

Many famous artworks of the Italian Renaissance were made to celebrate love, marriage, and family. They were the pinnacles of a tradition, dating from early in the era, of commemorating betrothals, marriages, and the birth of children by commissioning extraordinary objects—maiolica, glassware, jewels, textiles, paintings—that were often also exchanged as gifts. This volume is the first comprehensive survey of artworks arising from Renaissance rituals of love and marriage and makes a major contribution to our understanding of Renaissance art in its broader cultural context. The impressive range of works gathered in these pages extends from birth trays painted in the early fifteenth century to large canvases on mythological themes that Titian painted in the mid-1500s. Each work of art would have been recognized by contemporary viewers for its prescribed function within the private, domestic domain.

A unique glimpse into a less well-known side of Renaissance art and love is provided by erotica. Profane love was celebrated in many media, including drawings, prints, books, and sculpture, and some of the finest artists active in the first decades of the sixteenth century—Giulio Romano, Parmigianino, Perino del Vaga—contributed inventively to the genre. Besides offering titillation, these works could be enormously subversive of authority. Nourished by a satirical spirit and deep appreciation of the ancient world, they are a revelation.

A group of distinguished scholars have authored the essays and descriptions of individual artworks in this beautifully illustrated volume. They are among the most important contributors to today's parallel studies—historical and art-historical—of Renaissance rituals, customs, and secular art. The great nineteenth-century art historian Jacob Burckhardt was the first to recognize that secular festivals and public display in the Renaissance marked “the point of transition from real life into the world of art.”

This superb volume accompanies a major exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.