

## *Curating the Middle Ages: History, Perspectives, and Directions*

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### **Content**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art possesses the finest, most comprehensive collection of Medieval and Byzantine art in the western hemisphere. It is held in two locations: the centrally located galleries of the Met at 82nd and 5th Avenue and the Met Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park. The collections at the Met occupy both a pivotal position historically and a strategic location within the museum's encyclopedic collections. Opening on either side of the grand staircase, the main galleries expand into the heart of the museum's original building. With material from both the eastern Christian world and western Europe, the medieval collections stand at the intersection of the Classical and modern European worlds, with discernible links to Africa and Asia. These wide-ranging collections extend from the Early Bronze Age to the early sixteenth century. Byzantine art is showcased in a suite of dedicated galleries together with early medieval works of art. Adjoining galleries present the museum's extensive holdings of medieval art from western Europe. Complementing these collections, The Met Cloisters presents works of art in a uniquely evocative setting, combining the visual arts with medieval architecture and gardens. The earliest works of art date from the ninth century and are linked to the court of Charlemagne; the primary holdings extend from the Romanesque and Gothic periods up to the early sixteenth century.

### **Program**

The breadth and scale of the Met's holdings provide a unique opportunity to consider the challenges and opportunities of "curating" the Middle Ages for a wide range of audiences. Using the Met's collections as a point of departure, this course will explore a range of issues related to the study, interpretation, and display of medieval art within the broader context of an encyclopedic museum. While no prior knowledge of medieval art is required, the course will explore some of the special issues surrounding its study and presentation. Classes will meet in the collections and installations at the Met 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Met Cloisters. Working closely with selected objects in the collection, students will learn about the history of collections, the ideas behind the arrangement of the galleries, and the many roles played by the visual arts in medieval society. The course will also consider the strategies developed by museums to make the past meaningful to the present. A dual emphasis on close looking and research will guide the work of the class.

### **Learning Goals**

- Students will come away with an overview of the Met's medieval collections in both locations
- Students will learn about the issues related to the presentation and interpretation of original works of art
- Students will explore the strategies developed by museums to present material from distant times and places
- Students will develop projects that are directly connected to installations under development within the department

## Assessment

- Students will participate in class activities, and will be marked on their contributions to discussions
- Students will prepare presentations on selected objects from the permanent collection
- Students will develop a small exhibition proposal, including a short checklist and narrative

## Bibliography

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