

THE FINE ART POST

Leafing through The Middle Ages. Exhibition. Paris

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The Katherina Hours (Use of Rome)

In Latin and French, illuminated manuscript on parchment
France, Tours, c. 1485-90
Master of Jean Charpentier

Galerie Meyer. Paris. May 16-25

www.galerie-meyer-oceanic-art.com

“LEAFING THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES” (“Le Moyen Age au fil des pages”) is the title of a special exhibition of Medieval Books of Hours curated by Dr Sandra Hindman that Galerie Meyer Oceanic Art in Paris will host from May 16 – 25. “An American in Paris,” like Sandra Hindman, Anthony JP Meyer is a celebrated tribal arts dealer well-established in the heart of the Left Bank in Paris since the 1980s.

This will be an occasion to discover the more recent acquisitions of Les Enluminures but also to leaf through the pages of these precious manuscripts, thanks to new technology developed for the British Library and called “Turning the pages.” Many of the richly illuminated Books of Hours will be complemented by an IPAD version of the software program that not only permits visitors to turn the pages but also to enlarge them and study them in greater detail.

Books of Hours are probably the most famous of all medieval illuminated manuscripts. Commonly described as lay people's prayer books, they are artifacts which encapsulate the spiritual life. They preserve something of monastic practice, allowing their owners to become "armchair monks" as they shared participation in monastic life while turning the pages of these picture books during the eight hours of the monastic day. Their pictures help the reader find his or her way around the book as well as to memorize the text. Scrupulously bequeathed within families, often carefully protected by deluxe bindings, these are private books meant to be cradled in the hand, at home, late at night, or early in the morning. They are private, personal, intimate, and tactile. We believe our exhibition will aid both new and established clients to appreciate their very special qualities.

Three Books of Hours stand out among the twenty that will be exhibited. The first has nearly 50 pages and is illuminated by an artist of the Master of the Gold Scrolls Workshop also responsible for a manuscript in Berlin (hence known as the Master of Berlin MS Grisebach 4k). The large number of illuminations and delightfully rich margins, as well as many textual peculiarities, signal that the manuscript was custom made for the patron and his wife perhaps as a wedding present as they had their portraits painted twice in the manuscript.

The second Book of Hours is one of the earliest known Books of Hours, here in an original binding. Replacing the Psalter as the requisite book of private devotion, the Book of Hours appears to originate in northern France. This one dates roughly 1260 to 1270 and is accompanied by splendid historiated initials with a Christological cycle that precedes each of the hours of the day. The style of the initials anticipates the renewal of illumination during the reign of Philip the Fair.

What is so extraordinary about the present example is that it preserves traces of its early owner – a Catalan textile merchant, who carried the book around Europe with him, using it to keep a record of his inventory of cloths as well as a reminder of the fairs he needed to attend in order to sell his merchandise. Since Books of Hours are often anonymous, revealing little about their earliest owners, these two manuscripts are special as they bring to life the stories of their owners and their earliest histories.

A third manuscript originates in Burgundy, probably in Dijon. Created by the so-called Master of the Burgundian Prelates, this book has long been cited as a work at the heart of the Master's style, but it had disappeared from view since its sale in the early 20th century to one of America's great bibliophiles Robert Hoe. The artist is known for his monumental style, and he was probably also a painter. He produced works, often of large format like this one and characterized by magical landscapes, for church officials in Burgundy, and many of his works are today in institutions, especially in the Bibliotheque nationale de France.