

The Spectator

Book reviews



Art Books: A sumptuous tour

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I was a friend of Frances Lincoln, whose firm publishes *Rossetti*. Sadly, she died about ten years ago. When I first knew her in the late 1960s, she was a junior editor at Studio Vista, and a quiet, retiring young woman. I must admit I had her down as a backroom girl, the equivalent of what business moguls call 'the unpromotable bright boy'. How wrong I was: setting up her own firm, she showed discrimination in her authors and a steely determination in getting from them what she wanted.

I think she would have been proud not only of *Rossetti* but of her firm's *Roberto Polo: The Eye* (£95) by Werner Adriaenssens and six others. The price is bound to deter many; but they will be missing a huge treat. This book is the equivalent of the Renaissance German *Wunderkammer*, cabinet of marvels. The full-page illustrations show over 300 masterpieces and gemstones from Polo's extraordinary collections. He is 60, lives in Brussels and is himself an artist. He is also an entrepreneur, having founded Citibank's Fine Art Investment Services. 'Vision,' he declares, 'is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.'

To buy his book is to acquire one's own private museum. The collection is strong in opulent 18th-century French works, 19th-century Belgian ones and Art Nouveau, but also extends into adventurous Modernism. (Another of Polo's *dicta*: 'The Avant-Garde exists only when it is rejected').