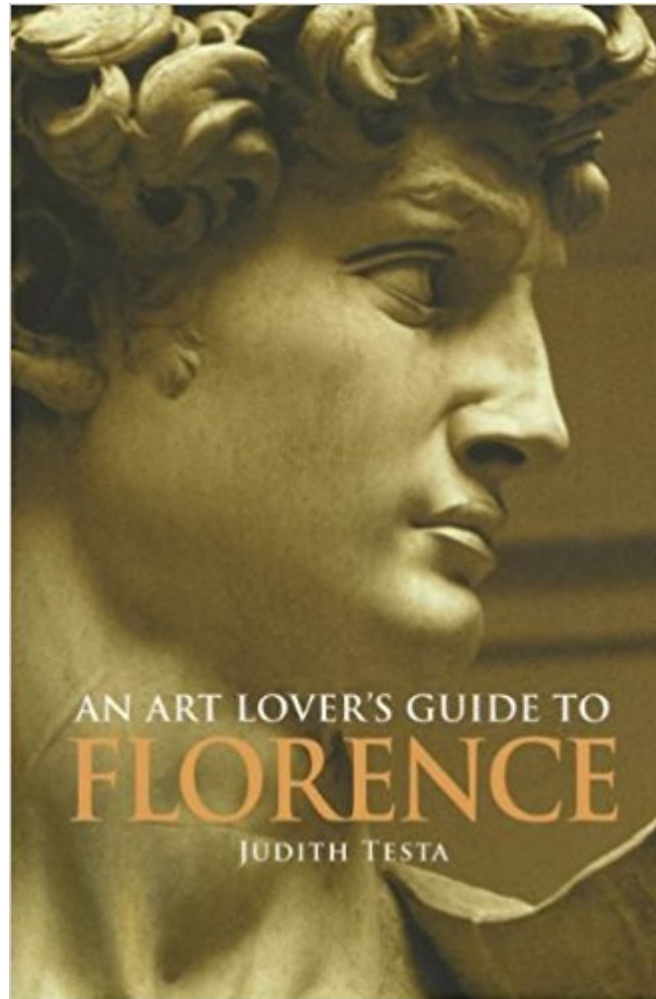




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An Art Lover's Guide To Florence



Synopsis

No city but Florence contains such an intense concentration of art produced in such a short span of time. The sheer number and proximity of works of painting, sculpture, and architecture in Florence can be so overwhelming that Florentine hospitals treat hundreds of visitors each year for symptoms brought on by trying to see them all, an illness famously identified with the French author Stendhal. While most guidebooks offer only brief descriptions of a large number of works, with little discussion of the historical background, Judith Testa gives a fresh perspective on the rich and brilliant art of the Florentine Renaissance in *An Art Lover's Guide to Florence*. Concentrating on a number of the greatest works, by such masters as Botticelli and Michelangelo, Testa explains each piece in terms of what it meant to the people who produced it and for whom they made it, deftly treating the complex interplay of politics, sex, and religion that were involved in the creation of those works. With Testa as a guide, armchair travelers and tourists alike will delight in the fascinating world of Florentine art and history.

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Customer Reviews

“An informative and erudite guide for art lovers, visitors or armchair travelers.”
—Chicago Tribune

Judith Testa is professor emerita at Northern Illinois University and author of *Rome is Love Spelled Backward: Enjoying Art and Architecture in the Eternal City*.

Even though I love art and history, I often can't stand to read art history books, but this one is an exception. Most authors feel the need to describe every statue, every major and minor painting, every building and every single piece of pottery. In trying to cover everything, they cover nothing well and the result is exhausting. I'm so overwhelmed, I don't bother to finish the book. But not this book. I consumed it eagerly. Testa is up front in stating that her book will not cover every piece of art in Florence. Instead, she weaves beautiful, fascinating stories about the art she does choose to emphasize-- which is the greatest art the city has to offer. Instead of merely describing the works, she includes the historical and religious background and even salacious details that are part of the meaning of certain works. I loved reading about the Florentines' struggle to avoid becoming the laughingstock of Italy with their cathedral's unfinished dome. I loved the gripping rivalry between Brunelleschi and Ghiberti and how childish they could be toward each other. And oh, the Medici. Testa tells their family travails in a way that makes you intimidated, envious, and happy they do not know your name. They appear not as distant historical figures, but as people like you and me, although with a LOT more money. Testa's description of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, Europe's first foundling hospital, is heartbreaking and empathetic. She lets us see early attempts to take care of the less fortunate, often with mixed results. She ends the chapter with a Latin inscription from the building, adapted from the Bible's Psalm 27: "Our father and mother have forsaken us; the Lord has taken us in." This author is a gifted historian and storyteller. I read the whole book and did not feel exhausted by the rich descriptions and fascinating stories of our cultural forebears. I felt alive.

I loved that fact that Judith Testa doesn't even pretend to try to cover all the art in Florence, because as she says in the first chapter it isn't possible. What she does do is give you the social, political, religious, and in some cases sexual background by means of individual stories to turn lifeless stone and canvas into time capsules of the human condition. It is a beautiful and entertaining way to connect to the art and artists in way that is deeper than focusing on art techniques or flowery words describing what you are already seeing. In fact the author skips over a few semi-famous pieces because there isn't a good story behind them (don't worry there will be plenty of signs point the way and you won't need a book to find them). I felt much closer to the artists, architects, and engineers of Florence after reading this book and the art became more interactive and personal because of it. It is also broken down into museum so you can focus on your next day's activity at your hotel the night before.

Very well written as a history of Florence, but the few illustrations are in black and white.

This book provides a political/religious/sexual viewpoint on many works of art in Florence! It is interesting reading and when we get to Italy in a few months, roaming the museums and galleries will be so much more meaningful to me because of this book. Its like gossiping with a backyard neighbor about the goings on in Florence back during the 1400-1500s. Terrific!

What a tour of Florence! Testa's rich descriptions and captivating writing are evident once again (as in her book on Rome). This is a must read before going to Florence and a wonderful reference book while there.

I brought this book to Florence on my first trip there. As an artist, I found it to be a tremendous guide as I toured that marvelous city. Ms. Testa helped me to focus on the greatest art to be found there (amid so many, too many pieces to enjoy) and enriched my experience profoundly. I still didn't get through it all and will return, with the book in hand. Great city; great book.

Looking at Florentine art from the perspectives of politics, religion and sex is a good way to travel back to Renaissance and imagining the busy lives of genius, eccentric, uncompromising artists and engineers in the time of constant peril, threats of wars and plague is more dramatic than a fiction. This book has exciting behind stories and theories about the artists and the people in power, makes their art come to life and meaningful to the admirers.

Wonderful! Read before a trip to Florence and gave a tremendous amount of depth and background to the city and the art. I wasn't able to finish it before getting to Italy but thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the book, even after I left Florence. A great read for art and history lovers.

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