

EARLY EUROPEAN ART



Unknown artist
French, 12th century
*Bishop Saint, Saint Andrew,
Virgin and Child, Saint John
the Evangelist, Bishop Saint*
(from the church of S. Martin
at Angers)
ca. 1185-1195
Polychrome limestone

The ensemble, with each figure now headless, consists of a seated Virgin and Child attended by four standing figures. Two of the four attendants wear the liturgical vestments of a bishop. Bare feet, nimbuses, and the books they carry identify the other two standing figures as apostles, and these are further characterized by partial inscriptions as Saint Andrew and Saint John the Evangelist. The over-lifesize figures were made for the collegiate church of Saint-Martin

in Angers, France. The statues were designed for a portal that was never built and were subsequently placed in the vaults of the choir and apse, where they remained until 1925. Their location in the vaults ultimately saved them from further disfigurement or total destruction: all other statuary in the church was removed or destroyed when the building was secularized in 1790-91.



Unknown artist
French, 12th century
*Column with capital
depicting the Adoration
of the Magi*
(from the abbey of
S. Martin at Savigny)
ca. 1150-60
Limestone

This magnificent monolithic column and capital is considered by scholars to be a premiere example of Romanesque architectural sculpture from southeastern France. Carved for the Benedictine Monastery of Saint Martin at Savigny, the capital of the column is decorated with a scene of the Adoration of the Magi. The subject is spread over the four faces of the capital, one king on each of three faces and their goal, the enthroned Virgin and Child, on the last. The kings are clearly centered in their respective fields, and they are flanked by hovering angels at each corner.



Unknown artist
French, 13th century
Reliquary chasse with angels
ca. 1220
Champleve enamel, gilded copper, and rock crystal

The demand for enamel vessels in which holy relics could be protected and exhibited was at its peak during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Because the relics stored in these vessels often represented a variety of holy persons and objects, the design of the angel medallions on this example was adopted to suggest the character of the contents without reference to a particular relic. Though the enameling technique of this class of object is usually referred to as Limoges, the best-known center for its production, no angel medallion reliquaries have been preserved in churches in that town, while several still remain in localities near Limoges and particularly in the Corrèze.



Unknown artist
Southern Italian, early
13th century
Eagle
ca. 1220-30
White Italian marble

Marble eagles in Italian medieval sculpture frequently functioned as pulpit or lectern supports, though in that context they were generally carved with extended wings and were rarely free-standing. This remarkable example may instead have been part of a secular architectural complex, or may have been included in a monumental figural group as an attribute of Saint John the Evangelist.



Unknown artist
Southern Italian, near Nola, 10th century
Relief showing a Stag and Unicorn
ca. 950
Marble

This relief from a church in Nola (near Naples) formed part of a transenna, a low wall that demarcated the church's presbytery, an area reserved for the clergy. The motif of opposed animals and the sacred tree is a symbolic reference to the Resurrection. Though pairs of stags and pairs of unicorns are common, this is the only known instance of the one animal opposing the other. Their abstract representation may have been influenced by Byzantine and North African textiles, which were widely available in Southern Italy.



Tino di Camaino
Italian, Siena, ca. 1285-1337
Three Princesses
ca. 1325-35
Marble and mosaic

In 1323 or 1324, King Robert of Anjou summoned Tino di Camaino, then one of Siena's most illustrious artists and the most renowned sculptor in central Italy, to Naples to undertake the design of several monuments for recently deceased relatives of the king. The sculptor spent the rest of his life there employed in carving a number of royal tombs and working as an architect. These three crowned marble figures with mosaic inlay background are probably a fragment from one of the dismantled royal tombs.



Unknown artist
Northern Italian,
16th century
*Angelic
candelabra figures*
ca. 1560
Bronze

Made either in late sixteenth century Venice or in the university town of Padua, these two candelabra figures have so far eluded precise attribution to a specific artist, despite their exceptionally high quality. Their diadems, long curling hair, feminine features, and masculine bodies have led to their identification as angels, although they are wingless, while an alternative identification as allegories of Abundance has been suggested by the cornucopia candleholders they bear. In the latter case they would probably have been cast for private, domestic use, whereas if they were meant to represent angels they would more likely have formed part of the liturgical furnishings of an altar table.

This guide was written by Laurence Kanter, the Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of Early European Art.