

Christmas Exhibition of Nativity Scenes in Illuminated Manuscripts at Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books

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Basel, Switzerland—In the last exhibition of this year, [Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books](#) will present extremely rare examples of religious book art, most of which are more than 500 years old. Elaborately illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, miniatures, and early printed books will be on display at the Dr. Jörn Günther Antiquariat in Basel from the 3rd to the 14th of December 2018. The magnificent artworks portray scenes from the Christmas story bringing the medieval and Renaissance interpretations of Christmas to life.



The Christmas selection features beautiful Books of Hours, including a lavishly illustrated manuscript that was presumably made for a member of the Venetian Zane family. The twenty-one delightful miniatures are attributed to the Masters of the so-called Gold Scrolls group. Albeit small in size, this elaborate manuscript is full of finely illuminated and elegant texts, manifesting individuality.

Another highlight of the exhibition is an unusual and beautiful Book of Hours that was made for or commissioned by Louis XII, King of France (1462-1515). Like his famous father, Charles of Orléans, Louis was a great bibliophile who preferred manuscripts to printed volumes in his exquisite Blois library. The manuscript appears to have been originally

conceived by a regional artist, who also carried out a great deal of the illumination. This master was assisted by an elaborate artist from the Parisian workshop of Jean Pichore, who executed some outstanding and famous manuscripts for Louis XII and was one of the king's favourite artists. Compellingly, the two artists not only divided the illustrations to be painted, but actually worked together in many of the same miniatures.

Another unusual manuscript in the Christmas line-up is a rare English Book of Hours, the Beauchamp-Corbet Hours. It was made in London in 1328 and was likely a wedding present for Beatrice Beauchamp (and widow Corbet, d. 1347). Nearly every page is decorated with a multitude of whimsical miniatures and *bas-de-page* scenes. Some miniatures in this volume show rare and most unusual iconography, for instance a historiated initial that depicts a funeral service attended exclusively by animals, an unusual topic for the Office of the Dead. A recent owner of this fanciful manuscript was the renowned German children's book writer Cornelia Funke. The Beauchamp-Corbet Hours reportedly served her as inspiration for her popular novel, *Ghost Knight*.

A beautiful Nativity scene on display at the Christmas exhibition comes from the Dupont Book of Hours, a fine Book of Hours made in the workshop of the Master of the Échevinage of Rouen. This manuscript, with bright, large margins, is an excellent example of the high quality of illumination from the city of Rouen. The unidentified name Dupont, with its monogram mark, gave this small, intimate, and personal prayer book its name. Interestingly, however, one miniature shows the anonymous patroness kneeling before the Virgin and Child. Miniatures and borders are richly detailed: textiles are patterned and gilt, architecture is articulated, and interiors may include arcades or a gothic sculptured throne. The narrative content is similarly expanded into scenes in the margins, in roundels containing ancillary characters or events.

Image: Book of Hours for Louis XII, use of Rennes. Manuscript on vellum, illuminated in the workshop of Jean Pichore. France, Paris, c. 1500-1515. 198 x 132 mm. 143 leaves, with 15 full-page compositions and 15 small

miniatures.