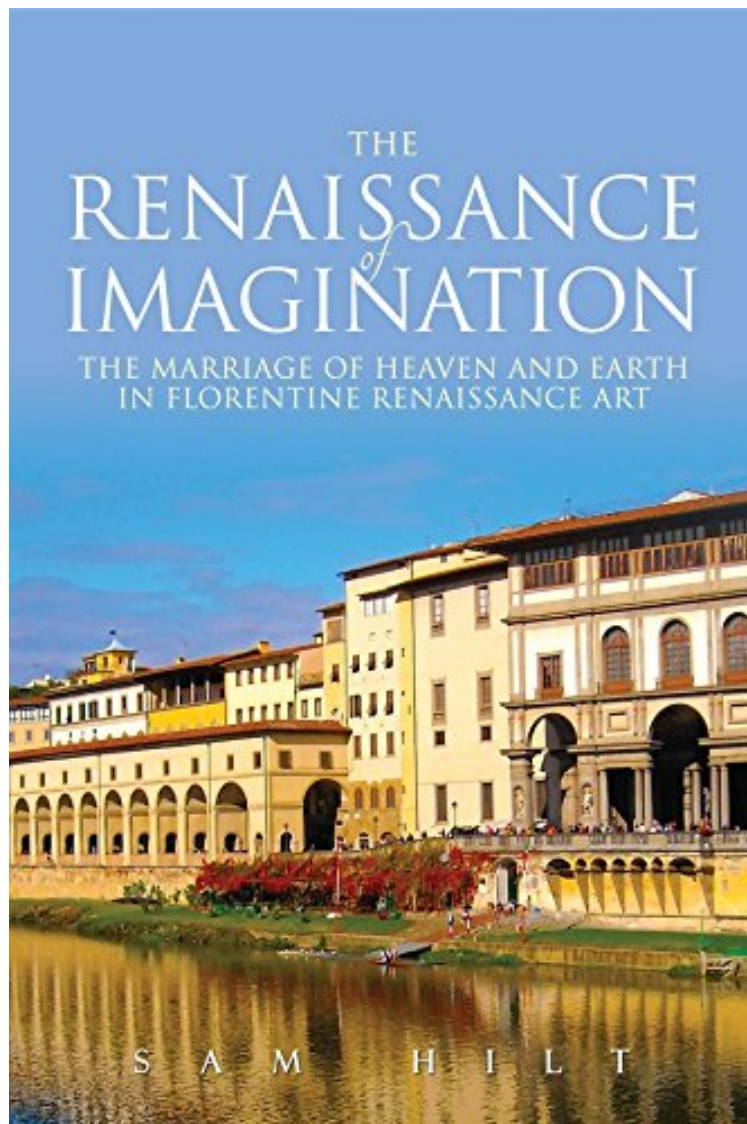


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# The Renaissance of Imagination: The Marriage of Heaven and Earth in Florentine Renaissance Art

*Sam Hilt*

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**Sam Hilt : The Renaissance of Imagination: The Marriage of Heaven and Earth in Florentine Renaissance Art** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Renaissance of Imagination: The Marriage of Heaven and Earth in Florentine Renaissance Art:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Clever and original By Harry Kanigel Sam Hilt was, for a time, a practicing clinical psychologist before wisely turning his attention to the presumably more jolly and aesthetically more

satisfying vocation of guiding tourists; he leads carefree and curious travelers through Tuscany, as a fellow aficionado of art, history, fine food and great wine. "The Renaissance of Imagination" is Hilt's eclectic take on Florentine Renaissance art, that draws from political history, past architectural fashions, Jungian psychology and sundry bits of art history and esoterica to produce a distinctive stew that can be savored by a wide range of readers. It is laid out in a series of essays that are stitched together like chapters because there is a pleasing continuity between them, as one idea points to the next. The book can serve as a not overly academic introduction to the Renaissance period and its achievements for casual readers who may have previously neglected this subject, as I had. Such readers will be rewarded with lively and astute guidance that may well open the way to further reading or, better, a richer and more satisfying experience of the art images themselves, when visiting Florence. But for seasoned art lovers, the work offers a novel style, mostly free of the humdrum de rigueur "usual suspects" of art history, such as disagreements about attribution, dating and so forth. Hilt seeks to transcend these matters when possible. He offers an original view of several Renaissance masterpieces in essays that draw us into paintings, altarpieces, panels, frescoes and sculptures by examining the social milieu or otherwise contextual elements. For example, he sets the scene of his explication of several annunciation-themed works with a stimulating short treatment of Florentine home design; he describes the role, e.g., of intimidating facades and welcoming courtyards and inner chambers. Resting on this short architecture discourse, he is able to make sense of the boundaries and settings depicted in the various annunciation images whose significance would otherwise elude twenty-first century Americans. To further orient us, Dr. Hilt sketches out a backdrop of fifteenth century religious sensibilities that undergird much Renaissance art; he takes us on a tour of the mind, accompanying Dante and his loyal sidekick Virgil on their ascent through purgatory as described in the Divine Comedy. Hilt wraps the elements of this "soul's journey" with the familiar corseting of modern psychotherapeutic practice, emphasizing the power of visualization, whereby pilgrims (clients/patients) "already have knowledge of the state they seek." All these images, which are "archetypally present," are available as themes that were familiar to fifteenth century artists such as Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and Piero della Francesca. He sketches out traditions and apocrypha that enrich our understanding of the annunciation story in which Mary is approached by the angel Gabriel who brings some important news. These accounts provide a backstory wherein this transmittal of Mary's divine assignment occurs over the course of several episodes that represent temporal or psychological or spiritual stages that range from her determined obliviousness to wariness to embrace. These stages provide a framework for the themes that animate the various annunciation depictions of Renaissance artists, notably Fra Angelico and Fra Lippi, who exhibited an amusingly subversive slant on this and other religious subject matter, as Hilt discerns by observations of body language and facial expressions depicted in the images. He teases out a plausible backstory of Lippi's Coronation of the Virgin with savvy and humor and the keen eye of an alert psychotherapist. In Hilt's quite believable view, Lippi signals a sub rosa storyline, that of the cuckolding of St. Eustace (!) that merits the viewer's attention. Hilt opines, and it is hard to disagree with him, that "the Coronation itself is only modestly capable of sustaining our interest" and is "only perfunctory." The son of God, we are told, is mainly concerned with "placing the crown carefully so that it doesn't fall off." Our focus is directed, instead, to bit players; we are to study, with some care and guidance from Dr. Hilt, the body signals of St. Eustace, his wife, and "his" two boys: one of the lads bears no resemblance to Eustace and strongly resembles an unnamed figure in clerical garb. A world-weary Lippi himself, makes a cameo, speaking to us with impish irony: "The Renaissance of Imagination" is no coffee table book with glossy color plates. This is a good thing in the sense that you aren't tempted to baby this book; rather, you can flip through it, re-read, scribble notes with abandon! But, herewith a small quibble that should ultimately have little practical effect: While there are numerous figures of the works discussed to aid Dr. Hilt's narration, they are, alas, black and white and not great. But fear not, the images all appear to be in the public domain; readers will be well served if they enlist a companion techno-assistant with Retina display or similar device (such as your garden variety laptop) that supports high definition images to pinch hit for the lesser images on the printed page. It's kind of fun.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The perfect Marriage By Tina Hittenberger We have gone to Italy many, many times. My husband teaches at Santa Reparata International School of Art in Florence. This is THE best, most compelling and most comprehensive book on the Renaissance. It should be required reading for all students at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and for any tourist, traveler or historian who wants to know (and understand) the underpinnings and future implications of this unique and astonishing humanistic event called the Renaissance.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Italian Renaissance art appreciation By Mark J. Gehrie Sam Hilt's "The Renaissance of Imagination" (2016) provides a delightful point of entry for the newcomer and scholar alike to the world of Florentine renaissance art. With an engaging, humor-inflected approach to art appreciation and interpretation, the author offers an enjoyable experience of access to the otherwise nearly impenetrable world of renaissance art criticism. Touring art museums in Italy with Sam Hilt's user-friendly guide as an erudite companion extends and enhances one's participation not only with renaissance art, but with a broad swath of Italian history and culture.

As you make your way through "The Renaissance of Imagination", you'll have the opportunity to explore works by artists from Donatello to Botticelli that span Florence's greatest century of art. But you won't find the usual discussions about the dating of particular works, or why a certain painting is considered "important" in the evolution of Western art, or how much was done by the master and how much by his workshop, or who influenced whom. Instead you'll have the opportunity to contemplate these masterpieces of Florentine art in ways that enable you to appreciate their beauty, depth and brilliance more fully. The facts of history, iconography and biography are fully respected, but it is the works of art themselves that are here given the final word. If the Italian Renaissance has ever captured your interest and fired your imagination, this book has been written for you. (59 Full-color Images)

This is a book for those who have fallen in love with Renaissance art and would like to deepen that relationship. It offers a refreshingly different approach to well-traveled territories, challenging conventional wisdom and, instead, observing carefully what the paintings and statues are actually showing us. After taking Sam Hilt's tour of Florence's fifteenth century, you'll never look at its artistic masterpieces in the same way. You might even feel that you've seen them for the first time. - John Gouldthorpe

About the Author Sam Hilt's earlier works include a guidebook to Florence's Uffizi Gallery ("The Uffizi Gallery"); an entertaining account of his family's experiences in relocating to Italy ("Turning Tuscan: A Step-by-Step Guide to Going Native"); and a brief introduction to the art of travel planning ("Paradise Now: How to Plan the Perfect Italy Vacation"). All titles are available on . While teaching part-time in the San Francisco Bay Area for several years, Sam and his wife began organizing summer art seminars in Florence for American travelers. Their avocation gradually became their primary activity, and they have been busy for these past twelve years developing cultural travel adventures throughout Italy and France. Their travel company, Tuscany Tours, may be found on the web at [www.TuscanyTours.com](http://www.TuscanyTours.com). Sam Hilt was born in Munich, Germany, and grew up in Newark, New Jersey. He studied Comparative Literature (English, French, Russian) at Brandeis University (B.A.) and at the University of Toronto (M.A.). He also holds a Masters degree in Psychology from Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, CA, and a Doctorate in Psychology from The Union Institute in Cincinnati. Sam and Pamela and their two daughters, Siena and Emma, currently spend much of their time in a tiny medieval village in Tuscany.