The Morgan Explores the Captivating Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern
February 14 through June 14, 2020

Press Preview: February 20, 2020, at 4:30 PM

New York (January 23, 2020) – The Morgan Library & Museum is pleased to present The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern, opening February 14 and running through June 14, 2020. The exhibition celebrates the gift made in 2018 by Joanna S. Rose of The Joanna S. Rose Illuminated Book of Ruth to the Morgan. The accordion-fold vellum manuscript, measuring nine inches tall and an astonishing eighteen feet long, was designed and illuminated by New York artist Barbara Wolff, who worked on the project for two years (2015–17). The Rose Book of Ruth is presented in conversation with twelve manuscripts, drawn from the Morgan’s holdings, that unfold the Christian traditions for illustrating the story of Ruth during the Middle Ages. Through the juxtaposition of the modern manuscript with these ancient works, which date from the twelfth to the fifteenth century and include three leaves from the Morgan’s famed Crusader Bible, the exhibition brings into focus the techniques of medieval illuminators that inspired Wolff, as well as her inventive approach to iconography.
Famine and flight, emigration and immigration, and the concept of foreignness are among the issues touched upon by the anonymous author of the Bible’s book of Ruth, the book’s titular character was a great-grandmother of King David and, in the Christian tradition, an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Most biblical narratives concern kings, priests, and warriors—the lives of men. In the book of Ruth, however, women’s voices speak to us from the world of the early Iron Age in the Middle East. They tell of lives spent in close contact with the natural world, dependent on the gifts of sun, rain, and dew, “each in its season.” In that ancient setting, women sustained the family, the tribe, and the community. The book of Ruth speaks of courage and devotion. Ruth and her daughter-in-law Naomi craft the means of their survival, and their strength helps build the foundation of the House of David. Though each chapter has a distinct character, visual language, and ethical message, together they blend into a pastoral narrative set during the springtime ingathering of the grain.

This exhibition is organized by Roger S. Wieck, the Morgan’s Melvin R. Seiden Curator and Department Head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscript. Wieck says, “I think visitors will be amazed at the inspiration that artists – both medieval and modern – have found in the suspenseful and touching story told in The Book of Ruth.”

**About Barbara Wolff**

New York artist Barbara Wolff, one of today’s foremost illuminators and illustrators, has exhibited at the Society of Illustrators, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Yeshiva University Museum, the Museum of Biblical Art, and the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, and at the Jewish Museum of Prague. She has produced several films on the techniques of manuscript
illuminations: *The Prato Haggadah: Making of a Manuscript* for the Jewish Theological Seminary; *An Illumination in the Rothschild Miscellany* for the Israel Museum; and *Creating the Rose Haggadah: An Illuminated Manuscript for the 21st Century* and *Your People Shall Be My People: Illuminating the Book of Ruth* for the Morgan.

**The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern**
February 14 through June 14, 2020
The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street
New York, NY 10016

For more information about the exhibition, hours, and admission, please visit [www.themorgan.org](http://www.themorgan.org).

**Related Programming**

**FILM**

*Your People Shall Be My People: Illuminating the Book of Ruth*
This documentary tells the story of the biblical character of Ruth by weaving together images of artist Barbara Wolff painting and illuminating the book Rose of Ruth with discussion by experts in the fields of Near Eastern archaeology, history, and biblical exegesis leading to the genealogy of King David. The Hebrew text, fully illuminated, takes its inspiration from biblical responsa, commentary, and folklore. The English texts pen drawings depict objects, plants and animals that the book of Ruth’s early Iron Age people would have known. Both manuscript and film conclude with the final verses of Proverbs (31:10-31, “A Woman of Valor”), an acknowledgement of biblical women celebrated for wisdom and righteousness.

**Tuesday, February 18, 2020, 3 PM**
**Friday, March 27, 2020, 7 PM**
**Tuesday, May 19, 2020, 3 PM**
**Friday, June 5, 2020, 7 PM**

**Tickets:** Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for Morgan Members only. Tickets are available at the Tickets Desk on the day of the screening.

**FAMILY PROGRAM**

*Illuminating a Story: The Book of Ruth*
Inspired by the exhibition *The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern* families will “take a page” from contemporary artist Barbara Wolff and learn how to make pigments. Participants will grind materials such as saffron, insects, and malachite to create vibrant colors, then paint their own image inspired by the manuscripts displayed in the exhibition. The biblical story from the book of Ruth will be discussed, and its enduring values of friendship and family.
Sunday, February 23, 2020, 11 AM–1 PM
Tickets: $20; $15 for members.

LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS

Barbara Wolff and Roger Wieck

The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern is an exhibition that juxtaposes the new with the old. It presents the Joanna S. Rose Illuminated Book of Ruth, designed and illuminated by New York artist Barbara Wolff between 2015 and 2017, alongside twelve medieval manuscripts illustrating the book of Ruth dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Join Roger Wieck, Melvin R. Seiden Curator and Department Head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, and artist and illuminator Barbara Wolff as they discuss both Wolff’s contemporary work and the ancient historic traditions.

Tuesday, March 10, 2020, 6:30 PM
Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members; free for students with a valid ID.

ADULT WORKSHOPS

Illumination Workshop

Explore the exhibition The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern then create your own illuminated letter with Museum Educator and artist Maria Yoon. Participants will use historical artists’ techniques as well as traditional tools and ingredients such as gold leaf, saffron threads, dried insects, and malachite chips.

Friday, March 27, 2020, 6–8 PM
Tickets: $45; $35 for Morgan Members. Limited availability; advance registration required.

Organization and Sponsorship

The Book of Ruth: Medieval to Modern is made possible by Joanna S. Rose, the David Berg Foundation, Joshua W. Sommer, and the David Klein, Jr. Foundation.

The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

About the Morgan Library & Museum

A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor Pierpont Morgan. The Morgan offers visitors close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music, drawings, and works of art comprises a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

The Morgan Library & Museum | 225 Madison Avenue | 212.685.0008 | themorgan.org