

Medieval Art in The Burrell Collection:

Sculpture

- Sculpture is three-dimensional art. It varies from works in low relief (i.e. those which are mostly joined to the background) to high relief (those more detached from background) to those 'in the round' (i.e. which are fully three dimensional and separate entities in their own right).
- The term 'Sculpture' covers many exhibits, from small-scale ivories and bronzes to wood and stone statues which can be life-sized or even larger. Almost all medieval sculpture, of whatever size or material, was 'useful' as well as decorative when it was originally made.



Ivory



Stone



Wood

- Ivory sculptures are generally small scale personal items, such as book covers, mirror backs and miniature devotional pieces. Delicate, and they need to be examined at close quarters in order to appreciate fully. Ivory was rare and exotic, imported. Mostly French-made.



- Bronzes and enamelled items are often liturgical in nature (i.e. used in church services. Generally robust material, but enamel decoration much more fragile (made of glass). Best-quality pieces (such as our Thomas a Becket chasse) came from Limoges, France.



This is not a group

- Nottingham alabasters form distinct group. Some individual panels, but most others would have been incorporated in groups (as display). We have four St John the Baptist heads (none currently on display in BC, but one in St Mungo's) Were painted, some traces still remain. Housed or framed in painted wood surrounds. Some individual figures on larger scale - e.g. our Virgin & Child and The Trinity = more special.



- Wooden sculptures in the collection date from 13th century to 16th century. Wooden sculpture is associated with painting as a medium. Most of ours made in Germany and 'The Low Countries' (i.e. Flanders - now mostly incorporated in Belgium - and the Netherlands). Fewer examples from Spain and Italy. Generally speaking, Northern European countries used oak or walnut, while limewood was used predominantly in Southern part of Germany (which was not unified at the time; made up of separate states).



- Most of our individual pieces from Southern Germany have been detached from large-scale altarpieces typical of the region. Many altarpieces broken up because of the Reformation in 1520s. Most, if not all of these sculptures would originally have been painted. Some are individual figures (saints, angels), others are reliefs depicting groups of figures (from wings of altarpieces, or central images).



Group of five nuns – PLEASE NOTE NEW RESEARCH ON THIS OBJECT

- Stone sculptures generally linked to architecture as a context - some exterior, others interior. Most would have been painted, some would even have artificial 'jewels' fixed to enrich them (e.g. our lie de France Madonna). The exception would be small-scale pieces, such as Rimini Master Pieta (currently at St Mungo's), or half-length Virgin & Child.