

The Fate of Early Italian Art during World War Two

Protection, Rescue, Restoration

by Cathleen Hoeniger

DESCRIPTION:

In Italy, art historians can study wall-paintings, tombs, and stained-glass windows in the early churches for which they were created because they have been preserved in situ over the centuries. This book explores one fraught period of this critical preservation work, during the five years of World War II in Italy, when numerous artistic monuments of value were vulnerable to damage and destruction. Works of art from the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance lie at the focus, among them, the Angevin tombs of Santa Chiara in Naples, the frescoes of Pisa's Camposanto, Piero della Francesca's wall-painting of Sigismondo in the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, and the Mazzatosta Chapel in Viterbo. Rooted in the archives, the narrative charts the formidable task of safeguarding stationary art in the midst of aerial and ground attacks. Taking centre stage are the struggles endured by heritage superintendents, the innovations tested under pressure by art restorers, and the desperate position of clerical custodians of churches. The Allied Monuments Officers, who arrived over halfway through the war, provided substantial assistance in the rescue of damaged art from ruined buildings. This study offers an original perspective by emphasizing the Italian protagonists, whose efforts played out against the political and economic landscape of fascism and the devastation wrought by the war on Italian soil.

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