

Love and the Erotic in Art

Stefano Zuffi

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Who can deny interest in a title like *Love and the Erotic in Art*? And for those who obey the urge to look inside, this book rewards with plenty of nourishment for the senses and the mind. One of sixteen in the Guide to Imagery series, this book's pages are filled with 400 full color reproductions of original artwork that illuminate—you guessed it—the varied representations of love and the erotic in fine art.

The book's structure facilitates research: topical divisions include "Gestures, Symbols and Objects"; "Love's Setting"; "Emotions and Passions"; and "Famous Couples." Significant historical works of art in each media by significant artists such as Frida Kahlo, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Thomas Gainsborough, Titian, Albrecht Dürer, Giovanni Bellini, and Henri Matisse are among the book's selections.

In each topical division, the subject matter is explained clearly and explored thoroughly. In "Gestures, Symbols and Objects," for example, nineteen subtexts are identified, including Gods of Love, Promise, Kiss, Mirror, Dance, and Good-byes. Each subtext topic features several artworks that illustrate the topic. If, for example, the reader considers the subject of the kiss in art, an overview discusses the cultural and historical significance of the kiss over the millennia: a consistent gesture that is social, emotional, and personal. Then, six artworks are presented. Each is paired with information about the media, the artist, and the artist's inspirations and influences.

One featured painting is *The Kiss*, by Francesco Hayez, created in 1859 and considered a primary example of Italian Romanticism. In it, a man and woman, dressed in costumes from the middle ages, passionately embrace at the foot of a stairway. As *Love and the Erotic in Art* points out, a declaration of love and the exchange of affection are important themes of Romantic expression. Zuffi goes on to explore the reasons behind the figures' attire, and further explains that the artist painted the composition for the Paris World's Fair and that the image was to allude to the "amorous" alliance between France and Italy.

Stefano Zuffi is an art historian and the author of more than forty books, including a previous title in Getty's Guide to Imagery series, *Gospel Figures in Art*.

In *Love and the Erotic in Art*, Zuffi has created a quick reference guide to significant works of art and the symbols used in the emotional narratives these works depict. Artists at all stages of development, art historians, art patrons, and curators will find this one of the first books they look for when developing their own ideas and research.

PAMELA AYRES (May / June 2010)

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