



1625 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE, CORNER OF CENTRAL AND McDOWELL · (602) 257-1222 · PHXART.ORG

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Paul Peterson

480-505-4539

[paulp@offmadisonave.com](mailto:paulp@offmadisonave.com)

## Phoenix Art Museum Hosts Monumental Gathering of Old and New Illuminated Manuscripts

*Three Important Exhibitions Celebrate 1300 Year History of Ancient Art Form*

**PHOENIX (October 23, 2007)** – Phoenix Art Museum will present one of its most *divine* exhibitions from December 11, 2007 – March 9, 2008 focusing on handmade Bibles and religious manuscripts from throughout history. Bringing together the old and new, three unique exhibitions will collectively span the more than 1300 years of history represented through this ancient art form. Highlighting this exhibition will be one of the most remarkable artistic endeavors undertaken this millennium as the museum plays host to *Illuminating the Word: The Saint John's Bible* – the only handwritten and illuminated Bible commissioned since the advent of the printing press more than 500 years ago.

Concurrent with *The Saint John's Bible*, Phoenix Art Museum will host *The Early History of the Bible* from the world-class collection of sacred manuscripts at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and *Selections from the James Melikian Collection* from a private collection in Phoenix representing more than 20 ancient Christian and Jewish texts and manuscripts from these two important collections.

"We are extremely proud to host this rare gathering of artwork celebrating the expansive history of the book as an art form," said James K. Ballinger, director of Phoenix Art Museum. "These three exhibitions provide an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view some of the rarest books and manuscripts from throughout history, and to experience the incomparable *The Saint John's Bible* masterpiece."

A richly ornamented masterwork, hand-illustrated with gold leaf on oversized vellum, *The Saint John's Bible* (which includes both the Old and New Testaments) is an unprecedented undertaking in contemporary book arts and a major cultural endeavor. Selections from the nearly-complete Bible are traveling the country as part of a national tour sponsored by Target; and for the **first time** it will be exhibited alongside ancient examples of the book arts.

"Target has a long history of partnering with arts institutions, like the Phoenix Art Museum, on special programs to ensure that the arts are accessible to as many families as possible," said Laysha Ward, vice president, community relations, Target. "Through our sponsorship of *The Saint John's Bible* "Illuminating the Word" exhibition, we hope all audiences will enjoy the project's unique artistic and contemporary nature."

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## illuminated manuscripts

DEC 11, 2007 – MAR 9, 2008

ILLUMINATING THE WORD: THE SAINT JOHN'S BIBLE · THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE BIBLE · SELECTIONS FROM THE JAMES MELIKIAN COLLECTION

*Illuminating the Word: The Saint John's Bible* is organized and circulated by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Saint John's University. The exhibition's local and national tour is presented by Target. • The *Early History of the Bible* is organized by the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. • Selections from the James Melikian Collection is organized by Phoenix Art Museum. • Major support for Phoenix Art Museum's presentation of these exhibitions is provided by Meridian Banks and Marquette Asset Management, Meridian Bank, EG and Carol Barmore, Sharron and Delbert Lewis, Matthew and Marysia Gerson, and The Virginia G. Piper Exhibition Endowment. • Promotional support is provided by The Arizona Republic and Barnes & Noble Booksellers.



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## ***Illuminated Manuscripts - Phoenix Art Museum*** **Add One**

### **A Rich History**

The book as it is known today – a portable, bound volume of pages – was born in the late years of the Roman Empire, replacing the stone and clay tablets, scrolls and sheets of papyrus used for centuries before. While the printed text would not come along until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century through the Renaissance, the only means of reproducing books was by writing each word...by hand.

This process is not more evident than in the most reproduced manuscript of all time – the Bible. Its status as a sacred text led to an ancient custom in which scribes and artists would also decorate, or “illuminate,” each page with paint and gold, making each manuscript an original piece of artwork. As such, these illuminated manuscripts have signified the time in place in which they were created and the most recently commissioned illuminated text, *The Saint John’s Bible*, is certainly no exception.

“This project is an incredible undertaking and the show is an invaluable opportunity for lovers of art and faith-based groups alike to explore a centuries-old tradition, and connect with the text of the Bible in an entirely new way,” said Thomas J. Loughman, Ph.D., Curator of European Art for Phoenix Art Museum. “Combined with the historical depth of the other collections, this show presents a one-of-a-kind chronological background of the art form and a unique juxtaposition of the contemporary *Saint John’s Bible*.”

Combining the centuries-old tradition of craftsmanship with modern imagery, *The Saint John’s Bible* reflects a multicultural world and humanity’s enormous strides in science, technology, and space travel. Because the project is an interfaith undertaking, the Bible incorporates imagery from Eastern and Western religious traditions, as well as influences from Native American cultures.

### **About the Exhibitions:**

#### ***Illuminating the Word: The Saint John’s Bible***

Commissioned in 1998 by Saint John’s Abbey and Saint John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, *The Saint John’s Bible* is considered one of the most monumental projects undertaken in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.




The project’s artistic director, Donald Jackson, is revered as one of the world’s foremost Western calligraphers. Born in Lancashire, England in 1938, Jackson began studying calligraphy and illuminating at the age of 13 and by his mid-twenties was appointed scribe to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s Crown Office at the House of Lords. During the past eight years, Jackson has worked in rural Wales, United Kingdom, with scribes and artists to write and illuminate *The Saint John’s Bible* entirely by hand, using quills and paints hand-ground from precious minerals and stones such as lapis lazuli, vermilion, malachite, silver, copper, and 24-karat gold.

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## ***Illuminated Manuscripts - Phoenix Art Museum*** ***Add Two***

For Phoenix Art Museum, *Illuminating the Word: The Saint John's Bible* features 49 two-page openings from the nearly-complete Bible, with selections from *Gospels and Acts*, *Pentateuch* (the first five books of Jewish and Christian scripture), and *Psalms*. Among the pages on view at Phoenix Art Museum are: *The Seven Days of Creation*, *Genesis*, *The Garden of Eden*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *The Ten Commandments*, *The Parable of the Loaves and Fishes*, *The Sermon on the Mount*, *The Parable of the Sower and the Seed*, *The Birth of Christ*, *Dinner at the Pharisee's House*, *The Woman Accused of Adultery*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, *The Death of Moses*, *The Crucifixion*.

Original preparatory drawings and artists' sketches will also be on display, as well as a worktable from the scriptorium displaying materials such as quills, hand-ground pigments, gold leaf, calfskin vellum, and ancient inks from China.

The project is expected to be completed in late 2009 and will comprise 1,150 pages in seven volumes. Once complete, the Bible will be housed permanently at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library at Saint John's University in Minnesota, where it will be used in worship and be available to the public.

### ***The Early History of the Bible***

Comprised from the extensive, world-class collection of sacred manuscripts and ancient Biblical works of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, *The Early History of the Bible* is a collection of illuminated and handwritten works ranging from an 8<sup>th</sup> century Biblical manuscript fragment from Egypt to a 16<sup>th</sup> century Hebrew Esther scroll, and features Bibles from the early age of printing, including a page from the Gutenberg Bible and a first edition of Martin Luther's New Testament.

*The Early History of the Bible* was conceived as an exhibition first in 2005 when the Walters Art Museum received the gift of a very rare item: an early 17<sup>th</sup> century Torah scroll made during the European Diaspora of Judaism. One of the most comprehensive collections of illuminated manuscripts in the world (ranging in date from 300 BC to the 19th century), this unparalleled collection chronicles the art of the book from antiquity to modern times.

Phoenix Art Museum has partnered with The Walters Art Museum to reconstitute the show for display in Arizona for several reasons, not least of which was its attention to the parallel traditions of handmade scripture, both in Judaism and the pre-Reformation Church, up through the first century of printing. The collection presents a unique historical background of hand-scribing and illuminating as an art form and complements the contemporary *The Saint John's Bible* exhibition.




Also included are such stunning pieces a New Testament written in Aramaic in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a leaf from a Byzantine Book of Psalms from around 1300, and two French illuminated Bibles from around 1250.

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## ***Illuminated Manuscripts - Phoenix Art Museum*** **Add Three**

### ***Selections from the James Melikian Collection***

One of the foremost private collections of ancient illuminated texts, the James Melikian Collection features several rare objects of note. *The Khabouris Codex* is one of only two privately held Assyrian New Testament manuscripts in existence in the Western Hemisphere from the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries, written in Aramaic.

The Melikian Collection also features a variety of English printed Bibles, ranging from the Bishops' Bible to various editions of the King James translation, all from the 1500s and 1600s (including the tallest printed Bible, printed in 1680). These Bibles showcase the intense activity that first brought the Bible into the English language.

Additionally, the collection features three Armenian *Four Gospels*, notable for their beauty and rarity to the Western region, the earliest of which dates back to 1350. Written in Armenian on rice paper, each manuscript begins with a series of full-page illustrations of the life and ministry of Jesus. One of the *Four Gospels* on display, dated 1651, was made by an ethnic-Armenian team in Istanbul and used through a three-decade career of the priest-monk (*vardapet*) Minas of Kona. Minas, in turn, commissioned a deluxe silver cover for the volume in 1675, just before donating the book to the parish he served throughout his life. Several other silver Bible covers, many from the 1800s, will also be on display.

### **Exhibition Store and Public Events:**

Phoenix Art Museum will provide a special satellite store within the gallery, featuring books, unique jewelry and inspirational gifts relating to the exhibition. The museum is also organizing a full schedule of programs and events relating to the exhibition, such as calligraphy demonstrations and workshops, lectures, music and more. Updated information regarding public programs can be found on the exhibition Web site at: [phxartilluminated.org](http://phxartilluminated.org).

### **Exhibition Details:**

Admission to the exhibition is included in general museum admission, which is \$10 for adults, \$8 for senior citizens (65+), \$8 for full-time college students with ID, \$4 for children ages 6–17 and free for children under 6 and for museum members. Admission is also free on Tuesdays from 3:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. and for everyone on First Fridays, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. For the Target Free Family Day on January 5, 2008, admission to the museum also is free for everyone and includes interactive programming and activities for children.

Phoenix Art Museum is located in downtown Phoenix at the corner of Central Avenue and McDowell Road. Museum hours are Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. and Wednesday – Sunday from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. The museum is closed on Mondays and major holidays.

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## ***Illuminated Manuscripts - Phoenix Art Museum***

### ***Add Four***

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### ***About Phoenix Art Museum:***

The classically progressive design of the 203,000 sq. ft. Phoenix Art Museum integrates art and architecture with the Southwestern landscape, accommodating large traveling exhibitions and a collection of over 17,000 works in American, Asian, modern & contemporary, European, Latin American and Western American art, and fashion design. Visitors also enjoy the Sculpture Garden, the Thorne Miniature Rooms of historic interiors, PhxArtKids interactive space for children, Art Museum Café and The Museum Store. Visitors can learn more about the Museum's collection through its bilingual, random access MP3 audio guide, available at the admissions desk. The museum recently opened its \$50 million expansion project, which included the addition of a glass-enclosed lobby and entry plaza, 4-level gallery wing, sculpture garden and expanded store.

For more information about this exhibition or Phoenix Art Museum, visit the Web site at: [phxartilluminated.org](http://phxartilluminated.org) or [PhxArt.org](http://PhxArt.org), or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

### ***About Saint John's Abbey and University and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML):***

Saint John's Abbey is a Benedictine monastic community of men who follow the 1500-year tradition of worship and work through daily prayer and service. About two thirds of the community live and work in Collegeville, Minnesota. The Abbey is located on 2,400 acres of woodland and lakes in Collegeville, 70 miles north of Minneapolis/Saint Paul. Located on the campus of Saint John's University, the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library is dedicated to preservation of and access to art, rare books, and manuscripts focused on how humans imagine the sacred. HMML's history of preserving rare and endangered handwritten works from around the world by capturing them on microfilm, and now in digital formats, began in earnest in 1965; the collection now totals 30 million pages of manuscripts, the world's largest collection of manuscript images.

### ***About Target:***

Minneapolis-based Target serves guests at 1,591 stores in 47 states nationwide by delivering today's best retail trends at affordable prices. Target is committed to providing guests with great design through innovative products, in-store experiences and community partnerships. Whether visiting a Target store or shopping online at Target.com, guests enjoy a fun and convenient shopping experience with access to thousands of unique and highly differentiated items. Target (NYSE:TGT) gives more than \$3 million a week to its local communities through grants and special programs. Since opening its first store in 1962, Target has partnered with nonprofit organizations, guests and team members to help meet community needs.

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