



Mary in Western Art

Timothy Verdon

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No one can doubt Mary's importance in the spiritual history of Europe: every European city has at least one grand church dedicated to her, and, from the fifth century to the present, Christian thinkers have devoted considerable space to her in their reflections. In the visual arts, perhaps not even Christ has had so eminent a role as she. In certain periods, images of the Mother indeed outstrip those of her Son both in quantity and in creative originality. The historical identity of Europe's peoples ?their self-image across time ?in fact seems linked to the ways in which they have venerated, imagined, and depicted Mary. Timothy Verdon organizes the rich, visual material according to several methodological principles, using a thematic approach in the first chapter, a biographical one in the second, and in the third offering a concrete historical example: Mary as a subject in Florentine art. Written from the viewpoint of religious faith, Verdon makes allowance for the fact that many readers may lack direct experience of that individual relationship with Mary which determined how she was represented in art. Verdon's text seeks to clarify the logical and emotional framework within which that relationship made sense without presuming to explain individual paintings or sculptures. True works of art, after all, are never mere textual illustrations.

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