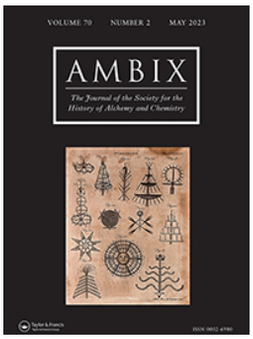

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From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World

By Pamela H. Smith. Pp. 344, illus., index. University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London. 2022. £79.00 (hardback), £29.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-22-680027-1 (hardback), 978-0-22-681824-5 (paperback).

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first warned of its hazards, sixty years after Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, and fifty years after it was banned, DDT is still here" (p. 323).

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From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World. By Pamela H. Smith. Pp. 344, illus., index. University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London. 2022. £79.00 (hardback), £29.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-22-680027-1 (hardback), 978-0-22-681824-5 (paperback).

In the eighteen years since its first appearance, Pamela Smith's *The Body of the Artisan* has become a seminal work for scholars in early modern history of science and art, who have often positioned their own contributions with respect to the insights and language Smith developed there. It is therefore hard to escape a comparison of Smith's newest monograph with that of 2004, especially because *From Lived Experience to the Written Word* returns to the vocabulary of *The Body of the Artisan*, such as "artisanal epistemology" and "vernacular science of matter." Does Smith's latest book offer something new to the reader who is familiar with *The Body of the Artisan*?

Let me immediately say that my answer to this question is unequivocally positive. The book is divided into four parts, and each part moves beyond *The Body of the Artisan*. Part I takes the *Book of Michael of Rhodes* and Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte* as points of departure to suggest that writing itself was a form of experimentation because it facilitated new ways of ordering practical knowledge, and that model books "could be a means to represent the process of coming to expertise" (p. 36). However, a major part of this section of the book focuses on the "material imaginary," which Smith defines as "a system of knowledge that provides flexible parameters within which the exploration of material properties and behavior is undertaken" (p. 45). Her example illustrates an imaginary connecting blood, sulfur, vermilion, lizards, and gold. The concept of the "material imaginary" replaces Smith's earlier term "vernacular science of matter," which could be misleading, she argues, as it anachronistically suggests that craftsmen developed a sort of proto-science aimed at clear expressions in words.

Part II focuses on *Kunstbücher*, and its central argument is that these and other "how-to" writings, from antiquity to the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert in the eighteenth century, were not just conveying technical know-how, but aimed to reform existing hierarchies of knowledge. For lack of a better term in English, Smith proposes to use *Kunst* to refer to craft knowledge which is unverbalised and multi-sensorial; it is knowledge of particulars, which in modern parlance is referenced as skill allowing the expert practitioner to improvise and intuit in the face of the whims of materials and the contingencies of the environment. Particularly new with respect to *The Body of the Artisan* is the attention to the role of recipes. Recent scholarship has shown that these should no longer be regarded as mere vehicles for the transmission of technical know-how. Recipes are invitations to action, Smith argues, and their serial ordering in collections enacts repeated testing to come to reliable results. *Kunst* as knowledge "must capture the characteristic of managing *process*" (p. 146).

In Part III, the attention shifts from makers and authors to readers and collectors. Among these, as it turns out, artisans themselves were by no means the most important group, and Smith discusses a variety of actors with different backgrounds and motivations who became interested in *Kunst*. For example, in the 1570s and 1580s the Basel jurist and city official Basilius Amerbach brought together a collection that included goldsmiths' tools, patterns, and moulds, reflecting his appreciation of the process of making in the workshop. However, most

space is devoted to the librarian Samuel Quiccheberg whose treatise made clear how important practical knowledge was to rulers and statecraft as part of a princely collection or *Kunstkammer*.

In the fourth and final part, the book moves most explicitly beyond *The Body of the Artisan* as it reflects Smith's experience of collaborative research in laboratory reconstruction of instructions from Ms. Fr. 640, a French manuscript of art and craft practices that forms the core of Smith's Making and Knowing Project at Columbia University. Here she distills the core insight that the anonymous author-practitioner of this sixteenth-century collection was primarily interested in the categorisation of materials by manipulating, hypothesising, and testing them – a working method that goes well beyond the trial and error typically identified as the artisanal *modus operandi*. This may also be the part of the book that speaks most to the interests of the readers of this journal, as it reveals an epistemically productive fascination with material transformation that was the core business of alchemy in the early modern period. This part concludes with a search for alternative formulations to *Kunst* to describe this cognitive activity, culminating in the final sentence of the book where it is called "material imaginary," "fundamental structuring categories," "artisanal epistemology," and a "mode of work," among other things. Confronted with the same limitations of language that vexed early modern artisans, Smith is on a similar quest for creative descriptions and translations.

Indeed, at its most basic level, the book tries to grasp and make explicit in words what practical knowledge is; and herein lies the most significant difference with Smith's previous monograph. As the subtitle of *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* suggests, it situated artisanal epistemology in relation to science. Traces of this approach remain, but *From Lived Experience to the Written Word* primarily defines practical knowledge on its own terms. Characteristically, the book ends with an epilogue on "Global Routes of Practical Knowledge" in which Smith starts to undo the Eurocentric assumptions of the concept of the Scientific Revolution. There are books which close the discussion by offering the final word, and others which open fields by drastically altering the terms of discussion. *From Lived Experience to the Written Word* is a perfectly crafted book belonging to the latter category.

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March of the Pigments: Color History, Science and Impact. By Mary Virginia Orna. Pp. xix + 477, illus., index. Royal Society of Chemistry: London. 2022. £34.99. ISBN (print): 978-183916-315-9; (ePub eISBN): 978-183916-326-5.

The coloured materials used over the centuries to give form and substance to depictions of the world we live in – or to visions of some inner world of the imagination – have been the source of inspiration for several recent authors. To take two examples, Philip Ball's *Bright Earth* (Viking, 2001) surveys the history, science, and development of an ever-increasing range of pigments, while Victoria Finlay's *Colour* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2002) is a wonderful travelogue of colour.

Both these books are cited by Mary Virginia Orna in what is a slightly different approach to the study of pigments, one concentrating on their chemistry, but in the context of the history and development of painting, taking art works and their making as starting points for exploring pigments. The book develops three parallel themes: the pigment in history; the location, usage, and survival of pigments; and the development of analytical methods. In sixteen chapters, the author takes us from the earliest deliberate applications of pigment to rock face in cave art, through tattooing, the earth's mineral wealth and the accidental discoveries of Drebbel's scarlet, Prussian blue, phthalocyanine blue, and YInMn