

Frist Art Museum Organizes First Major Exhibition in the U.S. Devoted to Medieval Art in Bologna

Medieval Bologna: Art for a University City
November 5, 2021–January 30, 2022



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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (September 8, 2021)—The Frist Art Museum presents [*Medieval Bologna: Art for a University City*](#), the first major museum exhibition in the United States to focus on medieval art made in the prosperous northern Italian city of Bologna. Conceived and organized by Frist Art Museum senior curator Trinita Kennedy, the exhibition of illuminated manuscripts, paintings, and sculptures will be on view in the Frist's Upper-Level Galleries from November 5, 2021, through January 30, 2022.

The nearly 70 objects in the exhibition span from 1230 to 1400, from the first great flowering of manuscript illumination in Bologna to the beginnings of the construction and decoration of the ambitious Basilica of San Petronio in the city's Piazza Maggiore. On view will be many illuminated law textbooks, which are fascinating for their distinctive page layouts and iconography as well as their notable size and heft. The works are drawn primarily from American libraries, museums, and private collections, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Library of Congress, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the New York Public Library, and Princeton University Library. Loans are also being sought from the Museo Civico Medievale in Bologna.

The exhibition explores how medieval Bologna, with its porticoed streets, towers, communal buildings, main piazza, and mendicant churches, became a center for higher learning at the end of the Middle Ages. Home to the oldest university in Europe, Bologna fostered a unique artistic culture with its large population of sophisticated readers. The city became the preeminent center of manuscript production south of the Alps, and it helped bring about a revolution in the medieval book trade. Manuscripts circulated in a thriving market of scribes, illuminators, booksellers, and customers operating mostly outside traditional monastic scriptoria. The university initially specialized in law, and many law books were illuminated in Bologna with brightly colored narratives. Professors enjoyed high social status and were buried in impressive stone tombs carved with classroom scenes.



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A highly respected curator in the field of medieval and renaissance art, Kennedy also organized the award-winning exhibition *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, on view at the Frist in 2014–15, and edited the companion catalogue of the same title. The research that originated with the exhibition was the basis for an honors seminar at Tulane University.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a 256-page lavishly illustrated hardback catalogue titled *Medieval*

Bologna: Art for a University City, published by Paul Holberton Publishing (London). Edited by Frist Art Museum senior curator Trinita Kennedy, the publication includes seven essays and is the first major study in English about manuscript illumination, painting, and sculpture in Bologna between the years 1200 and 1400. The essays—by academics, a conservator, curators, and a museum educator—create a rich context for the works in the exhibition, many of which have never been studied in depth or published before. The book aims to expand our understanding of art and its purposes in the medieval world.

The authors describe the bookmaking process in Bologna, including the pigments used by illuminators. They also discuss the illustrious foreign artists called to work in the city, most notably Cimabue and Giotto; the devastating impact of the bubonic plague; and the political resurgence of Bologna at the end of the 14th century that led to the construction of the Basilica of San Petronio, one of the largest churches in the world, in honor of the city's patron saint.

In addition to Trinita Kennedy, the catalogue contributors are Lyle Humphrey, associate curator of European art and collections history, North Carolina Museum of Art; Bryan C. Keene, assistant professor, Riverside City College; Susan L'Engle, professor emerita, Saint Louis University; Areli Marina, associate professor, University of Kansas; Michael Byron Norris, retired museum educator, the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Nancy K. Turner, conservator of manuscripts, department of paper conservation, The J. Paul Getty Museum.

The catalogue will be available for purchase in the Frist Art Museum Gift Shop and through booksellers in October 2021.

Programs

Thursday, November 11

6:00 p.m.

Presented on Zoom

Free; [registration required](#).

Curator's Perspective:

Art and Learning in Medieval Bologna

Presented by Trinita Kennedy, senior curator

Join Trinita Kennedy as she introduces the northern Italian city of Bologna and its significant role in the history of both art and education. Bologna is home to the oldest university in Europe. Students have been flocking there as pilgrims of learning since at least the early twelfth century. The academic environment contributed to the unique artistic culture of late medieval Bologna. Professors were buried

in impressive stone tombs carved with classrooms scenes. Most importantly, teachers and students created a tremendous demand for books, all of which had to be made by hand before the invention of the printing press. This lecture will explore the large and dynamic book industry that developed in medieval Bologna to serve students, involving parchment makers, scribes, illuminators, and booksellers. It will also look inside medieval textbooks to see how information was organized on the page and the ways in which decorations added by illuminators made the labor of learning more delightful for readers.

Thursday, January 13

6:00 p.m.

Frist Auditorium

**Bologna Redux: A Fresh Look at the Beginnings of
Legal Manuscript Illumination presented by Susan
L'Engle, professor emerita, Saint Louis University**

Textbooks made for law professors and students, lawyers and judges represent a major category of manuscripts made in the northern Italian city of Bologna in the late Middle Ages. Hundreds of examples survive, and in them we find distinctive page layouts, illuminated courtroom scenes and illustrations of societal regulations, and the marginal annotations of readers. Susan L'Engle has spent her academic career studying Bolognese legal manuscripts of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. In this lecture presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Medieval Bologna: Art for a University City*, Dr. L'Engle takes us on a journey of how she first became interested in these complex and sophisticated books and the avenues of research that she has since pursued as she seeks to understand medieval legal iconography, the ways scribes and artists worked in service to Bologna's university, and how students in this period engaged with texts and images in the classroom as they learned and memorized the law.

Susan L'Engle, PhD, is a professor emerita of Saint Louis University and former assistant director of the Vatican Film Archive Library. The author of numerous essays on canon and Roman law manuscripts and a specialist in Bolognese illumination, she co-curated the exhibition *Illuminating the Law: Medieval Legal Manuscripts in Cambridge Collections* (2001) and co-authored its catalogue. She contributed the essay "Learning the Law in Medieval Bologna: The Production and Use of Illuminated Legal Manuscripts" to the catalogue for the Frist Art Museum exhibition *Medieval Bologna: Art for a University City*.

Exhibition Credit

Organized by the Frist Art Museum

Image Credits

1. Nerio (active late 13th and early 14th centuries). Cutting from a Choirbook (antiphony): Easter Scenes (in initial *A*), ca. 1315. Tempera, gold, and ink on parchment, 9 3/8 x 9 3/8 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1912, 12.56.1
2. Seneca Master (active early 14th century). Cutting: The Sixth Day of Creation, early 1300s. Tempera and gold on parchment, 2 3/4 in. diameter. The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Jeanne Miles Blackburn Collection, 2006.9
3. Nicolò di Giacomo di Nascimbene (active 1349–1403). Cutting from a Choirbook (gradual): The Trinity (in initial *B*), ca. 1392–1402. Tempera, gold, and ink on parchment, 14 x 12 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Elizabeth J. Ferrell, Ms. 115 (2017.122.1), leaf 1

4. Master of 1328. Leaf from Gregory IX, *Decretales (Liber extra)*: Classroom scene (in initial G), ca. 1330. Tempera, gold, and ink on parchment, 17 3/8 x 11 1/4 in. The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, New York, Purchased in 1927, MS M.716 1v (detail)

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Read about the Frist's Health and Safety Procedures.

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About the Frist Art Museum

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the Frist Art Museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit art exhibition center dedicated to presenting and originating high-quality exhibitions with related educational programs and community outreach activities. Located at 919 Broadway in downtown Nashville, Tenn., the Frist Art Museum offers the finest visual art from local, regional, national, and international sources in exhibitions that inspire people through art to look at their world in new ways. Information on accessibility can be found at FristArtMuseum.org/accessibility. Gallery admission is free for visitors ages 18 and younger and for members, and \$15 for adults. For current hours and additional information, visit FristArtMuseum.org or call 615.244.3340.
