

Ottawa Has Middle Age Spread

Canada, which missed the Middle Ages, borrowed some of its best results this spring. Arts and The Courts, L'Art et La Cour — France and England from 1259 to 1328 — showed at Ottawa's National Gallery from April to July. The pieces came from all over, Amiens to Worcester. The exhibit arose from a desire to explore the past of Canada's two founding cultures, English and French. The period chosen was one when the two nations were finding their own identities but when they shared cultural patterns and exchanged cultural products. Professor Peter Brieger, of the University of Toronto and Professor Philippe Verdier, of the University of Montreal, put it all together. It involved an almost unprecedented achievement in systematic borrowing from museums, churches, and libraries throughout Europe and America, particularly from Great Britain and France.

The art of the Middle Ages focused, as did its people, on the religious past and life after death.

Reliquary Crown from the Abbey of the Paraclet, Paris or Northern France, early 14th century.

There are rich, everlasting colors, intricate design and homey details: illuminated manuscripts with book covers of gold, precious stones, cameos and pearls; statues from the churches — The Virgin and Child, with a hundred human faces, all real, Christ in alabaster being arrested by a half dozen soldiers, one with a sword, all with worried expressions. The art was in the tools of ceremony — the cantors' staves, the relics, the bishops' crosiers, the Chrismatories, chalices and ewers, caskets, patens and plates. There was occasionally a more secular treasure, a belt for a lady's dress in silk, silver and translucent enamels, a crown for a king, chessmen in ivory. There was humor and great sophistication of technique. The exhibit closed July 2, after being viewed by some 129,000 people. The treasures, carefully packed and escorted, are being returned to their permanent homes.

