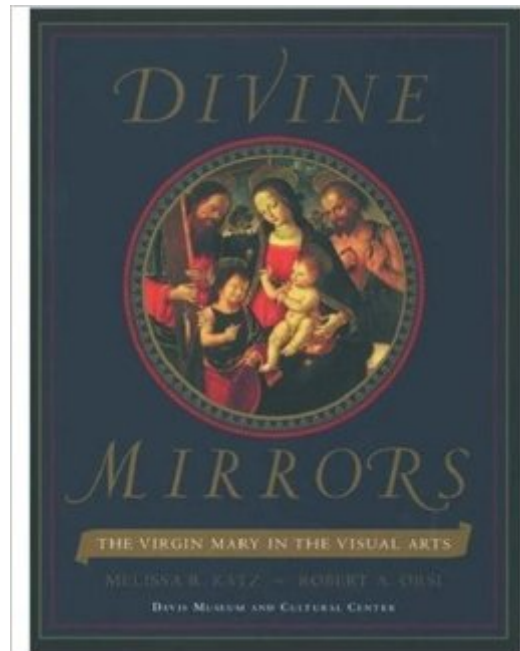


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Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary In The Visual Arts



Synopsis

Through a unique and stunning collection of paintings, sculpture, rare books, and works on paper, *Divine Mirrors* examines the complex relationship between sacred imagery and secular identity in the art of the Madonna. This magnificent work--born from a multi-year project that included a museum exhibition, scholarly symposium, and reinstallation of a segment of the permanent collection of the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College--features the work of such renowned artists as Il Pintoricchio, Mantegna, Munch, and Léger, alongside fresh, undiscovered masters and little-known works of art. The book's fifty catalogue entries range from a rare thirteenth-century panel painting to a specially commissioned artwork exploring the intersection of religion and modern life. This volume investigates everything from non-Western perceptions of European religious practices to the Virgin Mary's voice in musical composition. In the opening essay "The Many Names of the Mother of God" noted scholar Robert A. Orsi considers why images of Mary offer contemporary Americans such a powerful visual experience. Unlike paintings and sculptures created solely for aesthetic contemplation, Orsi writes, images of Mary are more than just artistic representations--they become for us an embodiment of the Virgin Mother herself. Then, moving into the historical realm, editor Melissa R. Katz guides us on a twenty-century chronological tour that explores the intersection of art history and world history in representations of Mary. Katz's essay "Regarding Mary: Women's Lives Reflected in the Virgin's Image" takes the elements of Marian iconography most relevant to the study of art and weaves them together to provide a guide for modern audiences to engage with the religious origins of our common artistic legacy. Filled with fascinating information, this important work requires no particular background in art history, religion, or the Bible. Readers of all levels will be rewarded with an in-depth encounter of a remarkable and complex figure.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press (July 12, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195145585

ISBN-13: 978-0195145588

Product Dimensions: 10.6 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (3 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #624,935 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #131 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Catholicism > Mariology #300 in Books > Reference > Catalogs & Directories #306 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Themes > Religious

Customer Reviews

This book is the companion to a multi-year exhibition of (mostly) paintings at Davis Museum at Wellesley College. Most of the works are from the Renaissance, with a smattering of Medieval images and some recent. There are a series of essays included, most of which will not be electrifying to any beginning bible studies student. In fact, the lack of biblical scholarship in the discussion of Mary is quite startling. The biggest asset of this book is the catalogue section wherein they discuss the sociopolitical concerns at the time of the painting, the meaning of various images and symbols inside the painting, the religious beliefs of the artist, etc. This is truly revealing. And, of course, the sheer quantity of images is truly impressive, and would be difficult to find under any other circumstances.

For me the real beauty of this book was not the illustrated catalogue of images in the Wellesley College collection, it was the excellent essay by Melissa Katz. Robert Orsi's essay was superb as usual, but rather short, and the other essays are so short (2 pages each) as to be almost unmentionable. Katz on the other hand takes her readers on a historical tour of Marian imagery that is also thematically related to the hours of her devotion. In this way, her essay is not only an overview of Marian imagery, but it is also an overview of the history of the Roman Catholic church, an overview of Marian devotional practices, and the social forces in Europe which shaped these two phenomena. My only criticism of her essay, which might be more accurately a criticism of the Wellesley College collection, is that there is very little information on Marian imagery and devotion outside of Europe.

I truly enjoyed this tour through Wellesley's collection of Marian art. The essays are clear, accessible and thought-provoking. Melissa Katz gives an accurate and broad summary of Christian history, with a special focus on the development and uses of art as well as the development of the Marian cultus. Her introduction is thorough, presuming little previous knowledge of Christian history. Orsi's essay is concise, thought-provoking, and helpful. The images are diverse and beautifully presented, ranging from ancient to (some) modern images of Mary as well as some other Western Christian subjects. I enjoyed this book enough to purchase a copy.

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