

The University of British Columbia
Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory

ARTH 533B.001 Medieval Art Seminar
Term 2 Winter 2008-9
Office Hours: Thurs. 3:40-5 (& by appt.)

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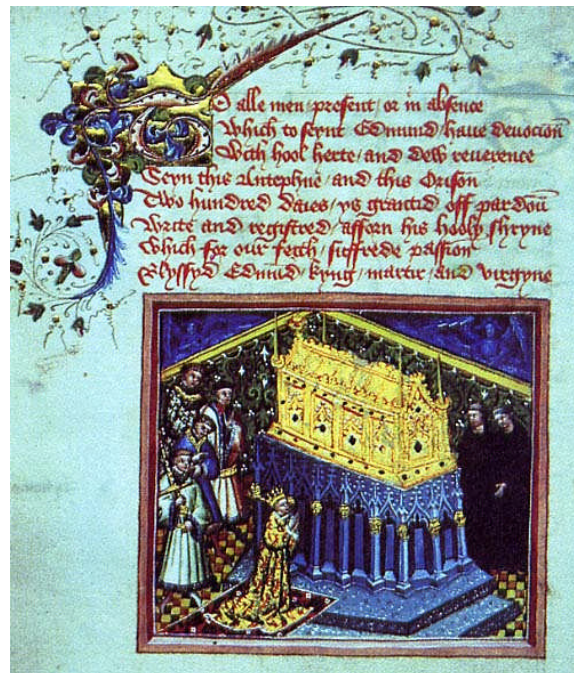
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Student Evaluation:

Participation (General and as discussant) 30%
Paper: Oral Presentation 10% Final Written 60%

The Ineluctable Materiality of Spirituality

Towards a Critical Rethinking of the Spiritual Component in Medieval Art



The aim of this seminar is to rethink the relationship between the material and the spiritual in medieval art in the wake of a renewed theoretical interest in the role of the material in culture and a general critique of modernism's radical separation of the human and non-human along with other dichotomies like materiality vs spirituality; nature vs society (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*). We will see, on the other hand, that the conundrum materiality/spirituality was well understood in the Middle Ages (neo-Platonic thought) and indeed, at times, was a matter of fierce debate (Cistercians & Protestants). At the same time, modern art historians' tendency to focus on spiritual symbolism at the expense of the material objects themselves in their consideration of medieval art may be a product of modernity's desire for clear distinctions rather than a product of the lived relationship to art in the Middle Ages, even when we are speaking of sacred art. Ironically, this goes against a modernist emphasis on pure material and medium in avant-garde art.