

## Frescoes by the Bay: Art, Artists, and Their Stories

**Karen Norton-Sinell**

Tayen Lane Publishing (Jun 15, 2018)

Hardcover \$39.99 (512pp)

978-0-9990807-0-2

*Frescoes by the Bay* is a two-volume visual tour of the wealth of fresco murals in the San Francisco area. Karen Norton-Sinell provides detailed research and extensive commentary about the frescoes' history, composition, iconography, and the identity of their many figures.

High-quality color reproductions of Norton-Sinell's photographs of the frescoes are critical, rendering the outsized paintings on a small scale. They allow for examination of the smallest details, right down to the titles on painted books and newspapers.

The 1930s mural and public art revival, largely supported by the federal Public Works of Art Project, kept unemployed artists working through the Great Depression and fostered an American national art identity. The author leads off her first volume with analysis of the twenty-six artists whose frescoes of Californians at work and play adorn the walls of the iconic Coit Tower.

While Diego Rivera, who graced San Francisco with four mural projects that are still on view today, may be familiar, many other local fresco artists are also importantly documented here. From Clifford Wright's heroic rendering of a surveyor and steelworker to John Langley Howard's Social Realist scenes of miners, these images of California history are well examined and described.

The books can be purchased as a set or as stand-alone volumes. As such, they each have the same bibliography and identical first chapters describing the elaborate and highly skilled buon fresco process and history of mural art. Since murals by Diego Rivera, Bernard Zakheim, and Victor Arnautoff are featured in each volume, there is also repetition of text introducing these artists.

Descriptions of artists' lives and work are authoritative and written in unadorned, easily accessible prose, avoiding esoteric artspeak. Norton-Sinell is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide to the Bay Area's frescoes and has created a useful resource that art aficionados, tourists, and regional history buffs alike can use and enjoy.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July/August 2018)

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