Class 2 : It's in the Details

A. Berry and Burgundy

1. Section title A (January detail)

Let's start with some music and pictures. The image on screen right now is a detail from the January opening of the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry, painted shortly before 1414; I'll show you all twelve months. The music is from the same general area and about 15 years later; I'll say more once we have watched the video.

2. Dufay: *Se la face ay pale*, with scenes from *Les très riches heures*
3. September opening, with questions

What is it? A large illuminated **Book of Hours**, that is to say a prayer book containing the prayers and rituals proper for each day of the year. The patron, the Duke of Berry, owned several of these; the name, "The *very rich* Book of Hours," comes from an inventory of his possessions after his death, to distinguish it from the other Books of Hours that he owned, called such names as *Beautiful* or *Small*.

What is special about it? Perhaps I can leave that to you? The points that I would make include its extraordinary detail, the depiction of both court and rural life, and the depiction of each of the patron's castles in the background of each. These are real places and real activities, depicted in detail.

4. Detail from January opening, with the Duke, Dufay, and Binchois

For whom was it made? The man shown feasting here, **John, Duke of Berry**, the younger brother of the King of France. He was an avid collector and fabulously rich—though not quite rich enough to sustain his habit; more than once he had to ask for bank loans.

By whom was it made? Almost certainly by the three **Limbourg Brothers, Herman, Paul, and Johan** (about 1385–1416), though we don't know exactly who painted what. All died of plague in the same year, all still in their twenties. They were from the Low Countries, from Nijmegen in present-day Holland. The composer of the music I chose to accompany it, **Guillaume du Fay**, or **Dufay** (1397–1474), was also from the Netherlands, born near Brussels, as was the other man shown here, **Gilles Binchois**, whom we will meet again in a moment. I will use the term ***Netherlandish*** quite often today.

5. May opening, with questions continued

When was it made? I won't go into questions of exact dating, which have to do with such things as which castles are and are not shown. Let's just say that around 1410–16 is as good a date as any. You will usually hear these works described as **medieval**, the last great flowering of the Gothic. *But the important point to make here is that the idea of the unenlightened Medieval style giving way to the new*

thinking of the Renaissance is essentially an Italian construct, formulated to promote the kinds of art being produced there. In a Netherlandish context, it has little or no meaning; the flow from the extraordinary craftsmanship of works such as these to the equally fine craftsmanship of artists such as **Jan van Eyck** and **Rogier van der Weyden** is virtually unbroken.

6. Europe in the mid-15th century, maps

Where was it made? The geography is simple enough; the history is a little complicated, but it is important, so I must apologize for over-simplifying. The Duchy of Berry based around Bourges, was only one of several created for relatives of the King. It pales in comparison to the **Duchy of Burgundy** to its west, which at this time was was held by John's nephew, **John the Fearless**. Indeed, the Limbourg brothers had been working in the Burgundian court for four years, illuminating another Book of Hours, before their patron passed them on to his uncle in Berry. As you will see, though, the Burgundian lands were much more extensive, stretching northwards to include all of the Low Countries, the present-day Belgium and Holland. This is important, for when we talk about Northern art, the terms *Netherlandish*, *Flemish*, *Burgundian*, and even *French* are virtually interchangeable, because the artists moved freely between the various centers.

7. Rogier van der Weyden: Presentation of the Chronicles of Hainault to Philip the Good

And here is another miniature, this time by **Rogier van der Weyden** (1399–1464), of the presentaton of a very similar illuminated manuscript to **Philip the Good**, one of the Dukes of Burgundy.

8. Split of the Duchy of Burgundy, 1477

But wait a minute! When we saw a Rogier van der Weyden last week, it was in the Prado, and I made the point that the Netherlands was ruled by Spain; how come? Now this really *is* complicated, but here's the capsule version. In 1477, the Duke of Burgundy died without issue, leading to a reconfiguration of the balance of power in Europe that would last for over three centuries. The southernmost parts of Burgundy were reabsorbed into France, but the Netherlands passed through marriage to the **Habsburg family**—the **Holy Roman Emperors**—who at roughly this time were themselves split into two branches: the senior branch, including the Netherlands, but ruling from Spain, and the junior branch which would later become the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The title of Holy Roman Emperor was basically in the pocket of the Eastern branch. The map at bottom right, showing the situation around 1700, should give you a general idea. Anything in red was at one time controlled by the Spanish Habsburgs. Anything in yellow was controlled by the Austrian ones. You will notice that between them, they also carved up large portions of Italy.

9. Sacred Images from *Les très riches heures*

What else does it contain? My last question about *Les très riches heures* was "What else does it contain?" As it a religious book, it will not surprise you that most of its images are sacred, some done by the Limbourgs, others by much later artists. Here are two of them, a *Nativity* and a *Man of Sorrows*. Both are medieval in the artificiality of their design. Both artists make much use of landscape. But look how detailed and realistic the later landscape is; it's a theme to which we shall return.

10. Christine de Pizan and *The City of Women*

I will be doing a lot of sacred stuff in this and the next two classes. And almost everything I show will be by men. So to correct the balance somewhat, let me introduce a remarkable woman, **Christine de Pizan** (1364–1430). Though born in Venice, her father brought her to Paris at the age of 4, so to all intents and purposes she was French. She married an official in the French court, but in 1390 her husband died, leaving her to fend for herself. In the early 15th century, she was court writer to the **Duke Philip of Burgundy**, writing a biographer of his father, together with a number of prose works, such as *The City of Women*, which extols powerful and intellectual women over the ages, and is an implicit guidebook for the education of princesses. So before leaving the secular world, I'd like to play you part of of song by the other composer I illustrated earlier, **Gilles Binchois** (1400–60), setting a poem that Christine wrote in 1390, lamenting the death of her husband. I hope you will find it as beautiful as I do. The singer is **Sylvia Rhyne**, with **Eric Redlinger** on the lute; it was filmed at one of the Burgundian residences, the Chateau de Germolles. [All my partial clips can be found complete on the website.]

11. Binchois: *Dueil angoisseux* (first three stanzas)

B. Ghent

12. Section title B (Saint Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent)

In the first class, I joked about hopping around in my helicopter, and I have shown you a lot of images so far in this one. So now I want to concentrate on single town, a single church, and a single altarpiece in that church: the *Adoration of the Holy Lamb*, completed in 1432 by **Jan van Eyck** (1390–1441) following in the footsteps of his bother **Hubert**, who he says was an even better artist. Commonly known simply as **The Ghent Altarpiece**, it is the earliest dated of its kind by a known artist, and it is generally taken as the starting point of the Renaissance in Flanders, whatever that word means in a northern context.

13. Ghent altarpiece closed
14. — as above, with details of the two Johns

Here is the outside, which is how you would normally have seen it, except on feast days. Like the **Rogier van der Weyden** *Deposition* that we saw last week, Jan van Eyck is imitating a sculptural altarpiece, with the figures in shallow niches. Indeed, he has two of them in the bottom center, St. John the Baptist on the left and St. John the Evangelist to his right. They are not stone, but painted to look like stone—late medieval sculptures under a Gothic arch.

15. — as above, with details of the donors

But compare the two other figures in the stone niches. It is not only the fact of their being in color that makes them real; they are clearly people that Jan painted from life; from the beginning, one of the great strengths of Netherlandish artists were their skill in portraiture. These people in fact have names: **Joos Vijdt**, the mayor of Ghent at the time, and his wife **Lysbette Borluut**. Vijd's motive for putting out all

that money was partly spiritual, to secure his place in the afterlife, and partly political, to keep in with **Philip the Good of Burgundy**, whose son was baptised in the cathedral the day the altarpiece was dedicated.

16. — as above, with details of the *Annunciation*

And up above, van Eyck paints another subject we will remember from last week, the *Annunication*. Once more there is the contrast between the reality of the figures and the deliberate narrowness of the space, but the figures are soft and rounded, and there is a lovely view outside the window.

17. Ghent altarpiece closed (repeat)

What we are looking at here is the outside of two hinged covers that fall back to reveal the main picture within. I tried all sorts of clever ways to animate this, but in the end I realized that simpler was best, so here goes!

18. Ghent altarpiece, animation of opening
19. Ghent altarpiece open

Once again, a combination of figures and groups, displayed in an arrangement that is entirely artificial (it makes no attempt at unified scale, for example), but each treated quite realistically in its own way.

20. — as above, with Mary, the Almighty, and John the Baptist

The figures at the top—the **Almighty** (perhaps Jesus) flanked by the **Virgin Mary** and **John the Baptist**—are the most stylized, not so much in their detail as in their presentation, and the conspicuous expenditure of precious materials (gold and ultramarine) and the use of all those texts.

21. — as above, with details of Adam and Eve

Let's turn to the outside, with the panels of **Adam and Eve** with moments from the story of **Cain and Abel** above. Do you see the difference between how the subjects are treated? Both spring from the idea of sculpture in a shallow niche, but while the Cain and Abel are painted as though they were stone, Eve and Adam are real figures in natural colors, with character and dimension; Adam's foot even protrudes a little over the edge! There is no need to assume that Eve is pregnant, incidentally; they is enough evidence to suggest that the protruding belly was the contemporary ideal of feminine deportment.

22. — as above, with details of the angel musicians
23. —extreme close-up of the above

In between we get two groups of **Angel Musicians**, a choir on one side and an instrumental consort on the other. Given this this subject is entirely conceptual, the amount of realism is staggering. Especially if you look at just a tiny detail from one of the pictures. This attention to detail and play of light to reproduce various textures—broacde, embroidery, gold and jewels, human hair—is one of the leading characteristics of Netherlandish art, which is why I called this class "It's in the Details." But it is only made possible by the use of **oil paint**, which is both semi-transparent, creating effects of great depth,

and ranging from highly fluid to quite viscous, allowing the application of fine detail. Van Eyck did not invent it; oil was being used even in the 13th century. But it was almost unknown in Italy, where artists generally used egg tempera or fresco, and looked with wonder at the pictures reaching them from the north; more on that later.

24. *Adoration of the Holy Lamb*

The central panel is the ***Adoration of the Holy Lamb***, a symbolic gathering of all the Saints. In the front, we see the **Fountain of Life**, and the whole thing is set in a verdant meadow with quite a number of recognizable buildings in the background. Next to the power of Netherlandish painters as portraitists is their uncanny affinity for landscape. Jan van Eyck is by no means alone in this regard.

25. Johannes Ockeghem and singers (posthumous miniature)

Seeing all those angel musicians puts me in the mood for another piece of music, a rather later piece from 1497, but from the right part of the world. The composer, **Johannes Ockeghem** (1410–97), was born in present-day Belgium; he became one of the most famous musicians of his time; this portrait is posthumous. The piece is an incredible piece of virtuosity. I assume you all know what a **canon** is: something like "Frère Jacques" or "Row, row, row your boat," where the voices sing the same melody a few beats apart. Ockeghem has taken the words "Deo gratias" (thanks be to God), and written a **canon for thirty-six separate voices**. They overlap in the usual way in groups of nine, then the next nine sing an extension of the tune while the others sustain the harmony, and so on, all the way to 36.

26. Ockeghem: *Deo Gratias*, canon for 36 voices
27. Hans Memling: *Christ Enthroned with Music-making Angels* (c.1490, Najera, Spain)

That painting I have been playing with in my attempt to create a visual equivalent is an altarpiece by **Hans Memling** (1430–94) from about the same time; I will show another by him later.

C. The Italian Connection

28. Section title C (Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, top half)
29. 15th-century trade routes

I mentioned before that Bruges was not only the major center from Netherlandish art in the 15th century, but also the most important commercial center in Europe. So it is not surprising that the major powers in Italy should have maintained permanent representatives there, or that these representatives should have become very rich. In what remains of the first hour, I want to look at two Italian families in Bruges: the **Arnolfini** and the **Portinari**.

30. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, top left

Here is Jan van Eyck's portrait of one of them, the Luccese merchant **Giovanni Arnolfini**—though we don't know *which* Giovanni Arnolfini; there were two cousins. You can see that he is rich by the costliess

of his fur (which he wears even on a spring day), the fineness of the objects in his room, and by the oranges so carelessly scattered around. He is not the handsomest of men, but Van Eyck was not out to flatter; it is another reminder of the Netherlandish excellence in portraiture.

31. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, full picture

That was in fact a detail of a larger work, now in the National Gallery in London. Though actually it is not large, a mere three foot by two. It has various titles, but for now let's just look at it, teasing out its details, which are brilliantly executed but carry the sense that they are there for a reason.

32. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, pattens and dog
33. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, top center
34. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, chandelier and signature
35. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, mirror

The dog is presumably just a dog; it was apparently a late addition; it does not appear in the underdrawing that can be seen by X-ray. But the discarded pattens, when they appear in religious art, generally imply that this is holy ground. In a religious painting, the single candle in the chandelier would signify the presence of God. The Saint Margaret on the bedpost is the patron saint of childbirth; the hand-broom symbolizes purity. Above the mirror, you can see Van Eyck's proud signature, "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic." The mirror itself is surrounded by scenes from the Passion of Christ. And in it, you can just see two people entering the room; perhaps one of them is Van Eyck himself? [This picture was for a while in the Spanish Royal Collection, incidentally; it may have given **Velázquez** the idea for the mirror in *Las Meninas.*]

36. Van Eyck: *Arnolfini Portrait*, full picture (repeat)

So *is* this a religious painting, and are the symbols significant? For a long time, this was known as the *Arnolfini Wedding*, making the picture a form of marriage certificate. It was even conjectured that the woman was pregnant—but there is no quality of a shotgun marriage in any of this, and other pictures of the period show women thrusting their bellies forward and/or holding up the folds of their dress in this manner. Then it was discovered that the Arnolfinis did not marry until after Van Eyck was dead—or at least not *that* Arnolfini. The various theories are listed on Wikipedia: it could be an earlier undocumented wife, it could be the cousin and *his* wife, or—the one I find most intriguing—that it is a memorial picture to a wife who is now dead; the burnt-out candle over her head and the fact that all the Passion scenes on her side of the mirror take place after Christ's death would seem to bear that out.

37. Hans Memling: *Tommaso and Maria Portinari* (c.1470, NY Met)
38. Hans Memling: conjectural restoration of the *Portinari Triptych*

Here is the other Italian couple that I mentioned: the Medici banker **Tommaso Portinari** and his wife. These panels by Hans Memling (who painted all those angels) are thought to be the wings of a hinged triptych. Anyway, they are yet more proof of Netherlandish prowess in portraiture. This triptych was presumably for private use, but a few years later the Portinaris commissioned a large-scale painting of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* from another Netherlandish painter, **Hugo van der Goes** (1435–1482),

destined for a very public site indeed, the chapel of the hospital which they founded back in Florence; you can see their portaits reappearing as the praying figures, one on each wing.

39. Hugo van der Goes: *Portinari Altarpiece* (c.1475, Florence Uffizi)
40. — central panel of the above

The painting arrived in Florence in 1483, and the Italians were astounded by it. True, the medieval disregard for discrepancies in scale and the lack of any sense of a coherent space must have given them a chuckle or two. But the richness, the color, the landscape, the naturalistic detail, not to mention the sheer skill made possible by the oil medium, must have knocked them for a loop.

41. Domenico Ghirlandaio: *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1485, Florence Sta. Trinità)

Here is one example of the influence, another *Adoration*, this time by **Domenico Ghirlandio** (1449–94), the teacher of **Michelangelo**. The combination of motifs from classical archaeology with northern realism in the Shepherds and the landscape behind them is quite striking.

42. Leonardo da Vinci: *Portrait of a Musician* (c.1484, Milan Ambriosiana)

I hope I have given you some sense of the national characteristics of Netherlandish painting. I have made no attempt to do so with music, because in the 15th century the Netherlands were quite simply where it was at; when the Italians wanted music, they sent from composers from across the Alps. So while the greatest composer of the century, **Josquin des Pres** (1440–1521) was born in Flanders, he spent much of his later life in Italian courts. This *Portrait of a Musician* by **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519)may not actually be Josquin, but it is plausible that it could be, for both were working in Milan around this time. And it was in Milan that Josquin wrote his most famous motet, *Ave Maria, virgo serena*. We probably can't hear it all, but I hope I can play enough to send to to the website to hear the rest. If you listen carefully, you can hear that Josquin composes in single-breath phrases which are imitated by the successive voices, overlapping and reaching a climax.

43. Josquin des Pres: *Ave Maria, virgo serena*
44. Intermission title (detail of the *Portinari Altarpiece*)

D. Military Intermezzo

45. Section title D (Altdorfer detail)

I am moving ahead now into the 16th century, and for the most part westward into Germany. I suppose both apply to the piece I am going to play now: a celebration of a victory by the French king **François I** against the Swiss in the **Battle of Marignano** in 1515. But the real reason I'm playing it is because it is such fun. The composer, **Clément Janequin** (1485-1558), who was French, was renowned for his part-songs in a popular style, and this is no exception. I have written a summary translation, but listen more for the marvelous **onomatopoeia**, describing the sounds of trumpets, artillery, and fighting. The illustrations are all of roughly the same date, and if not all on the French side, at least they are colorful!

46. Janequin: *La guerre*

However, lest you be fooled into thinking that 16th-century war was at all as jolly as Jannequin's song makes out, let me show you a print of the aftermath of Marignano, made from a battlefield drawing by the Swiss artist Urs Graf, who may himself have fought in the battle.

46b. Urs Graf: *The Horrors of War*

E. Man of the Bible

47. Section title E (Antonello: *Saint Jerome*)

Although you might think this is a Netherlandish picture, it really isn't—but it *is* the work of the one Italian artist I mentioned last week as being Netherlandish in all but passport: **Antonello da Messina** (1430–79). It is one I particularly love; I may well come back to it next week.

48. Dürer and his *Saint Jeromes*

I am using the example of the **Saint Jerome** (roughly 347–420), in order to compare the four versions that **Albrecht Dürer** (1471–1528) made of him at various stages of his life. Jerome is considered one of the Fathers of the Church, and was the first to translate the Bible into Latin, and edition known as the Vulgate. So he is either presented as a scholar working in his cell, or an ascetic in the desert hardening himself against the indulgences of the flesh. Now I am not saying that Dürer's style is typical of 16th-century painting in the North, or even of German art. He had more than one style, as I hope to show, and was far too individual a genius to be typical of anything. But a genius he was, and I cannot omit him. And he was the unchallenged master of what *was* the great German contribution to renaissance art, the artist's **print**, whether in **woodcut** or **engraving**. He also makes the point that, all over the North, aspects of the Middle Ages lingered in art for a very long time. And I think you will find that he fits the title of this class, "It's in the Detail."

49. Dürer: *Saint Jerome* paintings (1497 and 1521)

Let's look at the two painting first. Would anyone care to compare them? The settings are obviously different: the wilderness and the study. But they have in common a kind of fierce asceticism that I see as a continuation of a medieval spirit. Certainly there are medieval hangovers in the rocks and sky of the earlier painting, together with a certain creepiness in the landscape that I think we will come to recognize as a German specialty.

50. Dürer: *Old Man* (1521, Vienna Albertina) with the 1521 *Saint Jerome*

As a painter, I would not place Dürer among the very greatest artists, but as a draughtsman he is incomparable. The 1521 *Saint Jerome* may be an imagined subject, but the drawing he made for it is totally real, and obviously taken from life.

51. Dürer: *Saint Jerome* prints (1511 and 1514)

There is not such a gap between the two *Saint Jerome* prints, only three years between 1511 and 1514. But the difference in concept and technique is immense. Dürer realized early on that selling multiples impressions of his prints was a much better bet financially than waiting for individual commissions, and indeed he hired his wife and mother as traveling salesmen. German printmakers used two main techniques. In a **woodcut**, the ink was spread onto the surface of a polished wooden block, from which the artist had cut away the areas he wished to appear white. It is obviously suited to quite crude illustration, such as you might get in early printed books, but Dürer was able to cut lines with remarkably fine detail; the picture on the left is a woodcut. An **engraving**, however, was the opposite. The artist would use a fine point called a **burin** to cut lines into a copper plate; when the plate was inked and then rubbed clean, the ink would remain in the incised lines, and picked up by the slightly damp paper, which would be forced against the plate in a high-pressure press. So unlike the *negative* process of removing the white areas from a woodcut, engraving is a *positive* one, much closer to drawing.

52. — detail of the above

What Dürer could achieve in this medium was little short of amazing. He rivals Van Eyck in his control of detail and his ability to suggest the play of light on the various surfaces, from glass to fur. Of course, engravings like this were not made for the mass market; they were for conoisseurs rich and discerning enough to pay high prices. For subjects he intended to sell in bulk, like his two separate books of Passion illustrations, Dürer stuck to woodcuts—even though *his* woodcuts were produced almost to the standard of other people's engravings.

53. — comparison with the *Arnolfini Portait*

In his way, Dürer achieved something in this print very much like Jan van Eyck did in his *Arnolfini Portrait* of 1432: creating a coherent interior space, flooded with light, and replete with symbolically significant detail. But there is one difference, and it is significant. Dürer uses a coherent geometrical perspective in the Italian manner, and all the objects in the room are arranged to reinforce this). I will say more about perspective next week, but the key point for now is this. Whereas in the 1400s, the tide of influence was

flowing mainly from North to South, sometime around 1500 this reversed. Dürer, who made two trips to Italy, was one of its beneficiaries—when he wanted to be.

54. Dürer: *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1526)

This scholar writing in his study is not Dürer's imagined Saint Jerome, but a real man, the Protestant scholar **Erasmus**, whom Dürer went to visit towards the end of his life. He had wanted to visit **Martin Luther** (1483–1546) also, and had even sent him some of his prints, but he never made it. All the same, I don't suppose that his interest in Saint Jerome, the first person to translate the Bible into the Latin vernacular, was unconnected with his admiration for Luther, and *his* translation into vernacular German. And I do think it parallels the greater asceticism and order you see in much of his later work. Anyway, it gives me a cue for a verse of Luther's famous hymn, "A mighty fortress is our God," as a kind of palate-cleanser between courses!

55. Luther: *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, first stanza

F. Landscape all Over

56. Section title F (Dürer: *View of Trento*)

I said that **Albrecht Dürer** was a matchless draughtsman. When he came back through the Alps on his trips to Italy, he drew and painted in watercolors everything he saw, such as this view of Trento. If this were **Constable** or **Turner**, we would hail it as a finished picture, but Dürer did not intend to exhibit it. Landscapes as items in their own right—as opposed to artists' sketches or backgrounds for other subjects—would appear in German art around this time, as we shall see later, but not for Dürer. All the same, he sets me off on a summary of everything we have covered today, focusing on yet another striking characteristic of Northern art: its use of landscape.

57. Van Eyck: *Ghent Altarpiece* (1432)

I'm done with lecturing for the day. I am merely going to show you details of some things you have seen before, plus a couple of new ones. Starting with the background of the *Ghent Altarpiece*. There is so much going on in this picture, that one can easily miss how beautiful and how detailed is **Jan van Eyck's** landscape.

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

In another of Van Eyck's devotional pictures, the *Madonna of Chancellor Rollin*, he gives us another Netherlandish specialty, the landscape view through an open window. But this one is exceptionally detailed and far-reaching; it seems that these lowlanders get so tired of flatness they just have to put the Alps in somewhere! This is a foretaste of the kind of whole-world landscapes you get with Bruegel.

59. Rogier van der Weyden: *Mary Magdalene* (right wing of the Braque Triptych, 1452)

Rogier van der Weyden did not cram all his paintings into the gilded box he used for the Prado *Deposition*. Here, in a wing from another altarpiece, he sets the figure of *Mary Magdalene* against a landscape that takes up the entire picture.

60. Hugo van der Goes: *Portinari Altarpiece*, right wing (c.1485, Florence Uffizi)

We have seen this picture, the *Portinari Altarpiece*, before. But it is worth going back to look at the wonderful landscape vignettes that **Hugo van der Goes** gets into this and the other two panels.

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

This **Memling** picture from five years later, also in the Uffizi, is a pretty stilted creation overall. But look out through the two windows, and you'll see marvelous landscapes. Of all the landscapes we have seen so far, this is the one that most convinces me that it is showing a real slice of the Netherlands.

62. Konrad Witz: *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444)

The earliest known depiction of a real place in art is this picture by the German-Swiss artist **Konrad Witz** (1400–46). The subject is Christ walking on the water on the Sea of Galilee, but Witz has transposed it to Lake Geneva, a view that is still recognizable, with Mont Blanc in the distant background.

63. Dürer: *Pond in the Woods* (c.1496)
64. Dürer: *Great Piece of Turf* (1503)

Witz, being German, brings us back to **Dürer**, and another of his extraordinary watercolors. It is notable, though, that his observation was not confined to large views. He could also get down on his knees to paint a simple clump of grass in the most extraordinary detail.

65. Albrecht Altdorfer: *Danube Landscape near Regensburg* (c.1522)

I mentioned that that first pure landscapes were produced in Germany around this time. The artist I was thinking of is **Albrecht Altdorfer** (1480–1530), a large proportion of whose work are views of the Danube valley near where he lived, without a hint of a Biblical subject to give them justification.

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

And views such as these, stretching away towards distant mountains, takes me to where I always intended to end up, with the wonderful landscapes of **Pieter Bruegel** (1525–69), the last of the great Netherlandish painters before you could really call them Flemish or Dutch. So I end as I began, with a **series of seasons of the year**. I am showing one of them now, another as my closing slide, and three more as a montage in between. I have arranged each to start with the far distance, then zoom out to the full picture, then in again to one of its details of peasant life which, in Bruegel, goes hand in hand with the landscape in which they live. The music is from about the same time, and by another Netherlander, **Adrian Willaert** (1490–1562). He is another Northern composer seduced by Italian employers, and the text of this little piexe, *Vecchie letrose*, is in Italian; basically it is saying "Withered old hags begone; we

have no place for you here." Perhaps it is a little too lively for the context, but I bet you'll go away humming it!

67. Willaert: *Vecchie letrose*, with Bruegel *Seasons*
68. Closing title (Bruegel: *The Gloomy Day*)