



Art & the Zodiac

Stefano Zuffi

The Book

Man has been gazing at the sky for years seeking signs for interpreting his destiny. About seven centuries before Christ, Assyrian and Egyptian astronomers fixed the sequence of the twelve constellations which alternate during the course of the year with the continuous rotation of the firmament. The signs of the zodiac, associated from that moment on with a series of "figures", were supposed to determine a person's character, make it possible to foresee events, and provide guidance for everyday activities or for the great events of history. True or untrue, every day millions of people still open the newspaper to look for their horoscope.

We should not be surprised if images of the zodiac and its influence are very frequent in the course of the history of art, especially in various highly characteristic moments, and are combined with magical and mysterious rites. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the reference to astral signs characterizes highly evocative works: from archaeology (the "Denderah Zodiac" conserved in the Louvre today is one of the absolute marvels of Egyptian sculpture), through the entire course of the Renaissance to the Baroque period, and even afterwards. The "wheel" of the heavens with its twelve signs is very frequent on the dials of the large clocks dominating squares and towers. The most significant works include beautiful Roman reliefs, the grandiose cycle of frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, the repeated astrological interpretations from Albrecht Durer (strongly convinced of the influx of the stars on a person's character), paintings depicting astronomers from Giorgione to Vermeer, and many other surprises.

The volume envisages a general introductory essay on the history and iconographic fortune of the zodiac, followed by chapters which present the twelve months one by one, as depicted in art, and their symbolic contents.

The Author

Stefano Zuffi (1961), an art historian from Milan, is the author of essays and specialist studies on Renaissance and Baroque painting, but especially of countless popular books on the history of art, translated and distributed all over the world. His works of greatest success include *La pittura italiana* ("Italian Painting", 1997, new edition 2005), *Il grande atlante della pittura* ("The Great Atlas of Painting", 2002), *Episodi e personaggi del Vangelo* ("Episodes and characters from the Gospels", 2002). In 2007 Sassi Editore published his *Gatti nell'Arte* ("Cats in Art") and, in 2008, *Cani nell'Arte* ("Dogs in Art"). He acts as the scientific consultant for the realization of widely distributed editorial series.

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