PRAY MOBIL

MEDIEVAL ART IN MOTION

EN

The exhibition "Praymobil. Medieval art in motion" is the result of many years of intensive research and preparation. It is the world's first overview exhibition dedicated to the concrete use of medieval sculptures – Christian works of art, which people set in motion to make their faith visible and tangible.

WELCOME!

74 selected works from eight countries invite you to re-discover the Middle Ages. We have brought them together especially for the exhibition from European museums, private collections and remote church communities.

A varied accompanying programme for adults, children and families, as well as a comprehensive academic catalogue, explore the themes of the exhibition in greater depth. Let yourself be moved, impressed and enchanted – we wish you an enriching visit!

Michael Rief
(Deputy Director and Curator),
**Dr. Dagmar Preising and
Maria Geuchen**
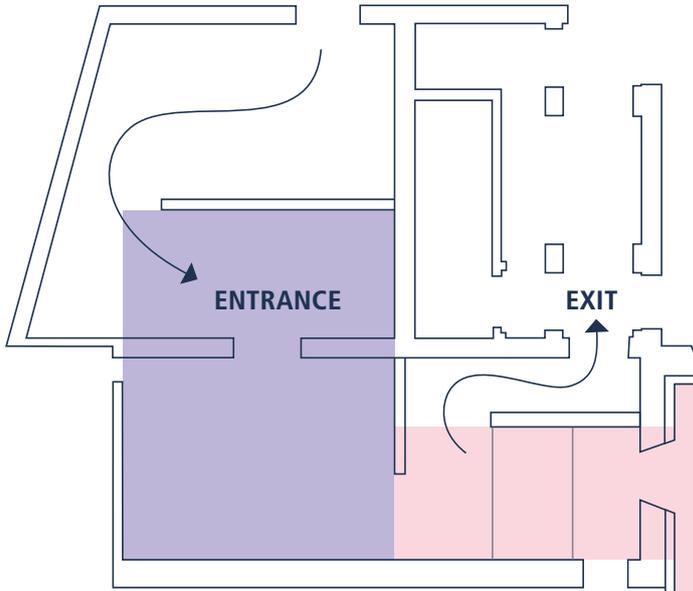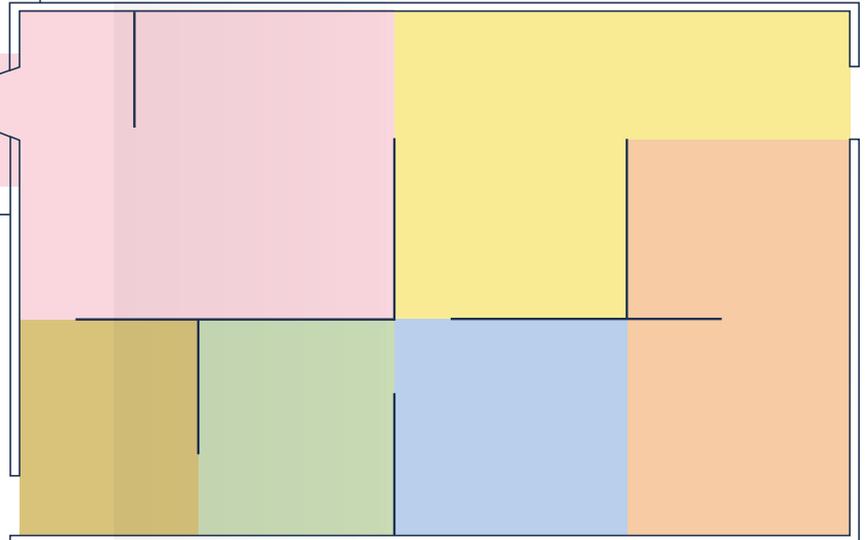(Co-Curators),
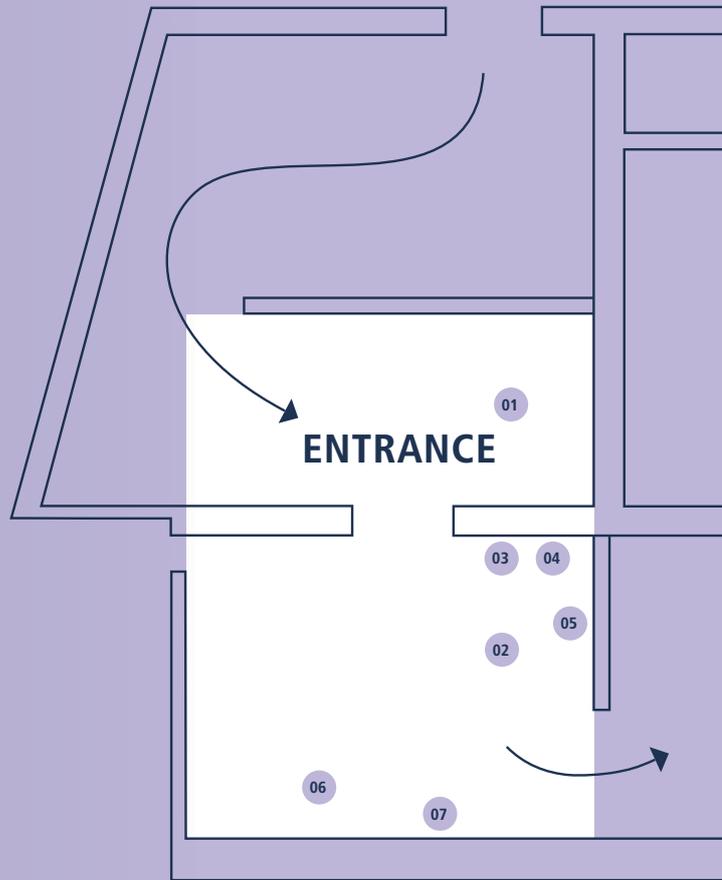**Till-Holger Borchert**
(Director)
and the SLM team

Praymobil

ENTRANCE

EXIT

ROOM PLAN

(E)MOTION – FIGURES, THAT MOVE

ENTRANCE

01

03 04

05

02

06

07

HORSE AND RIDER ON WHEELS

Southern Netherlands, probably late 16th century

Saint George on horseback
As the horse prepares to leap, Knight George holds his lance – just before the decisive thrust. His full attention is focused on the (no longer preserved) dragon, which, according to legend, he must defeat in order to rescue the princess.

The large, rollable figure was used in processions and presumably also in spiritual plays, known as miracle plays, together with a transportable dragon figure, which was dragged directly in front of the horse and rider. As the horse rolled along, the movable tail swung along with it. With the lively re-enactment of the dragon fight, the audience was able to celebrate Saint George as an exemplary hero – a symbol of the victory of good over evil.

SPECIAL AFFECTION

From the Cistercian Monastery in Bebenhausen (Tübingen), probably south-west Germany, around 1550

Curve of an abbot's staff with the embrace of Saint Bernard
In the curve of the staff, Christ bends down from the cross to embrace Saint Bernard. With outstretched hands, he grasps him by the shoulders, even the loincloth appears to be moving.

The scene refers to a vision in which a sculpture of the crucified Christ suddenly came to life before the praying Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. The embrace as a sign of divine affection became a central motif of Christian piety – especially for the Cistercian monks, whose order was founded by Bernard. The goldsmith's work, reminiscent in its form of a shepherd's crook, was worn by the abbot of the Cistercian Monastery of Bebenhausen (Tübingen) as a sign of his spiritual dignity.

WONDERFUL SURPRISES

03 Private collection
Shoe donation by a figure of Saint Kümmernis to a needy fiddler
Southern Germany, second half of the 15th century

04 Lübeck, Lübecker Museen – St. Annen Museum
Milk donation by a figure of Mary to Saint Bernard
Northern Netherlands, around 1520

05 Lienz (Tyrol), Museum Schloss Bruck
Saint Elizabeth with Christ figure in her bed, with her husband and the kneeling donor Count Leonhard von Görz and his wife Paola von Gonzaga
Simon von Taisten, Tyrol, around 1490

Saint Kümmernis – a bearded woman who was crucified for her Christian faith – throws her precious shoes down from the cross to a needy fiddler **03**. The Mother of God Mary gives Saint Bernard of Clairvaux milk from her breast **04**. And instead of a sick person, the crucified Christ appears in the bed of Saint Elizabeth **05**.

All three paintings show legends in which statically depicted figures become active agents and – through gifts, donating milk or revelation – intervene surprisingly in the world. The wonderful powers of these autonomously acting sculptures fascinated people so much that they became a popular motif on devotional pictures.

AUTOMATONS AT WORK

06 Augsburg, Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte/ Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum
Death riding a lion with movable arm and lower jaw (skeleton) and movable tongue (lion)
Copy: 2016/17, Original: Middle Franconia, 1513, Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum

07 Collection Prof. Dr. Rützler Manfred
Wheel clock with movable devil mask
Southern Germany/Switzerland, 1550–1580 (?) with 19th century alterations

The skeleton jerks and strikes a bell in the lion's mane with its bone **06**. The moving model is an almost true-to-life replica of an automaton that belonged to a monumental clock in the abbey church of Heilsbronn. The lower jaw and arm of the riding death as well as the tongue of the lion could be activated by a mechanism inside the figures.

The small devil mask on the wheel clock, whose lower jaw snapped open and shut on the hour, also moved automatically **07**.

Both automatons served as a powerful reminder of the transience of life: time is running out – and death and the devil are lurking.

ENTRANCE

EXIT

30

10 11
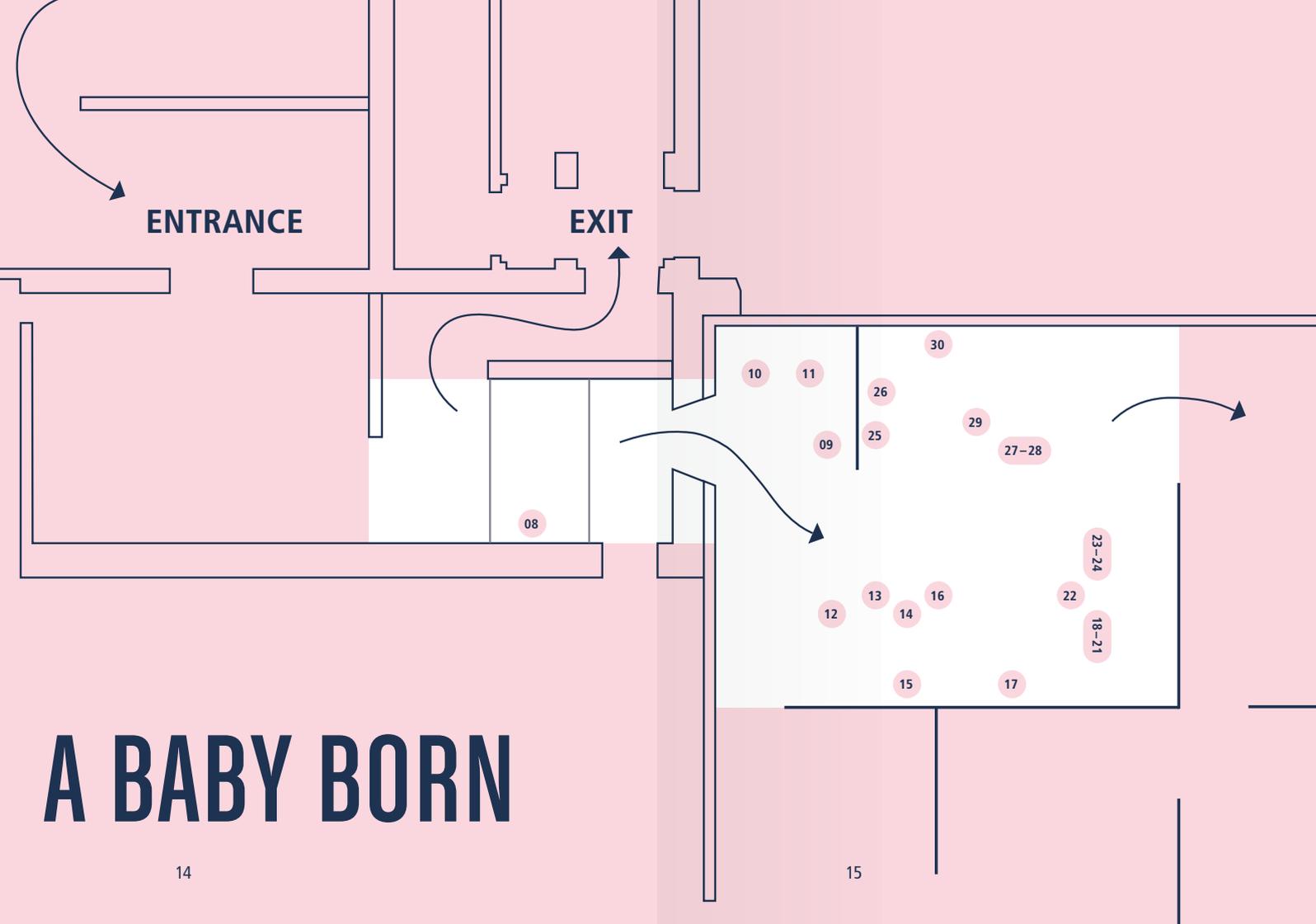
26

09 25 29

27–28

23–24

13 16

12 14 22

18–21

15 17

08

A BABY BORN

DRESSED, BEDDED, WORSHIPPED

Mechelen (now Belgium), 1500–1580

Standing, blessing Christ Children
Doll-like faces, a wreath of curly hair, but also a gesture of blessing, a globe or orb characterise the standing, naked Christ Children from Mechelen (now Belgium). From the late 15th century onwards, such figures were produced there in large numbers.

Novices often received a Christ Child as a gift from their family when they entered the convent. In their cells, it served for personal devotion, it could be dressed and put to bed. At Christmas, it was venerated on the altar of the church – as a visible sign of the incarnation of God in the form of a small child. The missing arms and hands of the specimens bear witness to their intensive use.

ROSY CHEEKS AND BABY FAT

Michel Erhart (?), Ulm, around 1470/75

Standing Christ Child
The naked Christ Child looks at us with alert eyes. His rosy cheeks and the baby fat on his neck and thighs emphasise his human nature. The lost forearms – once probably blessing and holding a globe or orb – also pointed to his royal role as ruler of the world.

The child is particularly impressive due to its lifelike size, lively facial expressions and sculptural design. An "encounter" with it must have seemed almost real. The sculpture was probably commissioned for personal worship in a monastery or wealthy household.

SHARED MOTHERHOOD

10 Nuremberg, German-isches Nationalmuseum
Maria gravida (pregnant Mary) with the Christ Child removable from her womb
Regensburg, around 1300/10

11 Panschwitz-Kuckau (Sax-ony), Cistercian Abbey St. Marienstern
Maria gravida (pregnant Mary), known as Mariech-en, removable Christ Child lost
Bohemia-Silesia/Upper Lusa-tia, second third of the 15th century

Through a small glass window in the body of the pregnant Mother of God, Mary, what is otherwise hidden becomes visible: the un-born Christ Child **10** . In a second sculpture, the child has not been preserved, and the oval opening was later closed with a small wooden plate **11** .

The rare Maria gravida figures (Mary in hope) enabled nuns to empathise with Mary's joys and fears. Even though they were childless by religious vow, they could remove the child from Mary's womb through a "baby hatch" at the back and lay it in a small bed at Christmas. In this way, they experienced the birth of Christ and could empathise with Mary as a new mother.

DRILLED AND DOWELLED

12 Cologne, Museum Schnütgen
Anna Selbdritt Group with removable Christ Child
Cologne, 1470/80

13 Cologne, Museum Schnütgen
Enthroned Mother of God Mary; removable, standing Christ Child lost
Probably from the Clarissan Convent in Cologne, Cologne, around 1340

14 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Seated Christ Child with drill hole
Cologne, 1470/90

15 Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzerland), Museum für Kunst und Geschichte MAHF
Seated Christ Child with drill hole and dowel
Workshop of Hans Klocker, Brixen, 1490/1500

16 Frankfurt a. M., Historisches Museum Frankfurt
The Holy Family in Egypt (Christ Child sitting in bed), clay model
Middle Rhine, ca. 1460

Christ Child figures with a drill hole or dowel on the underside could be easily attached to larger groups of sculptures and just as easily removed again. The child in the trio of Anna Selbdritt **12** could be placed on the lap of his grandmother Anna by sticking him onto an iron spike. And the standing child (no longer preserved), which the enthroned Mary **13** once held in her left arm, could be fixed in place with a peg.

Even outside such groups, the removable child figures found a variety of uses in the monastery, for example as individual figures that were placed in a bed, as can be seen on the clay disc **16** .

COMPANION IN EVERYDAY MONASTERY LIFE

Southern Germany, late 15th century/ around 1500

Seated Christ Child on a small chair
One leg raised, the other bent – this is how the Christ Child sits on a chair painted with flowers. What today resembles a piece of movable children's furniture was understood in the Middle Ages as a throne that distinguished Christ as ruler of the world. The backrest is decorated with a lamb as a sign of Christ's sacrificial death and a bird, which probably refers to his future suffering.

In everyday monastery life, the child and its little chair could be taken along and set up flexibly – for example, for prayer in the monastery church or for meals in the refectory, the monastery's dining hall.

BASED ON THE MECHELEN MODEL

18 Suermondt-Ludwig-
Museum
Standing, blessing Christ Child
*Mechelen (now Belgium),
around 1510/20*

19 Munich, Bayerisches
Nationalmuseum
**Standing, blessing
Christ Child**
*Master of the Madonna
with the Coral, Cologne,
around 1500*

20 Frankfurt a. M.,
Liebieghaus
Skulpturensammlung
**Standing, blessing Christ
Child with pomegranate**
*Lower Saxony (?),
around 1500/20*

21 Salzburg,
Dommuseum Salzburg
**Standing, blessing
Christ Child**
Salzburg, around 1510/20

From the late 15th century onwards, the city of Mechelen (now Belgium) was famous for its mass-produced Christ Children, which were distributed throughout almost all of Europe. Workshops throughout the German-speaking world – for example in Cologne, Lower Saxony and Salzburg – partially adopted the characteristics of the standing, naked child with a doll's face and a crown of curly hair, a gesture of blessing and a globe or imperial orb with a crown cross **18** .

However, the child made in Lower Saxony in particular has its own characteristics **20** : as a reference to its later suffering, it presents a blood-red pomegranate. And around its neck hangs a coral necklace, which was said to have a protective effect against evil.

SOFTLY PLACED

22 Private collection
Switzerland
**Seated Christ Child on
cushion with fawn**
Swabia (Ulm?), around 1500

23 Utrecht, Museum
Catharijneconvent
**Seated Christ Child on
cushion**
*Mechelen (now Belgium),
1500/10*

24 Frankfurt a. M.,
Liebieghaus
Skulpturensammlung
**Seated Christ Child
on cushion**
Upper Swabia, around 1500

With their legs crossed or playfully moved, the Christ Children sit on differently designed cushions, which – firmly attached to the figures – serve as base plates. Particularly striking is the seated child with a fawn: an allusion to the biblical psalm verse in which a fawn thirsts for water as the soul of man thirsts for God **22**.

Seated Christ Children are rare, probably because they were not used very often. Only one example is known from Mechelen (now Belgium) **23**. During the Christmas season, the figures could be venerated on the altar. Signs of wear on the cushion of the Upper Swabian child **24** also indicate use in a larger group of figures.

SLEEP, LITTLE ONE, SLEEP

25 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum (Ludwig collection – loan from the Peter and Irene Ludwig Stiftung, Aachen)
Standing, blessing Christ Child
Southern Germany or Cologne, around 1520

26 Wienhausen (Lower Saxony), Wienhausen Monastery
Vestments for a Christ Child
1469–1587

27 Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh
Christ Child's bed
Brabant, 15th century

28 Cologne, Museum Schnütgen
Christ Child's cradle
Cologne, around 1340/50

29 Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum
Christ Child's cradle
Middle Rhine (Wetterau), 15th century

30 Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge
**Christ Child's cradle with case**
Borman workshop (Jan II.?), Brussels, 1500/10

In addition to clothing **26** , the lovingly cared Christ Child also needed the appropriate bedtime accessories. Beds and cradles were available on runners or in frames, with figures or filigree architecture, made of wood or metal. Only rarely have the child and bedding been preserved, as in the case of the small example from Brabant **27** . The Brussels cradle with bells – presumably used in a hospital in Tienen (Belgium) – could be removed and stored in a case bearing the coat of arms of the couple who owned it **30** .

Initially, such beds and cradles were only used in convents. In the 15th and 16th centuries, clergy or lay people – mostly children – rocked the Christ Child to sleep at Christmas on the altars of parish and collegiate churches, accompanied by singing and dancing.

33–34 32 40 41 42 43

31 38 39

35 36 37
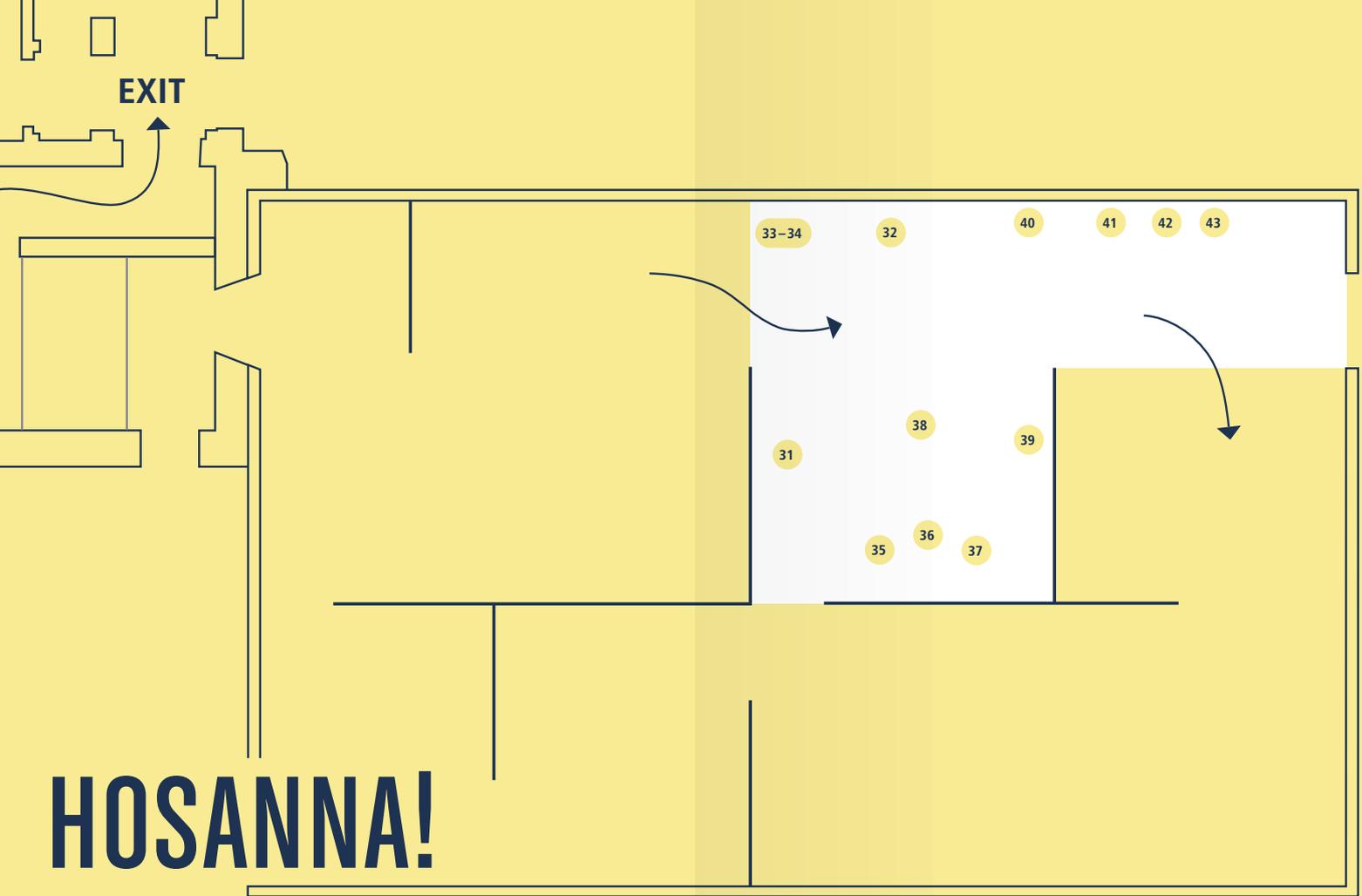
HOSANNA!

JOYFUL WELCOME

Christ on the palm donkey: Southern Germany, around 1490, trolley: newer production

Christ on the palm donkey
Christ rides on a donkey – simply dressed, one hand on the reins, the other raised in blessing. He enters not like a wordly king on a magnificent horse, but modestly, on a simple working animal.

On Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, male parishioners paraded the sculpture – here on a newer trolley, originally on wheels – ceremoniously through the streets. The people shouted "Hosanna!" ("Blessed is he who comes!") and threw branches as a sign of their reverence – the whole way to the church, which was understood as a symbol of the Holy City of Jerusalem. In this way, the congregation itself became part of Christ's entry and their own city became the stage for the biblical story.

CHANGED USE

From the parish church of St. Nicholas in Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzerland), sculptor Marti, Freiburg i. Ue., 1513/14

Fragment of Christ on the palm donkey, reworked into Christ blessing bread
As a symbol of his body and sacrificial death, Christ blesses a loaf of bread. Originally, the figure was part of a large depiction of Christ riding a donkey from the parish church of St. Nicholas in Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzerland), which was used in processions until the 18th century.

After the donkey and lower abdomen had been destroyed, only the upper part remained intact. The left arm, which once held the reins, was reworked into a bread-blessing gesture. From then on, the figure was used on Corpus Christi, the feast of Christ's presence in bread and wine. The reason for this alteration was the ban on processions during the Enlightenment, as a result of which many palm donkey figures were irretrievably destroyed or altered.

MINIATURE DONKEYS

33 Zurich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum
Christ on the palm donkey with wheels
From the Dominican Convent of St. Katharina in Wil (Switzerland), unknown workshop, eastern Switzerland (?), early 16th century

34 Cologne, ELMAR ROBERT – MEDIEVAL ART COLOGNE
Christ on the palm donkey
Germany, early 16th century

The depiction of Christ riding on a donkey, illustrating the biblical entry into Jerusalem, also exists in small format. The donkey from the Dominican Convent of St. Katharina in Wil (Switzerland) is mounted on a base plate with disc wheels **33**, while the German donkey steps over a piece of lawn with no wheels attached **34**.

Such small palm donkeys were not used in public processions, but in convent churches. On Palm Sunday, the abbess would pull the sculpture on a string through the cloister of the convent, accompanied by the prayers and singing of the nuns. Sculptures without wheels were probably carried during such processions.

EXIT

33–34   32   40   41   42   43

31   38   39

35   36   37
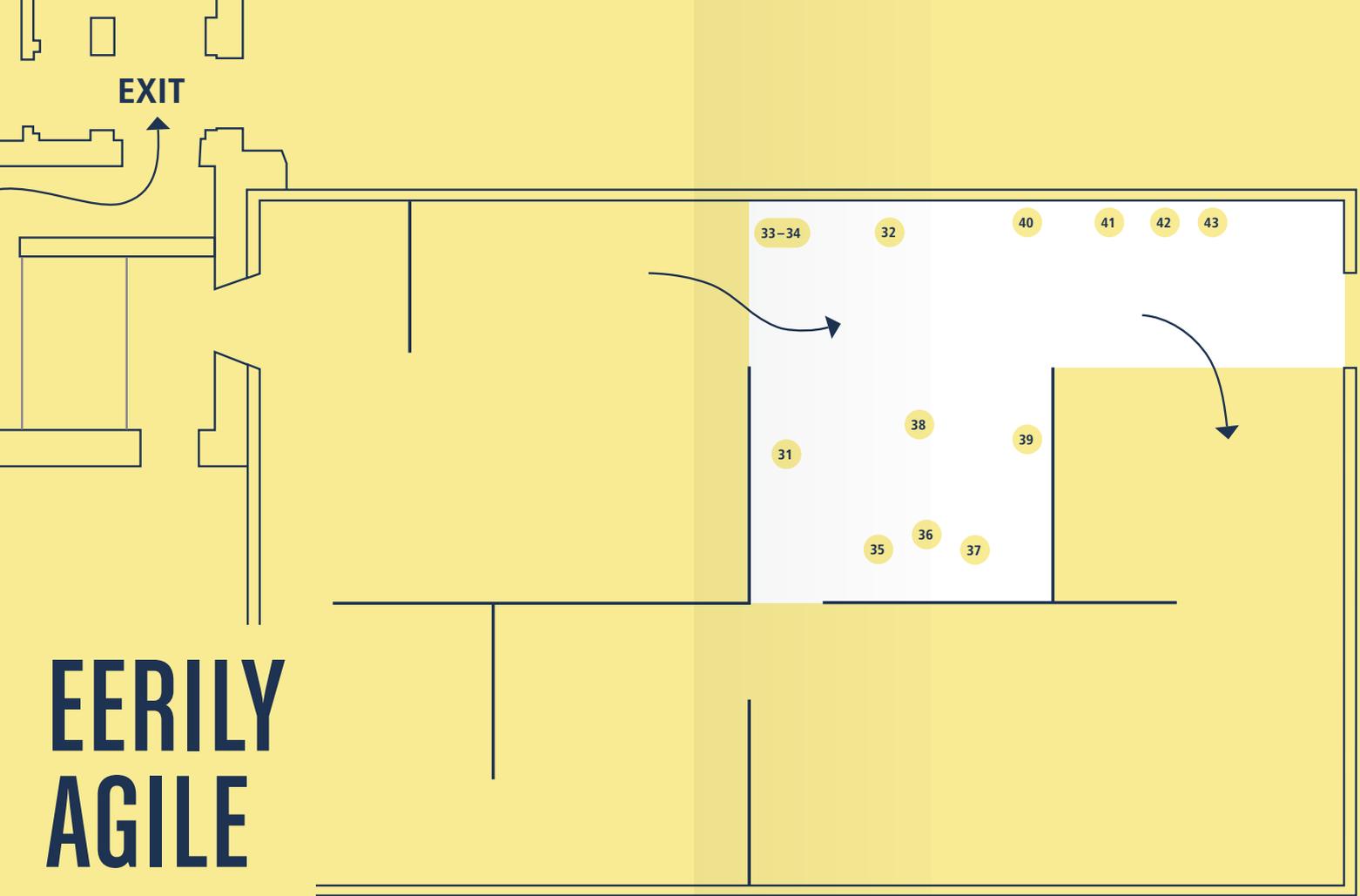
EERILY
AGILE

LAST STIRRINGS

35 Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzerland), Couvent Saint Hyacinth
"Bleeding" crucifix with drill hole
Freiburg i. Ue. (?), 1550/60

36 Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseen/ Volkskunstmuseum
Crucifix with head parts moved by strings
Josef Barthlmä Kleinhans, Nauders (Tyrol), first half of the 19th century

37 Cologne, LETTER Stiftung
Corpus Christi with movable limbs (limb man)
Unknown workshops (carver, barrel painter, blacksmith), Italy or Central Europe, around 1500 (?), Cross: newer production

The more realistic, the more credible – this was especially true for depictions of the crucified Christ. The small crucifix from Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzerland) has a drill hole that leads from the back to the side wound **35**. Presumably red liquid was injected there so that the biblical Spear Thrust during the Crucifixion could be impressively re-enacted as Christ appeared to be bleeding.

A larger, post-medieval crucifix **36** follows the tradition of movable limbs such as those from Italy/Central Europe **37**. Hidden in the open back of the crossbeam is a system of strings that could be used to animate Christ's death: the head tilted, the jaw sank, the tongue slackened and the eyes closed.

DRAMATIC SIGHT

*Miracle man:
Saxony,
around 1510,
chest: newer
production*

Miracle man with movable limbs
The life-size figure of Christ lying in the chest
is marked by terrible torment: covered in blood
and deathly pale. His arms and legs could be
moved by means of hinges and strings, partly
hidden under the textile loincloth. During the
re-enactment of the Spear Wound, red liquid
flowed from a container – for example, a pig's
bladder – through the side wound, which was
sealed with coloured wax.

    Such miracle men, who showed suffering
so relentlessly, were both shocking and fasci-
nating. On Good Friday, they enabled the
dramatic re-enactment of Christ's death, the
Spear Wound, the Descent from the Cross, the
Lamentation and the Entombment – with the
participation of clergy and laity.
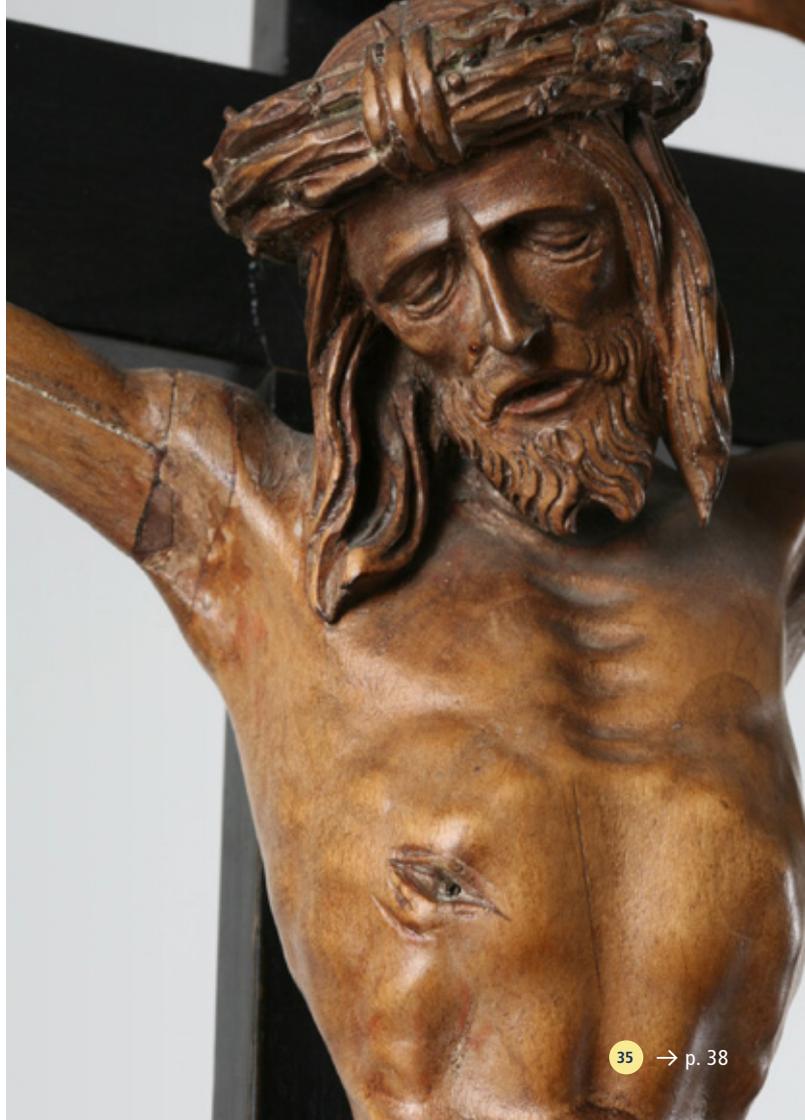
LIMB MEN

39 Rattenberg (Tyrol), Augustinermuseum
Man of Sorrows with movable limbs (limb man)
Tyrol, around 1500

40 Cologne, LETTER Stiftung
Corpus Christi (limb man) with movable limbs
Unknown origin (Northern Italy?), early 16th century

The limbs of the standing, life-size Christ figure from Tyrol **39** were flexible thanks to turned ball joints and could be placed in different positions. The same figure could be used for several scenes from the Passion – from the Flagellation to the Crucifixion and Entombment. Even the tongue was movable via a rotating mechanism – but whether the figure actually "spoke" remains uncertain.

The Tyrolean example originally had a real hair wig and a textile loincloth, which were later replaced by carved hair and cloth. In religious plays, the textile (no longer preserved) served to cover Christ's nakedness – as was the case with a second so-called limb man **40** .

CRUCIFIXES WITH FOLDING ARMS

41 Wadersloh-Liesborn (Warendorf district, near Lippstadt), Museum Abtei Liesborn (permanent loan from the LETTER Stiftung, Cologne)
Crucifix with swivelling arms
Alsace/Upper Rhine, around 1500

42 Cologne, ELMAR ROBERT – MEDIEVAL ART COLOGNE
Crucifix with swivelling arms
Germany, first half of the 14th century

43 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum (property of the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum and Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung; the acquisition was made possible by a grant from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung and the Museumsverein Aachen e.V. as well as a donation)
Crucifix with swivelling arms
Eastern Austria, around 1520

On all three crucifixes, the separately carved arms are attached with mortise and tenon joints at the shoulders and could be folded up and down.

Widespread in Central Europe and Italy since the 14th century, such sculptures were venerated throughout the year with outstretched arms on the cross. On Good Friday, they were removed, the arms were lowered and scenes such as the Descent from the Cross, the Lamentation and the Entombment of Christ were re-enacted. Clergymen participated in this, taking on the roles of the Mother of God Mary or the disciple John, for example.

DEEPLY
SADDENED

49
48
50
44
52
46–47
51
45
53
54
56
55

COMPASSION STAGED

44 Tengen-Watterdingen (Constance district), Roman Catholic parish of Tengen Bernhard von Baden, parish church of St. Gordianus and Epimachus
Pietà with removable Christ figure (?), partially covered with remnants of a parchment manuscript with Hebrew characters to improve the adhesion of primer and paint
Upper Swabia, around 1340/50

45 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum (donated by Peter and Irene Ludwig in 1977)
Pietà with removable Christ figure (?)
Seeschwaben, second quarter of the 14th century

Deep sorrow is evident on the face of the Mother of God Mary. The statue of Mary from Upper Swabia **44** holds the body of her son in her arms – similar to the one from Seeschwaben **45**, whose forearms are no longer preserved.

Such Pietà representations (pietà = compassion) invited devotion and enabled emotional identification with Mary's pain. Whether Christ figures in larger Pietàs were removed and "buried" in a tomb is not known, but possible. In religious plays, real actors portraying Mary – usually men – were sometimes given a figure of Christ to hold in their lap and to stage the Lamentation in an impressive manner.

ATTACHED AND REMOVED

46 Cologne, Museum Schnütgen
So-called Pietà Schnütgen with removable Christ figure
Cologne, around 1450/70

47 Private collection
Pietà with removable Christ figure
Cologne, around 1470/1500

The Mother of God Mary mourns her dead son Christ, whose figure in these small representations could be attached and removed using a dowel. With their arms held close to their bodies and their legs only slightly bent, the Christ figures in both Pietà display a closed posture. Christ could be placed in a narrow tomb or, alternatively, placed in front of Mary, who then looked down on him, almost standing.

The small size of the figures suggests that they were used in monastery cells, presumably for the personal devotion of monks. Immersion in the Passion of Christ was reserved especially for men.

LYING DOWN, STANDING UP – OR FLOATING?

48 Salzburg, Salzburg Museum
Entombed Christ (Ecce homo-Man of Sorrows-Christ of the Ascension?)
Alpine region, around 1400–1410

49 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Entombed Christ (Ecce homo-Man of Sorrows-Christ of the Ascension?)
Cologne, around 1390

50 Vahrn (near Brixen), Augustinian Canons' Abbey Neustift, Stiftsmuseum
Entombed Christ (Ecce homo-Man of Sorrows?)
Brixen (?), around 1450/60

51 Cologne, ELMAR ROBERT – MEDIEVAL ART COLOGNE
Entombed Christ
Southern Germany, around 1470

Hanging eyelids, wounds on the elongated body, arms on the lap or at the sides – the Christ figures are designed to be used both lying down and standing up. One exception is the South German sculpture **51**, whose design suggests that it was intended exclusively for use in a lying position.

When lying down, the figures served as the so-called Entombed Christ, whom clergy solemnly "buried" on Good Friday. When standing, they were venerated as the scourged Ecce Homo (Ecce homo = "Behold, the man", referring to Christ before his public humiliation) or as the Man of Sorrows, marked by death on the cross. Devices such as metal sleeves on the back of the Alpine figure **48** indicate an additional floating use: some of the sculptures were probably hoisted up to the church vault on ropes on Ascension Day.

FLEXIBLE HANDLING

Copy: North Tyrol, 18th century, cross with base: probably late 18th/early 19th century, original: from the parish church of Mariä Himmel-fahrt in Matrei Pfons (Tyrolean Wipptal), 2nd half of the 14th century

"Our Lord in Misery"
Christ can be seen here on the cross – with long limbs, protruding ribs and his hands in his lap instead of on the crossbeam.

The figure is a more recent replica of a large 14th-century Entombed Christ. The original was erected in Matrei-Pfons (Tyrolean Wipptal) as early as the Middle Ages and venerated as the scourged Ecce Homo.The small copy from the 18th century was given new meaning by attaching it to a cross.

This example clearly shows how flexibly depictions of Christ were treated over the course of time – from the reclining Christ to the Ecce Homo to the crucified Christ.

GOLDEN SPLENDOUR

From the Bürgerspita-kirche in Salzburg, Petrus Pistator, circle, Salzburg, around 1475

Reliquary/Holy Tomb
The large, gilded wooden shrine, possibly cre-ated for the cathedral or the Franciscan church in Salzburg, is reminiscent of a Gothic chapel. A vessel containing communion wafers could be placed in the side bay windows. Four women can be seen around the perimeter – the Marys at the tomb – who, according to the biblical account, hurried to Christ's tomb to anoint his body.

Whether the high-quality carving served as a portable shrine for relics – the earthly re-mains of saints – or rather as a tomb for a (no longer preserved) figure of Christ remains un-clear. With its size and splendour, the shrine was probably not only on display at Easter, but could be venerated in the church through-out the year.

FROM ENTOMBMENT TO RESURRECTION

54 Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum
Holy Tomb chest with Entombed Christ
Probably from the Cistercian Convent of Lichtenthal in Baden-Baden, Upper Rhine, mid-14th century

55 Brixen, Diözesanmuseum Hofburg Brixen
Holy Tomb with Entombed Christ (not originally part of the ensemble)
*From St. Magdalena in Viums (near Brixen), probably 17th century*

56 Private collection
Holy Tomb chest
Allegedly from Reichenau Island, possibly early 15th century, in the 16th century by adding a lock and two eyelets to become a secular storage piece, alterations made in the 19th century

Holy Tombs came in various forms: designed in the shape of a chapel, such as the tomb from St. Magdalena in Viums (near Brixen) **55**, the Entombed Christ could be pushed inside through a door. Chests with flat lids or saddle roofs that could be opened **54** **56** also housed the deceased. Many tombs were decorated with depictions of the risen Christ, angels, sleeping tomb guards or Mary at the tomb.

Smaller chests were used for personal worship, especially in monasteries. On Good Friday, the corpse was placed inside and taken out again at Easter – the empty tomb proclaimed Christ's Resurrection.
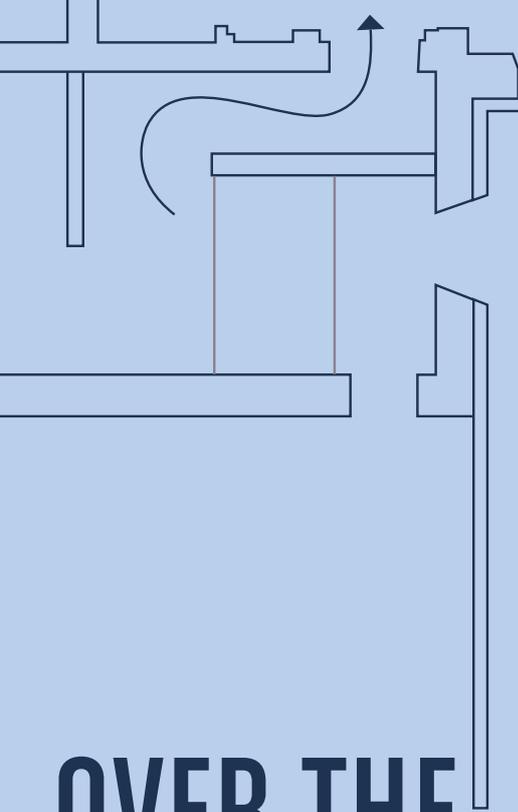
OVER THE
MOON
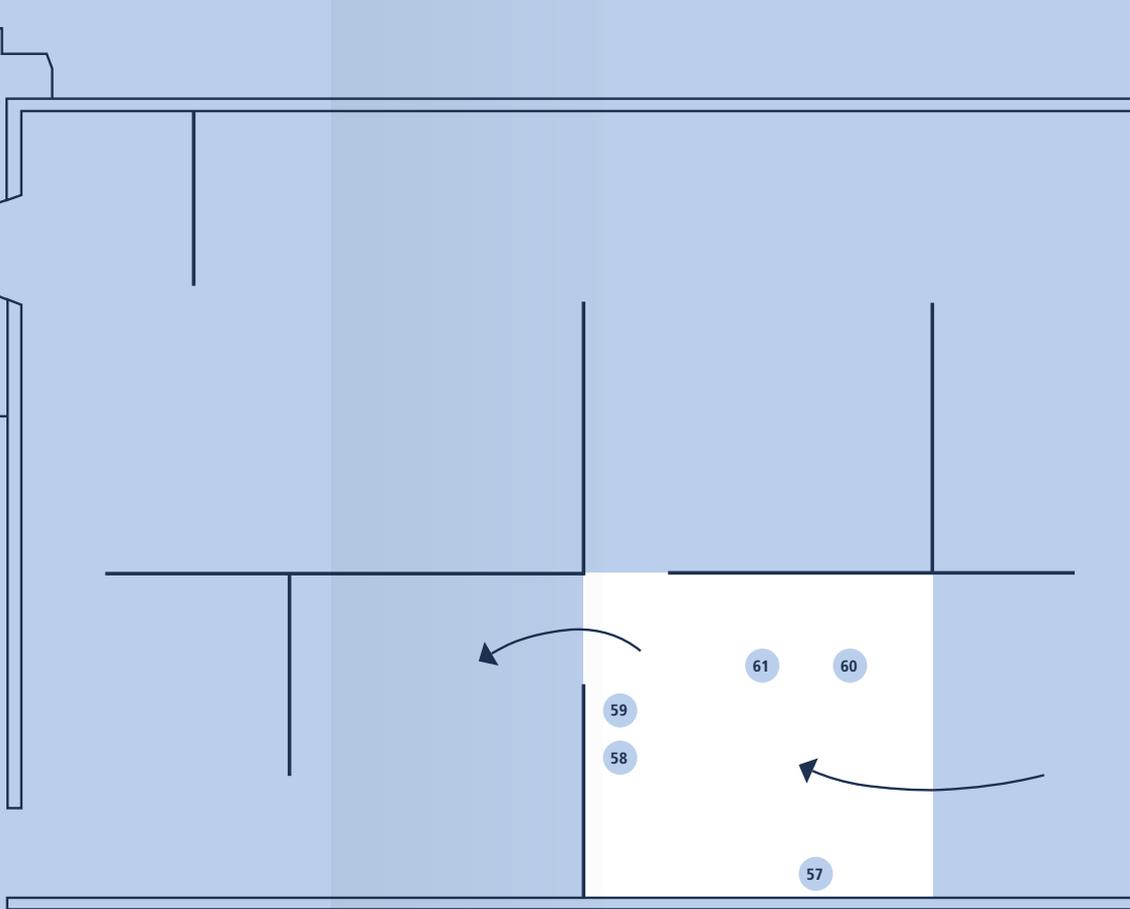
CLOUDS, WIND AND BARE FEET

57 Freiburg i. Ue. (Switzer-
land), Museum für Kunst
und Geschichte MAHF
Christ of the Ascension
*Master of the big noses,
Freiburg i. Ue., 1503*

58 Darmstadt, Hessisches
Landesmuseum Darmstadt
**Christ of the Resurrection/
Christ of the Ascension**
*Hesse/Thuringia, around
1480*

The figure of Christ in a light-coloured cloak
57 was intended as a figure of the Ascension.
On Ascension Day, it was hoisted up through
an opening in the church vault – the so-called
sky hole – by a rope attached to the iron eyelet
on its head. The cloak, fluttering as if in the
wind, reinforced the idea of upward movement.

The figure of Christ in the red cloak **58**
had two functions: at Easter, it was venerated
on the altar as the risen Christ – with stigma-
ta, a gesture of blessing and formerly a cross
flag. On Ascension Day, it was pulled upwards
in the church interior. From below, the congre-
gation could only see the soles of the feet
carved out of the base plate in blue clouds.

BLESSINGS FROM LOFTY HEIGHTS

Probably from the former collegiate church of St. Victor in Xanten (Xantener Dom), Master Arnt of Kalkar and Zwolle, 1476

Christ of the Ascension

With his head bowed and mouth open, Christ raises his hand in blessing, as if looking directly at the faithful and giving his blessing. Fine details – such as the wrinkles on his face and the veins on his hands marked with wounds – lend the sculpture great vitality.

The figure was probably used on Ascension Day in the former collegiate church of St. Victor in Xanten. Metal eyelets on the upper arms indicate that it was hoisted up by ropes. Flaps under the arms may have released a shower of flowers – it is no longer possible to say for sure as the sculpture is only partially preserved.
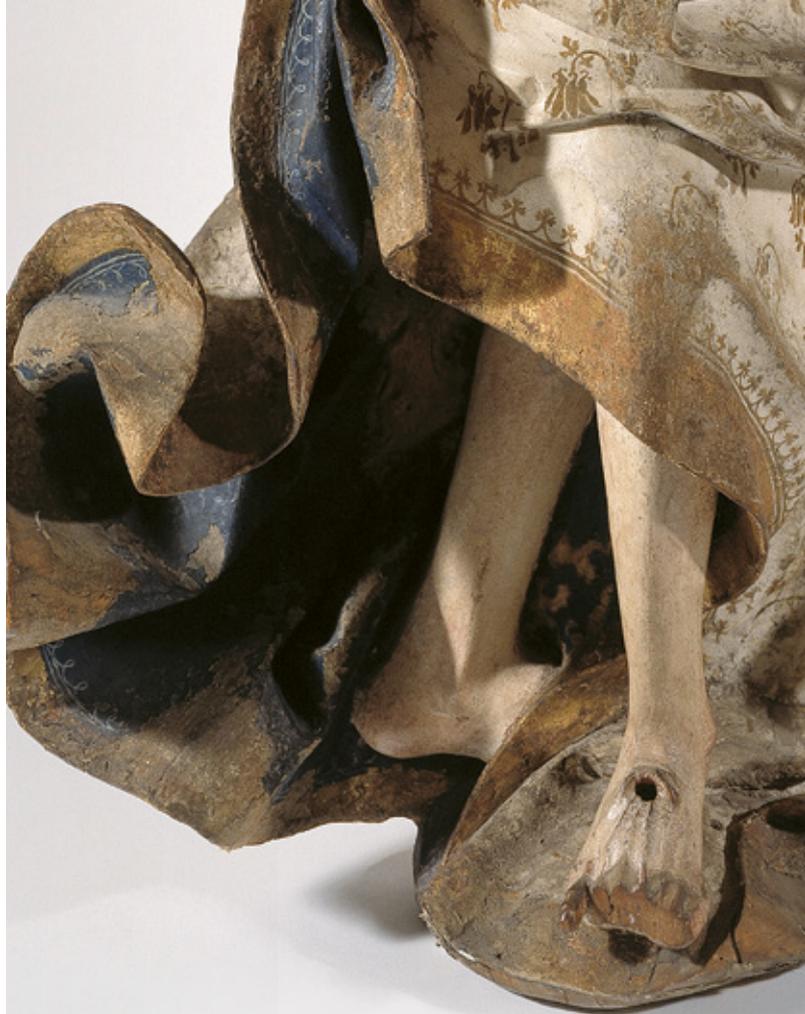
LITTLE ANGELS AND RAINBOWS

60 Thaur (Tyrol), Roman Catholic parish church of Mariä Himmelfahrt
Christ of the Ascension in mandorla with four angels
Tyrol, angels: second half of the 15th century (candlesticks and wings renewed), Christ: around 1520/30

61 Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg
**Christ of the Resurrection/Christ of the Ascension in mandorla**
Swabia, around 1430/40

Christ is depicted as the risen Lord, his right hand raised in blessing, his left hand once holding the cross banner **60** . His body bears the wounds of the Crucifixion. Particularly noteworthy are the four angels with candlesticks, which are rarely preserved, and the almond-shaped aureole, which in the Middle Ages was called a rainbow because of its once colourful painting. Such a mandorla also adorns the Swabian Christ of the Ascension **61** .

On Ascension Day, the figures in the nave were raised until they disappeared into the so-called sky hole. Special effects such as falling blossoms and wafers enhanced the impressive sight.

IMPETUS OR INDECENT?

65

66

64

62

63
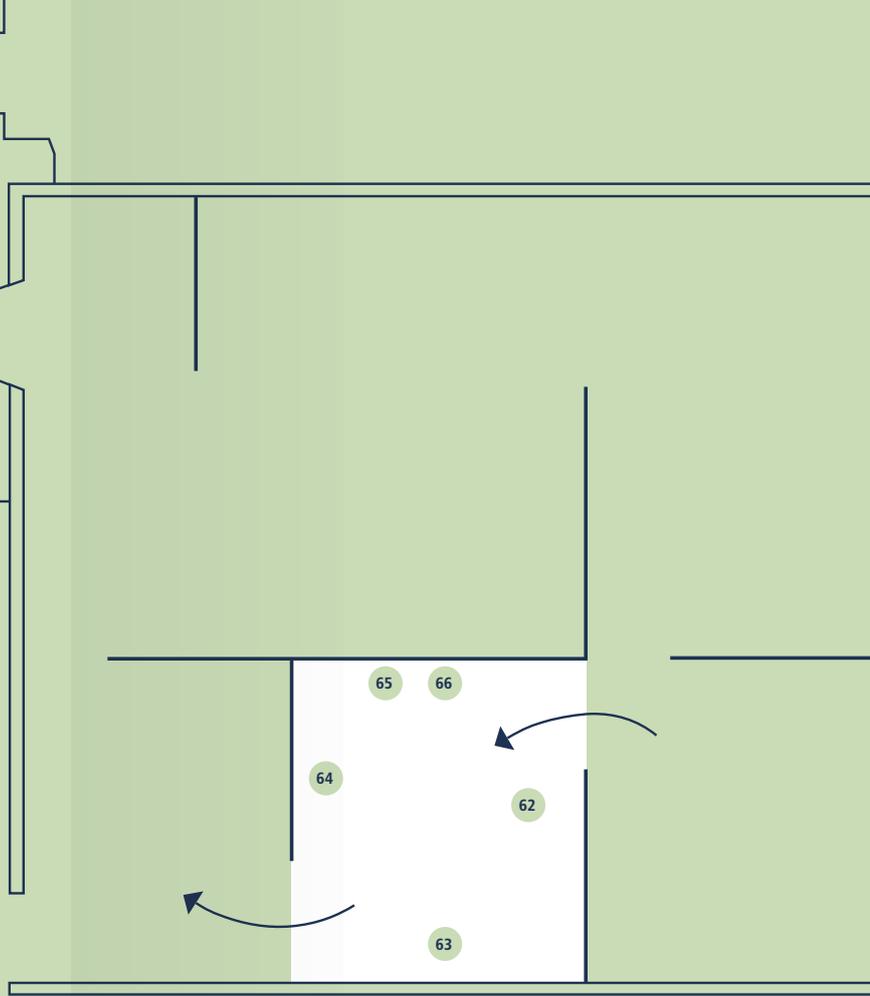
ALL A SCAM?

62 Budapest, Szépmüvészeti Muzeum/Museum of Fine Arts
Mary and Child with movable head from Topertz (Slovakia)
Spiš (Slovakia), around 1320/30

63 Leuven, M – Museum Leuven (loan from Sint-Jacobs-Church in Leuven since 1965)
Christ on the cold stone with speaking hole (?)
*Jan II. Borman or Pasquier Borman, Brussels, around 1500*

Controlled from behind, some figures performed astonishing feats: the head of the Christ Child on Mary's arm could be turned on a string **62** . And behind the so-called "Christ on the cold stone", a person recited Passion texts through a speaking hole in the rock **63** .

Turning heads and voices made the sculptures appear alive and fascinating in the Middle Ages. During the Reformation, however, they were criticised as deceptive, as they allegedly only "reacted" when large donations were made.

CARROT AND STICK

65 66

64

62

63
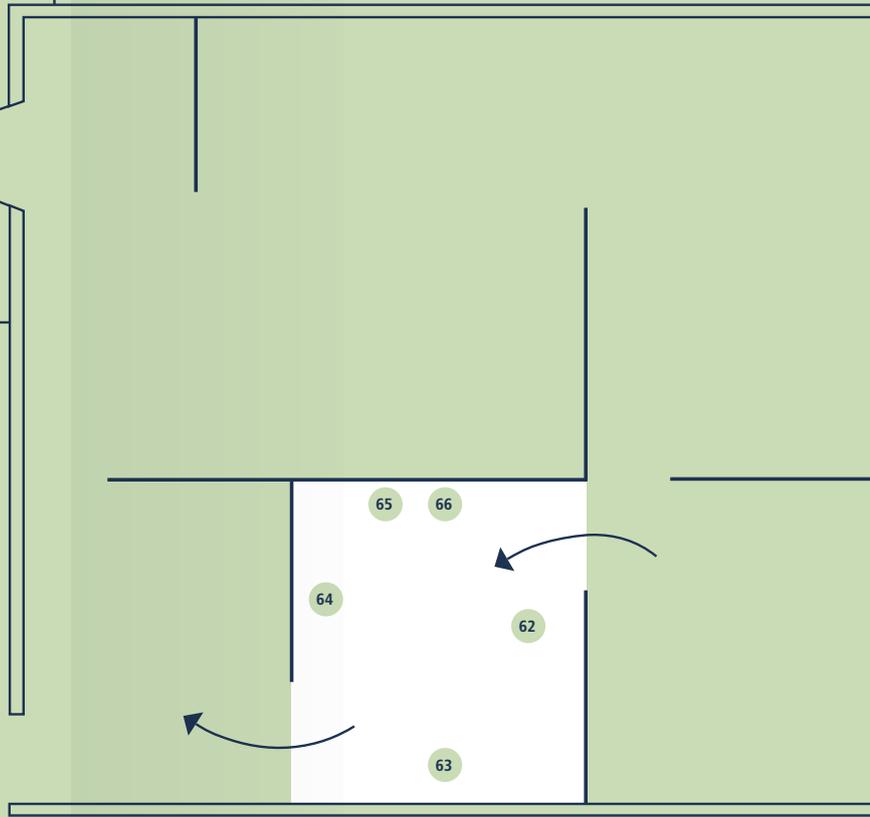
ADMIRED – AND DESPISED

64 Steinheim-Kleinbottwar (Ludwigsburg district), Protestant parish Lower Bottwartal
Entombed Christ, reinterpreted in 1534 as Saint Urban
Neckar region, around 1515

65 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Saint Urban
Middle Rhine, around 1500

66 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Saint Nicholas, from Hartheim (near Breisach im Breisgau)
*Upper Rhine, early 16th century*

Some holy figures suffered outright retribution when the prayers of the faithful went unanswered. For example, the Entombed Christ from the Neckar region **64** , who was interpreted in the 16th century as Saint Urban – patron saint of winegrowers – shows clear signs of punishment inflicted due to anger over bad weather and crop failures. Whether the Middle Rhine Urban **65** was also treated in this way remains unclear.

Saint Nicholas **66** recalls a legend according to which a sculpture of Nicholas was whipped in anger. These "educational measures" were intended to persuade the saints to answer the prayers of the faithful.

UP IN
THE AIR

74

74

70

72

69

71

73

67–68
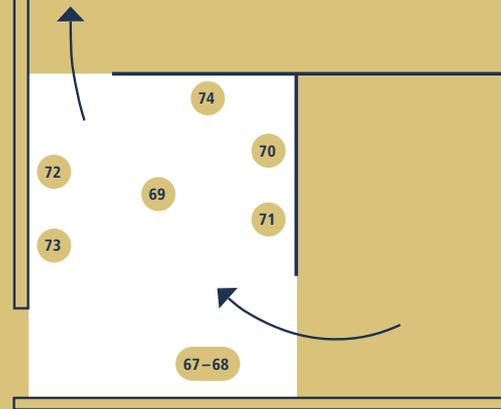
INSPIRING EXPERIENCE

67 Münstermaifeld, former collegiate church of St. Martin and Severus, parish of Maifeld
Host Dove
Limoges (France), mid-13th century

68 Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Holy Spirit Dove
Germany, 17th/18th century

The medieval metal dove was filled with consecrated wafers and hung above the altar **67** – or it was lowered down into the nave on a rope. The latter is assumed to be the case for the Baroque wooden dove with outstretched wings **68**.

Such displays were sometimes accompanied by live birds, flowers, wafers or small burning balls of hemp – as a symbol of the biblical tongues of fire. The doves were used at Pentecost: the Descent of the Holy Spirit described in the Bible was not only visible in the form of the dove, but was certainly also experienced by the faithful as joyful and encouraging.

ALL-ROUND BEAUTY

*Henrick
Douwerman,
Lower Rhine,
before 1520*

Mary Immaculate
With flowing hair and a floral headband, the
Mother of God Mary appears as Immaculate
(immaculata = unblemished). Her youthful
beauty illustrates the dogma that Mary was
chosen by God and free from original sin from
the beginning.

Since the late 13th century, such figures of
Mary have been raised into the church vault
with ropes on the feast day of the Assumption
– possibly attached to a separately carved
mandorla. Thanks to the fully rounded design,
the clergy and the congregation could admire
Mary as she floated up from all sides.

CANDLELIGHT AND THE SOUND OF BELLS

70   Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent
Two candlestick angels with movable arms
Kleve (Geldern), around 1535/44

71   Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum GmbH, Alte Galerie
Two candlestick angels with formerly movable hands
Carinthia, around 1520/25

72   Cologne, Museum Schnütgen
Two angels with movable arms on candelabra poles
Southern Germany, around 1470

73   Wienhausen (Lower Saxony), Wienhausen Monastery
Vestments for an angel sculpture
1469–1587

Small angels, usually dressed in long chasubles and carrying candles, not only accompanied Christ's Ascension, but also served as assistants in the celebration of Mass. Some were mounted on poles – presumably placed near the altar, where the Mass was celebrated.

In the case of the pairs of angels from Kleve and southern Germany **70** **72** it is assumed that they used their arms – some of which have been lost – to swing small incense burners by means of a string mechanism. The movable hands of the kneeling Carinthian angels **71** probably once rang small bells. Some angel figures were dressed in textiles: the vestments **73** were put on from the front, leaving the wings exposed.

SWEETS, SWEETS!

Streuengelche van de Rues
A white dress, curly hair, delicate wings and a bowl full of sweets – this is how the people of Aachen know their Streuengelchen (German = sprinkling angel), which floats high above the local Rosviertel district every year during the Roskirmes festival. Set in motion mechanically on two parallel ropes, it whirls sweets down and makes children's eyes light up.

 The origin of this cheerful custom lies in a medieval legend: a pious servant is said to have regularly given sweets to needy children. After his death, a little angel took over this good deed, and thus the "Streuengelche van de Rues" was born, distributing sweets – a tradition that is over 300 years old and still alive today.

CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS

Without the major festivals of the church year, there would have been no medieval art in motion: They offered the faithful not only an occasion for worship, but also for the solemn staging of central beliefs – mostly biblical events.

What do the Christian faithful celebrate and when?
The overview shows the most important Christian holidays on which the objects shown in the exhibition were set in motion.

Christmas (25 December) and the Christmas season – Birth of Christ
Use of Christ Child figures with accessories such as clothing and beds, as well as sculptures of Maria gravida (pregnant Mary), in which the Christ Child could be removed from the womb.

Candlemas (2 February) – Presentation of Christ in the temple
End of the Christmas season. The figures previously used were stored until the next Christmas season.

Palm Sunday (Sunday before Easter) – Christ's entry into Jerusalem
Beginning of Holy Week. Use of sculptures depicting Christ riding on a donkey.

Good Friday (Friday before Easter) – Crucifixion, Descent from the Cross, Lamentation and Entombment of Christ
Use of sculptures of the crucified Christ with movable limbs, sculptures of the sculptures of the Entombed Christ, Pietà groups (Mary with her dead son) and Holy Tombs.

Easter (March/April) – Resurrection of Christ from the dead
Use of Holy Tombs and sculptures of the risen Christ.

Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) – Christ's Ascension into heaven
Use of sculptures of Christ ascending and accompanying angels.

Pentecost (50 days after Easter) – Descent of the Holy Spirit
Use of metal or wooden doves as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Assumption Day (15 August) – Assumption of Mary into heaven
Use of figures of Mary Immaculata (Mary of the Immaculate Conception)