

## Experience *The Saint John's Bible* and Ancient Manuscripts at *The Saint John's Bible* Gallery at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library

*The Saint John's Bible* is considered one of the largest and most significant art commissions in the modern world. The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) is a global organization that preserves manuscript cultures across the globe. Learn about these local treasures as you explore the gallery.

### ***The Saint John's Bible* Gallery**

**Location:** Lower Level of Alcuin Library, beyond the wooden gate found in the lower-level lobby.

1. Begin your self-tour by watching the video "In the Beginning" to give yourself a brief background of the project. You may watch the video in the Video Room in the back corner of the gallery, or you may watch it on-line before you arrive at the gallery using the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohAD2mG08j4&feature=related>
2. The Bible Gallery is divided into three parts: The seven tall display cases in the center contain a sample of the original manuscript pages from *The Saint John's Bible*. The table cases around the perimeter display historical manuscripts which give a historical context for the work done in *The Saint John's Bible*. Behind the red wall you will find the actual tools, materials and methods used in making the Bible.
3. After watching the video, go back to the entry door and stand and look at the room as a whole. Think about the following:
  - a. What strikes you most about what you are seeing?
  - b. From a visual perspective, what makes this Bible stand out from others you have seen? Can you think of a theological reason as to why the Bible is so large?
  - c. How does the physical space help you appreciate the art on display?
4. After getting a sense of the whole, start to explore the tall display cases. *The Saint John's Bible* is the first hand-written and illuminated Bible to be commissioned by a Benedictine monastery in over 500 years. Saint John's Abbey and University commissioned it in 1998 and it was completed in 2011. It took 23 artists almost 13 years to make one copy of the Bible and you are looking at some of the original pages. Only 28 pages of the 1120 are on display in the gallery as the rest are kept in the vault and pages rotated for display. As you look at each page, consider the following:
  - a. What strikes you most about each written page and each artwork?
  - b. How do the illuminations welcome you into the passages?
  - c. The Bible was created to be welcoming. Where do you see evidence of welcome and inclusion of others in the pages.
  - d. The illuminations are not meant to be pictures of the stories, they are designed to make you think and question. What questions do you have as you look at each page on display.
  - e. Take a minute and read the art label that is presented at each case. These labels will give you some background, but there is also a question at the bottom of each display. Ponder this question and think about how it relates to you and to the community.

5. After exploring the glass towers, spend some time exploring the table cases around the perimeter of the room. See if you can discover the following:
  - a. How did ancient scribes correct mistakes in manuscripts? How did *The Saint John's Bible* Scribes fix mistakes?
  - b. What ancient process was used to affix the gold to the manuscript pages?
  - c. How did ancient artists let you know where a manuscript was made? How did *The Saint John's Bible* include local references?
6. After exploring the table cases, take a look behind the red wall and look at the tools and materials used in making *The Saint John's Bible*. The artists of the Bible project used these simple items to bring the pages to life. Spend some time reading the text and imagine for a few moments how you would organize a group of 23 artists and support people to work collectively together to create one work of art over a 13 to 15-year period.

## For further thought

*The Saint John's Bible* was created to remind the world that the Bible is communal – it is meant to be shared. The Bible was commissioned by one of the largest monastic communities in the world and it is meant to be an extension of this place and the Benedictine spirit present in all we do.

The Bible was created with the following principles:

Quality  
Longevity  
Forward Thinking  
Welcome

These are qualities we strive to make a reality at Saint John's Abbey and University.

- How does *The Saint John's Bible* bring these four qualities to life?
- What does the commissioning of the Bible tell others about us?
- *The Saint John's Bible* travels around the world and is widely shared through museum exhibitions, programming, fine art reproductions, tours. How does sharing of *The Saint John's Bible* extend the sense of place beyond the campus boundaries.

Complete your visit by watching the following video and think about Donald Jackson's charge to the community.

Amen: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SY0onA4WAb0>

**N.B.** You may take photographs anywhere in the gallery, but please refrain from using flash.  
Thank you.