CONTENTS

04 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
Stephen Perkinson

06 SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

08 MEMBER NEWS
Member Awards and Appointments
Books
In the Media

12 ICMA EVENT RECAPS

15 BRIEFS FROM THE FIELD

16 COMMEMORATION
Claire Richter Sherman, 1930–2023
Robert Ousterhout, 1950–2023

26 SPECIAL FEATURES
Report
Dumbarton Oaks Museum Colloquium Examines Mosaic Works Across the Global Medieval World, by Elizabeth McCord
Report
Gaming Goes Medieval, by Larisa Grollemond
Reflection
Elina Gertsman Receives CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies, by Cecily Hughes, Reed O’Mara, Sam Truman, and Angelica Verduci

Exhibition Reports
Notre-Dame de Paris: At the Heart of the Construction Site, by Kris N. Racaniello
The Nature of Things: Medieval Art and Ecology, 1100–1550, by Daria Berman
Riemenschneider and Late Medieval Alabaster, by Rebekkah Hart

41 EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES
Future ICMA Events
Ongoing Opportunities for ICMA Members
Other Opportunities
Exhibitions
Conferences, lectures, symposia, workshops
CFPs

52 CONTRIBUTORS
The 2023 CARA Teaching Prize has been awarded to Elina Gertsman (Case Western Reserve University).

About the Prize
The CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies recognizes outstanding pedagogical achievement by Medieval Academy members. This can include:

- teaching inspiring courses at the undergraduate or graduate levels;
- creating innovative teaching materials (including textbooks);
- developing courses and curricula;
- scholarship of teaching and learning (including presentations at conferences as well as publications);
- support for K–12 pedagogy and curricula;
- community-oriented or publicly-directed educational initiatives.

Congratulations to Elina and other ICMA members who won awards (past and present)!
ICMA at AAH in London: “Digital Medievalisms” (April 14, 2023)

In April, Claudia Haines (Case Western Reserve University) and Atineh Movsesian (University of California, Berkeley) traveled to University College London to chair their ICMA-sponsored session entitled “Digital Medievalism” at the 2023 Association for Art History Annual Conference. The session featured four papers that considered the benefits technology can bring to the study of medieval art. As the speakers—Sabina Zonno and Lynn Dodd (both University of Southern California), Begoña Cayuela (independent scholar), Kristine Tanton (Université de Montréal) and Meredith Cohen (University of California, Los Angeles), and Matthew Westerby (Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts)—demonstrated, technologies like virtual reality, digital modeling, and user-generated 3D models can have fascinating implications for the study of everything from manuscripts to wall paintings to architecture and beyond. In short, the session left its participants convinced that the future of the digital humanities is bright!

The following lists the presenters and their papers:

Lynn Dodd and Sabina Zonno
“Using Virtual Reality to Explore 15th Century Illuminated Manuscripts”

Begoña Cayuela
“The Colors of Sant Quirze de Pedret”

Kristine Tanton and Meredith Cohen
“Digital Gothic: The Case of the Lady Chapel of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (c. 1255)”

Matthew Westerby
“Digital Medievalism and User-Generated 3D Models”
Elina Gertsman Receives CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies

By Cecily Hughes, Reed O’Mara, Sam Truman, and Angelica Verduci

At the 98th Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America (MAA) in Washington, D.C., in February 2023, Elina Gertsman, Professor of Art History at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), was awarded the Committee for Centers and Regional Associations (CARA) Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies (Fig. 1). She was nominated for the award by us, a group of her current and former graduate students who have been greatly impacted by her outstanding efforts both in and out of the classroom. Our group includes a current Ph.D. student, two doctoral candidates, and a recent graduate. Collectively, we have known Professor Gertsman for many years, which we believe grants us a particularly informed perspective on her teaching and mentorship. To extend the celebration of Professor Gertsman’s accomplishment, we write to enumerate the many reasons why she is so deserving of the CARA Award.

Professor Gertsman’s wide-ranging impact on the scholarly community at CWRU cannot be overstated. As the Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan Professor in Catholic Studies II, Professor of Art History, and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Art History and Art in the joint program between CWRU and the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), Professor Gertsman engages with students as our Director of Graduate Studies, Interim Chair, professional development mentor, and fearless *Methodologies of Art History* leader, to name a few of her roles. It is through her teaching, however, that she has perhaps made her greatest contribution to the department’s culture, which emphasizes high academic standards, object-based study, and enthusiasm for learning.

The idea that the Middle Ages can be brought to life through teaching lies at the core of Professor Gertsman’s work. She vividly resurrects the medieval world in the classroom through a thoroughly interdisciplinary teaching style that incorporates a wide range of topics spanning from medicine to theology. Throughout her syllabi, plentiful primary sources bring the voices of medieval thinkers and writers into the lives of modern-day students, emphasizing the ongoing relevance of the Middle Ages to a contemporary audience. From the political showmanship found in Abbot Suger’s humorous insistence that his brilliant designs and lavish spending were all thanks to God’s will instead of his own—to the original “scream therapy” of Christina the Astonishing (who enjoyed catharsis by rolling herself into a ball and bellowing), students discover how very like us medieval people could be. Professor Gertsman’s dedication to making the Middle Ages relevant in the current cultural climate carries throughout CWRU’s campus. She frequently organizes lectures, bringing guest speakers to address pressing topics in medieval studies, including eco-criticism, gender, and race.

Professor Gertsman’s emphasis on the importance of the Middle Ages as a highly relevant topic of study, coupled with her obvious love of the subject, is both infectious and incredibly influential. No matter how many times she has covered the material, she presents it to her students with open enthusiasm underscored by the earnest conviction that medieval art is the most fascinating topic—something that hardly...
needs to be explained to the readers of this newsletter. Her ability to convey complicated information in a way that is not only accessible but also fun and engaging has led numerous students who were not previously medievalists to leave her classes with a newfound appreciation for the ideas and art of the Middle Ages.

An example of Professor Gertsman’s unique teaching style near and dear to many students is her lecture on the relics and reliquaries of the CMA’s Guelph Treasure. Her colorful explanation of *pars pro toto*—which paints the Portable Altar of Countess Gertrude (Fig. 2) as a sort of clown-car, packed full of saints via their bodily fragments, accompanied by the infamous story of Hugh of Lincoln fervently chewing on Mary Magdalene’s finger bone—is as funny as it is unforgettable. Similarly memorable is her lecture on how the Arm Reliquary of the Apostles (Fig. 3) transformed the celebrant into a kind of priestly cyborg, who used the metal arm as an extension of his own body to bestow blessings upon the laity—an act which she modernizes with the good-humored wish of being able to bop students with the reliquary to cure their ills (especially those that seem to manifest miraculously as paper deadlines near). So many objects in the CMA’s collection have Professor Gertsman’s mark on them that students can hardly help but recall her words when passing through the galleries. Few will ever forget that the saints who hauled around their own decapitated heads are called “cephalophores” thanks to her enthusiasm for the song “You Probably Get That a Lot,” in which They Might be Giants croon about “The way you swing your head while strolling fancy free....”

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**Fig. 2: Portable Altar of Countess Gertrude**, ca. 1045. Germany, Lower Saxony, 11th century. Gold, cloisonné enamel, porphyry, gems, pearls, niello, wood core, 4 1/8 in. x 10 13/16 in. x 8 1/4 in. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust, 1931.462.

**Fig. 3: Arm Reliquary of the Apostles**, ca. 1190. Germany, Lower Saxony, Hildesheim. Gilt silver, champlevé enamel, oak, 20 1/16 in. x 5 1/2 in. x 3 5/8 in. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust, 1930.739.

**Fig. 4: Professor Gertsman and students Cecily Hughes, Rebekkah Hart, and Claire Sumner experience the Immersive Realms app.**
Outside of the classroom, Professor Gertsman is also engaged in projects that are intended to make the Middle Ages more accessible. While her bi-annual, medieval fiction book club—often held at a local meadery!—is both welcomingly low-stakes and low-tech, other projects are anything but. She has recently been working in collaboration with her students and CWRU’s Interactive Commons on a mixed-reality project Immersive Realms, an application for Microsoft HoloLens headsets that lets users virtually hold, turn, and even resize scanned objects from the CMA’s collection while they walk through a digitally-constructed private chapel (Fig. 4). In other words, participants can interact with and examine medieval objects in a way not possible in either a traditional museum or classroom context. This means that Professor Gertsman’s hope to wield the Apostles arm reliquary and bless a student has finally come to pass. The application allows everyone an immersive experience evocative of real medieval architecture—complete with sounds and (some) scents—without the cost of an international flight. Along with this, Professor Gertsman is working to create a 3D scan of one of the CMA’s medieval ivories. As these examples show, Professor Gertsman is forward thinking and keenly aware of how technology can augment teaching about the Middle Ages, making learning an immersive and kinetic experience.

Because of Professor Gertsman’s tireless efforts, CWRU’s campus is home to a thriving, dedicated, and actively-engaged group of medievalists. Under her tutelage, this group continues to grow—and make its own mark on the field—with each passing year. We were elated to see the announcement that Professor Gertsman would receive the award, and several of us had the opportunity to attend the MAA this year and watch the award ceremony in person (there were posters involved, as well as many happy tears shed) (Fig. 5). It is Professor Gertsman’s passion and drive, as well as her attentiveness and care, that spur her students to strive for success in everything they do. We have long lauded her as an instructor par excellence, and we are elated to see Professor Gertsman’s efforts honored with this year’s CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies.

Cecily Hughes (second-year doctoral student), Reed O’Mara (fourth-year doctoral candidate), Sam Truman (sixth-year doctoral candidate), and Angie Verduci (2023 Ph.D. graduate) are all medievalists under the supervision of Professor Elina Gertsman at Case Western Reserve University.
Riemenschneider and Late Medieval Alabaster, Cleveland Museum of Art, March 26–July 23, 2023

By Rebekkah Hart

Riemenschneider and Late Medieval Alabaster (March 26–July 23, 2023), now on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), brings together fifteen continental alabaster sculptures and highlights work by Tilman Riemenschneider (1460–1531). Curated by Dr. Gerhard Lutz, the Robert P. Bergman Curator of Medieval Art, the exhibition includes several late medieval alabaster sculptures owned by the CMA and is supplemented by loans to showcase the medium’s wide-ranging popularity and importance for devotional sculpture (Fig. 1).

Alabaster became widely popular as a sculpting medium across England and mainland Europe between ca. 1350 and 1550. The stone itself, and Riemenschneider’s command of the material, is at the center of this exhibition. Visually similar to marble but in reality a much softer medium, alabaster can be sculpted with woodworking tools, which allows for a high degree of detail. While Riemenschneider is generally known for his wood sculptures that include elaborate altarpieces and funerary monuments, the artist has a small surviving body of work in alabaster. This exhibition is the first in the U.S. to highlight Riemenschneider’s mastery of this luxury medium.

The core of the exhibition is Riemenschneider’s Saint Jerome (ca. 1495) that depicts Jerome gently pulling the thorn from the paw of a submissive lion (Fig. 2). Documented to have come from the Benedictine monastery in Erfurt, Germany, the sculpture, with its extraordinary attention to detail—like the fine hairlines in the lion’s face—rewards close looking. Placed in visual conversation with the Saint Jerome sculpture, The Virgin of the Annunciation (ca. 1485), also by Riemenschneider and loaned by the Musée de Louvre, is from the same monastery and its stone was quarried from the same location (Fig. 3). These sculptures are two of only a few known extant alabasters by the artist.
The intimate exhibition is installed in a single room, the CMA’s Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery, where *St. Jerome* and *The Virgin of the Annunciation* reside in the very center. The choice of midnight blue walls and cases in the enveloped space cause the creamy translucency of the stone to glow. All pieces are displayed in the round, allowing the visitors to see the sculptures from every possible viewpoint. One can walk around the *Pietà* (ca. 1475/1500) to marvel at the extreme angle of Christ’s body or circle the *Virgin Enthroned* (ca. 1480) to query what the Christ Child could be holding (Figs. 4 and 5). A fourteenth-century sculpture of Gabriel from the CMA’s collection has always been displayed parallel to a wall, and only with its newfound positioning away from the wall for this exhibition can curators, conservators, and museum-goers marvel at the elaborately painted back of the sculpture. What was the intended function and original placement of this work?

Although the CMA Gabriel and *The Virgin of the Annunciation* from the Louvre do not form a true pair, wall didactics contextualize both sculptures as being originally paired with versions that matched each sculptures’ origin. Prints of Gabriel and the Virgin by Martin Schongauer highlight the stylistic milieu of the region and tap into the CMA’s impressive collection of prints by Schongauer, an artist with whom Riemenschneider was familiar. Wall-mounted images of an earlier Gabriel and Virgin Mary of the Annunciation by Riemenschneider carved from alabaster (now in the Rijksmuseum) give further insight to the Louvre sculpture and how it might have once been coupled with another figure of Gabriel.

The exhibition highlights contemporaneous works, like the three mourners sculpted by Claus de Werve (c. 1380–1439) for the tomb of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (r. 1363–1404) (Fig. 5). Mourner sculptures were commissioned to line funerary monuments, making them some of the more plentiful and now well-known genres of alabaster sculpture. These mourners are carved of exceptionally white alabaster, which was prized in the fifteenth century. Other works depict the wide variety of color and veining that is naturally possible in alabaster in addition to the varying amounts of polychromy that could be added.

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New acquisitions by the CMA make their debut in this exhibition: two apostles carved from alabaster and believed to have been made as part of a high altar ensemble for the Notre-Dame Collegiate Monastery Church in Saint-Omer (Figs. 6 and 7). Both retain gilding on the abundant folds of drapery and intricate details of their hair. These two new works share their display case with an apostle, Saint Philip (1420–30), loaned from the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which isotope fingerprinting has confirmed came from the same quarry as Riemenschneider’s sculptures.

In the corner of the room, a film details the experimental contemporary reconstruction of St. Bartholomew from the Rimini altarpiece by the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung in Frankfurt, Germany. The film begins with sculpting raw alabaster from a basic block form in the studio.

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and continues all the way to the partial gilding and polychromy, clarifying for the viewer the process of working the material. Because many of the pieces in the exhibition have been heavily cleaned, and their polychromy and gilding are no longer visible, this didactic effectively exemplifies what some of the pieces in the exhibition could have looked like at their time of creation.

A poignant selection of some of the finest continental alabaster sculptures in US collections, this small but effective exhibition highlights the recent scholarly interest in the allure of alabaster as material and introduces it to a broader museum audience. A richly illustrated catalog accompanies the exhibition and is available for purchase.

Rebekkah Hart is a Ph.D. student in the Art History of Late Medieval Europe at Case Western Reserve University working with Prof. Elina Gertsman.