

# *Saint Jerome*

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Under the simple title **Saint Jerome**, visitors will discover an exhibition, combining ancient works dating from the 16th century with contemporary works, which has been made possible by private collectors showing a part of their collection: a book from one of them and three oil paintings from the other. Words and images combined.

The book, presented centrally, was published in 1516 by Johann Froben in Basel. This extremely rare tome contains part of the writings of Saint Jerome and erudite annotations written by Erasmus. Written in Latin, with excerpts translated into Greek, the texts are compiled, annotated and indexed by Erasmus and reflect the theological and moral convictions of Saint Jerome.

The three panel paintings representing Saint Jerome are placed in a triangular way that does not allow them all to be seen from a single viewpoint. This will encourage visitors to look closely at the works and their specific characteristics.

Considering the history of painting in the last seven centuries, one can see that the representation of this Saint, who was born in 347 and died in 420, is one of the most frequently occurring. A Father of the Church, Saint Jerome occupies a prominent place in the history of the Christian religion in his capacity as translator of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin; he produced the *Vulgate* (from the Latin *Vulgata* meaning "made accessible"), which was the official Bible translation still used by the Church in the twentieth century. With a typical iconography, Saint Jerome was painted by all the great Masters, from Van Eyck to Rubens, from Da Vinci to Caravaggio, from Dürer to Cranach, from El Greco to Zurbaran, ... he is mainly represented as a penitent, but famous works also show him in his study reading, studying or writing. The story goes that he left Rome to get away from the world of men, and abandoned everything to live as a hermit before travelling to end his life in Bethlehem. The three tableaux presented here show him as a hermit with a recognizable iconography: the saint is half-naked, kneeling, facing a crucifix, holding a stone in his hand as a sign of mortification, accompanied by a benevolent lion, the cardinal's cassock and biretta thrown to the ground. The relationship with time is clear, through the recurring presence of a human skull or an hourglass, and the reference to Jerome's intellectual activity is visualized by the illuminated book facing him in most cases. Artists have generally used the landscape metaphorically and set Jerome in a wild natural setting, while painting a horizon with towns and villages, ports and ships at their moorings or setting sail.

The purpose of art history is to "read" images and understand and explain them. Many elements emphasize the solitude of the saint. The motivations for his spiritual withdrawal from the world draw on a wish to be closer to the divine, and a willingness to renounce the vicissitudes of a world of abundance or the temptations of everyday life. Losing oneself in order to find oneself.

The exhibition introduces three avenues for reflection: on the one hand, Jerome as an intellectual, as the patron saint of translators and librarians; on the other hand, Jerome as a metaphor for the artist who, paradoxically, withdraws from the world in order to think more clearly, and finally an avenue dealing with the components of the iconography of the saint.