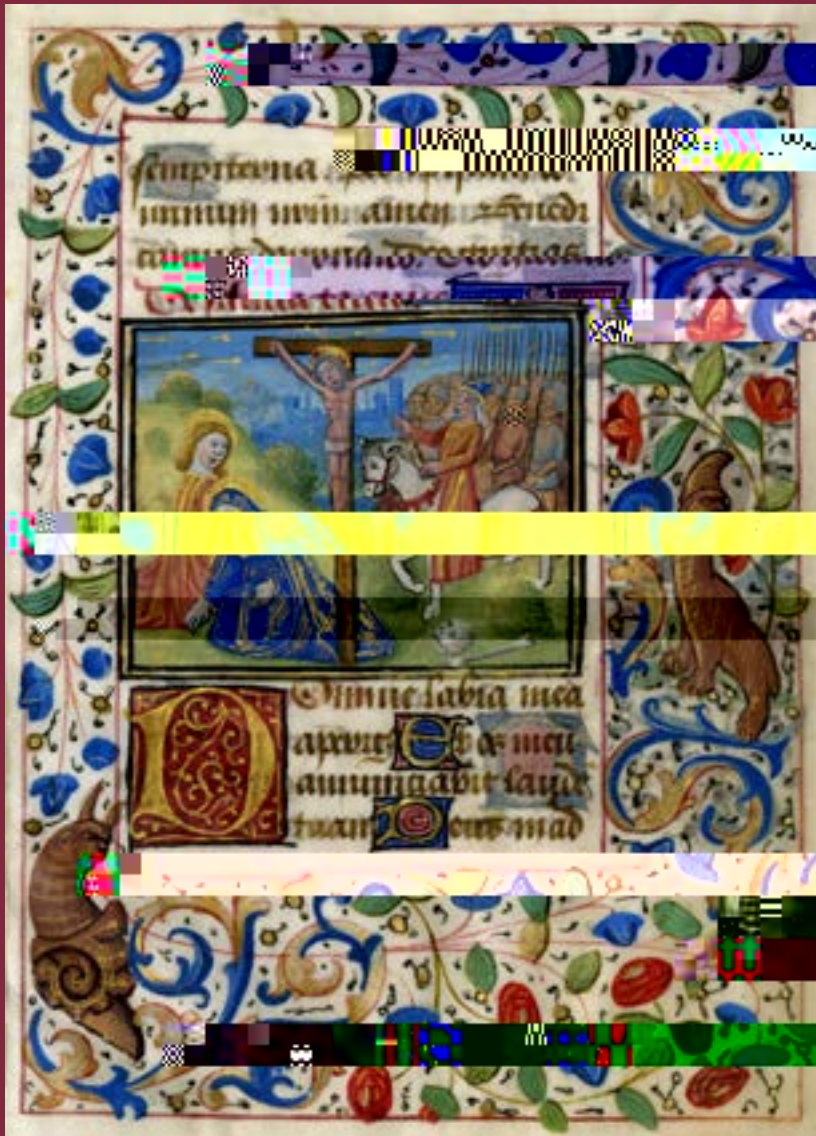


# MATERIAL MUSES

Medieval Devotional Culture and Its Afterlives



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MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

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## 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

# 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: *n t vit s*, 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.



## 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. Beiho

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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