Gothic Ivories between Luxury and Crisis (Bern, 27–28 Oct 22)

University of Bern, Institute of Art History, Oct 27–28, 2022
Deadline: Jun 3, 2022

Prof. Manuela Studer-Karlen

Despite military and pandemic crises, ivory carvings as luxury goods experienced a boom in the 13th and especially 14th centuries. This apparent contradiction raises questions about the value and significance of these objects in elite society. A large number of preserved utilitarian items such as boxes, combs, and mirror cases feature profane depictions of courtship or other imagery from contemporary romances.
Analysis of these representations offers insight into the interests of courtly owners as well as into related social structures. In this way, profane ivory carvings reflect, albeit in an idealized manner, the lives, tastes, and literary knowledge of the elite. Such objects are the focus of this conference.
The frequent contrast staged between scenes of love and war on Gothic ivories reflected certain crises faced by society: did the images on these luxury objects help members of society to cope with violent crises, or were they not perceived as related to violence at all? Did they aid individuals in dealing with the personal dilemmas posed by courtly canons of virtue? Did they reflect quandaries that arose – as propagated in minnesong – from the suffering of love? What role did their materiality play? Can we determine to what extent economic realities also came to bear on the production, execution, or decline of profane ivory carvings?

The two-day conference will be divided into four sections, focusing on historical, social, personal, and economic crises respectively.
Interested parties are asked to submit an abstract of max. 300 words (German, English, or French; with an indication of which of the four sections is desired) and a short biography by June 3, 2022. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered.

Timetable:
Deadline for submission of abstracts and CV: June 3, 2022
Feedback on abstracts: June 15, 2022
Date of the conference: October 27–28, 2022
Submission of manuscripts: January 31, 2023

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Reference:

CFP: Gothic Ivories between Luxury and Crisis (Bern, 27-28 Oct 22). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 7, 2022 (accessed

Nov 28, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/35841>.