

6-25-2018

## Black Madonnas: Intriguing and Ancient

University of Dayton. Marian Library

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University of Dayton. Marian Library, "Black Madonnas: Intriguing and Ancient" (2018). *Marian Library Exhibit Summaries*. 142.

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MONDAY JUNE 18, 2018

## **Intriguing and Ancient: A Photographic Exhibit of Black Madonnas**

<https://udayton.edu/blogs/marianlibrary/2018-06-18-exhibit-black-madonnas.php>

By Maureen Schlangen, E-scholarship and communications manager

In an exhibit opening June 25 in the Marian Library, religious architecture photographers Dennis Aubrey and PJ McKey of Sugar Grove, Ohio, explore the mysterious origin and intriguing significance of Black Madonnas in French shrines.

The exhibit, “Black Madonnas — Intriguing and Ancient,” features 24 photographs of mostly enthroned Madonnas, also called “Throne of Wisdom” sculptures, many of which are considered Black Madonnas. Known as *vierges noires* in French, Black Madonnas depict the Virgin Mary seated with the Christ child on her lap. Though most prevalent in France, they also appear in Spain, Poland, Switzerland and other countries.

The moniker is not a racial one.

“Often they are painted black,” Aubrey wrote in a [2015 blog](#). “Often they are a wood, like pear, that blackens with age, and sometimes they are blackened by the accumulation of soot and smoke from the candles that burn perpetually in their honor.”

Other art historians [offer biblical and cultural explanations](#), said Michael Duricy, coordinator of academic programs at the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton.

One theory, Duricy said, is that the images were darkened to illustrate a text from the Song of Songs: “I am black but beautiful” [*Negra sum sed formosa*]. Many of the sculptures date from the Crusades, when Bernard of Clairvaux wrote commentaries on the Canticles, comparing the soul to the bride. He was also known to have visited several shrines of the Black Madonna. In the Gothic period, texts explicitly interpreted the bride in Canticles as referring to Mary. Once this artistic precedent was set, subsequent Black Madonnas may have been more the result of artistic convention than of theological motivation.

Along with this exhibit, “The Prints of Benjamin Miller” will be on display through July 27.

Though the photography in the Black Madonnas exhibit is on loan, the Marian Library has several Black Madonna images and statues in its collection, as well as some jewelry. Visitors are welcome to view the items with the assistance of Marian Library staff.

For more information, visit [udayton.edu/marianlibrary](http://udayton.edu/marianlibrary)

#### HOW TO GO:

Black Madonnas — Intriguing and Ancient

June 25–July 27, 2018

Marian Library Gallery, seventh floor of Roesch Library

Open 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Monday–Friday

Admission and parking are free; visitor parking passes can be obtained at the [visitor parking information center](#).

For special arrangements, please call 937-229-4214.