

The Medieval Bible Gets A Satirical 21st-Century Update

In an opulent, illuminated art book, a Brazilian design studio reimagines biblical stories, with the “savior” depicted as cellulite cream.

If the Bible were written today, locust swarms and fire storms would be replaced with traffic jams, nuclear weapons, and the fast food industry. And perhaps, as Brazilian designer Gustavo Piqueira imagines in his elaborate new book project, the savior would come not in the form of Jesus Christ, but instead as a cellulite cream.

Mateus, Marcos, Lucas e João is a surreal, satirical 21st-century spin on the text of the Bible and the design of Medieval illuminated manuscripts. Piqueira, founder of design studio Casa Rex, has bound his intricate illustrations in a sheet metal cover adorned with fake jewels, glued on by hand. “Its pages are filled with contemporary versions of medieval historiated initials,” Piqueira explains in a statement. The book presents four different versions of the story of the savior, each narrated by one of the evangelist characters in its title. “Each one, like its medieval predecessors, presents a visual narrative,” Piqueira says. But he’s drastically rewritten biblical stories: Piqueira’s opulent visual narrative is filled with mobile phones, modern warfare, and criticism of beauty-obsessed consumer culture. The savior is not one who forgives your sins, but one who makes your skin smooth and lump-free. He calls it “a satirical yet concise portrait of our era.”

Some might find the conceit sacrilegious, but people have claimed to have seen Jesus Christ in some unlikely places—in pancakes, toilet floors, and Marmite, to name a few—so Christ-as-cellulite-cream isn’t as unprecedented an idea as it might sound.

The book launch comes accompanied by an exhibition, Inanis—iluminuras para o século 21, at the University of Sao Paulo’s Biblioteca Brasileira Guita e Jose Mindlin, open until February 2015. It showcases the three unique typefaces Piqueira developed for the project, available for free download at the project’s website. There’s also a historical overview of the graphic evolution of the Bible, beginning with the dawn of Christianity and continuing through the invention of printing in the 15th century.

The box set of two books has been released in a limited print run of 1,000 numbered copies.

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