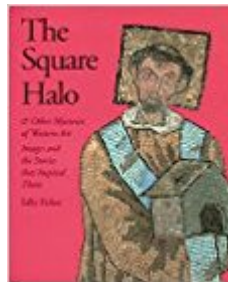




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# The Square Halo And Other Mysteries Of Western Art: Images And The Stories That Inspired Them



## Synopsis

Fisher "translates" the symbolism found in many Old Testament stories, the rich lore of the saints, angels, devils, and monsters, as well as enduring classical myths--which has been lost to many modern readers--revealing not only the true subject matter of the works, but also the drama, color, humor, and occasional quirkiness of these artistic narratives. 150 illustrations, 134 in color.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The very symbols and stories that imbue much of Western art with its meaning and drama are often enigmatic to contemporary viewers. Why, for example, are some saints represented by certain animals, or why are they depicted with square or triangular halos? The answers, which were once clear to viewers of previous eras, are now long-forgotten and obscure. Paintings from earlier centuries can be totally mystifying if viewers do not understand certain iconography and what it once meant to the artist and his or her patrons. Author Sally Fisher, who worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for 17 years, bridges that gap with this fascinating, clearly written book. Each of the 150 works of art included (most in full color) illustrates age-old beliefs, stories, and symbols, from Old Testament stories and the lives of the Madonna, Christ, and the saints, to the peculiar symbolism of classical mythology.

What does a square halo mean? Why is Saint Lucy carrying a plate of eyeballs? And who is that miniature man in the corner of the painting? Medieval art uses a host of unfamiliar symbols, stories, and devices. Children's book author Fisher (Christmas Journey, Viking, 1993) approaches Western

art with the aim of finding out the stories behind the pictures?and she is a wonderful storyteller. Arranged by broad topic, this is not an exhaustive source and does not evaluate style, period, or artists. This is art appreciation without intimidation. Charming and delightful, the only fault is that the pictures are sometimes too small to see some details described in the text. This fascinating tour through the mysterious world of Medieval art would make a wonderful introduction to art history for young adults, students, and curious adults. Highly recommended.?Karen Ellis, Baldwin Boettcher Lib., Humble, Tex.Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Great something different in the art world love it have given it as gifts many times excellent condition.

This is an informative and accessible guide to symbols in historic art works. Most of the works examined are pre-Reformation and many are religious in nature. In past centuries most of the public were illiterate. Art in church or public places was meant to instruct and/or inform the public. Our ancestors had a very different "popular culture" and this book explores some of this.

This is great for anyone who wants to look deeper and learn more about early art, and Christian art is the basis of most all early art. This book is fascinating!

Sally Fisher's book, 'The Square Halo', is a small but great book on some of the mysterious, often overlooked, symbols in Western art. The idea of art for art's sake is a relatively new one -- the idea of using art solely for aesthetic reasons is largely one of the modern age. Art was, in fact, an important medium of communication when the majority or at least a significant minority of the populace was illiterate. Paintings and works of art that we see today as mysterious, or sometimes without mystery and think are fairly straight-forward presentations, are in fact hiding meanings that we, because we have not generally been taught to look for meanings in these places, easily overlook.'To many educated persons, a museum visit is mystifying. There is Aristotle--we know who he is--but why is he crawling on all fours with a woman named Phyllis on his back? There is a group of gorgeously dressed persons. Each holds an object: keys, a sword, a small dragon on a leash, a little tower, a pair of eyes on a plate. They gaze into space. No one says a word. The title is Sacred Conversation. What can it mean?'Some symbols, however, we take for granted that we do know. For instance, the halo -- a common symbol. But is it?'Now and then a person simply glows. We have all seen it, or perhaps more accurately, felt it. In the Mediterranean world this experience found

pictorial expression. It began, as we might expect, with the sun. The fan of beams splaying from the edge of a cloud became the rays that emanated from the garland on the head of the Greek sun god Helios.'The Christian adaptation brought about an outward expression of an inward light (much in the way Christian sacraments were considered outward expressions of inward grace). Halos come in many forms, hollow or full, head-only or bodily encompassing, and, of course, square. Square??Of course (the title of the book had to have derived from something, after all). One image that is used is that of Pope John VII, who is portrayed in a mosaic in the Vatican Museums. A square halo is a symbol. It tells us that the wearer was still living at the time of the art work. A circle is perfect; so is Heaven. Earth is imperfect; so is the square. Thus, the person was considered blessed and saintly, but, as official sainthood cannot be conveyed until after the death of the person, an 'official' round halo would be inappropriate. Often a person will be holding an object (like a church, a house, etc.). These objects are in fact things that they built, or caused to be built (the same mosaic shows Pope John VII holding a model chapel which he had built). Biblical stories are played out in art work, often the entire story (or a significant portion) portrayed by the symbols on one canvas or panel, which would have triggered memories of the complete story in the viewer, and which we, in our modern 'literate' phase have forgotten. We also learn of some of the quirkiness of art -- the apostle Paul, for instance, is sometimes portrayed on horseback, and other times not. Generally, the horsey Paul is a Catholic painting; the pedestrian Paul is a Protestant painting. How do we know this? Because in the Catholic world, Paul was considered a person of importance, and people of importance travelled by horse. However, by the Protestant era, with a more literal reading of the text, as no horse was mentioned, no horse was painted. Fisher examines 150 works of art, grouped into chapters on The Old Testament, The Virgin Mary, The Life of Jesus, Earth and Heaven, Saints, and Rome Revisited (which looks at mythological influences in art). This is a fascinating book, lavishly illustrated in wonder colour plates, well written and intriguing.

This is a marvelous overview of western religious art of the late medieval period through the renaissance. Ms. Fisher uses familiar examples of painting and sculpture, and explains painting traditions and conventions, and does so frequently through the use of subtle humor. This is a pleasurable books for the student of art history, the lover of western religious art, and anyone who enjoys expanding their horizons! A great read, which lifts the veil on many of our current religious and artistic traditions.

This book is great, if you can still find it. I've purchased 6 copies to give as gifts and my friends

loved it! This is perfect as a coffee table book, or one that may inspire you! I highly recommend it! The pictures are beautiful and the stories complement. Don't read fairy tales to your kids, this is what they can inspire with and question.

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