

Minneapolis Institute of Art

# Martin Luther

## Art and the Reformation

Presented by



# Mia

# Martin Luther

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### An Introduction for Teachers

Give your students an opportunity to see rare works of art—paintings, sculpture, furniture, and metal-work—that tell the story of Martin Luther and his times. “Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation,” presented by Thrivent Financial, features hundreds of artworks and artifacts that have never before been seen outside Germany.

“Martin Luther” marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s presentation of the Ninety-Five Theses, an event that gave rise to religious beliefs now shared by millions of Minnesotans. The unprecedented exhibition teaches about this momentous event and its aftermath through archeological finds from Luther’s home, his personal effects, letters and studies from his hand, and books that he published. Works of art by some of the most heralded artists of the time also tell the story from multiple points of view.

### Schedule a class tour today.

Simply complete the tour request form at <http://new.artsmia.org/visit/plan-your-trip/tours/request-a-tour-online/>

We look forward to seeing you at Mia soon!



Writing set from Luther's House in Wittenberg, excavation at the Luther House in Wittenberg  
© State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt  
Photo: Juraj Lipták

Cover: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Martin Luther* (detail), 1528  
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Organized in cooperation with the Minneapolis Institute of Art; Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt, Wittenberg; Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin; Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha; under the Leadership of the State Museum of Prehistory, Halle (Saale). Its realization has been made possible due to the support of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany within the framework of the Luther Decade.

Federal Foreign Office





Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Martin Luther* (detail), 1528  
© Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

## Luther's Origin and Childhood

Until quite recently little was really known about Martin Luther's family background and childhood. Luther told of a poor childhood home in Mansfeld and described his father as a simple miner. His home, as it was preserved for centuries, did appear humble. Objects recovered through new archeological excavation and research into the site of his home, however, reveal the family was, in fact, very wealthy and lived in an urban complex with extensive living quarters. His father was an affluent mine operator and investor. The many objects excavated in a refuse pit on the site of the family home in 2003 set the stage for an understanding of Luther as an individual. The finds include children's toys and whistles made from goose bone, clay marbles, pilgrimage objects, and an abundance of silver coins.



Hans Plock (attributed), *Formerly golden chasuble with coat of arms of Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg*, c. 1530–35  
© Picture archives of the Combined Cathedral Chapters of Merseburg and Naumburg and the Diocese of Zeitz  
Photo: Thomas Kreil

## Feudal Power and Courtly Art

Meet the power players, secular and religious leaders who clashed during the Reformation. Art played a varied and vital role in the courts of European rulers during Luther's time. Art made excellent diplomatic gifts and met the needs of rulers eager to display their wealth, taste, and patronage. Inevitably, a great deal of art served as propaganda. The rulers of the Electorate of Saxony, which supported Luther against the pope and the Catholic emperor Charles V, employed the Cranach workshop to spread their images as powerful publicity for the Lutheran cause. Portraits in the exhibition introduce viewers to Frederick III, his brother John, and his son John Frederick, all of whom supported Luther. An aristocratic tomb effigy, princely hunting knives, and an emperor's pilgrimage robe expand the story. Paintings of classical subjects illustrate the rediscovery of ancient culture during the Renaissance to round out this introduction to the art and politics of the time.



St. Mary's altar from the eastern apse of Naumburg Cathedral, c. 1510  
© Picture archives of the Combined Cathedral Chapters of Merseburg and Naumburg and the Diocese of Zeitz  
Photo: Matthias Rutkowski

## Pre-Reformation Piety

Context is everything. Martin Luther grew up in surroundings that were largely influenced by religion and religious practices. People around him viewed God as an all-knowing ruler who controlled all aspects of their lives. They undertook activities ranging from prayer and attending services to making financial contributions of all sizes in the hopes of gaining salvation at the end of their lives. This section of the exhibition provides an overview of the types of art commissioned and created in medieval and Renaissance Germany to decorate and support Catholic churches. These artworks include altarpieces, vestments, and gold treasury objects. Among these are images of saints and the Virgin Mary cradling her son's body, typical of the iconic images Luther rejected. He believed images like these encouraged people to worship the objects themselves rather than God.

## Luther as a Monk, Scholar, and Preacher

Martin Luther spent years on the faculty at the University of Wittenburg. It was there he wrote his Ninety-Five Theses against the sale of indulgences, the document that launched the Reformation in 1517.

In 1501 he began his academic studies at Erfurt, where he earned a master of arts, demonstrating proficiency in the seven liberal arts, which included grammar, arithmetic, and astronomy. He entered the University of Wittenberg in 1505 as a student of theology and became a doctor of theology. In 1513 he accepted a position as preacher in the town church of Wittenberg. Scholars believe his day-to-day contact with the ordinary Christians of Wittenberg contributed to his evolution as a reformer. Objects in this section of the exhibition include Luther's handwritten notes on a book by Saint Jerome, scepters from the university, and a pulpit from which he preached shortly before his death.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Law and Grace* (detail), 1529  
© Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

## Luther's Theology

Examples of Reformation art, including a spectacular altarpiece with 157 panel paintings, showcase Luther's efforts to develop art forms that focused on biblical texts rather than on icons of saints. He supported contemplative images and paintings as useful tools for generating faith. Pictures could provide solace, issue warnings, and improve viewers' understanding of the Gospel. Essays and letters by Martin Luther in the exhibition reveal his conception of Christian freedom, views on sacraments, concrete suggestions for reform, and many other radical ideas. Lucas Cranach the Elder's painting *Law and Grace* illustrates Luther's views expressed in his doctrine of justification.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Katharina von Bora*, 1528  
© Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

## Luther in Wittenberg

Wittenberg, a university town and residence of the Saxon electors when Luther studied there, was the birthplace of the Reformation. The former Augustinian convent in Wittenberg was turned over to Luther as his home and workplace. Archeological finds from this site allow a glimpse into the daily life of Luther and his family. Portraits of Luther, his wife, Katharina von Bora, and their close associates, as well as Luther's study furniture and household objects, help viewers imagine this historic setting.

Finds from other nearby sites enable us to better understand the general cultural and historical background of the town and times.



*Demon playing monk bagpipe*, c. 1535, attributed to Erhard Schön  
 © Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

## Polemics and Conflicts

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press with moveable type increased the ability of the general population to participate in and be informed about social and cultural change. Reform was a frequent topic of theological debate. While only educated burghers could read Luther's treatises and participate in debates through written words, others could engage with images distributed through woodcut or copperplate prints. Pictorial propaganda in the form of colorful cartoons, including caricatures, illustrates the multiple perspectives represented in these often troublesome debates. The exhibition addresses critical issues of Luther's anti-Semitism and class warfare.



Johann Jacob Marchand, *Disputation Lectern of the University of Wittenberg*, after 1685  
 © Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

## Luther's Legacy

Countless variations on Lucas Cranach's portraits of Martin Luther continue to keep the reformer's memory alive. Luther's texts, sermons, and songs still inspire the faithful. The exhibition concludes with an array of artworks and objects related to the end of Luther's life, including a deathbed portrait, the original model for his grave, and an assortment of early Luther souvenirs. The baroque debating stand from the University of Wittenberg provides a centerpiece and connects Luther to the tradition of intellectual dispute in search of truth.