



ARCHIVED PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

1 EAST 70TH STREET • NEW YORK • NEW YORK 10021 • TELEPHONE (212) 288-0700 • FAX (212) 628-4417

*The Medieval Housebook:
A Fifteenth-Century View of Life*

**LAST VENUE ON INTERNATIONAL
TOUR RAISES DEBATE ABOUT AUTHORSHIP**

MAY 18 THROUGH JULY 25, 1999

On tour in the United States for the first – and perhaps only time – is the *Medieval Housebook* -- a legendary work of the late fifteenth century -- in an exhibition that asks compelling new questions about the identity of the artist(s) who produced it. Since the nineteenth century, the authorship of the famed illustrations has been the subject of continuing and often contentious debate inspiring an uninterrupted flow of scholarly articles and publications all addressing the *Housebook Master problem* (*Hausbuchmeister-problem* or *Hausbuchmeisterfrage*). Organized exclusively for The Frick Collection by **Timothy B. Husband**, Curator of Medieval Art and The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, ***The Medieval Housebook: A View of Fifteenth-Century Life*** presents approximately thirty pages of the codex alongside drypoint prints, many never seen in this country, by the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet*, the artist believed to be responsible for several of the illustrated pages in the *Housebook*, and arguably the finest graphic artist prior to Albrecht Dürer. Manuscripts related to the *Housebook*, prints by other contemporary masters, and several examples of stained glass will also be shown in this special presentation which features -- in total -- over eighty works on paper and objects borrowed from various owners, private and public. Of the five venues participating in the international tour of the *Medieval Housebook*, The Frick Collection is the sole institution to present the codex with this particular investigation as its theme.

EXCLUSIVE TOURING OPPORTUNITY

In fact, the very tour of the *Medieval Housebook* is somewhat of a remarkable event. Since the seventeenth century, the work has belonged to a private noble family in southwestern Germany, the Counts of Waldburg Wolfegg, where it has remained for over three hundred years, never before being made available for public viewing -- despite the lively interest in its pages. The unique opportunity to borrow and present the *Medieval Housebook* now exists because the manuscript has been temporarily disbound for the creation of a facsimile reproduction. In a manner previously impossible, individual pages and drawings of the manuscript can be displayed separately for close examination. Following the exhibition at The Frick Collection, the book will be permanently rebound and returned to the Wolfegg family in Germany. The limited facsimile edition is on display and available to order through the Museum Shop, and two related publications are also available.

§ § §

Famed for its full-page pen and ink illustrations, some enhanced with color, the *Medieval Housebook* is a compendium of secular texts that provides a remarkable view of life in a princely court at the end of the late Middle Ages. It was produced in the region of the Middle Rhine of Germany over an uncertain period of time between 1475 and 1490. The manuscript has been known as the *Medieval Housebook* ("das mittelalterliche Hausbuch") ever since Ralf von Retburg, a cultural historian and the first scholar to study systematically the manuscript, referred to it as such in 1865. It is not a Housebook in the sense of a household manual and almanac of the late Middle Ages; rather it is something of a compilation of texts and images, often seemingly unrelated, the preponderance of which is largely concerned with the mechanics of warfare. But, but it also addresses medicinal treatments, household recipes, animal husbandry, mining and metallurgy, minting, castle defense, and pyrotechnics. Among the most vivid of the full-page illustrations are those depicting the personifications of planets and those born under their signs, a Garden of Love, a bath house, and tournament scenes. As with many such manuals, the *Medieval Housebook* reflects the knowledge of numerous texts, but is modeled specifically on none.

The Wolfegg *Medieval Housebook* presently comprises nine gatherings, each with four vellum sheets folded in two, making eight folia (recto and verso) or sixteen pages each, totaling sixty-three folia or 126 pages. The gatherings are attached by an arrangement of leather strips, tied and sewn, to a soft leather wrapper dating from the seventeenth century. The want of a proper binding suggests that the manuscript was not intended for a larger library, but served as a reference that could have been added to and updated.

The treatise in the first gathering is in Latin; the rest of the texts are, for the most part, in a German -- sprinkled with Hebrew, Latin, and Italian -- that suggests an origin in that country's southern region.

"HAUSBUCHMEISTERPROBLEM": THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP

Notes Guest Curator Timothy Husband in the booklet that accompanies the exhibition at The Frick Collection, "It was not unusual in the late Middle Ages for manuscripts to be produced by collaborative effort, and the *Housebook* appears to be no exception. A number of stylistic observations can heighten our appreciation of the artistic achievement of the *Housebook* as well as inform us of how this exceptional manuscript was created." Husband suggests that "the illustrations were the cumulative product of no less than three or four artists...It seems that the workshop...had been commissioned primarily to create a number of compelling images or groups of images that stood independently, unimpeded even by text -- an extraordinary concept for a manuscript. Clearly stylistic homogeneity was of secondary interest, and one might add that what might appear disturbingly inconsistent to the modern eye was less jarring to the medieval. From that point of view, the exercise of identifying hands is devalued; nonetheless, the process of isolating two principal hands in the *Medieval Housebook*, who remain frustratingly anonymous -- the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet* and the *Master of the Genre and Tournament Scenes* -- does shed light both on the production of the manuscript and on the late-fifteenth-century workshop practices."

On loan from the Rijksmuseum's print room, known as the *Amsterdam Cabinet*, are approximately twenty-four drypoints. By including these prints in the exhibition, Husband allows viewers to closely inspect the work of a superb artist, known as the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet*, who is also believed to have had a hand in several of the *Medieval Housebook* pages. Based on stylistic grounds, this Master is believed to have been responsible for the pages *Mars*, *Sol*, and *Luna* in the *Children of the Planets* series. Husband credits this Master with having brought exceptional psychological content to his subjects asserting that he was "arguably one of the first Northern graphic artists to do so." He further suggests that this Master's influence can be seen not only in his contemporaries, but also in his successors, citing that Albrecht Dürer's engraving of the *Holy Family with a Butterfly* clearly reflects his knowledge of the Master's *Holy Family with a Rose Bush*. The latter work is included in the exhibition at The Frick Collection, along with *Standing Saint George*, *Young Man and Death*, *Two Youths in Conversation*, and *Dog Scratching*. The New York presentation also features a number of his prints that were not included

in the *Medieval Housebook* exhibition earlier this year in Washington, among them *Wildman on a Unicorn*, *Gypsy Family*, and *Heads of Christ and the Virgin*.

Works by the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet* and the *Housebook Master* have also made their way into other collections, and this exhibition includes additional examples on loan from The Art Institute of Chicago; The Cleveland Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and The National Gallery of Art, Washington.

An artist has also been named after the pages in the *Medieval Housebook* referred to the *Genre and Tournament Scenes*. Husband proposes that this section was produced with the help of an assistant and that, in fact, this Master is responsible for more pages than any other artist. In the booklet, Husband discusses the characteristic elements in the work of the *Master of the Genre and Tournament Scenes*, such as typically broad faces tinted with a pink wash and a signature comma rendering of the eyes. These pages reveal an impressive technical range, from the firmly-outlined architectural structures to the fine lines of hair and feathers. Although essentially nothing is known of this Master, he is defined by this skill and his engaging subjects such as jesters, acrobats, trouble makers, and lewd chamber maids -- set in a variety of landscapes, gardens, and noble structures.

Comments Samuel Sachs II, Director of The Frick Collection, "As visitors examine the various folios of the *Medieval Housebook*, they will have the opportunity -- perhaps one never again available -- to search for striking similarities -- as well as distinctions -- in style and technique from section to section and page to page. While the total number of hands involved may never be fully confirmed, we are proud to have had the occasion to work with Timothy Husband to present the compelling possibility that there were many hands involved in the creation of this enigmatic manuscript. It is an event long-anticipated and eagerly shared with the public."

THE DRYPOINT TECHNIQUE

The first extensive use of drypoint, a print-making technique, is seen in works that have been attributed to the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet*. A drypoint is created by cutting or scratching, using a variety of pointed styli, into the surface of a soft metal plate, probably a copper and tin or lead alloy. The needle leaves a curled metal residue or "burr" along the cut line when the plate is inked and printed on paper. The resulting impression of these lines yields a silvery, finely modulated, velvety texture. Because of the

softness of the metal, the fine burr and subtle line are quickly obliterated by the repeated pressure of the printing press; therefore the drypoint plate, unlike an engraved plate, is restricted to a relatively small format and produces only a few quality impressions. As such, it is a medium suited for a small production, not a mass market. Most of the drypoints associated with this artist(s) have survived in only one impression.

ORGANIZATION AND SPONSORSHIP

Organizing the exhibition for The Frick Collection is **Timothy B. Husband**, Curator, Medieval Art and The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The installation was designed by Stephen Saitas and coordinated for The Frick Collection by its Associate Curator, Susan Grace Galassi. *This exhibition has been made possible, in part, by the Fellows of The Frick Collection and by H.P. Kraus, Inc., with additional major funding from Deutsche Bank and Bankers Trust.*

FREE PUBLIC PROGRAM

Wednesday, May 19, 5:30pm

The *Medieval Housebook* and the Art of Illustration

Speaker: Timothy B. Husband, Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Cloisters

The lecture will focus on secular illustration, upon which the fame of the *Medieval Housebook* rests. It will include a discussion of the various hands involved – with emphasis on the *Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet* – and how a workshop that produced such a manuscript would have functioned. All seating for this free lecture is unreserved and is available beginning at 5:00pm. Seating is limited.

THREE PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

An illustrated booklet, *The Medieval Housebook and the Art of Illustration*, by Guest Curator Timothy B. Husband has been prepared exclusively for this venue of the tour and will be available in the Museum Shop for \$12.95. Its text includes a description of the entire manuscript of the *Housebook* examined in sequence, with emphasis on the pictorial pages. Also featured is a discussion of the style and authorship of the illustrations, the structure of the workshop that may have created the work, and the artistic context in which it was produced. A detailed description of the contents of the *Housebook* is followed by a consideration of its age and original ownership. Also available is a fully illustrated catalogue, created more generally to accompany the international tour of the pages of the *Housebook*. *Venus and Mars: The*

World of the Medieval Housebook, published by Prestel, may be purchased in softcover for \$35.00. The limited facsimile edition of the *Medieval Housebook*, in an ornate slipcase with a commentary volume edited by Christoph Count of Waldburg Wolfegg, is also available through the Museum Shop for \$1,980.00. Only 750 numbered copies of this set were created by Prestel. For information, please call (212) 288-0700.

ALSO OPENING THIS SPRING

***MANET'S "THE DEAD TOREADOR" AND "THE BULLFIGHT":
FRAGMENTS OF A LOST SALON PAINTING REUNITED***
May 25 through August 22, 1999

ABOUT THE FRICK COLLECTION

The Frick Collection features masterpieces of Western art from the early Renaissance through the late nineteenth century. Important works by Bellini, El Greco, Rembrandt, Titian, Turner, Vermeer, Whistler, and many others are housed in one of the great mansions remaining from the Gilded Age. These paintings are complemented by one of the world's finest collections of Renaissance bronzes and by French sculpture of the eighteenth century, in addition to outstanding furniture and decorative art works from the ateliers of Riesener, Lacroix, Boulle, Carlin, Gouthière, and Sèvres. Each year more than 250,000 visitors from New York, across America, and around the world come to the Collection at 1 East 70th Street, once the residence of Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919). Designed by Thomas Hastings of Carrère and Hastings and constructed in 1913-1914, the building was changed after Mrs. Frick's death in 1931, with alterations and additions made by the architect John Russell Pope. In 1935 the Collection opened to the public. A new Reception Hall, built in 1977, was designed by John Barrington Bayley, Harry van Dyke, and G. Frederick Poehler, as well as two temporary exhibition galleries. The Frick Collection also operates the Frick Art Reference Library at 10 East 71st Street, both a research library and a photoarchive. The Library is one of the world's great repositories for the documentation and study of Western art and has served the international art world for more than seventy-five years.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phones:

Collection (212) 288-0700

Library (212) 288-8700

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: The Collection is located at 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

The Library is around the corner at 10 East 71st Street.

Museum Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesdays through Saturdays, and from 1pm to 6pm Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, December 24, and December 25. Limited hours (1:00 to 6:00pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Library Hours: 10am to 5pm, Monday through Friday; 9:30am to 1pm on Saturday.

Closed August and on Saturdays in June and July. Please call for holiday closure schedule.

Museum Admission: \$7, general public; \$5, students & senior citizens. See updated "Tour Information."

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection, and those under sixteen must be accompanied by an adult.

Library Admission: free.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station

Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: now included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide INFORM® Audio Tour of the permanent collection, provided by Acoustiguide. The tour is offered in five languages: English, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop closes at 5:45pm, and is open otherwise the same days and hours as the Museum.

Group Visits: Please call (212) 288-0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

14, April 14 1999

For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Communications Officer

Direct Phone: (212) 547-6866 (new direct number)

General Phone: (212) 288-0700

Fax: (212) 628-4417

E-mail: Rosenau@Frick.org