



The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck's Double Portrait (The Discovery Series)

Edwin Hall

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Commonly known as the "Arnolfini Wedding" or "Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride," Jan van Eyck's double portrait, painted in 1434, is probably the most widely recognized panel painting of the fifteenth century. One of the great masterpieces of early Flemish art, this enigmatic picture has also aroused intense speculation as to its precise meaning. Edwin Hall's accessible study—firmly grounded in Roman and canon law, theology, literature, and the social history of the period—offers a compelling new interpretation of this wonderful painting.

Instead of depicting the sacrament of marriage, Hall argues, the painting commemorates the alliance between two wealthy and important Italian mercantile families, a ceremonious betrothal that reflects the social conventions of the time. Hall not only unlocks the mystery that has surrounded this work of art, he also makes a unique contribution to the fascinating history of betrothal and marriage custom, ritual, and ceremony, tracing their evolution from the late Roman Empire through the fifteenth century and providing persuasive visual evidence for their development. His illuminating view of Van Eyck's quintessential work is a striking example of how art continues to endure and engage us over the centuries.

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