



A Masterpiece Reconstructed: The Hours of Louis XII

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The Hours of Louis XII is the stunning prayer book that Jean Bourdichon painted for the king of France, mostly likely on the occasion of his coronation in 1498. Bourdichon was the court painter to four successive French kings, including Louis and his predecessor, Charles VIII. The manuscript was originally illuminated with twelve large calendar miniatures and two dozen full-page miniatures, but by the seventeenth century the Hours of Louis XII had been dismembered so that the large miniatures could be enjoyed separately as individual paintings. In recent years sixteen of these images have been located, including the portrait of the king that served as the book's frontispiece. This catalogue, which accompanies an exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum, to be held October 18, 2005-January 8, 2006, publishes the paintings together for the first time, along with a selection of other books illuminated by the artist, by his teacher Jean Fouquet, and by their contemporaries.

Janet Backhouse, who originally assembled the evidence attesting to the existence of this long-forgotten masterpiece, introduces the book and its cycle of miniatures. Thomas Kren considers the book's provocative miniature of Bathsheba bathing within the context of the king's own taste and predilections and within the emerging genre of the female nude in French painting. Nancy Turner examines the important evidence of the painter/illuminator Bourdichon's technique in the Hours of Louis XII in relation to his other work and that of Jean Fouquet. Mark Evans examines the individual histories of each of the surviving portions of the manuscript to reconstruct their peregrinations and to weigh the evidence of the book's place in the history of collecting single illuminated leaves. Lastly, an appendix presents a reconstruction of the book's devotional contents and program of illumination.

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