

Maurice Luker

Columbia University's Multimedia Education Project

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame at Amiens

Through the application of sophisticated Softimage™ digital modeling and animation, the Amiens project reveals how the great French cathedral is encoded as an image of Heaven, the way it was built, and why it nearly collapsed. Video technology lets users travel above and through the cathedral, examining all aspects of the architecture. Digital images, Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York. All rights reserved.

Images from the Amiens Cathedral Project are also featured on the cover of this CRM.

Begun about 1220 and located in the Picardy region north of Paris, the Cathedral of Notre-Dame at Amiens is one of the chief glories of Gothic architecture; its west façade comprises the most ambitious sculptural program of the Middle Ages. Dr. Stephen Murray of Columbia University has studied the building for over a decade and visitors to his World Wide Web-site on Amiens Cathedral at www.lean.columbia.edu/Amiens.html can explore one aspect of his work with his team of collaborators. Their broad aim is to engage a variety of media, from computer animation to digital panoramic images, in the study and interpretation of this historic monument. Support has come from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, among others.

The Amiens Cathedral Web site provides easy access to hundreds of photographs and images, including historic maps and drawings, and texts in Latin or French with their English translations. A special feature permits users to explore all of the sculpture of the west façade and listen to the sculpture actually "speak" from a Biblical text or a contemporary sermon. This innovative technique has opened up an accessible way of identifying and learning about the extensive program of sculpture. It is possible to explore the interior of the cathedral using some 40 Quick Time Virtual Reality™ (QTVR) nodes or digital panoramic images.

Dr. Murray's book on Amiens has joined his previous monographs on the Gothic cathedrals of Beauvais and Troyes. Though his interest in media dates to an early film project on the Armenian capital of Ani, it was his film on Beauvais Cathedral,

made as part of the Production Laboratory of the Program for Art on Film, that led him to think about the possibilities of animating a monument with a variety of media. His hope is that visitors to the Web site and to the cathedral itself will consider the creativity of the designers; the layering of the edifice in time and its structural behavior; the urban and social framework; and the multiple levels of meaning encoded in the cathedral.

Through the award of a Challenge Grant, the NEH has helped establish the Media Center for Art History to encourage other projects of this kind headed by Columbia University faculty. Participating scholars will challenge the accepted ways of teaching and publishing about art, while serving the most basic of academic pursuits: distilling ideas from fundamental research and presenting these in fresh and compelling ways to new stu-



dents, professionals, and the public. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is backing Dr. Murray's next project on the Cathedral of Notre-Dame at Paris that will be conducted as part of a six-week seminar involving 15 college faculty from several institutions and disciplines.

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