The Lives of Things: The Brummer Apostles at the Nasher Museum of Art

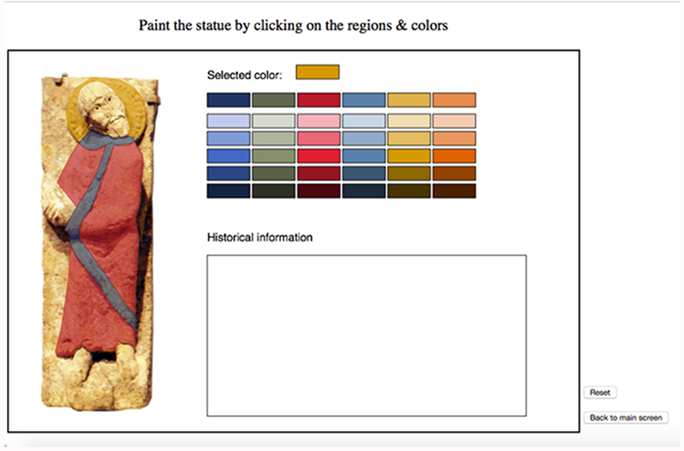
Background: These four figures, which date from the 12th century, are part of a larger composition that once decorated the façade of a medieval church in southern France. Traces of paint indicate that these apostle figures were once painted. Our team has created an interactive tool to allow the public to restore medieval pigment to these figures.

The Apostles as they are currently installed at the Nasher Museum of Art

Objectives:

- To understand the role of polychromy in medieval religious sculpture
- To gather accurate information about medieval pigments, patterns, and garments
- To create an interactive display for the museum setting to communicate information about the apostles' material history and polychromy that is not apparent in their current form

Design: We developed an interactive application for use on a tablet interface. Our goal is to engage the public in restoring the color of the Nasher Apostles. The app allows museum visitors to paint with light by selecting areas of stonework and applying color. The selected colors are projected onto the statues.



Top: An apostle at our Nasher demo "painted" with light
Bottom: A demo version of the coloring interface

Exploring Medieval Polychromy through Interactive Display

Medieval polychromy: painted stonework at the Church of Saint Nectaire, France

Polychromy in Medieval Sculpture: Most medieval sculpture was painted, transforming its appearance with lively and engaging surfaces. Medieval pigments were made from metals (gold and copper), stone (lapis lazuli for vibrant blue) and plants. The apostles' garments likely had borders and linings of different colors and possibly patterns to represent woven texties.

Top: ultramarine pigment from Lapis Lazuli

Bottom: Verdigris pigment from copper acetate

Material History: This project explores the material history of the apostle sculptures and communicates that history to museum visitors. It is built on research not only about medieval pigments and sculpture, but also about textiles and garments. Close attention to the stonework gave us important clues about the layering of garments and folds in their fabric as they were rendered by medieval stonemasons.

Prof. Janet Snyder of WVU, an expert on medieval sculpture and textiles advised our team on the historical accuracy of pigments and patterns for the apostles' garments

Amanda Lazarus, Caroline Bruzelius, Mark Olson, Jordan Hashemi, Mariano Tepper, and Alexandra Dodson at our Nasher demo.

Project Team: Alexandra Dodson, Jordan Hashemi, Amanda Lazarus, Max Symuleski
Supervisors: Caroline Bruzelius, Mark Olson, Guillermo Sapiro, Mariano Tepper
Duke Art, Art History and Visual Studies & Electrical and Computer Engineering

Duke University | Bass Connections | iiD | Wired! digital art history & visual culture