



The Isenheim Altar: Suffering and Salvation in the Art of Grunewald

Gottfried Richter, Matthias Grunewald

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Grunewald is generally regarded as the greatest painter of the German Renaissance, and his masterpiece, "The Isenheim Altar" in Colmar, as one of the great works of western art. Painted for the Order of Saint Anthony -- a monastic fraternity that cared for the sick and suffering humanity of the time -- Richter explains how the various panels of the altarpiece, and in particular the great central panels of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, need to be seen as a unity that provoked in the observer a profound experience of the meaning of earthly suffering and the power of healing transformation. In an age when illness and disease were still seen as a result of 'the sickness of sin' that had befallen humanity, such a picture has a spiritual therapeutic effect on those exposed to it and gave them an inner strength to endure and triumph over their often painful and difficult destinies.

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