

Now, it is necessary for the painter to know how to organise his painting. Let me explain. I will tell you what I do when I paint. On my painting surface I first draw a rectangle of any size I like which I think of as an open window through which I see whatever will be painted. Here I determine how large I would like the figures in the painting, and I divide the height of the man into three, each part equal to the measure known as a braccio, because when measuring a man one sees he is about three braccia. With these braccia I mark the bottom line of the rectangle into as many parts as it will hold. Then wherever I wish in the rectangle I mark a point where the centric ray strikes, and this I call the centric point. To be well positioned it must be no higher from the base line of the rectangle than the height of a man to be painted there, so that both the spectators and the painted objects appear to be on the same plane.

Having marked the centric point, as I said, I draw straight lines from it to each of the divisions on the base line of the rectangle. These lines show in what way lines diminish into infinity. For the horizontal lines lying one behind another I proceed as follows. In a small space I draw a straight line and divide it up into parts similar to the base of the rectangle. Then above it I put a point at the same height as the centric point was above the base line, and from this I draw lines to each division marked on the base. Then I establish how great I want the distance from the spectator's eye to the picture and drop, as the mathematicians say, a perpendicular line that cuts through whatever lines it encounters. A perpendicular line is a straight line that, when it cuts another straight line, makes right angles all around it. So this perpendicular, where it cuts the other lines, will give me a succession of horizontal points. And in this way I have found how to draw all the parallels of the pavement in the painting.



Man and Birds

Page spread from *On Painting*. Alberti's interest in perspective is captured by this celebrated image. The left-hand page shows text outlining his ideas. On the right-hand page is a hard-ground etching, with aquatint and surface roll, and with etched perspective lines drawn according to Alberti's text. Allix carefully followed his instructions regarding the lines of perspective and the division of a man's height into three braccia, and the image demonstrates how effective and accurate these were.