

Press Release

PRAYMOBIL. Medieval Art in Motion

November 29, 2025 – March 15, 2026

Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, Germany

www.suermondt-ludwig-museum.de

Summary

The Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum in Aachen presents the world's first major exhibition dedicated to movable sculptures from the Middle Ages. PRAYMOBIL. Medieval Art in Motion explores how medieval artists brought sacred figures to life through ingenious mechanisms — long before robotics or animation existed. From rolling Palm Donkeys to jointed crucifixes and “birthing” Madonnas, these remarkable works reveal a forgotten chapter of European art and faith.

A World Premiere: When Medieval Art Came to Life

What rolls, what turns — and why does blood flow from Christ's side? With PRAYMOBIL. Medieval Art in Motion, the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum presents for the first time a comprehensive exploration of medieval sculpture in motion. These extraordinary objects were used in religious plays, processions, and devotional practices to create the illusion of living, breathing sacred figures.

Whether Christ on a movable donkey, a crucifix whose arms could be raised, or a Christ Child emerging from the Virgin's body — these artifacts once astonished audiences across Europe. They combined craftsmanship, faith, and theatrical ingenuity to evoke awe, emotion, and presence.

Curated by **Michael Rief** (Deputy Director and Head of Collections), with **Dr. Dagmar Preising** and **Maria Geuchen**, the exhibition brings together around **80 rare objects** from **eight countries**, including a long-distance loan from **Budapest**.

“We wanted to show that these figures were much more than curiosities,” says Rief. “They carried an emotional and spiritual force that deeply moved medieval audiences — and we are eager to see how they speak to people today.”

Art, Technology, and Illusion

From a technical perspective, these works reveal the remarkable inventiveness of medieval workshops. Pulleys, hinges, and string mechanisms were cleverly designed — many still function today.

Yet the exhibition also uncovers the blurred lines between faith and illusion: some “miracles” were deliberately staged, as weeping or bleeding statues could attract pilgrims — and significant donations.

“The ingenuity of these mechanisms feels surprisingly modern,” notes Rief. “When we marvel today at animatronic figures or immersive art installations, we react just as people did centuries ago.”

Beyond Treasures and Thrones

Unlike traditional displays of medieval splendor, PRAYMOBIL focuses on works from everyday devotion — pieces that moved hearts rather than adorned altars.

Museum Director Till-Holger Borchert explains the exhibition’s title:

“PRAYMOBIL plays with the dual meaning of pray and mobile. It invites a fresh perspective — these figures were not static images, but active participants in a sacred performance.”

The exhibition also connects the past with the present, tracing traditions that continue today — such as Aachen’s ‘Streuengelchen’ festival, where a movable angel figure showers sweets on the crowd.

For All Audiences

Designed for a broad public, PRAYMOBIL appeals not only to specialists but also to families, students, and first-time museum visitors. With its tactile, accessible approach, the show offers new ways to experience medieval art — across generations, backgrounds, and beliefs.

At the same time, new research and rarely exhibited works make it an important event for scholars and professionals in the field.

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Accompanying Program and Support

A varied public program of guided tours, workshops, lectures, and performances will accompany the exhibition.

PRAYMOBIL is supported by:

Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation, Arts Foundation of North Rhine-Westphalia (Kunststiftung NRW), Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Renate König Foundation, Sparkassen-Kulturstiftung Rheinland, Youth and Cultural Foundation of Sparkasse Aachen, Sparkasse Aachen, and Aachen Museum Association (Museumsverein Aachen e.V.).

Key Dates

- Press conference & preview: Thursday, 27 November 2025, 12:30 p.m.
- Official opening: Friday, 28 November 2025, 6:00 p.m. – Church of St. Adalbert
- From 7:00 p.m.: Exhibition viewing at the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
- Program overview: www.heinekomm.de/Presse

Press Contact

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