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From Locus Sacrum to Exhibition Space. Decontextualizing and Aestheticizing Medieval Art

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Abstract: *The transfer of medieval art from a liturgical context to a secular exhibition setting generates profound changes on its perception. This process generates phenomena of decontextualization, aestheticization and desacralization, which dilute the original meaning of the artifacts, transforming them from cult objects into museum exhibits evaluated predominantly from an aesthetic and historical perspective. This paper examines the impact of this transfer on the sacredness of medieval art and explores strategies by which museums can counteract the loss of the spiritual dimension. These solutions include the reconstruction of the original context as much as possible, highlighting the immaterial dimension of medieval sacred art, detailing devotional practices, saints' hagiographies, sacred symbolism, integrating evocative scenographic elements (light, music, scents), using immersive technologies and creating an atmosphere conducive to a contemplative experience. Relevant examples, such as The Cloisters or the Musée de Cluny, demonstrate that careful curatorial approach can facilitate the recontextualization of medieval art without compromising its transcendental dimension. Museums can go beyond mere conservation and exhibition spaces to become environments for rediscovering an authentic relationship with the sacred, offering visitors an experience that goes beyond mere aesthetic admiration and enters the realm of spiritual reflection.*

Keywords: *medieval art, exhibition spaces, decontextualization, aestheticization, resacralization*

Introduction

The impact of exhibition spaces on the sacred dimension of medieval art calls for a subtle and interdisciplinary analysis, given the complexity of the interplay between artistic expression, sacredness and the contemporary secular context. This paper examines how the display of medieval artifacts in museums and art galleries influences perceptions of their sacredness. Sacredness, a defining attribute of medieval art, undergoes a reappraisal

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under the influence of the secular setting of museum institutions, thus reshaping the public's experience of these creations[1].

Museum institutions, by their very nature, decontextualize sacred objects, dislocating them from the original sphere of liturgical and devotional practices[2]. Sacredness does not reside exclusively in the objects, but is manifested in a complex ensemble of rituals, representations, symbolic expressions and transmitted knowledge, each with a profound charge within a well-defined spiritual ecosystem[3]. Once transferred to the museum space, these artifacts lose their religious function in favor of an aesthetic, historical and cultural valorization, where the human and interpretative perspective tends to replace the transcendent dimension. This paradigmatic shift raises essential questions about the authenticity of the sacred experience in museum display and about the capacity of institutions to restore, in a way that is intelligible and meaningful to contemporary sensibilities, the spiritual depth inherent in these objects.

In trying to understand the meaning and direction of medieval art in the context of contemporary exhibition spaces, we can refer to the essential questions posed by Paul Gauguin: "*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going*?"[4]. In addition to origin, essence and destiny, these questions also concern the search for meaning and relevance of medieval art in a secularized world. Nikolai Berdiaev emphasizes the importance of introspection, stating that the meaning of things is hidden within man himself[5]. Deciphering the meaning of medieval art thus requires a thorough exploration of human values and beliefs, as well as an understanding of the historical and cultural context in which it was created.

Secularization represents a significant challenge in understanding medieval art. Contemporary society is faced with a loss of familiarity with religious symbolism and context, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as "*illettrisme religieux*"[6]. Museums as cultural institutions address an increasingly diverse public with heterogeneous cultural references and often a lack of specific religious knowledge. In this context, medieval art, originally conceived as an expression of faith and an instrument of devotion, risks being

[1] Roque, Maria, "Le sens caché : Exposition de l'art chrétienne au musée*"*, *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 170-175, p. 171.
[2] Branham, Joan, "Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space", *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, The Walters Art Museum, 1995, 33-47, p. 33;
[3] Stoleriu, Adrian, *Interferențe vizual-artistice. Artă și sacralitate în contemporaneitate*, Artes, Iași, 2019, p. 80.
[4] Ibidem, p. 8.
[5] Berdiaev, Nikolai, *Sensul creației*, Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 67 apud Stoleriu, Adrian, *Interferențe vizual-artistice. Artă și sacralitate în contemporaneitate*, Artes, Iași, 2019, p. 9.
[6] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

reduced to a mere aesthetic or historical value, thus losing its spiritual dimension.

Nevertheless, the sacred continues to exert a strong fascination and draw audiences to art, including medieval art. Despite the process of secularization, people are in search of points of security and connections with the idea of transcendence. Medieval art, in this sense, can offer a way to explore and experience the spiritual dimension of existence. Museums in turn can become cultural spaces of the sacred, where visitors can experience a form of spiritual reflection.

In analysing the impact of exhibition spaces on medieval art, it is crucial to consider a number of key issues: decontextualization, aestheticization and ritualization. Decontextualization refers to the separation of objects from their original liturgical and devotional context, which can lead to a loss of their original spiritual significance. Aestheticization describes the emphasis on the aesthetic value of objects at the expense of their religious function[7]. Ritualization concerns museums that create their own exhibition rituals, which may replace or alter the original religious significance of the objects[8].

In this article, we will look at issues related both to how museums might convey the sacred significance of medieval art in a secularized context, and the extent to which the museum experience can become a form of pilgrimage or encounter with the sacred. By analyzing these issues, the paper aims to offer insights into how exhibition spaces influence perceptions of the sacredness of medieval art and how museums can balance the preservation of historical and artistic value with the transmission of spiritual meaning, providing contemporary audiences with a relevant and inclusive experience.

Medieval art: a sacred perspective

In order to understand the impact of exhibition spaces on medieval art, it is essential to clarify the initial framework in which it functioned. Medieval art was conceived as a means to reach the sacred, to facilitate the connection between the believer and the divine. Some of the creations had a naturalistic, even theatrical aspect, the aim being to bring people closer to the church[9]. The works are distinguished by their universality, their detachment from the material world and their search for the higher realities of human

[7] Aboudrar, Bruno Nassim, „Le musée et le paradoxe du sacré profane", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 25-28, p. 25.
[8] Rey-Regazzi, Jean, "Ce qui nous lie (au musée)", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 160-164, p. 161.
[9] Norris, Michael, *Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005, p. 107.

existence. For the most part, medieval art is defined as religious and sacred art by its primary function of serving religious worship[10].

Before they were displayed in museums, many medieval works of art were integrated into a complex system of religious meanings and devotional practices[11]. Icons, reliquaries and liturgical objects were not seen as mere decorative objects, but as bearers of divine grace, as means of communication with God and the saints. Icons are representations of divinity and are considered windows to heaven, bridges between the mundane and the sacred. The "*Nomina sacra*", considered the earliest forms of visual expression of Christianity, form the basis of the cult of icons[12]. The attainment of transcendental quality is essential in sacred art, and in ancient times, icon-painters adhered to a strict set of rules, not only in terms of the technical excellence and conceptual depth of their work, but also in relation to their own inner conduct. As "*homo religiosus*"[13], the artist assumed an attitude of deep devotion, considering the act of creation both an artistic expression and an exercise in asceticism.

Byzantine art played a key role in defining medieval aesthetics and spirituality by embellishing churches, transforming them into transcendent spaces designed to inspire piety and facilitate religious experience. Medieval visual representations played a fundamental role in reinforcing and reaffirming sacred beliefs, functioning as a structured mnemonic mechanism. These images ordered and sequenced historical events, regulated the unfolding of the liturgical spectacle and anchored the viewer in a spatio-temporal framework correlated to the rhythms of sacred time[14]. They also made it easier to recall the essential points of Christian doctrine, thus providing an indispensable visual support for internalizing and perpetuating religious principles.

The monumental mosaics and frescoes used to create an atmosphere of heavenly nature, inviting the faithful to contemplate divine beauty. Beyond the purely aesthetic, Byzantine art served as a means of worship and connection with the sacred. Icons, placed in places of honor, were venerated as representations of the divine, and gestures of adoration in front of icons, such as worship and candle lighting, were considered acts of faith. Byzantine art brought the believer closer to the divine, mediating between the material and spiritual worlds.

Iconography is a key element in understanding medieval art, providing a complex visual language through which religious and spiritual

[10] Kessler, Herbert L., "On the State of Medieval Art History", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 1988, pp. 166-187, p. 173.
[11] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
[12] Melniciuc-Puică, Ilie, „Abbreviations and Symbols Founded in Biblical Manuscripts and Christians Icons", *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2010, p. 11.
[13] Eliade, Mircea, *Sacrul și profanul,* Humanitas, București, 1992, p.17.
[14] Kessler, Herbert L., *op. cit*., p. 186.

messages were conveyed. Ottonian miniatures, for example, are recognized for their ability to communicate important ideas[15]. Each image, color and symbol had a precise meaning, rooted in the tradition of the church and sacred scripture. "*Christ Pantocrator*", "*Virgin Mary with Child*", saints and scenes from the Bible were depicted according to strict canons[16], designed to ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the message conveyed. Through iconography, the faithful could better understand religious dogmas, biblical events and the lives of the saints, thus strengthening their faith and closeness to God. Constantine Cavarnos states that Byzantine iconography is a sacred, spiritual art that has seven functions, including perfecting the beauty of a church, instructing in the Orthodox Christian faith and inspiring the saints depicted in icons[17].

Medieval art, especially Byzantine art, is a unique phenomenon in which aesthetics is intertwined with spirituality and religious function transcends mere decoration. Through icons, mosaics and frescoes, Byzantine art not only embellished places of worship, but also facilitated access to the sacred for the faithful, conveying profound religious and spiritual messages. This sacred perspective on medieval art is essential to understanding the impact that modern exhibition spaces have on the public's perception of it.

The impact of musealisation on the sacredness of medieval art

The musealization of medieval art involves a process of relocating sacred objects from their original liturgical space into a secular setting, which brings about a significant change in their perception. Objects originally created for liturgical use - icons, reliquaries, frescoes - had a precise function in religious rituals, not simply as objects of contemplation, but as an active part of the sacred act. Icons were venerated in a context involving prayer, lit candles and collective participation in the liturgical act.

Transferring these objects into the museum space, where they are displayed under glass cases or on walls, transforms them from ritual artifacts into aesthetic objects. As Judith Walker Mann points out, medieval art is inseparable from its spiritual context, and removal from this environment can lead to a loss of its sacred dimension[18]. This alteration alters the perception of the viewer, who no longer interacts with the object through faith, but through a purely aesthetic perspective. Museums tend to privilege aesthetics over the original function of medieval works of art. This transition is marked by a change in the status of the sacred object: from an element of religious cult to an exhibit to be admired from a formal point of view. For example, a Gothic

[15] Diebold, William, "Medievalism", *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 33, Special Issue Medieval Art History Today, 2012, pp. 247-256, p. 253.
[16] Stoleriu, Adrian, *op. cit.,* p. 130.
[17] Cavarnos, Constantine, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină*, Editura Sofia, București, 2005, p. 14.
[18] Walker-Mann, Judith, Medieval Art, *Bulletin (St. Louis Art Museum)*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1992, pp. 1-68, p. 33.

altar, which originally structured the liturgical space of a church, becomes a dislocated sculptural ensemble, and its iconographic details are appreciated for their fine craftsmanship rather than for their theological significance. This aestheticization is visible in the way museums present medieval art, emphasizing authorship, style and material without adequately including the spiritual dimension of the works. Michael Norris points out that many medieval objects are now evaluated in terms of their artistic and historical value, completely ignoring their liturgical significance.

Another consequence of musealization is the trivialization of the spiritual dimension of sacred objects by reproducing them in banal contexts. Icons, for example, are often reproduced on souvenirs, T-shirts or decorative objects, leading to a desacralization of the original image. In this case, the talent and faith of the medieval artist, who created the icon as an act of devotion, become irrelevant in the face of a process of commercial consumption. This trend raises questions about the authenticity of the modern aesthetic experience in relation to medieval art. Is the icon still a window to the divine when it is industrially reproduced on a coffee mug? The decontextualization of medieval artworks transforms them from instruments of religious meditation into mere cultural artifacts, fundamentally altering the purpose for which they were originally created.

The loss of the original context, the aestheticization of the sacred object and the commercialization of religious symbolism lead to a reduction of the sacredness of these artifacts. While museums play an essential role in preserving artistic heritage, they also contribute to redefining the way in which the public relates to medieval objects. A more sensitive approach, including the spiritual dimension of these works, could contribute to a better understanding of their authentic value.

Resacralization strategies in exhibition spaces

There are, however, some ways in which museum institutions can counter the effects of decontextualization and aestheticization on medieval art in order to restore some of the original sacredness of these objects. Although the transfer from the "*locus sacrum*" to the exhibition space inevitably involves a shift in function and perception, certain curatorial and museographic strategies can facilitate a deeper understanding of the sacred dimension of medieval art for contemporary audiences.

A first essential strategy is to reconstruct, as far as possible, the original context of medieval artworks. Museums can try to evoke the complex set of relationships with liturgical space, rituals, beliefs and devotional practices through various means. For example, displaying fragments of ecclesiastical architecture alongside sculptures or murals may give an idea of their original place. In the case of reredoses, mentioning that they were placed above altars and existed in connection with the Eucharistic

celebration and the relics can significantly enrich the visitor's perception. The Wallraf Museum in Cologne is an eloquent example in this respect, with the way in which the polyptychs are displayed, reflecting a sensitivity to the original spatial configuration. By adopting a cross-shaped plan for the medieval painting section and replacing the comfortable pews with church pews, the museum to some extent recreates the ecclesiastical atmosphere, thus facilitating an aesthetic and interpretative experience closer to the original one[19]. This approach suggests to the visitor the primary form of viewing these works in their ecclesiastical context.

Another important strategy aims to highlight the immaterial dimension of medieval sacred art[20]. Sacredness is not only contained in physical objects, but also in the beliefs, symbolic meanings and ritual functions associated with them. Museum institutions can make use of extensive explanatory panels to elucidate the iconographic dimension, the theological underpinnings and liturgical function of the artifacts on display. The detailed exposition of devotional practices, the hagiographies of the saints depicted and the sacred symbolism help to transcend a mere aesthetic perception, facilitating a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimension and sacredness inherent in medieval art. In the context of analyzing the retablature, Fanny Fouché suggests that it is essential to convey the fact that these works were not just paintings, but had a specific purpose and were linked to beliefs and devotional practices of the late Middle Ages[21]. The evocation of the medieval church as a place of hyper-sacralization and as the epicenter of Western Christian society can contribute to an understanding of the original significance of these objects.

Clever use of museography and scenography can also contribute to an attempt at re-sacralization. The museum space itself can be designed to induce an atmosphere of recollection and reverence, similar to that of a sacred place. While the direct equation of the museum with the temple or church is a nuanced and hotly debated issue, certain architectural components, lighting schemes, acoustic characteristics and even the direction of the visitor's path can be deliberately designed to foster a contemplative aesthetic and reflective experience, evoking the atmosphere of sacredness specific to ecclesiastical spaces. The exhibition "*Le sens caché: Exposition de l'art chrétienne au musée*" emphasizes that the museum alters the visual appreciation of the object, bringing it closer to the viewer and emphasizing its formal aspects, often ignoring the theological, liturgical and devotional

[19] Fouché, Fanny, "D'un temple à l'autre, le retable: jaillissement de l'invisible au Moyen Age comme au musée?", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 65-68, p. 67.

[20] Guiragossian, Olivia, "Le sacré exposé: espaces, dispositifs, paroles", *Museology and the Sacred. Materials for a discussion*, Mairesse, François (editor), ICOFOM, Teheran, 2018, 97-101, p.97.

[21] Fouché, Fanny, *op. cit*., p. 65.

connotations[22]. Therefore, a scenography that takes into account the original function of the objects and the way they were perceived in sacred space might be more effective in conveying sacredness. The example of the Wallraf Museum, with its use of the color royal blue and stellar motifs borrowed from the palette and motifs of medieval wall panels, illustrates how visual elements can prepare the visitor for a more sensitive reception of the medieval context[23].

Another strategy could involve the integration of sensory experiences specific to the medieval sacred context, aimed at authentically recreating the religious atmosphere of that period[24]. For example, inserting fragments of Gregorian music or diffusing delicate incense fragrances (with caution and prior information to visitors) would help to create a multi-sensory atmosphere of deep spiritual evocation. In parallel, the use of contemporary technologies, such as augmented or virtual reality, could make it possible to visualize reconstructions of medieval sacred spaces, making it easier to understand how works of art were integrated into the liturgical and ritual complex of the time.

Last but not least, transparency and honesty about the process of decontextualization and potential loss of meaning are crucial. Museums should recognize that transfer into a secularized space inevitably alters the perception and meaning of sacred art. Discussions of the selection process, the history of collections and the impact of musealization can help visitors to understand the complexity of the relationship between object and sacredness in the museum context.

The resacralization of medieval art in museums is not a simple or completely achievable process, given the intrinsically different nature of the original sacred space and the modern exhibition space. However, by adopting museographic and curatorial strategies that emphasize contextual reconstruction, highlighting the immaterial dimension, creating an evocative atmosphere and providing detailed information, museums can facilitate a deeper understanding of the sacredness of medieval art for contemporary audiences, going beyond a mere aesthetic appreciation and inviting reflection on the role these objects played in the spiritual life of their time.

Case studies from the museology of successful recontextualizations

The Cloisters, a branch of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, is one of the most successful examples of museums that exhibit medieval art without decontextualizing it. This is due to a number of factors, including the architecture of the building, the organization of the exhibitions, and the strategy for displaying the artifacts. The museum building was constructed

[22] Roque, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
[23] Fouché, Fanny, *op. cit*., p. 67.
[24] Guiragossian, Olivia, *op. cit*., 98.

using original architectural elements taken from 12th-15th-century European monasteries, including arches, capitals and colonnades[25]. The pieces added not only lend authenticity to the space, but also allow visitors to experience medieval art in a setting that reflects the structures for which it was originally created. The Cloisters not only exhibits liturgical objects, sculptures and manuscripts, but integrates them into reconstructed spaces that restore their original function. Medieval stained-glass windows are not simply displayed on the walls, but placed in Gothic windows[26], allowing natural light to highlight them exactly as they would have been seen in a medieval church. This type of contextualization reduces the impact of disconnecting the art from its original space, providing a museum experience deeply rooted in the medieval spirit. Sculptures and reliefs are also integrated into medieval architectural structures, such as portals and reclaimed colonnades[27]. Rather than being placed on simple pedestals, many of these artifacts are arranged to suggest their original position in a monastery or cathedral. For example, statues of saints are placed in specific niches, while altars and crucifixes are presented in spaces that evoke their liturgical use.

The museum gardens also contribute to this atmosphere. The Cloisters includes several medieval gardens reconstructed on the basis of historical manuscripts, using plants specific to the Middle Ages[28]. These gardens provide an additional sensory dimension, recreating the monastic atmosphere and complementing the visitor experience. Another key element of the museum's presentation of medieval art is the carefully controlled use of light to mimic natural light. This approach creates a solemn atmosphere akin to that of the original places of worship, allowing visitors to perceive the objects on display as closely as possible to the medieval experience.

Another fitting example of a museum is the Musée de Cluny, a conversion of a former abbey built in the 15th century, which was originally the residence of the Abbots of Cluny in Paris[29]. The presence of this authentic architectural setting helps to preserve the medieval atmosphere and place the artifacts in contexts close to the original ones. Visitors not only discover medieval art objects but step into a real medieval space, which contributes to an immersive and authentic experience.

The museum groups its collections in a way that reflects the original use of the objects and captures the atmosphere of the medieval era. For example, the tapestries from the famous "*Lady with the Unicorn*" cycle are

[25] *, "Medieval Monuments at the Cloisters as They Were and as They Are", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1972, pp. 170-175, p. 171.
[26] Barnet, Peter, Wu, Nancy, *The Cloisters: Medieval Art and Architecture*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005, p. 89.
[27] *, "Medieval Monuments at the Cloisters as They Were and as They Are", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1972, 170-175, p. 173.
[28] Barnet, Peter, Wu, Nancy, *op. cit.,* p. 16.
[29] Kessler, Herbert L., *op. cit*.

displayed in a semi-dark room with discreet lighting, evoking the medieval noble spaces where such tapestries were used. This manner of presentation helps both to protect the sensitive material of the tapestries and to recreate the intimacy and refinement of medieval interiors.

The Musée de Cluny also uses modern technologies to re-contextualize medieval objects[30]. Through digital projections and virtual reconstructions, the museum gives visitors the opportunity to see how certain artifacts originally looked and were used in their heyday. One relevant example is the use of augmented reality to recreate the original colors of Gothic sculptures. Over the centuries, many of these sculptures have lost their original polychromy, but with the help of technology, the museum gives visitors a faithful image of what they looked like in the Middle Ages.

Museum Schnütgen in Cologne houses one of the most significant collections of medieval art in Europe and is an outstanding example of a museum institution that succeeds in displaying medieval art without decontextualizing it[31]. Housed in the 12th-century Romanesque-Gothic church of St. Cäcilien, dating from the 12th century, it provides an organic contextualization of the collections. The museum uses display methods that avoid isolating objects from their historical context. For example, religious sculptures are placed on authentic medieval architectural structures to evoke their original position in churches or monasteries. Instead of being placed on simple plinths in a neutral environment, these sculptures are displayed in niches, next to colonnades or on church walls, giving visitors a clearer picture of their original function. Museum Schnütgen avoids the harsh lighting typical of modern museums and uses mainly natural light through Gothic windows[32]. This type of lighting creates plays of shadows and reflections that emphasize the details of the sculptures and objects of worship, bringing the visitor's experience closer to that of a medieval pilgrim in a medieval church. For artifacts that require special protection, discreetly integrated, warm-temperature lighting sources are used to avoid artificial contrast between the objects and their surroundings. This approach maintains the visual coherence of the exhibition and avoids turning the medieval objects into mere aestheticizing exhibits.

Through these rigorous strategies, aimed at both the harmonious integration of historic architecture and the refinement of display methods, the implementation of innovative technologies, the careful management of lighting and the exploitation of authentic heritage elements, The Cloisters, Musée de Cluny and Museum Schnütgen succeed in presenting medieval art

[30] Sortiraparis, Cécile, Sortiraparis, Laurent*, Le Musée de Cluny, le musée du Moyen-Âge de Paris*, *son programme et ses trésors séculaires* 14.01.2025, Sortiraparis, 22.03.2025.
[31] Sternberg, Maximilian, "Modern Stagings of the Medieval at the Schnütgen-Museum in Cologne (1910–1939)", *The Art Bulletin*, 102:1, 79-105, p. 79.
[32] Sternberg, Maximilian, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

in a way that preserves its sacred dimension, almost completely eliminating the risk of decontextualization or, in certain circumstances, achieving an exemplary recontextualization.

Conclusions

Much medieval art was created to serve religious worship, playing an essential role in facilitating the connection between the believer and the divine. By moving it from the liturgical to the exhibition space, its sacred dimension is undergoing a profound reassessment, leading to a change in the way the public perceives and interacts with it.

One of the main effects of this transfer is decontextualization, which deprives the objects of their direct connection with the ritual act and the beliefs that generated them. Sacredness does not reside exclusively in objects, but is the result of a set of practices, beliefs and rituals. By separating artifacts from this framework, they lose their original function and become mere museum exhibits, valued mainly for their aesthetic and historical value. As a consequence, museums tend to promote a formal reading of these works, emphasizing style, technique and materiality at the expense of their spiritual significance.

Another major phenomenon is aestheticization, whereby medieval art is perceived more as an object of artistic contemplation than as an instrument of religious devotion. This change fundamentally influences the experience of the public, which no longer interacts with icons or relics in the same way as it would in a religious context. Aestheticization also translates into a change in the way these artifacts are presented in museums, which frequently adopt neutral scenographies, removing any element that might suggest their original use. At the same time, contemporary secularization is contributing to a diminishing public capacity to understand religious symbolism. The phenomenon of "*illettrisme religieux*" underlines the difficulty for modern visitors to decipher the sacred meanings of medieval art, leading to a superficial interpretation centered on the artistic value of the objects. This amplifies the process of de-sacralization, in which objects gradually lose their religious significance and are reduced to the status of cultural artifacts.

However, the fascination with the sacred remains a persistent element in the museum experience. In spite of secularization, contemporary audiences show a continuing interest in the spiritual dimension of art, seeking a connection with the transcendent. This raises the question of how museums can convey the sacred significance of these artifacts, balancing the preservation of historical and artistic value with the restoration of a form of spiritual experience for visitors. One possible solution mentioned in this article is to implement resacralization strategies aimed at restoring some of the spiritual dimension of medieval art. These include reconstituting the original context of the objects by displaying them in architectural ensembles

similar to those from which they originate. The use of appropriate lighting, scenographic elements inspired by medieval churches, and detailed explanations of the liturgical function of the artifacts can also facilitate a better understanding of their significance. Some museums, such as The Cloisters in New York or the Musée de Cluny in Paris, have successfully implemented such strategies, offering visitors an authentic experience.

Another key aspect is the integration of sensory experiences that can recreate the medieval sacred atmosphere. Playing fragments of Gregorian music, using subtle incense smells and creating the right soundscape can help evoke an atmosphere closer to that of medieval ecclesiastical spaces. New technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, allow visitors to experience the original spaces in which these artifacts were created and used, facilitating a deeper understanding of their original significance. Transparency about the museumization process is crucial. Museums should clearly explain to visitors the impact that display in a secular context has on the perception of sacred art. Information about the history of the objects, how they were used and their theological meanings can help to preserve a link with their original sacredness.

The museumization of medieval art involves a complex transformation of the perception of these artifacts, entailing the risk of losing their sacred significance. Decontextualization, aestheticization and secularization contribute to this mutation, but resacralization strategies can offer solutions to preserve and communicate the spiritual dimension of the works. Through a sensitive museographic approach that takes into account both the artistic value and the religious significance of objects, museums can offer a deeper and more authentic experience, keeping alive the sacred message of these objects in the contemporary world.

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