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Title: Jane's Smart Art Guides: Sta. Maria Del Popolo

Author: Jane McIntosh

Rating:  Excellent!

Publisher: Context Audio Guides, LLC

Reviewed by: **Nicholas Wiedenhoft**



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It's hard for me to review any audio literature topic without wishing to direct the discussion towards the larger world of audio literature for the disabled through RFB&D and the Library of Congress regional libraries for the blind and disabled. As a profound dyslexic it was these two resources that allowed me to pursue my undergraduate and graduate studies in fine art, accidentally earning a degree in English literature along the way. How dose all this pertain to a review of Jane's Smart Art Guide? I make mention of this here because I wish the reader to understand the fundamental power of spoken literature, not as a mere light entertainment for when you're too lazy to read, but know that for many it is a liberating educational tool of unquestioned academic authority. Along the way I have had to listen to a great many recordings including a wealth of art history texts some of which were first rate and some of which were of the worst quality imaginable (RFB&D recordings can often sound like the ravings of a lunatic chipmunk). The Jane's Smart Art Guides are conspicuous in their attention to quality in material, recording, and voice. You will now, I trust, have a better understanding of what I mean when I say that Jane McIntosh has a beautiful voice. It is a true marvel to feel her presence with and enjoyment of what she is describing. She has a supple, easy quality to her speech aided by superb pronunciation of place names and regional vernacular that not only enhances the pleasure of listening to her Smart Art Guides but it empowers the material discussed with an authority that renders the listener more readily sensible of the information they wish to understand. Believe me when I say that the quality of a reader's voice can make all the difference between zoning out and missing important information and staying tuned in to the directed discussion.

The Smart Art Guide I was given as a review copy was the Audio Guide to Santa Maria Del Popolo in Rome. It is in a high quality clamshell case with ring bound sleeves for the 2 audio CDs that comprise the tour. Included is a handy reference sheet with instructions on how to use the guide, audio track list, time line and a glossary of terms. You're first treated to a nice bit of history and a brief discussion of applicable architectural style about the place you intend to visit, something you can listen to before you arrive. The tour begins with a guide to the exterior of the building and the Piazza del Popolo. The guide then moves to an examination of the facade and then an interior exploration, escorting the visitor through the many chapels, their history and art. Something I had forgotten from my Art History days was a monument built in 1670 by the Polish architect G.B. Gisleni erected for himself just two years before his death, it is in Santa Maria del Popolo. That's the piece everyone describes as macabre because of the life like marble skeletal figure. I've always loved that work because it seems such a peaceful affirmation, an understanding of death, a contentment to live and to die. And who doesn't love a good skeleton as well? Jane's Guide treated this work with an intelligence and deference that almost amounts to tenderness. This was a tribute to the humanity of the monument's message, and the author of this guide's perceptual ability. An appreciation for, even affection of an artwork should always accompany a command of facts, and I feel is essential to any constructive discussion of Art. Jane's Guide emotes this educated appreciation as it informs, a potent combination.

The guide is laid out in a simple straightforward manner to facilitate ease of use. It is well written, very

informative, and would be a great aid to the traveler who wants more information and historical background than they can readily find on site. It's sort of like bringing your art history professor with you to Italy but it travels better. And you don't have to buy her all of those gelatos.

Jane's Smart Art Guides describe themselves as being for the person who:

- appreciates art, architecture, culture, history and the way this enhances their travel experiences.
- would like to spend less time reading a guidebook and more time looking with more and better information about what they see.
- prefers to travel independently, on their own schedule, at their own pace.

These Guides are available in two formats: audio CD and downloadable mp3 files for your ipod or mp3 player.





So if you are looking for a site specific guide to some of the major religious art sites of Europe take a look at the Jane's Smart Art Guide titles at their website www.janesSmartArt.com

Nicholas Wiedenhoeft

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