ART ESSAY

ON AT NEW YORK'S MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

The Morgan Library and Museum, a complex of buildings in Manhattan's Eastside tree-lined Murray Hill neighborhood, began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913). As early as 1890, Morgan had begun to assemble a collection of illuminated, literary, and historical manuscripts, early printed books, and old master drawings and prints. Since his death not quite a century ago while on vacation in Rome, through purchases and generous gifts, his already world-renowned manuscript collection has more than doubled. Today it spans ten centuries of Western illumination and includes more than 1,100 manuscripts as well as papyri. Primarily Western (with French being the largest single national group) and of a religious nature, the collection's highlights include the ninth-century bejeweled *Lindau Gospels*; the tenth-century *Beatus*; the celebrated *Hours of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese*, one of the best-known Italian Renaissance manuscripts; and *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, one of the masterpieces of Northern European illumination. Purchased by the Library after having disappeared from view for some 400 years, this book, the most lavishly illuminated of the Morgan's Dutch manuscripts, is the centerpiece of the exhibition, entitled "Demons and Devotion," on until May 2. The parchment pages of its two volumes (M. 917 and M. 945) have been unbound, and 93 of its 157 pages (originally 168, 11 being lost) have been mounted individually for the first time.

Illustrations from medieval books. From left, Catherine of Cleves (kneeling at left) praying to the Virgin and Child (M. 945); *Mouth of Hell* (M. 945); *Holy Family at Work* — Joseph planes a board and the Virgin Mary weaves while the Infant Jesus takes his first steps in a walker — (M. 945); and *Arnold of Egmond Praying to Christ* (M. 917)

SPEAKING OF BINDINGS

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves was not meant to be in two volumes. After its owner's death in 1476 it disappeared and didn't resurface until 1856, according to both Eve M. Kahn's article "Pearls, Fish and Devils Unbound at the Morgan," published on January 7, 2010 in the *New York Times,* and to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*'s entry for the manuscript.

"In the 1850s," relates Kahn, "a French book dealer named Jacques Techener sliced apart Catherine's manuscript, shuffled the 738 pages, and divided them into two piles. He bound each group with goopy hide glue" and sold half (manuscript 945 or M. 945) to the Belgian Prince Charles d'Arenberg and the other half (manuscript 917 or M. 917) to Adolphe de Rothschild.

"Neither aristocrat seems to have heard," Kahn continues, "about the other's supposedly complete set or noticed that the prose sometimes broke off abruptly."

In 1963, an unnamed European owner offered Frederick Adams, the library's director at the time, M. 917, known as *Cleves Master Horae*, for sale. "A comparison of this newly-discovered book," relates *Wikipedia*, "with M. 945, known as the *Guennol Horae*, revealed that not only were they by the same artist, and from the same workshop, but that both *Horae* were incomplete and complemented each other." Adams purchased M. 917. Seven years later the Morgan purchased M. 945 from the world-famous bookseller H.P. Kraus.

"By studying the text, the iconography, and the physical make-up of the two volumes," continues *Wikipedia*, "Dr. John Plummer, the then Curator of Medieval Manuscripts, reconstructed the original sequence of the original, single volume of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*."

Still to be decided: When "Demons and Devotion" closes, will the Morgan's curators rebind its pages as one or two volumes?

Catherine of Cleves (1417-1476), Duchess of Guelders, Countess of Zupten, and the great-great-aunt of Henry VIII's fourth homely and repudiated wife, Anne of Cleves, is known for two things: this namesake magnificent *Hours* and the often violent political battles she waged against her bloodthirsty debt-ridden husband, Arnold of Egmond, whom she'd been forced to marry at age 13. Although some scholars suggest that her *Hours* may have been commissioned for Catherine by her father or by her husband on the occasion of their pre-arranged wedding in 1430, it seems more likely that she commissioned it herself in the year 1440, when after bearing him six children, she left her warmonger husband and took up residence in castles in Nijmegen and Lobith.

The exhibit's title derives from the dramatic juxtaposition of numerous demonic creatures "lurking" within the pages of a text that is otherwise filled with devotional prayers. It is generally believed that, after being a victim of political intrigue and violence, Catherine had "hoped to use prayer to avoid eternal damnation to the realms of the demons so vividly portrayed here."

Textually rich, in addition to the traditional Hours of the Virgin and Office of the Dead, Catherine's *Hours* contains unusual prayers for the hours of every day of the week, complemented with an appropriate votive Mass. The book also features an unusually rich suite of fifty-seven Suffrages, or petitions to individual saints.

Equally rich visually, the manuscript's meticulous miniatures, depicting in detail colorful landscapes and urban scenes of the 15th-century: buildings, textiles, furniture, jewelry, food, and animals, all painted over silver foil, clearly show the influence of Jan Van Eyck and of Robert Campin's Merode Altarpiece on their anonymous illuminator, the Master of Catherine of Cleves, who may have belonged to the van Aken family of painters from Utrecht. Most innovative are his borders, no two of which are alike. His attraction to everyday objects—far ahead of its time—was to flower in Dutch still-life painting during the seventeenth century.

"Demons and Devotion" is supplemented with illuminated works by both predecessors and contemporaries of the Master of Catherine of Cleves. For example, a manuscript illuminated by an artist nicknamed the Master of the Morgan Infancy Cycle, purchased by the Library in 1953 and open to an image of King David encircled by dragons, was probably an inspiration for the Master of Catherine of Cleves' wild beasts, while undoubtedly, the exhibition's logo, the Master's miniature representing the Mouth of Hell for the Office of the Dead, inspired Hieronymus Bosch's similar devils and eternal torture.

Another supplement and intriguing comparison to "Demons and Devotion" is the smaller exhibition, also on until May 2, "Flemish Illumination in the Era of Catherine of Cleves." Its 18 manuscripts illuminated in the area of Flanders in the southern Netherlands (today part of Belgium) celebrate the variety of styles from the last great flowering of Flemish illumination during the 15th and early 16th centuries.

Speaking of the 16th century, a third exhibition on until May 9 is "Rome After Raphael." Its approximately 80 works, drawn almost exclusively from the Morgan's exceptional collection of Italian drawings, illustrate the artistic production in Rome from the Renaissance to the beginning of the Baroque — from approximately 1500 to 1600. This exhibition, the first ever in New York to focus solely on Roman Renaissance and Mannerist drawings, begins with Raphael and ends with Annibale Carracci.

Top, drawing of a male figure symbolizing an earthquake, by Raphael. Below left, black chalk drawing of the Annunciation, by Michelangelo; right, drawing of St. Jerome and St. Augustine, by Giulio Romano

It could be considered a complement to the splendid exhibition "Fifteenth Century Rome: The Rebirth of the Arts from Donatello to Perugino," held in Rome's Museo del Corso in the spring of 2008 (see *ITV* June 2008). Both illustrate how, after nearly 1,000 years of abandonment and degradation, the Eternal City was reborn as the Capital of Art and Christianity, the unrivalled cultural capital of Europe.

Besides Raphael, whose work epitomizes elegant restraint and clear narrative style, and that of Michelangelo, characterized by high drama and muscular nudes, among the other artists represented are: Baldassare Peruzzi, Polidoro da Caravaggio, Giulio Romano, Perino del Vaga, Parmigianino, Daniele da Volterra, Francesco Salviati, Pirro Ligorio, Pellegrino Tibaldi, Taddeo Zuccaro, Girolamo Muziano, Cesare Nebbia, Federico Zuccaro, Raffaellino da Reggio, and Giuseppe Cesari, called Il Cavaliere d'Arpino.

Highlights of the exhibition are Giulio Clovio's sumptuous *Farnese Hours* and the *Codex Mellon* — an architectural treatise of key Roman sites and projects, including Raphael's design for St. Peter's — as well as a magnificent gilt binding of the period. Numerous drawings here are related to Roman projects and commissions, including elaborate schemes for fresco decorations for city palaces, rural villas, and funerary chapels, as well as altarpieces, tapestry designs, and views of recently-discovered antiquities.

"Rome After Raphael," like "Fifteenth Century Rome," opens a window onto the artistic sensibilities and lavish patronage of the Popes of that century from Julius II, elected in 1503, the patron of both Raphael and Michelangelo, to Clement VIII, who died in 1605, with Leo X (1513-21), Hadrian VI (1522-23), Clement VII (1523-34), Paul III (1534-49), Julius III (1550-55), Marcel II (1555), Paul IV (1555-59), Pius IV (1559-65), Pius V (1566-72), Gregory XIII (1572-85), revolutionary town-planner Sixtus V (1585-90), Urban VII (1590), Gregory XIV (1590-1) and Innocent IX (1591) in between. ❍