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*University of* **NOTRE DAME**

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## **Breaking Books: The Snite Museum of Art and Hesburgh Library Present A Rare Reconstructed Medieval Manuscript**

*Hour by Hour: Reconstructing a Medieval Breton Prayer Book*  
On view January 18 through March 15, 2015

**NOTRE DAME, IN - December 12, 2014**— Intact manuscripts from Brittany, France, dating to the Middle Ages are rare finds on today's market. So when one of the few remaining examples was sold at auction in 2011 and subsequently dismembered by a dealer in order to increase the profit from selling the sheets individually, it represented a severe blow to the community of scholars, collectors, and connoisseurs interested in medieval culture. *Hour by Hour: Reconstructing a Medieval Breton Prayer Book*, presented at the Snite Museum from January 18 through March 25, is an exhibition that tells the story of this book's importance to the people who owned it, its significance as medieval craft, and the current effort to put it all back together.



“Book breaking is an all too common practice of cutting apart a book to sell the pages separately. In the process, important details about cultural history, such as symbols, rituals and practices, and beliefs are lost,” said David T. Gura, curator of ancient and medieval manuscripts at the University of Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Library.

As its name suggests, a manuscript is a book that was written by hand, often on specially prepared animal skin (parchment), before the invention of the printing press and the widespread use of paper. Sometimes manuscripts were embellished with pictures and decorative borders painted in rich colors and precious metals. A book of hours was used for private devotions and in the grieving process

after the loss of a loved one. They often included calendar pages that mark and calculate time in complex ways.

It was one of these peculiar calendar pages that caught Curator Gura's attention when it went up for sale in 2012. Recognizing the sheet's rarity—only a few are known to exist—Gura acquired it for the Hesburgh Library's collection and then set about finding all of the rest of the pages that once accompanied it.

Of the 129 leaves known to have been in the original bound book, Gura has found 91 of them in places as far away as Europe and Japan. This exhibition will feature about 40 of the most compelling pages illustrating Brittany's unique use of symbols and its artistic skill. Visitors will also learn about the ethical issues involved in "book breaking" and the amount of sleuthing necessary to reconstruct this remarkable book.

*Hour by Hour* is organized by Hesburgh Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, in collaboration with the Snite Museum of Art.

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**Photo Caption:**

*John, the Apostle*, 15<sup>th</sup> century, pigments and gold on parchment, 7 x 5 ½ in (173 x 135 mm). University of Notre Dame: Hesburgh Library, Frag. III.1 fol. 49r.

For additional images, contact Gina Costa at [gcosta@nd.edu](mailto:gcosta@nd.edu) or 574-631-4720.

**The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame**

The Snite Museum of Art is located on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, near South Bend, Indiana. Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; and Saturdays and Sundays Noon–5:00 p.m. Admission is free. Museum information is available at 574-631-5466 or at the Museum's website: [sniteartmuseum.nd.edu](http://sniteartmuseum.nd.edu). Driving directions and parking information are available at <http://nd.edu/visitors/directions/>. Find us at [inthebend.com](http://inthebend.com) and [facebook.com](http://facebook.com).

The Snite Museum of Art provides opportunities to enjoy, respond to, learn from, and be inspired by original works of art. As an integral unit of the University of Notre Dame, the museum supports teaching and research; furthers faith-based initiatives for greater campus diversity and service to the broader community; and reflects the traditions and values of the University.

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