

ILLUSTRIOUS ILLUMINATIONS

A remarkably detailed book of hours (c.1490–1500) created at the dawn of the French Renaissance in Lyon, France, has surfaced after 35 years in a private collection.

“The resurfacing of this manuscript, published but in a private collection for nearly three decades, prompts a re-examination of the styles of its collaborating artists and their importance for development of Lyonnais painting,” states Tomas Borchert, Associate Art Director at Les Enluminures, a gallery (with locations in Chicago, New York, and Paris) that specializes in manuscripts and miniatures from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Just like all books of hours, it is a Christian devotional book used to pray at home at eight different times or hours of the day. What sets this particular example apart from others of its genre is its vast array of elegant iconography. Known as the “Le Saunier” Hours, this richly illuminated manuscript on parchment is written in both Latin and French with 16 full-page miniatures, 15 small miniatures, and 24 calendar miniatures.

Stylistically, it is clear that these images were painted in Lyon at the turn of the 16th century and that they can be attributed to the Master of Guillaume Lambert, (active in Lyon, 1475–1500) and the Master of the Alarmes de Mars (active in Lyon, 1485–1510).

The first artist is responsible for most of “the lavish decoration of the manuscript” that is “enshrined within golden architectural frames.”

The second artist is credited with the two full-page donor portraits.

In the Litany, the male donor is presented by Saint John the Baptist, while the female donor is presented by Saint Catherine. The unique donor portraits demonstrate the early interest in portraiture shown by the Lyon elite. The patrons, likely named Jean and Catherine, most probably come from the Le Saunier family whose arms are reproduced three times in the manuscript. Along with the painted heraldic shields, the Le Saunier family motto is repeated a number of times throughout the manuscript, including once above the male donor’s portrait.

The “Le Saunier” is a coveted illuminated manuscript that has surfaced on the open market only a few times over the years.



COURTESY LES ENLUMINURES, NEW YORK