

PRESS RELEASE

First Exhibition Marking 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's "Ninety-Five Theses" Presented by Minneapolis Institute of Art

Exhibition Features Newly Excavated Objects Offering New Insights into Luther's Personal Life and Many Works of Art Never-Before-Seen Outside of Germany

Exhibition Launches International Collaboration with Germany's Leading Institutions Preserving Luther's Legacy

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MINNEAPOLIS, MN [February 22, 2016] – This fall, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) will mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's "Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" by presenting the first exhibition in the United States to explore the indelible impact of the Protestant Reformation through major works of art. On view from October 30, 2016 through January 15, 2017, "Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation" will feature paintings, sculptures, gold, textiles, and works on paper—many of which have never before left Germany—as well as Luther's personal possessions and recent archeological finds from his homes to shed new light on the critical religious, cultural and societal changes of this tumultuous and transformative period. The exhibition is the first in a series of international initiatives commemorating this important moment, which will be observed around the world on October 31, 2017.

"Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation" at Mia is organized in partnership with four German institutions—the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle, Luther Memorials Foundation in Saxony-Anhalt, German Historical Museum in Berlin, and Foundation Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha. The Luther House in Wittenberg, Germany is closed in 2016 for major renewals of its permanent exhibition for the Jubilee Year 2017, which has allowed key works to travel to Mia for this first-of-its-kind exhibition.

"We are thrilled to launch the international commemoration of this watershed moment in history with such an extraordinary exhibition," said Kaywin Feldman, the Duncan and Nivin MacMillan Director and

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President of Mia. "Minnesota is home to one of the largest Lutheran populations in the nation, so this story has a special resonance here. We are proud to partner with our peers in Germany, and look forward to engaging our local audiences and visitors from around the world with the art and objects that were at the heart of the Reformation."

"Martin Luther : Art and the Reformation" will place particular emphasis on Luther's support of art as a tool for worship, teaching, and propaganda. Among the works on view will be paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), who was inspired by Luther's preaching to develop didactic paintings that vividly depict the viewer's choice between salvation and damnation. Cranach's narrative paintings illustrate biblical stories in brilliant colors and ravishing—sometimes gory—detail, and his stylized portraits capture the humanist spirit of the age. Additionally, several vandalized objects by other artists will be presented to underscore the intense emotional reaction in the wake of Luther's protest.

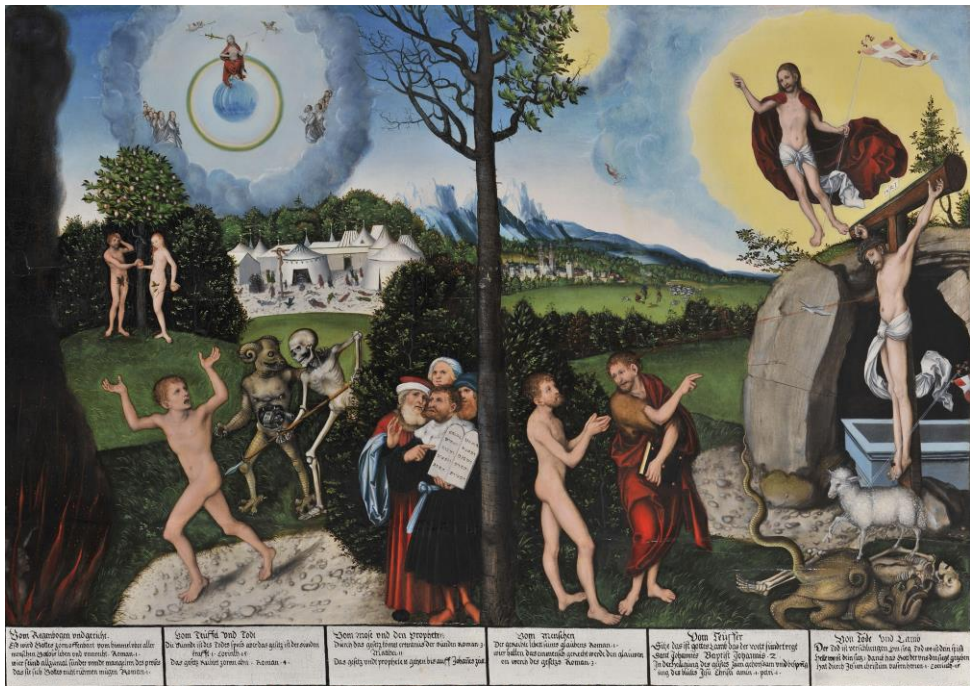
A major portion of the exhibition devoted to Luther's personal life will feature recent archaeological finds from his boyhood homes in the towns of Eisleben and Mansfeld, as well as his house in Wittenberg, the base for his history-making activities. Excavations, undertaken in 2004 and 2005, uncovered household goods that reveal new information about Luther and his family. A selection of those objects will be displayed for the first time in the United States and offer new insights into Luther's daily life, especially his childhood.

"The objects in this exhibition have strong visual and emotional presence. Not only do they tell the fascinating story of the man and his impact on religion and politics, but they also continue to reverberate today," said Tom Rassieur, Mia's John E. Andrus III Curator of Prints. "With the incredibly generous support of our German colleagues, we are excited to be able to share spectacular works of art and new discoveries with the public, and to vividly bring Luther's world to life for contemporary audiences."

Exhibition Themes and Highlights

"Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation" will be organized chronologically and comprise eight primary sections:

- **"Boyhood,"** in which the archeological findings at Luther's childhood homes will be displayed;
- **"Secular Power,"** which features rare paintings, prints, sculpture depicting the rulers and courtly life of the era, as well as opulent status symbols belonging to the most powerful men of the age;
- **"Pre-Reformation Piety,"** which presents paintings, carvings, goldsmith's work, and vestments associated with late medieval and early renaissance Catholic practice;
- **"Luther as Monk, Scholar, and Preacher"** includes the notorious indulgence chest of Wittenburg, a 1517 printed copy of the "Ninety-Five Theses," and the final pulpit from which Luther preached—newly-restored for the exhibition;
- **"Luther's Theology"** features Lucas Cranach's *Law and Grace*, the 157-panel Gotha Altar, and some of Luther's own hand-written notes for his translation of the Bible;
- **"Luther's House as the hub of the Reformation,"** featuring the furniture from his studio, his personal possessions, portraits of Luther, his wife Katarina von Bora, and their associates, as well as additional archeological finds from Luther's home—from jewelry and pen knives to tiles and glass—that embody his daily life and international status;
- **"Polemics and Conflicts"** underscores the turbulence of the era through vandalized works of art, satirical woodcuts, weaponry and war trophies; and
- **"The Legend,"** which highlights the establishment of Luther's posthumous reputation through memorial objects such as the model for his grave marker, the debating stand of the University of Wittenburg, and relics that gave his followers tangible bonds to their spiritual leader.



Additional highlights from the exhibition include:

- **Sixteen paintings from Lucas Cranach the Elder's studio, two-thirds of which are autographed, including *Martin Luther* (c. 1541), *The Death of Holophernes* (1531), and *Law and Grace* (1529),** one of the most influential allegories of the Reformation, which underscores Luther's belief in faith as the path to salvation. Several of these works also showcase a shift from the lifelike compositions of the Renaissance to more stylized figural representations, solidifying Luther's use of art as a tool for communicating to a broader public.
- ***Old and New Testament, the so-called Ortenburg Bible* (1535),** a hand-colored copy of Luther's complete translation of the Bible into German.
- **Luther's studio furniture** and other personal effects, including his ornate folding travel spoon and his beer stein.
- **Rarely seen 16th-century editions of the Bible** in contemporary German vernacular, as well as a selection of 16th-century publications that demonstrate Luther's intolerance of corruption and his concern for women.
- **The Altar of the Virgin Mary from Naumburg Cathedral,** a carved and polychromed altar produced around 1500.
- **The Heiltumsbuch of Friedrich the Wise,** the first illustrated manuscript ever printed.
- **Pope Leo X's Bull of Excommunication** against Luther, in three early editions.
- Recently discovered remains of an alchemist's laboratory.

Programming and Catalogue

"Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation" will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, as well as a new book of essays, which will serve as a fundamental work resource in Luther studies for the next decade. In the book of essays, forty European and American authors tackle subjects that set the stage for Luther's activities. They closely examine the various phases of his life, his theology and his translation of the Bible, as well as his intellectual, spiritual, and economic environment; the Reformation as a media revolution; his relationship with Jews and Muslims; reformation art and architecture, Lutheran memorial culture, Lutheranism in America, Martin Luther and Martin Luther King, in addition to other topics. Both volumes will appear in English and German.

Programming related to the exhibition will include a lecture series featuring Professor Harald Meller, Director of the State Museum of Pre-History, Halle, who conceived of the exhibition; Professor Christiane Andersson, Bucknell University, an expert on Reformation art and censorship; and, Tom Rassieur, Mia's curator collaborating on the exhibition. Mia will engage youth groups through programs on protest art. Additional programming details will be announced in the coming months.

Support

"Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation" has been made possible by the support of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany within the framework of the Luther Decade and is presented by Thrivent Financial. Lead sponsors for this exhibition are John and Nancy Lindahl.

About Martin Luther

When Martin Luther (1483-1546) posted his "Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, he cracked the foundations of papal authority and set in motion a revolution that would reshape Western civilization. Luther's story is intimately connected to the collapse of medieval society and the birth of the modern age—by translating the Bible into contemporary German vernacular and disseminating his teachings through the newly invented printing press, he not only eroded Catholic authority, but also epitomized how the right tools, and strategic use of technology, could spur near-immediate and irreversible change.

Luther was born to a mining family in Germany in 1483. At age seven, he enrolled in school and became an avid student of grammar, rhetoric and logic, eventually entering the University of Erfurt to earn a Master of Arts degree in the field. Although he initially intended to practice law, Luther became increasingly interested in theology, philosophy and scripture as a source for assurances about life. In 1507, he was ordained to the priesthood, and later awarded his Doctor of Theology from the University of Wittenberg, at which he spent the remainder of his career as a professor of theology.

It was shortly after entering the monastery that Luther began to doubt that the Church could offer salvation. A visit to Rome in 1511 solidified this view as he witnessed rampant corruption, and was particularly outraged by the issue of "indulgences," or certificates that could be purchased to gain forgiveness of sins and freedom from purgatory. On October 31, 1517, Luther decided to publish his opinions on the matter of indulgences—and the conclusion that faith, not the Church, would guarantee salvation—by posting the "Ninety-Five Theses" to the door of the Castle Church. These were then taken to the university printing press and produced in Latin and German, and within four weeks had spread far beyond Germany—ultimately giving rise to what would become the Protestant tradition.



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About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 89,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. General admission for “Martin Luther Art of the Reformation” is \$20.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday 10am–5pm

Thursday, Friday 10am–9pm

Sunday 11am–5pm

Monday Closed

For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org

Image credits:

Page one: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Martin Luther*, 1528, ©Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Death of Holophernes*, 1531, ©Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Erhard Schon (attributed), *Demon Playing Monk Bagpipe*, c. 1535, ©Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Page three: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Damnation and Salvation*, 1529. ©Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Page five: St. Mary's altar from the eastern apse of Naumburg Cathedral © Picture archives of the Combined Cathedral Chapters of Merseburg and Naumburg and the Diocese of Zeitz. Photo: Matthias Rutkows

Faience bowl from Venice, 1st half of 16th Century. Excavation at the Luther House IWittenberg © State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony -Anhalt

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