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Introduction to Visual Arts

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### Art as a Path to Devotion

Jean Pucelle was a French Gothic artist. His work “The Visitation,” is included in the illuminated manuscript *The Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux* which is a devotional work commissioned by King Charles IX of France for his wife who is named in the title. Pucelle employs a unique and refined visual language which unites the illusion of pictorial depiction with structure of compositional design. The particular page depicts a visit between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth who is the mother of John the Baptist. The pregnant women embrace one another.

This is a ground-breaking work of 14th century art. Pucelle’s pictorial depiction was innovative. Pictorial depiction is the creation of the visual illusion of creating a three dimensional picture on a flat surface. Compositional design is the organization of two dimensional forms on a flat surface. The robes which drape over the women’s arms make compositional forms.

Pucelles' design has the shape of arrows. He visually suggests the illusion of two forms wrapping around each and also pointing toward each other. The depiction of the visitation is an example of the uniting of compositional design and pictorial depiction. Pucelle draws the viewer's spiritual imagination into the painting through the depiction of the space in which the women stand. They are within a curving frame which echoes the forms of their halos. The shape both gives them their own space and forces them toward each other. The women are clearly separated at the top but connected at the bottom of the frame. They are spiritually and

compositionally united with each other. The viewer is changed from a passive observer to a spiritual participant in the scene.

I have seen illuminated manuscripts in museums before, so I was familiar with this type of devotional work. (My family and I were trying to remember where we saw an exhibit of illuminated manuscripts. We think it may have been the Cleveland Museum of Fine Arts.) However, one thing that surprised me was the size of this work. The other illuminated manuscripts I've seen are quite large, maybe the size of a magazine or even larger. This work is only about the size of an iPhone. It was surprising that so much detail could fit in the page of a small prayer book.

In terms of artistry, this is a transitional work combining Gothic Art of northern Europe with perspective used by Italian Renaissance artists. These manuscripts were often personalized and this is no exception. For example, there are images of the queen's great grandfather tending the sick and washing the feet of the poor. An image of the Queen herself is nestled in the letter D. This was designed to make the prayerbook more meaningful to the reader. The Queen was known as a very devout person, just as was her great-grandfather Louis IX of France who was actually made a saint. The inclusion of her picture was meant to suggest that she could follow in the steps of her great-grandfather.

Although I've been to the Met, I've never been to Cloisters. This made me interested in going to see this unique work in person.