



Antiqua Nuova Review



After reading this book you will no longer be able to look at a painting as before. Seeing, for example, a character crossing his legs you will wonder if he is trying to keep his balance or if he is hiding something. That of reading and interpreting ancient works of art through the decoding of hidden symbologies that refer to secret areas is a relatively new trend in art criticism that is flanked by the more traditional iconology. Renée Mulcany's project is ambitious because it aims to reread the great masters of the Renaissance through some details scattered in some parts of their works. Here it is not a question of providing an interpretation through references to the Scriptures, but of linking the works and their authors to the complex worlds of magic, alchemy and occult sciences. The works were secreted precisely to prevent the authors from being accused of various heresies and incurring in the streets of the Church. The references are therefore mainly to the pagan sources from which the humanists traked with full hands. Membership in secret societies, free associations and logies is intertwined with the awareness of being part of an exclusive group of intellectuals who express themselves with initiatic language. These links between art history and esoteric language are often evoked in other works of critical analysis, without being adequately probed or explained with terminology or references that presuppose historical, scientific and philosophical knowledge that is not within everyone's reach. Mulcahy's merit is to address the issue with great simplicity, with very synthetic cards, sometimes even too telegraphic, that draw attention to about 160 masterpieces of painting and sculpture, often only on some details of them. Often we limit ourselves to detecting a posture or a gesture without providing explanations and some statements appear approximate (*), but the overall result is extraordinary precisely because it leads us to look at the works, even the very famous ones, in detail to discover new meanings. Some observations really have the ability to surprise and the desire to deepen is triggered