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Ars Sacra: Christian Art And Architecture Of The Western World From The Very Beginning Up Until Today



Synopsis

Ars Sacra is an unique tribute to 2000 years of Christian art, architecture and spirituality. This glorious tome takes the reader on a tour through seventeen centuries of sacral art, architecture, and culture, from the late antiquity to the middle ages, renaissance, baroque, art nouveau to works by contemporary artists such as Marc Chagall and Gerhard Richter.

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Customer Reviews

WHPK-FM radio 88.5 FM in Chicago "This may be the biggest coffee table book I've ever seen: It's about 800 pages, it weighs 25 pounds. It's not just a coffee table book, it is a coffee table... But, what the book is, ARS SACRA, is a history of Christian Art in the Western World, beginning to contemporary""Talk about comprehensive? This goes beyond the word... It is gorgeous, it is mind blowing, it is beautiful when you see the pictures and reproductions in this book. It's extraordinary... I didn't know where to put it because it's one of those books you want to put it in a vault, let alone a coffee table. It took me maybe a week just to go through it, page by page, in awe of the images as well as the history of Christian Art.""If you want a book that will truly astound you, it is ARS SACRA published by hf Ullmann Publishers. Once again, a great book company doing some really superior, beautiful work in books of arts and culture""In our technology-infatuated era, we've become accustomed to the idea that whatever is smaller and faster must surely be better.The slim, omnipotent iPhone is obviously superior to the primitive rotary dial mechanisms that people once used. The whisper-thin laptop looks like an almost comical repudiation of the great beeping,

flashing, wall-size computers of the early jet age. These comparisons do not flatter the old stuff. Even books seem increasingly quaint, and imperiled. What, after all, can a book do for you that a computer or smart phone can't instantly outdo? This Easter Sunday I am happy to say that I have an answer, one that perfectly suits the day's deeper meanings. It's a monumental book called "Ars Sacra," first published in late 2010, that weighs almost 22 pounds. Over its 800 pages, this miraculous achievement chronicles the art and architecture of Christianity from the gorgeous mosaics of antiquity all the way through to the computer-designed abstract stained glass cathedral windows of today. It's the biggest book I've ever held -- certainly the biggest I've ever seen outside a museum or library (I had to wrestle a bit just to get it into the house). Unlike most glossy art books, "Ars Sacra" is less of a coffee table book than an actual coffee table. You could serve lunch on the thing. Yet you wouldn't want to, for though the golden, seemingly bejeweled cover would make a lovely tablecloth, what's inside is more beautiful still. Here are delicate gilded paintings from 9th century Byzantine manuscripts, precious chalices from medieval Ireland, stave churches from 11th century Norway and painted statuary from the Romanesque period. In stunning photographs, we see the remarkably detailed figure of John the Baptist from a niche high on the Cathedral at Reims and Duccio's exquisite chronicle of Christ's Passion from the Cathedral of Siena. And on it goes, each page more engrossing than the one before: grotesque gothic representations of demons torturing the damned, joyous cherubim dancing across a Renaissance frieze and Masaccio's achingly sad painting of Adam and Eve in disgrace, from the Brancacci chapel in Florence. You could get lost in the Renaissance era alone -- and I plan to -- such is the beauty and abundance of that artistic flowering as it appears in these pages. Not everything is here, mind you -- no mortal could print, let alone lift, the book containing all Christian art -- and the English translation (from the German) is not always felicitous, but there are treasures almost beyond measure, in stunning photographic detail. The marvelous solidity of a book like "Ars Sacra" makes technology seem frail and even feeble. Such a compendium is like a physical rebuttal to the Kindle and the Nook. It's an aesthetic and intellectual rebuke of the Twitterized sensibility that so values breeziness and disposability. In fact, in subject and physicality, it's a countercultural book, about the Eternal, for the ages. Once today's chocolate and jellybean frenzy is over and we've finished our feast, I plan to disappear into its pages for the rest of the day. Technology can wait until tomorrow. Happy Easter!

Meghan Cox Gurdon
Washington Examiner Columnist

Big, visually stunning art book may bolster publishing's future

There are art books, coffee table books, books that are themselves artworks. "Ars Sacra: Christian Art in the Western World" is all of the above. First and foremost, it is a visual treasure chest, comprising 800 pages brimming with 1,000 brilliantly colored, sharply

detailed images of Christian art and architecture drawn from the fourth to the 21st centuries. The big names are well represented -- Bernini, Caravaggio, Raphael, Michelangelo, Le Corbusier -- but, significantly, so are rarely seen works and sites. Each page holds a new wonder and presentation is paramount. "Ars Sacra" weighs nearly 23 pounds due to its thick, glossy paper, and size, 17 1/2 by 11 1/2 inches, which reflect the publisher's commitment to the project, as do double-page spreads, fold-out pages and an exquisite reproduction of the 10th-century "Limburg Staurotheque" on its covers. The reader's eyes soar to a Baroque ceiling fresco, which fills two pages and invites examination of each cherub, cloud and figure in a way that even the most avid church-touring, binocular-toting visitor couldn't achieve. Another double-page image reveals the skilled craftsmanship of a reliquary artisan through larger-than-life detail, the rainbow colors of cabochon gemstones set elegantly amid gilding and cloisonne, populated with narratives of the faith. "Ars Sacra" is arranged by art epochs and begins with "Late Antiquity -- Byzantium" and images of a fourth-century catacomb. The final image, within the section "Art Nouveau -- Expressionism -- Modern Age," is of a stained-glass window by internationally hailed contemporary artist Gerhard Richter, who used a computer to randomly generate its abstract color squares arrangement. Such chronology, grouping and resultant juxtapositions prompt cultural comparisons, including the differing ways groups perceive and relate to divinity. The pictures, then, are instructive as well as beautiful and the information more complex than that of a straightforward art historical timeline. Texts by eight scholars are illuminating but brief by necessity of space, and at times awkwardly translated from the original German. Editor Rolf Toman's ambition for the book was high, but containing Christian-themed aesthetic achievements in one volume -- no matter how superb -- must have required some soul-searching choices. That presumption was confirmed by Lucas Ludemann, commissioning editor at publishing house h.f. ullmann, in Potsdam, Germany, near Berlin. He explained, by telephone, that photographer Achim Bednorz traveled approximately 93,000 miles to 20 countries to shoot the thousands of photographs that were carefully winnowed to those included. The upside is that digital photography makes taking large numbers of photographs more economically feasible, and more choice allows for creative approaches to book design, Mr. Ludemann said. Pictures of the same object may be shot in "different constellations of light" that can be patched together in Photoshop to get "the perfect light for an object" and thereby the most authentic representation. One part of a cathedral, for example, may be brightly lit while another is very dark. "The eye can focus on the dark and light at the same time, but the camera can't focus on both." "It's a technology we didn't have 10 years ago," Mr. Ludemann said, and it's "so important for making a book like this." The selection task was even more difficult due to the variety of content,

including majestic cathedrals and remote monasteries, paintings and illuminated manuscripts, sculpture and liturgical objects."We tried to make not only very well-known artworks the focus in this book, but also not so known works of art," Mr. Ludemann said.Mr. Toman's idea for the book was large from the inception. When the publishers saw Mr. Bednorz's photographs, they realized they could do an immense format, Mr. Ludemann said."If we do a topic like this, we have to show something magical so that people will say it's magnificent and it's the right medium for Christian art."Last year, ullmann released "1,000 Sacred Places," a smaller book that similarly explored spiritual heritage, a topic that appears to be gaining increasing interest."You're right," Mr. Ludemann said. "We think at the moment, and also in the long term, people are looking more toward spiritual things. They need something beyond what they are doing on earth. Life is getting faster and faster. Book editor Toman is fond of his Christian culture and his spiritual life. He has a love for art and for history, and a feeling for spiritual things."The first edition of "Ars Sacra" was published simultaneously in German, English, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese in a print run of 20,000, high for such a specialized publication. It is now in its second printing with added Czech and Slovak language editions.Due to its sales success, and people responding so positively, Mr. Ludemann said this will not be the last book of its kind. And it may be the sort of publication that saves the printed book."We see it as an answer to the ebook. We love ebooks, too. We will also do ebooks. But we also love our printed books. ... You can't present content like 'Ars Sacra' on a medium like an iPad," Mr. Ludemann said, pointing out the impossibility of controlling things like color and format. "A book is a medium that's binding."Wednesday, December 14, 2011By Mary Thomas, Pittsburgh Post-GazetteARS SACRA, DENVER POST - "This book is an accomplishment worthy of endless page turning."ARS SACRA, MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW - "A magnificent feast for the eye, "Ars Sacra" presents its reader with unforgettable vistas of Christian art history and accomplishment."ARS SACRA, WALL STREET JOURNAL - "For anyone whose travels include stops to look at sacred art, "Ars Sacra" will be a godsend."ARS SACRA, AMERICA MAGAZINE - "This massive encyclopedic survey covers Christian art and architecture in Europe from its beginnings in the catacombs of third-century Rome to the present day." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cologne-based photographer Achim Bednorz has specialized in photographing sacred places. The principle behind his method of interpretation is simple: to get as close to reality as possible. This means presenting the object in well balanced directed light, making the object recognizable as if in ideal circumstances, and foregoing any special effects. --This text refers to an out of print or

unavailable edition of this title.

This is an amazing book. I am reading it and admiring the gorgeous pictures page by page. It is an enormous book, and heavy. I have to read it at a table, which isn't as cozy as I would like, but the book is well worth the lack of cozy reading comfort. The paper is heavy and of high quality. The cover alone is breathtaking. I really like the protective plastic cover on the book--it has the book's title "clear" so that the artwork on the exterior of the book shows through against the heavy white plastic. I want to protect the book, but the exterior artwork is so lovely, I want to show it off without the plastic cover. What to do, what to do.... I am not an expert of art; I just seriously enjoy it and I am grateful there are people in this world with talent as is reflected here. The architectural details of the churches are incredible. The translation from the original German may not be perfect, but I find it easy enough to follow--really not an issue for me at all. I am so proud to own the gorgeous book. It is so inspiring to me!

Incredibly beautiful book; a superbly rendered art book filled with thousands of artistic images of paintings, architecture, sculptures and carvings, manuscripts and more. Well laid out by chronological time and artistic periods. The paper quality is first-rate and the layout shows great attention to detail. My only criticism is that I would have split the book into two volumes as the single-volume execution is extremely bulky and heavy.

The masterpiece of art books. A massive volume (25 lb) of sacred art up to the twentieth century. With a thousand color photographsshot throughout the western world. It is an experience going through this (definitely not a lap book). I have owned many art booksover the years, but this one tops them all.!

Pristine photo images, fantastic details, comprehensive historical overview.

Amazing book with superb reproduction quality. Many full 2 pages image. Highly recommended for art lover.

Quality throughout. Good balance of text and pictures, though sometimes wished for more information, I wouldn't like it at the expense of the lavish imagery. I don't think the option to make the book even bigger was probably there.

Fantastic book. I may never complete my bucket list of foreign travel, but this book is almost like looking at my own photo album.

There are some issues with clarity as far as the text's translation is concerned but the reproductions and the layout are superb. Excellent value as well.

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