

Artistic activity around 1400

This wing of the museum displays works illustrating the art of the 15th century, most of which are characteristic of the geographical area extending on either side of the River Rhine from Basel to Strasbourg. This region, which was under the political authority of the Holy Roman Empire and the spiritual authority of the dioceses of Basel in the south and Strasbourg in the north, provided a varied environment for artistic activity. Churchmen and members of the bourgeoisie living in the heart of the free cities (Strasbourg, Basel) or the ten cities and towns that made up the *Décapole* (Colmar, Mulhouse, Sélestat, Obernai...), as well as local lords, commissioned the construction of churches and convents, châteaux and houses, which they unfailingly decorated with paintings, sculptures and decorative works.

The “International Gothic”

Artistic activity around 1400 was typified in all domains by harmonious forms with a preference for curves, whilst the refined gestures, the sweetness of the expressions and the taste for detail all served the purposes of narrative. Art historians have described this style as the “International Gothic”, in order to emphasise the diverse origins of works sharing the same characteristics, which often complicates the task of attributing a piece to a given centre. Fortunately, most of the museum’s paintings, sculptures and decorative works, which joined the collections when they were confiscated during the French Revolution, are of local origin and mainly reflect the art produced in Strasbourg or Colmar.

The Crucifixion with the Dominican Friar was in the collegiate church of St Martin of Colmar in the late 18th century.



Attributed to Hermann Schadeberg, *The Crucifixion with a Dominican Friar*, c. 1410–1415, oil on wood panel (pine)

The taste for narrative inspired the artist to illustrate the scene in great detail. Flanking the dying figure of Christ, whose soul in the form of a little silhouette is about to be welcomed by God, we see the two thieves. Life is leaving their bodies, and whilst the soul of the impenitent thief flees from a devil, the soul of the penitent thief is waiting to be led away by an angel. The gold and blue background is adorned with numerous angels collecting Christ’s blood. To ensure that Jesus is dead, Longinus has just pierced his right side with his lance, whilst Stephaton raises the sponge soaked in vinegar to his lips. Beneath the Cross, the lioness and her cubs symbolise the mystery of Christ’s Resurrection. According to Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, the lioness gave birth to still-born cubs that she revived on the third day with her breath or with a roar. The Crucifixion is flanked by the group of women around the Virgin to one side, and the group of men to the other. The composition, which is close to illuminated manuscripts in its desire to convey a narrative and its taste for detail, is typical of the early 15th century, as are the little scenes of the *Life of Christ*.



Upper Rhine (Colmar ?), *Life of Christ*, 1420, oil on wood panel

The delicacy of the gestures, for example the hands of the holy women supporting the Virgin or the open hands of St John, corresponds to the delicate hand holding the phylactery in the sandstone figure of a *Prophet*, or the tender gesture that unites the Virgin and her son in the ivory work from the Middle Rhine.



Upper Rhine (Colmar?), *Prophet*, c. 1410 – 1420, Vosges sandstone



Middle Rhine, Master of the "Kremsmünster Diptych" workshop, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1400, ivory with traces of polychrome and gilding

Ignoring the texture of the fabrics, the drapery curls and fall in sinuous scrolls or forms deep folds that break in a "V" shape.

The *Crucifixion with a Dominican Friar* remained anonymous for many decades, but it has now been possible to attribute the work to a Strasbourg artist, Hermann Schadeberg, thanks to its formal and stylistic similarities with stained glass designs linked to the artist by documents.