



The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante

C. Jean Campbell

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The Commonwealth of Nature explores the role of Tuscan visual culture in the poetic construction of a commonwealth. For Campbell, “commonwealth” should be viewed not only in the context of abstract political theory but also as a living reality, dependent upon the very processes of art making. The book focuses on four exceptional works: Brunetto Latini’s didactic poem the *Tesoretto*; a unique illustrated manuscript of the same; and Simone Martini’s *Maestà* and Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, both painted for the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.

Campbell asserts that political interpretations of the art of the Tuscan communes ignore what Brunetto understood as a vital difference between the institutions of civic government and the reality of a commonwealth that was properly conveyed by poetry. Guiding us from the miniature to the monumental, from the private to the public, Campbell presents the inextricable links among poetry, art, and commonwealth. Beginning with the trope of secrecy in the *Tesoretto* and the poetic interpretation of friendship in the illustrated manuscript, she then moves on to Martini’s and Lorenzetti’s paintings, arguing that they are not solely political but are fully charged with the poetic as well. Concluding with a discussion of the *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, Campbell interprets the painting as a medium through which the peaceful commonwealth might be reinvented as a vital experience.

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