



**DATE:** September 27, 2016  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MEDIA CONTACT**  
Valerie Tate  
Getty Communications  
(310) 440-6861  
vtate@getty.edu

**J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS**  
***The Alchemy of Color in Medieval Manuscripts***

**On View October 11, 2016 –January 1, 2017**  
**at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center**

LOS ANGELES – Today color is appreciated primarily for its aesthetic qualities, but during the Middle Ages it was also recognized for its material, scientific, and mechanical properties. The manufacture of colored pigments and inks used for painting and writing was part of the science of alchemy, the chemical transformation of matter. Manuscripts not only transcribed the scientific practice of alchemy—a medieval antecedent to modern chemistry—but were created with alchemically produced materials.

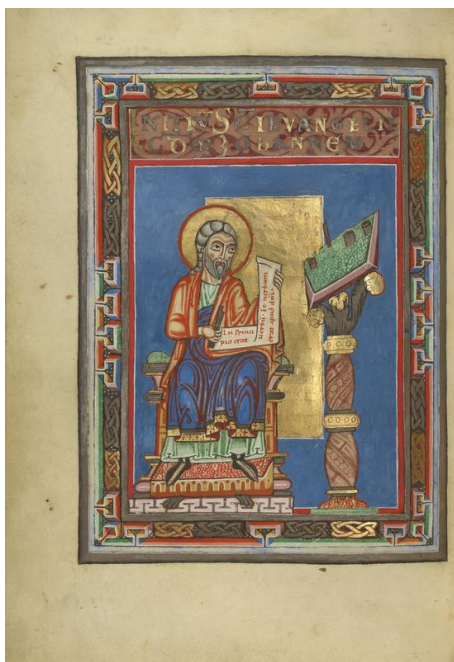
From October 11, 2016, through January 1, 2017, *The Alchemy of Color in Medieval Manuscripts* at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center sheds light on medieval manuscript illumination within the context of alchemy as early chemistry and craft practice. With objects from the Museum's renowned manuscripts collection complemented by generous loans, the exhibition examines colorants and medieval recipes for pigments and imitation gold in a presentation that highlights the Getty's ongoing research into the materials used by book illuminators.



Pentecost, about 1030-1040, Ottonian. Tempera colors, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 9 1/8 x 6 5/16 in. 83.M190.47v. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig VII 1, fol. 47v

"Alchemy was the medieval antecedent to modern chemistry," says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "Manuscripts exemplify this tradition well, not only as a medium by which scientific texts were transmitted, but because the painted illuminations are themselves made with alchemically produced materials. Our ongoing research into materials that were used for manuscript illuminations reveals an *alchemical rainbow* of colorants made from plants, minerals, and metals."

The exhibition is divided into three sections exploring the technical aspects of alchemy, the manufacture of color, and the use of gold.



Saint John, about 1120-1140, German. Tempera colors, gold, and silver on parchment bound between pasteboard covered with brown calf. Leaf: 9 x 6 ½ in. 83.MB.67. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig II 3

### **Alchemical Heritage in Manuscripts**

Medieval technical manuals and early scientific books are filled with recipes and instructions for manufacturing pigments. Alchemy was an ancient tradition known to medieval readers through texts compiled and copied over centuries in manuscripts. Alchemical knowledge from antiquity entered medieval encyclopedias, craft manuals, household miscellanies, and literary texts. This section of the exhibition describes the types of documents in which alchemical texts reside, including medicinal, astrological, scientific miscellanies, and craft treatises, as well as the earliest mention of the practice of alchemy in medieval literature in *The Personification of Nature Making Birds, Animals, and People* (about 1405). The authors, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, likened the female personification of Nature to the most adept alchemist, transforming base materials and hammering at the anvil to make all the creatures of the world. Evoking the ancient challenge for artists to imitate Nature with their skillful handling of materials, this trope positions alchemists and craftsmen as rivals to Nature herself.

### **The Alchemical Rainbow**

As the medieval forerunner to chemistry, alchemy was concerned with the basic transformation of matter, and this included the fabrication of beautiful coloring materials for painting. This section highlights the colors and pigments utilized by illuminators, such as ultramarine blue, vermilion red, orpiment yellow, and other lesser known pigments. Some pigments were made from colored earths or semiprecious stones ground to a fine powder and mixed with a sticky medium. Other pigments required chemical separations or synthesis by heating or exposing metals to corrosive or reactive agents. Highly toxic products and materials often yielded the most brilliant colors, creating a remarkably varied alchemical rainbow. One of the highlights of this section of the exhibition is an illuminated manuscript of *Saint John* (late fourteenth –early fifteenth century). The Indigo blue used for this painting was produced by the fermentation of the tropical *indigofera* plant. This plant was not only used as a dyestuff for textiles but also as a painting material. Its color can range from blue-black to a paler greenish-blue, as used for the background coloring in this illumination.

### **Illuminating with Precious Metals**

"Contrary to the popular misconception that the pursuit of alchemists was simply *chrysopoeia*, or the making of gold, for many alchemists the goal was nothing less, in fact, than the reproduction of the divine act of creation itself," says Nancy Turner, J. Paul Getty Museum conservator and curator of the exhibition. The term used to refer to paintings within books – "illumination" – derives from the Latin *illuminare* meaning pages "lit up with gold." Having come to epitomize the art of book painting, gold is used not only for its incorruptibility, purity, and high value as a material but also for its spiritual connotations. Among the examples on view in this section of the exhibition is *Pentecost* (about 1030-40). The illuminator depicted the moment when the Twelve Apostles are imbued with the Holy Spirit of God. The shimmering gold background adds to the radiant, visionary images, and was achieved by

painting onto the parchment layered applications of granular gold paint, which was polished with a stone burnisher to achieve a highly lustrous effect.

*The Alchemy of Color in Medieval Manuscripts* will be on view October 11, 2016 –January 1, 2017 at the J. Paul Getty Museum. The exhibition is curated by Nancy Tuner, conservator of manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum. This exhibition is presented in conjunction with *The Art of Alchemy* at the Getty Research Institute (October 11, 2016 –February 12, 2017) and *The Shimmer of Gold: Giovanni di Paolo in Renaissance Siena* at the J. Paul Getty Museum (October 11, 2016 –January 8, 2017).

# # #

**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

**The J. Paul Getty Museum** collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

#### **Visiting the Getty Center**

The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Mondays, and January 1, Thanksgiving Day and December 25. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is \$15 per car, but reduced to \$10 after 3 p.m. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

**Same-day parking** at both Museum locations (Getty Center and Getty Villa) is available for one fee through the Getty's Pay Once, Park Twice program. Visit the Museum Information Desk at the Center or the Villa to obtain a coupon good for same-day complimentary parking at the other site.

**Additional information is available at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu).**

Sign up for e-Getty at [www.getty.edu/subscribe](http://www.getty.edu/subscribe) to receive free monthly highlights of events at the Getty Center and the Getty Villa via e-mail, or visit [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu) for a complete calendar of public programs.