

# Hunterian Art Gallery

## Press Release

### Breaking the Renaissance Code: Emblems and Emblem Books

25 June - 4 October 2011

Admission free

The University of Glasgow is home to an unrivalled collection of emblem books. Bequeathed to the University in 1956 by Sir William Stirling Maxwell, the collection is the best in the world. Today it is housed in the University Library Special Collections department.

'Breaking the Renaissance Code: Emblems and Emblem Books' is a focus space exhibition in the University's Hunterian Art Gallery which offers the chance to see some of these rare and often beautiful books.

Developed in the 16th century, emblem books were extremely fashionable and had enormous influence on literature and the visual arts. Examples of their impact can still be seen today. They featured symbolic pictures and text which expressed a hidden moral, political or religious message which was then decoded by the reader. Over the next 200 years, several thousand were issued from printing presses across Europe.

Codes, emblem books and emblematic thinking have featured prominently in popular fiction and films, most famously in Dan Brown's 'Da Vinci Code'. In Roman Polanski's 1999 film 'The Ninth Gate', the Devil makes himself known through a series of prints that mix enigmatic images with one-line mottoes. 'Breaking the Renaissance Code' looks at the story of this code, of those who created it, those who tried to crack it in Victorian times, and those who have resuscitated it in the 21st century.

The exhibition displays some precious examples from the Stirling Maxwell collection alongside emblematic prints, drawings and paintings from The Hunterian and some contemporary examples.

'Breaking the Renaissance Code: Emblems and Emblem Books' coincides with the Ninth International Emblem Conference which takes place at the University from 27 June - 1 July 2011.

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Page from François du Moulin's, *Emblesmes Sacrez*. French Emblem book, c1520 with 25 watercolour emblematic pictures. © Glasgow University Library Special Collections.



### **Hunterian Art Gallery**

University of Glasgow  
82 Hillhead Street  
Glasgow G12 8QQ

Open Monday - Saturday, 9.30am - 5.00pm\*

\*From 10 September, open Tuesday - Saturday, 10.00am - 5.00pm and Sunday, 11.00am - 4.00pm

[www.glasgow.ac.uk/hunterian](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/hunterian)

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### **Notes to Editors**

Founded in 1807, The Hunterian is Scotland's oldest public museum. Built on William Hunter's founding bequest, the collections include scientific instruments used by James Watt and Joseph Lister; outstanding Roman artefacts from the Antonine Wall; major natural sciences holdings; one of the world's greatest numismatic collections and impressive ethnographic objects from the Pacific Ocean.

The Hunterian is also home to a major art collection ranging from Rembrandt and Chardin to the Scottish Colourists and contemporary art; the world's largest permanent display of the work of James McNeill Whistler; the largest single holding of the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and The Mackintosh House, the reassembled interiors from his Glasgow home.

There are four Hunterian venues on the University of Glasgow campus - the Hunterian Museum, Hunterian Art Gallery, home to The Mackintosh House, the Zoology Museum and the Anatomy Museum.



## Available Press Images



Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia I*, 1514.  
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Page from François du Moulin's, *Emblemes Sacrez*. French Emblem book, c1520 with 25 watercolour emblematic pictures. © Glasgow University Library Special Collections.



*In Silentium*, from Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum Libellus*, Paris, 1534. © Glasgow University Library Special Collections.