

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

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EXHIBITION OF ROSENWALD MINIATURES

MARKS CATALOGUE PUBLICATION AND CAA CONFERENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. December 4, 1974. The first complete exhibition of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts from the National Gallery of Art's Rosenwald Collection will be on view January 26 through June 1, 1975 at the Gallery. Accompanying the exhibition is a scholarly catalogue, the fourth in a series devoted to the graphic arts collection given to the Nation by former National Gallery Trustee and rare book collector Lessing J. Rosenwald.

The opening of the miniatures exhibition will mark the 63rd annual College Art Association Conference, which will be held in Washington, D. C. from January 22 through 25.

The seventy-six miniatures in the exhibition will represent most of the centers of artistic activity in Europe--from the Romanesque period, when book illumination was firmly established as a medieval art form, to the Renaissance.

The greatest strength of the Rosenwald Collection is in fourteenth-century Italian manuscript leaves, when book illumination was as highly regarded as panel and mural painting. Some of the rarest examples in the exhibition are those still in the Byzantine tradition, with a suggestion of the growing

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contemporary concern with spatial and three-dimensional values.

The earliest manuscript in the exhibition is the only surviving fragment of a Giant Bible, executed in Rome shortly before 1100 A.D. On this leaf, letters of the alphabet and human figures freely mingle within the same frame in a flat figural style, which illustrates the break with the sumptuousness of former centuries.

Throughout fifteenth-century Italy, giant choir books were popular and from such a book comes one of the largest and most exquisite leaves in the exhibition. Attributed to Belbello da Pavia of Milan, it is notable for the artist's naturalistic treatment of flowers in the border. This decorative use of realistic flowers contrasts with the conventional vine and acanthus motifs.

An extraordinary series of thirteen elaborately-decorated miniatures depicting saints within letters by the "Master of the Cypressess" reflects a concern for furniture and still-life detail which is characteristic of fifteenth-century Spanish painting.

Other miniatures in the exhibition include full-page illuminations depicting the life of David and the birth of Christ from a twelfth-century Psalter, and four leaves with portraits of the Evangelists from a French Book of Hours. Another leaf might have come from a Book of Hours produced for the illustrious late fourteenth-century patron, Jean de Berry.

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition was written under

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the direction of Carl A.J. Nordenfalk, an eminent scholar of medieval art. Dr. Nordenfalk, who also wrote the introduction to the catalogue, was the National Gallery's 1972-73 Samuel H. Kress Professor. The catalogue entries were compiled by Carra Ferguson and David Schaff, former Kress Fellows who worked with Dr. Nordenfalk at the Gallery. Gary Vikan, Kress Fellow at the Gallery 1973-74, edited the catalogue entries.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, area code 202 737-4215, ext. 224.