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Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence

George R. Bent

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Street corners, guild halls, government offices, and confraternity centers contained paintings that made the city of Florence a visual jewel at precisely the time of its emergence as an international cultural leader. This book considers the paintings that were made specifically for consideration by lay viewers, as well as the way they could have been interpreted by audiences who approached them with specific perspectives. Their belief in the power of images, their understanding of the persuasiveness of pictures, and their acceptance of the utterly vital role that art could play as a propagator of civic, corporate, and individual identity made lay viewers keenly aware of the paintings in their midst. Those pictures affirmed the piety of the people for whom they were made in an age of social and political upheaval, as the city experimented with an imperfect form of republicanism that often failed to adhere to its declared aspirations.

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