



The Oxford History of Western Art

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The Oxford History of Western Art is an innovative and challenging reappraisal of how the history of art can be presented and understood. Through a carefully devised modular structure, readers are given insights not only into how and why works of art were created, but also how works in different media relate to each other across time. Here--uniquely--is not the simple, linear "story" of art, but a rich series of stories, told from varying viewpoints.

Carefully selected groupings of pictures give readers a sense of the visual "texture" of the various periods and episodes covered. The 167 illustration groups, supported by explanatory text and picture captions, create a sequence of "visual tours"--not merely a procession of individually "great" works viewed in isolation, but juxtapositions of significant images that powerfully convey a sense of the visual environments in which works of art need to be viewed in order to be understood and appreciated. The aim throughout is to make the shape and nature of these visual presentations a stimulating and rewarding experience, allowing readers to become active participants in the process of interpretation and synthesis.

Another key feature of the narrative is the re-definition of traditional period boundaries. Rather than relying on conventional labels such as Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque, the book establishes five major phases of significant historical change that unlock longer and more meaningful continuities. This new framework shows how the major religious and secular functions of art have been forged, sustained, transformed, revived, and revolutionized over the ages; how the institutions of Church and State have consistently aspired to make art in their own image; and how the rise of art history itself has come to provide the dominant conceptual framework within which artists create, patrons patronize, collectors collect, galleries exhibit, dealers deal, and art historians write.

Though the coverage of topics focuses on European notions of art and their transplantation and transformation in North America, space is also given to cross-fertilizations with other traditions--including the art of Latin America, the Soviet Union, India, Africa (and Afro-Caribbean), Australia, and Canada. Written by a team of 50 specialist authors working under the direction of renowned art historian Martin Kemp, *The Oxford History of Western Art* is a vibrant, vigorous, and revolutionary account of Western art serving both as an inspirational introduction for the general reader and an authoritative source of reference and guidance for students.

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