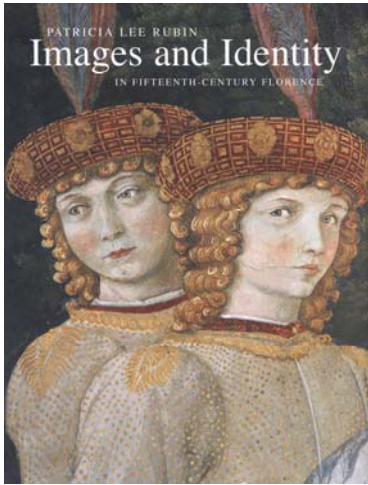


**Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence** / Patricia Lee Rubin.—New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, August 2007.—418 p.: ill.—ISBN-13: 978-0-300-12342-5: \$60.00.



One of the most difficult assignments for an art history student is to competently analyze an artwork, using primary sources and considering the artwork in its historical and social context. Author Rubin is expert at doing this and students can learn from her example. Colorfully illustrated, written with clarity, and devoid of extensive scholarly or theoretical jargon, this study looks closely at paintings to introduce the concepts of perception and vision in fifteenth-century Florence.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, Rubin discusses the social issues of Florence at the time: the identity of the individual within the organization of the city, the relationships between wealth, material goods, and the kinds of expenditures expected of an eminent citizen (the concept of “magnificence”). The section’s final chapter covers the role of the artist and the guilds and uses Donatello as an example. Part II examines Florentine attitudes toward “visual awareness.” In a critique of Michael Baxandall’s book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of*

*Pictorial Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Rubin investigates Florentine ideas on sight. She goes on to explore “vision as a cultural construct,” by using Canto X of Dante’s *Purgatory* as a stepping stone to a discussion on the relationships among literature and art, the language of vision, and societal perceptions of art. In Part III, she compares the sacred and the profane, as motifs. The importance of meditation, the contemplation of sacred images, and the cult of the Annunciate Virgin are examined in a chapter on religious beliefs, while another chapter focuses on the secular purposes of images, such as communicating the role of the individual within society, and looks closely at Botticelli’s *Wedding Feast of Nastagio degli Onesti*, by way of example.

Rubin makes clear that her work is not a straightforward social history of Florence; nor is it in any way a linear history of the art during the period. As such, this book would serve best as a supplementary text for advanced undergraduates or graduate students. The book’s exemplary, annotated bibliography is an excellent starting point for student papers.

Tamara Fultz, Associate Museum Librarian, Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
 Tamara.Fultz@metmuseum.org

Copyright © 2008 ARLIS/NA