

Dictionary of Christian Art

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona
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Diane Apostolos-Cappadona : Dictionary of Christian Art before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dictionary of Christian Art:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Invaluable resource and fun browsing
By Ted Agostino
As a church architect, liturgical consultant and church geek, I love this book. I keep it at my desk, so that when I need to know, "How has the transfiguration traditionally been represented in Christian art?" or "What are the traditional Christian associations with violets?" I can look it up quickly, and quickly know enough to be able to do deeper research. Christian art and iconography are becoming a lost language, so that few of us can connect with all the layers of meaning in a piece of art that would have been explicit to earlier generations. I also find, with the extensive cross references, that I can easily lose track of time browsing in this book. I will start out looking up one entry, then become fascinated by the threads that connect it to other entries, or even just something on the same page that catches my eye. I wish the illustrations from Medieval, Renaissance and Counter-Reformation art could have been reproduced in color, as many of them are quite beautiful, but again, the point of this book is to give the reader a point of entry: enough information to know where to look for more. As such, the black and white reproductions merely whet the appetite.

The aim of this dictionary is to give the reader access to the pictorial tradition that was once the common visual vocabulary of Christians. In over 1,000 entries from Aaron to Zucchetto, the Dictionary identifies and explains the major signs, symbols, figures, and topics that have emerged in 2

From *Library Journal* This dictionary's approximately 1100 entries cover Christian subjects depicted in art from the beginning of the Christian era to the present. Brief entries ranging from 50 to 600 words are chosen to reflect the commonest themes and subjects in Christian visual arts; related entries are starred in the text, with alphabetically arranged general entries (e.g., "head") collecting together references to related topics. Neither deep nor exhaustive (only some saints and some classical gods are represented, based on depiction), this book still has value as a quick resource for students of art history or museum visitors. No comprehensive, single-volume source exists in English. Recommended for general and undergraduate collections. Jack Perry Brown, Art Inst. of Chicago Lib. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From *Booklist* This dictionary is intended to give the reader access to the pictorial tradition that was once the common visual vocabulary of Christians. According to the author, an editor of several books on art and religion, laypersons of the medieval and Renaissance periods understood the symbolic significance of objects or saints' attributes depicted in artwork. This dictionary is a fascinating guide to these symbols for contemporary readers. In her introduction, the author describes how the reader might use the dictionary to decipher the meaning of symbolic elements in a painting of the baptism of Christ by the Master of the Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece. The 1,100 entries are arranged alphabetically and are of several categories. Entries for symbols such as colors, animals, plants, clothing (e.g., scapular), and architectural elements (e.g., apse) are generally brief, with cross-references to longer entries that provide historical background. Persons selected include saints and biblical figures who were either the subjects of a large array of artworks throughout the history of Christianity or were popular during a particular period. Old Testament figures, mythological figures that prefigure Christian figures (Athena as a foretype of Mary), Christian theologians and artists are included if they influenced the symbolism of Christian art. Entries about persons, events with which symbols are associated, or artists usually provide more background than entries for specific symbols. The entry Barbara, for example, explains that the tower became her attribute because she was imprisoned in one; that Barbara is the patron saint of artillery soldiers, gunsmiths, architects, builders, and miners; and that she was invoked against lightning, thunderstorms, and sudden death. It describes her usual depiction in northern medieval art as a richly dressed young woman seated before a tower, reading a book. When appropriate, citations to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are included. Entries do not usually list specific artworks that represent the person, event, or symbol. Other entries provide concise overviews of broader topics, such as Evangelists and Romanesque Art. Longer entries provide numerous cross-references and an index provides access to terms that are not easily identified within the alphabetical arrangement of the book. The 162 small black-and-white illustrations were selected because they exemplify particular symbols. The illustrations do not provide enough detail for thorough examination of the symbolic images they contain. A list of illustrations provides the name of the artist, title of the work, date, current location, size, and medium. A bibliography lists approximately 70 publications that complement the dictionary. This book is closest in format and scope to George Ferguson's *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford, 1954; reprinted 1972), which is listed in the bibliography. Many of the topics are defined similarly in both books. Apostolos-Cappadona expands the scope of the older work by including references to classical figures, artists, and art terms. Some of her entries provide more cross-references and more detail. Its combination of appeal to a wide variety of readers, engaging subject, and lack of up-to-date competitors make the *Dictionary of Christian Art* an essential purchase for academic, public, and seminary libraries.