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Mobile Furniture
A Study on Foldable Plates in the Late Middle Ages

17:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 25, 2015
CEU–Faculty Tower #409
Budapest, V. Nádor u. 9.

Reception to follow!

It is only in recent years that scholars began to study a type of medieval art sharing one essential material feature: the images are painted on movable surfaces. The transformation brought about by the opening and closing of painted surfaces, for example layered or folding images, as well as the new skills and knowledge necessitated by this format, are typically the key aspects of analysis. These studies mainly focus on the most popular formats of images in the medieval and early modern period, such as pages, diptychs and triptychs.

Pavla Ralcheva introduces an entirely new group of objects that have never been analyzed as folding units, panels that probably functioned as lids and bear painted images on both sides. These objects have been systematically ignored by art historians either because of their function as a piece of furniture or the lower quality of execution traditionally associated with them. Ralcheva suggests that upon closer observation, a number of self-reflexive constellations “un-fold” before the eyes of the spectator effectively emphasizing their function as mobile plates. The main focus of the presentation is a pictorial cycle depicting the Legend of St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne.

Pavla Ralcheva is a PhD Student of Art History at the University of Cologne in Germany. Her main field of interest is the coherence of material and functional qualities of pictorial objects from the late Middle Ages. Her first study of this kind was dedicated to the so-called Palanter Altar, an ensemble of plates and a wooden relief, parts of which are now scattered across various museum collections throughout Germany. Ralcheva argues that the objects are independent units and that their attribution to the same context of creation is a construct of art historians.

Pavla Ralcheva is also the author of a series of audio descriptions for “Art Blind,” an exhibition of blind and visually impaired artists, which took place between 15 May and 16 June 2013 in Cologne, Germany.