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MASTERPIECES OF ILLUMINATED ITALIAN MANUSCRIPTS FROM SIX REGIONS AND FIVE CENTURIES ON VIEW IN MULTIMEDIA EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, September 25 , 2005 – January 2, 2006



Belbello da Pavia

Lombard, active c. 1430 - c. 1473

Initial A: A Young Christ Blessing, Venice, 1467 - 1470

leaf from an antiphonal

Initial: 18 x 15.5 cm (7 1/16 x 6 1/8 in.)

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 96, verso, 2005.29

Washington, DC – From medieval monasteries in Southern Italy to Renaissance courts in the north, and cosmopolitan Rome, the artistic achievements of Italian manuscript illuminators from the 12th to the 16th centuries will be explored in a stunning exhibition, **Masterpieces in Miniature: Italian Manuscript Illumination from the J. Paul Getty Museum**, in the East Building, National Gallery of Art, Washington, from September 25, 2005, through January 2, 2006.

The exhibition originated last spring at the J. Paul Getty Museum, which organized the show. It has been expanded for the National Gallery of Art to include a number of works acquired by the Getty this summer. In Washington it will feature more than 45 exquisite volumes, individual leaves, and miniatures from the Getty's comprehensive collection of European manuscript illumination and a select number of related medals and panel paintings from the Gallery's collection.

The painting in medieval manuscripts, called miniatures, demonstrates that manuscript illuminations are not only works of great beauty, but they also reveal new facets of the visual culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The visitor's appreciation of works of manuscript illumination—which could be quite large in scale and could cost more than entire frescoed rooms or chapels—will be enhanced by a six-minute video on the complex process of creating a manuscript and by listening stations of recorded Gregorian chants. These chants appear in two of the choir books on display.

“The J. Paul Getty Museum has one of the finest repositories of Italian manuscript painting in the United States, and we are grateful to the Getty for sharing these extraordinary works of art, particularly as we approach the festivities of the holiday season,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The Exhibition

Masterpieces in Miniature highlights six cities and regions of Italy that were significant centers for manuscript illumination, each with its own traditions, innovations, and

circumstances of production.

Southern Italy: During the Middle Ages, books were primarily written and illuminated in monasteries. The abbey of Montecassino, the cradle of Benedictine monasticism, flourished as a center of illumination in the 11th and 12th centuries. Manuscripts were adorned with brightly colored initials, formed of interlacing tendrils, that were meant to enliven the word of God, as exemplified by *Initial B* (1153), the oldest miniature in the exhibition. A different style of illumination predominated in Sicily, partly because of its strategic location on Mediterranean trade routes.

Bologna: An important center for the Dominican order and the site of the first major European university, Bologna became a leading center of manuscript production, especially during the Gothic period in the 13th and 14th centuries. One of the greatest Bolognese miniaturists of this era, the Master of Gerona (active c. 1260-1300), was inspired by Byzantine artists. His miniature from a choir book, *Initial A: Christ in Majesty* (late 1200s), complements the first long chant sung on the first Sunday of Advent, the season of preparation for Christmas. This chant will be available for visitors to hear.

Florence and Siena: Manuscript illuminators often also worked in other media, such as wood panels and frescoes. This was especially true in Florence and Siena during the 14th and 15th centuries. The close connection between parchment and panel is demonstrated by two paintings from the National Gallery's collection by Giovanni di Paolo (c. 1403-1482) and the Master of the Osservanza (active late 1420s–early 1440s). They are exhibited next to Getty miniatures by these Siennese artists that depict, respectively, *Initial A: Christ Appearing to David* (c. 1440) and *Initial L: The Baptism of Saint Augustine* (c. 1430).

Lombardy and the Duchy of Milan: The late Gothic style flourished at the court of the dukes of Milan, who controlled Lombardy, influencing such artists as Stefano da Verona (c. 1374 - c. 1438) and Belbello da Pavia (active by c. 1430, died after 1473). These artists were in demand across northern Italy and traveled from court to court to fill commissions. Belbello's *Initial A: Young Christ Blessing* (1467-1470) is characteristic of the elegant

and courtly late Gothic style. Traditionally conservative, Lombardy began to follow the latest developments in the art of painting only after Leonardo da Vinci's arrival in Milan from Florence in 1480.

Ferrara, Mantua, and the Veneto: The small courts of northeastern Italy, such as Ferrara and Mantua, became important artistic centers in the 15th century, partly under the influence of two artists from the Veneto: Pisanello (c. 1395-1455) and Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506). The work of a Ferrarese artist, Cosmè Tura, is represented in the exhibition by works on both parchment and on wood panel. The miniature *Initial D: Saint John the Baptist* (c. 1470-1480) attributed to Tura, is exhibited next to his tiny panel paintings from the National Gallery of Art representing the Annunciation with saints.

Rome: The center of western Christianity and a significant center of artistic patronage, Rome played a major role in the revival of the art of classical antiquity during the Renaissance. Many motifs from antiquity can be found in the initial and border of the huge gradual (a choir book containing the sung portions of the mass) illuminated by Fra Antonio da Monza (active 1480-1505). More than any other manuscript in the exhibition, this gradual, opened to *Initial R: The Resurrection* (late 15th/early 16th century), expresses the dual allegiance to pagan antiquity and Christianity that characterized Italian Renaissance sculpture. Visitors will have the opportunity to listen to a recording of the chant notated on the manuscript, *Ressurexi*, which is sung at Easter.

Manuscript Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum

In 1983 the J. Paul Getty Museum established a major collection of medieval and Renaissance illumination with the purchase of the comprehensive collection formed by Peter and Irene Ludwig of Aachen, Germany, which included manuscripts from across Europe. Since then, the Getty has expanded significantly upon the Ludwigs' core group of Italian books, with numerous acquisitions to represent more fully the history of Italian illumination.

Exhibition Curators, Publication, and Related Activities

The exhibition curators are Thomas Kren and Kurt Barstow, curator of manuscripts and

associate curator of manuscripts, respectively, at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Kren will present an illustrated lecture on the opening day of the exhibition, Sunday, September 25, at 2 p.m., entitled "Renaissance Princes, Victorian Vandals, and Modern Moguls: Collecting Italian Manuscript Illuminations," in the East Building, large auditorium.

The Sydney J. Freedberg Lecture on Italian Art will be delivered by Jonathan J.G. Alexander, Sherman Fairchild Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Entitled "Illuminated Choral Manuscripts of the Italian Renaissance," the lecture will be given on Sunday, November 13, at 2 p.m. in the East Building, large auditorium.

The National Gallery of Art Vocal Arts Ensemble will present a concert of Gregorian chant and music by Palestrina on Sunday, November 6, at 6:30 p.m. in the West Building, West Garden Court. Admission is free; first-come, first-seated.

Italian Illuminated Manuscripts in the J. Paul Getty Museum, by Thomas Kren and Kurt Barstow, will accompany the exhibition. Published by the J. Paul Getty Museum, it includes 80 color illustrations and is available for \$19.95 softcover from the shops at the National Gallery of Art, by visiting www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>), or by calling (202) 842-6002 or 1 (800) 697-9350.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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