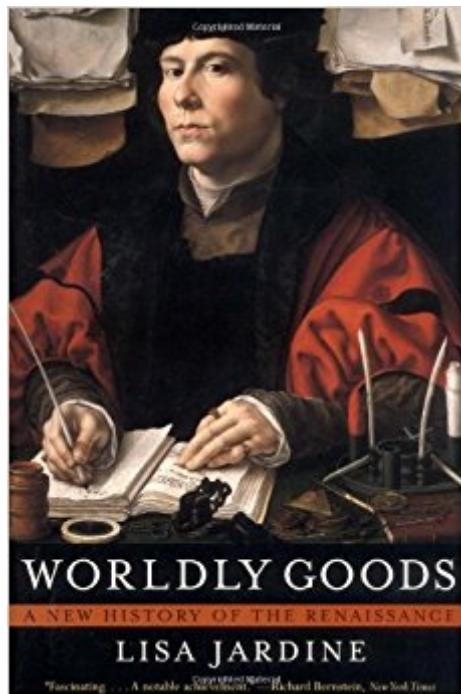


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# Worldly Goods: A New History Of The Renaissance



## Synopsis

"Fascinating. . . . A notable achievement. . . . Real history is in the details, the small stories, of which *Worldly Goods* is a treasure house." •Richard Bernstein, *New York Times* In this provocative and wholly absorbing work, Lisa Jardine offers a radical interpretation of the Renaissance, arguing that the creation of culture during that time was inextricably tied to the creation of wealth • that the expansion of commerce spurred the expansion of thought. As Jardine boldly states, "The seeds of our own exuberant multiculturalism and bravura consumerism were planted in the European Renaissance." While Europe's royalty and merchants competed with each other to acquire works of art, vicious commercial battles were being fought over who should control the centers for trade around the globe. Jardine encompasses Renaissance culture from its western borders in Christendom to its eastern reaches in the Islamic Ottoman Empire, bringing this opulent epoch to life in all its material splendor and competitive acquisitiveness. "A savvy, street-smart history of the Renaissance." •Dan Cryer, *Newsday* "Jardine's lively book is specific and down-to-earth. A particularly fascinating section recalls how books suddenly ceased to be principally collector's items or aids to scholars and became the sixteenth century's Internet, dispensing fact and fancy to high and low." •The New Yorker Illustrated

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Drawing from her earlier and more academic studies, Lisa Jardine approaches the challenge of creating a new history of the Renaissance with remarkable bravura and all the boldness required to deliver a fresh and highly readable story of an age we think we know so well. In *Worldly Goods*, Jardine argues that while the Renaissance was indeed marked by a flourishing cultural identity, it

was the material and commercial spirit of the 15th and 16th centuries that set the tone. Commerce and international trade provided the enormous fortunes that funded artistic production, and luxury goods, including great works of art, became important as means of displaying newly acquired wealth and status. It was an urge to own, a ceaseless quest for new horizons and exotic treasures, that fueled the cultural output of the Renaissance, according to Jardine, and that taste for conspicuous displays of opulence characterizes the Western experience of the arts and culture to this day. That *Worldly Goods* succeeds in telling a captivating new story of the Renaissance is testimony to Jardine's literary and scholarly success at a difficult task. That her book, richly illustrated and well written, makes contemplation of its subject a thrill is testimony of a very good read. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Arguing that acquisitiveness ranked among the chief traits of leading Renaissance figures, Jardine (Erasmus, Man of Letters), a noted British academic, seeks to reinterpret the forces at work in an era traditionally defined in terms of the triumph of humanism. Writing with critical intelligence and authority, Jardine characterizes the artistic masterpieces of the period as "strictly commercial" undertakings designed to glorify their owners while doubling as convertible capital. Extravagant expenditures on conspicuous display in the interest of dynasty-building drew the Habsburg emperor Maximilian so deeply into debt to Jakob Fugger, the prominent German financier, that Maximilian was forced to cede long-term rights in the profits from his silver and copper mines in exchange for further loans. The struggle to control the globe led to intrigue at the highest levels-both Columbus and Magellan took advantage of stolen maps for their landmark voyages-and Jardine's examination of exploration and commerce provides a window onto the times. Her extended discussion of the rapidly emerging book trade highlights the role of financiers such as the Medicis, the Pope's main bankers, whose keen interest in profits led them to ensure that even books proscribed by the Church remained in circulation. By analyzing the Renaissance narrowly in terms of the ascendancy of modern mercantile capitalism, Jardine likens the period to our own. The risk of such an approach is to slight the hold of antiquity on the shapers of our modern world. Author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is truly an amazing book -- it is very well-written and wonderfully researched -- with an extraordinarily clear-headed view of the Renaissance that takes into account its major economic underpinnings. For some idea that seems to anger some people -- which is fairly puzzling, since all it does is establish the fact (if it were not already obvious) that the "modern consumerism" people love

to rend their garments about did not suddenly roar into life with the opening of Macy's. (News flash: it didn't roar into life with the Renaissance, either.) Part of the cachet of culture lies in the way it disguises the idea that money has anything to do with it (which makes it a different form of commodity than money), and perhaps some are irritated that Jardine's brilliant book opens the books on this mythology. It doesn't take anything away from the Renaissance for me; to me it only lends depth to my art history education, and if you ask me it should be read by every art history and economics student in the world.

As someone who has been teaching the history of the arts for many years, the Renaissance is often a frustrating period to teach. Most of the histories stress the "Great Men" approach, discussing the "genius" of Leonardo, Michaelangelo, et al, as though these dudes had been beamed into Italy from the planet Krypton. Lisa Jardine has finally anchored the artistic and humanistic achievements of the Renaissance in the believable realities of the rise of commodities trading, political gamesmanship, multicultural curiosity, and emerging market savvy, making the Renaissance sound remarkably like the present day. Jardine permits us to see Renaissance art in the same terms that the patrons who commissioned these works saw them, which is no small achievement. Her discussion of the relation between Luther's critique of the Pope and the rise of German business interests is quietly brilliant. On top of all this, the book is lusciously illustrated, a treat for the eye as well as the mind. If you think you just don't "get" the Renaissance, you need to read this book, for Jardine has provided us with insights not just into the past, but into how we think and act today.

Were Britisher Lisa Jardine resident on this side of the Pond, she would be familiar in our mouths as household words, celebrated in print and film and certified a MacArthurian genius. As it is, she is simply the author of stimulating, beautifully conceived and compiled, engagingly written works of revisionist history with a uniquely, appealingly literary twist. *Worldly Goods* looks at the Renaissance through its material traces and transactions, focusing on the immortal works of art, yes, but using them forensically as primary depictions of a burgeoning material culture that invariably gets lost in our customary focus on "humanism" and the great "humanists." And the artistic evidence Jardine considers includes jewelry, tapestries, books, maps, and the full range of opulent artifacts that, assembled in display, demonstrated the stature of the owner to his or her beholders. In an imaginative preface, Jardine creates a powerful hook, taking the reader across the surface of Carlo Crivelli's lovely "Annunciation with St. Emidius," then diving deeply to a close analysis of the imagery. What Jardine calls attention to is not the prayerful Virgin with downcast eyes or the calling

Archangel at the point of "Ave!" but to the contemporary urban Italian setting of the meeting. Here we are not, as you may think, on familiar ground - "Oh, I know - Leonardo gives his Annunciation a well-known, but anachronistic, Tuscan background because that's what the era's painters KNEW" - because Jardine's analytic eye is on the profusion of lovely objects that literally spills into the street from the marble- and terracotta-clad house in which Mary prays: rugs, vases, hanging tapestries, wall and ceiling paneling, finely tooled books, ornamental plants, a peacock. And among these objects are items contemporary viewers would have immediately recognized as the especially prized and precious products of international commerce: Ottoman rugs, Venetian glass, Spanish tapestry, English broadcloth, and more. This is a commerical civilization in capsule. We are carefully led to join Jardine in concluding that Crivelli, in addition to inspiring a numinous awe in the picture's viewers, almost certainly sought also to create a "frisson of desire at the lavishness of (the) surroundings," in the service of a wealthy patron whose munificence was therein on display. The revelatory point, of course, is Jardine's suggestion that "the impulses which today we disparage as 'consumerism' might occupy a respectable place in the characterization of the new Renaissance mind." She prosecutes this thesis with great vigor, imagination, and thoughtful interweaving of evidence from commercial, artistic, scientific, philosophic, and literary sources (which, sadly, receive NO documentation whatsoever except for a bibliography that does not seem comprehensive). The chapter titles tell much of the story - "Conditions for Change: Goods in Profusion," "The Price of Magnificence," "The Triumph of the Book," "New Expertise for Sale," "A Culture of Commodities" - although each is an absolutely brilliant essay that takes its thematic lead from the title but interweaves collateral evidence from diverse sources and field of endeavor. We always knew the great merchant and banking houses were also the major patrons of the Raphaels, Michaelangelos, and Leonardos and that all the geniuses of artistic beauty worked for commissions. We understood less, however, how thoroughly commercial the era was, how its opulence functioned, and how the spread of learning and beauty was born on commercial wings, for profit, as a series of commercial transactions. In our own time we've debated endlessly the question "Can 'commercial' also be 'art'?" And we've taken this issue up with just as much heat when discussing any potential "sell-out," high or low, from Julian Schnabel to Green Day. But the answer to this great question, driven home again and again in Lisa Jardine's spectacular book, is "of course, dummy." (In addition to the unfortunately lack of scholarly trappings, the book's other failing, which I note parenthetically, is the inclusion of illustrations that from time to time are too small to assist the reader in following Jardine's close visual analysis, an absolutely essential aspect of this work. On the other hand, from time to time, as in her wonderful analysis of Holbein's The Ambassadors, she includes the necessary color

plates, plus numerous black and white details, that powerfully advance the analysis. Although beautifully produced, *Worldly Goods* would be even better in folio - something to hope for - with larger illustrations and many, many more color plates.) Why not bring Professor Jardine to the US of A (the combined Florence, Venice, Rome, and Antwerp of our time) for a few years - which of our major research universities wouldn't like having her on its faculty for a spell? Or how if our own patron creates the position of ".com fellow" at Harvard, Yale, or Princeton? - and drop a MacArthur on her (she needs to be working here for that to happen), simultaneously certifying her genius and deservedly enriching her. She'd understand perfectly.

A wonderful story of the Renaissance and how it resulted from world wide trade.

Lisa Jardine gets in the last word on the Renaissance and it is well-written. Add to that a timely delivery at a great price and you have an excellent buy.

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A helpful read about the Renaissance.

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