

# Celebrating Sacred Art Throughout the USA

A feast for the eyes and the spirit

## BEFORE THE WORD BECAME...PRINT

It must not be forgotten that until well into the 20th century the majority of people, worldwide and even in "civilized" Europe, did not know how to read. So the only way to convey a message was by speech or by art.

As many *Inside the Vatican* readers will already know, centuries before Gutenberg and the printed word in Europe, there were illuminated manuscripts. Fashioned from costly materials such as liquid gold, rare luminous pigments, and jewels, and entirely hand-produced by highly-skilled scribes, artists, and binders, these extremely labor-intensive books required a significant investment of financial and human resources.

Only wealthy institutions and individuals had access to the large amounts of capital necessary to commission such volumes. Thus, universities, monasteries, priories, churches and royal courts were their typical patrons.

Today, not surprisingly, the Vatican Library possesses 150,000 such manuscripts.

In the United States the finest collections of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts belong to the Morgan Library in New York and the Walters Gallery in Baltimore.

Another, scarcely known to scholars, much less to the public, belongs to the New York Public Library, also home to the first Gutenberg Bible to come to the New World.

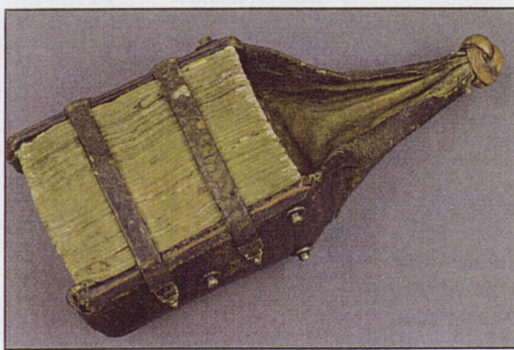
Although it may seem strange, for the first time ever, exactly 100 of New York Public Library's 300 sumptuously illustrated, little known (most never previously exhibited and some not even studied) treasures — each page is a work of art — are on view until February 12, in an exhibition called *The Splendor of the Word: Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts at the New York Public Library*, in the D. Samuel and Jeane H. Gottesman Exhibition Hall at the main branch on 42nd Street and 5th Ave. The works range from Bibles, Gospel

books, liturgical books, missals, books of private devotion, atlases, to romance literature and rare scientific texts, and illuminate centuries of profound political, ecclesiastical, social and intellectual change in Western Europe and the world.

Among the highlights are a 10th-century Ottonian manuscript from the Benedictine Abbey of Convey in Germany, with its imitation of Byzantine textile and gold decoration; the Towneley Lctionary, illuminated by Giulio Clovio (once praised as the "Michelangelo of small works"), which originated in Rome and belonged to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who gave it to the College of Cardinals for use in the Sistine Chapel upon his death; and a late 15th-century Book of Hours, which presents the leading style of illumination from Besançon, one of the French regional schools. More Books of Hours have survived the ages than other types of illuminated manuscripts because they were privately owned and so protected.

The history of each work's patron and owners, from the Psalter-Hours of Blanche of Burgundy, the first wife of King Charles IV of France (in which Blanche herself is depicted in miniature 10 times), to a copy of the *Roman de la Rose* owned by art historian John Ruskin in the 19th century, provides insight into the background of the works themselves and the centuries through which they have passed. A very rare object on exhibit is a "pouch" or "girdle" book similar to the one in the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz (ITV August/September 2005). Only some two dozen are known to exist today. The New York library one dates to 1454 and originated in the Benedictine Monastery of Kastl in Bavaria.

Exhibition hours: Tuesday and Wednesday: 11 AM-7:30 PM; Thursday-Saturday: 10 AM-6 PM; Sunday: 1-5 PM. Closed Mondays and national holidays. Admission free.



Medieval "pouch" book on display amid other medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts at the New York Public Library this winter



## FIRST AMERICAN RETROSPECTIVE OF FRA ANGELICO

**A**lso, on at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York until January 30th is the first American retrospective devoted to the work of the great Italian Renaissance artist Fra Angelico (1390/5-1455). This is the first comprehensive presentation of his work assembled anywhere in the world during the last 50 years. The only other took place in 1955 in Florence, where he did most of his work.

More than 50 public institutions and



rests on his frescoes, especially those painted in the dormitory cells at the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence, the Cathedral of Orvieto, and the Chapel of Pope Nicholas V in the Vatican, and on altarpieces like that of San Marco and San Pier Martire in Florence, as well as San Domenico in Fiesole, too large to be transported safely to New York. Displayed in chronological order, *Fra Angelico* features around 75 of his smaller



Above, Fra Angelico's  
*Saint John Gualbert in  
Glory*

*The Crucifixion*,  
ca.1420

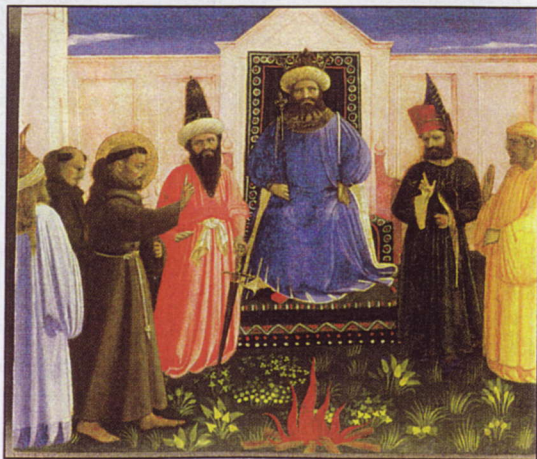
*Seventeen Blessed  
of the Dominican  
Order and Two  
Dominican Tertiaries*,  
ca. 1420-24

Below, *Saint Francis'  
Trial by Fire before the  
Sultan*, ca. 1428-29



private collections in Europe and the United States have lent paintings to this landmark exhibition, which commemorates the 550th anniversary of the artist's death. He is buried in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, a Dominican convent, where Fra Angelico passed his final years, and Rome's only Gothic church.

Much of Angelico's enduring popularity



paintings, drawings, and manuscript illuminations from throughout his career as well as 45 additional works by his mentor, Camaldolese Don Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1370-1423/24), and his assistants and closest followers, Battista di Biagio Sanguigni, Zanobi Strozzi, Francesco Pesellino, and Benozzo Gozzoli. Highlights include recently-discovered paintings and new attributions, paintings never before displayed publicly, and reconstructed groupings of works,





some of them reunited for the first time.

Of particular interest: the *Bowdoin cassone*, which may be his earliest surviving work, is certainly the only one with a secular subject: episodes from Boccaccio's epic poem, *Ninfale Fiesolano*; the *Griggs Crucifixion*, which belongs to the Metropolitan, is his only known work that bears an inscription that may be interpreted as his signature (across the bridle of the horse); and the *Virgin and Child with Four Angels*, on loan from the Detroit Institute of Arts, is the smallest (6 x 3 inches) work he ever painted.

Born in the countryside north of Florence, Guido di Pietro was already an established artist when he joined the Dominican Order sometime between 1419 and 1422, taking for himself the name Fra Giovanni. He began his artistic career as an illuminator of missals and other religious books, but soon received commissions for important altarpieces from his own monastery of San Domenico in Fiesole, from other Dominican houses in Florence, Cortona, and Perugia, and from religious institutions as far away as Brescia in the north of Italy and Orvieto and Rome to the south. Unlike other artists, Fra Angelico never abandoned his religious calling for his craft and his prominence as an artist was challenged only by the brief and meteoric career of Masaccio (1401-1428). However, when Masaccio left Florence for Rome in 1427, Angelico was indisputably the leading painter in Tuscany, a position he maintained for nearly 30 years, eclipsing the reputations of many gifted artists: Carmelite Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), Domenico Veneziano (c. 1410-1461), and even the young Piero della Francesca (c. 1406/12-1492).

Known for his pious treatment of religious subjects, shortly after his death, Fra Giovanni was eulogized by a fellow Dominican friar as "*pictor angelicus*," the Angelic Painter, a name that came to be rendered in English as Fra Angelico. The intent was to place him on a par with the heroes of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the artists Giotto and Cimabue are named as the personifications of fame, and with the great Dominican theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas, known as the Angelic Doctor. In 1984, Fra Angelico was beatified by Pope John Paul II, who also decreed him the patron of artists.

Hours and entrance fee same as the Met's. For more information, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).



*The Virgin of the Annunciation*

## ANTONELLO DA MESSINA: SICILY'S RENAISSANCE MASTER

Also on view at the Met until February 28 are three masterpieces by Antonello da Messina (c. 1430-1479). Although not well-known even to the museum-going public of the United States, Antonello was one of the most ground-breaking and influential painters of the *quattrocento*. His formation took place in Naples during the reign of Alfonso of Aragon. He was so heavily influenced by French and Dutch contemporary painting that he is credited with introduc-

ing the use of oil paints in Italy.

Antonello's most compelling painting, the *Virgin of the Annunciation*, on loan from the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia in Palermo — a work whose enigmatic character can only be compared to Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* — is the centerpiece of the exhibition. Also on display is the recently re-discovered double-faced *The Madonna and Child with a Franciscan*, and an *Ecce Homo* that may indeed be the artist's earliest work.

## SAINT PETER AND THE VATICAN: THE LEGACY OF THE POPES



*Pope Pius VII's papal tiara*

After a hugely-successful first tour of American museums in 2003: Houston Museum of Natural Science, Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, Cincinnati Museum Center, and San Diego Museum of Art, *Saint Peter and the Vatican: The Legacy of the Popes* is back. This time its itinerary runs from Montreal and San Antonio to the Milwaukee Public Museum. Here from February 4 to May 7, 2006, 300 works of art trace 2,000 years of Catholic leadership from Saint



Peter through Pope John Paul II. The objects, including tiaras, sketches, jewelry, vestments, sculptures, as well as gifts to the Popes from notables Napoleon (a tiara for Pope Pius VII) and the Dalai Lama, are on loan from the Office of the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Vatican Museums, the Reverenda Fabbrica of Saint Peter, the Patriarchal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, and the Apostolic Floreria.

Many of these objects have never been displayed in public before this exhibition, not even in Vatican City or Rome. Milwaukee is the last stop!

Among the most popular and touching objects of this once-in-a-lifetime tour is the bronze cast of Pope John Paul II's hand. Visitors may press their hands against it as they exit, symbolizing personal contact with the Pope himself.

Made especially for the exhibition, Pope John Paul II consented with great enthusiasm that a cast be taken and put on view as a sign of welcome along with an accompanying personal letter.

He wanted this gesture to remind visitors of his journeys around the globe and his desire for dialogue with the citizens of wherever he'd gone.

Other items relating to Pope John Paul II include a silver pastoral staff, several vestments, medals, and a Holy Door coffer.

Other highlights of the exhibition include a 4th-century marble headstone; a 5th-century mosaic and a 6th-century fresco of St. Peter, both originally from Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-



**CAST OF THE HAND OF POPE JOHN PAUL II (1978-2005)**  
Made specifically for the exhibition, Pope John Paul II consented with great enthusiasm that a cast of his hand be taken and put on view as a sign of welcome

**MANDYLION OF EDESSA**  
This image of Christ is considered the oldest known representation of Jesus



Walls; the Mandylion of Edessa, a 5th-century linen painting of the face of Jesus, his oldest known likeness; a reliquary of Pope Gregory the Great; an invoice signed by Bernini for work done in St. Peter's Basilica; vestments worn by Bernini's patron, Pope Urban VIII; drawings and letters by Michelangelo; a 16th-century chalice encrusted with pearls, rock crystal, silver gilt, and enamel; the first-known map of Australia (1676); a jewel-encrusted papal tiara of Pope Pius IX, also worn by Pope John XXIII; Pope Benedict XV's diary of the 1914 conclave; and a Buddhist devotional cloth, or *Thanka*, presented to Pope John Paul by the Dalai Lama.

Tickets are available from 1-800-848-1549. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10 AM-5 PM; Sunday noon-5 PM.

## PAPAL PORTRAITS

**I**nside the Vatican readers who did not get to Rome at Christmastime 2004 to see *Papi in Posa: 500 Years of Papal Portraiture* (ITV December 2004) can visit the exhibition until March 30, 2006 at the Pope John

Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.

Portraits displayed in the USA only include: Mario Russo's *Pius XII*, *John XXIII*, and *John Paul II*, and Natalia Tsarkova's (ITV, January/February and April 2005) *John Paul II Lying-in-State*.

One of her portraits of John Paul II is in the Center's permanent collection.

Inaugurated in 1989, this \$65-million museum is located at 3900 Harewood Rd. NE, Washington D.C. 20017-1555, tel. (202)-635-5400.

Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10 AM-5 PM and Sunday noon-5 PM. ●

*Lucy Gordan is the Culture & Arts Editor of Inside the Vatican.*