Foreword

Dear Reader,

I knew of Giulia Simonini and her work before we met. In the emerging discipline of technical art history, trained conservators of art willing to use their benchwork or practical experience to serve historical inquiries were rare; the other way around was and remains more typical. And what training she was able to access! Not only a well-developed understanding of objects and their production but also, as a paleographer, deeper insight into thought processes about them that comes from a close relationship with writing. The effect of her background is reflected in this volume.

At its core, *Color Charts in 18th-century Europe: Natural, Pigmentary, and Trichromatic* is a prosopographic study of 18th-century color charts. Calling on three dozen examples, Giulia explains the efforts behind their creation and addresses their reception, no matter how they originated or how far use diverged from expectation.

In choosing to write about color charts, and in centering her study on work in the 18th century, Giulia has been able to combine and transcend some major themes in early modern color studies. Her holistic approach creates a more fully contextualized analysis of color charts, identifying similarities within different purposes. Histories of color descriptions or ordering systems rely on certain highlights: color scales used in medical analysis, the cabinet of curiosities approach to collecting and ordering natural history objects or the output of colormakers, and the efforts to find and coordinate the order of tangible forms with growing understanding of the spectral colors of light. The result of this work, as you will see, goes further, permitting a more concise definition of differences among the presentations.

Giulia describes an 18th-century seething with ideas about color, a turning point in the working approaches of natural historians and scholars. She recognizes the act of creating a color chart as a transfer of tacit knowledge onto paper, with all the compromises and confirmations inherent in this kind of transfer. The historiography she presents moves forward the conversation about the representation and order of color as it marks out its many descriptions so that it raises important questions as it provides a foundation for their answers. The clarity of Giulia's positioning explains the often-confusing connections between an artisan's trichromatic experience and

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the nature of color in the physical world. This means the book functions as an interdisciplinary tool, connecting objects treated as disparate in many earlier studies.

Part of Giulia's strategy to cut through the confusion is to turn first to rationales for color-chart making. She contrasts and connects the overlapping concerns of medical, natural history, and pigmentary systems, drawing connections through a multitude of simultaneous purposes. This makes clear why there was never one universally adopted form—or even a few—and why charting color continued throughout the 19th century and continues today. Bringing to the forefront the novelty of chromatic ideas, the order within their presentations and the shifts this philosophy of color use creates for the constants of lightness and darkness, and the issues of their replication (tied to problems of color reproduction). She nicely calls into question the nature of description, interrogating in turn the novelty of chromatic ideas, the role of mathematics in artisanal color-chart construction, and the practices of making and disseminating a color chart.

This is a work of enormous significance to the study of color and to the representation and communication of ideas. Of particular importance is the way Giulia addresses the interfaces of artisanship and philosophical practice in the long 18th century. Charts offer order. Ordering systems facilitate communication; they might also illustrate a theoretical stance. Printed or published color charts make ideas about its form and its uses available to an ever-widening community of interest. Yet each color chart is a tool that could be proscriptive and descriptive, advising or confirming. And so they continue: Artists, artisans, manufacturers, designers, and natural historians, all seeking to catalog their aspects of their world, have these charts to guide their own, whether they choose to imitate or counter, for whatever purpose they hope to address.

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