



John Singer Sargent and the Art of Allusion

Bruce Redford

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A revealing, interdisciplinary exploration of the brilliant visual quotations in the work of the celebrated grand-manner portraitist

The work of portraitist John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) has come to epitomize the glamour and anxiety of his age. In this innovative study, Bruce Redford reveals the web of visual quotations and references that informed Sargent's most ambitious paintings. Throughout his career, Sargent was recognized and rewarded as a “Young Master” whose bravura portraits inspired comparison with the likes of Velázquez, Van Dyck, and Reynolds. At the same time, his paintings responded to the stylistic experiments and cultural preoccupations of a world on the cusp of modernity. Sargent achieved this complex synthesis through a pictorial language composed of witty acts of allusion.

John Singer Sargent and the Art of Allusion offers the first sustained inquiry into the painter's practice of quotation—one that created a complex visual code. Through comparative analysis among thematic groupings of portraits and analogous literary texts, Redford shows how Sargent devised and transmitted that code. The result is an enhanced awareness of Sargent's daring gamesmanship, his place in the history of portraiture, and the dynamics of allusion in both art and literature.



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