A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art

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Featuring original contributions by an international roster of scholars from various disciplines, writings are grouped by concept in five sections that spotlight the varied components and processes that constitute the world of the visual arts and the variety of interpretive methods and ideas that can be, and have been, brought to bear on art objects. Essays explore how art interacts with the cultural paradigms of this explosive time: the interface between art and religion, art and science, and gender and sexuality to name a few.

Combining an unprecedented breadth of coverage and depth of scholarship with lucid and accessible writing, A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art represents the most comprehensive reference on Renaissance and Baroque visual arts available today.

Edited by Babette Bohn and James M. Saslow

Babette Bohn is Professor of Art History at Texas Christian University. Her publications include two books on Italian prints, Agostino Carracci (1995) and Agostino Matese of the Sixteenth Century (1996), and two on the drawings of Ludovico Carracci (2004) and Guido Reni (2008).

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A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art
These invigorating reference volumes chart the influence of key ideas, discourses, and theories on art, and the way that it is taught, thought of, and talked about throughout the English-speaking world. Each volume brings together a team of respected international scholars to debate the state of research within traditional subfields of art history as well as in more innovative, thematic configurations. Representing the best of the scholarship in the field and pointing toward future trends and across disciplines, the Blackwell Companions to Art History series provides a magisterial, state-of-the-art synthesis of art history.

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**Mark Zucker** is J. Franklin Bayhi Alumni Professor at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge. A specialist in Renaissance art who received his Ph.D. from Columbia University, he has contributed seven volumes on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian engravings to *The Illustrated Bartsch*, a series of scholarly reference books on old master prints, besides publishing on various aspects of Renaissance art in leading international journals. He is currently working on relationships between Italian Renaissance art and literature and also serves as Coordinator of LSU’s Art History program.
This book project began, at least conceptually, as a customary *Festschrift* on the occasion of Professor David Rosand’s retirement. When we thought about it, however, we decided on a joint dedication, enabling us also to honor Professor Howard Hibbard (1928–84), who sadly died too young to have received such a tribute during his own lifetime. So our book honors Professor Rosand, on the occasion of his recent retirement from teaching, and also commemorates the 25th anniversary of Professor Hibbard’s death (in 2009). It is thus dedicated to two eminent scholar-teachers in the field of Renaissance and Baroque art, both of whom were our mentors in graduate school at Columbia University as well as key intellectual leaders for a generation of scholars at the university’s Department of Art History and Archaeology. They had themselves been students of the “greatest generation” of art historians, the many brilliant central European Jews who were forced to emigrate to Britain and the U.S. before World War II to escape Nazi persecution. Howard and David (we didn’t call them that at the time) were our living links to the legacy of those revered academic grandparents – for whose sake all graduate students had to learn German. Contributors of many of the essays come from among the former students and associates of these two esteemed mentors. While the book thus shares some aspects of the traditional *Festschrift*, our goal is to replace the old model for such personal and professional tributes – a celebratory miscellany of highly focused scholarly studies seldom claiming much “shelf life” – with a more practical and coordinated collection aimed at a wider and continuing audience.

Both Rosand and Hibbard were great scholars who were equally dedicated to teaching – a combination that is not common, especially in competitive, top graduate programs like Columbia’s. We reaped the considerable benefits of their respective expertises while they wrote the books and articles that made them
famous, including David’s groundbreaking work on Titian, drawings, Venetian woodcuts, and other aspects of Venetian culture; and Howard’s still-fundamental publications on Michelangelo, Bernini, Reni, and Caravaggio, among others. Many of us took their seminars or wrote our dissertations under their direction. One contribution comes from a recent Columbia graduate, Carolyn Yerkes, who wrote her dissertation (related to her essay topic here) with the aid of a Howard Hibbard Fellowship, established in his memory to assist graduate students working in similar areas of interest; she represents the newest link in the lengthening chain of generations.
Like all book projects, ours is indebted to the support and assistance of many individuals. We take this opportunity to thank all the staff at Wiley-Blackwell, in particular our wonderful and sympathetic editor, Jayne Fargnoli. Thanks are due also to the three anonymous readers who responded so constructively and encouragingly to our prospectus and whose suggestions helped to shape the final form of our conception. We would also like to express our gratitude to our authors for their hard work, incisive thought, and dedication to this project; we have both learned a great deal from them. As always, our special gratitude and love goes to our respective husbands, Daniel De Wilde and Steven Goldstein, who put up with our distraction and fatigue over a long gestation period. Finally, our deepest gratitude and affection goes to our “art history fathers,” Howard and David, whose examples have inspired us and guided us throughout our respective art-historical careers.

Babette Bohn and James M. Saslow
There’s a longstanding adage among both faculty and students that art history is divided into three broad periods, a structure that is often reflected in the organization of introductory survey courses. This trio of time spans, from cave painting to the present, is lightheartedly classified as “Grotto to Giotto,” “Giotto to Watteau,” and “Watteau to Blotto” (a swipe at modern abstraction). This book is concerned with European art and society during the second of those periods. Our chronological parameters stretch from the age of Giotto di Bondone (1266/7–1337) – the fountainhead of the naturalism and emotional verismilitude that distinguished Renaissance art from its medieval predecessors – to the early eighteenth century, when Rococo artists such as Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) chronicled the decline of those powerful institutions, state and church, that had previously shaped European society and art.

Wallace Ferguson’s classic survey, The Renaissance in Historical Thought (1948), opens with a summary of the period’s centrality to the myth of the modern west and a hint at the high stakes involved in its interpretation to later audiences: “For centuries the idea of a Renaissance at the end of the Middle Ages has been an active agent in shaping conceptions of the development of Western European civilization. But, though the idea has enjoyed so long a life, conceptions of the nature of the ‘long Renaissance,’ of its sources, its extent, and its essential spirit have varied from generation to generation” (1948, ix). Scholars have long produced conflicting responses to the questions Ferguson raises, explicitly or implicitly: When, where, and what was the Renaissance? What is its relationship to the seventeenth-century culture that built upon its achievements? What were the motivating ideas of this splendid, sustained outburst of creative energy, innovation, thought, and technology in western Europe? And why does it matter?

Today, the 400 years of European history that witnessed such groundbreaking developments as the invention of the printing press, the advent and growing
availability of paper, the encounter with the Americas, the Protestant Reformation and Catholic response, and the scientific redefinition of the universe as a heliocentric system, is often called "early modern," a term that is arguably more geographically neutral (many scholars think that "Renaissance," with its notion of reviving classical antiquity, is better suited to Italian culture than to northern Europe). The term "early modern" is useful, because it emphasizes how this period links the pre-industrial world to the industrial, political, and scientific-intellectual revolutions that ushered in our "modern" age in the later 1700s.

Certainly, developments in science, politics, and philosophy shaped early modern cultures, directly contributing to the increased naturalism of the visual arts in representing both the human figure and the landscape, informing a new awareness of the individual, and yielding new complexities of meaning. Indeed, we considered titling this book the *Companion to Early Modern Art*, but in many people’s minds "early modern" implies the beginning of the modern era—roughly, from pre-French Revolution Neoclassicism through nineteenth-century Realism. To avoid confusion, therefore, we have, somewhat reluctantly, retained the older terms, Renaissance and Baroque, although we ourselves actually prefer the newer terminology. Our authors use both throughout the volume, more or less interchangeably, and at times use just “Renaissance” as shorthand for the entire period.

The goal of this anthology, as with all volumes in the Blackwell Companion series, is to provide a standard reference work that is at once comprehensive in scope, comprehensible to the non-specialist, and representative of the diversity of current approaches within the discipline. To this end, we have endeavored to touch on a range of European cultures (Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, France, and Germany) as well as colonial Latin America and a variety of media (painting, sculpture, architecture, tapestry, so-called “minor arts,” prints, and drawings). Some essays focus on the evolution of a particular medium such as sculpture or printmaking; others address key developments in a specific geographical region; a few consider aspects of historiography and methodology; a number explore specific genres, such as landscape or self-portraiture; and others address key themes, such as gender or evolving definitions of artistic identity.

Although, as explained in the Preface, we planned from the outset to dedicate this volume to David Rosand and Howard Hibbard, we rejected the notion of a traditional *Festschrift*, in which students and colleagues contribute specialized essays that are related to the interests of the honoree(s). Instead, given our professors’ lifelong interest in teaching, we decided that a more fitting tribute would be a scholarly anthology designed for utility in the classroom, a combination of general introductions to topics in the field that would be useful to upper-level undergraduates and beginning graduate students, as well as a reference work for scholars. Based on our own years of teaching experience, we have not come across such a volume, and we are convinced that one is sorely needed. There are, to be sure, useful anthologies of primary texts from the period, but these require the type of contextualization that our volume offers. There are also readers, collections of (usually previously published) scholarly essays on early modern culture,
but these, however useful, tend to focus on more specific topics than the “big picture” our volume aims to provide.

By commissioning twenty-eight new essays that supply comprehensive and accessible overviews for many of the major issues and ideas of early modern visual culture, we intend to provide college professors with a convenient means to augment students’ knowledge of the cultural context of the arts and a selection of key topics. Although there are obviously many fine studies in all the areas we consider, most existing publications are too specialized, complex, or lengthy for a weekly reading assignment, or too technical and dull for the uninitiated. We have aimed for a level of depth, sophistication, and specificity that is pitched somewhere between the broad general survey text and the scholarly article. Our essays are intended to complement the traditional textbooks in courses on Renaissance and Baroque art history, providing more depth than a textbook and greater scope and accessibility than a scholarly article, with selected suggestions for further reading. We hope these essays will encourage students to go on and read more specialized materials, armed with a sense of the larger context that has shaped such focused studies in our field.

These twenty-eight essays have two overlapping objectives: to outline early modern ideas about art; and to discuss art history’s ideas about the early modern period. The first focus – the corpus of artworks, as well as supporting documents and commentary that survive from the period – is fixed, although our knowledge of them continues to increase with ongoing research. The second – the narratives that later periods have developed about what the Renaissance was, how its art was characterized, and how it functioned – is endlessly evolving, responding to new information as well as to issues of overriding concern in each successive cultural context. Thus, while mapping the art of the period is not the same endeavor as mapping the state of research about that art, any attempt to analyze a particular artistic phenomenon inevitably entails discussion of conflicting or changing opinions on that theme. That is the realm of historiography – in its most fundamental definition, “the history of history” – which is further introduced below.

A practical note: for art forms that are inherently visual, reproductions of the works being discussed are indispensable, but we have been able to illustrate only a small selection of them here. In order to offer easy access to additional illustrations that can be consulted while reading, the authors have inserted, where practical, a stable URL for a World Wide Web image. Whenever possible, these links are to two user-friendly sites: Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu>, and Wikimedia Commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org>. For these sites, only the general URL of the site is given, unless it is not self-evident; search by artist’s name, or if no name is known, by title. URLs for other sites are given in full.

Defining the Subject

What exactly is our topic, in this broad survey? That question is tripartite: What are the boundaries and defining traits of Renaissance–Baroque art and culture
chronologically, geographically, and conceptually? Longstanding debates about the spatio-temporal and intellectual qualities of the period continue, in part because in the era before modern mass communication and travel, ideas and cultural forms spread slowly and unequally from place to place. Because we feel that cultural constructions are best surveyed, in a book of this nature, with a wide historical lens, whenever possible, we asked authors to be broad and inclusive in scope, to stretch beyond the customary limits of their individual specializations chronologically, geographically, and methodologically.

**Time**

A fundamental but confusing question is, when did the Renaissance begin? Was it with the Italian poet Petrarch in fourteenth-century literature and the conscious rediscovery of alternative (antique) modes of cultural expression? Or did it begin with the pictorial innovations of van Eyck and Masaccio in the fifteenth century? Alternatively, were the subsequent developments of printing, capitalism, Protestantism, or the Catholic Reformation the pivotal events? And when did it end? When the Industrial Revolution supplanted the agricultural economy of all previous human cultures? When the French Revolution overthrew the feudal, autocratic ancien régime that had held political sway since the Middle Ages? Or when the scientific revolution that began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries finally discredited the quasi-sciences of alchemy and astrology and the longstanding religious belief that the earth was the center of the universe?

The earliest monuments discussed in the book, such as the frescoes at Assisi and Italian urban piazzas, date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, an era frequently labeled “late Gothic.” The latest are works still recognizably in a “Renaissance tradition,” such as the tapestries discussed by Koenraad Brosens (chapter 14), which continued to be produced until the end of the ancien régime, often repeating earlier motifs and styles. And we are sensitive to the continuing presence of the Renaissance in the modern imagination, as exemplified by the 1980s cartoon illustrating Sheryl Reiss’s essay (chapter 1), and to the continuing physical presence of Renaissance objects, which need to be cared for as precious artifacts of the past (see the essay by Claire Barry, chapter 16).

The confusion of overlapping terminology indicates that the traditional chronological terms that subdivide the period from 1300–1750 are highly problematic. Though we will probably never get rid of them, they limit our understanding of early modern art. Inherent in the name “Renaissance” is the centrality of rebirth, framing the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries as mainly shaped by the revival of antiquity, although that was far from the only cultural influence at work. The catch-all label “Mannerism” for certain aspects of sixteenth-century art has been endlessly debated and redefined, but its persistent implications of self-conscious novelty and personal style obscure the fact that, although some artists rejected the High Renaissance classical synthesis, others accepted it as the basis for contin-
ued evolution, while still others canonized it into a set of repeatable academic formulas. “Baroque” is often used as shorthand for “seventeenth century,” but here too, the term was never used in the period itself, and its connotations of opulence and grandiosity are far less applicable to Dutch genre painting or Poussin’s austere classicism than to the theatrics of Versailles or Bernini’s ebullient designs for St. Peter’s. Besides being inaccurate, these period labels were based on the influential philosophy of the German G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), who saw history as an endless dialectical process in which each period’s synthesis, confronted by an opposing antithesis, together resulted in a new hybrid synthesis. In an influential theoretical work titled simply Renaissance and Baroque (1888), Hegel’s admirer, the Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), categorized the stylistic traits that characterized those two cultural phases as pairs of Hegelian opposites (such as linear versus painterly, unity versus multiplicity). His formalism, which treated art as an autonomous sphere evolving from immutable inner tensions, magnified the differences between successive stylistic periods, inevitably occluding many of the similarities.

Space

Like time, our sense of the spatial extent of Renaissance–Baroque culture has also expanded in recent decades. The geographic purview of this anthology is the core of western and central Europe and that territory’s interactions with neighboring civilizations and distant discoveries. Page limitations unfortunately precluded coverage of such regions as Scandinavia, the British Isles beyond England, and most of the Slavic east. Inevitably, it was impossible to make every essay cover the whole turf or to achieve total integration of all regions into one universally valid narrative. Many essays necessarily focus on themes that predominated in one or more distinct areas: still-life and landscape painting, for example, were more popular and developed in the Low Countries, whereas art history and theory were born in Italy with Giorgio Vasari.

Nevertheless, links between various areas of Europe, and with the rest of the world, were more extensive and influential than we were once taught. So wherever a topic crosses borders, or the patron, artist, or object did the same, we have encouraged our authors to pan their cameras widely over the cultural territory and to take a global view as much as possible, conceiving of European art as developing in tandem with a number of diverse foreign cultures. This situation raises issues of hybridization and cultural transfer, both within and beyond this subcontinent of the Eurasian landmass.

Spirit

The longstanding debate about the motivating dynamics and principal features of the period is sometimes acrimonious and ultimately fruitless. The problem is in the question itself, which posits that there must be a single, distinctive mentality
for any age, or a consistent set of forces that shaped European culture from the fourteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. A revealing session at the Renaissance Society of America (RSA) conference, about fifteen years ago, sheds some light on this dispute. Two prominent scholars debated the question of whether the period is best understood as a retrospective revival of antiquity (as its French name implies), or as an embryonic stage of the modern world, with a new spirit of forward-looking innovations that warrant the name “early modern.” After each had advocated for one horn of this historiographical dilemma, the respondent mischievously replied that they were both wrong: the period was in fact “none of the above,” and should be understood instead as the final phase of the Middle Ages. In fact, of course, all three were correct. Like all historical periods, the Renaissance (which RSA defines as extending to the late seventeenth century) was full of conflicting, overlapping, and simultaneous ideas, of established forces on the wane and insurgent ones storming the barricades. Which view – revival, survival, or innovation – is the most relevant or helpful lens depends upon what aspect of the era one examines.

Studies focusing on the latter portion of the early modern period have addressed a range of key issues with clear pertinence for earlier centuries as well. Notions of originality, authorship, influence, and invention for such diverse artists as Guido Reni, Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Domenichino, and Salvator Rosa, among others, have reshaped the discourse on artistic identity. Gender studies for seventeenth-century art have been particularly rich, during the period that first witnessed the emergence of women as history painters in the public sector and as scientific illustrators, along with the growing popularity of artistic subjects featuring heroic women from the ancient world. Expanded global awareness, with increased travel, trade, and religious proselytizing in far-flung corners of the globe, the latter launched by the Jesuits and driven by the concerns of the Catholic Reformation, became a key factor during the seventeenth century. Emerging and conflicting ideas about science versus faith, the impact on artistic creation of patron versus broader public, artistic collaboration versus the unique character of artistic genius, and continued valuing of history painting versus the emergence of new, popular genres like landscape, still-life, and genre painting are just a few of the many issues that continue to be addressed for the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Full understanding of early modern art thus requires today’s scholars and teachers to venture across intellectual borders. Because Renaissance–Baroque culture is multi-faceted, this book attempts to address the interface between art and such other social factors as religion, science, gender, and sexuality, to name just a few intimately linked fields of inquiry. In this we are following one kind of period precedent, best known in the multi-faceted “Renaissance man” Leonardo da Vinci, who was at once a painter, an engineer, a scientist, and a musician. Leonardo’s example reminds us to resist compartmentalizing human knowledge and experience.
Scope and Content

The twenty-eight essays included here are divided into five thematic sections, intended to spotlight both the variety of components and processes pertinent to the visual arts and the diverse interpretive strategies that can be brought to bear on art objects. A work of art is simultaneously a product of social-economic forces, individual creative expression, material culture and technology, religious or philosophical systems and values, and of reception and interpretation by changing audiences.

The five sections are arranged to mirror the sequence of production and consumption of visual culture. First, the instigation of most early modern works came from patrons, individual or collective, with varied agendas and resources. These patrons then hired artists, who often produced their works in collaborative workshops, and whose personalities and creative processes can be glimpsed in far richer detail than for earlier periods. The physical objects they produced, from miniature gems to grand palaces, were part of the larger realm of material culture, whose forms were determined in part by available materials and technologies, which were undergoing a dramatic transition from hand to machine, from inherited craft traditions to empirical innovation. The meanings that these generally representational images were meant to convey depended on multiple systems of thought, symbolism, and allegory, from the religious to the aesthetic, shared by significant segments of the viewing public. And, as outlined above, the reception of that art has shifted over time, from the audience of contemporaneous spectators and theoreticians to modern critics and historians, whose writings offer a variety of competing interpretations. Although the order of our five sections might be taken to suggest that the art object and its creators in some way pre-exist the discourses about art, in fact the creative sequence is an endless circle. Developments in the sphere of theory and criticism, considered at the end of this Introduction, contributed in turn to the formation of changing tastes, attitudes, and goals among patrons and artists, the instigating agents with whom this book begins.

Part I. The Context: Social-Historical Factors in Artistic Production

The opening group includes six essays addressing a variety of cultural and economic forces that are foundational for understanding the art of the period. Artworks were made by artists, but their conception was the product of a complex interaction between patron, artist, and society. The patrons who commissioned and paid for a work shaped its formation with their own social, religious, and political views. Sheryl Reiss (chapter 1) outlines the character of patronage in Renaissance Italy, discussing the different types of patrons, the necessarily symbiotic relationships of patrons and artists, pertinent motivations and economic circumstances, and the role of open markets for uncommissioned objects.
Two essays deal with differing aspects of the religious context that was so pervasive in all early modern cultures. Shelley Perlove’s subject (chapter 2) may be relatively unknown, even to many scholars: Judaism and the arts in early modern Europe. Focusing in particular on artistic production in the Dutch Republic, she explores three separate but related topics: the creation of art for or by Jews; the troubling images that viciously denigrated Jews; and Christian art that is integrally related to contemporary as well as ancient Judaism. In contrast, Julia Miller’s essay (chapter 3) is concerned with Christian religious art in Italy from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, when religious subjects predominated over all other genres. She traces how changes in popular devotion and politics reshaped Italian religious imagery during this period.

Alongside money and faith, another fundamental variable of social life is the values and practices that structure each individual’s experience of gender and sexuality. James Saslow (chapter 6) surveys how the dominant norms of suitable identity and behavior for males and females, and associated conceptions of masculinity and femininity, played a role in art through shaping patrons, subjects, and audiences. He links this dominant discourse with the dramatic and often contested challenges to it, such as the increased visibility of sexual minorities, the revival of ancient Greco-Roman social patterns justifying homosexuality and bisexuality, and the use of the new print media for erotic literature and imagery.

In line with our desire for geographical inclusiveness, Amy Golahny (chapter 5) undertakes an international perspective in her essay examining the varied artistic exchanges between Italian and northern European artists from 1400 to 1700. In setting forth the long-running dialogue between these disparate cultures, with their distinctly different attitudes toward both the artist and artistic style, she explores such issues as appropriation, patronage, differing approaches to imposing order on the visible world, and artistic rivalry. Similarly, at a far larger scale, Larry Silver (chapter 4) introduces a theme that has gained considerable attention since the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s first American voyage: the mutual impact of Europe and the other cultures around the globe. Such global exchanges were rapidly increased by expansion of “the west” through trade, evangelism, and colonization.

Part II. The Artist: Creative Process and Social Stature

Part II shifts our focus from the context to the artist, a critical subject for the period in which the social and intellectual status of the artist, as well as the methods of artistic creation, were dramatically transformed. The internal, psychological aspects of creative methods are also key components in understanding artistic production during this period, in which, for the first time, we possess enough biographical evidence to enable connections between identifiable individuals’ personalities and their work.

William Wallace’s illuminating essay (chapter 7) examines one of the signal legacies of the Renaissance: the rise of the artist from craftsman to genius, an apotheosis that yielded the modern notion of the artist as a unique and prestigious
personality. Tracing this evolution from the sculptors Nicola and Giovanni Pisano to the ennobled courtier-artists Bernini, Rubens, and Velázquez during the seventeenth century, Wallace explores the emerging notion of the artist as universal genius. Shifting from abstract ideas to concrete evidence of the creative process, Mary Vaccaro (chapter 8) provides a fascinating introduction to Italian Renaissance drawings, a medium whose expansion was made possible by paper, a revolutionary commodity that first became widely available in Europe during this period. She lets us see the “genius at work,” explaining the various materials, techniques, and functions of drawings, their key role in evolving notions of invention in the visual arts, and the nascent practice of drawing collecting during the period. Perry Chapman (chapter 9) moves the focus to northern Europe in her compelling examination of self-portraiture, a genre that flourished in the context of the new, humanist-inspired importance attached to the individual. She considers the different reasons that motivated artists to produce their own images and the ways in which such self-fashioning shaped early modern notions of the artist.

Elinor Richter’s essay (chapter 10) examines the role of the sculptor, particularly in Italy, explaining the crucial emancipation of sculptors from the strictures of the family workshop and guild and sculpture’s elevation to a higher status as one of the liberal arts. She connects these developments to sculpture’s materiality, evident relationship to antiquity, and the new valuing of invention over craft.

Babette Bohn’s essay (chapter 11) explores another novel phenomenon that emerged during the 1500s, with crucial implications for later centuries: the emergence of women artists, who broke into the public sector in an occupation traditionally restricted to men. Focusing on painters in Italy and the Netherlands, she considers contemporary social realities for women, placing their accomplishments into the context of societies that rarely encouraged vocational pursuits for women and considering these artists’ innovative approaches to their subjects.

Part III. The Object: Art as Material Culture

These five diverse essays turn from the maker to the made object and the materials and methods of artistic production, ranging over economics, science, and technology. They explore various aspects of art as material culture: that is, one among many types of physical objects that humans make to satisfy their needs for survival, pleasure, and meaning, reflecting social priorities and perceptions.

Prints on paper emerged as a new art form around 1400, providing a revolutionary new technology for the mechanical reproduction of images, often alongside printed texts, and enabling an unprecedented explosion of communications and knowledge (both visual and textual). Alison Stewart’s essay (chapter 12) provides an engaging introduction to printmaking, explaining the various techniques, styles, and subjects as well as the social and political impact of these groundbreaking inventions.

Jacqueline Musacchio’s fascinating contribution (chapter 13) considers some key objects that were closely associated with daily life and family rituals in early
modern Europe, focusing in particular on prosperous Florence. Considering these material objects in their original social context, her essay elucidates the character of domestic life, providing especially crucial insights into the experiences of women during this period.

Tapestries, the most labor-intensive, expensive, and prestigious artworks of the time, flourished, typically through collaboration in large proto-capitalist workshops between an artist-designer and a team of skilled manufacturers. Koenraad Brosens (chapter 14) takes on this complex and elaborate art form, which grew from textile weaving into a prestigious form of decoration for popes and kings. In her wide-ranging essay (chapter 15), Eileen Reeves demonstrates how all the arts were impacted by the unprecedented surge in scientific discoveries about the material world, ranging from mathematical perspective to increased understanding of biology, including human anatomy, and the cosmological discoveries of Kepler and Galileo, which upended longstanding traditions of representation based on pre-scientific scripture and observation.

Claire Barry’s contribution (chapter 16) adds a different set of considerations to the mix, discussing the groundbreaking contributions of scientific technologies and conservation methods to our knowledge of Renaissance and Baroque paintings, introducing students to the tools and insights that these methods have yielded. She discusses the increasingly sophisticated types of technical analysis that have dramatically expanded our knowledge of these objects’ original creation as well as our ability to minimize the damages wrought by time.

Part IV. The Message: Subjects and Meanings

Whereas the previous section focuses on the artwork as a concrete physical product, these essays explore the intangible but equally fundamental aspect of an art object: its content – or, more broadly, its intended function and meaning. For most commissions, patrons and artists took it for granted that the visual arts were an effective medium to shape, communicate, and reinforce ideas and values, whether personal or public, in modes from didactic to satiric to fantastic. Whether sacred or profane, meanings were, so to speak, “built-in” to the work by means of established patterns of allegory and symbolism. In this section, where we take up questions of iconography and differing subject types, we were inevitably forced to be selective among the many possible topics (regrettably, for example, we had no space for a study of still-life painting), but we endeavored to include essays that were as varied and wide-ranging as possible.

Mark Zucker’s essay (chapter 17) on iconography provides an illuminating overview of the expanding range and hierarchy of subject matters, which constructed broad categories of significance based on various textual sources, ancient precedents, and artistic conventions. Whereas some subjects were pioneered or preferred in Italy, such as theatrical metaphors, the revival of the nude, and narratives from classical mythology, other categories, including genre, landscape, and still-life painting, were shaped largely in northern Europe. The most widespread