

MATERIAL MUSES

Medieval Devotional Culture and Its Afterlives



HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

This exhibition was curated by Abby Armstrong Check, Claire Kilgore, and Tania Kolarik, Art History PhD Candidates at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The curators would like to thank the dedicated Haggerty Museum staff for their assistance in this process, especially Lynne Shumow, Curator for Academic Engagement, Daniel Herro, Head Designer and Preparator, and Amanda Brown, Collections Manager and Registrar, and Leigh Mahlik, Academic Curator of the UWM Art Collection and Mathis Art Gallery. The curators are especially appreciative of the Haggerty Museum of Art, the Raynor Memorial Library Special Collections at Marquette University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for their guidance, opportunity, and care in the crafting of this exhibition.

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Front cover:
Plate 1
Unknown Artist
French
Book of Hours Leaf, ca. 1470
Ink, tempera, and gold leaf on vellum
5 1/4 x 3 3/4 in
2024.I.14
Gift of Miles and Kathleen Vilski

Back cover:
Plate 5
Unknown Artist
French
Vestment Set, 18th century
Silk
Variable dimensions
71.1.1-5
Gift of Miss Avrina Pugh

MATERIAL MUSES

Medieval Devotional Culture and Its Afterlives

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The Middle Ages (ca. 500–1500 CE) is often thought of as a period of heightened religious devotion, especially in the Catholic regions of Western Europe. Looking to the Joan of Arc Chapel, at the heart of the Marquette University campus, and pulling from the collections of the Haggerty Museum of Art and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, *Material Muses* considers how artists since the end of the Middle Ages have looked back to the art from this period as inspiration for creating “authentic” devotional objects of their own time. The exhibition also explores the allure of medieval material as it converses with and energizes post-medieval religious narratives.

Modern day Catholic devotion is rooted in approximately two thousand years of Christian practice since Catholicism’s founding in the first century CE. Many devotional practices, objects, and rituals developed during the subsequent Middle Ages, also known as the medieval period. There have been major changes to how Catholicism has been practiced since the medieval period—notably the reforms initiated by the Council of Trent (1545–63) and Second Vatican Council (1962–65). While some material objects—such as the maniple, a piece of fabric worn by priests on their left arm during Sunday Mass (see the French vestment set)—have become obsolete, many of the material objects have remained the same, such as chalices (or goblets) for Communion wine. Over time, artists have continued to look at medieval examples of devotional objects for inspiration to produce religious objects that convey their “authentic” devotional purpose.

One impressive example of medieval “authenticity” is the Joan of Arc Chapel, located at the heart of the Marquette University campus. The building began its life as the Chapelle de St. Martin de Seyssuel and was part of a larger sixty-room chateau structure in the French village of Chasse, a small hamlet just south of Lyon in the Rhone River Valley. Following WWI, American collector Gertrude Gavin Hill purchased the structure from a French antique dealer, assembled it on her New York private estate, and later renamed it the “Joan of Arc Chapel.” The estate was later purchased by Marc and Lillian Rojzman in 1962, and the chapel was gifted and transferred, stone by stone, to Marquette University in 1966. The rebuilding of the chapel and its blending of religious objects inside creates an exceptional religious space. The Joan of Arc Chapel continues to carry out its primary mission as a place of worship, offering daily services for the Marquette community. It is the only active “medieval” religious space in America. The curators invite you to visit the Joan of Arc Chapel, when able, as an extension of the exhibition experience and to consider how the Middle Ages and its post-medieval interpretations function as “muses” for artists, everyday viewers, and religious devotees.

BIRTH

The narratives of Christianity center on birth, (re)birth, and resurrection. The celebration of birth marks the beginning of the liturgical year, with the Feast of the Nativity (Latin: *nātīvitās*, birth), also known as Christmas in English or Christ's Mass. The birth of Jesus illustrates a central mystery within Christianity through the doctrine of the incarnation, which is the embodiment of the divine in the person of Jesus, the son of God. Representations of this moment appear widely in medieval Catholic art, ranging from large painted or sculpted altarpieces within churches to small private devotional images, such as Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of *The Nativity* (Plate 2). This print was created at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a moment of transition as the Middle Ages drew to a close with the start of the Protestant Reformation and global expansion that led to European colonial empires in Asia and the Americas. Produced alongside nineteen other woodcuts that were published together as a book, *The Nativity* was only one narrative in a larger project known as the *Life of the Virgin*. This book was one of many printmaking projects made by Dürer to capitalize on the technology of the printing press that allowed for single images carved onto wooden blocks or engraved onto metal plates to be reproduced as needed to satisfy demand. The printing press allowed for multiple copies of books and images to be made much more quickly and at a cheaper price compared to the previous method of copying by hand, allowing text and images to spread broadly across European social classes and geographies. This spread also aligned with medieval practices that encouraged private devotion using the technique known as affective piety, which is the emotive and imaginative meditation on the lives of Christ and the Virgin, emphasizing their humanity and the miracle of the Incarnation.

Iconography (a set group of images and/or symbols) depicting the Incarnation through the Annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus frequently appears on Catholicism's ritual objects. One example of this is the thirteenth-century *Incense Burner with Annunciation Scene* ("navicula"), generously loaned to the exhibition from the collection of University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Its typical hinged lid features an engraved scene of the Annunciation to Mary. The act of opening the container, in order to ritually burn incense, animates the scene of the archangel Gabriel (on the right) announcing to the Virgin Mary (shown seated on the left) that she will miraculously conceive and be the mother of God's son, Jesus. An early thirteenth-century stained glass window from Soissons Cathedral, now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts (59.34), depicts two clerics in procession. The first cleric swings a thurible (a metal incense burner suspended from chains) with his right hand and carries a *navicula* in his left, while the second cleric carries a processional cross.



Plate 2
Albrecht Dürer
German, 1471–1528
The Nativity, c. 1502/1504
Woodcut
11 3/4 x 8 1/8 in
56.8
Gift of Mrs. Otto H. Falk

Catholicism also uses rituals to enact (re)birth. Most notably the Sacrament of Baptism signifies the cleansing of sin as an essential method of gaining salvation, but also the (re)birth of an individual as a Christian. Within medieval Catholicism, birth communicates not only a linear beginning point, but also works with death to provide cyclical renewal through the celebration of Jesus's resurrection. Similarly, the thematic subcategories of this exhibition should also be viewed cyclically with death not as an ending but as a transition that continues on toward (re)birth.

RITUAL

The rituals of Catholic devotion can be private (reciting the rosary before bed) or public (the performance of the Mass), ordinary (Sunday Mass) or extraordinary (Easter Mass). In each of these cases, Catholic rituals are deeply rooted in the power of prayer and the material objects that are necessary for the rituals to take place. While prayer can be a direct conversation between an individual and the divine figures of God, Jesus, or one of the saints, for most Catholics there is often a material component facilitating that prayer, such as pocket-sized to large-scale painted images of Jesus, rosaries, crucifixes, and saint medals, as well as other material objects, that mediate and focus the connection between the devotee and whom they are praying to.

In this exhibition, the ivory carving of a mitred bishop (Plate 3) is one example of a material object facilitating a devotee's private devotion. Small enough to fit into a person's hand, the exterior representation of the bishop may be meant to recall the first bishop of the Catholic church, St. Peter, holding a small representation of the church in his left arm and his right hand raised in a sign of blessing. An alternate reading could be of a specific bishop who had a church or cathedral constructed in his diocese. The lower half of the sculpture, the bishop's robe, opens to reveal a scene of Christ's crucifixion (in the center) with two female figures in prayer carved into the interior portion of the bishop's skirt. The exterior of the ivory sculpture allows for the devotee to pray and meditate on the role of the bishop and the church, while the interior encourages prayer toward Christ. The scale of this hand-holdable carving reflects the ability of religious art objects to create intimate interactions with the divine through prayer.

The public ritual of Mass involves several objects purposely made for its performance and the intercession between devotees and the divine. The priest, for example, wears special clothing in the form of vestments. As part of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Catholics consume the host, held within a pyx, and drink wine out of a chalice (or footed cup) that has been changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, respectively, through a ritual process known as transubstantiation. In the thirteenth century, the celebration of the Eucharist was codified into the Feast of Corpus Christi. It was then necessary for new material objects to be made for this devotional ritual through the creation of the monstrance, a vessel meant for the display of the host.

An example of the post-medieval adoration of the Eucharist can be seen in this exhibition's nineteenth century brass *Monstrance* (61.12). A circular pane of glass in the center is meant to display the Eucharist wafer, which is surrounded by metal rays, symbolic of the light of Christ. The metal rays are typical of monstrances after the Middle Ages, as medieval examples have Gothic spires and arches



Plate 3
Unknown Artist
Italian
Untitled (Mitred Bishop), (n.d.)
Ivory
7 1/2 x 4 1/4 x 2 in
68.4
Gift of Mrs. Jean Messmer

to make the Eucharist look like it is inside of a small chapel (for example, the German monstrance from ca. 1450 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (32.100.226)). Monstrances may be displayed in special side chapels within churches or kept on or near the altar, which allows the worshiper to see and pray in the presence of the body of Christ. As part of a ritual act of benediction or blessing, the priest will hold a monstrance above the congregation, an action that represents being blessed by Christ himself through the mediation of a priest.

Ritual activates and enlivens medieval and modern Catholicism's interest in the mysteries of birth, death, and resurrection. As muses, ritual objects both embrace long standing traditions and innovate to communicate new ideas.

DEATH

Since Roman times, the Latin phrase *memento mori*, or “remember that you will die,” acted as a reminder of human mortality and the salvation of the soul in the afterlife. The rise of Christianity—and the emphasis on Divine Judgement of the soul—produced a wealth of art objects concerned with reminders of the fragility of humankind’s time on earth. The objects in this section of this exhibition relate to Catholicism’s views on how humanity should understand specific aspects of death, from the Middle Ages to the present.

Arguably the most common and important image of death in the Middle Ages, the Crucifixion, represents Christ’s sacrifice for humanity. Countless reproductions of the Crucifixion are meant to remind believers of this sacrifice and to encourage them to act accordingly in their everyday lives. In the medieval period, images of the Crucifixion would follow a similar iconography, or set of symbols, still in use today. The iconography would include Christ on the Cross, with the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. John the Evangelist mourning at the base. Sometimes artists would include additional details, such as the bones of Adam, or would remove or include additional figures and backgrounds that related to specific places.

In this exhibition, the power of the Crucifixion and its lasting impact over the past 500 years can be seen in a group of objects that use this iconography as their central focus: the French *Book of Hours Leaf: Crucifixion*, (Front cover, Plate 1), the German *Crucifixion* ivory (Plate 4), and Nicholas Herrera’s *At the Foot of the Cross* (2009.10.1). The book of hours was the most essential book to own during the late thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries. Owning a book of hours fulfilled the desire by the laity to imitate the clergy and their interactions with the divine; therefore, through a book of hours, the laity could seek out a series of similar prayers that were easier to understand and access because they included vernacular languages. Books of hours were also highly ritualized objects that allowed the user to read, pray, and—in the case of this particular book—contemplate Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. In contrast, the later ivory *Crucifixion* and Herrera’s *At the Foot of the Cross* play with the tangible nature of Christ’s death and sacrifice as well as the mourning of this loss, which is emphasized through the works’ sculptural nature and the physical display of his body.

Another allegorical use of death in the Middle Ages is called the *Danse Macabre*, or “Dance of Death.” The *Danse Macabre* consists of a skeletonized personification of death walking amongst the living, creating an appalling and emotionally reactive scene for the viewers who would view themselves amongst the dance. In the medieval period, the Dance of Death could be displayed anywhere in murals, pageants, sculpture, and books, as a consistent reminder of one’s fragility on earth



Plate 4
Unknown Artist
Germany
Crucifixion, 1858
Ivory
16 3/4 x 7 1/2 x 11 in
50.1
Gift of Mr. Abraham D. Braun

and the dangers of vanities in life. In this exhibition, the *Danse Macabre* can be seen in two objects, one late medieval and one modern: Georges Rouault’s *Debout les Morts! (Arise you Dead!)* (58.1.54) and the opening of Philippe Pigouchet’s *Ces presents heures a luisiage de Romme* (1497) from the Raynor Library collection. Pigouchet’s early printed book relies heavily on this medieval narrative, as Death dances with everyone, regardless of their ferocity of faith, as seen in the border of the text. This reminds the faithful to behave with propriety in life. Rouault’s print follows a darker period of humanity, post-WWII, and uses the allegorical dance to comment on Man’s inhumanity to fellow Man in times of war.

During the Middle Ages, there was greater engagement and comfort with the concept of death. Saints (known as the “very special dead”) could be called upon to intercede on behalf of an individual or community. Further, death was not understood as the absolute end of life as one was judged to continue on in hell or heaven, though possibly after time spent in purgatory. Through this exhibition we can examine how people, medieval and modern, utilized the visual language of death, dying, and sacrifice to make sense of the world around them.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Unless otherwise indicated, all objects are from the collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University

Unknown Artist
Italian
Untitled (Madonna and Child), ca. 1650
Ivory
20 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 in
63.15
Gift of Mr. Norbert J. Beihoff

Jacques Villon
French, 1875 - 1963
Maternité (Maternity), ca. 1948
Oil on canvas
57 1/2 x 38 in
62.7
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt

Albrecht Dürer
German, 1471 - 1528
The Nativity, ca. 1502/1504
Woodcut
11 3/4 x 8 1/8 in
56.8
Gift of Mrs. Otto H. Falk

Unknown Artist
Germany
Incense Burner with Annunciation Scene (“navicula”), 13th century
Cast copper
2 1/4 X 2 1/4 in
1986.002.64
UWM Art Collection, Gift of Charles Bolles Rogers

Unknown Artist
Country Unknown, (French Limoges style)
Angel Reliquary, 19th century
Bronze, enamel, and crystal
9 3/8 x 3 3/4 x 3 5/8 in
1986.002.81
UWM Art Collection, Gift of Charles Bolles Rogers

Edmund D. Lewandowski
American, 1914 - 1998
Untitled (Cathedral), ca. 1960 - 1970
Screenprint
8 1/2 x 12 in
99.7.4
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Paul G. LaBissoniere

Unknown Artist
French
Vestment Set, 18th century
Silk
71.1.1.1-5
Variable dimensions
Gift of Miss Avrina Pugh

Unknown Artist
Spain
Chalice, 16th century
Gilt on silver
8 5/8 x 5 3/4 in
2003.12
Gift of Ms. Margaret E. Schumaker

Unknown Artist
French
Monstrance, 19th century
Brass
19 1/16 x 10 1/2 x 4 in
61.12
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. John Pick

Unknown Artist
Southern Netherlands
The True Likeness of Ignatius of Loyola, 1597/1622
Oil on copper
7 5/8 x 5 1/2 in
94.10
Museum purchase, Gift of Marquette University Jesuit Community

Unknown Artist
Spain
St. Ignatius of Loyola Reliquary, 17th century
Silver
10 1/2 x 6 1/4 x 4 5/8 in
1986.002.71
Gift of Charles Bolles Rogers
UWM Art Collection, Gift of Charles Bolles Rogers

Philippe Pigouchet, Printer and Engraver
French, 1488 - 1518
Simon Vostre, Publisher
French, 1486 - 1518
Ces presents heures a luisiage de Romme, 1497
Linen paper bound with pigskin over wooden boards
6 3/4 x 4 3/4 in
Raynor Library Archival Collections, Rare Books, Incunabula Collection

Georges Rouault
French, 1871 - 1958
Debout les morts! (Arise, you dead!), 1948
Aquatint, etching and engraving
25 1/2 x 19 7/8 in
58.1.54
Gift of Mr. Leonard J. Scheller

Lucas Cranach, the Elder
German, 1472 - 1553
The Lamentation, ca. 1550
Woodcut
10 1/2 x 7 in
98.19
Museum purchase

Unknown Artist
Italian
Untitled (Mitred Bishop), (n.d.)
Ivory
7 1/2 x 4 1/4 x 2 in
68.4
Gift of Mrs. Jean Messmer

Unknown Artist
French
Book of Hours Leaf, ca. 1470
Ink, tempera, and gold leaf on vellum
5 1/4 x 3 3/4 in
2024.1.14
Gift of Miles and Kathleen Vilski

Unknown Artist
Germany
Crucifixion, 1858
Ivory
16 3/4 x 7 1/2 x 11 in
50.1
Gift of Mr. Abraham D. Braun

Nicholas Herrera
American, b. 1964
At the Foot of the Cross, 1999
Carved and painted wood
14 x 13 x 11 in
2009.10.1
Gift of Janice and Chuck Rosenak

Philippe Pigouchet, Printer and Engraver
French, 1488 - 1518
Simon Vostre, Publisher
French, 1486 -1518
Jean Pichore, Designer
French, Active ca. 1501 –1521
Leaf from a Book of Hours (Assumption of the Virgin), ca. 1506
Print with hand-illumination on vellum
6 1/2 x 4 3/8 in
2024.1.3
Gift of Miles and Kathleen Vilski

Anton Koberger, Printer and Publisher
German, c. 1440/1445 - 1513
Biblia, 1483
Ninth German Bible
Linen paper bound with leather over wooden boards
15 x 10 in
On loan from St. Francis De Sales Seminary, Salzmann Library
Raynor Library Archival Collections, Rare Books, Salzmann Collection

Eduardo Paolozzi
British, 1924 - 2005
Jesus Colour by Numbers, 1970
Photolithograph
15 x 10 in
81.38.37.33
Gift of Mr. Steven D. Sohackie and Mrs. Bernice Sohackie



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