



The Summary

Why is Peter holding a knife in Leonardo's Last Supper? And what is he whispering in Giovanni's ear? Why does the painter Alessandro Allori depict Cosimo I de' Medici pointing at something with his left index finger? In her new essay, "Messages of the Masters" (Polistampa, English and Italian edition, 160 pages, €25), American scholar Renée Mulcahy reveals a centuries-old secret visual language hidden in the works of great Renaissance painters and sculptors such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Botticelli.

The book was produced with the contribution of Antonio Godoli, director of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, who oversaw both the translation and the iconographic research. The main theme is the communication hidden in some of the most famous Renaissance masterpieces: a set of signs expressed with the hands and feet, symbols and gestures typical of confraternities and secret societies. Artists belonging to these close circles sought to convey important messages in their works. Buy best-selling books online

"Once initiated and sworn," explains Renée Mulcahy, "members pledged to secrecy and silence, often until death. Thus, they sought to preserve a hidden flow of wisdom through art." The details are typically found on the lower right side of the fresco or painting, but occasionally also on the left side, or on both sides simultaneously. Often, the entire work reveals a dual meaning: the first, more obvious, and a second, referring to an obscure visual language. This cryptic alphabet, typical of some of their compositions, has remained unchanged over the centuries: this book, accessible to all but requiring careful participation, will allow readers to admire works of art with fresh eyes in any museum around the world.

Renée Mulcahy

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