



100 Details from Pictures in the National Gallery

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100 Details from Pictures in the National Gallery originally appeared in 1938, at a time when Kenneth Clark was director of that world-famous museum. The book sprang from his personal love of these paintings and his professional responsibility for them (shortly after Clark published his book, most of the paintings were crated and shipped out of London to avoid the ravages of the Blitz). Unlike its counterparts in America (the National Gallery in Washington, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Art Institute in Chicago), the National Gallery in London operates on a relatively small scale, but nearly every painting is a stunning classic. Only the first-rate paintings merit display, and Clark chose the overlooked details from the core of that collection, his personal favorites, some one hundred in number.

This handsome edition, beautifully bound and printed, is no mere coffee-table book, although it will certainly give immediate pleasure even to the casual browser. Clark has worked very carefully to enhance the reader's appreciation of these justly acknowledged masterpieces. Clark organizes his choices and his commentaries by the device of comparison and contrast, a method that is particularly appropriate for the visual arts. The reader is treated to no less than six famous heads of the Virgin, five angels, cupids by Corregio and Velazquez, pairs of hands by Rubens and Holbein, and trumpets by Rubens and Uccello. Clark writes clean, well-crafted prose that clarifies the subtleties of more technical concerns related to landscapes, portraits, and the differences between Flemish and Italian painters. One cannot read Clark's notes nor dwell upon these sumptuous illustrations without being enriched. No, the book will not replace a long visit to an art museum, but it will put beauty in the eye of the beholder. Among all the illustration, it is hard to choose a favorite, but the sleeping apostles from Giovanni Bellini's *Agony in the Garden* are especially beguiling, with their delicately sandaled feet and finely modeled heads. Many other works also come to mind, like the magnificent angel by Leonardo. In fact, there is so much richness here that it can safely be said that every reader will find lingering pleasure and enlightenment.

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