

★ **Princes of the Renaissance: The Hidden Power Behind an Artistic Revolution**

Mary Hollingsworth

Pegasus Books (Mar 2, 2021)

Hardcover \$35.00 (504pp)

978-1-64313-546-5

Mary Hollingsworth's *Princes of the Renaissance* is a revealing account of the city-state dynasties that created unimaginable wealth, cut-throat competitions, and lavish displays of patronage, resulting in some of the Western world's most sublime art.

Addressing the panoply of the Italian Renaissance, including its ambitions, betrayals, and the breadth of its material culture, the book reveals a dangerous competition for power through which ostentatious displays of wealth became the coin of the realm. The patronage system supported workshops, sculptors, and glass blowers—thousands of artists who created works to emphasize a patron's power, wealth, and discernment.

Intricate details and juicy tidbits reveal the era's personalities, including Cosimo I de' Medici (a snob whose family's mercantile origins fueled resentment for the D'Estes family) and Isabella Gonzaga, who maintained her own studio of artists and craftsmen. It was a time when women one-upped each other with jewels, musical talents, and social dexterity to cover infinite power plays; a period marked by wealthy business and religious power brokers (including Pope Paul III, who commissioned a Titian portrait of himself to advertise his prominence).

Insightful details, such as that medieval tapestries remained popular because wealthy travelers required ostentatious caravans, and tapestries were easy to transport, reveal how life was lived. And beneath these accounts of wealth exist a group of rivals whose power-motivated intermarriages became so dense that strengthening one alliance started wars with others. There's a welter of similar names, titles, and relationships involved; a background in Renaissance history is helpful, but not essential. The book's full-color photographs of artworks and architecture are an added treat.

Princes of the Renaissance is a significant addition to Renaissance studies, and a delicious deep dive for those fascinated by the era.

SUSAN WAGGONER (March / April 2021)

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