

1 *Lion (lecturn support)*,
14th–15th century
Germany, Rhine region
Bronze

Purchase, 1957 (2301.1)

2 **Comb**, ca. late 15th century
France
Boxwood

Purchase, 2002 (11,823.1)

The cultivation of feminine beauty through the use of cosmetics and toilet articles was well established in western Europe by the late medieval period. Recipes for care of the skin, face, hands, and hair were published in special treatises, while ornate toilet accessories were sold in market stalls and by traveling peddlers. The comb, an essential item in the process of personal enhancement, was itself an object of exquisite workmanship.

In addition to the decorative Gothic elements of interlocking circles, quatrefoils, diamonds, and arches, combs were often embellished with inscriptions relating to the themes of beautification and love. Carved on this comb in Old French is the phrase "To serve you." This comb is also fitted with two sliding covers which open to reveal compartments for cosmetics. A similar comb appears in the large tapestry hanging in this gallery: Semiramis, queen of Assyria and Babylon, is depicted combing her hair in front of a mirror.

4 *The Harrowing of Hell*,
15th century
England
Alabaster, traces of polychrome and
gilding

Purchase, Robert Allerton and Prisanlee
Acquisition Funds, and the General
Acquisition Fund, 1985 (5382.1)

Alabaster quarries around Nottingham and
other English towns led to a brisk trade in
carved altarpieces and tomb sculpture. The
subject of this relief is somewhat unusual in
English alabaster carvings. It derives from the
apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus in which

is said to have descended into Limbo during his
stay on earth after the Resurrection to rescue
Old Testament personages. Hell is symbolized
by the wide-open mouth of Leviathan, the great
fish-monster in the Book of Job. The large
figure of Christ dominates the scene at left, as
he reaches to pull Adam out by the arm, while
Eve, her hands held in prayer, stands behind
ready to follow. The alabaster's translucency
and creamy white tones enhance the beauty of
the panel, while traces of paint and gilding hint
at its original colorful brilliance.

5 ***The Crucifixion*** (panel from a diptych), second half of the 14th century
France
Ivory

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Livingston Jenks, 1961
(2887.1)

Ivory has been appreciated as a luxury material ideal for carving since antiquity. It is easily worked with saws, chisels, drills, and rasps, and its close grain lends itself to low relief. During the late medieval and early Renaissance periods, small ivory reliefs with religious subject matter were produced in great numbers as

private devotional diptychs and triptychs. As in this representation of the Crucifixion, they often consisted of architectural frameworks, here a Romanesque-style arcade with rounded arches, carved with dense groupings of figures. Christ appears at center on the cross with figures on either side of him. The Virgin Mary stands below him at left, surrounded by other pious women.

6 *Adoration of the Magi*,
early 16th century
Germany or Holland, upper
Rhine region
Ivory

Purchase, 1951 (1167.1)

Over the millennia artists have relied on a variety of types of ivory, a term that has come to include elephant and walrus tusks as well as hippopotamus teeth and narwhal and rhinoceros horn. The circular shape of this small carving represents the cross-section of the tusk from which the disc was cut. This depiction of the Adoration of the Magi deserves careful attention, as it is filled with charming

headdress, proffered gifts, landscape vegetation, and figural individuality. Joseph watches over the Virgin Mary as she holds the Christ Child in her lap. He receives obeisance from the Magi, who are so keenly depicted as to suggest the three ages of humankind and even racial heritage. The Magus at right is African. Note, too, the tiny angel hovering overhead, just below the upper rim of the ivory disc.

3 Lace Panel, 16th century

Italy

Linen, needlepoint lace, punto in aria,
Reticelli pattern, buttonhole stitch

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1931 (3024)

Needlelace, also known as needlepoint lace, is the art of making lace with a needle and thread. This is a general term referring to an entire body of different types of laces, such as Reticella and Punto in Aria. It is one of the oldest types of lace known. The earliest type of needlelace called Reticella or “little net” or “mesh stitch” appear to have evolved from Venetian openwork embroidery.

Reticella tends to be very geometric in nature and is based on a framework of fabric from which threads have been withdrawn. The empty spaces thus created are filled with threads, often radiating devices worked by means of whipped and buttonhole stitches. Reticella is commonly viewed as the precursor for Punto in Aria or “stitch in the air” which were made independently of any linen as a starting base. Punto in Aria is not bound by geometry. In Punto in Aria lace, “brides” (overcast bars of threads) are used to give substance and stability to the lace. Many of the exquisite ruffs and collars seen in 16th century paintings are Punto in Aria lace.

3 Lace Panel, 16th century

Italy

Linen, needlepoint lace, punto in aria,
Reticelli pattern, buttonhole stitch

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1931 (3025)

Needlelace, also known as needlepoint lace, is the art of making lace with a needle and thread. This is a general term referring to an entire body of different types of laces, such as Reticella and Punto in Aria. It is one of the oldest types of lace known. The earliest type of needlelace called Reticella or “little net” or “mesh stitch” appear to have evolved from Venetian openwork embroidery.

Reticella tends to be very geometric in nature and is based on a framework of fabric from which threads have been withdrawn. The empty spaces thus created are filled with threads, often radiating devices worked by means of whipped and buttonhole stitches. Reticella is commonly viewed as the precursor for Punto in Aria or “stitch in the air” which were made independently of any linen as a starting base. Punto in Aria is not bound by geometry. In Punto in Aria lace, “brides” (overcast bars of threads) are used to give substance and stability to the lace. Many of the exquisite ruffs and collars seen in 16th century paintings are Punto in Aria lace.

7 ***Châsse*** (Reliquary), ca. 1280–1290
Limoges, France
Champlevé (enamel) on gilded copper

Gift in memory of Martha Cooke Steadman
from Judge A. E. Steadman and their sons
John, Richard, and David, 1961 (2832.1)

A choir of angels adorn in *champlevé* this gilded
copper *châsse* or reliquary, a container for the
storage of a sacred relic, contrived here in the
shape of a simple gabled church. One of many
different decorative enamel techniques,
champlevé was popular during the Middle Ages.
In this process, powdered glass was poured
into grooves or compartments recessed on the

surface of a silver, bronze, or copper support.
When heated, the powder fused and bonded to
the metal and was then polished down to its
same level. The coloring of the usually lead-
soda or lead-potash glass enamels created
imagery vibrant with rich color.

