

Session at Int. Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, 12–15 May 16)

University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo, May 12–15, 2016

Deadline: Sep 15, 2015

Adam Stead

CFP: Ordering Matter: Hierarchies of Material and Medium in Medieval Art

Organizers:

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Questions of the significance of materials now occupy a central place within medieval art history. Within this material turn, attention has generally been centered on the importance and meaning of individual materials, particularly luxury materials, such as gold, silver, ivory, and gemstones. But how were these—and other—materials evaluated relative to each other? That is to say, to what extent did material hierarchies obtain, both in theory and in (artistic) practice? This session investigates hierarchies of materials and media in medieval art from Late Antiquity through the end of the fourteenth century. It seeks to build upon the burgeoning body of work on medieval materiality and to engage recent interrogations of object ontology and the relationships between surface and substrate, and between substance and appearance.

We seek papers that examine objects within the larger discursive context of medieval matter, ranging from natural philosophy and theology to political symbolism and earthly economics. While papers may engage issues of material iconography and iconology, they should prioritize the larger question of hierarchical value and intersecting value systems. We are especially interested in papers that address some or all of the following questions:

- Given that so many medieval artworks are gloriously multimedia things, what patterns of assemblage (of different media, of objects from different cultures, etc.) obtained, and how did these patterns create, reify, or critique hierarchies of material and media?
- How are we to interpret materials that imitate or simulate others (e.g., glass that resembles gemstones, or gilded surfaces)?
- In what ways do objects, either individually or categorically, align with or deviate from the media hierarchies promoted by specific discursive traditions (e.g., the transmission and diffusion of Pliny, Isidore, and other natural philosophers; the conventions of hagiography, romance, and other literary genres; and/or something less textualized, such as economic exchange, etc.)?

- Which types of artistic media, if any, escape rigidly discursive definition? What are the conditions for such flexible and/or fugitive materials?
- How can “preciousness” be used as an historically specific analytic tool?
- In what ways might hierarchies of material and medium have generated meaning? Can we speak of an “iconography” of material hierarchies, whether in specific cases or generally?
- What implications do hierarchies of material and medium have for medieval art history generally (whether in terms of production, patronage, or reception)?

Materials to be considered may range from the precious, such as gold, silver, enamel, ivory, gemstones, and textiles, to the semi- or non-precious, including copper-alloy (copper, bronze, and brass), wood, paint, glass, and stucco.

DEADLINE FOR PAPER PROPOSALS: 15 September 2015

Paper proposals should consist of the following:

1. Paper proposal (maximum one page)
2. Completed Participant Information Form available at: <http://wmich.edu/medieval/congress/submissions/index.html#PIF>
3. CV with home and office mailing addresses, e-mail address, and phone number

Please direct all proposal submissions and inquiries to the organizers:

Joseph S. Ackley (ja2998@columbia.edu) and Adam R. Stead (astead2@uwo.ca)

Reference:

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