

GLASS, THE INVENTIVE MIDDLE AGES

From 20th September 2017 through 8th January 2018

Stained glass, goblets, stemware, enamelled beads and panels, optical glass: the Middle Ages presented a real fascination with glass.

Throughout the period, glass production methods became more complex thanks to better mastery of techniques, innovative shapes and varied uses.

To show and build a better understanding of this flourishing creative and technical affluence, the Musée de Cluny, the National Museum of the Middle Ages, is presenting the exhibition “Glass, the Inventive Middle Ages” from 20th September 2017 through 8th January 2018.

Ambassadors of the Middle Ages glass production, a number of glass masterpieces greet visitors at the entrance to the exhibition. An art of luxury rooted in the creativity of Merovingian glassmakers around the 5th century, stained glass gained renown with the advent of Gothic architecture, as witnessed by the spectacular examples from the Abbey of Saint-Denis or from the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Once it was rendered transparent, stained glass made its way into the more prestigious homes towards the end of the period.

A luxurious or semi-luxurious product, glass gradually arrived not only on the richest tables but also, rather strangely, in the taverns. After lasting through the first centuries of the Middle Ages, glass manufacturing was reinvented by the Carolingian dynasty. They developed the first “fern glass”, distinguished from all other by the blue-green tint transmitted by plant ash.

In comparison, the Western world was dazzled by the “whiteness” and sophistication of Islamic glass. At the beginning of the 14th century, the virtuosity and precision of the Italian and then the Provençal glassmakers began to vie with imports from the Orient. Glass masters created elegant glasses decorated with blue trails. The Venetians were renowned for their enamelled goblets whereas the very first stem glasses were beginning to appear in the North of France.

Glass began to be used for both sacred and scientific purposes. Since urology was one of the rare ways to make a diagnosis in the Middle Ages, a glass urinal became the symbol for doctors. Along with progress in distilling, certain alembics and other containers led to using glass in the apothecary sciences. Thanks to progress in optics research at the end of the 13th century, the very first spectacles appeared, composed of two convex lenses set into a nose clip, the so-called “clouantes”, or nose spectacles.

Glass mirrors, until then used in miniature to help with reading, started to become popular. The exhibition thus presents the one unique example of a curated parabolic mirror, known as “à bosse” (concave), on loan from the Musée historique de Vevey in Switzerland.

Objects of fascination, drivers of innovation, some 150 glass works are brought together in the frigidarium of the Cluny Roman Baths to illustrate the excellence of the medieval production. They are staged amongst illuminated manuscripts, paintings and engravings that attest to the use of glass throughout the Middle Ages.

The “Glass, the Inventive Middle Ages” exhibition is organised in partnership with the Réunion des Musées Nationaux - Grand Palais and is made possible through loans from such international institutions as the Regensburg Museum of History (Germany), the archaeological department of Zeeland (Netherlands), the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, the Swedish Museum of History in Stockholm, the Bergen-op-zoom Markiezenhof Museum (Netherlands) and the Tarquinia Museum (Italy). Many pieces from French museums such as those in Lille, Metz, Strasbourg, Caen, Avignon and Angers also figure in the Cluny Museum exhibition.

Related events

- A free games booklet for families will be available upon entering the museum as well as online.
- A superb book, with articles from 20 authors and 200 illustrations over 240 pages, published by the Rmn-Gp, will be for sale at €39.

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Days and hours of opening

Every day except Tuesday,
from 9:15 am to 5:45 pm.
Desk closes at 5:15 pm.
Closed 1st January, 1st May and
25th December.

Bookshop/Shop

9:15 am to 6 pm, free access
T. + 33 (0)1 53 73 78 22

Access:

Métro Cluny-La-Sorbonne / Saint-Michel / Odéon
Bus n° 21 - 27 - 38 - 63 - 85 - 86 - 87
RER B and C line, stop at Saint-Michel - Notre-Dame station

Rates

Full price: 9€
Concessions: 7€ Free for UE nationals under 26
Free for everybody on the first sunday of each month

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