



Descent (New Testament series)

Editors of Phaidon Press

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The Descent from the Cross, or Deposition, is the last act in the human drama of Christ's mission on earth, in which Joseph of Arimathea obtains Pontius Pilate's permission to take Christ's body down from the Cross and bury it. The pathos of this particular scene has captured the imagination of artists from every age, and this book presents a chronological sequence of over 100 versions of the event selected from masterpieces of all periods by the greatest artists. Like its companion volumes, Descent presents an extended meditation on a single theme that has many facets: the universal human tragedy of loss, grief and the shattering of all hope on the one hand; and the promise, as yet unknown to the participants, of renewed hope and eternal life on the other. This complex web of emotions has inspired a rich heritage of interpretation, and the images presented here form a deeply moving and ever-evolving study of grief and resignation; of human and divine drama; of individual physiognomy and character; and of ultimate hope and salvation. The concentration on a single theme opens up an intense and heightened awareness of the intricacy of human emotion and the magnitude of the artist's expressive resources. Each respective image reveals a new insight, as the profoundest mysteries of religion, human experience and artistic creation are explored here in a concentrated form. Like its companion volumes Annunciation, Crucifixion and Last Supper, Descent presents a focused meditation on a single theme that is infinitely rich, allowing the viewer to appreciate the nuances of character and the endless skill with which artists have created new masterpieces out of old materials. Whether one focuses on the religious mystery, the human drama or the marvellous skill of the artist, these uncluttered and simply presented works of art provide endless food for thought and contemplation.

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