

ALLEGORICAL UNICORN HUNT
LETTERPRESS PRINT by DANIEL MITSUI



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This print is formatted as a verso page in an illuminated manuscript. The central image depicts a unicorn hunt as an allegory of the Incarnation of Christ.

The unicorn is a long-established Christological symbol. The second century *Physiologus*, precursor to the medieval bestiaries, described the unicorn as

a small animal, but exceeding strong and fleet, with a single horn in the centre of its forehead. The only means of capturing it is by stratagem, namely, by decking a chaste virgin with beautiful ornaments and seating her in a solitary place in the forest frequented by the unicorn, which no sooner perceives her than it runs to her and, laying its head gently in her lap, falls asleep. Then the hunters come and take it captive to the king's palace and receive for it much treasure.

The chaste virgin who captures the unicorn of course represents the Blessed Virgin Mary. Late medieval artists combined the iconography of the Annunciation with the imagery of the unicorn hunt, representing the Archangel Gabriel as the hunter. The most elaborate of their compositions included hunting dogs representing mercy, truth, justice and peace; Old Testament prefigurements of the Annunciation; and the Marian titles from the Canticle of Canticles.

Here, I included the Enclosed Garden, the Closed Door, the Tower of Ivory and the Tower of David. Specific works of art that provided inspiration for the figures are a panel painting from the circle of Martin Schongauer and the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry.

The background sky has a pattern of orthogonal letters spelling the words *AVE MARIA*. The ornamental border surrounding the central image contains branches of the plants that yield coffee, tea, cocoa and vanilla.

Medium: Letterpress print, based on ink drawings
Press: Heidelberg cylinder (Rohner Letterpress, Chicago, IL)
Ink: 1920 bond black (Graphic Chemical & Ink, Villa Park, IL)
Paper: Cotton wove (Reich Savoy)
Edges: Cut
Edition: Open, approximately 200
Dimensions: 7" × 10"
Year: 2016

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