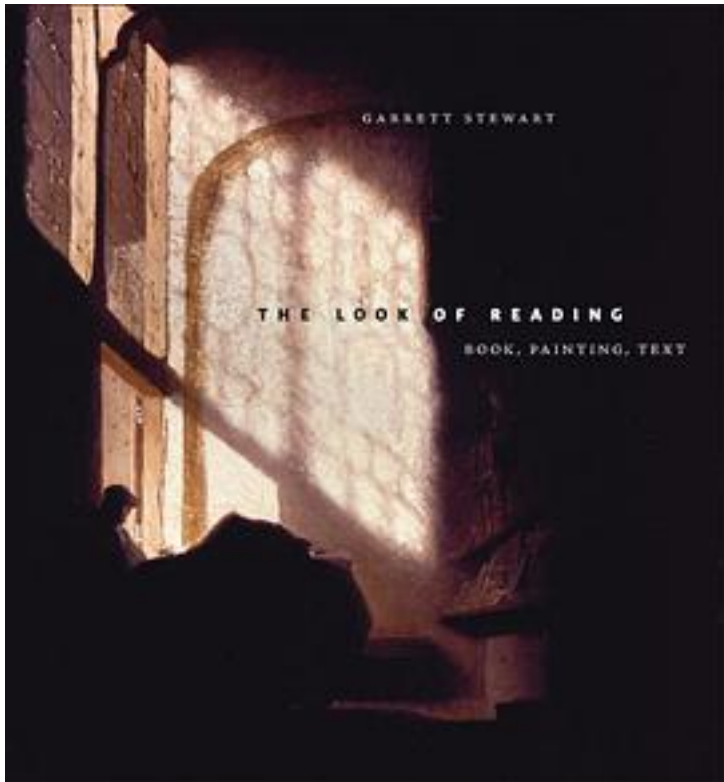# The Look of Reading

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We take for granted that words can describe pictures, but we don't often consider that the reverse is also true: pictures can depict words, as well as the people reading them. In "The Look of Reading," Garrett Stewart explores centuries of painted images of reading, arguing that they collectively constitute an overlooked genre in the history of art.

A stunning array of artists--including Rembrandt, Picasso, Cassatt, and Caravaggio,

among many others--have worked in this genre during the past five hundred years. With innovative interpretations of their work, ranging from Bellini's open Bibles to Bacon's mangled newsprint, Stewart examines the give-and-take between reading matter depicted in painting and the "look of reading" on the portrayed face. He then traces this kind of interaction from the sixteenth century, when pictured reading generally illustrated people reading holy scriptures, to later periods, when secular painting started to represent the inwardness and absorption associated especially with novel reading. Ultimately, Stewart shows how the subject fell out of such paintings altogether in the late twentieth century, replaced by words, scrawls, and blurs that put the viewer in the place of the reader.

Lavishly illustrated with the paintings it discusses, "The Look of Reading "charts the life and death of an entire genre. Essential reading for art historians and literary theorists alike, it will become the definitive study of this overlooked aspect of the relationship between images and words.

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