



The Color of Medieval Life

Les Enluminures New York

23 East 73rd Street,
7th floor Penthouse
New York, NY 10021

November 9 to January 10, 2023

Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm, on appointment

A time traveler walking through medieval Europe might ask themselves:
“how could these be the ‘Dark Ages’?”.

Life there is filled with color. Upon visiting a church, our traveler finds beautifully polychromed sculptures. In the streets they encounter fashion that flaunts colorful and luxurious textiles. Through a window, they might get a glimpse of a woman in prayer, reading her luxuriously illuminated book of hours, sparkling with gold and rich in lapis lazuli. She’s joined by her husband, whose hand is bedecked with rings adorned with exceptional gemstones that glisten in the light.

Featuring miniatures, manuscripts and jewelry, this exhibition is a celebration of life in the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, presenting viewers with an opportunity to discover the roles that color played in the medieval visual landscape.

Amongst our carefully curated group of jewels, viewers will see different recurring stones. The choice for using one gemstone over another was not merely aesthetic, as they carried meaning. Rubies and garnets were linked, through their red color, to the heart and became symbols of passion and love. They were often found on betrothal or weddings rings, together with rock crystals and diamonds, which in turn stood for virtue and constancy. Some were thought to have magical properties. Amethysts were seen as antidotes against intoxication, nightmares, or melancholia. The Renaissance sees the integration of enamel into jewelry, leading to an exponential degree of creativity in jewelry design, culminating in the Baroque period with exceptionally complex enamel design, not to be seen again until the nineteenth century.

Manuscript illumination is known for its vibrant colors originating from a number of materials, such as minerals, plants, and animals. Gold and blue were the costliest materials and connoted preciousness as early as the twelfth century. The mantle of the Virgin was depicted in blue, often made from lapis lazuli, a rare stone found exclusively in modern-day Afghanistan. Kings were also dressed in blue, supplanting the imperial purple cloth of the Roman Empire. Like blue, white had a special place in the color canon of medieval illumination. The color of purity, chastity, innocence (then and now), white is used to dress female saints and for certain monastic orders. Along with blue and white, red was frequently used, but it is more multivalent. Red is the color of the Savior’s blood, or the Holy Spirit, and of certain types of angels (seraphim), but it is also the color of hell and of the devil itself. It was also used throughout manuscripts for rubrication (signaling the importance of a passage).

The selection of works on view offers visitors an overview of how color was used from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries throughout medieval and Renaissance Europe in both manuscripts and jewelry.

THE EARL OF ASHBURNHAM "SONGE DU VERGIER"

Évrart de Trémaugon, Songe du Vergier (Dream of the Orchard)

In French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France, Lyons, c. 1455-1460

2 large miniatures by the Master of the Vienna Roman de la Rose (Jean Hortart?)



Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

PRESS CONTACT: newyork@lesenluminures.com

PARIS

1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
75001 Paris
France

CHICAGO

980 North Michigan Ave.,
Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611

NEW YORK

23 East 73rd Street
7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021

NERI DA RIMINI, *CHRIST BLESSING*

Leaf with initial 'I' from an Antiphonal
Italy, Rimini, 1310–1314
Tempera and gold leaf on parchment



Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

PRESS CONTACT: newyork@lesenluminures.com

PARIS
1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
75001 Paris
France

CHICAGO
980 North Michigan Ave.,
Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611

NEW YORK
23 East 73rd Street
7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021

PENDANT WITH CAMEO OF KING HENRY IV OF FRANCE

Mother of pearl, tortoise shell, silver gilt
France, late 16th century; mount: probably 18th century



Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

PRESS CONTACT: newyork@lesenluminures.com

PARIS
1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
75001 Paris
France

CHICAGO
980 North Michigan Ave.,
Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611

NEW YORK
23 East 73rd Street
7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021

LATE RENAISSANCE DIAMOND RING

Western Europe, c. 1600-1620

Gold, diamond

Weight 2 gr; Circumference 52.50mm; US Size 6 1/4; UK Size M 1/2



Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

PRESS CONTACT: newyork@lesenluminures.com

PARIS

1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
75001 Paris
France

CHICAGO

980 North Michigan Ave.,
Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611

NEW YORK

23 East 73rd Street
7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021

HEART PENDANT

Gold, enamel, glass

Spain or Italy, c. 1600

Weight 17.2 grams; dimensions 45 × 31.4 × 13.8 mm



Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

PRESS CONTACT: newyork@lesenluminures.com

PARIS

1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
75001 Paris
France

CHICAGO

980 North Michigan Ave.,
Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611

NEW YORK

23 East 73rd Street
7th Floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021