

## **The intimate spirituality of the Renaissance takes on a new immediacy in this stunning hand-painted Book of Hours from the Library of Congress**

France, 1524. 9 1/4 inches x 6 inches (226 x 152 mm), 226 pages, 16 large miniatures, 26 small miniatures, 16 borders.

Books of hours are the most common of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts — the family copy was generally the text from which medieval children were first taught to read. But volumes of such exceptional quality as this one from the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress are rare. Its most attractive aspect is its superb illumination — forty-two tiny paintings of dazzling virtuosity, manufactured with astonishing dexterity; nothing is neglected, from pebbles in the dusty foreground to glimpses of fantastic buildings in the furthest distance.

A Book of Hours is a prayer book in Latin for private devotion. The name derives from the central portion of the book, which mainly consists of biblical psalms, other short texts, and prayers to be read in private at each of the canonical “hours” of the day: Matin, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The owner of a Book of Hours was expected to pause eight times during the day to read through one of these short Hours in honor of the Virgin Mary.

The Rosenwald Book of Hours is attributed to a workshop of artists probably located in Tours, in west central France. This French atelier mingled elements of Italian Renaissance illumination, German engraving, Flemish foliated borders, and Antwerp mannerism in a distinctive style to decorate the 113 leaves of vellum. A series of twenty-six exquisitely finished small miniatures displays saints and evangelists, while another sixteen nearly full-page illustrations depict events in the life or legend of the Virgin Mary and scenes from the Bible. Each of the larger brilliantly colored miniatures marks a major division in the text.

One extraordinary detail in this Book of Hours is that its date, 1524, is actually painted into one of the illuminations. It is rare to find an exact date

in any Book of Hours and, more notably, this is a particularly late date for an illuminated manuscript — fully seventy years after the printing of the Gutenberg Bible.

The Rosenwald Book of Hours has been a bibliophile's treasure since its creation. The binding of is eighteenth-century full red levant morocco decorated in gilt *à la dentelle*. Impressed in gilt on the spine is the title HEURES | SUR | VELIN and the compartments are gilt-decorated. This binding is attributed to Derôme in the Hoe catalogue on account of the tooling of the covers *à l'oiseau*, with which the third and most famous son of Jacques Antoine Derôme, Nicolas Denis, was especially associated. The volume is kept in a solander case done in dark green-blue morocco on whose spine is the title: PRECES | PIX | MS. VELIN | GEOF. TORY | 1524. The first identifiable owner of this Book of Hours is the eighteenth-century collector Paul Girardot de Préfond.

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