



# Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art

By Hans Belting

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**Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art** By Hans Belting

Before the Renaissance and Reformation, holy images were treated not as "art" but as objects of veneration which possessed the tangible presence of the Holy. In this magisterial book, Hans Belting traces the long history of the sacral image and its changing role in European culture. *Likeness and Presence* looks at the beliefs, superstitions, hopes, and fears that come into play as people handle and respond to sacred images, and presents a compelling interpretation of the place of the image in Western history.

"A rarity within its genre—an art-historical analysis of iconography which is itself iconoclastic. . . . One of the most intellectually exciting and historically grounded interpretations of Christian iconography." —Graham Howes, *Times Literary Supplement*

"*Likeness and Presence* offers the best source to survey the facts of what European Christians put in their churches. . . . An impressively detailed contextual analysis of medieval objects." —Robin Cormack, *New York Times Book Review*

"I cannot begin to describe the richness or the imaginative grandeur of Hans Belting's book. . . . It is a work that anyone interested in art, or in the history of thought about art, should regard as urgent reading. It is a tremendous achievement."—Arthur C. Danto, *New Republic*

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

The icon, a representation of an early saint or religious personality, has a complex history. Belting, a professor of art history at the University of Munich who has authored several books on art history (e.g., *Image & Its Public in the Middle Ages*, Caratzas, 1989), focuses not on the art but the application and interpretation of the icon, offering a detailed examination of its use in early Christianity. The scholarship is excellent, but the book is not for the casual reader. The writing is complicated and difficult to follow, with an in-depth understanding of early Christian history assumed. The notes and appendix include pertinent quotes from medieval theologians. Recommended only for large academic libraries or special collections.

(Illustrations and index not seen.)-Karen Ellis, Baldwin Boettcher Lib., Humble, Tex.

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#### Review

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(Arthur C. Danto *The New Republic*)

"An *opus magnum*, one of those works of art history that can be counted among the books of the decade."  
(Oskar Bätschmann *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*)

#### Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: German

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