

# National Identity in the Arts



## 2. It's in the Details

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## It's in the Details

THE ARTS OF THE NETHERLANDS IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY have a long history of underappreciation by historians for whom the only true Renaissance was the emergence of *Italian* artists from medieval thinking by their deliberate return to the lessons of classical antiquity. But in fact Netherlandish artists such as Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden were able to retain the best of medieval practice while harnessing it to powers of observation and mastery of technique that were the wonder of Europe. For most of the century, in fact, the tide of influence flowed strongly from North to South. And Netherlandish composers were in demand all over the continent; we shall hear why.

In the Sixteenth Century, that tide reversed. But a genius like Albrecht Dürer was able to learn from Italy, especially in his fine engravings, while maintaining an inherited Northern vigor in his more popular woodcuts. And artists North of the Alps continued to excel in the things they did best: precise depiction of everyday detail, and the painting of landscape. *rb.*

### A. Berry and Burgundy

We focus on the extraordinary illuminated Book of Hours owned by the Duc de Berry, the brother of the King. We also look briefly at the Dukes of Burgundy to the west, whose lands included the Netherlands.

♪ **Dufay:** *Se la face ay pale*

**Limbourg Bros:** *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry* (c.1415)

**Van der Weyden:** *Presentation to Philip the Good*

♪ **Binchois:** *Dueil angoisieux* (text by Christine de Pizan)

### B. Ghent

A single work, but a significant one: the huge altarpiece in the Ghent Cathedral, completed in 1432 by Jan van Eyck, apparently following in the footsteps of his brother Hubert.

**Van Eyck:** *Adoration of the Holy Lamb* (1432, Ghent Altarpiece)

**Memling:** *Christ Enthroned with Music-making Angels* (c.1490)

♪ **Ockeghem:** *Deo Gratias*, canon for 36 voices

## C. The Italian Connection

In the 15th century, Bruges was the commercial capital of Europe, attracting many merchants and bankers from other countries. We look at two such families, the Arnolfini and the Portinari, and the works they commissioned from Netherlandish artists.

**Van Eyck:** *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434, London NG)

**Memling:** *Tommaso and Maria Portinari* (c.1470, NY Met)

**Van der Goes:** *Portinari Altarpiece* (c.1475, Florence Uffizi)

**Ghirlandaio:** *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1485, Florence S. Trinità)

♪ **Josquin des Pres:** *Ave Maria, virgo serena*

## D. A Martial Intermezzo

Montage of pictures to a lively vocal piece celebrating the victory of King François I over the Swiss at the Battle of Marignano in 1515. Illustrations include contemporary depictions of the battle, a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer, and some slightly later German woodcuts.

♪ **Janequin:** *La guerre*

## E. Man of the Bible

Some aspects of the art of Albrecht Dürer, as a printmaker in woodcut and engraving, a painter, and a draughtsman, seen through his images of the first translator of the Bible, Saint Jerome.

**Dürer:** *Saint Jerome* (1497 painting, London NG)

**Dürer:** *Saint Jerome* (1511 woodcut)

**Dürer:** *Saint Jerome* (1514 engraving)

**Dürer:** *Saint Jerome* (1521 painting, Lisbon)

**Dürer:** *Old Man* (1521 drawing, Vienna Albertina)

**Dürer:** *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1526 engraving)

♪ **Luther:** *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, hymn

## E. Landscape All Over

Finally, as a kind of overview and summary, we look at landscape details in some earlier Netherlandish pictures, at the watercolors of Dürer, at the first stand-alone landscapes by Altdorfer, and some paintings of the seasons by Bruegel.

**Van Eyck:** *Madonna of Chancellor Rollin* (c.1435)

**Van der Weyden:** *Mary Magdalene* (1452, Paris Louvre)

**Memling:** *Madonna Enthroned Between Two Angels* (c.1490, Uffizi)

**Witz:** *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444, Geneva)

**Dürer:** *View of Trento* (1495, Vienna Albertina)

**Dürer:** *Pond in the Woods* (c.1496, Vienna Albertina)

**Dürer:** *Great Piece of Turf* (1503, Vienna Albertina)

**Altdorfer:** *Danube Landscape near Regensburg* (c.1522, Munich)

**Bruegel:** *The Hay Harvest* (1565, Prague Castle)

**Bruegel:** *The Gloomy Day* (1565, Vienna)

♪ **Willaert:** *Vecchie letrose*, montage with Bruegel *Seasons*

Albrecht **Altdorfer** (1480–1530, German painter), **Antonello** da Messina (1430–79, Italian painter), Gilles **Binchois** (1400–60, Netherlandish composer), Pieter **Bruegel** (1525–69, Netherlandish painter), Guillaume **Dufay** (1397–1474, Netherlandish composer), Albrecht **Dürer** (1471–1528, German painter), Jan van **Eyck** (1390–1441, Netherlandish painter), Domenico **Ghirlandio** (1449–94, Italian composer), Hugo van der **Goes** (1435–1482, Netherlandish painter), Clément **Janequin** (1485–1558, French composer), **Josquin** des Pres (1440–1521, Netherlandish composer), **Leonardo** da Vinci (1452–1519, Italian painter), **Limbourg Brothers**, Herman, Paul, and Johan (about 1385–1416, Netherlandish painters), Martin **Luther** (1483–1546, German theologian and composer), Hans **Memling** (1430–94, Netherlandish painter), Johannes **Ockeghem** (1410–97, Netherlandish composer), Christine de **Pizan** (1364–1430, French poet), Rogier van der **Weyden** (1399–1464, Netherlandish painter), Adrian **Willaert** (1490–1562, Netherlandish composer), Konrad **Witz** (1400–46, German painter)

The class website is [www.brunyate.com/national-identity](http://www.brunyate.com/national-identity)

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