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THE STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS ROLE OF THE MONSTER IN THE MIDDLE AGES IS THE SUBJECT OF NEW MORGAN EXHIBITION

Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders

June 8 through September 23, 2018

Press Preview: Thursday, June 7, 10:00-11:30am

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New York, NY, May 3, 2018 — From dragons, unicorns, and other fabled beasts to inventive hybrid creations, artists in the Middle Ages filled the world around them with marvels of imagination. Their creations reflected a society and culture at once captivated and repelled by the idea of the monstrous. Drawing on the Morgan Library & Museum's superb medieval collection as well as loans from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*—on view beginning June 8—examines the complex social role of monsters in medieval Europe. It brings together approximately seventy works spanning the ninth to sixteenth centuries, and ranging from illuminated manuscripts and tapestry to metalwork and ivory.

The show explores three key themes:



Siren, from Abus du Monde (The Abuses of the World), France, Rouen, ca. 1510. New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.42, fol. 15r. Photography by Janny Chiu, 2017.

“Terrors” demonstrates how monsters enhanced the aura of those in power, whether rulers, knights, or saints. “Aliens” reveals how marginalized groups in European societies—such as Jews, Muslims, women, the poor, and the disabled—were further alienated by being depicted as monstrous. The final section on “wonders” considers the strange beauties and frightful anomalies such as dragons, unicorns, or giants that populated the medieval world. The show runs through September 23, 2018. Following its exhibition at the Morgan, it will travel to the Cleveland Museum of Art from July 14 to October 6, 2019 and the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin from October 27, 2019 to January 12, 2020.

“In the medieval world the idea of the monstrous permeated every level of society,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum, “from rulers, and the nobility and the clergy, to agrarian and urban dwellers alike. Artists of the Middle Ages captured this phenomenon in images of beings at once familiar and foreign to today’s viewer. We are grateful to our guest curators Asa Simon Mittman and Sherry Lindquist for helping us bring this engrossing subject to the public.”

THE EXHIBITION



The Taming the Tarasque, from Hours of Henry VIII, France, Tours, ca. 1500. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS H.8, fol. 191v, detail, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS H.8, fol. 191v-192r. Photography by Graham S. Haber, 2013.

I. Terrors

Throughout the Middle Ages, rulers capitalized on the mystique of monsters to enhance their own aura of power. In medieval art, they often depicted themselves—or figures with whom they could identify—as righteous heroes demonstrating their worthiness by slaying the most frightful creatures imaginable. By embellishing all manner of luxury objects with monstrous imagery, the nobility and clergy could also reinforce and dramatize their own authority. Such fearsome motifs

were often thought to have not only a symbolic potency but also actual power in warding off evil.

Because of their ability both to terrify and to inspire awe, monsters could even be used to evoke the divine. From headless saints to three-headed trinitities, these “sacred terrors” vividly bring to life the power of monsters to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural. Ultimately, the monsters in this section offer us a glimpse into how people in the Middle Ages perceived relationships of power, whether earthly or divine.

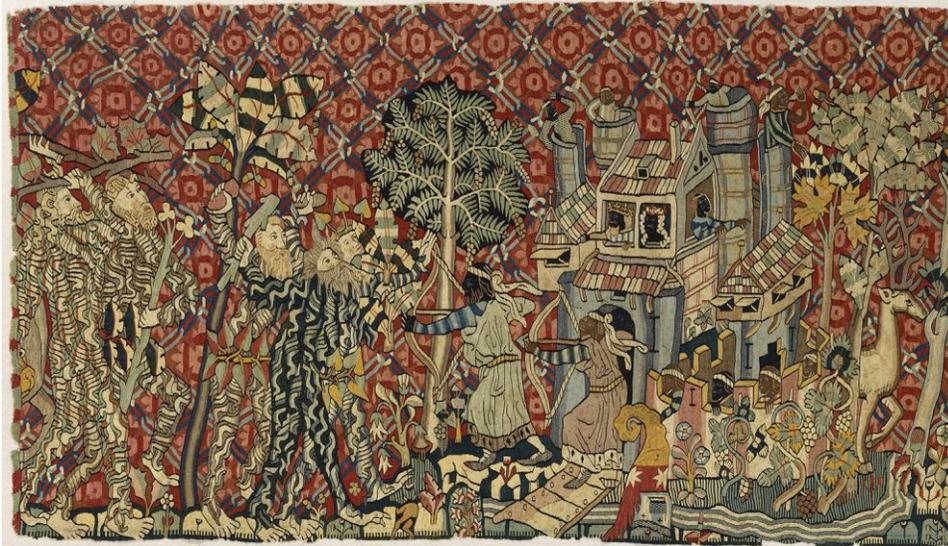


Left: Detail from *Twelve Minor Prophets with Gloss*, Northeastern France, 1131-1165, purchased on the Fellows fund, 1974, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.962 fol. 55r. Photography by Janny Chiu, 2017. **Right:** Detail from Hungarian Anjou legendary single leaves, Bologna, Italy, or Hungary, 1325-1335, purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1909, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.360.21. Photography by Janny Chiu, 2017.

II. Aliens

In the modern world, the term alien is most strongly associated with extraterrestrials. In the Middle Ages, however, aliens were very much inhabitants of our world. Deriving from the Latin word for “foreign” or “exotic,” an alien was simply a person or thing from somewhere else. For medieval men and women, the various peoples thought to live on the other side of the world were just as unreachable, and therefore unknowable, as Martians would be to us. At times, these aliens were the subject of titillating speculation; other times they were sources of fear or objects of derision.

As in other eras, monstrous imagery could be used to stigmatize those perceived to deviate from the norm. This held true not only for “strangers” to medieval Christian societies—most

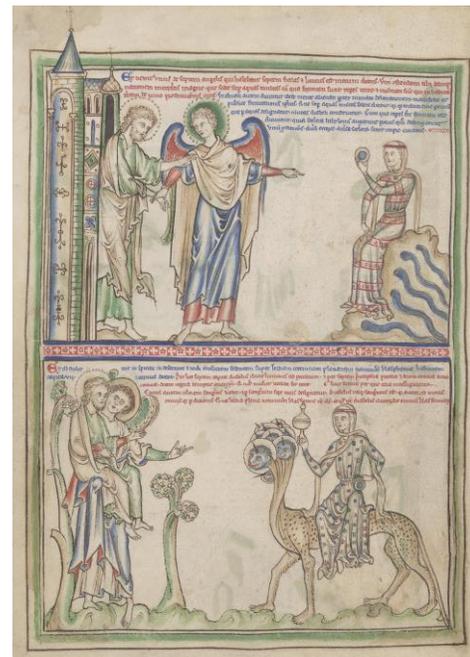


Detail from *Tapestry with Wild Men and Moors*, ca. 1440, linen and wool slit tapestry, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund. Photograph © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.

notably, Jews and Muslims—but also for those who were marginalized within their own communities. Women, the poor, the mentally ill or physically impaired could all be made monstrous by medieval artists. Such representations helped define the difference between those who were accepted and those who were cast aside. Confronting these at times difficult images reminds us of the ability of the visual arts to shape our perceptions of others.

III. Wonders

For medieval viewers, monsters could also inspire a sense of wonder and marvel as a transformative response to strange, surprising, or mysterious phenomena. During the Middle Ages, wonders were only as significant as their authenticity, which could be confirmed either by eye-witness accounts or by the authority of venerable authors. The difficulty of disentangling truth from fiction became a common theme, giving rise to entire genres of text that claimed to catalogue the various phenomena of the world: from herbals and bestiaries to travel accounts.



Morgan Apocalypse, London, England, ca.1255, purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1908, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.524 fol. 16v. Photography by Graham S. Haber 2017.

Capable of shifting expectations and perceptions, monsters inspired viewers to reconsider their place in the world. These fantastical creatures were often so unpredictable and prevalent in the cultural imagination that it is often hard to judge whether they reinforce or disrupt the norms of the time. This exhibition invites visitors to consider what medieval monsters can teach us about the cultures that created them.



Left: *The Annunciation as an Allegorical Unicorn Hunt*, Eichstätt, Germany, ca. 1500, purchased on a grant provided by the Bernard H. Breslauer Foundation and with contributions from the Visiting Committee to the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, 2016, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1201. Photography by Janny Chiu, 2017.

Right: *Book of hours*, Bruges, Belgium, ca. 1520, purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1907, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.307 fol. 160v. Photography by Graham S. Haber, 2017.

Publication

The accompanying catalogue, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*, features full-page reproductions of 61 works in the exhibition, a Director's Foreword by Colin B. Bailey, a preface by China Miéville, and essays by Sherry C. M. Lindquist and Asa Simon Mittman.

Author: Sherry C. M. Lindquist, Asa Simon Mittman

Publisher: The Morgan Library & Museum, in association with D Giles Limited.

175 pages.

Public Programs

LECTURE **The Monstrous Other in Medieval Art**

Sherry C. M. Lindquist and Asa Simon Mittman

Co-curators of the exhibition *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*, Sherry C.M. Lindquist, Associate Professor, Western Illinois University and Asa Simon Mittman, Professor, California State University, Chico, will discuss the ways that medieval artists and writers demonized cultural outsiders, transforming religious and racial others into monsters, framing poverty and impairment as sin, and characterizing women as inherently deviant and dangerous.

Friday, Friday June 8, 6:30 pm*

Tickets: \$15; free for members and students with a valid ID. Tickets include free admission for the day of the program.

*The exhibition *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* will be open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

FILMS

Film Screening with Live Music: *The Golem*

Directors: Carl Boese & Paul Wegener
(1920, 86 minutes)

Suffering under the tyrannical rule of Rudolf II in 16th-century Prague, a Talmudic rabbi (Albert Steinruck) creates a giant warrior (Paul Wegener) to protect the safety of his people. Sculpted of clay, the Golem is a seemingly indestructible juggernaut, performing acts of great heroism, yet equally capable of dreadful violence. Live piano accompaniment at this silent film classic by Ben Model.

Friday, June 22, 7 pm*

King Kong vs. Godzilla

Directors: Ishirô Honda
(1962, 87 minutes, English subtitles)

Join us for a campy monster mash for “The two mightiest monsters of all time!...in the most colossal conflict the screen has ever known.” A pharmaceutical company captures King Kong and brings him to Japan, where he escapes from captivity and battles a recently released Godzilla.

Friday, July 13, 7 pm*

Pan's Labyrinth

Director: Guillermo del Toro
(2006, 118 minutes)

In 1944 Spain, young Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) and her ailing mother (Ariadna Gil) arrive at the post of her mother's new husband (Sergi López), a sadistic army officer who is trying to quell a guerrilla uprising. While exploring an ancient maze, Ofelia encounters the faun Pan and escapes into an eerie but captivating fantasy world.

Friday, July 27, 7 pm*

*The exhibition *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* will be open at 6 pm for program attendees.

Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

**GALLERY
TALKS**

Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders

Sherry C.M. Lindquist, Associate Professor, Western Illinois University & Asa Simon Mittman, Professor, California State University, Chico

Friday, June 29, 6 pm

Joshua O'Driscoll, Assistant Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts

Friday, July 20, 1 pm

Tickets: All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary. Please note that tours are subject to cancellation or change without notice.

**ADULT
WORKSHOP**

Monstrous Manuscripts

Join New York City based artist Max Greis for brief tour of the exhibition *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* then using a combination of paint and collage techniques participants will make their own illuminated manuscript scene featuring a monster of their creation.

Friday, July 13, 6–8 pm

Tickets: \$45; \$35 for members

**FAMILY
PROGRAM**

Monstrous Masterpiece

Discover the frighteningly strange beauty of monsters and why they still fascinate us today. Inspired by *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*, participants will join New York City-based artist Max Greis to create monstrous creatures with beastly painted paper and their favorite real and make-believe elements.

Saturday, June 16, 11 am–1 pm

Tickets: \$20; \$15 for members. Each ticket is valid for one child and up to two adults. The program consists of a thirty minute exhibition experience and a ninety minute art-making activity. Materials included. Appropriate for ages 6–14.

Organization and Sponsorship

Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum, New York. The guest curators are Sherry C.M. Lindquist, Associate Professor, Western Illinois University and Asa Simon Mittman, Professor, California State University, Chico. The coordinating curator at Morgan Library & Museum is Joshua O'Driscoll, Assistant Curator, Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts.

The exhibition is generously supported by an anonymous gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden, The Janine Luke and Melvin R. Seiden Fund for Exhibitions and Publications, the Andrew W. Mellon Research and Publications Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Charles E. Pierce, Jr. Fund for Exhibitions, and Mrs. Alexandre P. Rosenberg.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

The Morgan Library & Museum

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