



American Pantheon: Sculptural and Artistic Decoration of the United States Capitol (Perspective On Art & Architect)

Donald R. Kennon

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Like the ancient Roman Pantheon, the U.S. Capitol was designed by its political and aesthetic arbiters to memorialize the virtues, events, and persons most representative of the nation's ideals—an attempt to raise a particular version of the nation's founding to the level of myth.

American Pantheon examines the influences upon not only those virtues and persons selected for inclusion in the American pantheon, but also those excluded. Two chapters address the exclusion of slavery and African Americans from the art in the Capitol, a silence made all the more deafening by the major contributions of slaves and free black workers to the construction of the building. Two other authors consider the subject of women emerging as artists, subjects, patrons, and proponents of art in the Capitol, a development that began to emerge only in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Rotunda, the Capitol's principal ceremonial space, was designed in part as an art museum of American history—at least the authorized version of it. It is explored in several of the essays, including discussions of the influence of the early-nineteenth-century Italian sculptors who provided the first sculptural reliefs for the room and the contributions of the mid-nineteenth-century Italian American artist Constantino Brumidi, to the mix of allegory, mythology, and history that permeates the space and indeed the Capitol itself.

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