

Seminar in Medieval Art:

Sacred Things, Material Intellects

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Form and matter, spiritual and earthly, abstract and sensory, divine and human: in theory, these hierarchical categories framed medieval ideas about the nature of reality. Material objects, however, were often seen as powerful intermediaries, capable of transgressing binaries and being other than they seemed. In this course, we will explore the role of medieval objects “in between,” as tools for human enlightenment, evidence of human creativity, or literal embodiments of divine presence. We will weigh arguments about the agency of materials against the labor of human makers and viewers, and leave room for the miraculous. *While this course is not designed to provide a survey of medieval art, case studies will be drawn from different time periods, locations, and cultures (including examples from both Christian Europe and the Islamic world). Course fees will go towards a printed reader. Readings consist of scholarly essays and primary sources, including writings by philosophers, theologians, and artists. In class, we will focus on discussions of the assigned readings, student presentations, and peer-reviewed assignments. Over the course of the semester, students will produce a research paper on a topic of their choice.*