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# Pissing Figures 1280–2014 (Ekphrasis)



## Synopsis

"Not just anyone makes a good pisser."--Jean-Claude Lebensztejn

Jean-Claude Lebensztejn's history of the urinating figure in art, *Pissing Figures 1280-2014*, is at once a scholarly inquiry into an important visual motif, and a ribald statement on transgression and limits in works of art in general. Lebensztejn is one of France's best-kept secrets. A world-class art historian who has lectured and taught at major universities in the United States, his work has remained almost entirely in French, his American audience limited to a small but dedicated group of cognoscenti. First introducing the Manneken Pis—the iconic little boy whose stream of urine supplies water to this famous fountain and is also the logo for a Belgian beer company—the author takes the reader through a semi-scatological maze of cultural history. The earliest example is a fresco scene located directly above Cimabue's Crucifixion from around 1280 at the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, in which Lebensztejn's careful eye locates an angel behind a pillar urinating through a hole in his garment. He continues to navigate expertly through cultural twists and turns, stopping to discuss Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1968 film *Teorema*, for example, and Marlene Dumas's 1996 homage to Rembrandt's pissing woman. At every moment, Lebensztejn's prose is lively, his thinking dynamic, and his subject matter entertaining.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

...[Lebensztejn] elegantly reveals how artists have repeatedly used our queasiness in the face of bodily functions to transgress narrow-minded cultural norms. (Alexxa Gotthardt Artsy). . . amusing,

memorable books. . . (Jonathon Sturgeon Artnet) The books in the series seem designed to slip into your back pocket — slim, spartan, and compact, sporting uniform covers consisting solely of typeface in black or white, with a matching horizontal bar across the top, against a solid color. (Thomas Micchelli Hyperallergic)

Jean-Claude Lebensztejn is a French art historian, critic, and honorary professor of the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His interests range from the art of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, to film, music, human animality, and more generally, the question of frontiers and boundaries. In addition to his *Études cazzannienes* (2006) and a scholarly edition of fifty of Cézanne's letters (2011), Lebensztejn has recently published a collection of essays on nomads, a translation of Lao-tseu, a study of Pygmalion, a conversation with Malcolm Morley, and numerous texts concerned with questioning norms of taste and aesthetic values in general. He is preparing a book on transgression in the works of Franz Kafka, Marquis de Sade, and Comte de Lautréamont. Jeff Nagy is a translator, critic, and historian of technology based in Palo Alto, California. His research focuses on networks pre- and post-Internet and the development of digital labor.

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