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Ijperlaan, M.

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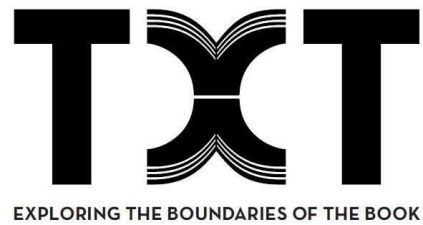
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The Morgan Library and Museum

MARGOT
IJPERLAAN

In New York one can find many special museums and collections, from large and famous like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to smaller, but no less impressive museums. The Morgan Library and Museum is one of the latter. In the centre of New York, the new gallery of the museum connects three houses, the original library of J.P. Morgan (1837-1913) and two exhibition and study rooms.

J.P. Morgan Jr., the son of America's most influential banker Pierpont Morgan, founded the Morgan Library and Museum in 1924. Pierpont Morgan had a great fondness for art; from 1890 till his death in 1913 he spent \$60 million on manuscripts, early printed books, drawings and prints. Although he was not educated in art, he selected the finest works and created an enormous collection. Beaux-Arts architect Charles McKim designed an Italian Renaissance-style palazzo that is a masterpiece itself, with a study room, a library and a rotunda. Construction was completed in 1906.

Eleven years after the death of his father, J.P. Morgan Jr. decided to change the private library into a public institution deciding that the collection was too important to remain private and should serve as a library for research and a gallery of art. Morgan's work was carried on and the collection was expanded through gifts and purchases over the years. Today the collection is vast, consisting of Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books and bindings – among which there are three Gutenberg Bibles and the works of many famous writers, music manuscripts and printed music, ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets, and paintings and art objects.

The dual nature of the institution is reflected in its mission. The museum's focus is to show the collection to a broad public, but it is also open for researchers. The access of the collection is valued as highly important by the institution.

The Rotunda, the original entrance of J.P. Morgan's library, was built in a completely different style than the new

museum entrance. The ceiling paintings depict the major literary epochs from the Morgan collection, and everyone can see that an important library is housed here. The hallway is full of iconic references to the function of the building.

A study is situated in the West Room, which is a place to work and relax. Morgan wanted to be surrounded by his favourite works of art. Many books are placed along the walls in low bookcases and paintings decorate the walls.

The original library is located in the East Room, on the other side of the Rotunda, which is a treat for the eye. In this large room three levels of bookcases flaunt numerous rare printed books. There are so many books in this room, no one, including J.P. Morgan himself, could have read them all. The inlaid walnut bookshelves do justice to the books, as they give the room a noble character. All of the iconographic indications of the Rotunda are confirmed, artworks adorn the walls and the ceilings are illuminated. Any book historian would like to see, touch and browse through the



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books. Unfortunately, only a few books are exposed in showcases, that one of them is a Gutenberg Bible is a great compensation.

The last room of the original library building, the North Room, was originally the librarian's office. Nowadays the earliest works from the collection are shown here; ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

The rooms in the original library form the permanent collection. Collections that give such a complete overview of book history are rare, which shows the museum's uniqueness. The original library gives the idea of a Gesamtkunstwerk. It presents a library not just as a

place where books are stored, but the experience is also accompanied by decoration and other artworks; it is complete in all senses. Four other rooms, in the more modern parts of the museum, serve as exhibition spaces where temporary exhibits are displayed.

The Morgan Library and Museum is a wonderful museum to visit for people who love books, but also for people who like any form of art. The original library building is a masterpiece thanks to its architecture and collection. As a museum guest, you do not necessarily notice the library is also used for research. The facilities for scholars are good; the Morgan has a reading room for scholars

who want to study the collection. The only disappointment is that the extensive museum shop does not have a recent catalogue of the collection in the shop. In this way, the Morgan goes modern: a great website with beautiful sharp photo's of the books and art works serves as their catalogue. For more information, go to <http://www.themorgan.org>.

margotijperlaan@gmail.com

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