



High Renaissance Art in St. Peter's and the Vatican: An Interpretive Guide

George L. Hersey

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Michelangelo, Raphael, Bramante—together these artists created some of the most glorious treasures of the Vatican, viewed daily by thousands of tourists. But how many visitors understand the way these artworks reflect the passions, dreams, and struggles of the popes who commissioned them? For anyone making an artistic pilgrimage to the High Renaissance splendors of the Vatican, George L. Hersey's book is the ideal guide.

Before starting the tour of individual works, Hersey describes how the treacherously shifting political and religious alliances of sixteenth-century Italy, France, and Spain played themselves out in the Eternal City. He offers vivid accounts of the lives and personalities of four popes, each a great patron of art and architecture: Julius II, Leo X, Clement VII, and Paul III. He also tells of the complicated rebuilding and expanding of St. Peter's, a project in which Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo all took part.

Having set the historical scene, Hersey then explores the Vatican's magnificent Renaissance art and architecture. In separate chapters, organized spatially, he leads the reader through the Cortile del Belvedere and Vatican Museums, with their impressive holdings of statuary and paintings; the richly decorated Stanze and Logge of Raphael; and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and newly cleaned Sistine Chapel ceiling. A fascinating final chapter entitled "The Tragedy of the Tomb" recounts the vicissitudes of Michelangelo's projected funeral monument to Julius II.

Hersey is never content to simply identify the subject of a painting or sculpture. He gives us the story behind the works, telling us what their particular themes signified at the time for the artist, the papacy, and the Church. He also indicates how the art was received by contemporaries and viewed by later generations.

Generously illustrated and complete with a useful chronology, *High Renaissance Art in St. Peter's and the Vatican* is a valuable reference for any traveler to Rome or lover of Italian art who has yearned for a single-volume work more informative and stimulating than ordinary guidebooks. At the same time, Hersey's many anecdotes and intriguing comparisons with works outside the Vatican will provide new insights even for specialists.

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