



BOSTON COLLEGE

McMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART HOSTS EXCLUSIVE EXHIBITION:

***Secular/Sacred: 11th-16th Century Works*
from the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
February 19-June 4, 2006**

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (January 2006) – The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College will present *Secular/Sacred: 11th-16th Century Works from the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. The exclusive exhibition—on view from February 19 through June 4, 2006—is the first to explore multiple ways in which medieval and early modern objects communicated both "sacred" and "secular" messages to viewers.



16th-century French tapestry, "A Demoniac Delivered and A Pagan Converted."

By re-thinking scholars' traditional division of medieval and early modern objects into "secular" and "sacred" categories and by examining the history of this categorization, the exhibition shows visitors how to decode these images, and reveals how lines between the two categories blur for each object.

Conceived in 2002 as a collaboration among three local institutions—Boston College, the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) and the Boston Public Library (BPL)—the exhibition displays works from the Boston-area's most significant medieval and early modern collections.

It was planned to coincide with the 2006 annual meetings in Boston of the Medieval Academy of America (March 29-April 1) and the College Art Association (February 23-26).

"The McMullen Museum is pleased and proud to collaborate with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Boston Public Library in examining their collections from a new perspective," said McMullen Museum Director and Professor of Art History Nancy Netzer. "The present exhibition takes as its premise that the traditional division of artworks dating from the Middle Ages and early modern period into categories of sacred and secular is too rigid to accurately reflect the multiplicity of messages that most of these objects convey. Seeking to articulate the secular and sacred discourse engendered by each object in the exhibition, the exhibition's co-curators have examined from various disciplinary perspectives the multivalent secular and sacred sources of the objects' meanings. They show how some artists depicting biblical narratives inject sensual details from contemporary secular life, like sumptuous clothing, jewels and architecture, to impress the viewer with the subject's relevance. Or, they reveal how seduction works in reverse by infusing a scene from contemporary life with spiritual meaning to awaken the viewer to higher concerns."

One of the showpieces of the exhibition, never before exhibited, is a fully illustrated 33 ½-foot-long, 15th-century French manuscript scroll from the collection of the BPL, which records the history of the world from Creation through the year 1380, with 57 detailed miniatures illuminating the text.

According to organizers, the exhibition provides the only opportunity for many years to see most of the MFA objects which are now in storage pending completion of a new building. Most of the BPL manuscripts and books have never before been formally exhibited or published.

Secular/Sacred

Comprising nearly 100 objects—including illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, silks, stone sculpture, metalwork, paintings and some ceramics and early printed books—*Secular/Sacred* takes an inventive and interdisciplinary approach to the study of the style, subject matter, functions and reception of works of art from the 11th through the 16th century, with emphasis on works from the 15th century. The exhibition is organized thematically in six sections.

I Beasts: Sacred/Secular

The splendid *Samson and Lion Aquamanile* and *Fox Spoon* serve as centerpieces for this section, which also comprises 11 illuminated manuscripts with representations of various beasts. The section analyzes the interplay between text and image in the multiple representations of beasts.

II Ministers and Magistrates

An array of paintings, official documents, manuscripts, seals and commemorative medals in this section both illustrate and complicate the prevailing medieval and Renaissance political philosophy of the "Two Swords"—a theory that defined, and sought to differentiate and isolate, the respective jurisdictions of sacred ministers of the Roman Catholic Church and "secular" magistrates, princes and kings. This section debuts the fully illustrated 33 ½-foot-long 15th-century French manuscript scroll, representing the history of the world through parallel genealogies of secular and sacred history. It was created around the year 1440, and is one of the earliest known copies of *La Chronique Universelle*, a generic title supplied to the anonymous French text by modern scholars. The Chronicle draws on sacred and secular sources to create a "universal" history that ties together Biblical stories, ancient Greece and Rome, and the royal houses of France and England.

III Worshipping a Worldly Virgin

In this section, Italian paintings, sculptures and manuscript illuminations of the 14th and 15th centuries reveal how Mary is portrayed in the late middle ages as a real woman, both in her traditional roles of mother of the infant Jesus and queen, and as depicted in western Christianity for the first time.

IV The Sacraments: Sacred and Profane

This section examines depictions of lives of children, adolescents and young adults in manuscripts, wedding chests and tapestries, and the ways in which sacramental and secular rites of passage mark the progress of young people's maturation and integration into the community. It includes a series of tapestry fragments associated with the sacrament of the Eucharist, assembled and displayed for the first time.

V The Devotional Book and Its Worlds

This section focuses on a group of devotional and liturgical books from the western and eastern Christian worlds. First is a selection of illustrated manuscripts and early printed books intended as spiritual guides and religious instruction for lay readers. Second is a group of three late-medieval Armenian liturgical manuscripts.

VI Sacred/Worldly Goods

The concluding section examines functional objects as well as depictions of "secular" scenes dealing with commerce and luxury goods. In the 11th century a new economy—centered

around coinage, commerce and the banking trade—developed and came to dominate the secular life of the later middle ages. A second area focuses on textiles and jewelry, to show how piety and status came to reinforce one another and how the symbols of one became the symbols of the other. The final area examines works produced in the Islamic world. Made as accouterments for the good life, the textiles and ceramics, enjoyed by the wealthy and powerful in the Islamic lands, took on new meanings when they reached Europe, as trophies, gifts or trade-goods, in association with Christian practices and as reliquaries for the remains of Christian saints.

Exhibition Curators

Scholars from a variety of disciplines serve as exhibition co-curators and contributors of essays to the accompanying catalogue; 11 are from Boston College:

BC Professor Pamela Berger, Fine Arts Department
BC Calderwood Chair of Islamic and Asian Art Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, Fine Arts Department (jointly held)
BC Professor Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Romance Languages Department
BC Associate Professor Michael Connolly, Slavic/Eastern Languages Department
BC Associate Academic Vice President for Faculties Patricia DeLeeuw
BC Professor Robin Fleming, History Department
BC Assistant Professor Stephanie C. Leone, Fine Arts Department
BC Professor Nancy Netzer, Fine Arts Department (also catalogue editor)
BC Associate Professor Virginia Reinburg, History Department
BC Associate Professor Laurie Shepard, Romance Languages Department

As well as:

Earle A. Havens, Curator of Manuscripts, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, BPL
Lisa Fagin Davis, Independent Scholar

The audio guide, produced by BC, will be provided free of charge on iPods to visitors and made available to the MFA and BPL for future use with their permanent collections.

Exhibition Catalogue

According to exhibition organizers, the accompanying catalogue will be a major contribution to the study of medieval and Renaissance art, casting these works in their widest interdisciplinary context. It will serve in addition as a publication on the permanent collections for the MFA and BPL, and be sold in their respective bookstores. Edited by Nancy Netzer, the catalogue features 13 essays by the exhibition co-curators and illustrations of all works in the exhibition.

Accompanying Educational Programs

Public events—including a lecture series featuring exhibition co-curators, and concerts of medieval and Renaissance secular/sacred music—will be offered. Boston College faculty will work with local teachers to prepare curricula for class visits, and Museum docents will offer group tours.

For more information on public programs, or directions to the BC campus, call 617-552-8100 or visit www.bc.edu/artmuseum.

Exhibition Organizers

The exhibition is an innovative model of collaboration among the three organizing institutions: Boston College has a strong faculty in medieval and early modern studies across several disciplines; the MFA is a major private museum of art with one of the largest medieval and early modern collections in North America; the BPL is a major public library with world-class collections of rare books and manuscripts. To capture the significance of this collaboration, a documentary on the process of shaping the exhibition will be available on Boston College web sites and will be screened during the exhibition in the Museum.

During their annual meetings in Boston, both the Medieval Academy of America and the International Center for Medieval Art, in conjunction with the College Art Association, have

planned activities around the exhibition. In addition, the American Association of Museums will hold its annual meeting in Boston this spring, which will include a session on institutional collaborations using the exhibition as a model. According to the AAM (www.aam-us.org), 2006 marks its 100th anniversary and has been designated the Year of the Museum.

McMullen Museum of Art

The McMullen Museum is renowned for organizing interdisciplinary exhibitions that ask new questions and break new ground in the display and scholarship of the works on view. It serves as a dynamic educational resource for all of New England as well as the national and the international community. The Museum displays its notable permanent collection and mounts exhibitions of international scholarly importance from all periods and cultures of the history of art. In keeping with the University's central teaching mission, the Museum's exhibitions are accompanied by scholarly catalogues and related public programs. The 10th anniversary of the formal reopening of the Museum was marked in 2003-04.

The Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art was named in 1996 in honor of the late parents of the late Boston College benefactor, trustee and art collector John J. McMullen. The exhibition and catalogue will be dedicated to the memory of Dr. John J. McMullen, 1918-2005.

McMullen Museum Hours and Tours

Admission to the McMullen Museum is free; it is handicapped accessible and open to the public. The Museum is located in Devlin Hall on BC's Chestnut Hill campus, at 140 Commonwealth Avenue. Group tours arranged upon request; call (617) 552-8587. For directions, parking and program information, visit www.bc.edu/artmuseum or call (617) 552-8100.