



THE HENRY LUCE III
CENTER FOR THE
Arts & Religion

**Wesley Theological Seminary's
Luce Center for the Arts & Religion
Presents *In League with Devils* by Michael Petry**

Exhibition explores forgotten gods, resurrected rituals & queer desire

"Michael Petry celebrates the ceremonial, memorializes the mythical and acknowledges, honors and explores the deeper spirits within us whom we all feel and hear yet have always found hard to name. Our gods and our devils.

— Stephen Fry

WASHINGTON, DC — The Luce Center is proud to host *In League with Devils* by Michael Petry, a leading multi-media artist, author, and director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in London. The exhibition in the Dadian Gallery opens May 5 (Friday) at 12pm and runs through August 21.

The Bible praises "the Living God" and decries the deities of surrounding cultures, from the Assyrians to the Greeks, as mere lifeless idols. Yet these forgotten gods—left for dead in the dustheap of history—are precisely the ones that interest Michael Petry.

"I feel like an archaeologist sifting through the sands of time to uncover the old stories, the old myths, the old beliefs on which modern believers act," reflects the artist. "I have bathed in the spirit of the ancients. Marduk and Thor, Brigit and Ra, Janus and Seth are only a few of the now mythologized gods of old. They are no longer held in the respect they were, but does that stop them from being gods? Is it simply time that morphs a god into a myth, and if so what of the current gods, and devils? Will they too just become stories told around a camp fire?"

Steeped in the history of religion, Petry's exhibition finds the perfect home at Wesley Seminary, with its rich collection of ancient artifacts from the Middle East. With a keen eye for historic techniques and materials, Petry casts mysterious objects and ritual appurtenance from silver, gold, and bronze.

For his installation *At the Foot of the Gods*, Petry cast dozens of bronze toes from life from contemporary cultural icons. These comprise the central installation in the gallery, while the artist also places glass versions in sly locations around campus. In *Piercing the Barrier*, Petry inserts verdigris patinated bronze arrows into trees in Wesley's quad, evoking the Catholic saint (and latter-day queer icon) Saint Sebastian as well as the erotic tools of Cupid.

Apollo's Mirror—patinated and polished to look like ancient Greek originals—sits in Wesley's Oxnam Chapel. As part of the Luce Center's exciting new collaboration with [VOMA](http://www.voma.space) (www.voma.space), the world's first virtual online museum, Petry has also created a digital collectible of *Apollo's Mirror*, available for patrons to purchase to support future collaborations.

The exhibition is curated by Aaron Rosen, PhD, director of the Luce Center for the Arts & Religion and author of *Art & Religion in the 21st Century*. *In League with Devils* is accompanied by an eponymous hardback book with essays by Petry, Rosen, Daniell Cornell, and Rick Herron, with an introduction by British comedy legend Stephen Fry (sample texts available to [download here](#); full review copies available upon request).

About the Artist

Michael Petry (b. Texas, 1960) has lived in London since 1981. He studied at Rice University (BA), London Guildhall University (MA), and has a Doctor in Arts from Middlesex University. Petry is an artist, author and director of the [Museum of Contemporary Art \(MOCA\) London](#). Petry is a Fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors (FRBS), served as the first Artist in Residence at Sir John Soane's Museum (2010/11) and was included in *Frontiers Reimagined* (2015) at the Venice Biennale. Petry's many books include: *The Art of Not Making: The New Artist Artisan Relationship* (2011, pbk 2012); *Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinvigorate the Still-Life Tradition* (2013); and *The WORD is Art* (2018, pbk 2021). Petry's book *Hidden Histories: 20th Century Male Same Sex Lovers in the Visual Arts* (2004) was the first comprehensive survey of its kind, accompanying an eponymous exhibition he curated at The New Art Gallery Walsall. *The Trouble with Michael*, a monograph of his practice, was published by Art Media Press (2001). His two-volume book *Golden Rain* (2008) accompanied his installation for the *On the Edge* exhibition for Stavanger 2008, European Capital of Culture. Recent solo shows include *A Twist in Time*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester (2016) and *In the Realm of the Gods*, Holburne Museum, Bath (2017-18).

About the Luce Center for the Arts & Religion

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts & Religion is located at the heart of Wesley Theological Seminary's sweeping, hillside grounds in northwest Washington, D.C. The center has been a national leader in research, teaching, outreach, and exhibitions in its field for over 30 years. It is home to the Arthur & Marjorie Dadian Gallery, featuring contemporary art exhibitions open to the public every weekday, free of charge. The Luce Center's permanent collection is on exhibition throughout the campus and ranges from ancient Near Eastern artifacts to Reformation Bible manuscripts to works by major modernists such as Georges Rouault and Louise Nevelson. Each year, the center hosts a creative-in-residence in its expansive on-campus studio, with a focus on supporting diverse emerging and mid-career artists engaging with spiritual themes and questions. More information at luceartsandreligion.org.



Top: *Stigmata Bowl*, 24k gold, 2022. Middle: *Apollo's Mirror*, patinated bronze, 2020. *Apollo's Mirror*, virtual sculpture installation, VOMA, 2023. Bottom: *At the Foot of the Gods*, patinated bronze, 2017; *Gift of Apollo II*, solid bronze, silver, then 24k gold plated, 2020.

Further images available upon request as hi-res JPEG or TIFF files.

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