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A celebration of one of the most popular types of illuminated books during the Middle Ages known as the bestiary, its visual contributions, and its lasting legacy

LOS ANGELES, CA—The fabled unicorn has held the imagination of generations for over two thousand years, although many today would dismiss the legendary animal as no more than evidence of past gullibility, more appropriate for children's toys and fantasy posters than to the annals of natural history. But those living in Europe during the Middle Ages did not have the access to travel and instant information that we take for granted. Their beliefs about the world, including unicorns, were largely informed by a handful of authorities such as the Bible, Aristotle, and even Marco Polo—who claimed to have seen a unicorn with his own eyes—as well as a ubiquitous book known as the bestiary.

Brimming with imaginary creatures such as unicorns and griffins, exotic beasts including tigers and apes, and animals native to Europe like beavers and dogs, the lively bestiary was one of the great illuminated manuscript traditions of medieval Europe, particularly in the North, and the most popular nonsacred text of its time. Textually and visually, it imparted a largely symbolic worldview informed by Christian beliefs; its widely circulated stories and narrative images became so iconic that the beasts essentially escaped from the pages, appearing in a wide variety of manuscripts and other medieval art objects, including tapestries, ivories, metalwork, and sculpture.

With a mix of thematic essays and catalogue entries by twenty-six leading scholars, ***Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World* (Getty Publications, \$60.00, hardcover)** is the first to explore the phenomenon of bestiaries in depth, focusing on the artistic significance and widespread influence of these uniquely inventive works. This ambitious volume presents over a hundred examples of bestiaries from the Middle Ages, which represent a third of the world's surviving illuminated bestiaries.

Looking beyond the bestiaries themselves, *Book of Beasts* illuminates the lasting legacy of these medieval manuscripts—from their widespread influence on medieval art and culture, to their role in the formation of natural history texts, to their influence on twentieth and twenty-first century artists like Pablo Picasso, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Alexander Calder, and Damien Hirst.

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This volume is published to accompany an exhibition on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center May 14–August 18, 2019.

Elizabeth Morrison is senior curator of manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum, coauthor of *The Adventures of Gillion de Trazegnies* (Getty Publications, 2015), and editor of *A Knight for the Ages: Jacques de Lalaing and the Art of Chivalry* (Getty Publications, 2018).

Larisa Grollemond is assistant curator of manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

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Book of Beasts

The Bestiary in the Medieval World

Edited by Elizabeth Morrison with Larisa Grollemond

J. Paul Getty Museum

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