

Summary

MICHAEL GRILLO (University of Maine) / Perspective as structured memory in the wake of the Great Plague of 1348

The Great Plague of 1348 prompted a cathartic shift in thinking about cities, from organic social networks of individuals, to the remaining buildings indexing the memory of their lost residents. The profound impact of such population loss forced survivors to engage the Classical device of Memory Theater, remembering people by their spatial locations rather than their bodily presence. Engaging this public sensibility, the Trecento reconceptualized how pictorial structure, from one centered around protagonists to a standardized compositional system placing each figure in clearly mapped relationships, serving what Leon Battista Alberti would later deem the primary purpose of painting: clear narration, *istoria*. Displacing subjects for their spatial relations, this new compositional scheme of perspective offered a mimetic form in which painters of the Quattrocento could then explore how to articulate the capacities of historical memory itself. From the chaos of pestilence emerged one of the definitive design elements, one of rationalized narrative space, core to Renaissance vision.