

**From Shrine to Room: An Interpretation of the House Interior
in Early Netherlandish Panel Painting c.1400-1450**

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Abstract

Securely dated to 1446, Petrus Christus' *Portrait of Edward Grimston* is among the earliest surviving panel paintings to place a single individual in a described environment specific to them – possibly *the* earliest surviving. How might we account for this phenomenon? This thesis sets out to re-evaluate the 'house interior' in early Netherlandish panel painting, c.1400-50, tracing the emergence of the first portraits of secular individuals in rooms of their own.

The early Netherlandish interior is traditionally explained through religious symbolism, or as a sign of social status, or for its spatial ingenuities. While absorbing these approaches, this study shifts gear. It emphasises the need to see the communicative potency of such famously well-furnished fifteenth-century architectural settings against a broader temporal sweep. Following the question historically, acknowledging the longstanding significant relationship, between sacred figures and their shrine-like encasements, it pursues what happens to this relationship in Netherlandish panel painting c.1430s (the moment of enhanced focus on inviting the religious image into recognisable, earthly settings). The significance of these older architectural conventions is appropriated, transferred onto the secular depictions, manipulated for diverse ends – with important consequences.

Beyond its sustained investigations of form, the thesis provides new information about the patrons and commissions of several important paintings. For Grimston's indoor surroundings conjure not only the time and place he occupied, but also, as evoked by documentation, a very personal interpretation of the man himself. Weaving together enquiries into media, composition and reception, material culture, and the motivations and influences of religious and social contexts, an alternative genealogy is traced for the 'interior' in painting. The argument helps us to better understand the origins of that significant genre, whose use would continue to serve multiple purposes in picture-making right up to the present day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS: VOLUME 1

Abstract	2
List of Images	6
Acknowledgements	18
Author's declaration	20

Introduction: from Shrine to Room	21
‘Figural’ interpretation and the translation of architectural form	27
The story of <i>Stimmung</i> : on the history and historiography of the ‘interior’ in late medieval panel painting	37
The hermeneutics of inanimate pictorial content	41
Pre-Eyckian Literature: a chasm less travelled	57
Aims: the ‘charged’ interior and the relevance of patronage	60
Approaches: description versus historicism and the instability of the work of art	66
The “first truly modern interior”?	69

Chapter 1. Painting as House: the *Norfolk Triptych* and the Resolution of the Architectural Frame into a Spatial Setting

Introduction	71
The house-frame in history	81
The <i>Norfolk Triptych</i> : interpreting the architecture	88
Architectural form and pre-Eyckian ‘reliquary character’	102
Among the micro-architectural objects: painted and metalwork <i>tableaux</i> c.1400	114
Resolving the architectural frame into a spatial setting: towards an alternative genealogy of the early Netherlandish ‘house interior’	124
Conclusion	135

Chapter 2. “A présent”: the *Werl Altarpiece* and the Contemporary Interior in Early Netherlandish Religious Painting

Introduction	141
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Realism: sacralisation or seculariation?	150
The <i>Werl Altarpiece</i> : facts and questions	157
Stipulations “a présent”	169
Magister and Minister: Werl and his altarpiece in their religious and artistic contexts	174
Greatness and straitness: Werl’s paradox of lowliness and elevation	197
A ‘convenient’ mirror	206
The contemporary as vernacular communication	217
Conclusion	232

Chapter 3. ‘The Room makes the Man’: the Emergent ‘Milieu Portrait’ in Petrus Christus’ *Portrait of Edward Grimston*

Introduction	237
Christus’ ‘portrait boxes’: a compositional comparison	248
Suitable spaces: <i>The Carthusian</i> and <i>The Falconer</i>	256
The room makes the man: <i>Edward Grimston</i>	269
Conclusion	301
Conclusion: <i>Homo Habitans</i>	306

TABLE OF CONTENTS: VOLUME 2

Images

Images for Introduction	317
Images for Chapter One	332
Images for Chapter Two	371
Images for Chapter Three	406

Bibliography

Unpublished Sources	456
Published Primary Sources	456
Online Sources	460
Published Secondary Sources	463

List of Images

[0.1] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of Edward Grimston*, 1446. Oil on panel, 32.5x24cm. On long-term loan to The National Gallery, London from the Earl of Verulam (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[0.2] Workshop of Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], *Annunciation Triptych* ('Mérode Altarpiece'), c.1427-32. Oil on panel, 64.5x117.8cm (open). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[0.3] Maasland (Liège?), *Norfolk Triptych*, c.1415. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 33x58cm (open) (Photograph: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen).

[0.4] Robert Campin (?) [Flémalle Group], the St John the Baptist and St Barbara panels from the *Werl Altarpiece*, 1438. Oil on panel, 101x47cm (each panel). Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[0.5] Netherlandish, *St Ursula Shrine*, c.1400-15. Paint and gilding on wood, 19x32x16.3cm. Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[0.6a] Hans Memling, *St Ursula Shrine*, c.1489. Oil and gilding on wood, 87x33x91cm. Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[0.6b] Detail of *St Ursula Shrine* [0.6a] (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[0.7] Nicholas of Verdun, *Verdun Altar* (left wing), 1181. Enamel on gilded copper, 108.5x120.5cm (each wing, without frame). Klosterneuburg Monastery, Austria (Photograph: Lessing Images).

[0.8] (Hubert and?) Jan van Eyck, *Annunciation from the exterior of the Ghent Altarpiece*, completed 1430-2. Oil on panel, the whole exterior measures 375x260cm (closed). St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent (Photograph: Closer to Van Eyck / clostovaneyck.kikirpa.be).

[0.9] Master of 1499, *Diptych with Abbot Christiaan de Hondt*, c.1499. Oil on panel, 29x31cm. Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[0.10] Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434. Oil on panel, 82x59.5cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[0.11] Quinten Massys, *The Moneylender and his Wife*, 1514. Oil on panel, 70.5x67cm. Louvre Museum, Paris (Photograph: Directmedia).

[0.12] Jan van Eyck, *Virgin in a Church*, c.1438-40. Oil on panel, 31x14cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Closer to Van Eyck / clostovaneyck.kikirpa.be).

[0.13] Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in his Shop*, 1449. Oil on panel, 100.1x85.8cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[0.14] Dirk Bouts, *Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament*, 1464-8. Oil on panel, 88x71cm. St Peter's Church, Leuven (Photograph: Art in Flanders).

[1.1] French, *Tabernacle or Folding Shrine*, 14th century. Ivory with metal mounts, 24.3x21.6cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[1.2] Paris, *Basin Portable Shrine*, 1320-40. Silver gilt, enamel and gems, 26x12cm. The Morgan Library, New York (Photograph: The Morgan Library).

[1.3] The lost *Tabernacle-altarpiece* at Stams, c.1376; drawing by Wolfgang Lebersorg, c.1630. Stams, Stiftsarchiv (Photograph: Stephan Kemperdick, "Tabernacle-Altarpieces in Central Europe: Examples, Types, Iconography," *Medievalia* 23, no. 1 (2020): fig. 4).

[1.4a] Netherlandish, *Large Carrand Diptych*, c.1385-90. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 90.4x58.6cm. Bargello Museum, Florence (Photograph: Bargello Museum).

[1.4b] Detail of the *Large Carrand Diptych* [1.4a].

[1.5a] Maasland (Liège?), *Norfolk Triptych*, c.1415. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 33x32.9cm closed. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (Photograph: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen).

[1.5b] Maasland (Liège?), *Norfolk Triptych*, c.1415. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 33x58cm (open) (Photograph: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen).

[1.5c] Detail of *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b].

[1.5d] Detail of *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b].

[1.5e] A view of the *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b] within the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (Photograph: hillfamilysoutherndivision.wordpress.com).

[1.6] Paris, *Reliquary in the Form of a Triptych* ('Choques Triptych'), c.1400-10. Gold and enamel, 12.5x12.7cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Photograph: Rijksmuseum).

[1.7] Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], Saints James and Clare from the reverse of *The Betrothal of the Virgin*, 1420-30. Oil on panel, 77x88cm. Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[1.8] Jacopo di Cione and Workshop, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (centre main tier panel), 1370-1. Egg tempera on panel, 206.5x113.5cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[1.9] Normandy, *Christ and the Twelve Disciples*, c.1450-1500. Sandstone with traces of polychrome, 104.1x240x21cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Photograph: Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

[1.10] Netherlandish, *Apostle Altarpiece*, c.1350. Polychromed stone, dimensions not ascertained. Church of St Dymphna, Geel (Photograph: Jacobs, "Inverted 'T'-Shape," fig. 1).

[1.11a] Melchior Broederlam, exterior of the *Crucifixion Altarpiece*, 1390-9. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 166x251x22 (closed). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon (Photograph: Jean-Louis Mazieres).

[1.11b] Jacques de Baerze (carving) and Melchior Broederlam (gilding and polychromy), *Crucifixion Altarpiece*, 1390-9. Gilded and polychromed wood, 166.5x502 (open). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[1.12] *Reliquary of the Cross of Floreffe*, after 1254. Silver and copper gilt, gems and niello, 72x90 cm (open). Louvre Museum, Paris (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[1.13] Netherlandish, *Annunciation and Visitation* ('Walcourt Panels'), c.1415-20. Paint and gold leaf on panel, 132.6x68.7cm and 132.8x67cm. Musée provincial des Arts anciens du Namurois, (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[1.14] Netherlandish, *Tower Retable with Scenes from the Life of Christ*, 1395-1400. Paint and gold leaf on panel, 47.5x137cm. Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[1.15] Netherlandish, *Shrine of St Maurice d'Agaune*, c.1400. Paint and gold leaf on panel, 32.5x67.5x21.5cm. Musée provincial des Arts anciens du Namurois (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[1.16] Netherlandish, *Triptych with Crucifixion and Saints*, c.1401-10. Paint and gold leaf on panel, 64.3x51.5cm (open). Museum Schepenhuis, Mechelen (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[1.17] French, probably Burgundian, *Virgin and Child*, c.1390-1400. Oil and tempera on panel, 21.9x14.3cm. The Frick Collection, New York (Photograph: The Frick Collection).

[1.18] Wells Cathedral west front, Somerset, completed c.1250 (Photograph: Britannica).

[1.19] Parisian, *Reliquary of St Taurinus of Évreux*, 1240-55. Gilded copper, enamel and silver over a wooden chest, dimensions not ascertained. Saint-Taurin Church, Évreux (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[1.20] *Shrine of St Gertrude Nivelles*, cast from silver original formerly in church of Saint Gertrude in Nivelles, 1272-98 (original mostly destroyed in 1940). (Cast) Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[1.21] X-ray photograph of *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b] centre panel, taken 1991-4 (Photograph: Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg).

[1.22] *Mosaic Icon with Man of Sorrows*, c.1300 (image), c.1380 (case with relics). Multicoloured stones, gold and silver, on wood, 23x28cm. Basilica di Sta Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome (Photograph: Kathryn Rudy, *Image, Knife and Gluepot: Early Assemblage in Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Open Books Publishers, 2020), fig. 30 [chapter 1]).

[1.23] Netherlandish, *Last Judgement*, c.1425-35. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 231.5x186.5cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (on loan to the Stedelijk Museum, Diest) (Photograph: Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique).

[1.24] Attributed to Jean Touyl, *Reliquary Shrine*, c.1325-50. Gilded silver, translucent enamel, paint, 25.4x40.6x9.2 cm (open). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[1.25] *Baiser de Paix*, c.1320-30. Metalwork and enamel, 19.4x16.1cm (open). Saint-Aubain Cathedral Treasury, Namur (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[1.26] Parisian, *The Holy Thorn Reliquary*, c.1400. Gold, thorn, enamel, rock crystal, gems, 30.5x15x7cm. The British Museum, London (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[1.27] Master of St Jerome or Paul van Lymborch (?), *Bible Moralisée*, St Jerome in his Study, c.1402-4. Pen and ink on parchment. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS. fr. 166, frontispiece (detail) (Photograph: Jos Koldeweij and Pieter Roelofs, eds., *Maewael Van Lymborch Studies 1* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 40 [fig. 1]).

[1.28] Detail of *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b].

[1.29] Detail of *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b].

[1.30] 'Hand G' (Jan van Eyck?), *Turin-Milan Hours*, Office of the Dead, c.1420 or c.1445-52. Illumination on parchment. Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, Turin, no. 47, fol. 116 (Photograph: Museo Civico d'Arte Antica).

[1.31] Rogier van der Weyden, *Miraflores Altarpiece*, c.1442-5. Oil on panel, 220.5x259.5cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

[1.32] Jan van Eyck, *St Barbara*, 1437. Silverpoint, ink and oil on panel, 41.4x27.8cm (unframed). Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. (Photograph: Art in Flanders).

[1.33] Picasso, *Mandolin and Guitar*, 1924. Oil with sand on canvas, 140.7x200.3cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (Photograph: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).

[2.1a] Robert Campin (?) [Flémalle Group], the *Werl Altarpiece* panels, 1438. Oil on panel, 101x47cm (each panel). Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[2.1b] Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], left wing from the *Werl Altarpiece*, 1438. Oil on panel, 101x47cm. Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[2.1c] Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], right wing from the *Werl Altarpiece*, 1438. Oil on panel, 101x47cm. Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[2.2] Master of 1420, *The Virgin Child with St Catherine, St George and Donors Yolande Belle and Joos Bryde and Children*, 1420 (with restorations). Tempera on panel, 62x117cm. Museum Belle Godshuis, Ypres (Photograph: KIK-IRPA).

[2.3] Jan van Eyck, *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*, 1434-6. Oil on panel, 141x176.5cm (framed). Groeningemuseum, Bruges (Photograph: Heritage Brugge).

[2.4] Follower of Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], *The Virgin and Child before a Firescreen* ('Salting Madonna'), c.1440. Oil with tempera on panel, 63.4x48.5cm. National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[2.5] Limbourg brothers, *Très Riches Heures*, January Miniature, c.1410. Illumination on vellum. Condé Museum, Chantilly, MS. 65, fol. 1v (detail) (Photograph: Réunion des Musées Nationaux).

[2.6] Master of Flémalle (Robert Campin?) [Flémalle Group], *The Annunciation*, c.1415-25. Oil on panel, 61x63.7cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[2.7] Rogier van der Weyden, *The Magdalene Reading*, before 1438. Oil on panel, 62.2x54.4cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[2.8] Rogier van der Weyden (and Workshop?), *Annunciation Triptych*, c.1440. Oil on panel, 86x92cm. Louvre Museum, Paris (centre) and Galleria Sabauda, Turin (wings) (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[2.9] Jan van Eyck, *Lucca Madonna*, c.1437. Oil on panel, 65.7x49.6cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt (Photograph: Städel Museum).

[2.10] Tracing after the x-radiograph of the reverse of the St Barbara panel (right wing) from the *Werl Altarpiece* [2.1c] (Photograph: Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, fig. 155).

[2.11] Copy after Robert Campin [Flémalle Group] *Adoration of the Virgin and Child*, date not ascertained. Drawing, 17.7x23.5cm. Louvre Museum, Paris (Photograph: Louvre).

[2.12] Attributed to the Master of the Koberger Rundblätter (copy after Rogier van der Weyden), *Madonna and Child with Saints*, late 15th century. Drawing, 21.7x18.5cm. National Museum, Stockholm (Photograph: Ward, "Proposed Reconstruction," fig. 4).

[2.13] Domingos António de Sequeria after Rogier van der Weyden, *The Family of the Duke of Burgundy*, 1808. Drawing, 20.3x27.2cm. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon (Photograph: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga).

[2.14] Master of the Schöppingen Altarpiece, *Annunciation*, left-hand exterior panel of *Schöppingen Altarpiece*, c.1453-4. Oil on panel, dimensions not ascertained. St Briccius Church, Schöppingen (Photograph: Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe).

[2.15] Master of Liesborn, *Annunciation*, c.1470-80. Oil on panel, 98.7x70.5cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: National Gallery).

[2.16] *East Wall Crucifixion with Hardevust Donors*, 14th century, destroyed WW2. Wall painting. Formerly Minoritenkirche or St Mariä Empfängnis, Cologne (Photograph: Clemen, *Monumentalmalereien*, fig. 234).

[2.17] Post-restoration photograph of the Minoritenkirche or St. Maria Empfängnis, Kolpingplatz, Cologne, from the SW. Begun mid-13th century, heavily damaged in WW2, majorly restored in 1958 and 2009-10 (Photograph: Raimond Spekking).

[2.18] Bavarian Master, *Sermones xviii de sanctis* (Nicolaus de Dinkelspuhel), The Good and Bad Prayer, 1430-1460. Coloured woodcut from the Augustinian monastery of Ranshofen, Upper Austria. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm. 12714, back of binding cover (Photograph: Gerhard Jaritz, "*Trad Dei*," fig. 2.1).

[2.19] Hieronymus Bosch or follower, *Superbia* from *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*, 1505-10. Oil on panel, 119.5x139.5cm (whole table). Prado Museum, Madrid (Photograph: Prado Museum).

[2.20] Rogier van der Weyden, *Abegg Triptych*, c.1445. Oil on panel, 102x70.5cm (centre), 103x31cm (each wing). Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[2.21] Stefan Lochner, *Madonna in the Rose Bower*, c.1448. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 51x40cm. Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne (Photograph: Directmedia).

[2.22] Stefan Lochner, Annunciation, exterior panels of the *Altar of the Three Magi*, c.1440-45. Oil and gold leaf on panel, 260x185cm. Cathedral, Cologne (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[2.23] Stefan Lochner, Sts Catherine, Hubert and Quirinus, wing panel from the *Last Judgment Altar*, soon after 1435 (1440/50?). Oil on panel, 120 x 80.4. Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Photograph: Alte Pinakothek).

[2.24] Dormitory, Bebenhausen Monastery Baden-Württemberg, originally built 1216-17, adapted c.1500 (Photograph: Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg).

[2.25] Copy after Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], *Mass of St Gregory*, c.1510 after an original usually dated c.1440. Oil on panel, 85x73cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Photograph: Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique).

[2.26] Rogier van der Weyden, Annunciation, left wing of the *St Columba Altarpiece*, c.1455. Oil on panel, 138x70cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Photograph: Alte Pinakothek).

[2.27] Dirk Bouts, *Christ in the House of Simon*, c.1460. Oil on panel, 40.5x61cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[2.28] Oratory, Gruuthuse, built 1470s, adjoining Church of Our Lady, Bruges (Photograph: Musea Brugge).

[2.29] *The Book of the Queen*, Christine de Pisan presenting her book to Isabeau of Bavaria, c.1410-14. Illumination on parchment. British Library, London, MS. Harley 4431, fol. 3 (Photograph: British Library).

[2.30] La Salle des Malades, Hôtel-Dieu, Tonnere, built 1293 (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[2.31] 'Grande Salle des Pôvres', Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune, founded 1453 (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[2.32] Detail of left wing from the *Werl Altarpiece* left wing [2.1b].

[2.33] Detail of *The Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10].

[2.34] Detail of the *Werl Altarpiece* right wing [2.1c].

[2.35] Quatrefoil Stone Relief containing the February Labour, West façade of Amiens Cathedral, c.1230 (Photograph: Princeton Index of Medieval Art).

[2.36] Master of Catherine of Cleves, *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Holy Family at Supper, c.1440. Illumination on parchment. The Morgan Library, New York, MS M.917/945, fol. 151 (Photograph: The Morgan Library).

[3.1a] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of Edward Grimston*, 1446. Oil on panel, 32.5x24cm. On long-term loan to the National Gallery, London from the Earl of Verulam (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.1b] Inscription on reverse of *Portrait of Edward Grimston* [3.1a] (Photograph: Ainsworth, *Christus*, fig. 15).

[3.1c] Artist's impression of the heraldry painted on reverse of *Portrait of Edward Grimston* [3.1a] (Photograph: Franks, "Notes," pl. 27 (459)).

[3.2] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Carthusian*, 1446. Oil on panel, 29.2x21.6cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[3.3] Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement*, c.1440. Tempera on panel, 64.1x41.9cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[3.4] Franco-Flemish, *Portrait of a Woman*, c.1410. Oil on panel, 52x36.6cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington (Photograph: National Gallery of Art).

[3.5a-b] Robert Campin [Flémalle Group], *A Man and A Woman*, c.1435. Oil with tempera on panel, 40.7x28.1 and 40.6x28.1cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.6] Netherlandish, *Portrait of Lysbeth van Duvenvoorde*, c.1430. Oil on parchment mounted on plexiglass, 32x20cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Photograph: Rijksmuseum).

[3.7] Petrus Christus, *The Holy Family in a Domestic Interior*, c.1460-67. Oil on panel, 69.5x51cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (Photograph: Nelson-Atkins Museum).

[3.8] Petrus Christus, *The Falconer*, c.1445-50. Silverpoint on prepared paper, 19x14.4cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt (Photograph: Städel Museum).

[3.9] Comparison of [3.1a], [3.2], [3.8].

[3.10] Copy after Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Isabella of Portugal*, 17th c. (date disputed). Drawing. Arquivo Nacional da Torre Tombo, Lisbon (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[3.11] Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Man ('Léal Souvenir')*, 1432. Oil on panel, 33.3x18.9cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.12] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c.1450. Silverpoint on prepared paper, 13.2x8.9cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Photograph: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam).

[3.13] Petrus Christus, *Christ as Man of Sorrows*, c.1450. Oil on panel, 11.2x8.5cm. City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham (Photograph: Birmingham Museums Trust).

[3.14] Jan van Eyck, *Annunciation*, exterior of the *Dresden Triptych*, 1437. Oil on panel, 33.1x27.5cm (closed). Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden (Photograph: Closer to Van Eyck / closertovaneyck.kikirpa.be).

[3.15] Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Cardinal Niccolò Albergati* (?), c.1435-40. Silverpoint on paper, 21.4x18cm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden (Photograph: Kupferstich-Kabinett).

[3.16] Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Cardinal Niccolò Albergati* (?), c.1435. Oil on panel, 34x29.5cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Photograph: Kunsthistorisches Museum).

[3.17] Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Emperor Maximilian I*, 28 June 1518. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 38.1x31.9cm. Albertina, Vienna (Photograph: Web Gallery of Art).

[3.18] Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Emperor Maximilian I*, 1519. Oil on panel, 74x61.5cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Photograph: Kunsthistorisches Museum).

[3.19] Infra-red reflectogram of the *Portrait of Edward Grimston* [3.1a], taken September 1993 (Photograph: Ainsworth, *Christus*, fig. 64).

[3.20] Petrus Christus, *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Francis*, 1457. Oil on panel, 46.7x44.6cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt (Photograph: Städel Museum).

[3.21] To scale comparison of [3.1a], [3.2], [3.8].

[3.22] Jan van Eyck and Workshop, *Virgin and Child, with a Saints and Donor* ('Madonna of Jan Vos'), c.1441-3. Oil on panel, 47x61cm. The Frick Collection, New York (Photograph: The Frick Collection).

[3.23] Petrus Christus, *The Virgin and Child with St Barbara and Jan Vos* ('Exeter Virgin'), c.1450. Oil on panel, 19.5x14cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Christoph Schmidt).

[3.24] Image of *The Carthusian* [3.2] before the halo was removed (Photograph: van der Velden, "Defrocking," fig 8).

[3.25] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c.1470. Oil on panel, 29.1x22.5cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

[3.26] Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy*, c.1435. Oil on panel, 26x20cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

[3.27] Follower of Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Man with a Carnation*, c.1436 (?). Oil on panel, 41.5x31.5cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photograph: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

[3.28] Jan van Eyck (?), *St Jerome in His Study*, c.1435 (?). Oil on linen paper on panel, 20.6x13.3cm. Detroit Institute of Arts (Photograph: Detroit Institute of Arts).

[3.29] Rogier van der Weyden or associate (?), *Philip of Brabant* (?), date unknown. Drawing for Louis de Mâle's tomb, destroyed, formerly Amsterdam, Mannheim Collection (Photograph: A.C.L., Brussels).

[3.30] Jan van Eyck (?), *The Fishing Party*, c.1420-5. Two coloured drawing fragments pasted on paper, mounted on a wooden board, 24.4x38.8cm. Département des Arts graphiques, Louvre Museum, Paris (Photograph: Louvre Museum).

[3.31] Follower of Jan van Eyck, *Marco Barbarigo*, c.1449-50. Oil on panel, 24.2x16cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.32] Attributed to Rogier van der Weyden, *Chroniques de Hainault*, Jean Wauquelin presenting his 'Chroniques de Hainault' to Philip the Good, 1447-8. Illumination on parchment. Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels, MS. KBR. 9242, frontispiece (detail) (Photograph: Bibliothèque royale de Belgique).

[3.33] Hans Holbein the Younger, *Sir Thomas More*, 1527. Oil on panel, 74.9x60.3cm. The Frick Collection, New York (Photograph: The Frick Collection).

[3.34] The Talbot Master, *Talbot Shrewsbury Book*, Henry VI enthroned, 1444-5. Illumination on parchment. British Library, London, Royal MS. 15 E vi, fol. 405r (detail) (Photograph: British Library).

[3.35] Image of 3.1a in (later, non-original) frame, in which it is not displayed in the present day (Photograph: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/24364447@N05/6444763035>).

[3.36] Rubbing from ledger-stone of Bishop Robert Hallum, d.1416. Choir, Constance Cathedral, Germany (Photograph: Franz Xaver Kraus, *Die Kunstdenkmäler des Grossherzogthums Baden. Band 1: Die Kunstdenkmäler des Kreises Konstanz* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1887), fig. 52 (163)).

[3.37] Probably by Pieter van Coninxloo, *Margaret of Austria* (part of a diptych with Philip the Handsome), c.1493-5. Oil on panel, 23.2x15.2cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.38] Swabian Master (or of Constance?), *Wilhelm IV. Graf Schenk von Schenkenstein and Agnes von Werdenberg*, c.1440/45. Support not ascertained, 14.9cm high. Schwäbisch Hall, Sammlung Würth (Photograph: AKG-Images).

[3.39] Master of Girart de Roussillon, *Roman de Girart de Roussillon*, Jean Wauquelin Presents the *Roman* to Philip the Good, c.1447-50. Illumination on parchment. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS. 2549, fol. 6r (detail) (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[3.40] Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *A Man Reading (St Ivo?)*, c.1450. Oil on panel, 45x35cm. The National Gallery, London (Photograph: The National Gallery).

[3.41] Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *Portrait of Isabella of Portugal*, c.1450. Oil on panel, 46x37.1cm. Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Photograph: Getty Museum).

[3.42] Petrus Christus, *Death of the Virgin*, c.1460-65. Oil on panel transferred to mahogany, 73.7x102.9cm. Timken Museum of Art, San Diego (Photograph: Timken Museum of Art).

[3.43] Wappensaal, Albrechtsburg Palace of the Electors of Saxony, Meißen, begun 1471. Postcard, 1931 (Photograph: Brück & Sohn Kunstverlag).

[3.44] Workshop of the Master of Girart de Roussillon, *Dialogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne à Jésus Christ*, Margaret of York before the Resurrected Christ, 1468-77. Illumination on parchment. British Library, London, Add. MS. 7970, frontispiece (detail) (Photograph: British Library).

[3.45] The Talbot Master, *Talbot Shrewsbury Book*, Chapter of the Garter, 1444-5. Illumination on parchment. British Library, London, Royal MS. 15 E vi, fol. 439r (detail) (Photograph: British Library).

[3.46] Rudolf Wittkower, 'The Social Background of the Sitter'. Exhibition on portraiture, Warburg Institute, 1943 (Photograph: Warburg Iconographic Database, https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/subcats.php?cat_1=12&cat_2=1393).

[3.47] Wall Paintings of the Counts of Flanders (left to right: Robrecht III, Lodewijk I, Lodewijk II, Margaretha III, Filips I), initially c.1370, majorly restored 19th century. Chapel of the Counts (built 1370) at the former Collegiate Church, now Church of Our Lady, Courtrai (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons).

[3.48] Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1472-75. Oil on panel, 40x29cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

[3.49] Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Man*, c.1465. Oil on panel, 47.6x35.2cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Photograph: Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction: from Shrine to Room

How many emotions must be frustrated of their object, when one gives up the titles of dignity, the crimson lights and blare of brass, the gold embroidery, the plumed troops, the fear and trembling, and puts up with a president in a black coat who shakes hands with you, and comes, it may be, from a 'home' upon a veldt or prairie with one sitting-room and a Bible on its centre-table. It pauperises the monarchical imagination!

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), 460.

When we look at Petrus Christus's *Portrait of Edward Grimston* [0.1], what do we see? How do we see it? The man depicted emerges from the murky confines in a room of his own, in the world of his day. Without this definite space surrounding him, he would look different. Such a portrayal – a man indoors – seems quite natural from our vantage point following centuries of similar presentations. But it was not always so.

Securely dated to 1446, the work is among the earliest surviving panel paintings to place a single individual in a described environment specific to them – possibly *the* earliest surviving.¹ How might we account for the house interior in *Edward*

¹ Possibly also the earliest surviving single-sitter portrait on panel of a non-royal English person (C. S. L. Davies, "Grimston, Edward," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004),

Grimston? My thesis forms a circuitous response to this single art historical question, which it targets from a particular angle and propels backwards further into time.

One might imagine that the development represented by this portrait marked a significant instance in the history of art. Yet, scholars have been relatively laconic, both about the phenomenon and its elaboration in Christus' portraiture.² *Grimston* himself remains somewhat neglected; his panel is in poor condition, on long-term loan to the National Gallery from a private collection and was included only as a comparative image in the catalogue to the major monographic exhibition on the artist in 1994.³

While the arrival of the interior in single-sitter secular portraiture is generally judged an innovation attributable to Christus, it has aroused little further comment. The question of whether the artist pioneered the genre is unsolvable and hence immaterial, although that a portrait of this type at this time was rare, is highly probable. And so that leaves, surely, the more central issue: what does this picture stand for? The neglect of this portrait, and of this bewitching question, I

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-69056?rskey=5NVTyU&result=4>).

² But see Gustav Künstler. "Vom Entstehen des Einzelbildnisses und seiner frühen Entwicklung in der flämischen Malerei," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 27, no. 1 (1974): 50-51; 54-5; Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 114-15; 128 and note fn712 and fn713 below. Readings generally relate to Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and its Character* (New York: Icon Editions, 1971) 1:310. For the sixteenth century see, in particular, Petra Kathke, *Porträt und Accessoire: eine Bildnisform im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Reimer, 1997).

³ Maryan Ainsworth, ed., *Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 49-50 (fig. 64-65).

argue, has not allowed us to follow the link that this creates in the history of the use of interior and architectural environments in panel painting.

I come at this from a particular position. I believe that the significance of these early spatial settings can only be properly understood within the context of architectural framing in late medieval panel painting: architecture's associations with honour and sacrality, its structuring of composition, its definition of a location in which the painted figures can be seen to dwell, virtually. In recovering this influential conception of the medieval picture as an aedicule or 'little house' – all but lost in our present day – and blending it with close attention to the social and religious context of a picture's patronage and visual content, I aim to reinvigorate our understanding of what can seem like a bafflingly pronounced attachment to architectonic form in some Netherlandish panel paintings of the first half of the fifteenth century, which, I believe, translate the older architectonic conventions into new descriptive settings. This thesis attempts to discern the significance of indoor environments to certain key works of the period – especially their role in *producing* the figural content. Eventually, I hope that when we once again gaze upon *Edward Grimston*, we do so with greater understanding of how he arrived in that setting at that particular moment.

The following study is therefore devoted to the house interior in Netherlandish panel painting of c.1400 to c.1450, exploring various means by which paintings of the era housed their contents. Why specifically Netherlandish interiors? Otto Pächt once called the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] the “first true modern interior in the

history of art”.⁴ Whether we agree with this ambitious statement (there are many examples from the Italian Trecento potentially equally “modern”), the hold of some of the finer Netherlandish interiors over our cultural memory is undeniable, crystallising into an enduring image of the late medieval domestic sphere.⁵

Traditionally, art historians used terms like ‘bourgeois interior’, ‘domestic interior’, the French *intérieur* (interior scene or setting) and the German *Innenraumbild* (‘inner-space-picture’, difficult to render in English) to label depictions like the Virgin’s room in the *Mérode Altarpiece*. These terms are, respectively, either too sociological, too limited, too open or too spatial to entitle this thesis. Instead, I use ‘house’ to circumscribe a more nuanced approach, inviting instability between sacred and secular categories of experience; the church was of course the *domus dei*.⁶ ‘Shrine’ in this thesis is an intentionally malleable term, denoting a containment structure of expandable proportions with sacred implications, often using architectural language to convey its purpose. I also make continuous use of the word ‘setting’ to bring out the integrative quality of some of these interiors with respect to their figural contents.

⁴ Otto Pächt, *Van Eyck and the Founders of Early Netherlandish Painting*, trans. David Britt (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1994), 50. Cf. the useful definition: Wolfgang Kemp, “Ganze Teile. Zum kunsthistorischen Gattungsbegriff,” in *Kemp-Reader*, ed. Kilian Heck (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006), 143: “An interior is only an interior when all objects... appear subject to the logic of the indoor space, that is the difference between a ‘woman at the spinet’ and an ‘interior with woman at the spinet’.”

⁵ Francis Borzello, *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 26: “At the beginning of the history of the interior in art, I would put Jan van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Portrait*”; Judith Flanders, *The Making of Home: The 500-Year Story of How our Houses Became Homes* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014), fig. 8; fig. 10-11; Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration from Pompeii to Art Nouveau* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), 83; 92.

⁶ See Jeanne Nuechterlein, “The Domesticity of Sacred Space in the Fifteenth-Century Netherlands,” in *Defining the Holy. Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (Aldershot: Algate, 2005), 49-79 on the ambiguous conceptual line between sacred and secular space in representations of interiors with domestic features.

My date-range was selected to look both backwards and forwards from the 1420s-30s moment in which Pächt claims to have located the first “modern” interior. This thesis therefore begins with paintings of the pre-Eyckian era, tracing a longstanding conception of the picture as a type of house-shrine for venerable images.

Thus, my chapter one uses the *Norfolk Triptych* [1.3], a particularly complicated object, to explore the broader artistic context surrounding some of the finer examples of Netherlandish panel painting involving architectural form, c.1400. It thinks about how conventions of housing the figure in early panel painting might relate to objects of other media and materials, especially metalwork. The *Norfolk Triptych* is, however, interesting because it is so virtuosically painted, and because it is the painting – not the crafting – that conveys its architectonic nature. The chapter hopes to demonstrate that conceptualising a picture as a diminutive building was an influential idea that underwent a remarkable transmutation under the brushes of early Netherlandish panel painters.

The second chapter – the thesis’ fulcrum – deals with a further translation of architectural form by the Netherlandish paintbrush, but one more obliquely apprehensible: in the 1430s, in the next generation of painters including Jan van Eyck and the Master of Flémalle (or Robert Campin), when house-shrines became recognisable rooms and buildings, dressed in fifteenth-century architectural

elements and furnished with contemporary objects.⁷ Here, we encounter the ‘painting as house’ in vernacular guise in the *Werl Altarpiece* by the ‘Flémalle Group’ of 1438 [0.4], of which two wing panels survive. This picture demonstrates a powerful impulse to locate saintly figures in the present day, and the apparent importance of such a recognisable, worldly setting to the depicted mendicant friar, its patron. This chapter does not seek to claim, as others have done in the past, an exclusively devotional basis for the interpenetration of sacred and secular. It proposes that the contemporary language of the architectural setting serviced various ends, not all consistent, that conceivably suited the patron himself and the Franciscan context. The setting is shown to be a crucial component of this picture’s visual significance, substantially defining the manner of its reception.

My third and final chapter remedies the neglect of the portrait setting’s coming-into-being, concerning the settings and sitters of three similar portraits by Petrus Christus from the later 1440s [0.1] (see [3.9]). As some of the earliest surviving examples to show a sitter in a complementary indoor space, they mark an intriguing point of transition in the history of the house interior. The chapter investigates how the depiction and content of a setting may be used to reflect the circumstances of a portrait’s patronage – how the pictorial background could function as a social background. It explores some of the compositional, iconographic and biographical circumstances that may have underpinned the interior’s appearance in portraiture.

⁷ On Campin/Flémalle artistic identity, see Jochen Sander, “Reconstructing Artists and their Oeuvres,” in *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden*, exh. cat., ed. Stephan Kemperdick and Jochen Sander (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 75-93.

The rest of this introduction functions as an outline to the broader topic of the interior in early Netherlandish panel painting, its history, historiography and its interactions with diverse pools of scholarly literature. I will touch on certain debates or issues within the field that are relevant to my interpretation of the topic: namely, the hermeneutics of the inanimate pictorial content, the predominance of iconographic or iconological models of analysis, the privileging of theological explanation and the relative scholarly disregard for architectural features (and their architectural nature). I will address this thesis' particular historical timespan and the problems that arise in interrogating the entrenched divisions of traditional periodisation between pre-Eyckian and Eyckian or post-Eyckian scholarship. I will end by iterating my central aims and objectives, accounting for my particular view of the house interior's significance, demonstrating the importance of a study of patronage and social context to some of my case studies, but also admitting, in a closing discussion of methodology, the difficulty of integrating various modes of art historical analysis (visual description with, for example, the facts of material culture), and the capacity of the artwork to slip from one's historical or historicist grasp – to be, somehow, just out of reach.

'Figural' interpretation and the translation of architectural form

One of the problems faced in interpreting the house interior in early Netherlandish painting is exactly this instability with regard to time and history. We might look at the Barbara panel from the *Werl Altarpiece* [0.4] and imagine that we see into a fifteenth-century room as through a window. In fact, the whole conception is

deeply implicated in a complex chain of formal traditions, not necessarily immediately graspable when viewed in a museum context, rather than its probable original ecclesiastical location.⁸ Its apparently freshly conceived domestic interiors are, I posit, obliquely indebted to certain historic conventions regarding the housing of saintly figures. They are, in a sense, ingenious translations of older concepts.⁹ Therefore, I will first explain my perception of the significance of the architectonic frame's 'long tail' for early Netherlandish painting and in doing so define a particular position regarding the history of forms. Nowhere is the fifteenth-century Netherlandish contribution towards the transmutation of architectural form better displayed than through the two St Ursula Shrines made for the *Sint-Janshospitaal* in Bruges, the later work believed to have directly replaced the earlier. Here we grasp the full weight of painterly 'translation'.

The first shrine [0.5] was made by an anonymous artist in the pre-Eyckian era.¹⁰ It was carved out of wood to resemble a miniature church, a customary form for reliquaries. Painted in red and once embellished with gilding, its images of St Ursula and her virgins are sculpted in relief under the central arch, with further (non-sculpted) blessed companions situated against a non-descript red background, among erratic foliage.

⁸ See p164-68 below.

⁹ Taking inspiration from Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 397: "We approach the mentality of the time when we look for the presence of the old in the new" (in the context of Dugento and Trecento altarpieces).

¹⁰ Cyril Stroo, ed., *Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting in the Low Countries* (Brussels: Brepols, 2009), 156-95 (no. 3).

The second shrine [o.6a-b] was made c.1489 by Hans Memling in a pointed commission to engage in a conscious, respectful artistic dialogue with the older shrine (at and beyond that time a cherished sacred object, proven by its continuity until our present day) – and, furthermore, with a historical tradition of micro-architectural metalwork reliquaries stretching back into the medieval era.¹¹ His larger, more ornate work is similarly shaped as a miniature golden church, and his St Ursula is similarly nestled within a Gothic arch, though at the gabled end this time. But the gilded arch undergoes a metamorphosis, becoming the stone detail of a painted chapel as might be seen in the Bruges of that day, on whose richly tiled floor the saint persuasively stands, backed by windows letting in the light of a world beyond.¹² On the sides, there are landscapes and city scenes, narrating the saint’s legend with recognisable buildings. Here, Memling went further than renewal, more aggressively thwarting the object’s bounds; his painterly virtuosity fictively, illusionistically triumphing over the limitations of the conventional architectonic form.¹³ Karel van Mander highlighted this self-conscious sublation of older artistic traditions by fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting when he claimed Memling’s reliquary was “executed in so masterly a style, that many times an offer for buying the shrine was received amounting to the cost of a shrine of pure silver”.¹⁴

¹¹ For Memling’s work, see Dirk de Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) 296-303 (no. 83), who believes Memling conceived the whole object (296).

¹² De Vos, *Memling*, 301: “... painted in such a way as to suggest the interior of the reliquary”. De Vos (296) likens the object to the Paradise portal of Our Lady’s Church at Bruges, noting (303n16) that now-lost documents may have existed proving that Memling made two trips to Cologne, perhaps recording locations for depiction (53).

¹³ Jeanne Nuechterlein, “Hans Memling’s St. Ursula Shrine: The Subject as Object of Pilgrimage,” in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, ed. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 74.

¹⁴ Carel van Mander, *Dutch and Flemish Painters: Translation from the Schilderboek*, trans. Constant van de Wall (New York: Mcfarlane, Warde, Mcfarlane, 1936), 20. The original: Karel van Mander, *Het Leven der Doorluchtighe Nederlandtsche, en Hooghduytsche Schilders*, part three of *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604). The later translation was unavailable to me (Hessel

A preserved document relates the relics' ritualised, solemn *translatio* on St Ursula's feast-day, 21st October 1489: "... from an old shrine or vessel, in which they were long reverently kept, honourably preserved, and arranged, into this present new vessel or new shrine, entitled 11,000 Virgins..."¹⁵ By converting the older shrine into a new artistic language, Memling also contributed his own artistic *translatio* of a kind. The old carved architectonic form, formerly deemed most appropriate to accent the saint's honour, transmutes into a painted spatial setting, which compensates for the loss of sculpted relief by illusionistic depth. This arc of assimilation, simultaneously metamorphic and respectful, connecting the newer painterly modes with established traditions of imagery, underpins the span of my thesis.

Recognising old forms in new objects and new forms in old objects is a peculiarity of art historical apprehension rooted, I suggest, in an ancient conception of images or 'figures' as fixed ideas with multiple, evolving expressions. The relationship of new shrine to old shrine cannot be satisfactorily understood through straightforward chronological time; it is not simply that the one form is newer and the other older, but that the old is somehow *realised* or "fulfilled" in the new – and *vice versa*.¹⁶ Art historians *perform* the realisation by a tutored, quasi-scientific

Miedema, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, 6 vols (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994)).

¹⁵ Original transcribed: James Weale, *Hans Memlinc / biographie / tableaux conservés à Bruges* (Bruges: L. de Plancke, 1901), 47-50 (48): "... nuper ex quadam vetusta capsula, sive feretro, in qua diu ab antea reverenter recondite, honorifice recluse, et collocata extiterant, et in hoc presenti novo feretro, sive nova capsula, Undecim Mille Virginum attitulato..."

¹⁶ For the classical and Christian backgrounds to the 'figura' as historical phenomenon, see Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Meridian, 1959), and note esp. 12: "the notion of the new of the new

sense of the history of iconographies and styles. But despite the patinas of certainty conjured by technology, through vast statistical surveys or technical analysis of objects, the basis of the craft is still the eye – unreliable, human. If, relinquishing the westernised concept of ‘art’, one came to judge these fundamental processes of art historical thinking, what is enacted might be considered more the stuff of mysticism than history, a ‘dramatically ironic’ providential vision, a ‘backwards prophecy’ retrospectively staged with art historical contents as actors.¹⁷ As with the medieval perception of the interrelations of scriptural content, the artworks are “real events... within time, within the stream of historical life”; but it is their “understanding” that is akin to a “spiritual act”.¹⁸

When Otto Pächt performs his Wölfflinian ‘double-slide’ comparisons between successive International Gothic and Eyckian styles using two examples of identical iconography, he stimulates a ‘figural’ connection; similarly, the Christian artists of

manifestation, the changing aspect of the permanent runs through the whole history of the word [*figura*],” and 29-30 and 53. On the value of the ‘figural’ for understanding the history of art, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), noting esp. 9: “no device more effectively generates the effect of a doubling or bending of time than the work of art...”

¹⁷ For a modernist view on struggles of synthesising scientific rigour with the study of artworks, and on art’s imperviousness, see Hans Sedlmayr, “Towards a Rigorous Art History,” in *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 133-80 and note Meyer Schapiro, “New Viennese School,” *Art Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (1936): 259: “Anyone who has investigated with real scruple a problem of art history knows how difficult it often is to establish even a simple fact beyond question and how difficult it is to make a rigorous explanation...”; “Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art,” *The Arts* 8 (1925): 171: “[art] employs visual facts, but all these visual facts cannot equal the work of art.” Cf. Christopher S. Wood, *A History of Art History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 407: “[art] is unavailable to reason and not fully involved with history, an unknown external to man even if produced by man” and Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. George Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 32: “How best can we define something that lies so far beyond the reach of time and yet is subjected to time? Is this prodigy merely a simple phenomenon of cultural activity in a chapter of general history? Or is it something added to our universe – an entirely new universe, with its own laws, materials and development, with its own physics, chemistry and biology, with its own engendering of a separate humanity?”

¹⁸ Auerbach, “Figura,” 53: “... but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions...”

the Middle Ages, reflecting typological practices of scriptural exegesis, habitually placed significant Old Testament images side-by-side with significant New Testament images.¹⁹ This can be seen in Nicholas of Verdun's famous metalwork and enamel ensemble for the Klosterneuburg Monastery of 1181 [0.7]; in the left wing, Gospel episodes like the Annunciation, Nativity and Circumcision form a middle row of images between equivalent events in the lives of Isaac and Samson.²⁰ Such 'figural' connections were sustained by an intricate nexus of form and content. For the medieval artist pre-occupied by typological thinking, the contents ultimately dictated – were the higher purpose for – the formal bonds. For Pächt, however, it was necessary that subject-matter or iconography remain nearly identical across the chosen images, for his type and anti-type were employed primarily to explain stylistic contrasts and relations between different treatments of similar forms.

'Figural' relationships between images used to be detected and conveyed by medieval theologians; in modern times the work was (is) done by art historians acting, unintentionally, like priests without an altar.²¹ The subject's basic schema of stylistic periods reveals an implicitly Christian conception of history.²² The

¹⁹ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 19-20; 22-3; 37-9. On medieval typology, see especially Friedrich Ohly, "Typology as a Form of Historical Thought," in *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significance and the Philology of Culture*, ed. Samuel Jaffe, trans. Kenneth Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 31-67, and for an assessment of Ohly's ideas from an art historical perspective, see Aden Kumler and Christopher Lakey, "Res et significatio: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012): 1-17.

²⁰ According to an appended inscription, the work was transferred from an ambo to a retable format in 1331. On the work's reframing and its typological system, see Heike Schlie, "Vom Ambo zum Retabel – Das klosterneuburger Goldschmiedewerk von Nikolaus von Verdun," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 80 (2017): 247-74.

²¹ Ohly, "Typology," 35: "... art history alone – from 1860 till about 1920 – had cultivated the field of typological studies..."

²² On medieval Christian historiography, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 49-56. For the uncompromising belief in art historical epochs, note

widely used term ‘pre-Eyckian’ enacts its own *anno Domini* dating system based on Karel van Mander’s notion of a ‘zero hour’ for early Netherlandish painting with van Eyck in starring role (it may as well be BE – ‘before Eyck’).²³ Titles of recent exhibitions on the period demonstrate the persistence of this messianism.²⁴ Already in 1495, Nuremberg physician Hieronymus Münzer saw van Eyck’s great altarpiece while travelling through Ghent, saying, “one is able to see there much more than simply a picture, but rather the whole art of painting”.²⁵ Treating the *Ghent Altarpiece* [0.8] as a messianic microcosm for the pictorial artform in general, van Eyck’s *Allerheiligenbild* or ‘all saints image’ becomes the ‘all art image’. The spirit of Münzer’s comment lives on in recent art historians who envisage the altarpiece as a providential laboratory of modern pictorial genres (portrait, landscape, interior, still life).²⁶

The medieval sense of history, of time, was profoundly different to that of our modern age.²⁷ And there is every reason to believe that early Netherlandish patrons

Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979) 199, describing a conversation with Erwin Panofsky while walking in Cape Cod in summer 1951: “He [Panofsky] told me how puzzled he had been in his student days by the expression ‘Gothic painting’. He could understand the application to buildings or decoration, but in what sense could a painting be Gothic? I summoned my courage and asked, ‘Do you think that all this really exists?’, to which he replied with an uncompromising ‘yes’.”

²³ See Wood, *A History*, 107.

²⁴ Stephan Kemperdick and Friso Lammertse, eds., *The Road to Van Eyck*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2012); Maximiliaan Martens et al, eds., *Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020).

²⁵ E.-Ph. Goldschmidt, “Le voyage de Hieronimus Monetarius à travers la France: III,” *Humanisme et Renaissance* 6, no. 3 (1939), 348: “... ut nedum picturam, sed artem pingendi totam ibi videres”.

²⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Kemp, “Realismus als Katalysator. Der Genter Altar–vom Bildsystem zum Gattungssystem,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 83, no. 4 (2020): 471-91; Hans Belting, *Spiegel der Welt. Die Erfindung des Gemäldes in den Niederlanden* (Munich: Beck, 2010), 105-24; 191-224; 265-69, esp. 212 (note this is a reprint of Belting’s essay sections, with new postscript, from Belting and Christiane Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes. Das Erste Jahrhundert der Niederländischen Malerei* (Munich: Hirmer, 1994)).

²⁷ Cf. Giles Constable, “A Living Past: The Historical Environment of the Middle Ages,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (Fall, 1990): 49: “the bridges between ‘was’, ‘is’ and ‘will be’ were... stronger in the Middle Ages than at other times in European history, and they enabled people to

and painters considered their images in an accordingly historically resonant, typological fashion, not just in terms of the conventionalised relationships between Old and New Testaments demonstrated in handbooks like the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, but also in more ambiguous, indirect instances, in the mixing of genres and the interchange between sacred and secular elements.²⁸ This ‘way of seeing’ is forcefully demonstrated by the Master of 1499’s *Diptych* (believed to resemble and ‘refigure’ a (half-)lost diptych by van Eyck) [0.9] which combines heavenly and earthly realms into a single, unified perspectival space, the ecclesiastical furnishings of the house of God curiously echoing the worldly possessions of the house of man.²⁹ As one scholar says, “the work encourages the beholder to think in metaphors”.³⁰ The *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10] is one such unusual concoction of religious and profane types: a painted double-portrait with the aura of a sepulchral monument infused with Annunciation iconography – and taking the height of an altarpiece.³¹ According to some, Quinten Massys’ *Moneylender and his Wife* [0.11] is a comparable example of a secular subject with motifs based on Marian

move easily between periods and to experience them without losing a sense of their integrity and reality;” Auerbach, “Figura,” 53: “the Old Testament as... phenomenal prophecy, as a prefiguration of Christ... for a thousand years remained the only accepted view of history.” And consult further Aron Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G. Campbell (London: Routledge, 1985) on the metaphorical patterns of medieval thought, esp. 26-39 on categories of time and space and 129-30 on anachronism as an “inseparable feature” of medieval historiography.

²⁸ On the handbooks, see Bert Cardon, *Manuscripts of The Speculum Humanae Salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c.1410-c.1470)* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1996), containing a useful introduction (1-41) on the history and historiography of typological symbolism in medieval literature and the visual arts.

²⁹ The remaining half is van Eyck’s *Virgin in a Church* [1.12]. This diptych may have ‘figurally’ corresponded to two other images: the two most well-known ‘Hand G’ full-page miniatures in the *Turin-Milan Hours*, possibly also by van Eyck, one set in a church (see [1.30]), the other the *Birth of St John the Baptist* (fol. 93v), set in a well-appointed bedroom. Note there is some debate about the dating of these miniatures.

³⁰ Belting, *Spiegel*, 92. Cf. particularly Erich Herzog, “Zur Kirchenmadonna Van Eycks,” *Berliner Museen* 6 (August 1956): 2-16, esp. 11-16.

³¹ See Christopher S. Wood, “Review of *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism* by Craig Harbison...,” *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 1 (1993): 179.

iconographies.³² In the 1420s and 1430s, the domestic interior was a fresh and highly successful iconographic innovation for Marian subjects in Netherlandish panel painting.³³ But the type was, in turn, conceivably drawing upon elements from established profane themes including relations between the sexes, women's domestic occupations or representations of the cold months in calendar cycles, for which we have few if any surviving precedents in panel painting.³⁴ The exchange between sacred and secular was not one-way, but fluid and reciprocal.

And yet the 'figural' potentials of art historical vision are less fashionable today than they once were; unexploited in present-day scholarly appreciations of early Netherlandish artworks, or repeated without exploring the ramifications. My thesis, therefore, has an elective affinity with older publications combining the

³² Holger Kuhn, "From the Household of the Soul to the Economy of Money: What are Sixteenth-Century Merchants doing in the Virgin Mary's Interior?," in *Interiors and Interiority*, ed. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Beate Söntgen (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 229-46; *Die Leibhaftige Münze: Quentin Massys' Goldwäger und die altniederländische Malerei* (Paderborn: Willhelm Fink, 2015).

³³ Cf. observations in Nuechterlein, "Domesticity," 50-1; Dirk de Vos, *The Flemish Primitives: The Masterpieces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 33; Carol Purtle, "The Iconography of Campin's Madonnas in Interiors: A Search for Common Ground," in *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship*, ed. Susan Foister and Susie Nash (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 171-82; Erwin Panofsky, "The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece," *Art Bulletin* 17, no. 4 (1935): 446: "After around 1430 there is, so far as I know, not a single Annunciation of comparatively high quality in Flemish panel painting in which this bourgeois interior type is not adopted, excepting, of course... in grisaille."

³⁴ See, respectively, Raimond van Marle, *Iconographie de l'art profane au Moyen-Age et à la Renaissance, et la décorations des demeures* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1932) 2:483-9; 155-60; 382-3, and cf. secular subjects in tapestries owned by the Burgundian Dukes, listed in Georges Doutrepoint, *La Littérature française à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne Philippe le Hardi, Jean sans Peur* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1909), 117-19; 329 (romances and epic histories including King Arthur, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Jason, Gideon, Hector, the Nine Worthies, Perceval le Gallois, Judas Maccabeus, etc.; didactic and allegorical subjects like the *Roman de la Rose*, the virtues and vices, the liberal arts, and – importantly – scenes of "la vie du monde", such as images of rural life, of hunting, of landscape, of peasants labouring, and proto-genre scenes like a picture of a lady between two lovers, of knights and ladies, of children going to school with their teacher, etc.). Lorne Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools. National Gallery Catalogues* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 23 underlines that "vast quantities" of paintings (panel, cloth, etc.) with profane subjects, once existing, have been lost – highlighting that awareness of these vanished categories is not always acknowledged or apparent in scholarship on fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting.

aforementioned tendencies with a particular sensitivity to pictorial architecture – by art historians born between the 1890s and the 1910s, like Kurt Bauch, Gustav Künstler, Erich Herzog, Hans Kauffmann, Karl Birkmeyer and especially Otto Pächt (also the more famous Erwin Panofsky).³⁵ These figures generally studied either in Germany, under the influence of Adolf Goldschmidt or his pupil Hans Jantzen (Kauffmann, Herzog, Panofsky), or in Vienna (Künstler) or both (Pächt, Bauch). They exemplify an art historical tradition characterised by an interest in psychology, philosophically-motivated language, a formalist’s fondness for comparison, and an often-nomadic array of interests and specialisms resulting in a heightened sense of a particular artwork or artist’s position within a broader conception of history.³⁶ Their writings betray a strong grasp of the philosophy of history and a commitment to a genealogical conception of art historical evolution, sometimes resulting in a tendency to make (now) unfashionably grand claims stimulating to read but difficult to rectify – to be of course digested with due scepticism and sensitivity.

Large portions of present scholarship seemed uninterested in various questions I ask; but by journeying backwards into art history, I found more sympathetic interlocutors.³⁷ Almost all those scholars shared a particular vision of early

³⁵ Pächt, *Van Eyck* and “Zur Entstehung des ‘Hieronymus im Gehäus’,” *Pantheon* 21 (1963): 131-42; Kurt Bauch, “Bildnisse des Jan van Eyck,” in *Studien zur Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 79-122; Künstler, “Einzelbildnisses”; Herzog, “Kirchenmadonna”; Hans Kauffmann, “Jan van Eycks ‘Arnolfinihochzeit’,” *Geistige Welt* 4, no. 2 (January 1950): 45-53; Karl Birkmeyer, “The Arch Motif in Netherlandish Painting of the Fifteenth Century: A Study in Changing Religious Imagery,” *Art Bulletin* 43, no. 1-2 (1961): 1-20; 99-112; and from the following generation, Anna Rohlfsvon Wittich, “Das Innenraumbild als Kriterium für die Bildwelt,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 18, no. 2 (1955): 109-35.

³⁶ In Rohlfsvon Wittich’s and Bauch’s cases, phenomenology; passages of Bauch’s essay (cited) read as Heideggerian (the use of *Bedingung*, *Nähe* etc.); see Lee Sorenson, ed., “Bauch, Kurt,” *Dictionary of Art Historians*, <https://arthistorians.info/bauchk>.

³⁷ Some of their critical observations continue to fuel scholarly questions. Cf. fn26 above.

Netherlandish spatial settings as, in a sense, ‘figural’ translations of older traditions of architectural framing. When Bauch apprehends van Eyck’s portraiture, it is in a broader flow of history: he sees through the eyes of one who is art historically at home in the ages of Rembrandt, the medieval tomb monument and the phenomenology of images in the twentieth century. Consequently, this thesis aims to engage my case study images in a manner that humbly appropriates a surface sheen of their syntheses of rigour and imagination for useful assimilation with more modern methodologies.

The story of *Stimmung*: on the history and historiography of the ‘interior’ in late medieval panel painting

In 1901, Aby Warburg crystallised the contribution of early Netherlandish painting to the Italian Renaissance, and history of art more generally. From the fifteenth-century Flemings, he said, the Italians learnt “not the embodiment of the dynamic life, but rather the spiritual ambience of the interior [*seelische Interieurstimmung*]”.³⁸ This view is persistent. In an essay around a century later, Wolfgang Kemp claimed that the “qualities of interiority” were especially achieved in works such as the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], which stand for “a discovery of atmospheric space... a *Stimmungsraum*.”³⁹ Some of the period’s most celebrated works have become justly famous partly because of the special, elusive ambiances

³⁸ Aby Warburg, “Flandrische und florentinische Kunst im Kreise des Lorenzo Medici um 1480,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gertrud Bing (Leipzig: Teubner, 1932) 1:212.

³⁹ Wolfgang Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele. Versuch einer Gattungspoetik des Interieurs,” in *Innenleben. Die Kunst des Interieurs. Vermeer bis Kabakov*, exh. cat., ed. Sabine Schulze (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1998), 19.

of their particular interior settings: van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* or *Madonna in a Church* [0.12], the Flémalle Group's *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2], Rogier van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 1445-50), Petrus Christus' *Goldsmith* [0.13], to name only a handful.

Architectural settings are palpably important in fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting. In a twenty-first-century statistical study, Annette LeZotte judged over ten per cent of paintings in Max Friedländer's early Netherlandish corpus to employ one indoor location: the domestic room-setting. Alongside the many other kinds of spaces used, like churches, chapels and palaces, house interiors of some variety clearly made up a substantial proportion of these painters' overall output.⁴⁰

It has been a task of art history to explain how the early Netherlanders arrived at this quality of painted, ambient interiority, in which the beholder seems to appreciate something approaching the experience of being indoors. The interior, says Anna Rohlfsvon Wittich, occupies a "special position" in the history of painting, because it "poses painters an inherent problem": "how to make the inside

⁴⁰ Of 17 panel paintings considered autograph and given numerical entries in the twenty-first-century catalogue raisonnée on Robert Campin, 11 are or substantially incorporate architectural interiors (i.e., niches, churches, huts, rooms); 4 are domestic settings, including features like windows, beamed ceilings, fireplaces, tables, benches and tiled or stone floors; this scope includes copies after purported lost paintings and treats cycles as single numerical entities (Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* (New York: Prestel, 2002), 253-334). The proportion remains if including 27 pictures assigned to the workshop: 15 showing architectural structures, 6-7 that might be called domestic interiors. In a van Eyck catalogue, the proportions are analogous: 12 of the 20 pictures referenced (including those known only through literary sources) are or substantially incorporate architectural interiors and 5 might be called domestic settings (Elisabeth Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* (New York: Tabard, 1980). This ratio changes in Petrus Christus' oeuvre (Bruges' principal painter during the succeeding period) with interiors reaching a pinnacle of adoption. In a comprehensive catalogue (not catalogue raisonnée), 20 panels are attributed to Christus or associates; 15 portray architectural interiors and c.10 might be called domestic settings – more including pavilions in Virgin and Child depictions (Ainsworth, *Christus*, 68-176).

of an enclosure visible to the beholder”.⁴¹ The late medieval ‘solution’ to this problem is recounted in several publications, the traditional thrust of which is summarised in the following paragraph.⁴²

Depicted interior space was achieved in antiquity, evident from surviving wall paintings. It became ‘lost’ in the medieval era: “as is well-known”, writes Rohlfsvon Wittich, “the Middle Ages knows no representation of interior space”.⁴³ What the Christian medieval era did know was the architectural frame, which it used to enclose saintly figures with passionate intensity. Carl Nordenfalk called this the “house-canopy type”.⁴⁴ At a certain point usually located in the careers of Duccio and Giotto, Italian painters ‘rediscovered’ interior space. Their removal of the fourth wall, revealing the inside of a walled enclosure in the manner of a doll’s house, was “constitutive for the genre”.⁴⁵ This practice was refined throughout the fourteenth century, with the “airiness” of Pietro Lorenzetti’s *Birth of the Virgin* (Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Siena, c.1335-42) deemed a particular high point.⁴⁶ Pächt described the triumph of Italian interior scenes at the end of the century: “the creators... seem to have instinctively realised that two things are necessary to create the spatial illusion of an interior: the sense of the three-dimensionality of a space built for human occupation, and its interior atmosphere, which is evoked by

⁴¹ Rohlfsvon Wittich, “Innenraumbild,” 109.

⁴² E.g., Ibid., 109-35. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:28-61; Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 50-4; Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele”; Carl Nordenfalk, “Outdoors-Indoors: A 2000-Year-Old Space Problem in Western Art,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 117, no. 4 (1973): 233-58.

⁴³ Rohlfsvon Wittich, “Innenraumbild,” 109; note George Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 23-29 (23: “for more than two thousand years the artist thought of both himself and his characters in the open air”).

⁴⁴ Nordenfalk, “Outdoors-Indoors,” 238.

⁴⁵ Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele,” 20.

⁴⁶ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 50-54.

the depiction of the objects that furnish the space”.⁴⁷ These achievements, then, fed the establishment of the early Netherlandish interior with its qualities and ambiances, which developed, still haunted by the house-canopy formulas.⁴⁸ The definitive break-through was said to come in situating the beholder’s stand-point inside the room and dispensing with the architectural frame. This was the successful innovation, detectable in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10] and the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2], that hardened into the quiet genre known as the ‘interior’, one of history’s more unsung artistic categories.⁴⁹ Pächt took exactly this invention to herald the “first truly modern interior”.

This thesis was nurtured upon this narrative, much of which it holds dear. But in its traditional favouring of the spatial explication, this story omits much. How, for instance, might we interpret the apparent exchange between the house-canopy formula and a spatialised setting in the early fifteenth century? How do we account for the architectonic frame’s lingering persistence in picture-making years, decades, even centuries, after its supposed dissolution into a three-dimensional pictorial environment by van Eyck and others?⁵⁰ What might be the sociological or material significance of the contents of fifteenth-century interior settings? How might these contents be determined? How can an interior be made to function on a patron’s behalf?

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁸ Nordenfalk, “Outdoors-Indoors”: 244.

⁴⁹ Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele,” 18-19. On art history’s (and art theory’s) relative disregard for the ‘interior’ as phenomenon, see Borzello, *At Home*, 10-25.

⁵⁰ Cf. Birkmeyer, “Arch Motif”.

The traditional spatial explanation for the apparent modernity of early Netherlandish painting is only one portion of a much broader story. The crucial moment for this thesis lies in these paintings' forceful erosion of theoretical and pictorial distance between sacred and secular elements – a pointed frustration of the artwork's pretension to cult-like unapproachability, which, as Walter Benjamin memorably noted, was nothing other than “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be”.⁵¹ This is achieved by the citing of recognisable worldly features like clothing, objects, and architectural settings, and also more technical and compositional elements like the attentively rendered texture of the chosen matter or the orchestration of pictorial relationships. Thus, when the beholder's standpoint is located seemingly within the picture, the painter allows the beholder to experience phenomenologically what is *already* being enacted upon the religious icons within the picture: invigorated proximity. A good example of the abolition of remoteness is the *Werl Altarpiece* [0.4], chapter two's case study, in which ideal beholders are seen in a mirror approaching the painted St John the Baptist, who is also reflected, as if to stress that he is not a vision but tangibly there with them in the room. Somehow, his doubling makes him all the more real, temporally – and less 'real', celestially.

The hermeneutics of inanimate pictorial content

The study of the interior in early Netherlandish painting can be seen to emerge from two major strands of Panofsky's art historical research: one, the “disguised

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 222.

symbolism” theory made famous in his essay of the unassuming title “Jan van Eyck’s *Arnolfini* Portrait” published, presumably wholly consciously, five hundred years after the picture’s execution; the other, from his essay on perspective of 1927.⁵² From his study of the portrait spring the iconographic and sociological approaches, interpreting an interior and its contents in terms of religious or literary symbolism, or historical and material context. From the study of perspective arises the spatial or phenomenological approach, finding a prominent later evolution in studies associated with art historical ‘reception theory’.⁵³ Could it be that in the case of those two important publications, the language difference (and concomitant place of publication) is partly responsible for different casts of interest – speaking broadly – shown towards early Netherlandish painting in German and English scholarship over the following decades (i.e. German, the more philosophical, spatially oriented; Anglophone, the more iconographic and documentary)?

These approaches waxed into two schools of concern. Firstly, there was a literary and historical concern for content: for figures, details and objects. Secondly, there was a sensitivity for overall composition, shape and pictorial motifs, a mindset inspired by a mixture of contemporaneous developments in modernist painting, gestalt psychology and philosophical enquiry (especially phenomenology); even

⁵² Erwin Panofsky, “Jan van Eyck’s *Arnolfini* Portrait,” *Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934): 117-27; *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991) (published as “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-1925* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1927), 258-330). Rather than opposed, Panofsky would presumably have seen the two approaches as equally iconological. Both receive respective enlargements in his later book, *Early Netherlandish*.

⁵³ Notably Rohlf-von Wittich, “Innenraumbild”; Wolfgang Kemp, *Räume der Maler. Zur Bildererzählung seit Giotto* (Munich: Beck, 1996), esp. 100-45; Thürlemann, *Campin*, 92-108.

advances in technology like photography and the moving image.⁵⁴ In the early twentieth century, art history, even pre-modern art history, was more integrated with contemporary art and artists. Felix Horb, author of the book *Das Innenraumbild des Späten Mittelalters* (1938), based on a dissertation “Duccios und Giotto's Architekturbild und seine Vorgeschichte” (University of Vienna, 1923), had an older brother, Max, who was an expressionist painter in the circle of Max Brod and Franz Kafka.⁵⁵ Some early twentieth century art historians seem to have had contemporaneous modernist abstract works foremost in mind while visualising late medieval paintings in spatial terms.

Though it may once have been, the interior is not now a major subject for historians of early Netherlandish painting. Like the architectonic framing systems of the precedent era (in which this thesis is equally interested), interior settings are today routinely treated as though they were hardly there or did not play a substantial role in conveying the work to the beholder either in terms of visual effect or signification. On the rare occasions architectural settings are analysed in a sustained fashion (they are still mostly dealt with by little more than a few descriptive sentences), they are read in symbolic-iconographic terms, or tested for their realism (as in which real-world location they reflect) or as components of a

⁵⁴ Cf. Theodor Adorno's critical comparison of phenomenology and photography in *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 196: “Like the photographer of old, the phenomenologist wraps himself with the black veil of his *epoche*, implores the objects to hold still and unchanging... Just as in photography the *camera obscura* and the recorded pictorial object belong together, so in phenomenology do the immanence of consciousness and naïve realism”.

⁵⁵ Peter Gillgren, “Felix Horb: Notes in the margins of Max Dvořák, Hans Sedlmayr and Erwin Panofsky,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 21 (December 2019): 2.

spatial or perspectival effect.⁵⁶ Indeed, spatial and perspectival investigations can often be insensitive to the elements responsible for the effects, almost always architectural.⁵⁷

The hermeneutics of the inanimate content of early Netherlandish paintings is fundamental for my thesis' motivation and approach. The theological fixations of 'iconographic' art history were for a long time pervasive. A painted domestic interior (when not providing material for attributional debates) warranted the iconographic school's interpretation only through the prism of religion and its texts.⁵⁸ Other social connotations were wilfully ignored. An extreme example of this is Charles Minott's treatment of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, which relies rigidly on Isaiah 10:15 to explain the depiction of St Joseph and his array of tools in the right-hand panel (the axe, saw and wooden rod).⁵⁹ Other scholars, in a later permutation of the same interpretative school, wanted to completely sacralise the furnishings of these domestic spaces through the lens of liturgical symbolism, believing that these paintings recreated the stuff of the Mass in miniature in a consciously indirect fashion. This was 'figural' vision practised to extremes. In an article on the same

⁵⁶ E.g., Elizabeth Pastan, "Representing Architecture in the Altarpiece: Fictions, Strategies and Mysteries," in *Quid est Sacramentum? Visual Representation of Sacred Mysteries in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1700*, ed. Walter Melion et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 227-60; Stephan Hoppe, "Romanik als Antike und die baulichen Folgen," in *Wege zur Renaissance: Beobachtungen zu den Anfängen neuzeitlicher Kunstauffassung im Rheinland und den Nachbargebieten um 1500*, ed. Norbert Nussbaum (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2003), 89-131; Thomas Lyman, "Architectural Portraiture and Jan van Eyck's Washington Annunciation," *Gesta* 20, no. 1 (1981): 263-71; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:131-48.

⁵⁷ E.g., Ainsworth, *Christus*, 37-49; James Elkins, "On the Arnolfini Portrait and the Lucca Madonna: Did Jan van Eyck have a Perspectival System?," *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 1 (1991): 53-62; John Ward and David Carlton, "On the Mathematics of Perspective of the Arnolfini Portrait and Similar Works of Jan van Eyck," *Art Bulletin* 65, no. 4 (1983): 680-90.

⁵⁸ For an example of such object-focussed attributional debates, see a summary of the century-old (or more) discussion about the *Werl Altarpiece's* [2.1b] pitcher: Thürlemann, *Campin*, 246-50.

⁵⁹ Charles Minott, "The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," *Art Bulletin* 51, no. 3 (1969): 267-71.

altarpiece, Carla Gottlieb wrote that “like the niche, the laver and ‘linen’ in the Mérode Annunciation are not household goods, but liturgical paraphernalia”.⁶⁰

Pächt suggested that these mid-to-late twentieth-century tendencies in what he called the ‘iconographic school’ reflected a flipping of older (nineteenth- and early twentieth-century) approaches to these works’ worldly character.⁶¹ The earlier approach recognised the earthly elements that crept into established religious iconographies as the quiet, preliminary steps of a new secular spirit. They would eventually lead to the establishment of new pictorial genres in the early modern age, independent from theological embroilment. The iconographers, however, saw matters from almost the opposite perspective, struggling to imagine painters or patrons including any superficially profane element without a textually accountable contribution to religious symbolism.⁶² A prime example is the panel

⁶⁰ Carla Gottlieb, “Respicens per Fenestras. The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece,” *Oud Holland* 85 (1970): 66. Cf. Heike Schlie, *Bilder des Corpus Christi: sakramentaler Realismus von Jan van Eyck bis Hieronymus Bosch* (Berlin: Mann, 2002), an important twenty-first-century augmentation of these approaches.

⁶¹ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 56: “Earlier writers tended to regard it as a symptom of a secularisation process that culminated in such works as the market still-lives of Pieter Aertsen, in which the religious theme turned into a mere pretext for depicting everyday objects that had yet to establish themselves as suitable subjects in their own right. This historical approach lapsed into near-oblivion when a school of iconographical scholarship that terms itself iconology achieved success with a symbolic mode of interpretation... so far from being a secularisation of religion, it is the sanctification of nature” (cf. “Panofsky’s ‘Early Netherlandish Painting’-II,” *Burlington Magazine* 98, no. 641 (August 1956): esp. 275-79). Visible in: Johan Huizinga, “De Kunst der Van Eyck’s in het Leven van hun Tijd,” *De Gids* 80, no. 2 (1916): 440-62; Max Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, trans. Karl Swoboda (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 146-47 [published 1918]; Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West in the Middle Ages*, trans. Donald King (London: Phaidon, 1963) 2:167-71 [published 1938]; Max Friedländer, *Landscape. Portrait. Still Life: Their Origin and Development*, trans. R. Hull (Oxford: Cassirer, 1949), 19-21; 156-8 [produced 1949 from earlier essays].

⁶² One can discern hesitation between the two positions in Meyer Schapiro, “Muscipula Diaboli,’ The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece,” *Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1945): 186: “the devoted rendering of the objects of the home and the vocation foretells the disengagement of still life as a fully secular sphere of the intimate and the manipulable. Religious thought tries to appropriate all this for itself: it seeks to stamp the freshly discovered world with its own categories...”; Charles de Tolnay, *Le Maître de Flémalle et les freres Van Eyck* (Brussels: Éditions de La Connaissance, 1939), 16-17; 28-31; Julius Held, “Artis Pictoriae Amator: An Antwerp Art Patron and His Collection,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 50 (1957): 82.

portraying Joseph in the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2]. On its own, the depiction could conceivably pass for a depiction of a secular individual acting out their occupation with iconographic roots in medieval calendar imagery of “trades and crafts”.⁶³ But connected to the central Annunciation, the man becomes Joseph – no art historian would argue otherwise. The problem lies in that this theological interpretation so colours the image, it obscures its true, duplicitous nature: it is both saint and fifteenth-century joiner masquerading as saint.

The history of scholarship on the painting now known as Petrus Christus’ *Goldsmith* [0.13] is another fitting example. The central subject matter always appeared palpably non-religious. Yet for decades before he was ‘defrocked’, the seated shopkeeper was regarded as St Eligius, and the whole composition was submitted to elaborate allegorical readings.⁶⁴ Peter Schabacker, following Panofsky’s short consideration of the picture, provided the most intricate example of this moralistic manner, reading the depicted mirror as an exemplum of the imperfect and sinful state of the world of men, with the ‘saint’ as protector of holy matrimony.⁶⁵

⁶³ On this professional genre, see Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962), 339-45.

⁶⁴ No doubt encouraged by the figure’s confusing halo which technical analysis deemed false, hence subsequently removed in the later twentieth century (Ainsworth, *Christus*, 96). For its interpretation as a secular vocational portrait, see Hugo van der Velden, “Defrocking St Eloy: Petrus Christus’s Vocational Portrait of a Goldsmith,” *Simiolus* 26 (1998): 242-76.

⁶⁵ Peter Schabacker, “Petrus Christus’ Saint Eloy: Problems of Provenance, Sources and Meaning,” *Art Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1972): 103-20; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:313n2. (Note that more recent scholarship on the picture revisits the Panofskian perspective, arguing against van der Velden’s stringent secularity: Kuhn, *Leibhaftige*, 233-68; Sandra Braune, “Von der äusseren zur inneren Reflexionen: ein Goldschmied in seinem Geschäft von Petrus Christus als Spiegelbild des Gottesbundes,” in *Alltag als Exemplum: religiöse und profane Deutungsmuster der frühen Genrekunst*, ed. Jürgen Müller and Sandra Braune (Berlin: DKV, 2020), 24-45).

Like certain recent trends of scholarship, I believe that we should more seriously attend to the pictures' secular elements. I argue that this can be achieved by recovering some of the older intellectual positions identified by Pächt, privileging the hypothesis of a secularisation of religious convention above that of a sanctification of reality. Like Pächt and Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen more recently, I see the augmented inanimate content of many of these paintings as marking a turning point in the history of art, when received medieval hierarchies of form are reconfigured, the traditional fixation on the *imago* (human form) above all else is dethroned, and the surrounding world is invited in.⁶⁶ But I do not want to underestimate the iconographic school's contributions. Some of their efforts can be considered a preliminary redemption of the inanimate content of these paintings. Iconographers were right to sense that objects like glass vessels, ceramic pitchers, flowers or basins possessed an enigmatic profundity that modern habits of looking were unused to fathoming.⁶⁷ Through their 'symbolic' lens, they attempted to reconfigure scholarly understanding of this content. But they were ultimately perhaps not aware enough of the ramifications of their own inclinations.

The impress of the school's strategies is still eminently, rightly, detectable in art historical interpretative conventions. Consider, for example, the section "Perspective and Interior" from Till-Holger Borchert's well-received essay on van Eyck's innovative style of painting, focusing on the *Ghent Altarpiece's*

⁶⁶ Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, "The Hierarchy of Genres and the Hierarchy of Life-Forms," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 73-4 (Spring-Autumn 2020): 76-93; Otto Pächt, "Design Principles of Fifteenth-Century Northern Painting (1933)," in Wood, *Vienna*, 273-4; *Van Eyck*, 54-56.

⁶⁷ Cf. Bastian Eclercy, "Mousetraps and Firescreens: The Problem of 'Disguised Symbolism in Early Netherlandish Painting,'" in Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 133-49.

Annunciation [0.8] interior.⁶⁸ This passage might stand as exemplary of the prevailing scholarly explanation for this kind of indoor content – and also of the generally ‘anagogical’ dynamic of interpretation, beginning with the factual and progressing to the spiritual, mirroring that of much medieval exegesis.⁶⁹ Borchert first concedes the interior’s earthly appearance, then proceeds to analyse spatial elements, before briefly touching on the realism of the furnishings, the scene’s location, the architectural dressings and object contents. Then comes a pivotal moment of interpretative refocus: “In themselves, these meticulously rendered details create the impression of a casually arranged still life. However, their proximity to the prie-dieu clearly links them to Mary’s devotional practice... It is clear already that these seemingly incidental objects actually convey higher symbolic meanings, which only reveal themselves through the exegetical content of the biblical theme...”⁷⁰ With this, Borchert propels the whole analysis towards theological symbolism (“...this transcendent significance also applies to the furnishings...”) and underscores the enduring influence of the ‘disguised symbolism’ school over the hermeneutics of the inanimate content.

Note that there is a marked thrust towards a devotional end, indicative of more recent trends in scholarship that privilege a functional approach; the ‘devotional

⁶⁸ Till-Holger Borchert, “The Reinvention of Painting,” in *Van Eyck to Dürer: The Influence of Early Netherlandish Painting on European Art*, exh. cat., ed. Till-Holger Borchert (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 19-33; Larry Silver, “Review of *Van Eyck to Dürer*,” *Historians of Netherlandish Art Reviews* (April 2011), <https://hnanews.org/hnar/reviews/van-eyck-durer-early-netherlandish-painting-central-europe-1430-1530/>.

⁶⁹ On spiritual exposition (as opposed to literal), see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 242-63 and cf. Erwin Panofsky, ed., *Abbot Suger on the Abbey of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 65, for the Gothic-era anagogical interpretation of materiality.

⁷⁰ Borchert, “Reinvention,” 27.

school', if we may call it that, is the iconographic school's avatar, but tintured with an interest in the sociology of religion. Most important in this respect is Reindert Falkenburg's devotional rerouting of traditional iconographic text-based approaches: his attempt to read the Mérode *Altarpiece* in light of the rhetoric of Netherlandish spiritual literature pertaining to the 'household of the soul' and the imitation of Christ.⁷¹

My aim in this thesis is not to overturn such readings – I am in no doubt about the critical importance of a theological or devotional appreciation of paintings with chiefly religious subjects, even if in past decades these have been considered less ambiguous in their citation of religious information than they probably should have been. Rather, I want to augment these important contributions to the hermeneutics of depicted interiors, first by electing to survey a broader art historical timespan, and then by integrating a concentrated study of the social context of a commission while exploring the possible societal connotations of a setting and its ingredients. Crucially, I want to consider built environments alongside objects and furnishings. I see the two as inextricably combined: the interior is only fully “evoked” by the objects and architectural dressings that furnish the space.⁷² Reversing the usual interpretative dynamic by working towards the earthly rather than away from it, we can recover elements of these interiors that

⁷¹ Reindert Falkenburg, “The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the Mérode Triptych,” in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads. A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 2-17; Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture and Spiritual Experience in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 133-43.

⁷² Pächt, “Entstehung,” 131. Indeed, Felix Horb posited (*Das Innenraumbild des späten Mittelalters: Seine Entstehungsgeschichte* (Zürich: Niehans, 1938, 55-62)) that early interiors assume the character of a “housing-box” (*Kastengehäuse*) analogous to late medieval items of furnishing (*Einrichtungsgegenstände*) depicted within them.

have heretofore been hiding, 'disguised' under the shadow of theological symbolism.

The sociology of religion, architectural and social history, and material culture studies are vital for the portions of my thesis that aim to consider, seriously, the constituents of a pictorial space, architectural and otherwise, along with the space itself. Compared with theological or liturgical symbolism, such concerns have been much slower to develop among art historians engaging with early Netherlandish interior settings.

F. A. Lefever made a pioneering contribution in 1968 concerning the interior settings for Dirk Bouts' *Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament* [0.14].⁷³ Lefever's study was unusual in that it intricately analysed depicted objects (dishes, glasses) and architectural features (wood panelling, vaulting) in light of material and architectural history. He begins with the likely authenticity of the household items, especially the dining accoutrements and their association with certain late medieval mores, and ends with a hypothesised conceptualisation of the depicted house's overall plan (the kind that he believes would have belonged a very wealthy burgher). The article pursues the interesting premise that, in features like the colonnade of marble columns, Bouts synthesised components of the upper story of the Coenaculum in Jerusalem (erected in the fourteenth century, the last in a chain of structures built to commemorate the supposed site of the Last Supper) with a

⁷³ F. A. Lefever, "De Huisinterieurs in Dirk Bouts' Triptiek: Het Laatste Avondmaal (1464-1468)," *Mededelingen van de Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Leuven en omgeving* 8 (1968): 3-13; 120-32; 178-89.

prosperous mid-fifteenth century Netherlandish dwelling.⁷⁴ Lefever makes the persuasive argument that Bouts and the Leuven Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament who commissioned the work used ingredients drawn from concrete reality but manipulated them for particular pictorial and symbolic ends, in order to both respect biblical authority (“the representations are... completely justified on a theological plane”) and simultaneously to infuse the scene with an ingeniously “local colour” (when it was, he claims, usually only Marian scenes that received such earthly treatments).⁷⁵ “Bouts, himself a well-to-do citizen who participated in dignified urban life and received his assignments from the burgher classes, showed a scene here with a deep, religious character in a clearly characterised bourgeois house. And with what pleasure he described its peaceful prosperity!”⁷⁶ Ultimately, the author perhaps places excessive emphasis on the artist’s class-bound life experience as a pictorial source; Lefever would like to read into the work a kind of origin point for Netherlandish ‘genre’ painting, culminating in “H. Bosch and P. Breughel”.⁷⁷ Whether we agree with his conclusions, Lefever’s early investigation remains a model of such sociologically informed analyses.

Only from the 1990s do a significant number of contributions arrive covering similar ground.⁷⁸ Especially noteworthy are essays by Robert Calkins and Catherine Reynolds on domestic interiors in pictures of the Flémalle Group and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 185-7.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ But note Jozef de Coo, “A Medieval Look at the Mérode Annunciation,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1981): 114-32.

others.⁷⁹ Reynolds argues that interiors in early Netherlandish paintings like the *Mérode Altarpiece* are not ‘bourgeois’; that, along with the costumes, many of the depicted contents attest to a higher social status.⁸⁰ Perhaps Reynolds was slightly unfair on the earlier authors, some of whom potentially used bourgeois to label the demonstrably urban nature of the interiors as much as their specific social condition.⁸¹ I shall return to this topic in due course.

Calkins argues that beholders would have seen in contents like silver plate “a recognition of contemporary values” and in lavish beds “the aura of comfort and perhaps of social status”.⁸² Calkins admits that he aims not to reject discussions of religious iconography, merely provide them with supplementary material.⁸³ It is telling to compare the approaches of Calkins and an essay by Carol Purtle on the iconography of the Flémalle Group interiors.⁸⁴ These are two interpretations of exactly the same material, published only a year apart, representing two art historical schools, essentially both symbolic in their approach: one favours societal ends, the other theological.

⁷⁹ Catherine Reynolds, “Reality and Image: Interpreting Three Paintings of the ‘Virgin and Child in an Interior’ Associated with Campin,” in Foister, *Robert Campin, 1365-1398* (188-89); Robert Calkins, “Secular Objects and their Implications in early Netherlandish Painting,” in *Art into Life: Collected Papers from the Kresge Art Museum Medieval Symposia*, ed. Carol Fisher and Kathleen Scott (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1995), 183-211.

⁸⁰ Reynolds, “Reality,” 188-89.

⁸¹ On the potential multivalence of the term “bourgeois” for the fifteenth-century Netherlands, see Jelle de Rock, *The Image of the City in Early Netherlandish Painting (1400-1550)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 88-93.

⁸² Calkins, “Secular Objects,” 193; 195.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁸⁴ Purtle, “Iconography”. Cf. also the essay by Jeanne Nuechterlein already cited (“Domesticity”), fusing the devotional and the social, reading pre-1450 Netherlandish domestic interiors in terms of lay religious practice and the use of private space.

Annette LeZotte's thesis on domestic interiors tests the apparent 'realism' of the contents of early Netherlandish examples in a statistical study against surviving probate inventories, arriving at a similar conclusion to Lefever: that painters had a selective rather than faithful approach to reality and choreographed their paintings to suit particular ends.⁸⁵ In her view, contents functioned like workshop propaganda in an age before artistic signatures, signalling the input of a particular group of artists. The historian Julie de Groot has newly conducted a PhD on the material culture of the home in Bruges 1438-1600, which uses paintings in a reverse manner to LeZotte, comparing the outcomes of her extensive statistical analyses against pictorial evidence.⁸⁶ These material findings have contributed substantially to shaping some of my arguments.

Four major strands of interpretation have been mentioned so far: the theologically 'iconographic', the sociologically 'iconographic', the devotional and the spatio-perspectival. There are other efforts, harder to categorise, some of which are pertinent to scholarship on the interior in early Netherlandish painting today.

⁸⁵ Similar to the findings of Isabella Nicka, "'Möbel' als Analysekategorie der mittelalterliche Bildwelt. Strukturierendes und funktionalisiertes Interieur in konfigurierten Innenraumdarstellungen," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 60 (2010): 17-35, with references to comparable documentary studies on late medieval images with similar results including Sven Lüken, *Die Verkündigung an Maria im 15. und Frühen 16. Jahrhundert: historische und kunsthistorische Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

⁸⁶ Julie de Groot, "At Home in Renaissance Bruges: Material and Domestic Culture in a City in Decline, 1438-1600" (PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2017) (de Groot generously shared this before its public release); and see Nicka, "'Möbel'". Publications using paintings as comparative evidence for studies on material culture are, e.g.: Inneke Baatsen et al., "At Home in the City: The Dynamics of Material Culture," in *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100-1600*, ed. Bruno Blondé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 192-219; Eva Oledzka, *Medieval and Renaissance Interiors in Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2016).

Firstly, there is the attention to genre, mentioned already;⁸⁷ then, the phenomenological or anthropological approaches to interior settings, typified by Hans Belting and Christiane Kruse's important contribution to the study of early Netherlandish painting: *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*.⁸⁸ This book seems to have had only a moderate influence on the early Netherlandish field (anglophone or German), perhaps more reflective of the scholarly landscape than the study itself.⁸⁹ But Belting's essay sections are an unusual example of what he terms (in an appended post-script to their republication) a "phenomenology" of the artistic character of these "'foundational" panel paintings.⁹⁰ Especially relevant for the study of the house interior is the argument made for understanding beholding as a strongly metaphorical act. For Belting, categories of 'within' and 'without' create an "anthropology of the vision" which is especially epitomised in these early Netherlandish panel paintings. And he perceives these resonances reflected everywhere: in spatial settings; in a portrait's rendering of direct and indirect experience of a person as body and soul; in his metaphorical schemas of the fifteenth-century picture as transparent window or reflective mirror.⁹¹

Some years ago, Rohlf-von Wittich realised the special status of an interior form in structuring the world of the artwork in opposition to the world outside the artwork, in her singular article whose title translated into English would be "The

⁸⁷ See fn32 above.

⁸⁸ See fn26 above.

⁸⁹ Also pointed out in Jeanne Nuechterlein, "Perceiving Different Images at Different Scales of Research: the Case of Early Netherlandish Painting," *International Journal of the Humanities* 6, no. 8 (2008), n.p.

⁹⁰ Belting, *Spiegel*, 268, and note 75-94.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 125-34; 65-73; 149-65.

inner-space-image as criterion for the image-world”.⁹² Absorbing her (for the time) unusually pronounced investment in the nuances of a viewer’s *reception* of late medieval pictorial space triggers an idea that lies behind my thesis (as seemingly behind others): that there is something fundamentally *interior* about the psychology of many works of pictorial art, their aesthetic boundary delimiting a compartmentalised world *into* which the viewer directs their gaze – and that late medieval panel painting somehow profoundly *realises* this.⁹³ “In some senses”, Amanda Lillie suggests, writing about fifteenth-century Italian artworks, “a painting is a room”: its visual enclosure “produces focus” in comparable fashion.⁹⁴ Belting’s essays seem to rest on an analogous conviction.

I would add, following Lillie, that there is also something essentially architectonic about the conception of a substantial number of works of pictorial art in the fifteenth century, especially paintings on panel.⁹⁵ The realisation is a concern for recent scholarship of similar phenomenological or anthropological inclinations. Many triptychs, for example, appear to ventriloquise the architectural experience of entering a building.⁹⁶ Lynn Jacobs draws attention to the marked tendency in primary documents to refer to triptych wings as “doors”.⁹⁷ Amy Powell, from yet

⁹² Rohlf-von Wittich, “Innenraumbild”.

⁹³ Kemp, *Räume*, is particularly influenced by Rohlf-von Wittich, especially her notion of late medieval painting’s emphatic attentions to the image’s threshold of reception (and her difficulty to translate “Schauöffnung” or ‘display-aperture’).

⁹⁴ Amanda Lillie, ed. “Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting,” *The National Gallery* (2014), <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/research-resources/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture>.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*: “painters often adopted an architectonic approach to structure the whole painting at the initial planning stage.”

⁹⁶ See Shirley Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 4.

⁹⁷ Lynn Jacobs, *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012), 2-4.

another angle, encompasses a broader view of the interiority of the late medieval pictorial artwork, arguing that many compositions seem imprinted by the medium of the panel itself, with many pictures' illusionistic possibilities henceforth conditioned in a box-like manner.⁹⁸

The medieval image was principally defined by its architectural site, which traditionally would have substantially affected its formal constitution.⁹⁹ In the fifteenth century's pictorial experiments, this determining factor could be cohered with, stretched or even controverted in various interesting ways. Belting is particularly compelled by the dialogue between a picture's illusionistic space and the physical location in which the picture might be situated. Complementing this arena of enquiry in another publication, Belting establishes a pre-history to the birth of the modern 'easel picture': an independent, transportable entity enclosing a preconceived world within itself.¹⁰⁰ He detects these developmental roots in what he calls the 'private' image, for which, he believes, the early Netherlandish period is substantially responsible. According to the arguments of my thesis, particularly chapter one, a substantial tributary feeding into this conception of the modern 'easel picture' may be discerned in the later medieval era's painted micro-architectural objects and, subsequently, in the significant relationship between early Netherlandish painting and architectonic form. The useful conceptual opposition between 'public' pictures and 'private' pictures, constructed by Belting,

⁹⁸ Amy Powell, "A Short History of the Picture as Box," *Representations* 141, no. 1 (2018): 95-130.

⁹⁹ Kurt Bauch, *Das Mittelalterliche Grabbild. Figürliche Grabmäler des 11. bis 15. Jahrhunderts in Europa* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976), 3-4: "Like everything else in the mental life of the Middle Ages, the figural image [*Bildnis*] is first of all characterised by the place it occupies within the totality. Since its entire coherence is generated by this location, the question of where in the first place an image appears is a primary and principal concern..."

¹⁰⁰ Belting, *Likeness*, 409-57, esp. 409-10 and 428-33.

is comparable to that between immovable and movable property or between buildings (*immeubles*) and furniture (*meubles*). Like many items of medieval furniture that aped large-scale buildings, the early Netherlandish panel painting is formally haunted by architectonic immobility: in some cases, it might be defined as a *meuble* that yearns for the station of an *immeuble*. In interrogating this general hypothesis, this thesis ultimately aims to contribute to the ongoing debates in the above publications surrounding the geneses of the modern picture. I contend that the early fifteenth-century vicissitudes of the ‘house interior’ play an integral role in these debates.

Pre-Eyckian Literature: a chasm less travelled

A limitation of my study is that it does not substantially explore the interior setting in either stone or wooden sculpture, tapestry or manuscript illumination. Scholarship had traditionally focused more on the illumination of the pre-Eyckian period than on the panel painting.¹⁰¹ Panofsky wrote that “it is in libraries rather than in picture galleries, churches and palaces that we must study the antecedents of the great Flemings”.¹⁰² More recently, however, several publications have brought panel painting of pre-1425 more attention.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ For “pre-Eyckian realism” in manuscript illumination, with references, see Gerhard Schmidt, “Pre-Eyckian Realism’. Versuch einer Abgrenzung,” in *Flanders in a European Perspective. Manuscript Illumination around 1400*, ed. Maurits Smeyers and Bert Cardon (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 747-71.

¹⁰² Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:27.

¹⁰³ Pieter Roelofs, ed., *Johan Maelwael: Nijmegen – Paris – Dijon. Art around 1400*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2017); Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*; Kemperdick, *Road*.

My first chapter lies in this different contextual field, not traditionally the primary target of “early Netherlandish” research. Netherlandish panel paintings as far apart as the 1430s, 1480s and even 1510s are often considered under similar interpretative canopies. A tangible link is perceived, for instance, between the styles and iconographies of van Eyck, Hans Memling, Gerard David and even Quinten Massys, even though their combined oeuvres span well over a hundred years. But there often appears an impassable stylistic chasm dividing panel paintings made as close in time as the 1430s and 1390s or even the 1430s and 1410s, a chasm often reflected in the interests of scholarly investigations on early panel paintings. This is for two main reasons.

One, judged alongside each other, the finest examples of paintings in the different periods are seen to betray irredeemable stylistic and qualitative differences, unlike in the 1430s-1510s. Two, a traditional notion of a separate, generalisable *Geist* governing different art historical periods still lingers, perhaps, with the older period perceived as ‘medieval’ and subsequent period as ‘early modern’ or ‘northern Renaissance’. This separation dates back, at least, to the time of van Mander.¹⁰⁴ So many fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Netherlandish panels were lost due to wars or iconoclasms that the earlier period cannot hope to be (ever) comprehensively investigated.¹⁰⁵ The period’s art historians rerouted their interests towards illuminated manuscripts c.1400, considering these appropriate for excavating of the fountainhead of the so-called *ars nova* or new style of van

¹⁰⁴ Wood, *A History*, 107.

¹⁰⁵ On these historiographical issues, see Victor Schmidt, “Painting around 1400 and the Road to van Eyck: Notes on an Exhibition and a Catalogue,” *Simiolus* 36, no. 3 (2012): 210-24.

Eyck's generation, despite the obvious – and important – distances between the two media (and their respective types of patron).¹⁰⁶

Without a substantial enough central corpus, scholarship on pre-Eyckian painting was somewhat fragmentary. Until very recently, it was rare to come across general studies of painting in the Low Countries before the 1430s.¹⁰⁷ Studies arrived in different guises from overlapping fields, including (later) Netherlandish painting, International Gothic painting, sculpture and miniatures, the luxurious collecting habits of late medieval princes, the 'devotional school' of late medieval studies attending to religious objects and literature. However, following Anne van Buren's article calling for a renewed focus on pre-Eyckian panel painting, the period is undergoing re-evaluation.¹⁰⁸ This has chiefly been done somewhat impartially, in the form of surveys and large exhibitions.¹⁰⁹ These attentions to micro- rather than macro-history sensitively side-step the potential pitfalls of mounting more ambitious or pointed historical arguments about a period from which so many objects have vanished. However, as one scholar recently professed, the field needs new contributions: "one would like to read about the forest rather than the trees".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ For the *ars nova* style, see Jochen Sander, "Ars Nova and European painting in the Fifteenth Century," in Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 31-38; see fn120 below on patron classes.

¹⁰⁷ But note Georg Troescher, *Burgundische Malerei. Maler und Malerwerke um 1400 in Burgund, dem Berry mit der Auvergne und in Savoyen mit ihren Quellen und Ausstrahlungen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Mann, 1966); Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:75-97.

¹⁰⁸ Anne van Buren, "Thoughts Old and New, on the Sources of Early Netherlandish Painting," *Simiolus* 16, no. 2 (1986): 93-112.

¹⁰⁹ See fn103 above.

¹¹⁰ Kathryn Rudy, "Two Books on pre-Eyckian Painting," *Historians of Netherlandish Art Reviews* (April 2013), <https://hnanews.org/hnar/reviews/two-books-pre-eyckian-painting/>.

Thus, my chapter one seeks to target exactly this ‘chasm’ between the successive stylistic periods from the point of view of treatments of architectural form, in particular the assimilation of exterior architectonic frames into the domain of the painted panel. I am particularly interested to interrogate the view that architectonic framing held back the progress of the ‘modern picture’. The discourse surrounding the aesthetics of ‘micro-architecture’, established territory for historians of Gothic art but rarely, if ever, assimilated into studies of early Netherlandish painting, will provide an especially useful interpretative framework.¹¹¹ While my chapter one cannot pretend to any holistic treatment of the period (it is mainly directed towards one painting), its argument will hopefully contribute towards fostering new analyses of elements of pre-Eyckian panel painting.

Aims: the ‘charged’ interior and the relevance of patronage

The rest of this thesis’ essential aim is to refocus scholarly attention on ‘house interiors’ and the furnishings of settings – these apparently unassuming, subsidiary elements – and argue that they are not in fact unassuming and subsidiary, and would most likely not have been considered such by painters and beholders of the time.¹¹² In fact, my studies have led me to believe, these settings

¹¹¹ Two notable recent contributions on late medieval micro-architecture are Paul Binski, “Magnificentia in Parvis: microarchitecture et esthétique médiévale,” in *Microarchitectures médiévales: l’échelle à l’épreuve de la matière*, ed. Jean-Marie Guillouët and Ambre Villain (Paris: Picard, 2018), 13-24; Sarah Guérin, “Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine,” *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 53-77.

¹¹² Prompted by Lillie, “Building”, which foregrounds the communicative qualities of architecture in fifteenth-century Italian painting (“buildings in pictures perform an... essential rhetorical role”); cf. de Rock, *Image*.

are often the result of careful decision and deliberation, fitted and dressed to suit the particular needs of the patrons and figural contents. They are active, charged and motivated; not passive, uncommunicative and lifeless; inanimate, but not silent. Indeed, 'inanimate' may not be quite the right categorisation for such elements.

I hope to provide an argument for the necessity of interpreting an artwork's architectural environment along with its figures and objects, seeing the setting not as separate and subordinate to the figure, but integral and complementary. Conventions of pictorial construction are notable in this regard. Early Netherlandish architectonic accompaniments are frequently not laid down before the rest of the contents as an *a priori* 'space-box', as often in painting of subsequent centuries; for example, Jean-August-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) reportedly used to lay down his pictorial space first and then invite his figures into it, "like a polite host".¹¹³ Rather, they are routinely formed afterwards, around the figures, as we will see. One might imagine that this exposes the fifteenth-century setting as a secondary pictorial form, while proving the modern setting a more primary condition of the painting; in fact, the hierarchy of significance is not so clear-cut. The fifteenth-century Netherlandish tendency incorporated and refashioned the lingering medieval 'attributional' custom of adhering the surroundings to the animate form. Consequently, these environments could be far more intimately interwoven with the figures: like idiosyncratic, adaptable attributes rather than

¹¹³ Jeroen Stumpel, "On Grounds and Backgrounds: Some Remarks about Composition in Renaissance Painting," *Simiolus* 18, no. 4 (1988), 243. Note, however, that this procedural chronology by no means encompasses *all* modern painters.

detached backgrounds. The resulting tension – between enhanced attention to the inanimate environment and traditional pictorial customs of retrospectively adhering the non-figural elements to the figural – generates, I argue, a kind of electrical current running between figure and surrounding space.

Elements of interior decoration and architectural construction function thus like social attributes and signs – but with a privileged status. An interior is more than an attribute because it is also frequently fundamental to a picture’s construction and the production of the apparent presence of its figural content. It is precisely from the instability between these dissimilar roles – between the spatio-compositional and symbolic-attributational – that an interior setting obtains its real potency for effect and significance. Through this, something of the older ‘power’ of the saint inhabiting the house-shrine lives on, transferred to those initial portrayals of secular figures alone, in contemporary surroundings, for the first time in history.¹¹⁴ This is exactly what, in its entirety, this thesis attempts to demonstrate.

I believe that we can enhance our understanding of settings by considering, in a more sustained and integrative manner, the important roles that might be played by an interior and its furnishings. At root, here, is an acknowledgement of the multivalent capacities of this kind of extra-figural content, and by extension, of symbolism itself. Furnishings, architectural features and objects alike can produce connotations at different levels, and these are often dependent on their

¹¹⁴ E.g., Kauffmann, “Arnolfinihochzeit,” 47: “The whole room [of the *Arnolfini Portrait*] acts as a niche, shrine or attribute...”

compositional interactions.¹¹⁵ For instance, a painted barrel vault, as we will see, is capable of fulfilling a variety of different connotative functions, not necessarily bordered from one another. I argue that by integrating a sensitivity to the possible concerns of the patron and the social context of a work's conception and reception, we add supplementary dimensions to our understanding of the contents that make up an interior setting, refashioning timeworn religious interpretations in light of new evidence.

For this reason, this thesis has chosen case studies (in two of its three chapters) where the patron is known – for this adds colour to the sometimes-restrictive codifications in approaches to certain inanimate contents. Patronage can be surprisingly underplayed in the history of scholarship on early Netherlandish painting, especially among the 'iconographic school' of interpretation. Admittedly, many pictures' commissions are shrouded in obscurity. But, where known or supposed, patronage is frequently considered separately to, rather than alongside, the visual matter.

My readings of the domestic settings in chapters two and three ultimately have opposite ends to the study of LeZotte cited earlier (which read household contents like artists' 'signatures'): I see an exploration of patronage as the most useful factor in determining the various social signals potentially transmitted by a setting's contents. In this I follow the approach of Jelle de Rock in his recent book

¹¹⁵ On the multifaceted, even ambiguous, nature of symbolic attributes in portraits by van Eyck: Till-Holger Borchert, "Form and Function of van Eyck's Portraiture," in *Vision & Material: Interaction between Art and Science in Jan van Eyck's Time*, ed. Marc de Mey et al. (Brussels: KVAB, 2012), 213-34.

(incorporating a statistical survey like LeZotte) on city views in the backgrounds of early Netherlandish paintings.

De Rock makes the critical point that a work from the first half of the fifteenth century, a time when pictures were more rarely produced, is far more likely to bear the imprint of the patron than a sixteenth-century painting made for the mass market. This is demonstrated by the incidence of such obvious or probable customisations like particular coats of arms in windows, special architectural backdrops and the inclusion of unusual objects like mirrors with particular reflections, apparent in some of my case studies. I second de Rock's hypothesis of an occasionally "high degree of involvement" in the pictorial programme in commissioned works of the first half of the fifteenth century, such as make up my case studies, and thus that the choice of specific pictorial motifs may well have been "fuelled by individual concerns of the patron" (note, however, "involvement" not 'control').¹¹⁶ His theory opens up a whole arena of possible enquiry, which this thesis attempts partly to explore: the lives and concerns of the figures who patronised these works, to be considered in tandem with finer specifics of the works' appearance (contents, composition, shape, etc.).

The social rank implied by these settings can be difficult to specify, as Jeanne Nuechterlein has more recently suggested.¹¹⁷ There was, especially in the cities, a remarkable lack of social distance between the classes, and a material culture

¹¹⁶ De Rock, *Image*, 38.

¹¹⁷ Jeanne, "Domesticity," 72.

shared by nobles and rich burghers alike.¹¹⁸ Many could afford some luxuries and comforts; household items routinely painted in domestic interiors were probably luxurious versions of wares owned and recognised by a fairly broad class spectrum.¹¹⁹

Even so, many painted panels that remain from the first half of the fifteenth century were patronised by wealthy individuals; quality and value are responsible for their survival.¹²⁰ When art historians speak of ‘early Netherlandish painting’, they often refer to only a rarefied corner of a much larger whole. My choice of objects is no different, encompassing those commissioned by either the nobility, the urban elites, or elevated members of the clergy. The settings executed were presumably devised with an aesthetic relevant for the rank (or aspired rank) of the patron likely to commission or purchase the work, choice pieces of a recognisable vocabulary of vernacular material culture available for an artist’s depiction. It is precisely the degree of interaction between an architectural setting’s chosen constitution and a patron’s values that I pursue in chapters two and three.

¹¹⁸ De Rock, *Image*, 37, and for the top-down analysis, describing the marked interpenetration between the different grades of urban elites (“The ennoblement of city-dwellers from the fourteenth century onwards can only be understood as a consequence of a reciprocal ‘urbanisation’ of the established nobility”), see Frederik Buylaert, “Lordship, Urbanisation and Social Change in Late Medieval Flanders,” *Past & Present*, no. 227 (May 2015): 31-75 (35).

¹¹⁹ De Groot, “At Home,” 216-31. Some aspects of depicted interiors were conceivably even influenced by the lived environments of the middle-class painters (Lefever, “Huisinterieurs,” 131 speculates that Bouts used his own house as a model for the Passover Feast in his Leuven altarpiece [0.14]).

¹²⁰ Hanno Wijsman, “Patterns in Patronage: Distinction and Imitation in the Patronage of Painted Art by Burgundian Courtiers in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in *The Court as a Stage*, ed. Steven Gunn and Antheun Janse (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 61-67 finds the majority of major surviving altarpieces were commissioned by wealthy officials and burghers (not nobles) and that portraits were commissioned by a broader social spectrum including nobles (note that Wijsman bases his statistical analysis upon works in the catalogue raisonnées of the most notable painters); see also Lorne Campbell, “The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century Low Countries,” *Burlington Magazine* 118, no. 877 (April 1976): 189-90 for paintings collected by lower classes.

Approaches: description versus historicism and the instability of the work of art

I have approached this material bearing in mind two ideals: the importance of an artwork's social and historical context; secondly, the contained sphere of its own artistic creation. The latter is addressed through visual and critical analysis, the former through (especially in chapters two and three) extended investigations of a work's patronage and context.

But the two – the social and the aesthetic – are not opposing entities; they are necessarily, though obliquely, interrelated. A work is 'functional', designed to fulfil certain expectations but, as Paul Binski stresses, also fashioned with artificial capacities just as, if not more, relevant. "The charge that the Middle Ages were devoid of 'art', typically levelled by some (not all) forms of anthropology, is unhelpful", says Binski; "Images may well be presences, but they are also representations".¹²¹

Patronage should therefore not be an end of explanation; it can only be an aide.¹²² Here, we enter in the grey hermeneutic ground between the patron's agreement, the artist's hand and the beholder's share. Peter Parshall elaborated upon the

¹²¹ Paul Binski, *Gothic Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 18; 3; on Binski's position within current scholarly debates, see Niko Munz, "Review: *Gothic Sculpture*," *Sculpture Journal* 30, no. 1 (2021): 87-92.

¹²² Cf. Henk van Os, "Some Thoughts on Writing a History of Sieneese Altarpieces," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21-33.

situation for early Netherlandish painting, a period famously bereft of a tradition of art literature to match its sophisticated artistic produce:

... apart from the paintings themselves, we have precious little evidence and little vocabulary from the period to guide us... artists made things up as they went along, much as they often still do, and respondents did likewise. Formal invention and the elaboration of content went hand in hand, just as the experience of a devotional object must have been partly guided and partly improvised on the basis of different priorities of varying interest to the beholder. This assumption is just common sense.¹²³

Not all pictorial effects may cohere with artistic intention; aesthetics may in fact be at cross purposes with signification.¹²⁴ This, I argue, is especially true for early Netherlandish domestic interiors that aim at a significant blend of religious iconography with specific elements taken from the secular experience, some of which might be at odds with the patron's primary intention. Johan Huizinga frequently emphasised these conflicting dynamics in early Netherlandish painting: "It is exactly in the details that the artist has complete freedom".¹²⁵ "The eye continues to be drawn to the margin"; "we delight, even in this instance [the Annunciation of the *Ghent Altarpiece* [0.8]], almost more intensively in the copper kettle and the view of the sunny street" (than in the central iconography).¹²⁶ Much

¹²³ Peter Parshall, "Commentary: Conformity or Contrast?," in Ainsworth, *Early Netherlandish*, 19; 20-21.

¹²⁴ Cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 18.

¹²⁵ Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 338 and see his "Kunst".

¹²⁶ Huizinga, *Autumn*, 337.

‘counter content’, such as light catching on a metal ewer or the crack in a stone floor tile, can distract from the central theme, but also serve – in a contradictory, elusive fashion – to enhance, and aid in holding, the viewer’s attention.

In attempting to throw a wide net to capture such elements, this thesis has often found itself torn between the rigour of a historicist approach and the slippery variability of aesthetic, imaginative engagement with a singular artwork – that is, between fundamentally different conceptions of the subject of art history: as something, on the one hand, more akin to a modern science or, on the other hand, a kind of critical ‘art’ with description as its narrational tool.¹²⁷ Visual analysis - giving voice to the mute artwork - is a curious practice; especially when it attempts to be historically grounded.¹²⁸ Description, I continue to realise, can never be merely description; it is never disinterested. Rather, it is an integral part of interpretation.

When in his essays Belting wrote that scholars have “thought little about the images themselves”, he pointed to a deficiency within the field of early Netherlandish

¹²⁷ There is a broad literature on the modern domination of the scientific method in historical study, but see Johan Huizinga, “A Definition of the Concept of History,” in *Philosophy & History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. Paton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 1-10.

¹²⁸ Cf. Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Fontana, 1983) 198: “*to describe* consists precisely in joining to the denoted message a relay or second-order message derived from a code which is that of language and constituting in relation to the photographic analogue, however much one cares to be exact, a connotation: to describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different from what is show.” Cf. Erwin Panofsky, “On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts,” trans. Jaś Elsner and Katharina Lorenz, *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 473: “any initial description of a work of art... in fact subscribes to an interpretative position on issues of history and representation, even if only implicitly.”

painting, which his “phenomenology” attempted to alleviate.¹²⁹ Gaston Bachelard once similarly defined his critical practice: “A phenomenologist... takes the image just as it is, just as he created it, and tries to make it his own, to feed on this rare fruit. He brings the image to the very limit of what he is able to imagine. However far from being a poet he himself may be, he *tries to repeat its creation for himself*”.¹³⁰ Bachelard’s phenomenological epitome of re-enactment floats unattainably above this thesis. In chasing this epitome, I have opted for extended examinations of individual exemplary artworks over the more sweeping catalogue-style approach, inspired by certain twenty-first-century ‘neo-formalist’ practices.¹³¹ This thesis’ ideal hermeneutic stance would be a seamless fusion of the historical rigour of social and iconographic art history with a critical ‘close looking’ that openly admits, but endeavours to counteract, its distance from the historical moment with which it is concerned.

The “first truly modern interior”?

According to Peter Sloterdijk, “The exemplary human of modernity is *Homo habitans*”.¹³² When questions about ‘human domestication’ are directed down the centuries, as they continue to be, they can find a point of resonance in the interior

¹²⁹ Belting, *Spiegel*, 7; 268.

¹³⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin, 2014) 243 (my emphasis).

¹³¹ E.g., T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Note the theory of historical practice in Collingwood, *Idea*, 282-302 (“the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind” (282)).

¹³² Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalisation*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 25 and 197. On interior subjectivity and interior space in modernity, see esp. Richard Sennett, “Interiors and Interiority,” *Solid Interior Matters a+t* 47 (2017): 10-19 and his “Interiors and Interiority at Harvard GSD (4/22/16),” Youtube, accessed May 23 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVPjQhfJfKo>.

scenes of the early Netherlandish period, often considered primordial representations of domestication in its modern form.¹³³ From this perspective, Pächt was possibly right to locate the “first truly modern interior” in the 1420s-30s moment of early Netherlandish Marian domestic scenes, but wrong in the immediate reasons he gave for this judgement. This modern interior was not simply the result of spatial and constructive considerations. It also, as Pächt himself argues elsewhere, arises from the early Netherlandish painters’ enrichment of inanimate pictorial content.¹³⁴ And, what’s more, it is activated by the mediation by these of a significant moment of procreative interbreeding between pictorial types and motifs, both sacred and profane. Before the mortal individual is customarily depicted in a room of their own era, the saint or divine figure was already, in fact, in residence.

Ultimately, then, the thesis pursues a formal and conceptual arc that stretches from the painted architectonic shrine housing the saint to the portrait of the mortal, profane individual in a defined interior environment – via pictures that synthesise sacred and mortal figures under the same roof in the same setting. In the earliest extant single-sitter portraits to use interior settings, older iconographic conventions and new modes of representing subjectivity appear to converge head-on. I argue that it is this conjunctive moment that generates, ultimately, the possibility for the secular individual to see themselves represented, for the first time in history, in a room of their own in the world of their day.

¹³³ Beate Söntgen, “Inner Visions: Interiors,” *Tate Etc.* 10 (May 2007), <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-10-summer-2007/inner-visions>; Lajer-Burcharth, *Interiors*. And see fn5 above.

¹³⁴ Cf. Pächt, “Design,” 273-74; *Van Eyck*, 54-56.

Chapter 1. Painting as House: the *Norfolk Triptych* and the Resolution of the Architectural Frame into a Spatial Setting

Movables ‘furniture’ clearly developed out of immovables ‘real estate’. The armoire is compared to a medieval fortress. Just as, in the latter, a tiny dwelling space is surrounded in ever-widening rings by walls, forming a gigantic outwork, so the contents of the drawers and shelves in the armoire are overwhelmed by a mighty outwork.

- Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 199; 212 [incorporating Adolf Behne, *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1927), 59 and 61-2].

Introduction

I begin this circuitous response to the emergence of the portrait of Edward Grimston by attending to the relation of architectural frame and spatialised setting in a painting of the pre-Eyckian era. This chapter develops a hypothesis that the architectonic conception of various small-format painted panels in the late medieval era – many with formal ties to micro-architectural objects like shrine and tabernacles – may be partly responsible for stimulating the articulated house interiors found in religious paintings or portraits of the 1430s and 1440s and may

go some way to explaining the then palpable importance of the architectural setting. To approach the illusionistic feats of early Netherlandish spatial settings from this angle allows us to better appreciate the development of the interior – its special charge – in fifteenth-century panel painting, and ultimately deepen our understanding of the emergence of *Edward Grimston* in his well-described room in 1446.

In an essay accompanying the 2020 Jan van Eyck exhibition, Stefan Kemperdick writes of the artist's *Virgin in a Church* [0.12]: it is “part of an artistic tradition, dating back centuries”. “We are”, he says, “fundamentally looking... at a Madonna in a tabernacle”.¹³⁵ Spelled out, this hypothesis would read something like the following: the medieval Virgin in a tabernacle, whether of ivory [1.1], metalwork [1.2], or wood [1.3], was customarily represented as homologous with a surrounding architectural encasement; her tabernacle was borne close to the body like an attribute, related, ultimately, to a symbolic significance as Maria-Ecclesia; seen *as* tabernacle, *as* church. Such co-dependencies between figure and architectonic frame were also widely noticeable across a whole range of medieval representations of holy persons. The *Virgin in a Church* realises this inheritance.

But, crucially, van Eyck conceived this same timeworn figure-architecture relationship otherwise. Saint and shrine undergo a separation – light, air, stone and glass have been injected into the gap. A Madonna of gigantic proportions

¹³⁵ Stephan Kemperdick, “Jan van Eyck’s Madonna in a Church and its Artistic Legacy,” in Martens, *Van Eyck*, 262; cf. Kemperdick and Friso Lammertse, “Painting around 1400 and Jan van Eyck’s Early Work,” in Kemperdick, *Road*, 94-96.

appears within a deep, lofty nave. This architectonic frame is ‘fleshed out’, imagined as the interior of a cathedral with features described with such thoroughness and veracity as to compel some art historians to wonder whether it is in fact a portrait of a specific church, perhaps the cathedral of Tournai or Utrecht.¹³⁶ It is now a picture of Mary *in* a church and *as* a church.¹³⁷ And all is contained within the diminutive proportions of the painted panel measuring only 14x31cm.

Kemperdick reopens an old and problematic phenomenon of art history: the resolution of architectural frame into spatial setting in late medieval panel painting. A similar point, for example, was made by Erich Herzog. Herzog traced the roots of van Eyck’s *Virgin* in the high Middle Ages in the image type of the Madonna under an *Architekturarkade* or baldachin.¹³⁸ The Gothic baldachin and van Eyck’s light-flooded interior “mean the same thing”, says Herzog, “only their appearance is different”. “The resolution of the architectural frame into a spatial construction is characteristic for the end of the fourteenth century”.¹³⁹ Likewise, Otto Pächt saw in van Eyck’s work a pictorial conversion of the tabernacle form, calling it an “airy shrine”.¹⁴⁰ And Hans Kauffmann read the architecture, in spite of its powerfully convincing verisimilitude, as a reformed shrine that appeared

¹³⁶ E.g., Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:433-35n2.

¹³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 145.

¹³⁸ Herzog, “Kirchenmadonna,” 5; Carol Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 145-46.

¹³⁹ Herzog, “Kirchenmadonna,” 5: “Die Architekturarkade der Gotik und der lichtdurchströmte Innenraum van Eycks bedeuten das gleiche, verschieden ist nur ihre Erscheinungsform.... Für das Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts ist die Auflösung der mittelalterlichen Architekturumrahmung zu einem Raumgebilde bezeichnend.”

¹⁴⁰ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 205.

“hanging from above, as if a statue’s baldachin had been lowered which Maria was holding in suspension”.¹⁴¹

The general theory of the resolution of the architectural frame into a spatial construction can be pursued further back in art historical scholarship, formulated by, for example, Erwin Panofsky, Felix Horb and Alfred Stange.¹⁴² Panofsky explained: “... alongside the emancipation of plastic bodies is achieved – one would like to say automatically – the emancipation of a spatial sphere comprehending [*in sich befassenden*] these bodies. An expressive symbol of this is the high Gothic statue, which cannot live without its baldachin; for the baldachin not only connects the statue to the mass of the building, but also delimits and assigns to it a particular chunk of empty space...”¹⁴³ His use of “in sich befassenden” is notable, containing within itself cognitive understanding – the mind ‘grasping’ something – and also a muscular, manual holding. The implication is that the architectural space adheres to the Gothic figure in a symbiotic manner, at once physical and spiritual – and that this bound dependence becomes progressively freed in Renaissance painting. Panofsky’s conception of an evolutionary chain running between the medieval tabernacle and the early modern spatial setting seems to have been one of his deepest-seated assumptions, proven by the theory’s recurrence in several of his later publications.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Kauffmann, “Arnolfinihochzeit,” 49.

¹⁴² Alfred Stange, *Deutsche Kunst um 1400: Versuch einer Darstellung ihre Form und ihres Wesens* (Munich: Piper, 1923), 133-34 (“der Wegfall der architektonischen Rahmungen”); Horb, *Innenraumbild*, 67-70.

¹⁴³ Panofsky, *Perspective*, 53-4; “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form,’” in *Aufsätze zur Grundfrage der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Hariolf Oberer and Egon Verheyen (Berlin: Spiess, 1985) 114-15.

¹⁴⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences* (London: Paladin, 1970), 132; *Early Netherlandish*, 1:16.

But how to account for the obvious formal gap between the two – the medieval architectural frame and the illusionistic interior spatial setting? Art historical sight compels a morphological collapse of the Virgin in the tabernacle into the Virgin in the church; however, the two (the tabernacle and the spatial setting) are fundamentally different.¹⁴⁵ It is an aesthetic leap of an almost visionary kind to see the latter as a consequence of the former – the kind of ‘figural’ leap discussed in the introduction. But what is bound up and understood in this leap? How do we account for this seeming reverberation of the hieratic architectonic shrines of previous centuries in the realistic painted spatial settings of the Eyckian era?

In certain panel paintings of the immediately antecedent (pre-Eyckian) era, there can be points of calculated coincidence – where the abstract ‘place’ denoted by a painting’s architectonic frame meets (or sometimes even seems to deliberately thwart) the specific settings described within the picture. Pächt called this a tendency to “reify” the frame.¹⁴⁶ Consider the *Large Carrand Diptych* [1.4a-b]. The hinged work opens like a book to reveal adjacent portals, the wood of each having been elaborately carved and gilded to resemble goldsmiths’ work.¹⁴⁷ One gable enshrines a *sacra conversazione*, the other a Crucifixion. Debating prophets and musical angels animate the upper regions of the façades, nestling among the

¹⁴⁵ On the aesthetic difference between ornamental frame and pictorial content see Guérin, “Meaningful,” esp. 54; Gombrich, *Sense*, 199–200.

¹⁴⁶ See Otto Pächt, *Book Illumination in the Middle Ages: An Introduction* (London: Harvey Millar, 1986), 190–202; cf. Francis Wormald, “The Fitzwarin Psalter and its Allies,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 71.

¹⁴⁷ Grete Ring, *A Century of French Painting 1400–1500* (London: Phaidon, 1949), 192: “the impression... of an architecture on a minute scale, emulating the portal of a cathedral... In order to judge the diptych fairly, one should accordingly apply the standard of an *objet d’art* rather than that of an easel painting proper.”

crockets, pinnacles and buttresses, emphasising the sense that this structure is populated. The framing architectural tabernacles are explicitly in front, or on top of the scenes and figures.¹⁴⁸ The moulded trefoil foliate decoration ostentatiously overlaps, for example, the thief on the cross behind Christ as well as the canopy of Mary's baldachin. Karl Birkmeyer thought that the carved façade was "not coordinated" with the pictorial locations behind it.¹⁴⁹ In fact, the exterior architecture maintains a hybrid status mid-way between a frame and a setting.¹⁵⁰ The house-ornament is there to give a sense that the painted figures are inhabitants (setting) of the picture but also to abstractly aggrandise the scenes depicted (frame).

The diptych stages this hybridity through its form. In the right-hand panel, the crucifixion is evidently situated outdoors in the barren landscape of Golgotha, and as such the gable structure is disconnected conceptually from the contents, conveying location only in a metaphorical fashion. However, in the left-hand panel, the architectural frame synthesises with the *sacra conversazione* scene set in a chapel-niche. The moulded and gilded frame is a continuation of the painted setting, an exteriorised form of the location depicted *in* the painting. To force the point, the trefoil decoration of the carved frame echoes the tracery of the painted chapel-niche, and the luxurious carpet on which the holy figures sit spills out over

¹⁴⁸ Kemperdick, "Jan van Eyck's," 262.

¹⁴⁹ Birkmeyer, "Arch Motif," 9.

¹⁵⁰ Cyril Stroo, "The Enigmatic Carrand Diptych: Between Tradition and Innovation: Pictorial and Iconographic Peculiarities of a pre-Eyckian Panel Painting," in *La Pensée du regard. Études d'histoire de l'art du Moyen Âge offertes à Christian Heck*, ed. Pascale Charron et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 311-22 (312) calls it a "hybrid architectural setting" (of frame and setting), comparing with van Eyck's *Virgin* [0.12] and the *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5b] (this chapter's case study).

the bounds of the painted world onto the lower sill of the gable below. The diptych would like the beholder to consider it as a miniature house, and its images as inhabitants – it goes about this in two ways, which it attempts somehow to both fuse and keep separate: one, the architectural frame; the other, the spatial setting.

This chapter does not pretend to resolve the problem, outlined above, of the gap between the architectonic baldachin and the spatial setting, or of the conceptual and morphological difference between shrine and image (between shrine and an image of a shrine). Rather, it wishes to examine the analogical correspondence between the two – between the picture as a house and the house in the picture, and the concomitant junctions between exterior decoration and interior setting. We will see that the house-frame was not a mere extraneous embellishment, a role to which the modern frame can often be reduced. Instead, the house-frame was an active and integral constituent of the object, conditioning its composition and reception.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such circumscribing architectonics were extremely pervasive in the presentation of religious imagery; according to Henning Bock, the tabernacle or baldachin motif – piers, braces, arch and gable – appeared everywhere.¹⁵¹ This attachment to visible Gothic architectonics in smaller

¹⁵¹ Henning Bock, “Zum Tabernakelmotiv des 14. Jahrhundert in England,” in *Der Mensch und die Künste [Festschrift Lützelers]*, ed. Günter Bandmann (Dusseldorf: Schwann, 1962), 412; cf. Günter Meißner, “Bedeutung und Genesis des architektonischen Baldachins,” *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 33 (1959): 178–183; Eva Frodl-Kraft, “Architektur im Abbild, ihre Spiegelung in der Glasmalerei,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 17 (1956): 7-13. Many Gothic statues exhibited today appear free-standing but in fact their architectural frames have been lost (Guérin, “Meaningful,” 55).

objects was famously called ‘micro-architecture’ by François Bucher.¹⁵² Precisely because of this erstwhile ubiquity, these late medieval house-frames can sometimes appear like decorative superfluities unimportant for interpretation.¹⁵³ But recent research like that of Sarah Guérin understands such architectonic frames differently, as more than mere adornment – not just as bearers of symbolic connotation, rather also constituting an object’s reception.¹⁵⁴ Analogously, I would like to avoid treating the enmeshment of painting and architecture or micro-architecture as “axiomatic”, or *a priori*, but as an integrative part of aesthetic experience. In these earlier architectonic pictures, we might detect – in latent form – some of the structural force apparent in later fifteenth-century Netherlandish interior settings.

As stated, the evolutionary history of the early Netherlandish interior scene traditionally commenced with pre-Eyckian Franco-Flemish manuscript illumination.¹⁵⁵ However, this chapter chooses to focus its architectonic investigation on the fragmentary phenomenon that is pre-Eyckian panel painting

¹⁵² François Bucher, “Microarchitecture as the ‘Idea’ of Gothic Theory and Style,” *Gesta* 15, no. 1/2 (1976): 71; for counter-arguments to Bucher’s interpretation, see Binski, “Magnificentia,” 13-24 and Binski, *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 142-45. Cf. the conference papers in Guillouët, *Microarchitectures* and Christine Kratzke and Uwe Albrecht, eds., *Mikroarchitektur im Mittelalter: ein gattungsübergreifendes Phänomen zwischen Realität und Imagination; Beiträge der gleichnamigen Tagung im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg vom 26. bis 29. Oktober 2005* (Leipzig: Kratzke, 2008).

¹⁵³ Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5: “[ornament is] the aspect of decoration which appears not to have another purpose but to enhance its carrier.”

¹⁵⁴ Guérin, “Meaningful,” 53-54; Alison Wright, *Frame Work: Honour and Ornament in Italian Renaissance Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Maciej Kaźmierczak, “Frames and ‘Their’ Pictures. The Role of Frames and Frameworks in Old Painting. An Outline of the Subject,” *Journal of the National Museum of Art Warsaw* 7, no. 43 (2017): 353-68; Jeffrey Hamburger, “The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History: Problems, Positions, Possibilities,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11-31.

¹⁵⁵ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:28-61; but see Buren, “Thoughts,” for an early call to redress.

c.1400. Through this, we will be able to grasp more fully why the ‘house interior’ became a significant feature of Netherlandish panel painting throughout the rest of that century.

The term pre-Eyckian, coined in the mid-twentieth century, is used to label a group of twenty to twenty-five Netherlandish panel paintings remaining from the period before van Eyck was active, roughly 1350 to 1420.¹⁵⁶ We have limited knowledge of these earlier works, of which very few survive. In Karel van Mander’s *Schilder-Boeck* of 1604, the first history of the lives of northern artists to be published, van Eyck appears as if from nowhere. Van Mander’s frustrated research led him to assume: “that there were few painters or good examples of painting known in those early days in that uncultured, isolated backwater”; “Nowhere in High or Low Germany do I find earlier painters known or named”.¹⁵⁷ However, surviving documents from this period give us good reason to disagree.¹⁵⁸ Owing to iconoclasm, many works of art were most likely already lost by van Mander’s time.¹⁵⁹ One work, however, named the *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5a-e] in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, dated via stylistic means to c.1415, is among the significant exceptions.¹⁶⁰ It has been called “a culmination of the achievements of painting before the van Eycks”; but in many ways it is a complex object, not simply

¹⁵⁶ Cyril Stroo and Dominique Vanwijnsberghe, “Glimpses of a Lost Splendour: an Introduction to Pre-Eyckian Painting,” in Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:13-32; Stroo, “The Southern Netherlands,” in Kemperdick, *Road*, 34-39.

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *A History*, 107, citing the translation in Miedema, *Lives* (see fn14 above).

¹⁵⁸ Lorne Campbell, “Preface,” in Stroo *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:8.

¹⁵⁹ For some of the most significant survivors see Roelofs, *Maelwael*.

¹⁶⁰ See Volker Herzner, “Das Norfolk-Triptychon in Rotterdam: Das früheste Werk Jan van Eycks?: Gerhard Schmidt zum 80. Geburtstag,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 68, no. 1 (2005): 20-21 and 21n43 for a review of the scholarly datings, ranging between 1410 and 1415.

a ‘painting’ but rather mid-way between an image and a shrine.¹⁶¹ As such, it will form the case study around which this chapter’s discussions orbit.

Scholarship on the *Norfolk Triptych* has been chiefly concerned with its iconography and stylistic sphere.¹⁶² But, by picking apart the intricacies of its formal complexion, focusing in particular on the painted architecture visible in its open state, we can recognise it as a revealing junction in the pictorial elaboration of frame and setting between the *Carrand Diptych* and van Eyck’s *Virgin in a Church*.¹⁶³ And we can begin to trace an alternative genealogy of the early Netherlandish house interior. In examining the triptych, I will speculate on the significance of its use of architectural form, the situation of its original micro-architectural formal universe and then how it translates framing architectonics into painted illusion. It is in such multi-media panel paintings, I argue, that we might recover an embryonic character of the spatialised domestic settings of panel painting of the 1430s Eyckian era.¹⁶⁴ The chapter will look at the *Norfolk Triptych* and other specific examples later, but this next section will first focus on general

¹⁶¹ Anne van Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck to Bruegel, 1440 to 1550: Dutch and Flemish Painting in the collection of the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994), 29-33 (no. 1; 33); Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:92: “one of the most accomplished and sophisticated works of panel painting in the pre-Eyckian Netherlands”.

¹⁶² Especially the notional relationship to a young van Eyck: cf. Herzner, “Norfolk-Triptychon”; Rozanne de Bruijne, “Meer Licht op het Norfolk-Triptyek” (MA diss., University of Amsterdam, 2013).

¹⁶³ On the work’s historical importance to this effect, see Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1996), 74-75.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Stephen Perkinson, *Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 277: “Van Eyck’s images – and indeed all of the masterful instances of verism that arose in the fifteenth century – must be seen as the logical outgrowths of earlier artistic strategies rather than as the hallmarks of a radically new and disjunctive age”; Belting, *Likeness*, 425: “the forthcoming character of the work of art is already latent in this court production.”

concepts, establishing the significance of the house-frame in the broader sweep of history.

The house-frame in history

Around 1400, a significant number of panel paintings were shaped in the manner of buildings.¹⁶⁵ Following the myriad of different formats used for thirteenth-century religious painting, from around 1300 onwards panels began to take on more conventional shapes with unified structures, especially those “borrowed from the frames of portals and windows in Gothic architecture”.¹⁶⁶ Thus, painters and joiners in collaboration frequently fashioned architectural frames to provide depicted figures with ornament and situation.¹⁶⁷ Such architectonics, carved, gilded or painted, made the work into a little house: a self-contained ‘place’.¹⁶⁸ The picture and the depicted figures within were ontologically inseparable as far as the framing architecture was concerned: such frames enshrined the whole entity that

¹⁶⁵ Charles Sterling, “Die Malerei in Europa um 1400,” in *Europäische Kunst um 1400. Achte Ausstellung unter den Auspizien des Europarates*, exh. cat, ed. Vinzenz Oberhammer (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1962), 67: “... carved from the material of the panel itself, the frames are gilded, engraved, and often use architectonic form...”; Elizabeth Bailey, “The History of the Tabernacle: Form, Function, and Meaning,” *Medieval Perspectives* 17 (2002): 51: “In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, artists produced religious paintings encased in house-like frames.”

¹⁶⁶ Belting, *Likeness*, 354; cf. Monika Cämmerer-George, *Die Rahmung toskanischen Altarbilder im Trecento* (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1966). I have not been able to consult Irmtraud Schmidt, “Der gotische Bilderrahmen in Deutschland und den Niederlanden” (PhD diss., Freiburg, 1954).

¹⁶⁷ On the importance of architectural form in framing late medieval panel paintings see Hélène Verougstraete, *Frames and Supports in the 15th- and 16th-Century Netherlands* (Brussels, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage: 2015), 83-85, <http://org.kikirpa.be/frames/files/assets/basic-html/index.html#III>; Claus Grimm, *The Book of Picture Frames* (New York: Abaris Books, 1992), 26-30; Henry Heydenryk, *The Art and History of Frames: An Inquiry into the Enhancement of Paintings* (New York: Heinemann, 1963), 8-18.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Graham Runnalls, “Mansion et lieu: Two Technical terms in Medieval French Staging?,” *French Studies* 25 (1981): 385-93 who argues that in late medieval theatre, the words ‘house’ and ‘place’ were used almost interchangeably; Hans Huth, *Künstler und Werkstatt der Spätgotik* (Augsburg: Filser, 1923), 98-99n120 lists terms in contracts for late medieval altarpieces denoting figures’ architectonic niches: “simborien, zyborigen, tabernackel, husung, geheuß”.

was the picture but at the same time housed the human forms represented. The pictorial content might also contain painted buildings encasing the figures, frames of a subsidiary kind.¹⁶⁹ Thus, when I refer to the house-frame, I mean principally those that surround the entire picture – in the case of pre-Eyckian panel paintings, customarily carved by a joiner and gilded by the painter.

It must be added that among smaller painted panels, rectangular formats were equally prominent.¹⁷⁰ Late medieval panel painting thus reflects a certain structural tension between the arch and the rectangle.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Gothic arches were sometimes appended to quadrangular Byzantine icons to give them a guise of ‘western’ sacrality – “dignity and worship-worthiness”.¹⁷² Bernhard Decker has even suggested that Gothic architectural frames may have been responsible for tempering an image’s propensities to attract more dangerous kinds of veneration.¹⁷³ Ultimately, enframing Gothic architectonics satisfied “an

¹⁶⁹ E.g., Stroo *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:124-55 (no. 2); 196-271 (no. 4); 310-57 (no. 7); 386-419 (no. 9).

¹⁷⁰ Belting, *Likeness*, 78-101 on the origins of the icon format.

¹⁷¹ Wright, *Frame*, 41-44. For a Trecento work evincing this discomfort between architectures material and virtual, see Paolo Veneziano, *The Birth and First Miracle of Saint Nicholas* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1340s).

¹⁷² Michele Bacci, “Gothic-Framed Byzantine Icons: Italianate Ornament in the Levant during the Middle Ages,” in *Histories of Ornament*, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 106-14 (113-14): “modes of [Gothic] ornament from the Latin West were employed fairly often in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as visual strategies to enhance the religious prestige or Greek Orthodox icons... to make [them] more attractive, or, as both Italians and Greek donors would have agreed to say, to make them more ‘decorous and honourable’. This expression is often used in contemporary Latin documents as a sort of hendiadys, which indicates that it is indeed the decor, the juxtaposition of ornamental motifs, that conveys the dignity and worship-worthiness of a church, altar, or image.” On honour and ornament see Wright, *Frame*, esp. 26-27, 32-33 and for the rhetorical connection see Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112-25.

¹⁷³ Bernhard Decker, “Reform within the Cult Image: The German Winged Altarpiece before the Reformation,” in Humfrey, *Altarpiece*, 92-93 (93): “the winged altarpiece of the fourteenth century should be seen as an attempt to avoid idolatry... medieval cult images had always been set within an architectural frame – a niche, a pedestal, a tabernacle, or simply a tracery surround – in a way that served to emphasise the character of the image as a representation. This kind of framing... may be seen as a necessary precondition for the acceptability of the cult image. Until the end of the

increasingly pressing problem” of medieval image-making, which the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council was partly intended to remedy: “How can sacred objects be presented to distinguish them from the mundane ones of the everyday world?”¹⁷⁴

The close relationship between framing architecture and figural image had a special significance for Christian imagery.¹⁷⁵ We can extrapolate the particularly Christian function of the house-frame in late medieval Christian imagery from the arguments of Welsh prelate Reginald Pecock (c.1395-c.1461) in the second part of his *Repressor* (issued c.1449-55), defending the use of images, or “rememorative signs”, against charges of the Lollards. Pecock affirms the connection between image and place in the context of relics and pilgrimages. He says that relics should not be left “in the baar feeld” but that it is “resonable and worthi” that they be sheltered in “chapellis or chirchis”.¹⁷⁶ If a locality lacks a body or relic of a particular saint, an image should be set in a place to which people can come, behold and thereby remember; a chapel or church should be built to facilitate this. In his opinion, it is even more reasonable and worthy to make images representing Christ and the Virgin because they left behind no bodily remains. These too should be “housid” for the reasons applicable to the housing of the saints’ images.¹⁷⁷ When, therefore, an image of Christ, the Virgin or a saint appears encased in a house-

period in which cult images were used in Germany, the niche-bound structure of the sculpted figures was preserved.”

¹⁷⁴ Guérin, “Staging,” 54.

¹⁷⁵ David Cowling, *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 54-82; Grimm, *Frames*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London: Longman, 1860), 1:182-83.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

frame, it duplicates and aestheticises this requirement for an image to be “housid”, but on the reduced scale of the painted artwork.

In the New Testament, particularly St Paul’s letters, the *oikos* (house) is used literally and figuratively as both material and spiritual dwelling.¹⁷⁸ This parallelism is central to the visual relationship between figure and house-frame. Ephesians 2:19-22 reads:

Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners: but you are fellow citizens with the saints and the domestics of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: in whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into an holy temple in the Lord. In whom you are also built together into an habitation of God in the Spirit.¹⁷⁹

People are construction material, built together into God’s domicile (*coaedificamini in habitaculum Dei*) as so much stone and mortar.¹⁸⁰ Like the origin of ‘church’ in the Greek word *ἐκκλησία* (literally ‘those who are called upon’),

¹⁷⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 559-60 (οἰκῖᾱ) and 562-63 (οἶκος), with scriptural references. See especially Francesca Rigotti, “The House as Metaphor,” in *From a Metaphorical Point of View. A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Cognitive Content of Metaphor*, ed. Zdravko Radman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 419-45.

¹⁷⁹ For all biblical quotations, I have used the Douay-Rheims version available online, following the Latin Vulgate: *The Latin Vulgate Bible: The Holy Bible in Latin Language with Douay-Rheims English Translation*, accessed 24 May 2021, vulgate.org.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Ephesians 4:16; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 3:15; Colossians 1:18. Bernard McGinn, “From Admirable Tabernacle to the House of God: some Reflections on Medieval Architectural Integration,” in *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, ed. Virginia Raguin et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 42-56.

Christians are treated as both body and building, at once physical and spiritual. This analogising view is especially evident in the building of cathedrals; in the annals of Milan Cathedral, the ‘Masters’ justify the building of four towers by such reasons.¹⁸¹

But the custom of enshrining an image of a god in its own “symbolic-ceremonial” little house is, according to one modern scholar, “practically as old as architecture itself”.¹⁸² In his lectures on tomb sculpture, Panofsky drew attention to the marked “domatomorphic” character of many funereal monuments across history.¹⁸³ Symbolic architectonics are so enduring and wide-spread across cultures, their historical development is only vaguely understood (though a traditional hypothesis of western art history holds that the classical ‘proscenium arch’ endures in early Christian sarcophagi, persisting in sculpture and eventually migrating into the interior settings of late medieval painting).¹⁸⁴

The bond between image and place is ancient. According to Cicero, “forms and bodies” of images and things seen “require an abode”; “a material object without a

¹⁸¹ James Ackerman, “Ars sine scientia nihil est’: Gothic Theory of Architecture at the Cathedral of Milan,” *Art Bulletin* 31, no. 2 (1949): 100: “as if as a model for this, the Lord God is seated in Paradise in the centre of the throne, and around the throne are the four Evangelists according to the Apocalypse”.

¹⁸² John Summerson, “Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic,” in *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (New York: Norton, 1963), 3. On ancient Roman *lararia* as forerunners of the medieval Christian triptych format see André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 82 and cf. Karl Schade, *Ad excitandum devotionis affectum: kleine Triptychen in der altniederländischen Malerei* (Weimar: VDG, 2001), 17-18.

¹⁸³ Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York: Abrams, 1964), 14.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Krautheimer, “Review of *Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective* by Miriam Schild-Bunim,” *Art Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (1941): 178-80.

locality [*sine loco*] is inconceivable”.¹⁸⁵ Architecture was perhaps so often synonymous with ornament because visible location (and everything that comes with it: shelter, security, presence, power, conspicuousness, fixedness) is itself a kind of honour.¹⁸⁶ Less regularly explicitly acknowledged today, the subtle rhetoric of placement that accompanies an enframing arch or gable strongly complements an honorific effect. In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder describes a particular statue of Hercules as “dishonoured and without any shrine” [*inhonorus est nec in templo ullo*]. The Romans stripped the statue of its honour because of its importance to the Carthaginians (the Carthaginians had offered the statue an annual human sacrifice, an un-Roman practice).¹⁸⁷ The shrine and honour are equivalent, the one reflecting the other; when the architecture is withdrawn, so is the honour.

In the Middle Ages, ‘place’ was far more than inert location, it carried great significance.¹⁸⁸ Correspondence between location and honour finds a special expression in the convoluted hierarchies of late medieval ritual.¹⁸⁹ In the 1445

¹⁸⁵ Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1957), ii, 87.355-358 (468-69)

¹⁸⁶ Summerson, “Heavenly”; cf. Belting, *Likeness*, 48 on the Orthodox icon’s covering by a special canopy, “a sign of sovereignty since before Christianity,” and 75-76 for an example.

¹⁸⁷ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. D. E. Eichholz (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), xxxvi, 4.39 (10:30-1), instead of in a shrine, the statue “stands on the ground in front of the entrance to the Gallery of the Nations”.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Kemp, *Räume*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ On distance and ritual at the Burgundian court see Werner Paravicini, “The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy: A Model for Europe,” in *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c.1450-1650*, ed. Ronald Asch and Adolf Birke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 88-89, and *Mémoires d’Olivier de la Marche*, ed. Henri Beaune and J. d’Arbaumont (Paris: Renouard, 1884), 2:354-5 on the detailed narration of dinner placements at Philip the Good’s Feast of the Pheasant 1454. Cf. Paul Lacroix, *Manners, Customs, and Dress during the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance Period* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1874), 498-99 for the visit of Queen Marie of Anjou (1404-63) to the Duchess of Burgundy (1397-1471) at Châlons in 1445, related by Aliénor de Poitiers (1444/46-1509) in her *Honneurs de la Court*, written 1484-91 but drawing on her mother’s experiences of court etiquette (“a series of articles... at great length and enter[ing] into detail respecting the interior arrangements of the rooms in

meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece in St Jans (now St Bavo) Church in Ghent, described by the Burgundian chronicler Olivier de la Marche, the empty places (*places vuides*) of absent and even dead participants are preserved for the purposes of honour, demarcated above by rich gold work baldachins and painted coats of arms “as if they were there in person”.¹⁹⁰ In the world of the late medieval artwork, the same locational distinctions of social reality reappear in a sublimated fashion, at the level of form.

We maintain something of the link between honour, location and imagery today, each time we place a picture in a frame and mount it in a specific place for a certain time. But the twenty-first century digital image is a comparatively homeless image.¹⁹¹ As early as 1960 the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer prophetically wrote, “only since we no longer have any room for pictures do we know that pictures are not just images but need space”.¹⁹² Comparatively, digital images lack the security, and pretension to singularity and specificity, supported by those older

which princes and other noble children were born... formalities... as curious as they were complicated” (501): “[the Duchess] was conducted to the hall which served as the ante-chamber to the Queen’s apartment. There she stopped, and sent in M. de Crequi to ask the Queen if it was her pleasure that she should enter... as she entered she knelt and then advanced to the middle of the room... and moved straight towards the Queen, who was standing close to the foot of her throne...”

¹⁹⁰ *Mémoires d’Olivier*, 2:88-9 “comme s’il eust esté en personne”; cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 57-58.

¹⁹¹ Fitting that there is so much discourse around home relating to the infrastructure of the internet itself. On architecture and the computer screen, see Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), 219-39; Jacob Gaboury, “The Random-Access Image: Memory and the History of the computer Screen,” *Grey Room* 70 (2018): 25: “To be sure, the computer screen follows in the tradition of the visual frame that delimits, contains, and produces the image.” On ‘home’ and the curious ontology of the digital image and file, see Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso Books, 2016), 261-68.

¹⁹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 132.

rituals and infrastructures of placement; hence many of us have lost that propensity to honour images as we used to.¹⁹³

Hans Belting's influential "history of the image before the era of art" is peppered with metaphorical terms (in translation) like "abode", "reside", "home", "housed" etc., precisely to impress this erstwhile 'domesticative' treatment of images.¹⁹⁴ Through its investigations, this chapter consequently seeks to recover a certain architectural treatment of the painted religious image in the late medieval era, and with this something of an older bond between picture and house.

The Norfolk Triptych: interpreting the architecture

The so-called *Norfolk Triptych* measures around just 33x33cm when closed and 33x58cm when opened.¹⁹⁵ Gilded, carved and painted, the triptych offers a "polyphony of materials", probably made by several specialists working in collaboration.¹⁹⁶ Its ornate frame, integral to the panel, is an essential part of its formal appearance: the outer strips are decorated with painted foliated stems and pinecones, the inner grooves with rosettes of gold-plated cast lead.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ But the ephemerality of early prints is emphasised by their precarious adhesion to walls in e.g.: the *Annunciation* [2.6]; Petrus Christus, *Female Donor* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, c.1455); Joos van Cleve, *Annunciation* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, c.1525).

¹⁹⁴ E.g., Belting, *Likeness*, 6; 13; 174; 183; 184; 190; 194; 208; 213; 227; 230; 241; 311; 313; 315.

¹⁹⁵ Named thus because once in the collection of the Dukes of Norfolk, the picture has a provenance traceable to the nineteenth century. On the triptych, see Bruijne, "Norfolk-triptyek"; Kemperdick, *Road*, 185-87 (no. 33); Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon"; Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 28-33 (no. 1); Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, exh. cat. trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 120-21; Schade, *Excitandum*, 84-88.

¹⁹⁶ Belting and Kruse, *Erfindung*, 135-36 (no. 4-5); Schade, *Excitandum*, 25: "The properties of a reliquary and a devotional panel in ivory or gold merge in this product of a new type of panel painting..."

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22n47 thinks redolent of goldsmiths' work; Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 29.

The triptych is thought to have been made for a wealthy patron in the Southern Netherlands around Liège or Maastricht because of two unusual saints included on the interior, Lambert, patron saint of Liège, and Servatius, patron saint of Maastricht; Hubertus, James the Greater and Dionysius, patron saints of Liège churches, are depicted on its exterior.¹⁹⁸ The heritage of the artist is undetermined but there are resemblances to works made in the Rhine area.¹⁹⁹ The object's obvious preciousness suggests it may have been a luxury gift between persons of some standing, apparently particularly bookish: twenty books can be counted in the *Norfolk Triptych* (there are eighteen in van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*).²⁰⁰ The triptych has been connected to prominent patrons related to the Maas region including John of Bavaria, Prince-Bishop elect of Liège from 1390 onwards and Count of Holland from 1417, who patronised the young van Eyck.²⁰¹ One of the Magi on the outer right wing with fur hat and hooked nose bears a striking resemblance to the Emperor Sigismund (1368-1437, King of Hungary and Croatia 1387-1437, King of Bohemia 1419-37, Holy Roman Emperor 1433-37).²⁰² The

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 31; Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 3; Kemperdick, *Road*, 185.

¹⁹⁹ See in particular an early fifteenth-century Eyckian drawing, *The Marriage of St Catherine* (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg), whose John the Baptist is comparable; on this drawing's attribution and connection to the triptych, see Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon": 8-11. Note the advice: Stephan Kemperdick and Friso Lammertse, "Siting, Dating and Connections," in Kemperdick, *Road*, 111: "it is very important to know where the artist underwent his training. This, though, was by no means always where a given work was made, nor the site it was made for, since many artists travelled, often quite widely, and paintings were sent to all sorts of sometimes far-flung places." See also *ibid.*, 188-89 (no. 34) for a stylistically connected drawing in Erlangen and 192-93 (no. 36) for a comparable Rhenish Angel of the Annunciation.

²⁰⁰ Schade, *Excitandum*, 58 compares its precious appearance with *The Wilton Diptych* (National Gallery London, c.1395-9) and *Goldenes Rössl* (Kapellstiftung, Altötting, before 1405).

²⁰¹ For an overview of the hypotheses see Bruijne, "Norfolk-triptiek," 36-7; Schmidt, "Painting," 221; Kemperdick, *Road*, 185-86. For John of Bavaria as patron, see Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon"; for Jean Gilles, provost of Liège from 1405, endowing a Virgin and All Saints altar in St Lambert's Cathedral in Liège, see Jean Lejeune, *Les Van Eyck: peintres de Liège et de sa cathédrale* (Liège: Thoue, 1956).

²⁰² Schmidt, "Painting," 221. The iconography is broadly regal: an Adoration of the Magi and Coronation of the Virgin.

triptych thus likely originally featured in a courtly collection or church treasury, appreciated in parallel with metalwork and enamel objects of similar size and preciousness, a luxurious, transportable altar probably used in well-furnished oratories or chapels.

On the exterior [1.5a], three horizontal registers divide into six visible segments. Their frames are painted a rose colour, with evidence of a locking mechanism. The upper two registers represent an Annunciation in an unspecific location and an outdoors Adoration; the kneeling attendant offering the tower may be a 'crypto-donor'.²⁰³ Both scenes are staged across the central opening with the flow of action from right to left. The bottom register shows a row of evangelists with John the Baptist holding a lamb on the left. Over the divide on the right side is the apostle James the Greater with scallop shell, bishops Dionysius and Hubertus, St Vincent the Martyr, and the Archangel Michael.

The images of the Adoration and saints are situated outdoors among earth and sky, and there is a sense, especially in the lowest section, of travel, even of wandering.²⁰⁴ This is reinforced by the stretching of the scenes across divides, the figures' demonstrations and their glances (St James the Greater with the scallop is of course the patron saint of pilgrims). Indeed, the groups on the lowest level look curiously marooned, conversing among each other as if waiting for something; nomadic and not yet at rest. The star of the Adoration is not even contained within

²⁰³ Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 7-8; Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 31.

²⁰⁴ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:394n3 thought the sky, modulated from blue to grey, was perhaps influenced by the naturalism of miniaturists like the Boucicaut Master.

the picture but painted playfully upon the rose-coloured frame directly above the stable.²⁰⁵ The lamb appears to lead the below-left group, not so much to the right panel as to the seam in between the panels – to the interior.

From outdoors we move indoors, from wandering to sanctuary [1.5b-d]. Whereas the exterior scenes are contained within emphatically non-architectural box-like frames, the interior images occupy an elaborate structure painted to look like stone which sits snugly within the confines of the panel, transforming the shape into a hybridised façade, screen and cross-section of a Gothic cathedral. The exterior-interior painted dynamic mimics the physical experience – the “architectural experience” – of the triptych as a practical object, which the ‘T-shape’ reinforces: from outside to inside, exterior landscape to interior architecture.²⁰⁶

Within, we can see a kind of *Allerheiligenbild* or ‘all saints picture’.²⁰⁷ The holy figures have labels bearing their identifications on the painted frames, a combination potentially encouraging meditative, repetitive prayers such as the Litany of Saints.²⁰⁸ High on the left we have St Lawrence; a host of female saints appears beneath: Mary Magdalene, Dorothy, Agnes with her robe falling over the

²⁰⁵ Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Blum, *Triptychs*, 4; Lynn Jacobs, “The Inverted ‘T’-Shape in Early Netherlandish Altarpieces: Studies in the Relation between Painting and Sculpture,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54, no. 1 (1991): 33-65 (40) reads the ‘T-shape’ as an analogy for the church.

²⁰⁷ Heinrich Feurstein, “Allerheiligen,” in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (1934), 1:365-74, in RDK Labor, <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=89417>; cf. the *Allerheiligenbild* from the *Turin-Milan Hours* (Group K) in Eberhard König, *Die Très Belles Heures von Jean de France Duc de Berry: Ein Meisterwerk an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit* (Munich: Hirmer, 1998), 220-22 (fol. 113).

²⁰⁸ Kemperdick, *Road*, 185 admits, “the iconographical relationship between the saints is not easy to follow.” Cf. Dagmar Preisling, “Bild und Reliquie. Gestalt und Funktion gotischer Reliquientafeln und -altärchen,” *Aachener Kunstblätter* 61 (1995/97): 46-48 on the Litany of Saints’ possible correlation with works of similar composition.

architecture, Barbara and Catherine; the church fathers Jerome and Gregory stand below. High on the right is Stephen; beneath him are the blessed monks Antony, Benedict, Egidius and Leonard; below them the church fathers Augustine and Ambrose. Towards the centre on the higher register, we encounter apostles: on the left James the lesser with a club and Peter, on the right side Paul and Andrew; underneath on the left stand bishops Lambert of Maastricht-Liège (patron saint of Liège) and Servatius of Tongeren (patron saint of Maastricht), and on the right Bishop Martin of Tours (who had a collegiate church dedicated at Liège) and an unknown bishop whose label is no longer visible but may be Hubert, Remaclus or Theodorus.²⁰⁹

Painted with the grace and meticulousness of a highly skilled miniaturist, figures appear not in isolation but in little communities, stirring in silent conference in order to emphasise the sense that this is a lively, sociable throng.²¹⁰ One can almost hear the theological hubbub and murmuration. Every platform, every gap in the architecture is packed with figures; everyone has their place. In contrast to this conviviality, it is notable that the stone sculptures cladding the front of the building are all presented in isolation: from the prophets or patriarchs in their slim aedicules above the Coronation to the angels and (what are probably) further patriarchs adorning the hanging pendants at the sides.²¹¹ The coloured figures

²⁰⁹ For identifications, see Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 31; for further commentary, including upon attributes, see Schmidt, "Painting," 221.

²¹⁰ Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 1; Charles Sterling, "Jan van Eyck avant 1432," *Revue de l'Art* 33 (1976): 24-25.

²¹¹ Grevenstein-Kruse, *Van Eyck*, 31 tentatively identifies the figures on the hanging pendants at the sides as Old Testament and Greek patriarchs.

appear all the more animate and convivial via this visual comparison between stone and polychrome figures.

The aesthetic is similarly noisy. With the marked exception of one of the central scenes, the busy niches open onto a non-descript gilded background patterned with floral and other decorative motifs – both indeterminate beyond contrasting with the solid situation of the structure, and bounded world filling in space between figures with the dazzle of hard metal.²¹² The gold is not so much background as a solid, continuous surface into which the figures are integrated, much like the precious *arts de luxe* of the goldsmiths.

In the centre [1.5c-d], in the position – reading the structure as a church – usually occupied by the channel of correspondence between portal, nave and altar, the painter depicts a variant type of Christ as Man of Sorrows, standing above and behind an empty tomb with gaping wound. Christ's eyes are closed, and his heavy, lifeless body is held by two angels. This composition of Christ and angels, alone without his mother, would have been described as a *Pietié de Nostre Seigneur* in Burgundian inventories c.1400.²¹³ Greek letters probably designating (even if not exactly) *Basileus tes doxes* (King of glory) appear on a sign fixed to the cross behind as do the various tools of the Passion, the *arma Christi*, painted in a more realistic

²¹² Bruijne, "Norfolk-triptiek," 13-4.

²¹³ Sixten Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 73 (1969): 169n26; cf. similar iconographic compositions in the *Choques Triptych* [1.6] and Limbourg Brothers, *Très Belles Heures*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS. nouvelle acq. lat. 3093, fol. 84 (originally part of the *Turin-Milan Hours*).

“still life” manner than is usual.²¹⁴ Garments hang over the tomb side with tangible weight, reinforcing Christ’s unclothed, vulnerable state.

Above, in the crowning component of the whole ensemble, Christ now re-appears like the triumphal Christ-God hybrid of the *Ghent Altarpiece*, with a crown resembling a papal tiara. Beside him is the Virgin whom he has just crowned in Majesty; they occupy separate cushions on the same throne, as seen in the iconography of the Coronation of the Virgin. The throne is covered with a gilded cloth of gold and capped with lions symbolic of Solomon’s throne. Beyond the pair, rather than a gilded background consonant with the others, a shadowy chapel apse is depicted. This allows the gold of the throne to stand out, but it equally gives the majestic duo a determinate backing – a sense of fixedness and locality not granted to the other figures. The whole work crescendos here in a heavenly glorification of placement itself.²¹⁵

Henk van Os has drawn attention to the unusually overbearing nature of the triptych’s architecture. “The abundance of ornate frames and painted architecture”, he says, “would appear to nullify the devotional purpose of the central image”.²¹⁶ As a result, the Man of Sorrows is in his opinion “reduced to a tiny figure almost swamped” by the embellishments and entourage.²¹⁷ Comparably, Belting posits that the “greatest difficulty” in aesthetically assessing certain works

²¹⁴ Herzner, “Norfolk-Triptychon,” 6.

²¹⁵ The central portion uses a Gothic style of architectural decoration; the flanking arches are round and potentially “Romanesque” (ibid., 17).

²¹⁶ Van Os, *Devotion*, 120.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

of the pre-Eyckian period in light of early modern painting is their apparent ontological “indeterminacy” between “image” and “shrine” – the *Norfolk Triptych* deemed particularly culpable.²¹⁸ In his eyes, the architecture is something like a prison grill, choking panel painting’s struggle to become pure, surface-sustained illusion.²¹⁹ Its painted images are restrained by its painted architecture; they have, apparently, not yet achieved independence. However hyperbolic, these sensitivities provoke important questions about the work’s formal constitution and the resultant effect. Why does the work look like a diminutive painted edifice – a shrunken city of sorts?

Rather than reduce or dilute devotional purpose, the ornate framework and imposing architecture could be seen to work in tandem with the holy persons – building, gilding and figures existing in a symbiotic relationship, the one fulfilling and enhancing the other. As we have seen, the visual collaboration of figures and architecture is sustained by figurative buildings that appear in the Bible; in Paul’s vision of the Christian community as a spiritual edifice (Ephesians 2:19-22), the symbiosis is made explicit.²²⁰ The picture thus represents both an actual, physical structure and spiritual, indwelling community.²²¹ Indeed, the structure of the *Norfolk Triptych* could be said to support a whole range of associations pertaining to Christian architectural symbolism: the tabernacle or the temples of Solomon and

²¹⁸ Belting, *Spiegel*, 28-29. The use of *Schrein* is notable, as the word has a potentially multivalent meaning as reliquary, cabinet, altarpiece or a holy (usually built) location.

²¹⁹ Because, in his words, after this moment, “private images” or portable panel paintings were able to “[serve] up one modernism after another” (Belting, *Likeness*, 409).

²²⁰ See Jürgen Goetzmann, “House,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Michigan: Zondervan Corporation, 1976), 2:247-56, esp. 251 for the general sense of this bond between the physical and the metaphorical house (entries comprising οἶκος [dwelling], οἰκοδομέω [to build], οἰκονομία [household management]).

²²¹ Cf. Revelations 21:3 and 21:22; Galatians 6:10. Cf. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 559; 562.

Ezekial of the Old Testament which are remade as the New Jerusalem of Revelations in the New Testament;²²² Christ as the door; the Virgin as the intercessory entrance-way;²²³ the Virgin as queen or gate of heaven;²²⁴ or as *Ecclesia*, the Virgin's body symbolises the house of God, understood as the 'City of God' (*Civitas Dei*).²²⁵ The work seems to especially understand Jesus' promise "in my Father's house there are many mansions: If not, I would have told you: because I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).²²⁶

The intention of this study, however, is not to reduce the triptych to textual precedent. I seek to account for its remarkable appearance by attending more to shape, function, scale and illusionism. For instance, this painted structure is somewhat different to the painted framing architecture we customarily encounter in Netherlandish triptychs in the later fifteenth century. From the second quarter of the fifteenth century onwards, painted niches, often in grisaille colour, are found frequently on triptych exteriors [1.7]. These external aedicules stem perhaps from a "desire to evoke a building with half-open doors inviting the viewer to enter".²²⁷

²²² On the tabernacle and New Jerusalem symbolisms in relation to Gothic (micro-)architectural form, see Guérin, "Staging"; Michele Tomasi, "Luxe et devotion au XIVE siècle: autour du tabernacle de Thomas Basin," *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2012, no. 2 (156th year, 2013): esp. 1007-10; Hamburger, "Place of Theology"; Harvey Stahl, "Heaven in View: The Place of the Elect in an Illuminated Book of Hours," in *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Bynum (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), 205-32.

²²³ On the scriptural symbolisms associated with the door for both Christ and the Virgin, see Jacobs, *Opening*, 4-8.

²²⁴ Cf. Attributed to Petrus Christus, *Annunciation* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, c.1450) with *Regina Celi Let* ('Queen of Heaven, rejoice') on the portal's tiled step; and an archaic, Eyckian *Virgin and Child in a Niche* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, c.1500) with *Domus Dei est et Porta celi* embroidered on the aedicule's brocaded canopy (Genesis 28:17).

²²⁵ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 1:109.

²²⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:1. Cf. Hebrews 11:10 and 11:14-16. Cf. the "living stones" references in 1 Peter 2:4-6.

²²⁷ Verougstraete, *Frames*, 158.

They are intended to facilitate a particular conception of these multi-panel objects, unfamiliar to us today, used as we are to seeing paintings as flat rectangular canvases like apertures on a wall – an architectural conception that endows the object with the air of a miniature building to be opened and entered. But the *Norfolk Triptych*'s portal-like form is, in view of the later examples, unexpectedly located on its interior; there is no such framing architecture painted on its exterior panels. In this way, the triptych's painted architecture is more an end than a starting point, more about reaching than beginning. Indeed, the rhetoric of the ensemble is geared towards this metamorphosis: the triptych opens, and as from caterpillar to butterfly, the object transforms itself into a building. The exterior panels lack a painted architectonic 'portal' precisely to heighten the transformational effect.

Lynn Jacobs has drawn attention to the *Norfolk Triptych*'s dramatic transformation from exterior to interior. According to Jacobs, the interior's "gold-leaf backgrounds" and "framing elements" designate it as "the most holy zone"; the "compartmentalisation of the interior asserts sanctity", while the "less divided" nature of the exterior makes the scenes correspondingly less sacred and "more accessible".²²⁸ In interpreting the object's visual rhetoric, Jacobs' argument comes from a medium-centric perspective: a triptych's mechanical format conditions the object's message, engendering a hierarchy from out to in and side to centre.²²⁹ But

²²⁸ Jacobs, *Opening*, 26-29: the interior occurs in "eternal time" as opposed to the more earthly "temporal dimension" of the exterior.

²²⁹ A recent medium-centric study of the triptych as a machine of revelation that appeared simultaneously to Jacobs' book is Marius Rimmele, *Das Triptychon als Metapher, Körper und Ort: Semantisierungen eines Bildträgers* (Munich: Fink, 2010); Rimmele reviewed Jacobs' book positively: "Rezension von: *Opening Doors*," *Sehepunkte* 14, no. 10 (2014), <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2014/10/22019.html>. Cf. Verougstraete, *Frames*, 157-58 and Horst

an attention to the work's medium (or format) should surely be combined with an analysis of the object's most prominent feature, the architecture, which completely dominates its slight proportions. The work's metamorphic process is not so much conditioned by the medium as complemented by it.

Perhaps we can better appreciate the architectural form by paying attention to the interplay between the two central iconographies. Broadly speaking, the Man of Sorrows, an iconography especially widespread from the 1300s onwards, was particularly suited to individual, familiar contemplation.²³⁰ The Coronation of the Virgin, on the other hand, was traditionally associated with large altarpieces and portals in the public realm [1.8].²³¹ But the combination is found relatively infrequently in objects of this small a size; at least, not many examples seemingly now remain.²³²

Bredenkamp, "The Simulated Benjamin: Medieval Remarks on Its Actuality," trans. Iain Whyte, *Art in Translation* 1, no. 2 (2009): 288-89: "If the side panels of an altarpiece are only opened at particular times, the otherwise hidden centre panel is charged with an incredible aura, as a dynamic relationship is constructed in the alternation of denial and presentation that renders the viewer powerless."

²³⁰ For c.1400 small-scale metalwork objects bearing Man of Sorrows iconographies, cf. Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye and François Avril, eds., *Paris 1400: Les arts sous Charles VI*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2004), 171-72 (no. 91); 179-80 (no. 99). On the image type, see Erwin Panofsky, "Imago Pietatis. Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrix'," in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1927), 261-308 (292); Colum Hourihane, "Defining Terms: Ecce Homo, Christ of Pity, Christ Mocked, and the Man of Sorrows," in *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, ed. Catherine Puglisi and William Barcham (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 19-47. The term Man of Sorrows is derived from Isaiah 53:2-3.

²³¹ Schiller, *Iconography*, 1:27. The final episode in the Life of the Virgin; the *Regina Coeli* title and accompanying antiphon date from at least the twelfth century. The scriptural basis is: Song of Songs 4:8; Psalms 45:11-12; Revelations 12:1-7. Prominent examples include Notre-Dame de Paris west façade (c.1210s-120s), Chartres Cathedral north portal (c.1270) and also the apse mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore (c.1290).

²³² Kemperdick, *Road*, 185; Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 6-7. Van Os, *Devotion*, 121 says: "the existence of such combined scenes is known from documents, but they were usually made of far costlier materials." The iconographies can be seen twinned in a small number of private objects: notably, the metalwork *Choques Triptych* [1.6] and a French ivory diptych (Metropolitan Museum of Art, c.1260-70). The two iconographies are sometimes present in a less focused way in larger ensembles: e.g., the surviving central panel from the Master of the Bamberg Altar/Imhoff Altar, *Coronation of the Virgin Altarpiece* (once Nürnberg Lorenzkirche, now Germanisches

The two somewhat antithetical scenes arguably work in parallel with the object's ambitious architecture, its small scale and unlikely shape, generating together the kind of energy that results from the friction of competing indications. The miniature format suits the confidential tenderness of a Man of Sorrows, but the painted architecture brings a grandeur appropriate to the Coronation scene. In fact, a recent catalogue on Netherlandish painting before van Eyck yielded no other works that combine the 'upside down 'T'-shape' format of a large altarpiece with such small proportions.²³³ A comparison with the form and iconography of painted wooden triptychs and tabernacles of similar date, geographical location and dimension, further demonstrates the unusual nature of the triptych's elaborately overstuffed ensemble.²³⁴ Likewise, compared with the 154 works catalogued in Karl Schade's book on small-scale Netherlandish triptychs from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the *Norfolk Triptych's* compartmentalised architectural forms look out of place among the other diminutive *Andachtsbilder*, for the most part showing a central image of the Virgin and Child filling the frame to create an effect of proximity and immediacy with the holy figures.²³⁵

Recently, Noa Turel suggestively linked the work's form with fifteenth-century limestone altarpieces of French manufacture with far larger dimensions than the

Nationalmuseum, c.1418-22), whose reverse originally showed Christ as Man of Sorrows. Cf. Niccolò da Foligno, *Coronation of the Virgin Altarpiece* (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome, 1464-6). Possibly, this specific combination, with its iconographic opposition between sorrow and glory, was intended to encompass a particular range of prayers: the Coronation of the Virgin is the fifth 'glorious mystery' of the rosary; the Man of Sorrows coheres with the 'sorrowful mysteries'.

²³³ Kemperdick, *Road*.

²³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 232-33 (no. 56-57).

²³⁵ Schade, *Excitandum*, 118-429 (no. 1-154).

diminutive triptych [1.9].²³⁶ The triptych's abnormal "T'-shape' can actually be traced further back in time to certain carved fourteenth-century Netherlandish retables usually having a Crucifixion for their central scene. Few such 'Passion Retables' endure from before the fifteenth century, possibly due to iconoclasm.²³⁷ An exceptional survivor from the second half of the fourteenth century is the sizeable stone *Apostle Altarpiece* [1.10].²³⁸ Another early example is the famous *Crucifixion* retable, a particularly large work made for the Charterhouse of Champmol [1.11a-b].

In view of these considerations, the *Norfolk Triptych's* relationship to scale is enigmatic. It is as if the object wanted to both court and thwart conflicting modes of beholding or conduct one mysteriously through the other.²³⁹ Detecting similar inconsistencies, Belting and Christiane Kruse wondered whether the work is accurately described as a 'triptych'.²⁴⁰ In terms of size, the work is in dialogue with triptychs and tabernacles meant for intimate contemplation in the domestic sphere and usually made by goldsmiths and ivory carvers. But in shape and depicted content, the triptych clearly means to establish a relationship with retables that

²³⁶ Noa Turel, *Living Pictures: Jan van Eyck and Painting's First Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 57-58. Cf. French, *Retable with Scenes of the Passion* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, c.1425; limestone, 78.7x274.3x21.6cm) and Norman, *Retable with Christ and the Twelve Disciples* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, c.1450-1500; sandstone, 104.1x240x21cm).

²³⁷ See Jacobs, "Inverted "T'-Shape" for larger wooden and stone altarpieces of a similar shape.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²³⁹ On the 'affective' distinction between *admiratio* ("standing back in wonder") and *imitatio* or *curiositas* ("stepping forward to study, peer at, and assimilate"), see Caroline Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 43 and for their mutual relevance in defining the contradictory quality of late medieval micro-architecture, see Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 143-44; Carruthers, *Experience*, 173.

²⁴⁰ Belting and Kruse, *Erfindung* 135-36 (no. 4-6): "The designation as triptych is inexact since it reproduces in miniature the shape of a large altar retable with rectangular appendage."

stand on the high altars and side altars of churches and cathedrals, polychromed by painters but often carved in either wood or stone.

What are these contradictory formal dynamics aiming to achieve? In his review of Sixten Ringbom's *Icon to Narrative*, Colin Eisler touched on the occasionally paradoxical appearance of smaller late medieval devotional paintings (paradoxical because some panels seem to wish to be more substantial than the diminutive confines allowed by their actual proportions): "although generally intended for private devotional use, many smaller religious paintings, if not directly associated with an altar, contained within themselves references to the shrine and sanctuary, assuming a certain immobility and architectonic authority to suggest a liturgical context".²⁴¹ Irrespective of whether we subscribe to Eisler's particular liturgical angle, these notions of permanence and monumentality sought by certain small objects seems especially relevant for the *Norfolk Triptych*. This contradictory notion of an 'impermanent immobility' is precisely one of the meanings of the word *oratoire* in middle French: "a temporary aedicule for prayer" – 'sacred space' that could expand or contract to take the form of an altar, a chapel, a hall, a room, a corner or an item of domestic furniture like a closet or a work of art.²⁴² With this paradoxical, transportable "architectonic authority", we come closer to accounting for the work's remarkable use of architecture: a *meuble* that wishes it were an *immeuble*.

²⁴¹ Colin Eisler, "Review of *Icon to Narrative* by Sixten Ringbom," *Art Bulletin* 51, no. 2 (1969): 187.

²⁴² "Oratoire," *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (DMF 2020)*, <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/oratoire1>; on the plasticity of "sacred space", see Nuechterlein, "Domesticity"; for an example of such a compressed oratoire from a contract of 1448, see Alexandre Pinchart, *Archives des arts, sciences et lettres: documents inédits* (Ghent: Hebbelynck, 1860), 1:45 (see fn473 below).

Architectural form and pre-Eyckian ‘reliquary character’

The work’s glorious architectonics might also have been partly fashioned to aesthetically express an ulterior function. Schade noted that the majority of surviving small-format Netherlandish triptychs from around 1400 were likely to have once contained relics.²⁴³ In fact, the *Norfolk Triptych* appears to consciously evoke the aesthetic of earlier metalwork reliquaries, often architectonic. A number of scholars connect the triptych with Mosan ‘True Cross reliquaries’ from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries such as the famous *Cross of Floreffe* [1.12].²⁴⁴ Another scholar cites later Parisian tabernacle reliquaries made around 1400 in the tradition of the Mosan forebears [1.6].²⁴⁵

Indeed, the work’s apparent ‘reliquary character’ may have denoted a particular purpose: the *Norfolk Triptych* seems to have functioned not only as a symbolic house for its images but also as a shrine for some sort of relic. Scholars have traditionally been hesitant to substantially integrate this somewhat mysterious aspect of the object with their understanding of the work’s form or iconography, usually referring to it in an aside or postscript. However, we will next consider the interactions between this potential relic, the triptych’s iconographies and the painted architecture.

²⁴³ Schade, *Excitandum*, 22-23, investigating triptychs mostly between 30 and 60 cms in height.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 24-25; Jacobs, *Opening*, 27; Barbara Lane, “Depositio et Elevatio: The Symbolism of the Seilern Triptych,” *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (1975): 29-30; Barbara Brauer, “Pre-Eyckian Painting in the Mosan Valley: 1380-1430” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1979), 69-70. There are at least six surviving Mosan reliquaries with a similar triptych form: Nigel Morgan, “The Iconography of Twelfth Century Mosan Enamels,” in *Rhein und Maas. Kunst und Kultur 800-1400*, exh. cat., ed. Anton Legner (Cologne: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1973), 2:266n80.

²⁴⁵ Van Os, *Devotion*, 120-21.

In surviving examples of pre-Eyckian panel paintings collected in a recent catalogue, many of which are presumed to survive from ecclesiastical contexts, we find architectural frames often employed in objects with a particular function, tied in some way to storage, whether of a relic or relics, a statue, or the host.²⁴⁶ For instance, the *Walcourt Annunciation* [1.13] panels once formed part of a tabernacle or reliquary cupboard, and the open spire of the Antwerp *Tower Retable* [1.14] is thought to have housed a relic or statue.²⁴⁷ There is also the Tongeren *Reliquary of the Veil of the Virgin*, Namur *St Maurice Shrine* [1.15], Bruges *St Ursula Shrine* [0.5] and Mechelen *Triptych of the Crucifixion* [1.16].²⁴⁸ These “decorated shrines”, says pre-Eyckian specialist Cyril Stroo, “best epitomise an established (local) tradition”.²⁴⁹ The facility for storage is surely one – if not *the* – crucial reason why these works, some of them of perhaps lesser artistic quality, were deemed important enough to preserve.

By this example, I do not want to give a misleading impression of a ubiquitous use of architectural framing in the pre-Eyckian era. There were also simple, flat-panelled works, small quadrangular triptychs, panels inspired by orthodox icons and a range of other shapes influenced by expensive metalwork [1.17].²⁵⁰ Around

²⁴⁶ Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*. Note the publication covers only works today in Belgium, not outside.

²⁴⁷ Schmidt, “Painting,” 213: “in my view this precious object [the *Tower*] can best be regarded as a painted variant of similar objects in precious metal, such as the Paris tabernacle of c.1325-40 in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan.” Cf. Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:311-57 (no. 7); 83-123 (no. 1).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 421-46 (no. 10); 359-85 (no. 8); 157-95 (no. 3); 289-309 (no. 6).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 38. The oldest dated painted work on panel in the Low Countries is a house-shaped reliquary shrine made in Liège c.1292 for the Couvent des Croisiers, recently re-evaluated in Jeroen Reyniers, *Het Reliekschrijn van Sint-Odilia: Een Verborgen Prel Herontdekt* (Oplabbeek: Paesen, 2014).

²⁵⁰ For the Malouel group, see Roelofs, *Maelwael*, but note the window-like shape of: Jean Malouel or Limbourg Brothers, *Man of Sorrows* (Louvre Museum, Paris, c.1410). For other examples see Kemperdick, *Road*, 114-18 (no. 1); 124-25 (no. 4); 130-35 (no. 8-10). For the flat panel form in

1400, to conceive the picture in the manner of a building was a choice not an inevitability. A “Microarchitectural exterior”, Guérin writes, “served as a sign to notify viewers of the sacred contents sheltered within”.²⁵¹ Importantly, some of these painted pre-Eyckian works had double-faceted sacred contents; hence their architectural forms sheltered both images and relics.

One significant pre-Eyckian painted object, slightly larger than the *Norfolk Triptych* (closed 53.7x25.2cm), uses its architectural form to structure a particularly complex containment system: the Mechelen *Triptych* just mentioned [1.16].²⁵² Its form and function make for an especially interesting comparison with the *Norfolk Triptych*.

Crowned on top by John the Baptist, a Crucifixion and an angel with an empty tomb, the *Triptych* employs a framework of carved, gilded arches to display images of fifteen saints; its composition was possibly for therapeutic reasons, with the saints intended to provide protection against specific ailments.²⁵³ Like the *Norfolk Triptych*, the serial format may have been designed to provide a framework for prayer, invoking the individual saints as in the Litany of Saints in Psalters and Books of Hours.²⁵⁴ It similarly has an ambiguous relationship to scale. It has been

metalwork *tableaux*, see Jonathan Alexander, “A Metalwork Triptych of the Passion of Christ in the Metropolitan Museum, New York,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 46/47 (1993-4): 27-36.

²⁵¹ Guérin, “Spectacles,” 64; Bailey, “Tabernacle,” 67: “All tabernacles are houses or shrines meant to provide a residence for holy objects.”

²⁵² Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:303: “the tree from which the triptych’s wings are made cannot have been felled before 1376.”

²⁵³ *Ibid.* (note the theory that the triptych came from Mechelen’s Hospital of Our Lady is “unsubstantiated”).

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 303. Preising, “Reliquientafeln,” 46-48.

pointed out that the Mechelen *Triptych* bears a resemblance to contemporary manuscript illumination (in the painted figures) and architectonic ivories (in its multi-register structure).²⁵⁵ And the work has been associated with much larger altarpieces from Northern and Western Germany which assimilated relics and statues of saints in architectonically defined horizontal registers.²⁵⁶ But the system of crannies and dwelling places compares to structures on an even grander scale: Gothic buildings' façades, like that of Wells Cathedral [1.18] where saintly inhabitants are placed in dovecote-like shelters.²⁵⁷

This triptych once had a more profound dimension to its aesthetic of containment. Beneath each of the images are cylindrical cavities which probably sheltered relics relating to the various images.²⁵⁸ The images and relics would have had an uncanny visual relationship. Consider St Paul, at the centre of the lowest level. The saint is situated in a recessed arch, carved into the wood panel and sheltered behind the front plane of the object. His figure substantially fills the arch, his bald scalp almost grazing its ceiling. But his feet, swathed in a tunic, are far from the floor – he seems, in fact, to levitate. The gap was once presumably filled by a relic which corresponded to the saint. Appearing thus, St Paul's colourful image would have seemed to sprout like a flower from its corpse – a symbolic, horticultural resurrection enacted through the vertical relationship. The images are thus

²⁵⁵ Schade, *Excitandum*, 19.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Song of Songs 2:14 and Paul Binski, *Becket's Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 109-12; 119-21 (on Wells and St Bernard's Sermon on the Song of Songs).

²⁵⁸ Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:303. See Preising, "Reliquientafeln," 29-37 for comparable Northern-European objects.

intended to “enliven” the relics and grant the saints a second body in pictorial form.²⁵⁹

There are consequently two complementary modes of housing on show in the Mechelen *Triptych*: one, the housing of the saints’ images; the other, the housing of their corresponding relics. Both are contained equally within the symbolic house made by the micro-architectural framework.

As mentioned earlier, according to Bishop Reginald Pecock writing just before 1450, relics, like images, required a form of dwelling.²⁶⁰ Encasing the relic in a ‘house’ (church) form was accordingly a persistent tendency in reliquary production. In the high Gothic period, some of the most prominent reliquary shrines were conceived in the manner of miniature churches (*Schreinenreliquiare*), inheritors of a tradition linking micro-architectural form and the keeping of relics that stretched back centuries.²⁶¹ The shrines of St Taurinus [1.19] and St Gertrude [1.20] are prime, larger examples of these miniature reliquary-cathedrals.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:304.

²⁶⁰ Pecock, *Repressor*, 1:182-83.

²⁶¹ See Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1940) pl. 150-51; pl. 23-37. On these “miniature representations of the physical church”, see also Eric Palazzo, “Relics, Liturgical Space, and the Theology of the Church,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 99-109, esp. 99, which emphasises these shrunken buildings’ capacity to establish “the place of worship” in a manner analogous to large-scale built architecture. Hence, there is a reflective correspondence between the entire ecclesiastical institution, the physical building of the church, and the small-scale portable altar or reliquary, whose authority is transmitted and sustained through architectural form.

²⁶² Anton Legner, ed., *Die Parler und der schöne Stil 1350-1400. Europäische Kunst unter den Luxemburgern* (Cologne: Museen der Stadt Köln, 1978), 2:98.

Retable reliquaries (or reliquary *tableaux* like the Mechelen *Triptych*) also made substantial use of architectural ornament.²⁶³ It is likely that such smaller format metalwork or painted reliquaries were still considered “images of churches”, structured thus in order to establish a self-contained, potentially movable devotional location.²⁶⁴ The Mechelen *Triptych*’s housing premise and accommodating composition places it in dialogue with such metalwork micro-architectural reliquaries.²⁶⁵ Indeed, the work was probably much more opulent in its original form, with rich gold leaf and potentially also carved ornament adorning the gables.²⁶⁶ As Stroo says, “the gold ground behind the figures and the once fully gilded framework conjure up the idea of a reliquary in precious metal. All that gold would have transformed the modest wooden panel into an object of glory... intended to create the impression of rare preciousness”.²⁶⁷

With this in mind, let us compare the Mechelen *Triptych* to the *Norfolk Triptych*. The Mechelen work bears a strong resemblance to the structure of the *Norfolk Triptych*’s architectural interior in that it contains a series of recessed cavities or compartments arranged in rows, one on top of the other. The Mechelen architectural niches are carved and gilded; the *Norfolk*’s architecture, on the other hand, is a pictorial simulation. Here the ‘symbolic containment’ is made the province of the painter rather than the woodcarver. The *Norfolk Triptych* echoes

²⁶³ Cf. Braun, *Reliquiare*, pl. 76-79.

²⁶⁴ Marguerite Keane, *Material Culture and Queenship in 14th-century France* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 138-40, citing inventory references to various metalwork architectural reliquaries in Blanche of Navarre’s (1331-98) collections.

²⁶⁵ On these shrine-buildings and their relationship with built architecture, see also Peter Kurmann, “Gigantonomie und Miniatur. Möglichkeiten gotischer Architektur zwischen Grossbau und Kleinkunst,” *Kölner Domblatt* 61 (1996): 123-46.

²⁶⁶ Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:305.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the Mechelen work's emphasis on seriality and containment, and with this it evokes a certain reliquary character, architectonically expressed. But in the *Norfolk*, the reliquary character is converted into a painted ensemble. This primacy of the paint will be crucial in thinking about a potential and – from the innocent viewer's perspective – ulterior motive for the triptych, behind and beyond its imagery.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the work is that the Man of Sorrows is actually painted on a plug of softwood (12.5x9cm) that has been inserted into the oak panel.²⁶⁸ The area of the plug appears to correspond exactly with confines of the Man of Sorrow's architectural cavity, ending flush with the bottom of the tomb opening; one can see this in the difference in the direction of the wood grain on the x-ray [1.21]. There is no technical explanation for this softwood insertion. This led scholars to speculate that the painting had another function, not just as an image, but also as a reliquary, that behind the soft wood there would have been a relic enclosed and hidden from view.

In 2008 it was established via technical examination that there was nothing concealed behind the plug.²⁶⁹ And indeed others wondered if the softwood was actually a relic itself, of the true cross, painted over and incorporated within the painting (relics of the true cross seem to have consisted largely of softwoods).²⁷⁰ If this is the case, it is a fascinating example of the incorporation of a relic within a

²⁶⁸ Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 4.

²⁶⁹ Kemperdick, *Road*, 185-86.

²⁷⁰ Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 5; van Os, *Devotion*, 120: "this little block of wood in that particular spot can be none other than a relic of the True Cross... which was made of cedar."

painted representation.²⁷¹ Rather than encased by an extravagant reliquary, the relic would be thus wholly integrated within the artwork, having become quite literally part of the painting itself – specifically a representation of the Man of Sorrows in front of the cross. This relic becomes an image in a manner more literal than even the Mechelen *Triptych*'s resurrective rhetoric.²⁷² This practice of directly covering relic with image is comparable to certain metalwork reliquaries; for example, in the reverse of the *Choques Triptych* [1.6] where an openable compartment (containing a relic) is clearly identified by a representation of the *Vera Icon*.

Other scholars, however, find the size of the plug puzzling as it is larger than usual compared to other relics of the Holy Cross.²⁷³ Indeed, if the plug genuinely was a relic of the true cross, why would it be made effectively invisible? Why not instead allow it to be visually accessible, as in the monstrance reliquaries (*ostensoria*) popular at the end of the Middle Ages, 'cross reliquaries' with the relic incorporated in the centre of a metalwork cross, or triptych reliquaries in the Byzantine tradition imitated in the Mosan region in the twelfth century which show a central transparent screen behind which the relic is visible?²⁷⁴ For that matter, why not use

²⁷¹ Ibid., 120: "From around 1400 it had become accepted that the value of a 'true' relic could be transferred to its representation."

²⁷² On the complex relationship between the twin cults of relics and images, see Preising, "Reliquientafeln," 13-16; 53-54; Anton Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult zwischen Antike und Aufklärung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 220-31.

²⁷³ Bruijne, "Norfolk-triptyek," 67; Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 5 wonders if it has something to do with a touch reliquary.

²⁷⁴ For examples of *ostensoria*, see Braun, *Reliquiare*, pl. 88-117; for a c.1180 cross reliquary of French manufacture incorporating a relic of the true cross, see Bagnoli, *Treasures of Heaven*, 89-90 (no. 48); for Mosan examples, see Morgan, "Iconography".

a more obviously costly setting for its display of this important item? Why employ a painter rather than a goldsmith?

Another potential hypothesis is that the wood is the remaining fragment of an older artwork, perhaps also a panel painting, enshrined within the newer work and revered as, in effect, another kind of relic.²⁷⁵ Fragments of softwood under the Virgin and Christ are found inserted in a roughly contemporaneous oak painted panel in the Landesmuseum Münster.²⁷⁶ This may in fact be a stronger hypothesis: it explains the unusual circumstances of the integration as part of a painted ensemble. The *Norfolk Triptych* is predominantly a *painted* object, however strong its formal correspondences with other kinds of media. In the inventories of Jean de Berry, 1401-16, works called “ancient” well may be of Roman (even perhaps Greek) origin.²⁷⁷ In this respect, the intended designation of the difficult-to-decipher titular inscription on the triptych’s cross is noteworthy. Sometimes abbreviated to ΟΒΣΑΤΔΞ, *Basileus tes doxes* or ‘King of Glory’ was a liturgical title in the Orthodox Church, often given to Crucifixions or the Man of Sorrows image, signifying that “divine glory is present for the faithful in this figure of the dead Christ who appears to live”.²⁷⁸ Less common in the west, it notably adorns the crossbar above the famous small eastern mosaic icon of the Man of Sorrows [1.22] that migrated to Rome’s Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in 1385-6. Van Os

²⁷⁵ Kemperdick, *Road*, 185-86 (no. 33). On similar incidents of “enshrining the remains of revered images”, see Cathleen Hoeniger *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43-74.

²⁷⁶ Petra Meschede, *Der Fröndenberger Altar* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1996), 38-39.

²⁷⁷ See fn304 below.

²⁷⁸ Schiller, *Iconography*, 2:199-200; Paul Hetherington, “Who Is this King of Glory?,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53, no. 1 (1990): 25-38; from Psalms 23/24:9: “Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of Glory shall enter in.”

supposed the painter of the *Norfolk Triptych* to have drawn inspiration from this very object.²⁷⁹ Perhaps the triptych incorporates and ‘restores’ such an older holy image within itself, which may explain its apparent citation of a notable Greek-Roman cult image and the atypical titular inscription.

We may never know the exact status of this wooden insert; but it need not dramatically change our interpretation of the architecture. It is a reliquary of a kind; for what is a reliquary if not a vessel through which a fragment of the old lives on in the new?²⁸⁰ That this fracture occurs behind the Man of Sorrows must be significant. The wounded Christ embodies corruption and damage. The picture enunciates this vulnerability, not only by the bleeding wound in Christ’s side but also his body which is literally only a piece of a former whole, made so by the gaping tomb which slices the body so that we cannot see the bottom half. The cross is also emphatically fragmentary, cut by the hanging pendants of the stone building.

The work seems to encourage the beholder to read divine resurrection into the image of the wounded Christ himself, as well as the rest of the ensemble.²⁸¹ The

²⁷⁹ Van Os, *Devotion*, 120 and on the mosaic, see Carlo Bertelli, “The Image of Pity in S. Croce in Gerusalemme,” in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser et al. (London: Phaidon, 1967), 40-55. This image had an important cult legend attached to it: the Carthusians of Santa Croce believed it to have been revealed to St Gregory while he celebrated mass; it was the basis of the ‘Gregory-mass’ iconography. Maastricht, one of the possible Maasland locations for the *Norfolk Triptych*, was a particularly important pilgrimage site, its two main churches of St Servatius and Our Lady hosting several important relics and Orthodox icons; for an illustration of an eleventh-century icon in the Church of Our Lady, see Bissera Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): fig. 21.

²⁸⁰ For this more wide-ranging notion of ‘reliquary’, see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 175-84. On relics and spolia, see Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen, “Spolia as Relics? Relics as Spolia? The Meaning and Function of Spolia in Western Medieval Reliquaries,” in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Cynthia Hahn and Holger Klein (Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks: 2015), 173-92.

²⁸¹ Bruijne, “Norfolk-triptyek,” 64-65 and Kemperdick, *Road*, 185 see the scheme as a whole referring to sacrifice, resurrection and the salvation of man.

broken Christ as Man of Sorrows – painted on the section – is in direct contrast to the rest of the interior where every other figure appears so intact, so well-preserved by the containing architecture. The picture further supports this division between the fragility of the human state and the durability of heavenly glory through the image of the stable on its exterior, a makeshift structure exposed to the elements.²⁸² The cross is a reminder of this vulnerable wooden shelter – itself a kind of ‘figural’ architectural analogue for Christ’s perforated body. Just as the wooden stable is transfigured on opening the triptych into the impressively solid stone Cathedral, Christ as Man of Sorrows is triumphantly restored between the lower and upper registers, from broken and naked to whole and clothed. Likewise, the painting reconditions the fragment within it directly behind the wounded Christ. In becoming part of the painted ensemble, it is made seamless and intact as it cannot be in its material reality. The triptych conceivably adopts micro-architectural form so vigorously in order to house and incorporate this fragment. In contemporaneous Netherlandish representations of the Last Judgment [1.23], architecture helped the late medieval populace to visualise heaven and the promise of resurrection and wholeness. Here, the *Norfolk Triptych* stages a drama of corruption, resurrection and wholeness through the interaction of the painted images with the fractured panel.

²⁸² Exposure in the nativity structure was emphasised in medieval literature like *Mirror of St Edmund* (pre-1240): “the time was midwinter, when it was most cold, the hour was midnight, the hardest hour that is. The place was the mid-ward of the street in a house without walls”, quoted in George Henderson, *Gothic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 170.

The *Norfolk Triptych* can be interpreted as an elaborate containment facility hosting its saintly inhabitants and this enigmatic fracture. Relics are thought to have been closely tied to concepts of “wholeness, corporeal integrity, and the resurrection of the body”.²⁸³ As in grand Gothic house-shaped reliquaries, framing architecture is a way of expressing this important impression of wholeness and integrity at the level of form: a complete cosmos in itself, the *Norfolk Triptych*’s house-frame is an antidote to the relic’s incomplete reality. Indeed, the object discloses its own consciousness of the fracture, but inversely – the x-ray [1.21] demonstrates that the painted piers and the string courses thicken directly around and above the seams, as if the whole ensemble attempted to bind itself more tightly together by an aesthetic glue.²⁸⁴ The triptych’s ‘relic’, whether of the True Cross or a precedent artwork, is armoured by its architecture thereby attaining symbolic integrity. *Actually*, it is only a splinter; yet, *virtually*, it becomes unified within a continuous whole.

For the purposes of this thesis as a whole, reflecting on these dynamics helps us better understand the particular vigour, in evidence in this object in exaggerated guise, residing in the relationship between the house-frame and its images. Analogously, the imagery is sheltered by the architecture without which it would be less (aesthetically) durable, less secure.

²⁸³ Holger Klein, “Sacred Things and Holy Bodies. Collecting Relics from Late Antiquity to the Early Renaissance,” in Bagnoli, *Treasures*, 56. On the *Floreffe* reliquary [1.12] and similar objects in the context of resurrection and paradise, see Stahl, “Heaven”.

²⁸⁴ Time has turned the seams into cracks or fractures in the paint surface, but they would have originally been inapparent – disguised by the paint. Indeed, without the x-ray technology, we would be far less informed about these idiosyncrasies within the triptych’s manufacture. Indeed, one wonders how this plug may have functioned and how aware the owner was of its presence.

Among the micro-architectural objects: painted and metalwork *tableaux* c.1400

In the preceding discussion of the *Norfolk Triptych*'s reliquary character, I touched on the work's formal correspondences with metalwork *arts de luxe*, an aspect consistently gestured at by scholars but not much explored.²⁸⁵ For this reason, the triptych warrants a closer comparison with micro-architectural form in metalwork shrines and tabernacles of comparably diminutive proportions from this period, objects produced usually for the upper echelons of the nobility and church.²⁸⁶

Small-scale metalwork was the predominant art form at the turn of the fifteenth century.²⁸⁷ The inventive shapes and formats of these luxurious objects had a palpable impact on the manufacture of early painted panels, conditioning the expectations and aspirations of their formal horizons to a significant degree. At this time, panel painting was generally produced on a diminutive scale.²⁸⁸ Thus, by a comparison with such smaller courtly metalwork objects and references to lost works (relatively few now survive, many having been melted down for their exchange value), we might better apprehend the *Norfolk Triptych* in its original

²⁸⁵ E.g., van Os, *Devotion*, 120; Schade, *Excitandum*, 21-2; Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 21; Belting, *Spiegel*, 31.

²⁸⁶ For the purposes of comparison with the *Norfolk Triptych*, we will exclude ivories. Although employing equivalent formats and compositions, ivory tabernacles only rarely appear in princely and papal inventories – generally collected by persons of lower social rank (Tomasi, "Tabernacle," 1017); also, ivories seem largely to have not been deemed worthy of containing relics (*ibid.*, 1025).

²⁸⁷ Belting, *Spiegel*, 25. Susie Nash, "Pour couleurs et autres choses pris de lui... the Supply, Cost, Acquisition and Employment of Painters Materials at the Burgundian Court c. 1375-1415," in *Trade in Artists' Materials. Markets and Commerce in Europe to 1700*, ed. Jo Kirby et al. (London, Archetype Publications: 2010), 133 calculates decorative art made between 1375 and 1419 for the Burgundian court at Dijon used over 190,716 leaves of gold, of around eight-to-nine centimetres squared.

²⁸⁸ Schmidt, "Painting," 216: "panel painting consisted of a large number of usually small object types. The contribution of painting to large retables mainly took the form of polychromy..."

micro-architectural morphological orbit and approach from a different, contextual perspective our earlier question about why the interior of the work looks thus.²⁸⁹

Although it is painted with the meticulousness of an illuminator, the triptych diverges from a manuscript miniature in essential ways. Its painted depictions do not cover the surface of a folio but are integrated within a substantial, crafted object of a different kind, meant to be handled, apprehended and understood in three dimensions (and alongside comparable examples in a court or ecclesiastical treasury). Its architectural form arguably provides a complement, enunciating these spatialised dynamics at the level of aesthetics. The other aim of this section, then, is to come closer to the viewer's experience of a micro-architectural object like the *Norfolk Triptych*, and ultimately reflect on the resonance these qualities might have for the work's illusionistic interior settings.

Like some of the other pre-Eyckian painted panels mentioned earlier (e.g., the *Carrand Diptych* and *Mechelen Triptych*), much of the artistic thrust of the *Norfolk Triptych's* interior display – both in the frame decoration and the painted ensemble – encourages the artifice that this is not merely a painting, but also a physically crafted object. This is accomplished by, for instance, the frame's cast rosettes and the gilded background and the resemblance of the painted figures to gem-like enamel work.²⁹⁰ Its delicate size, most especially, places the work directly

²⁸⁹ Many such late medieval metalwork tabernacles have been lost, melted down for their exchange value; Johann Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa* (Munich: Beck, 1982), 25 states that in the year 1358 the Pope in Avignon allowed 58,6 kg of gold and 436,8 kg of silver objects from his treasury to be liquified in order to raise funds for war.

²⁹⁰ Van Os, *Devotion*, 120; Schade, *Excitandum*, 21-22.

in the context of surviving examples of luxurious metalwork reliquaries, tabernacles and *joyaux* produced for Europe's courtly and ecclesiastical treasuries in the fourteenth century.²⁹¹

Certain surviving tabernacles, often a combination of metal and enamel, are particularly comparable to the *Norfolk Triptych* interior; for example, the Rijksmuseum's *Choques Triptych* [1.6], wrought in gold with three enamel techniques (*champlevé*, *basse-taille*, and the more unusual three-dimensional *en ronde-bosse*).²⁹² It takes the form of a miniature winged triptych, the central part with angels revealing a sorrowful Christ, directly behind whom lay a relic in a similar placement to the Norfolk Triptych. Another metalwork object of equivalent size is the silver gilt and enamel reliquary potentially made by French goldsmith Jean Touyl c.1350 [1.24], traditionally associated with Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (1305-80).²⁹³ In this delicate object, angels flanking the Virgin and Child hold miniature *ostensoria*, with relics visible behind diaphanous panels.

²⁹¹ Examples of the type gathered in Tomasi, "Tabernacle," 999-1026 measure (two-dimensionally, opened): 26x12cm (*Basin Portable Shrine* [1.2]); 19x10cm (*Reliquary of Philip V and Jeanne of Burgundy*, Seville Cathedral Treasury, 1316-22); 27.5x18cm (*Tabernacle*, Milan Museum Poldi Pezzoli, 1325-50) and 25x40cm (*Reliquary Shrine* [1.24]). Tomasi (1013) draws attention to another class of object analogous to the metalwork tabernacle but with a slightly different, flatter format (*Baiser de Paix*, measuring 19x16cm [1.25]). I have not been able to consult Francesca Geens, "Ungs très petiz tableaux à pignon, qui cloent et ouvrent, esmaillez dehors et dedens: A Study of Small Scale, Folding Pieces of Goldsmiths' Work in Fourteenth-century Europe" (PhD, Courtauld Institute, 2002).

²⁹² Kemperdick, *Road*, 160-61 (no. 22).

²⁹³ Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, "The Reliquary of Elizabeth of Hungary at the Cloisters," in *The Cloisters Studies in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary*, ed. Elizabeth Parker (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 327-53; for luxury metalwork c.1400 from Valois and Burgundian courts, see Michele Tomasi, "L'art en France autour de 1400: éléments pour un bilan," *Perspective: La Revue de l'INHA* 1 (2006): 101-03, with references.

Like the *Norfolk Triptych*, these two objects place a similar aesthetic emphasis on containment in their shrine-like formats and micro-architectural framing devices that house their figures in a shallow niche or aedicule. In the tabernacles (and perhaps also in the triptych), there is a strong reason for this emphasis, in that both were constructed to house relics. They are literally a very opulent type of miniature house-box, made for private ownership, to be consumed in intimate, domestic settings like oratories, as their diminutive size indicates.²⁹⁴

The *Norfolk Triptych* is not a tabernacle; rather, in the extra accent given to its central compartment in both height and depth, and the grid-like rows of niches in its wings, the object displays the characteristics of such metalwork forms but in a reformulated fashion. The elaborate Gothic clerestory capping the Coronation of the Virgin appears to project forward, containing the central figures in the manner of a goldsmith's cast canopy. The three-dimensionality of the *en ronde bosse* technique transmutes into subtle painted depths and protuberances. The *Norfolk Triptych* thus reconceptualises the tabernacle in a pictorial manner, motivating the shrine-frame to become a tangible architectural structure. Its thorough description of a weighty stone exterior also has the paradoxical effect of 'grounding' the tabernacle form, making it more an object of earth rather than of eternity.

This apparent translation of tabernacle into building is curious considering the status of panel painting at this time, to which I just alluded. Metalwork was

²⁹⁴ On such (elite) domestic devotional settings, see Keane, *Material Culture*, 119-26; Lisa Monnas, "The Furnishing of Royal Closets and the Use of Small Devotional Images in the Reign of Richard II: The Setting of the Wilton Diptych Reconsidered," in *Fourteenth Century England III*, ed. Mark Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 185-206.

considerably more expensive than panel painting and, around 1400, demonstrably more desirable; more privileged by collectors, metalwork had better opportunity to be artistically pioneering.²⁹⁵ In a 2004 major exhibition on the court of Charles VI (reigned 1380-1422), panel paintings formed just a small portion of a very broad spectrum of objects.²⁹⁶ This reflects the historical reality. The 1404 inventory taken upon Philip the Bold's death begins thus: "this is an inventory of joyaux, gold and silver vessels, chapel ornaments, books, gold and silk draperies, hangings, tapestries, robes and other movable goods pertaining to the Duke of Burgundy..."²⁹⁷ Paintings – which would come, broadly speaking, under *joyaux* – are not specifically mentioned. It is, according to Victor Schmidt, "almost" fair to say that "painting" as we recognise it today "did not even exist yet".²⁹⁸ As a result, it seems crucial to set the *Norfolk Triptych's* architectural form within this wider *joyaux* context.

Around 1400, panel painting was – strictly speaking – a sub-division of *tableaux*, a much more all-encompassing object category (spanning carved, enamelled and cast techniques) within which the products of the goldsmiths were artistically leading. Painted objects, generally called "tableaux de bois... faiz de peinture", customarily occupy the same sections as the metalwork *tableaux*, and are

²⁹⁵ Philippe Lorentz, "Des tableaux de peinture comme les tableaux d'orfèvrerie," in Taburet-Delahaye, *Paris 1400*, 194-95 (195); Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:22; 38; Roelofs, *Maehwael*, 13.

²⁹⁶ For the few panels, see Taburet-Delahaye, *Paris 1400*, 194-200.

²⁹⁷ Chrétien Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers concernant l'histoire de l'art dans la Flandre, l'Artois & le Hainault avant le XV^e siècle* (Lille: Danel, 1886), 2:825-26.

²⁹⁸ Schmidt, "Painting," 210. On the status of painting in the fifteenth century, see *ibid.*, 210-24; James Bloom, "Why Painting?," in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 14500-1750*, ed. Neil de Marchi and Hans van Miegrot (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), esp. 17-18; Jean Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages: Studies in Society and Visual Culture* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 2-84.

described in a practically identical manner. Considering terminology across, for example, French and Burgundian inventories c.1400 (when architectonic shapes were very evidently in fashion), the formal interchangeability becomes particularly noticeable. Hence, various lessons about reception, pertinent to the *Norfolk Triptych*, may be gleaned from a brief immersion in the descriptive language used.²⁹⁹

Tableaux were often not just rectangular ‘panels’ as we might think of them; in fact, the term circumscribed a heterogeneous, shapeshifting class of object – in which architectural form provided a key range of patterns.³⁰⁰ Works frequently appear ‘in the manner’ or ‘in the fashion’ of something else – notably, doors, tabernacles, towers and castles. In 1404 Philip the Bold possessed “a large panel of wood in the manner of a half-door” by Jean Malouel.³⁰¹ In 1404 a gold panel “in the fashion of a door” was recorded in the *Chapelle* of the same Duke.³⁰² Such architectural forms feature throughout these courtly inventories – especially those of Jean de Berry. The 1401-3 Berry inventories list several instances of architectonic gold panels “with a gable” or “with five little gables closing in pairs” or “made with masonry above” or “with two small tabernacles above”.³⁰³ And there are many instances of closing “huisselles” (doors or aedicules) involved with gold and wooden panels

²⁹⁹ I have picked a representative selection from a much larger pool of references to architectural forms in these inventories.

³⁰⁰ Schmidt, “Painting,” 210, highlights the difficulty of typologising panel paintings c.1400 by shape.

³⁰¹ Dehaisnes, *Documents*, 2:840: “Item, ung grant tableau de bois en façon de demy porte, ouquel a Nostre Dame au milieu, les deux sains Jehan, saint Pierre et saint Antoine, et le fist Maluel”.

³⁰² Dehaisnes, *Documents*, 2:829.

³⁰³ Jules Guiffrey, *Inventaires de Jean duc de Berry 1401-1416* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1894-6), 2:57-8 (no. 392; 394; 395; 398).

alike.³⁰⁴ One gilded silver *joyau* given to the Saint Chapelle in Bourges, 1404-7, is made “in the fashion of a terrace” with “two castles”.³⁰⁵ A gilded silver reliquary is made “in the manner of a chapel”.³⁰⁶ Significantly, the same descriptive terms are used to characterise painted panels. In 1402, Jean de Berry possessed a two-sided painted *tableau* “fashioned with a gable” (and “including several relics”).³⁰⁷ In Philip the Good’s 1420 inventory of *joyaux*, we encounter a painted wooden *tableau* “in the fashion of a door”.³⁰⁸

In the same prestigious inventories, there is a notable fashion for *tableaux* “in the manner of tabernacles” (although this shape may have been even more popular with the wealthiest ecclesiastics than with the courts).³⁰⁹ Some of these tabernacle *tableaux* integrate relics. The 1413-16 Berry inventories record, for example, a “wooden panel in the manner of a tabernacle”, a holy thorn reliquary set within a large gold *joyaux* “done in architecture in the manner of a tabernacle”, and a painted panel of the Virgin holding her child, above which is “a gilded tabernacle picked out in gold”.³¹⁰ An impression of the holy thorn reliquary may be gained from the object of this description today in the British Museum [1.26] – essentially

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:56; 2:58 (no. 390; 395). There are also objects *d’ancienne façon* made in an architectural manner that would likely have formed precedents for the contemporaneously made objects, as in a gabled panel, probably Roman, with the *vera icon* or icon of Veronica: *ibid.*, 2:308-9, no. 139: “Item, un autre tableau d’or à pignon, d’ancienne façon, appelé le *Tableau de la Véronique*” and cf. also 1:23 (no. 31).

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:173 (no. 98).

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:44 (no. 318).

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:136 (no. 1068): “uns autres tableaux faiz à pignon, de pincture, où il a à l’un des coustез un Crucifiement, et en l’autre un ymage de Nostre Dame, et pluseurs reliques entour”.

³⁰⁸ Léon de Laborde, *Les ducs de Bourgogne: études sur les lettres, les arts et l’industrie pendant le XVe siècle et plus particulièrement dans les Pays-Bas et les duché de Bourgogne* (Paris: Plon Frères, 1851), 2:241 (no. 4085); 2:253 (no. 4140).

³⁰⁹ Tomasi, “Tabernacle,” 1017-18; cf. the many examples in the Papal treasury in Avignon 1314-76 in Hermannus Hoberg, *Die Inventare des Päpstlichen Schatzes in Avignon, 1314-1376* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 612 under “tabernaculum”.

³¹⁰ Guiffrey, *Inventaires*, 1:31-4 (no. 59; 62; 64; 66).

a sizeable (for such objects) fantastical gold niche surmounting a castellated base, its jewels larger than the heads of the holy figures.³¹¹ Note also the reliquary “in the fashion of a tabernacle” in the treasury of Margaret of Flanders in 1405.³¹²

The three descriptive terms for architectural form that most regularly recur in the inventories are the tabernacle, the portal and the gable. But these would not necessarily have denoted especially distinct classes of form. In fact, the terms may have been used more to vary language than to make description precise, as in the comparably interchangeable terms *façon*, *manière*, and *ouvrage*. A tabernacle or *maçonnerie* might just as easily be termed a gable or *à pignon*.³¹³ And a gable, quite obviously, might also look like a door or gateway, and vice versa. In any case, as most of the objects cannot now be identified, we can never be certain exactly what the differences may have been. But the point is that certain objects possessed enough architectural form to encourage the inventory-maker to add this aspect into their transcription. Patrons and collectors would have apprehended these objects metamorphically, architectonically, describing them ‘in the fashion of’ or ‘in the manner of’ a built structure. Beholders would have been used to the receptive demands such forms made upon them: namely, to enlist the eyes in a compressed recapitulation of the embodied experience of movement through space, mimicking the dynamics of entrance, passage and exit on a reduced scale. That these architectural shapes so evidently insisted upon description

³¹¹ Bagnoli, *Treasures*, no. 54; the British Museum does not correlate the object with the inventory reference, however.

³¹² Dehaisnes, *Documents*, 2:916.

³¹³ See Fred Crossley, *English Church Monuments, A.D. 1150-1550* (London: Batsford, 1921), 30 for the 1418-19 contract for the Greene tomb at Lowick, Northants, England, which specifies “two tabernacles called gablettes” at the heads of the entombed.

demonstrates that the forms affected – even conditioned – the reception of the works in substantial ways. Indeed, the shapes were consistently noted first, even before the central iconography.³¹⁴

Alongside their shapes, a frequent aspect of such objects as are covered in this section is that they were experienced in terms of an architectonic dynamic, whether they possessed architectural form or not.³¹⁵ As earlier discussed, the outside-inside dialectic was a vital feature of the *Norfolk Triptych*, both in the nature of its triptych format and the decision to depict the architectural framework on the interior rather than the exterior. Inventory makers commonly stressed the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of objects, and especially where figures were in relation.³¹⁶ For example, in the 1401-3 Berry inventories, we encounter a gold *tableau* with God the Father and the Virgin holding her Child, closing with two doors, “enamelled on the inside with St John and St Catherine, and on the outside with St Peter and St Paul”.³¹⁷ The spatialised dynamic involved in receiving such objects is spelled out particularly in the extended ekphrases in Louis d’Anjou’s inventory of precious *joyaux* made in 1379-80; *dehors, devant, dessus* etc. are frequently called upon for the processes of description.³¹⁸ Jacobs and Shirley Blum have drawn attention to this spatialised aspect of reception in (later) fifteenth-century Netherlandish painted triptychs and altarpieces, arguing that such pictures often intend to recreate experiences found in built architecture.³¹⁹ I would argue that a special

³¹⁴ Cf. Kemp’s definition of the ‘interior’ genre in fn4 above.

³¹⁵ Noted also by Tomasi, “Tabernacle,” 1021-23.

³¹⁶ Noted also by Verougstraete, *Frames*, 159: “perdedans et perdehors, binnen en buijten”.

³¹⁷ Guiffrey, *Inventaires*, 2:56 (no. 390).

³¹⁸ E.g., Henri Moranvillé, *Inventaire de l’orfèvrerie et des joyaux de Louis I, duc d’Anjou*, (Paris: Leroux, 1903-4), 18-31.

³¹⁹ Jacobs, *Opening*, 2-4; Blum, *Triptychs*, 4.

sensitivity to the intricacies of placement seems to have been a much wider phenomenon of late medieval art's reception. Having an inside and outside established the way objects of various different formats were conceived and received (not only triptychs – objects did not need to be hinged in the form of triptychs or diptychs to be made “in the fashion of a door”).³²⁰ Hence, it is almost as if the painters of the next generation, in painting their virtuosic indoor settings and architecturalised grisaille exteriors, were providing a virtual *compensation* for such spatialised experiences seemingly germane to many objets d'art.³²¹

The *Norfolk Triptych* displays a profound comprehension of the experimental habits of the metalworkers and their playful relation to form. But the triptych's interior is remarkable for being a pictorial transmutation of the spatial dynamics described above. It employs paint to both ape such works and, in describing an illusionistic structure that looks like built architecture, mark itself apart from them. The *Norfolk Triptych's* ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is conditioned, not so much by intricate choreography of crafted physical shapes (as with the metalwork), but by the interaction of the format with the painter's simulation of built architecture – with all its virtual concavities and protuberances.

³²⁰ E.g., Laborde, *Les ducs*, 2:241 (no. 4085). Jacobs, *Opening*, sees the ‘door’ metaphor strictly in context of triptychs. And read Laborde's warning against interpreting every *tableau cloant* (closing panel) in the courtly inventories as a diptych or triptych in the sense we understand: *Glossaire français du Moyen Age: à l'usage de l'archéologue et de l'amateur des arts...* (Paris: Adolphe Labitte, 1872), 506-07.

³²¹ On a similar topic (architectural ‘chapel space’ compared in carved and painted altarpieces), see Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 115-32.

Resolving the architectural frame into a spatial setting: towards an alternative genealogy of the early Netherlandish ‘house interior’

Pächt once made a connective aesthetic leap between a famous manuscript frontispiece, the *St Jerome in his Study* [1.27] and the work of the fourteenth-century goldsmiths.³²² He argued that this drawing, of cardinal importance for the northern tradition of interior and still life painting – in which the atmosphere of genuine “dwelling” was generated through the integration of figure, space and furnishings – was based not on a painted precedent, but on a particular *oeuvre en ronde bosse* that could be traced from the inventories of Charles V to Philip the Good.³²³ For Pächt, this miniature then represented a crucial fusion of Italian Trecento three-dimensional accomplishments and a “northern” attention to the finicky details of homely furnishings. Leaving aside Pächt’s convictions about national temperaments, although this *St Jerome* is not a panel painting, we can gather something significant from Pächt’s study, and from the preceding investigations, something even seemingly counter-intuitive: that the experimental formal world of Gothic micro-architectural objects can also be considered as a formative precursor to the illusionistic spatial achievements of early Netherlandish painting.³²⁴

Perhaps more than other comparable objects, the *Norfolk Triptych* appears poised between these two apparently separate aesthetic worlds. It maintains – like the

³²² Pächt, “Entstehung”.

³²³ Ibid., 131; Jules Labarte, *Inventaire du mobilier du Charles V, Roi de France* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1879), 258 (no. 2386); Laborde, *Les ducs*, 2:235 (no. 4071).

³²⁴ A similar argument is put forward in preliminary fashion in Belting, *Likeness*, 419-25, esp. 422.

ecclesiastical furnishings of old – “the character of an inviolable treasure” but thwarts this very promise of material substantiality through its pictorialised architectonics.³²⁵ The object’s art historical value lies especially in this tense interaction of the material and the virtual. In this final section I thus prepare an alternative genealogy of the interior setting by investigating, specifically in relation to the triptych, the ‘problem’ of our introduction: the late medieval resolution of the architectural frame into spatial environment. First, however, it is important to elucidate the exemplary role played by the *Norfolk Triptych*’s painter at creating a large building out of – and within – a small object, so that the viewer not only recognises it like an illustration but also perceives an illusionistic capacity, a sensed, relativised largeness and plasticity.³²⁶

The architectural ensemble’s three-dimensional effects are staged variously: through manipulation of the picture plane, the modelling of the structural components in light and dark and the solid interactions between the figures and their painted locations. The painter notably diverges from conventional techniques of pictorial space still in use in panel paintings of a similar era and locality, where figures customarily lack a convincing integration with their represented location, appearing ungrounded, hovering somewhere in front of their architectural confines rather than standing within them.³²⁷ Indeed, few other northern panel

³²⁵ Ibid., 424.

³²⁶ For another positive appraisal of the painted architecture, see Herzner, “Norfolk-Triptychon,” 14-17; 20-1 who says it forms the basis of an Eyckian “kontemplativer Gestaltungs-Naturalismus”, a term from Gerhard Schmidt, “Pre-Eyckian”, 750-2; 759.

³²⁷ E.g., Stroo, *Pre-Eyckian*, 1:196 (no. 4); 310 (no. 7); 386 (no. 9); cf. the Netherlandish *Four Panels with Scenes from the Life of the Virgin*, c.1430 (Kemperdick, *Road*, 244-47 (no. 62)). For earlier examples of the awkward relationships between figure and architecture in medieval painting, see Paul Lampl, “Schemes of Early Medieval Architectural Representation,” *Marsyas* 9 (1961): 6-13; Willibald Sauerländer, “Space in the Figurative Arts During the Middle Ages,” in

paintings from the period display comparable effects.³²⁸ Through the painter's careful orchestration of architecture and figure, the building seems, optically, as though it is palpably populated; it becomes a true 'setting', leading the eye from without to within.

A number of different devices are used to suggest pictorial depth. On the triptych's interior, the figures' feet are very surely, consciously placed in relation to the edge of their platforms; the bottom row is set at a significant remove from the frame. This strategy is complemented by the shadowy concave vaults above and around the figures, implying further recession. One of the platforms is exceeded by St Agnes' garment [1.28], drawing attention to the illusion that the building's façade stands *behind* the picture plane (likely meant as a witty amplification of the saint's long, loose flowing hair, emphasising the chastity for which she was well-known). The impress of remove between façade and plane is accentuated again in the noticeable gap between frame and building edge [1.29], a curious feature which reads as if the artist intended to disassociate the painted ensemble from the frame in order to distinguish the province of the painter from that of the woodcarver – as if to keep these 'aesthetic worlds' firmly apart. The recession effect is further emphasised by the overlapping pendants of the architecture which, along with the higher pendants, correspond to two curious tooth-like protrusions in the stone

Space in European Art: Council of Europe Exhibition in Japan, exh. cat., ed. Ernst Gombrich (Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art, 1987), 100-02.

³²⁸ But see *St Jacobi Altarpiece* (St. Jacobi Church, Göttingen, 1402), on which see Katrin Dyballa, "Cologne and Western Germany," in Kemperdick, *Road*, 49 and cf. *Road*, 192-93 (no. 36); 199-201 (no. 39). In other media, cf. three-dimensional effects to the stone baldachins in the embroidered triptych, Musée des Beaux Arts, Chartres, c.1380-1400 (Taburet-Delahaye, *Paris 1400*, 247 (no. 148)); the (Bruges) *Beaufort Hours*, c.1401, British Library MS. Royal 2 A XVIII, fol. 23v; and the c.1400 stained glass in the Stiftskirche Niederhaslach (Georg Dehio, *Geschichte der deutsche Kunst* (Berlin and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1921), 2:fig. 407).

base below.³²⁹ Together, these arrangements display an unusual degree of illusionistic self-consciousness.³³⁰

Most visually pronounced are the clustered piers which are markedly well-defined, picked out with a kind of “workmanlike naturalism”.³³¹ They are painted so as to appear protruding forward, and are often compared to the equally thick-set piers in the Turin-Milan Hours’ famous Office of the Dead miniature by ‘Hand G’ (possibly a young van Eyck) [1.30].³³² Like van Eyck’s convincing renderings of architecture, the structures suggest a naturalistically observed real-world precedent. Indeed, Volker Herzner, in a reading of the triptych particularly attentive to its formal intricacies, writes that “the architectonic construction is portrayed with such inner logic, coherence and verisimilitude that it inspires the feeling that there might have been a corresponding precedent in reality”.³³³

The piers achieve this persuasive spell of verisimilitude by their illumination, which gives them special visual weight.³³⁴ They are expertly moulded by painted

³²⁹ For a similar effect, cf. Austrian School, *Trinity* (National Gallery, London, c.1420).

³³⁰ Belting and Kruse, *Erfindung*, no. 4-5 (135-36) draw attention to this: “By an astonishing grasp of spatial construction, the painted stone architecture lies behind the rosette frame, such that a stone platform is formed for the figures below whereas the architectural structure passes behind the frame above.”

³³¹ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:92.

³³² Brauer, “Pre-Eyckian,” 50-87; Herzner, “Norfolk-Triptychon,” 10-20 and Bruijne, “Norfolk-triptiek” for the Hand G comparison. For other contemporary painted works evincing strategies of three-dimensional visual ‘eminence’, cf. the thrones in the pre-Eyckian *Weber Triptych* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1390) and Master of the Fröndenberg Altar, *Coronation of the Virgin* (Cleveland Museum of Art, c.1410).

³³³ Herzner, “Norfolk-Triptychon,” 15.

³³⁴ Could this be due to the triptych’s patronage? It may have been commissioned, we remember, by the Bishopric of Liège. Cf. William Durandus, *Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, trans. John Neale and Benjamin Webb (New York: Charles Scribner, 1893), 24, who teaches: the piers of the church are the bishops and doctors who “specially sustain the Church of God by their doctrine”, and “the capitals of the piers are the opinions of the bishops and doctors”.

light, highlighting the left side while casting their right in darkness.³³⁵ Within the light and dark halves of the piers are more subtle intricacies of lighting: each separate rib making up the stone members is tonally differentiated so that bands of blacker grey appear on the paler side of the pier, and conversely fairer bands on the darker side. This rich tonal contrast sets the triptych apart from pre-Eyckian contemporaries who typically adopted a more uniform, unnuanced brightness, strong luminosity being closely connected with the concept of beauty in medieval thought.³³⁶ Herzner believed that this aspect of the triptych anticipated the chiaroscuro accomplishments of the next generations.³³⁷

The most significant aspect of the *Norfolk Triptych's* illusionistic visual trickery relies on an ability to curiously counterbalance its obdurate matter, asserting a substantial preciousness while maintaining a projection of imaginary space.³³⁸ In addition to similarities with metalwork, the original impression of the triptych would likely have been of a more 'thing-like' object than it now appears. Conservator Rozanne de Bruijne notes that holes at the top of the panel suggest three-dimensional carved and gilded Gothic pinnacles once sprouted from the top of the frame.³³⁹ Seen thus, the painted building would thus have seemed to transform into a gold efflorescence – a two-way process with the setting blooming into gold ornament and the ornament liquefying into illusionistic setting,

³³⁵ Verougstraete, *Frames*, 164-65 points out that the usual direction of painted light is from left-to-right, following the western habit of following text.

³³⁶ Cf. Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 50-58.

³³⁷ Herzner, "Norfolk-Triptychon," 21.

³³⁸ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:180-81 noted this binary in van Eyck.

³³⁹ Bruijne, "Norfolk-triptiek," 12.

signalling its physicality in two parallel ways: through the bulging virtuality of the painted architecture and the glinting materiality of the gilded portions.

Particularly remarkable is the interaction between the rectilinear shape of the frame and its painted architecture, creating a sense of dynamic compression. The layering of the different frames creates a thickened outer shell marked with repetitive striations: first the red and floral pattern of the exterior wood case, then the preliminary indented gilded groove, next the bluish layer bearing the rosettes cast in metal and picked out in gold leaf, after that the second band of gilded moulding, and finally the beginning of the painted world with the grey box-shaped niches picked out with straight lines, as if they ultimately belonged to a right-angled grid network for controlling the figures.

Van Os wrote about similarly strained interrelations of form and format occurring equivalently in Quattrocento altarpieces: “[as if] Trecento polyptychs [had been] forced with a kind of fanatical zeal into square frames”.³⁴⁰ Van Os’ word “forced” comprehends something of the tensed visual correlation between the *Norfolk Triptych*’s painted and carved frames. The building appears to continue on behind the frame; the upper reaches of the Coronation’s canopy disappear above; the flanking grisaille prophets are only just visible, like the finely picked out capitals of the piers on which they stand, and their stone baldachins are cut in half. The painted architecture appears to press centrifugally outwards upon the frame, which exerts a contrary containing pressure. So much crammed into this diminutive

³⁴⁰ Van Os, “Sienese Altarpieces,” 22-23.

space, it seems the panel itself wished the illusory capacities of the painted ensemble to playfully disrupt the decorative encapsulation and enhance the object's grandeur on its own terms.

This triptych is deemed a pivotal instance in the history of frame-making, representative of an art historical junction at which the “architectonic frame” undergoes a transformative pictorialisation.³⁴¹ Claus Grimm references the triptych as a marked instance when “the portal and canopy framing, defining the impression the picture is to make, is taken into the illusionistic scheme”.³⁴² Likewise, a more recent history of framing cites the work as a crucial historical example of the “blurring” of framing roles, where “the artist painted his own inner ‘frame’”.³⁴³

According to these framing histories, the fact that the architectural structure is painted rather than carved is key to understanding the significance of the object. In other panel paintings made around the turn of the fifteenth century, the visual impression is often led by the loudness of the gold leaf (tooled and worked to resemble a cast metal object) and especially of gilded, architectural frames. This picture's painted ensemble assumes the central responsibility for channelling the pronounced initial visual communicative signal that is usually the frame's prerogative. For panel paintings to convert micro-architectural frames into spatial settings, they had first to subsume that frame within the painted ensemble. The

³⁴¹ Grimm, *Picture Frames*, 26-31.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴³ Mitchell and Roberts, *Picture Frames*, 74-75.

architectonics of the panel becomes a matter of paint rather than of wood or gilding. The enframing building, to quote Panofsky, is “simulated” not crafted.³⁴⁴

This word “simulated” is not incidental.³⁴⁵ *Semblance* was used in French courtly circles in the fourteenth century, favoured by poets and especially connected to portraiture.³⁴⁶ The inventory record of a witty present given by the Limbourg brothers to Jean de Berry describes a very early instance of a trompe-l’oeil still life on panel, noting that the item is made in the “semblance” (*semblance*) of a book – a “counterfeit book”.³⁴⁷ The usual term ‘fashion’ (*façon*) is significantly not used, nor are any of its correlatives (e.g. *manière*). There are enough references in the Berry inventories to objects *fashioned* like a book to demonstrate that this is a subtle but important terminological difference on the part of the inventory-maker.³⁴⁸ Highlighting the sense of wonder such a “semblance” engendered, the same inventory-maker adds: “where there are no leaves nor anything written”.³⁴⁹ In like fashion, the *Norfolk Triptych* counterfeits the look and space of a cathedral façade, but on the scale of a tabernacle. If the object were to have appeared in the same Berry inventory, it may conceivably also have been designated as showing a ‘semblance’ of a building – a kind of artifice crucially related but ultimately different from the formally experimental objects mentioned above.

³⁴⁴ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:92.

³⁴⁵ For Panofsky’s concise history of *ars simia natura*, see *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (New York: Icon Editions, 1968), 202-04n2.

³⁴⁶ Laborde, *Glossaire*, 496-97.

³⁴⁷ Guiffrey, *Inventaires*, 1:265 (no. 994): “item, un livre contrefait d’une pièce de bois (2) paincte en semblance d’un livre, où il n’a nuls fueillets ne riens escript”.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:57 (no. 394).

³⁴⁹ *Semblance* features elsewhere in the Berry inventories in a remarkable object which the Duke bought from his painter Michelet Saulmon: a round gold *joyau* featuring on one side an image of the Virgin and Child under a canopy borne by angels, on the other side a “half-image” made “in the semblance” of the Duke (*à la semblance de Monseigneur*), depicted holding a gold *tableau* in his hand (*ibid.*, 2:227 (no. 234)).

Accordingly, this is not to say that the triptych's simulative quality is something that arrives – in Netherlandish art – out of nowhere. On the contrary, the counterfeit character of the work's illusionistic exertions is already 'latent' in the metamorphic feats of the *arts de luxe* of the preceding period, especially the more ingenious kind produced for courtly patrons.³⁵⁰ An adjustment may thus be made to the usual 'one-way street' conception of c.1400 painting as a kind of *ersatz* metalwork.³⁵¹ As Jeanne Nuechterlein has argued, considering painting as a "lesser" object type for being an imitation is perhaps missing the point.³⁵² In fact, in the first half of the fifteenth century, painting's degree of persuasive likeness to solid metalwork was, or became, a desirable quality in itself. Developing under the shadow of other artforms, such early panel paintings as the *Norfolk Triptych* were not merely aping courtly metalwork but – more importantly – the objects' own propensities for counterfeiting. Metamorphically worked, often highly self-consciously, in the 'manner of' something other than their material realities, these luxurious objects customarily merged theological iconography with a sense of showy fantasy – at times seemingly incongruous with the content. In the context of other artforms, then, painting as a medium conceivably became increasingly desirable not simply as a cheaper gold surrogate, but for its special facility for illusionistic simulation that came to be valued on its own terms – at a remove from the contents counterfeited.

³⁵⁰ Cf. fn164 above.

³⁵¹ Cf. Panofsky, *Renascences*, 134n4.

³⁵² Jeanne Nuechterlein, "From Medieval to Modern: Gold and the Value of Representation in Early Netherlandish Painting," University of York, Department of History of Art Research Portal (2013), <https://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/docs/medievalToModern.pdf>, 18.

Indeed, the strangeness of the *Norfolk Triptych* is that it is able to aspire to be both frivolous *joyau* – a (usually small) treasured object with a sense of playfulness (its etymology shared with ‘joke’) – and substantial altarpiece. Its artist squeezes the form of a cathedral into a minute frame to make a grand vessel on a small scale. Its importance is as an early record of unusual *investment* in panel painting’s illusionistic qualities and three-dimensional capacities: if the patron had desired a more typical metalwork object or shrine in which to place something precious, such an object would have been commissioned; instead, however, the preference was for an example which would foreground the skill of the paintbrush. To opt for a small-scale luxurious work which gave such obvious centrality to oil paint was clearly a more unusual choice for a courtly or high-status commission in this era.

Such a privileging of painterly illusionism over materiality could be interpreted as marking a shift in the status of painting itself. Caroline Bynum conceptualised this shift in stark but useful terms: “Renaissance artists aimed for mimetic, illusionistic modes of representation that deliberately tried to trick the senses... In contrast, medieval artists expected viewers to notice and admire the stuff they employed as *stuff*... not as painterly illusion”.³⁵³ But, in view of the preceding discussions, Bynum’s historical dichotomy between modern illusion and medieval ‘stuff’ is perhaps too stark.³⁵⁴ Substantial artificiality is already germane to late medieval metalwork objects, described in markedly metamorphic terms, programmatically

³⁵³ Caroline Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 53-54.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 135-36 for criticism of Bynum.

concerned with visual tricks and disorientations of scale, surface and spatialised experience. It is within this point of historical convergence that we may better appreciate that aesthetic leap perceived – to parse Herzog once more – in the ‘resolution’ (with the sense of watery dissolution this *Auflösung* encompasses) of late medieval architectural frame into early modern spatial setting.

The triptych’s strong investment in the pictorialised architectural setting represents a significant development for early Netherlandish panel painters: locational form has the capacity to become ‘reified’, described, enlisted in a picture’s communicative potential. The object’s importance for this thesis is precisely as an unusually forceful representative of this juncture. The relationship of frame to setting is crucial; for it is as if the interior setting appropriates something of the house-frame’s primal conditioning importance. A whole alternative genealogy for the early Netherlandish ‘house interior’ thus emerges among Gothic micro-architectural objects of sacred containment, exquisitely represented in the *Norfolk Triptych* – a dazzling, jewel-like object with the appearance of an illusionistic painted building but the potential function of a reliquary.³⁵⁵ The early modern genre of the *Architekturbild* begins its initial stirrings in this period of pronounced transition in the architectural framing devices of late medieval panel painting.³⁵⁶ The house-frame gradually became a picture of a house.

³⁵⁵ When, under the aegis of (‘Renaissance’) progressivism, Panofsky (*Early Netherlandish*, 1:182) claims that “van Eyck’s eye operates as a microscope and as a telescope at the same time... so that the beholder is compelled to oscillate between a position reasonably far from the picture and many positions very close to it”, he actually points to this older micro-architectural inheritance. Cf. Binski, “Magnificentia,” 13-15; *Gothic Wonder*, 144.

³⁵⁶ Julius Held discerned the beginning of the genre in van Eyck’s church interiors, where the built structures are “no longer used like props, but rather made the basis of the composition in the guise

Conclusion

In 1961, Karl Birkmeyer published a two-part article providing an unusual structural-formalist approach to painted architectural framing elements in early Netherlandish painting. He pointed out that, whereas the religious art of the fifteenth century suffered from a restricted iconographic horizon, the painters' evolving spatial interpretations conversely showed much imagination and invention. He strove to prove this through tracing, "positively", the history of a "more or less constant" motif, the titular "arch motif" from the early to the late fifteenth century, and in so doing demonstrate a broader shift from a "devotional-symbolic" to a "narrative-representational" attitude, especially through the work of Rogier van der Weyden.³⁵⁷ Birkmeyer believed that the "proscenium arch" progressively shed its symbolic nature, devolving "completely into illusionism" by the career of Gerard David.³⁵⁸

This article's overall argument is perhaps less useful today than some of its detail. Birkmeyer explored the pre-history of such pictorialised architectonic frames in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; the author was right to look beyond manuscript illumination, where antecedents of early Netherlandish architectural frames were more usually recognised.³⁵⁹ But he considered pre-Eyckian panel painting only briefly and notably did not explore any *objets d'art*.³⁶⁰ One gets the

of self-contained, light-filled interiors, and are established in a formal relationship to the represented figures" ("Architekturbild," in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (1936), 1:905-18, in RDK Labor, <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=89647>).

³⁵⁷ Birkmeyer, "Arch Motif," esp. 2.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:27-31; 1:53; 1:57-61 for the manuscript narrative.

³⁶⁰ Birkmeyer, "Arch Motif," 8-10.

feeling that his investigations were restricted by, perhaps, a lack of available pre-Eyckian comparative material and, more significantly, his specific, governing conception of Rogier's spatially integrated "arch motif", for which he detected "only one direct antecedent" – the *Life of the Virgin* altarpiece or antependium (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, c.1390-1400). Birkmeyer's interpretation was directed by a conception of art history that marked a clear line between medieval and Renaissance, retrogression and progression. He drew attention to the "anachronis[ti]c" (i.e. medieval) flavour of the pronounced architectonic frames in Rogier's *Miraflores Altar* [1.31] but – sensibly – declined to label them as outmoded regressions explicitly, preferring instead to point to the innovative combination of structure and iconographic content produced by the otherwise ostensibly "anachronistic" motif.³⁶¹ Perhaps Panofsky was closer to the mark when he theorised such architectonics as "both an archaism and a great innovation".³⁶²

Since Birkmeyer's article, few if any scholars have engaged with the prevalent architectonics of fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting in an equivalently sustained manner. My chapter was therefore an attempt to revisit this arena and explore the pre-Eyckian history more widely, investigating the use of architecture in the *Norfolk Triptych* in light of the broader phenomenon of the late medieval 'resolution of the architectural frame into the spatial construction', targeting the

³⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

³⁶² Cf. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:260. Cf. Friedrich Winkler, "Weyden, Rogier," in *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Kunst* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1942) 35:473: "[Rogier's] connection with the architectonic frames that were developed in fourteenth-century French art is very evident."

customary progressivist evolutionary narrative of the interior scene in early Netherlandish painting – the early modern picture as progressively released from a medieval architectonic bondage. I argue that there may be other ways to interpret this arc of events.

The architectonic mode of framing endures for centuries in large-scale altarpieces.³⁶³ On the smaller scale of collectible pictures, the architectonic frame never fully dissolves into a purely spatial setting but rather perseveres (in a weaker half-life) in both the panel format and painted content. Something of this older house-like conception of medieval panel paintings lingers in the modern picture frame. Van Eyck conceived the frames for his panels [1.32], and decorated them in imitation porphyry or marble, to make the entire entity look as if it had been extracted from a built architectural location – part-niche, part-window frame.³⁶⁴ And, looking beyond the fifteenth century, Hélène Verougstrate pointed out the extent to which mouldings transmitted from architectural practice continued to be widely used in picture framing, “right down into the eighteenth century”.³⁶⁵

These architectonic vestiges are the positive spectres of a timeworn ‘domatomorphic’ approach to religious imagery, reformulated in fifteenth-century

³⁶³ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Peter Humfrey (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), especially, traces the long-lasting practice of architectural framing in Renaissance altarpieces.

³⁶⁴ See Monika Cämmerer-George, “Eine Italienische Wurzel in der Rahmen-Idee Jan van Eycks,” in *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien für Kurt Bauch zum 70. Geburtstag von seinem Schülern*, ed. Margrit Lisner and Rüdiger Becksmann (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1967), 69-76; Angelica Dülberg, *Privatporträts: Geschichte und Ikonologie einer Gattung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Mann, 1990), 116-27: “The imitation stone or marble frame summons the idea of a three-dimensional architectonic niche... [stressing] the portraits’ statuesque, timeless character...” (119).

³⁶⁵ Verougstraete, *Frames*, 83: “Right down into the 18th century, the mouldings of painting frames followed the mouldings used in architecture.”

spatial settings for sacred and profane iconographies alike. Spatialised domestic settings that begin to feature prevalently in the interiors of altarpieces from the 1430s onwards are thus not ‘breaks’ with this architectonic inheritance but rather reconceptions.

There is a point to these persistent long shadows of Eisler’s “architectonic authority”, especially as painted objects became increasingly portable and nomadic. The opening of the *Norfolk Triptych* would enact a vicariously comforting ‘arrival’ – a virtual ‘housing’ achieved via the pictorial progression from outdoors and temporary wooden accommodation to indoors and permanent places in the heavenly city of stone.³⁶⁶ If this triptych was indeed transported, this distinction would have acted as a complement to the travel. Aping the moveable micro-architectural objects of the courtly treasuries, the triptych did not need to be so specifically defined by its architectural location – this picture brings its house with it.

Even modernist painters found it difficult to let go of an underlying architectonic authority. For T. J. Clark, writing about Picasso’s *Mandolin and Guitar* [1.33], “room-space”, as the author calls it, is still fundamental: “Room-space remains [painting’s] reality. Objects and bodies are only given weight and identity in painting by being enclosed – by existing in relation to a finitude they call their own. Being is being ‘in’”.³⁶⁷ The late medieval micro-architectural frame haunts the early modern painted interior scene which in turn haunts Picasso’s pictorial world.

³⁶⁶ Kemperdick, *Road*, 185 for this connection.

³⁶⁷ Clark, *Picasso*, 104; cf. 59-109 (“Lecture 2. Room”) for context.

The architectonic conception thus enjoyed an afterlife, shadowing the transformation of a certain segment of undressed wood, eventually more typically of canvas, into the self-contained image-worlds that are the pictures of the modern age. The importance of the *Norfolk Triptych* is that it *paints* this concept, dramatically subsuming the house within the pictorial space. The triptych has proven remarkably protean in its appearance and influence, in dialogue with a range of precedent varieties and scales of object: reliquaries, small-scale metalwork, ivories, manuscript illumination, large retables of stone and wood, and cathedral facades. It is a product of an artistic universe in which the metamorphic feats of metalwork were aesthetically predominant, formed precisely in relation to these circumstances.

In the pre-Eyckian era, the microscopic pedantry of the manuscript illuminator and the rhythmic interplay of colour and gilding of the metalworker meet head-on. Their collision forms this unusual object – a simulated container – and sets a particular standard for architectural representation in early Netherlandish panel painting, part substantial building, part delicate jewel: a paradox sustained by the illusionistic capabilities of the paintbrush.³⁶⁸ Consequently, the triptych is a fascinating record of the status of panel painting in an era before its crystallisation into a medium.³⁶⁹ It appears like the outcome of an experiment to define a future for this nascent medium, bearing the imprint of exertion on the part of the artist(s)

³⁶⁸ Cf. Tolnay, *Le Maître*, 30 on Eyckian painting's jewel-like qualities.

³⁶⁹ At least until the middle of the fifteenth century, a major function of panel painters was to polychrome sculptures (Nuechterlein, "Medieval," 47-48, with references).

involved as they attempted to translate the influential precedent of the architectonic frame into a pictorial setting. With this chapter's investigation into the *Norfolk Triptych*, then, we have witnessed the somewhat slippery, polymorphous development of one of the key tributaries flowing to meet in the formation of what was to become 'the interior scene' in painting.

Chapter 2. “A présent”: the *Werl Altarpiece* and the Contemporary Interior in Early Netherlandish Religious Painting

Introduction

Gradually, in ever-progressing elaboration, everything sacred was pictured down to the smallest details. The sky had been pulled down to earth with longing arms.

- Huizinga, “Kunst,” 456.

An aspect of the *Norfolk Triptych* [1.5a] unexplored by chapter one is the reference it makes to the fashions of its own day; these occur not simply in the guise of contemporaneous Gothic architecture (even though the pretensions of that very architectural style may well be to a supra-temporal, supra-historical realm), but also as self-conscious injections of worldly modishness trespassing, deliberately, upon the sacred scene. On its exterior, the three Magi and attendant, probably ‘crypto-portraits’ of present-day figures, proffer micro-architectural shrines like Gothic reliquaries from a late medieval court treasury. They sport lengthy contemporary *houppelandes* (gowns) detailed variously, one with sleeves edged in fur (perhaps of ermine), another with modish high-waisted belt and a third with eastern fur hat or *chapka*. Such anachronistic updates to timeworn iconographies were to take centre-stage in early Netherlandish religious paintings of the 1430s, especially in domestic settings. The honorific house-frame is thereby no longer the

saintly ‘carapace’ of chapter one but motivated into a commodious room in which the beholder too might live. The second of my three-part circuitous response to the emergence of *Edward Grimston*, then, looks at the use of these domestic interiors in early Netherlandish panel painting.

Consider one of the panels comprising this chapter’s case study, the *Werl Altarpiece* [2.1c]. For the unaccustomed eye, the sacred figures now painted into a contemporary setting may appear disjunctive, as if the characters of a well-known book had suddenly risen from the page to sit beside the reader. Rather than occupying a heavenly ornament, the saint now sits on a bench, warming herself by a fire in an apparently mimetic, domestic interior. Through this development, location is hypostatized, treated as concrete reality, and honour conferred more subtly, dissipated through complementary surroundings. Perhaps, at no other point in the history of art have the icons of religion been brought closer – sociologically – to a mortal state. The devotional image had apparently come “right down to earth”.³⁷⁰

So, it is apposite that Heinrich von Werl, who commissioned this altarpiece and features in the other wing panel, was head of the Cologne province of Conventual Franciscans and professor at the University of Cologne (an unusual combination of offices for the time). As Jeanne Nuechterlein suggests, “a well-known professor and preacher, Werl would have viewed contemporary urban life as the fitting context for his life’s work”.³⁷¹ As will be demonstrated, the altarpiece, with all the

³⁷⁰ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 37-39 on the “localising tendency”; cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 125.

³⁷¹ Nuechterlein, “Medieval,” 40.

idiosyncrasies that it contains, is conceivably a product of Werl's mind as well as the artist's. Indeed, it is fortuitous for my research question in particular, that, almost uniquely among early Netherlandish altarpieces of the 1430s of equivalent quality, its date and individual donor are firmly established, and there is a host of available documentary biographical information still surviving on Werl, allowing us to examine the remaining panels in detail while remaining cognisant of the patron's likely preferences.

Using the *Werl Altarpiece*, we can explore the growing status and effective use of contemporary motifs and anachronisms, and how these may communicate, in ways beyond the religious message, about the values of a painting's patron and their position within the society of the time. The domestic setting, replete with detail, is intricately bound to Werl. Although he appears to keep a reverential silence, it speaks on his behalf.

I will briefly sketch out a fuller historical context for the kind of contemporary interior on view. Such up-to-date, earthly interiors were patently successful.³⁷² Scholars point to the "sudden popularity" of the new iconography of the Virgin in a domestic interior in Flemish painting around 1420-1430.³⁷³ These interiors, notably those associated with the Master of Flémalle's workshop, were reproduced in numerous variations, influencing decades of German painting; van Eyck's domestic settings had an equivalently wide and lasting reach.³⁷⁴

³⁷² Cf. Schlie, *Corpus*, 247.

³⁷³ Nuechterlein, "Domesticity," 52.

³⁷⁴ Jeltje Dijkstra, "The Brussels and Mérode Annunciation Reconsidered," in Foister, *Campin*, 95-104. For the influence upon German painters, see Barbara Jakoby, *Der Einfluß niederländischer*

That this fashion for a well-described pictorial environment happened swiftly and dramatically is demonstrated by comparing two similar iconographic ‘types’ with approximate compositions: A *Virgin and Child* dated 1420 [2.2]; and van Eyck’s *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele* of c. 1434-6 [2.3].³⁷⁵ Both sacra conversaciones have memorialising functions potentially deriving from the iconographic tradition of sculpted wall memorials; each shows saints and donors fanning out from a regal centre.³⁷⁶ However, the Ypres picture consciously avoids a recognisable location of its sainted figures and donors, while the Bruges setting is perceptibly real, it is of this world.³⁷⁷

Of course, various guises of ‘realism’ are implicated in this style that has been called the early Netherlandish *ars nova*.³⁷⁸ Here we are chiefly concerned with one prominent guise of realism: the impulse to locate in a present-day, domestic setting. How did this enter religious painting?

Tafelmalerei des 15. Jahrhunderts auf die Kunst der benachbarten Rheinlande am Beispiel der Verkündigungsdarstellung in Köln, am Niederrhein und in Westfalen (1440-1490) (Cologne: Kölner Schriften zu Geschichte und Kultur, 1987); Brigitte Corley, *Painting in Cologne, 1300-1500* (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2000), 169-217. On van Eyck’s impact, see Till-Holger Borchert, “Reflecting van Eyck. The Diffusion of an Optical Revolution in European Art around 1450,” in Martens, *Van Eyck*, 424-45; Belting, *Spiegel*, 151.

³⁷⁵ Note Douglas Brine, “Evidence for the Forms and Usage of Early Netherlandish Memorial Paintings,” *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008): 146-47: “the panel was either heavily overpainted or totally repainted in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Nonetheless there seems little reason to doubt the general accuracy, if not the execution of its present appearance.”

³⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 139-68.

³⁷⁷ Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 1980, 220-23 links the architecture with the Romanesque choir of Our Lady’s Church at Maastricht.

³⁷⁸ Schlie, *Corpus*, 233-35 for a useful list of the different kinds of early Netherlandish ‘realism’; on “ars nova” see, as before, Sander, “Ars Nova”.

Homely interiors, it is said, first “came of age” among familial biblical iconographies in Trecento painting.³⁷⁹ In late medieval piety, the more quotidian aspects of the Gospel were emphasised to bring events closer to lived experience. Homeliness was used as a metaphor for divine intimacy. Mystics like Margery of Kempe and Julian of Norwich consistently emphasised how they were “homely” with God.³⁸⁰ These methods of scriptural intimacy were instructed by popular devotional handbooks, as in the prologue to the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony’s fourteenth-century *Vita Christi*: “Although these accounts describe events that occurred in the past, you must meditate upon them as if they were taking place now: there is no question but that you will savour them with greater pleasure... This is why sometimes I describe the locations where events took place”.³⁸¹ Through such strategies of familiarisation, claimed Geert Grote (1340-1384), founder of the Brethren of the Common Life, one could seem “almost to live in the same house with Christ and Mary”.³⁸²

In art, consciously disjunctive anachronisms and ‘anatomisms’ (regarding place rather than time – the two phenomena often intertwined) of various varieties were exercised throughout the Middle Ages with increasing frequency and flagrancy – reaching a peak of sorts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁸³ Such practices

³⁷⁹ Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele,” 18.

³⁸⁰ Marjorie O’Rourke, *Divine Domesticity: Augustine of Thagaste to Teresa of Avila* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 134; Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser, “How homly ower Lord was in hyr sowle: Julian of Norwich’s ‘Revelations’ and Margery Kempes ‘Book’ im Kontext Weiblicher Frömmigkeitsformen des Spätmittelalters,” in *Außen und Innen. Räume und ihre Symbolik im Mittelalter*, ed. Nikolaus Staubach and Vera Johanterwage (Frankfurt: Peter Lange, 2007), 299-331.

³⁸¹ Ludolph of Saxony, *The Life of Jesus Christ. Part One*, trans. Milton Walsh (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018), 17-18.

³⁸² See John van Engen, ed. and trans., *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 101-02.

³⁸³ Louis Réau, “L’Anachronisme dans l’art médiéval,” in *Mélanges d’esthétique et de science de l’art, offerts à Étienne Souriau* (Paris: Nizet, 1952), 235-43 considers clothing medieval

clearly troubled some senses of historical propriety. In Italy, for instance, Filarete wrote, “When you make a figure of a man who has lived in our own times, he should not be dressed in the antique fashion but as he was”.³⁸⁴ Indeed, these aesthetic qualms could sometimes be bound up with other suspicions concerning moral or religious decadence.³⁸⁵ Much later, in the name of Renaissance progressivism, Aby Warburg resurrected Filarete’s distastes, troubled by what he saw as the legacy of medieval anachronism – in his view, the fault of France and Flanders – lingering within hallowed fifteenth-century Italian art.³⁸⁶ Erwin Panofsky reiterated this pejorative conception in his “principle of disjunction”, a contention that the Middle Ages had “a basic inability to make what we would call ‘historical’ distinctions”.³⁸⁷

But since Panofsky, scholars such as Giles Constable, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have sought to redeem “medieval” anachronism, arguing that when wielded thoughtfully it could have a considerable capacity for effect and relevance, even generating – when sensitively allied with older conventions – powerful new artistic languages.³⁸⁸ In these early Netherlandish domestic

anachronism’s “most striking” mode, followed by architecture and ‘crypto-portraits’ in biblical scenes; he believes architectural anachronisms and “anatomisms” were particularly rife at the end of the Middle Ages. On these phenomena in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century artworks, see Alexander Nagel, “Fashion and the Now-Time of Renaissance Art,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46 (Autumn 2004): 32-52; Wood and Nagel, *Anachronic*, 85-95; Constable, “Living,” esp. 60-63.

³⁸⁴ *Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino, known as Filarete*, trans. John Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 1:306 (Book XXIII, fol. 179v).

³⁸⁵ Cf. Savonarola’s later criticisms (in the ‘Sermon on Amos 5:26’ from 1496) of artists’ painting religious subjects based on contemporary models (Pasquale Villari, *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1896), 499): “these young men go about saying of this woman and that – Here is a Magdalene, here a Virgin, there a St John; and then ye paint their faces in the churches, the which is a great profanation of Divine things... think ye that the Virgin should be painted, as ye paint her? I tell ye that she went clothed as a beggar.”

³⁸⁶ Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 135-36; 148-59.

³⁸⁷ Panofsky, *Renascences*, 84; 106.

³⁸⁸ Constable, “Living Past,” 63; Nagel, “Fashion,” 37.

interiors, it is often precisely the choreographed clash of the old and the new that has a particularly forceful visual effect, discovering, to use Nagel's words, "a contemporaneity in the past that breaks through to the present".³⁸⁹ Perhaps nowhere is the interpenetration of tradition and contemporary detail more demonstrable than in the Flémalle Group's *Salting Madonna* [2.4], where a fifteenth-century firescreen doubles as a halo – a device also used to give a visual accent in a palpably secular sense in the January miniature of the *Très Riches Heures* [2.5]. The anachronistic efforts of early Netherlandish painting may actually be most satisfactorily characterised as technically progressive revisions of established tendencies, tuned and exaggerated for special effect.

But it can be difficult to determine how exactly to consider such flagrant intrusions of secular life into early Netherlandish saintly settings – or to ascertain what or who these intrusions satisfied. Some have sought to blunt the visual impact of such wilful secularisation and downplay the explosive potential of its contemporaneity, pointing to the palpable success of this imagery within established ecclesiastical institutions. For example, scholars argue that the subsequent flourishing of this "ars nova" throughout Europe would seem to suggest no conflict with pious ideals and devotional tactics.³⁹⁰ But surely, not all the reasons for commissioning and producing these religious pictures ally with purely religious intentions; other motivations, potentially at odds with piety, may have stimulated patron or artist. However evident this possibility may be to some, it is strongly contested by other

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 33.

³⁹⁰ Schlie, *Corpus*, 247.

academics. It is this particular debate on which I wish to focus throughout this chapter.

Patrons can be elusive, and as such many fifteenth-century Netherlandish paintings were traditionally studied “as singular artefacts in a social vacuum”, from necessity rather than choice.³⁹¹ It is no easy task to specifically determine the patronage of an early Netherlandish painting executed before c.1450, let alone refine that name to a single individual, or gather enough historical evidence to recover a satisfactory social and historical context surrounding a commission.³⁹²

The *Werl Altarpiece* [2.a-c] allows us the unusual opportunity to study the commission of an important 1430s Netherlandish painting including a domestic interior setting with contemporary elements alongside an enquiry into the historical circumstances of its ecclesiastical patron. I use this singular instance to ponder wider questions about the possible social implications of aesthetic ‘choice’ and ‘value’. In this interpretative emphasis, I follow Paul Binski’s discussion in *Gothic Wonder*. He writes:

Forms – contrary to some outmoded art-historical beliefs – do not operate within a charmed space set apart from human experience... Expertises,

³⁹¹ De Rock, *Image*, 90.

³⁹² Blum, *Triptychs*, 7: “although more than one hundred extant triptychs were painted in the Netherlands during the fifteenth century, the donor and location of very few are known”. The couple in the *Arnolfini Portrait* remain insecurely identified, as do the donors in the *Mérode Altarpiece*; for summaries of the debates see, respectively, Lorne Campbell, “The Arnolfini Double Portrait,” in *Investigating Jan van Eyck*, ed. Susan Foister et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 17-24 and Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 192-201 (no. 4). A new contribution to the *Arnolfini* debate is, at time of writing (2021), to be published imminently by Jan Verheyen in the journal *Simiolus*.

techniques, even styles are not only issues of *preference*; they are also matters of *value*. Values are not simply preferences... To live according to one's values (one's 'value rationality') is to flourish, to bring one's concepts and beliefs fully into line with one's thoughts, acts and experiences. To study sympathetically what, in their eyes, once made people flourish, what benefitted them, is to engage in that process of imaginative interpretation of experience called *Verstehen*...³⁹³

Bearing this in mind, I will attend initially to the scholarly consensus on the panels' attribution, iconography and location, before proceeding to analyse the way in which such a picture may have been contracted by the patron. I then mount a longer investigation of Werl and his panels within their artistic, aesthetic, ecclesiastical and social contexts, touching on, for example, rifts within the Franciscan Order and the state of painting in Cologne. Following this, I look closely at particular features and effects within the pictures such as the mirror and the barrel vault, pondering their relevance for the patron. The final section then returns to some of the themes of the introduction, arguing that we might better appreciate the 'value' of these contemporary settings and their objects by analogy with modes of religious familiarity used by late medieval preachers, like Werl, for enhanced communicative efficacy – in effect, as a kind of recognisable, vernacular pictorial alphabet.

³⁹³ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 121-22.

By this study of the *Werl Altarpiece*, I seek to increase our “meaningful understanding” of what the commission of an altarpiece by a Netherlandish painter in 1438 with such prominent, described, ‘realistic’, interior settings might have indicated about the patron’s social and aesthetic values, and, consequently, what these kinds of settings might have signified more broadly. As a result, I hope to contribute to wider, ongoing debates about early Netherlandish realism and the late medieval introduction of secular elements into religious pictures.

Realism: sacralisation or seculariation?

First, an outline of the current interpretative debate to which I allude: it has been remarked that a major thrust of scholarship on late medieval religious art argues that increased intrusions of secular space and time were “not employed in opposition to spiritual ends, but in tandem with devotional practices”.³⁹⁴ Such a view is represented by Heike Schlie.³⁹⁵ In her study of early Netherlandish altarpieces, Schlie identifies the diametrically clashing hermeneutical disagreements between Panofsky and Otto Pächt as the origin of this “fundamental” debate which “endures today”, namely whether to read early Netherlandish pictorial ‘realism’ as evidence of a “secularisation of the sacral contents of imagery” (Pächt) or a “sacralisation of the visible world” (Panofsky).³⁹⁶ Schlie endorses the latter stance, arguing that the profane world was calculatedly sacralised by the church, wielded as a kind of ecclesiastical propaganda.³⁹⁷ Building

³⁹⁴ Nagel, “Fashion,” 37. E.g., Lüken, *Verkündigung*, 17-31.

³⁹⁵ Schlie, *Corpus*.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 246-47. Cf. de Rock, *Image*, 89; 89n19.

³⁹⁷ Schlie, *Corpus*, 254-57; 279-80.

on a thesis of Winfried Wilhelmy, Schlie proposes a model of “sacramental realism”, really a sort of ‘functional realism’, seeing the new styles of verisimilitude generated specifically in the service of the church and religious motivations, as a pictorialised transubstantiation fuelled especially by the cult of the eucharist popular in the early fifteenth century.³⁹⁸ She believes that scholars have been guilty of overstating the profane connotations of the apparently worldly elements – the realisms – included in early Netherlandish interiors, as systematically at odds with religion.³⁹⁹

However, in his study of early Netherlandish cityscapes (motifs notably most well-described in the pre-1450 period), Jelle de Rock indicates an opposing (Pächt’s) view: that although the primary religious functions of many panels cannot be overlooked, “the sacral dimension of an altarpiece or devotional diptych has often been overstated...”⁴⁰⁰ Like de Rock, I argue that such paintings were not intended to serve a spiritual purpose alone; on the contrary, by attending to the various elements constituting an indoor environment and its furnishings, I seek to bring to the surface some of the secular aspirations embedded within these works, ‘disguised’ by religious symbolism.

For instance, Chancellor Rolin, the hugely wealthy Burgundian court official, and patron of the *Hospices de Beaune*, stated in its 1443 foundation charter (facilitating Rogier van der Weyden’s *Last Judgement* for the same hospital), that his purpose

³⁹⁸ Winfried Wilhelmy, *Der altniederländische Realismus und seine Funktionen: Studien zur kirchlichen Bildpropaganda des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Münster: LIT, 1993).

³⁹⁹ Schlie, *Corpus*, 247.

⁴⁰⁰ De Rock, *Image*, 83.

was “to exchange for celestial goods temporal ones, that [he] might from divine goodness render those goods which are perishable for ones which are eternal”.⁴⁰¹ However, it remains difficult to wholly trust his pious motivations.⁴⁰² In fact, a contemporary stated that the same Chancellor was “recognised as one of the wisest men in the realm, to speak temporally,” adding, “with regard to the spiritual, I will remain silent”.⁴⁰³

My hypothesis is that such ‘religious’ realisms likely could satisfy a number of conflicting aims. And thus, we can attribute the choice of the appearance of the *Werl Altarpiece* by a Franciscan friar also to cultural circumstances, his position within society, and cosmopolitanism – his embroilment in the world and in contemporary life. Realism, I argue, bore immediately recognisable sociological connotations that were significant for religious and secular patrons alike.⁴⁰⁴ This explains the somewhat paradoxical issue as to why religious patrons and secular would commission the same kinds of paintings: was it really *all* about worship? Were their concerns *only* for the afterlife?

Schlie herself draws attention to this very issue in the case of the supremely ostentatious donor portraits frequently inhabiting early Netherlandish devotional

⁴⁰¹ Cited in Blum, *Triptychs*, 46-47.

⁴⁰² But for a nuanced approach to Rolin’s life, particularly regarding the negative views demonstrated by potentially envious contemporaries, see Laura Gelfand, “Piety, Nobility and Posterity: Wealth and the Ruin of Nicolas Rolin’s Reputation,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 1, no. 1 (2009), <https://jhna.org/articles/piety-nobility-and-posterity-wealth-ruin-nicolas-rolins-reputation/>.

⁴⁰³ Jacques Duclerq, *Mémoires*, ed. Frederic de Reiffenberg (Brussels: Lacrosse, 1823), 3:203: “Le dit chancelier fust réputé ung des sages hommes du royaume à parler temporellement; car au regard de l’espirituel, je m’en tais.”

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Calkins, “Secular,” 198.

paintings, seemingly resolving the problem by appealing to scholarly anachronism: we moderns have exaggerated the conceptual distance between sacred and secular.⁴⁰⁵ In the fifteenth century, there was really no divide at all; religious motivations were inseparable from secular ones. “The life of medieval Christendom”, wrote Huizinga, “is permeated in all aspects by religious images. There is nothing and no action that is not put in its relationship to Christ and faith”.⁴⁰⁶ However, elsewhere, Huizinga indicates a separation, taking Philip the Good as his model of fifteenth-century paradox (“one of the most striking examples of the intertwining of piety and worldliness”): in such figures we should see, rather, “a state of tension between two spiritual poles that is no longer possible for the modern mind... Two views of life took shape side by side... the piously ascetic view that pulled all ethical conceptions into itself and the worldly mentality, completely left to the devil, that took revenge with greater abandon”.⁴⁰⁷ In the end, Huizinga could not account for the temper of the period without a conceptual schema of division and contradiction between the religious and the profane.

This was for good reason. There was a strong tradition of mistrust for the *saeculum*, dating back to Augustine’s notion of the two cities, one of God (*civitas dei*), one of the earth (*civitas terrena*).⁴⁰⁸ This wariness of the ‘real world’ and all its trappings

⁴⁰⁵ Schlie, *Corpus*, 261n128; 278.

⁴⁰⁶ Huizinga, *Autumn*, 174.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴⁰⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. John O’Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 14.28 (593-94): “the earthly city was created by self-love... its wise men who live by men’s standards have pursued the goods of the body or of their mind, or of both...” See Johannes van Oort, “Civitas dei-terrena civitas: The Concept of the Two Antithetical Cities and its Sources,” in *Augustinus. De Civitate Dei*, ed. Christoph Horn (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), 157-70 and Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 5. On the negative view of the ‘world’ in scripture, note 1 John 2:16-17: “For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of

developed into a literary and ethical genre, *contemptus mundi*, the tradition of criticisms of fashion, luxury goods and ostentation – and the sin of *Superbia* (Pride) – which, as we will see, had a particular relevance in fifteenth-century Franciscan politics and aesthetics.⁴⁰⁹ The ‘world’ was suspicious; but the ‘world’ was not only outside the church walls: indeed, clergymen were increasingly at risk of vice; mendicants, especially, became disparaged for dissolute lifestyles.⁴¹⁰ This chapter therefore argues against the schema of a seamless, invisible integration of temporal and sacred life, and seeks to foreground a notion of rupture between the spiritual and profane.

Certainly, the substantially costly ecclesiastical treasures illustrated as comparative material in chapter one (gold tabernacles etc.) may seem even more guilty of such vainglories than the descriptive style of early Netherlandish paintings. However, the use of precious materials to augment the religious aura of pious objects was deeply embedded in Christian history, with scriptural licence from St John’s description of Heavenly Jerusalem in Revelations 21. It was always an artist’s sacred duty to decorate the saints. But when in such early fifteenth-century paintings explored in this chapter two, material values are apparently transposed – one should like to say sublimated – into descriptive values, and the opulent gold leaf grounds are swapped for depictions of luxurious surroundings, something is curiously, almost uneasily, revealed. In crowning the saints in the

the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.”

⁴⁰⁹ On this general topic, see Gerhard Jaritz, “*Ira Dei*, Material Culture, and Behaviour in the Late Middle Ages: Evidence from German-Speaking Europe (2001),” in *The Beauty Is in the Details: Patterns and Contexts in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judit Majorossy et al. (Budapest: Trivent, 2019), 16-28.

⁴¹⁰ Huizinga, *Autumn*, 204.

here-and-now, in bringing them nearer to a mortal state, artists somehow exposed more nakedly the worldly ambitions of the patrons. As Jacob Burckhardt wrote in his *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, “It is just when religion exercises sovereign sway... when all life seems to revolve round that centre... that life will most infallibly react upon it”.⁴¹¹

In any case, re-presenting the past in contemporary clothing was never simply a technique of devotion.⁴¹² In the mid-fifteenth-century *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, apparently the first collection of ‘novels’ (in fact short stories or tales) in French literature, the ‘newness’ is emphasised especially by a “spatio-temporal precision”, frequently providing recognisable contemporary frameworks for tales which are in fact much older, taken from other times and cultures (a substantial portion were compiled from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* – which in turn repurposes older stories – originally completed by 1353 and known in its translated French form as the *Cent nouvelles* of 1414).⁴¹³ *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* displays an exemplary case of self-conscious ‘anatopism’ as well as anachronism; by the author’s own admission it places stories apparently occurring “long ago” and “in Italy” in present-day northern localities like “Flanders, Hainault, Brabant, Picardy, Champagne, Normandy, Boulogne, Artois and Bourbon”.⁴¹⁴ Indeed, the very act of translating these texts from one language to another is already, in a sense, ‘anatopism’ and

⁴¹¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 173 (from Burckhardt’s lectures published posthumously in 1905).

⁴¹² Constable, “Living,” 63; Raymond Cormier, “The Problem of Anachronism: Recent Scholarship on the French Medieval Romances of Antiquity,” *Philological Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1974): 145-57.

⁴¹³ Daniela Ventura, *Fiction et vérité chez les conteurs de la Renaissance en France, Espagne, et Italie* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002), 42-43. E.g., Antoine de la Salle, *Les cent nouvelles nouvelles*, ed. Thomas Wright (Paris, Janet: 1858), 1:1: “In the town of Valenciennes, there lived...”

⁴¹⁴ Doutrepoint, *Littérature*, 336.

anachronism at a more profound structural level. These instructive conversions of works from Latin and foreign vernaculars had been almost programmatically carried out by figures in the employment of the French and Burgundian courts during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries like Raoul de Presles (1316-82) and Laurent de Premierfait (c.1370-1418).⁴¹⁵ This broad topic, and its potential relevance for modes of pictorial expression, must be left in a suggestive state (returned to, in part, in this chapter's final section). Evidently, to say that such calculated anachronisms and 'anatomic', geographical familiarisations were primarily the prerogative of religious thought (often the impression given by scholarship on the period) is to underrepresent what was actually a much wider phenomenon, carried out for different purposes and within various contexts.

There is another perhaps more fundamental problem with accrediting artistic realism entirely to devotional motivations or spiritual objectives, more difficult to comprehensively delineate, and which can only be touched upon here: the act of making such works of art. The basic work of the artist is that of careful visual observation. Meyer Schapiro once wrote of the *Mérode Altarpiece* mousetrap, "like the other household objects, [it] had first to be interesting as part of the extended visible world".⁴¹⁶ Surely, one cannot ascribe (all) the painstaking hours studying

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 331 (and note 504-08 for the interesting analogous phenomenon, attributable to the French and Burgundian courtly patrons in the same period, of the widespread 'prosification' of poetic texts). For an introduction to such late medieval translations, with references to the various texts classical and otherwise, see Anne Hedeman, "Translating the Past: Laurent de Premierfait and the Visualisation of Antiquity," *Viator* 42 (2011): 27-50.

⁴¹⁶ Schapiro, "Muscipula," 185.

secular everyday items – whether in the flesh or second-hand through artists’ patterns – entirely to religiosity.⁴¹⁷

The *Werl Altarpiece*: facts and questions

Scholarship on the *Werl Altarpiece* [2.1a-c] has predominantly focussed on stylistic analysis to determine the identity of the artist or artists involved. The few studies on the work to substantially address the work’s patronage have been chiefly engaged with establishing location, connections with the artist Robert Campin, gauging subsequent influence on Rhineland painting, hypothesising about the iconography of the lost central panel and, more recently, attending to the rhythms of the pictorial spaces as aids to piety.⁴¹⁸ What follows will investigate these prior contributions before setting up our arena of enquiry.

The panels have caused attributional vacillation among art historians. Scholars regularly point out the various correlations with other works. The altarpiece shares key ingredients with older ‘Flémalle Group’ interiors (see [0.2], [2.4], [2.6]): its tiled floor, wooden ceiling, shuttered windows, bench with a moveable back seen side-on, plumped cushions, fireplace, candleholder, hanging towel, vase of flowers, metal vessel, book, table and other objects; indeed, Max Friedländer thought

⁴¹⁷ On patterns and the reproduction of specific objects and motifs in early Netherlandish painters’ workshops, see Campbell, *National Gallery*, 26-28.

⁴¹⁸ E.g., Dieter Jansen, “Der kölnner Provinzial des Minoritenordens Heinrich von Werl, der Werl-Altar und Robert Campin,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 45 (1984): 7-40; Paul Pieper, “Zum Werl-Altar des Meisters von Flémalle,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 16 (1954): 87-103; Jacobs, *Opening*, 52-57.

Werl's commission may have been directly inspired by the *Mérode Altarpiece*.⁴¹⁹ The panels also strongly correspond with Rogier van der Weyden's work. Among the many parallels are: the Werl St Barbara with Rogier's *Magdalene Reading* [2.7] (from a dismembered *Virgin and Child with Saints*) and a figure in the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 1445-50); St John the Baptist's gesture with Christ in Rogier's *Miraflores Altarpiece* [1.31]; the metal ewer with Rogier's *Annunciation* [2.8].⁴²⁰ There is a deeply engrained prejudice about the *Werl Altarpiece*'s artistic insufficiency, and it is perhaps telling that even though many of these works by Rogier are often dated later than the Werl panels, the influence is said to flow from Rogier to the Werl painter somehow backwards in time. Others point out the borrowings from van Eyck.⁴²¹ These include, for instance: the florid style of the donor inscription, the round convex mirror with seat below facing parallel to the picture plane, the warm, dancing light in the Barbara panel (compare to the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10]), the shadow cast by the frame (compare to the *Ghent Altarpiece* [0.8]), and the glass carafe (compare to the *Lucca Madonna* [2.9]).

These amalgamated motifs led Lorne Campbell to name the Werl panels as "pastiche in a true sense".⁴²² One recent hypothesis is that the work was executed

⁴¹⁹ Max Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, trans. Heinz Norden (New York: Praeger, 1967-76), 2:38.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Campbell, *National Gallery*, 28; 405; Stephan Kemperdick, "Rogier van der Weyden's Workshop around 1440," in *Rogier van der Weyden in Context. Papers Presented at the 7th Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, Leuven 2009*, ed. Lorne Campbell et al. (Paris: Peeters, 2012), esp. 64-71; Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 285-90 (no. 22); Thürlemann, *Campin*, 246-50; 302-04. The rep-use of the ewer and St John's (inappropriate?) gesture have been persistent connoisseurly focuses.

⁴²¹ Cf. Kemperdick, "Rogier," 64.

⁴²² Campbell, *National Gallery*, 28.

by a painter (or painters) who trained in the atelier of the Master of Flémalle but executed the picture in Rogier's workshop.⁴²³ Others maintain the earlier hypothesis that the work comes from the orbit of the Master of Flémalle or Robert Campin.⁴²⁴

A similar view to Lynn Jacobs will be adopted in this chapter: aligning the *Werl Altarpiece* more forcefully with one particular name would not substantially alter the chapter's argument, especially because of the strong and "extraordinarily complex" connections between the two workshops (Rogier and Flémalle).⁴²⁵ Borrowing a label from Dirk de Vos, then, we will refer to the work as part of the 'Flémalle Group'.⁴²⁶

The *Werl Altarpiece's* centre panel was lost before the work was first securely recorded in the Spanish Royal Collection at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴²⁷ The Latin inscription on the left-hand panel reads in its expanded form: *Ano milleno c quater x ter et octo. hic fecit effigie[?]... [?]... de[?]ingi [?] minister*

⁴²³ Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 285-90 (no. 22). Thürlemann, *Campin*, 302-4 believes it to be by Rogier.
⁴²⁴ Cf. Borchert, *Van Eyck*, 170-71; Campbell, *National Gallery*, 28; Albert Châtelet, *Robert Campin, le Maître de Flémalle: la fascination du quotidien* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1996), 228-32 (no. 18).

⁴²⁵ Jacobs, *Opening*, 297n116.

⁴²⁶ Dirk de Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden: The Complete Works* (New York: Abrams, 1999), 73-83 on the group and 86-99 on Rogier's early career.

⁴²⁷ The first provenance information sees the panels in the *Casita del Principé*, El Escorial-Madrid in 1801 in the time of Charles IV, apparently previously in the *Palacio Real de Aranjuez*, a palace established in the time of Philip II (1527-98). The left panel's first documented extended description reads as follows (and see fn645 below): *Catalogo de los Cuadros del Real Museo de Pintura* (Madrid: Aoiz, 1858), 330 (no. 1401): "Un sacerdote. / Está en su celda, arrodillado en actitud de hacer sus oraciones. Detras esta San Juan en pie, con el agnus-dei sobre el libro de los siete sellos. Al pie se lee que se hizo retratar en esta tabla el sacerdote Enrique Werlis, magistral de Colonia, en el año 1438" (A priest. He is in his cell, kneeling in an attitude of making his prayers. Behind is St John standing, with the Agnus Dei on the book of the seven seals. At the bottom it is read that the priest Henry of Werl, master of Cologne, was portrayed in this panel in 1438.) Jansen, "Kölner," 9; 12; 36-37n9, speculates that the work was acquired in the sixteenth century by Philip II, known as a keen collector of early Netherlandish religious pictures.

henricus Werlis magister coloniensis. In the damaged interval between *effigiē* and *deiñgi* there is enough space for a word corresponding to two or three syllables with the visible contraction mark.⁴²⁸ ‘*Suam*’ with a contraction above the ‘a’ is perhaps most likely.⁴²⁹ The inscription would then read *Ano milleno c quater x ter et octo. hic fecit effigie[m] sua[m] de[p]jngi minister henricus Werlis magister coloniensis* (In the year 1438 Minister Heinrich von Werl, Master of Cologne, had his own likeness painted here).⁴³⁰

The year 1438 places the work near the end of the career of the famous Tournai painter (perhaps head of the Flémalle Group) Robert Campin (1378/9-1444) and relatively early in the career of Rogier (1399/1400-1464). The Flémalle Group is associated with commissions from the Franciscan Order and may, like Rogier, have had Cologne patrons.⁴³¹ On December 1435, the Cologne Minorites made a journey to Tournai, where there was an important Franciscan convent, receiving on 1st December an honorary gift of “12 lots de vin” from the city’s *magistrat*.⁴³² The

⁴²⁸ Problems discerning the transcription are noted in Jacobs *Opening*, 297n120; Thürlemann, *Campin*, 303. The authenticity of the letters making up the date was checked under stereomicroscope in 1981 (Johan van Asperen de Boer et al., “Underdrawing in Paintings of the Rogier van der Weyden and Master of Flémalle Groups,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 41 (1990): 117).

⁴²⁹ One should perhaps also consider *veram* or *vivam*.

⁴³⁰ See p185-86 below for more on the inscription.

⁴³¹ A Flémalle Group portrait of an untitled man in a Franciscan brown cloak (National Gallery, London, 1432) (Campbell, *National Gallery*, 80-2). See p169-71 below, for a Flémalle Group commission involving a Franciscan friar in 1438. Note the argument that links the *Mérove Altarpiece* with the Engelbrechts or Ymbrechts family of Cologne (see Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 192-201, esp. 197 (no. 4)) and the hypothesis that Robert Campin painted the original series of Classical Men and Sibyls (known through fifteenth-century woodcut copies) for nearby Münster Cathedral (see Thürlemann, *Campin*, 141-54). Rogier’s *Columba Altarpiece* was likely made for St Columba church in Cologne during the 1450s (see Stephan Kemperdick, “I Tableau à II Hysseoirs – A Panel with Two Wing Altarpieces with and without Foldable Wings at the Time of Rogier van der Weyden,” in Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 130).

⁴³² Adolphe Hocquet, “Le Maître de Flémalle; quelques documents,” *Annales de l’Académie Royale d’Archéologie de Belgique* 73 (1925): esp. 11-17 (13-14 for the document), who draws attention to the frequent interchange between Cologne and Tournai during the 1430s and hypothesises about Werl’s connections with the Congress of Arras in 1435.

altarpiece could have been commissioned on this occasion.⁴³³ It is perhaps worth mentioning, however, that Werl's provincial domain had custody of Brabant and therefore Brussels (Rogier had settled in Brussels before 21 October 1435), whereas Tournai came under the custody of Arras in the French province.⁴³⁴

The altarpiece's left-hand panel [2.1b] is framed by a thin archway giving onto a space in which both side walls are present. It depicts Werl in his Franciscan habit and scholar's cap, praying in a tall, slim, barrel-vaulted chamber, attended by John the Baptist with a lamb on a closed book; between them a cushioned bench is just visible. The cord of Werl's habit has a life of its own, lying on the inscription shelf, its tassel jutting out in trompe-l'oeil just above his surname as if in gesticulation. The chamber is rendered semi-inaccessible, cut in half by a head-high wooden partition, on which hangs a circular convex mirror. Its miniaturised reflection beckons closer scrutiny: it shows two Franciscan friars approaching from an unseen part of the picture behind the beholder (see [2.32]). A stylistically sensitive stone statue of the Virgin and Child ("that can unhesitatingly be ascribed on formal grounds to the third quarter of the fourteenth century") is set upon the far wall above an enigmatic open cupboard or door, only the top of which is seen above the partition.⁴³⁵ On the left wall, below panes of stained glass showing coats of arms, the artist paints open windows seen obliquely, and through them can be glimpsed a well-ordered walled garden and a landscape with distant structures, including a

⁴³³ Pieper, "Werl-Altar," 96.

⁴³⁴ Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, "Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th Century" (2019), accessed May 23 2021, <http://users.bart.nl/~roestb/franciscan/province.htm#ProvinceofCologne>.

⁴³⁵ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 25.

church with connecting buildings. Werl is kneeling on grey stone steps in front of an open door which would lead, in a manner evocative of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, directly into a centre panel, had it survived.⁴³⁶ His eyes are tautly open and intent on whomever and whatever was once depicted therein.

The painter used a dissimilar interior architecture for the right-hand panel [2.1c]. The floor tiles are a warm red and the ceiling is flat and beamed. St Barbara is depicted sitting on a long, cushioned bench with adjustable backrest placed in front of a crackling fire with ornate firedogs, capped by a stone statue of the Trinity. Her head is uncovered to mark her as a virgin saint and she sports a beautiful, flowing, folding ensemble of garments, coloured green and blue, the cloth touched with gold. Finely painted objects – an elaborate ewer and plate, a hanging towel, a glass carafe, a metal jug holding an iris – and their strong shadows surround Barbara, but she shows no regard, being absorbed within the book she holds up to read. The painting's pronounced recession lines converge on a window, its shutters thrown wide open, letting the light of the day mingle with the glow of the fire in a virtuoso synthesis of exterior and interior atmospheres. Outside, Barbara's attribute, a tower, is being built by men at work in a green landscape using scaffolding and stone (see [2.34]). Three well-dressed figures, a man and two women, congregate before it; the man seems to gesticulate towards the building project. Beyond, we see a city's spires with rising mountains, soaring birds, and wisps of clouds, all set against the hazy yellow-blue-white of a distant stratosphere.

⁴³⁶ Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish*, 2:39: Werl is described as “peering into the sanctuary of the centre panel”.

We may never know what the centre panel looked like or what the subject was. Since Barbara appears to share her room-space with the central panel, the most believable hypothesis is, rather than a depiction of the Annunciation, a Virgin and Child, perhaps in the guise of a *Virgo inter virgines*.⁴³⁷ X-radiography of the panels has detected an image that once adorned the exterior of the altarpiece but has since been painted over [2.10]. The outline indicates a Virgin, Child and St Anne (a so-called *Anna Selbdritt*) in a style incommensurate with the Flémalle Group, the composition and colouring perhaps suggesting a Westphalian hand from the later fifteenth century.⁴³⁸ The additional *Anna Selbdritt* would have cohered with the Marian iconographies assumed for the lost centre panel.

There are various surviving drawings after lost works connected with the Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden workshops that give some impression of how the central panel, if it was a Marian interior, may have looked [2.11-13]. Some decades ago, John Ward used elements of the Werl panels to propose a hypothetical design for a lost work attributed to Rogier which would have included the National Gallery's *Magdalene Reading* fragment [2.7].⁴³⁹ A mysterious shadow cast by an unknown object – or possibly the frame – appears in the left foreground of the Barbara panel, indicating that a strong light source falls from somewhere to the left

⁴³⁷ Jansen, "Kölner," 28-31 and Jacobs, *Opening*, 52-57 argue for an Immaculate Conception; Jakoby, "Einfluß," 212-13 and Pieper, "Werl-Altar," 100 argue for an Annunciation; Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 287-88 (no. 22) argues for a *Virgo inter Virgines* and notes that St John must commend the donor to one higher up the saintly ranking than he – hence a Virgin and Child of some kind.

⁴³⁸ Carmen Garrido, "The Campin Group Paintings in the Prado," in Foister, *Campin*, 59-60; see Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 288 (no. 22) for more commentary. Interestingly, a Provincial Chapter was held in Cologne on St Anne's day in 1440, two years after the picture's completion (see p186 below).

⁴³⁹ John Ward, "A Proposed Reconstruction of an Altarpiece by Rogier van der Weyden," *Art Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (1971): 27-35 and cf. Campbell, *National Gallery*, 392-406. For the connection between the Werl Barbara and the Magdalene, see fn420 above.

of the panel. Whether actually from the centre panel or in fact from outside the picture (perhaps synthesising with the real light of a physical window on the viewer's side), we cannot know. The shadow may indicate that the setting continued across the panel boundary, as in the *Ghent Altarpiece* [0.8].⁴⁴⁰ But the potential iconography of the central panel is not our chief concern.

I will briefly cover the problem of original location, because it is important to the chapter's argument. It is highly likely the triptych functioned as an altarpiece.⁴⁴¹ The size of each of the side panels is 101x47cm, implying a central panel of roughly 101x94cm or more (assuming that it was simply a triptych, not a multi-panel polyptych). This would make the work comparatively large among the Flémalle Group altarpieces.⁴⁴² The Werl panels were presumably intended for a public, ecclesiastical setting rather than a private, domestic one.⁴⁴³ Rogier's *Middelburg Altarpiece* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1450), believed to have been made for the church of St Peter and Paul in Middelburg, is 93.5 cm tall and his *Columba Altarpiece* (see [2.26]), which may have adorned Johann Rinck's Chapel of the Virgin, in Cologne's St Columba church, measures 138 cm in height.⁴⁴⁴

In its hypothetical manner, the mirror with the two reflected mendicant friars suggests that at the very least the work's original beholders circulated in a location

⁴⁴⁰ On the ingenuity of this device, see Kemp "Realismus," 477-79.

⁴⁴¹ Jansen, "Kölner," 20-27 also drew attention to the work's "epitaph character" mentioning resemblances to wall-mounted stone memorials.

⁴⁴² Compare with the *Mérode Altarpiece* dimensions [0.2] or the *Seilern Triptych* (Courtauld Art Gallery, c.1410-20), whose central panel is 60x48.9cm.

⁴⁴³ Jacobs, *Opening*, 52-53.

⁴⁴⁴ On the *Columba Altarpiece*, see Kemperdick, "I Tableau," 130. On Bladelin and his commission, see Blum, *Triptychs*, 17-27. The size is also equivalent to Rogier's *Annunciation* [2.8].

in which Franciscans potentially had a presence. Even though the general scholarly consensus places the altarpiece in Cologne, the Franciscan convent at Osnabrück in Westphalia, where Werl retreated in the early 1460s just before he died, is a possible location.⁴⁴⁵ Might he have brought the picture with him? We should note the comments of an eighteenth-century biographer: “at length [Werl] breathed life into his convent at Osnabrück, which he had prominently embellished with treasures and relics. But now alas the heretics possess them”.⁴⁴⁶ Paul Pieper noted resemblances between the *Werl Altarpiece* and consequent local examples: the Annunciation from the *Schöppingen Altarpiece* [2.14] and *Liesborn Annunciation* [2.15]. Both Schöppingen and Liesborn are situated in upper Westphalia along with Osnabrück, whereas Cologne is in lower Westphalia.⁴⁴⁷

Even so, Cologne, centre and seat of Werl’s provincial domain, is still perhaps the picture’s likeliest initial abode, conceivably the Minorite church today named *St Mariä Empfängnis* (Mary of the Immaculate Conception) at *Kolpingplatz*, house of the city’s Conventual Franciscans.⁴⁴⁸ As the province’s chief convent, this was the usual seat of its Provincial Minister.⁴⁴⁹ What’s more, the city’s name – *colon* – is a prominent part of the painting’s inscription.

⁴⁴⁵ For hypotheses about its location in Cologne, its environs, and in Osnabrück, see Pieper, “Werl-Altar,” 90-96; Jansen, “Kölner,” 10-15 – the latter noting (10) that the Osnabrück *Minoritenkirche* was probably too small to have housed this relatively substantial altarpiece.

⁴⁴⁶ Vinzenz von Berg, *Ratiocinium Juventutis Franciscanae sive Disquisitiones Historico-Theologicae...* (Cologne: Jacobum Meyner, 1740), 325: “... provinciam vero egregie gessit annis 32 tandem efflavit animam in conventu suo osnabrugensi quem clenodiis et cimeliis insignier auxit. At modo pro dolor eundem possident haeretici...”

⁴⁴⁷ Pieper, “Werl-Altar,”; Jansen, “Kölner,” 33; Jakoby, “Einfluß,” 211. But see Daniel Levine, “‘St Jerome in his Cell’ and the Chronology of Stefan Lochner’s Work,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 58 (1997): 215-18 on the Werl panels’ possible immediate influence on Stefan Lochner in Cologne.

⁴⁴⁸ On the architecture and artwork of the Cologne convent, see Paul Clemen, *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Köln* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1929), 2:397-436.

⁴⁴⁹ Konrad Eubel, *Geschichte der kölnischen Minoriten-Ordensprovinz* (Cologne: Boisserée, 1906), 49.

Interestingly, an early Franciscan historian remarked that Werl's likeness was recognisably depicted in the "windows of our sacristy of Cologne".⁴⁵⁰ A more recent historian added that Werl's "portrait was painted on a sacristy window together with that of another [Duns] Scotus commentator, Johannes, who lived in Cologne in the fifteenth century".⁴⁵¹ How long the window portrait remained visible is uncertain.⁴⁵² No such portraits in the sacristy windows are described in the detailed account of the church made prior to its ruin during World War Two.⁴⁵³ The convent church still contains the tomb of the famous Franciscan scholastic theologian, John Duns Scotus (c.1265-1308), who spent time at the school of Cologne between 1307 and 1308. Werl's biographer notes that the friar was a *Skotist*, meaning a follower of Duns Scotus; and Werl wrote a treatise on the Immaculate Conception, an important 'Scotist' topic, at some point before the first manuscript surviving which is dated 1444.⁴⁵⁴ As a devoted 'Scotist', Werl may conceivably have wanted to place his painted effigy near to the famous scholastic's tomb. The architectural evidence suggests that Scotus' tomb was originally placed at the church's north-eastern corner and that the sacristy was adjacent, reachable via a few stone steps.

⁴⁵⁰ Joannes Sbaraleae, *Supplementum et Castigatio ad Scriptores trium Ordinum S. Francisci a Waddingo...* (Rome: S. Michaelis ad Ripam, 1806), 340: "cuius effigies adhuc cernitur depicta in fenestris sacrarii nostri Coloniensis".

⁴⁵¹ Patricius Schlager, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der kölnischen Franziskaner-Ordensprovinz im Mittelalter* (Cologne: Bachem, 1904), 241: "... Werl, dessen bild zusammen mit dem eines anderen im 15. Jahrhundert in Köln lebenden Scotuserklärers Johannes auf einem Sakristeifenster gemalt war."

⁴⁵² Willibrord Lampen, "Fratres Minores in Universitate Coloniensi," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 23 (1930): 475, notes there was "once" such a portrait; cf. Jansen, "Kölner," 11-12.

⁴⁵³ Clemen, *Kunstdenkmäler*, 2:397-436.

⁴⁵⁴ Sophronius Clasen, "Heinrich von Werl O.Min., ein deutscher Skotist. Beiträge zu seinem Leben und seine Schriften," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 10 (1943): 66-67.

It may be that the Flémalle altarpiece was intended for an altar close to both the tomb and the sacristy window accommodating Werl's other likeness. We know that the Cologne convent possessed altars dedicated to the two depicted saints, Barbara and John the Baptist, endowed respectively in 1337 and 1314.⁴⁵⁵ The convent also featured a prominent fourteenth-century representation of St Barbara in the Crucifixion painted on the east wall [2.16]; situated in an arcaded pictorial tabernacle of sorts, proffering her tower, she immediately flanks the central scene of Christ's passion with its diminutive donor figures.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, the formal composition of the *Werl Altarpiece*, with donors and saints fanning out from a central scene, would, if it was located in the Cologne Minorite church, have conceivably evoked – *translated* even – the appearance of these earlier pictures in the same building, with St Barbara's shrine elaborated and modernised into a contemporary room.⁴⁵⁷

The work's presence in the Cologne convent must remain conjectural. Destroyed by fire in the Second World War with the vaults and parts of the nave lost, the church was reconstructed by the Kolping Society in 1958 and again in an extensive refurbishment in 2009-10 [2.17]. No evidence from the surviving building records indicates that the altarpiece was physically present.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ Eubel, *Geschichte*, 38; 40, who mentions (39) a St Anne altar endowed in the later fifteenth century (as noted, a later hand likely added a St Anne to the triptych's exterior).

⁴⁵⁶ For the earlier paintings, see Paul Clemen, *Die gotischen Monumentalmalereien der Rheinlande* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1930), 222-26 (fig. 234-35).

⁴⁵⁷ Jansen, "Kölner," 22 hints at a similar proposal.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

However, given what we know about Werl and his position within the religious and social relations of his day, this chapter is above all interested in assessing the choice of the domestic setting and its particular portrayal. When he first published the painting in the nineteenth century, Hugo von Tschudi presumed that to commission such a work at this date, Werl must have been a man of some sophistication: “the altar that he donated here is a living testimony not so much to his piety as above all to his refined taste in art”.⁴⁵⁹ We can go further; Werl’s picture appears to have been a particularly exhibitionist, self-regarding commission, an early instance of a German patron’s purchase of a Netherlandish picture in this fashionable style, and, in view of the specificity of the motifs, plausibly configured with his input.

The interior setting should be regarded as a deliberate decision for a further reason. X-radiography witnesses that the whole composition of the left-hand panel formerly showed a “highly elaborate” landscape setting with “cloudy skies, mountains, woodland and bridges”.⁴⁶⁰ Even if the panel’s commission or patron switched during the painting, this is still evidence of a very conscious change of direction – from landscape to interior. As well as opting for the style, Werl must have actively wanted an interior scene. The domestic setting was not a small portion of a larger ensemble, as was formerly the more established practice, but rather took up substantial proportions of the triptych’s interior panels – indeed perhaps the setting covered the entire ensemble, assuming the centre panel

⁴⁵⁹ Hugo von Tschudi, “Der Meister von Flémalle,” *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 19 (1896): 21.

⁴⁶⁰ Garrido, “Campin Group,” 57-58.

maintained the same or a similar location.⁴⁶¹ If the work was indeed an altarpiece fashioned to adorn a side chapel in a Franciscan church in Werl's Rhineland province in 1438, as seems highly likely, its contemporary flavour must have made a strong visual and theological statement – bringing the recognisable urban world forcefully into the ecclesiastical space, planting a house of man in the house of God.

Stipulations “a présent”

As we noted in the thesis introduction, during the first half of the fifteenth century especially, panel paintings likely were more commonly tailored to individual patrons – especially compared with the products of later decades made for mass market – incorporating particular motifs, coats of arms and inscriptions. It is regularly assumed – but not often explicitly proven – that fifteenth-century patrons stipulated contemporary details in contracts with artists.⁴⁶² It is highly possible that Werl made certain recommendations to the artist concerning the painting's appearance. Franciscans customarily collaborated with Netherlandish painters' workshops. In 1431 friar Martin de Coulogne drew up a vernacular *vita* of St Margaret based on the Latin texts, in order to instruct an image cycle by the painter Mathieu Fournier for the parish of Sainte-Marguerite in Tournai.⁴⁶³ In 1438, the year of our altarpiece, the Flémalle Group painter Robert Campin

⁴⁶¹ Cf. an (earlier?) example of a well-described contemporary domestic interior painting for a religious context: Upper Rhenish Master, *Doubt of St Joseph* (Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame Strasbourg, dated – insecurely – c.1410-20 or c.1430), which likely occupied a compartment of a now-lost larger altarpiece, probably for Strasbourg's Dominican Convent of St Mark; see Philippe Lorentz ed., *Strasbourg 1400. Un foyer d'art dans l'Europe gothique*, exh. cat. (Strasbourg: Éditions des Musées de la Ville, 2008), 164 (no. 22).

⁴⁶² But see Lüken, *Verkündigung*, 24-25, citing contracts c.1500.

⁴⁶³ Stephan Kemperdick, “The Workshop and its Materials,” in Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 102

provided a design for canvases depicting the passion of St Peter, which Campin based on a vernacular life written by one of the Tournai Franciscans.⁴⁶⁴

Beyond these advisory relationships, we know that commissions for Franciscan churches could be detailed in their iconographic demands, as in the 1434 contract for a painted altarpiece by Ghent painter Saladin de Stoevere. Two shutters and a polychromed statue were ordered for the city's Minorite church.⁴⁶⁵ The work was financed and potentially masterminded by Willem du Buisson, a wealthy merchant from Douai, who in 1434 had a chapel built for his family in the church of the Order of the Friars Minor Conventual in Ghent.⁴⁶⁶ Erik Verroken postulates that Saladin may even have been apprenticed to Campin's Tournai workshop, which, if it were the case, would suggest a possible direct connection with the painter of the *Werl Altarpiece*.⁴⁶⁷ Saladin's contract incorporates many directions on colour and gilding, but also specifies particular materials (some clearly contemporary). For instance, the mantles of the Virgin, and saints John, James and Catherine are to "imitate pearls and precious stones"; St Catherine's sleeves are to be of "fine azure blue in imitation of damask cloth"; St James' pilgrim's staff is to be "like natural wood".⁴⁶⁸ St Catherine's mantle is to be "lined with ermine fur", her chaperon "den dusijnt" – which the nineteenth-century transcriber notes as a modish

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.; Thürlemann, *Campin*, 357-8 (doc. 64).

⁴⁶⁵ Edmond de Busscher, *Recherches sur les peintres Gantois des XIVe et XVe siècles: indices primordiaux de l'emploi de la peinture à l'huile à Gand* (Ghent: Hebbelynck, 1860), 28-32. On the artist, see Erik Verroken, "Saladin de Stoevere (ca. 1397-1474) een Gents schilder in Oudenaarde," in *Handelingen van de Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Oudenaarde, van zijn Kastelnij en van den Lande tusschen Maercke en Ronne* 43 (2006): 37-63.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 44-49.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁶⁸ De Busscher, *Recherches*, 29: "ghelije perlen ende ghesteente"; "van finen aijsuere, ghelije lakin van damast"; "ghelije den haute".

accoutrement of fifteenth-century headgear – the male donor’s clothing “of marten fur” and the child donor’s lined with “weasel fur”.⁴⁶⁹

Although the contract does not specifically detail settings, it is revealing of the kinds of instructions that Werl might have passed to his painter with a view to introducing up-to-date secular references. Especially notable is the fact that saints like St Catherine seem just as fashionably appointed as the donor figures, thereby both are directly implicated in the same world and the same time. In fact, Werl’s St Barbara – although largely attired in an archaic manner – shows a flash of grey fur, perhaps squirrel, in her mantle lining.⁴⁷⁰

One especially eloquent surviving contract (usually only briefly cited rather than analysed) may help us to determine how such vernacular constituents of a fifteenth-century Netherlandish interior *setting* might have been specified or conceived in a work made for a clerical patron, though not Franciscan. It is an agreement dated 1448 with the sculptor Riquart de Valenciennes for a carved altarpiece for the Abbey of Flines, a Cistercian nunnery then in the Burgundian territories on the border between the counties of Flanders and Artois, not far from Tournai.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 29: “ghevoedert ghelije bonten”; “ghevoedert ghelije martens”; “ghevoedert ghelije vissen”; for note see 32.

⁴⁷⁰ On the various furs popular in the later Middle Ages, see Elspeth Veale, “VII. Fashions in Fur,” in *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (London: London Record Society, 2003), 133-55. In *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol38/pp133-155>.

⁴⁷¹ Pinchart, *Archives*, 1:42-7; referenced in Campbell, “Art Market,” 192-93.

The descriptions of scenes portraying the Crucifixion and Infancy of Christ suggest that there were two criteria motivating and influencing the contents of a setting: iconographic convention and the (geographically specific) life of the present day.⁴⁷² In the rustic “shed” of the Nativity, there was to be “a beautiful and rich bed interlaced at the bedside... well and artificially trimmed in such a way that is at present done in the beds of lords and burghers”, with “an adjoining chair of the kind that are made in Brabant and Flanders and several other places” (note that Brabant is some way from Flines); another compartment showed an Annunciation where the Virgin was to be shown kneeling in front of an altar with her book in front of her on a “folding chair” (*faudosteul* – customarily used by fifteenth-century persons of high status), “which one calls a little oratory, covered by a cloth of gold done as well as possible”; nearby there was to appear “a vase of lilies which is put there out of tradition” (*de coustume*); “the whole” was to be made well and “after the living example”.⁴⁷³ This last notion, *après le vif*, is difficult to fully define. It was traditionally presumed to mean ‘from life’, as one would make a modern portrait, but more recently Noa Turel has proposed that *vif* should be read more rhetorically as ‘aliveness’, ‘liveliness’ or similar.⁴⁷⁴ This would justify the obvious impossibility of the execution of a Virgin Annunciate ‘from life’ – also surely supposed to comprise part of “the whole” (*le tout*).

⁴⁷² Pointed out by Reynolds, “Reality,” 183.

⁴⁷³ Pinchart, *Archives*, 1:44-45: “... et en icelle grange faire la manière d'une belle et riche couche entretailée au quavech [chevet]... bien et facticement entretailée, ainsi quant par telle manière que a présent on fait les couches des seigneurs et bourgeois” [...] “fourmé la manière d'une quayère appoyaire [chaise d'appui, fauteuil], de telle façon que on les fait en Brabant et en Flandres et en plusieurs aultres lieux” [...] “une Annunciacion, en laquelle sera Nostre-Dame à genoux pardevant ung autel, son livre devant luy, sur ung faudosteul [fauteuil] que nous disons ung petit oratoire, couvert d'un drap d'or, le mieulx ouvret que faire se porra... le pot à fleur de lys que de coustume on y fait, et le tout bien et gentement fait et après le vif” (square brackets from nineteenth-century editor). See “Oratoire” and “Fauteuil,” in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (DMF 2020)*, <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/oratoire1>; <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/fauteuil>.

⁴⁷⁴ Turel, *Living*, esp. 1-16, chiefly concerned with *au vif* (to liveliness).

What is more, the vase that is to be placed in the painting due to iconographic precedent (*de coustume*), attended by conventional symbolic associations, along with the figures and the furniture (the *faudosteul*), is also to be endowed with a “liveliness”. It is “the whole”, i.e., not just the animate content but also the subsidiary inanimate elements, that is to be *fait après le vif*. Whereas making a figure lively could relate to realistic physiognomic characterisation or animated physicality, one possible mode of enlivening an inanimate item must have been to base it, as the bed and chair, on recognisable examples (*des seigneurs et bourgeois*) from the geographically specific world (*Brabant et en Flandres*) of the present day (*a présent*).⁴⁷⁵ We know that artists of the Flémalle Group based at least some of their pictorial contents on specific, real-life precedents. Sometimes the same object can be traced throughout works, presumably evidence of different painters studying identical or similar objects.⁴⁷⁶ The *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] and the Brussels *Annunciation* [2.6] appear to capture the same majolica pitcher from alternative angles; the Louvre *Annunciation* [2.8] and *Werl Altarpiece* [2.1c] depict what is probably the same brass ewer using another viewpoint.⁴⁷⁷

This notional reconciliation of iconographic convention and the contemporary world in the contract’s described vase is especially significant for our argument, showing how artists dressed old symbols in new, socially connotative clothing.

⁴⁷⁵ See also Pinchart, *Archives*, 46 for further historical and geographical determinates in the same contract, e.g., “selon le temps demi-ancien”, “d’un capperon bourbonnoix”, etc. (in the altarpiece’s Adoration).

⁴⁷⁶ Campbell, *National Gallery*, 26-27.

⁴⁷⁷ Ellen Callmann, “Campin’s Maiolica Pitcher,” *Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1982): 629-31; Thürlemann, *Campin*, 246-50. Cf. Celia Fisher, “Floral Motifs and the Problem of a Campin Workshop,” in Foister, *Campin*, 117-22.

Werl must have had a sensitivity to the clash of the old and the new. He was himself a kind of living, breathing iconographic convention: the friar's habit was a pronounced visual archaism, worn as a symbol of contempt for worldly fashions – “poor clothing” harking back to the time of the apostles.⁴⁷⁸ Thus his decision to locate himself and his saintly protagonists in the *present* day appears even more motivated. Indeed, it is highly plausible that considerable portions of the *Werl Altarpiece* were deliberately requested or negotiated by the patron with these connotations in mind, leading one to speculate how Werl may have perceived such pictorial elements, what purposes his deliberate choice of this vocabulary may have served and how such a picture must have compared to typical Cologne painting of the same decade.⁴⁷⁹

Magister and Minister: Werl and his altarpiece in their religious and artistic contexts

A thorough understanding of the considerable tensions underpinning Werl's life and work will help us appreciate the panels, especially their choice of the well-furnished interior setting, within the particular historical environment.

Heinrich von Werl was born c.1400 in Werl, Westphalia, and died in the convent of Osnabrück on 10th of April 1464.⁴⁸⁰ He matriculated at the University of Cologne

⁴⁷⁸ Constable, “Living,” 70 notes that in their habits, monks and friars were “living anachronisms, in place but out of time”, and must have seemed as “anomalous” to medieval contemporaries as to us today.

⁴⁷⁹ On negotiations and complaints in fifteenth-century commissions, see Campbell, “Art Market,” 193-94.

⁴⁸⁰ For Werl's life I have relied on these three articles (the first already cited): Clasen, “Heinrich... Beiträge,” 61-72 and “Heinrich von Werl O.Min., ein deutscher Skotist. Beiträge zu seinem Leben

in 1430 and received his promotion as Doctor of Theology probably in early 1435.⁴⁸¹ This was unusual: he was one of only nine Minorites to matriculate at the university between 1400 and 1462.⁴⁸² Like many Franciscans, he was an advocate for papal authority. In the circles of ecclesiastical power at the Council of Basel, this branded him as a controversial figure: he wrote a polemical tract in support of the papacy in 1441 which was read at the Council after it had moved to Florence.⁴⁸³ It went against the fashion at Cologne University, where most condoned conciliar authority.⁴⁸⁴ He was certainly well-known at the Council, but it is not established whether he ever attended in person.⁴⁸⁵

From the summer of 1432, Werl was chosen as Minister Provincial of the Cologne province of Franciscans. He had jurisdiction over seven *Kustodien* and 51 convents and remained provincial head for over thirty years.⁴⁸⁶ During the 1430s and 1440s, there were persistent issues about the preservation of the unity of the Order, and a divisive rift developed between Werl's Conventual, city-dwelling Franciscans and the austere Observants or Spirituals who adhered to strict poverty, classically living

und seine Schriften (Schluß),” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 11 (1944): 67-71, with additional information in “Walram von Siegburg, O. F. M. und seine Doktorpromotion an der Kölner Universität (1430-1435),” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 45 (1952): 114-26 – the latter not usually referenced in the art historical literature. Cf. Kurt Ruh, “Heinrich von Werl,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 3:919-23; Sophronius Clasen, “Heinrich von Werl,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 8 (1969), 430-31, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz29317.html>. A recent evaluation of Werl's career is: Ralf Michael Nickel, “Zwischen Stadt, Territorium und Kirche: Franziskus' Söhne in Westfalen bis zum Beginn des dreißigjährigen Krieges” (PhD Diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2007), 124-25; 192-95.

⁴⁸¹ Clasen, “Walram,” 115.

⁴⁸² Schlager, *Beiträge*, 234.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 241-2.

⁴⁸⁴ Clasen, “Heinrich... Beiträge,” 70-72.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:67. Cf. Joachim Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel, and the Secular and Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire...* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 108-12.

⁴⁸⁶ Clasen, “Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß),” 67; “Walram,” 122.

itinerant lives labouring in the countryside, and possessing their own convents.⁴⁸⁷ The main problem was property: the *Ad Statum* passed on 23rd August 1430 by Pope Martin V allowed the Conventuals to “retain and enjoy any kind of property, real or personal, on the condition that it legally belonged to the holy see”.⁴⁸⁸ This was problematic for the Observants’ philosophy, and the debate frustrated hopes of union between the two factions. Despite the traditional authority of the Conventuals, the Observants now grew in power and influence, spurred by charismatic preachers such as San Bernadino and Giovanni da Capestrano. Active in the Cologne province, they aimed to convert Conventuals along with their convents.⁴⁸⁹

One scholar judged Werl’s ministership an especially troubling time for the Cologne Franciscans.⁴⁹⁰ Many Conventuals at that time wished to keep the German Observance movement from spreading.⁴⁹¹ Although Werl appears to have had initial sympathies with some tenets of the Observance movement, and his actions – particularly in his first years as Minister – may even have enabled its development, the in-fighting must have cast a shadow over Werl’s career.⁴⁹² In time, Werl became staunchly opposed to the administrative autonomy of the Observant foundations and the effect it had on the disunity of the Order.⁴⁹³ In fact,

⁴⁸⁷ See John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 441-78; John Hofer, *St. John Capistran: Reformer*, trans. Patrick Cummins (St Louis: Herder, 1943), 29-30; 72-95; Michael Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 202-12.

⁴⁸⁸ Robson, *Franciscans*, 208.

⁴⁸⁹ Schlager, *Beiträge*, 129; 146-47.

⁴⁹⁰ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 67-68.

⁴⁹¹ Hofer, *Capistran*, 94.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 2:70; "Walram," 122-24.

⁴⁹³ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 70; Ludovic Viallet, *Les sens de l'observance: enquête sur les réformes Franciscaines entre l'Elbe et l'Oder, de Capistran à Luther (vers 1450-vers 1520)* (Münster: LIT, 2014), 99-110.

in 1457 Werl managed to convert the Göttingen convent, previously lost to the Observants, back to the Conventual fold.⁴⁹⁴ The length of habit was a particular point of contention in the Order, a visual demonstration of the rift between the austere Spirituals and Werl's Conventuals. A study of the history of such sartorial conflicts observes: "the characteristic short and narrow habits of the Spirituals endangered both the Franciscan 'brand' and the institution itself".⁴⁹⁵ In a later tract from the beginning of the 1450s attributed to Werl, condoning obedience within the Order, the shortness of Observants' habits forms one of the six main points of contention.⁴⁹⁶ (It is interesting, in this regard, that in the picture Werl wears a particularly long, flowing habit, and perhaps, relatedly, that St John wears an especially short garment.⁴⁹⁷)

The most outspoken figure of the Observance movement during Werl's lifetime was the Italian Giovanni da Capestrano (1386-1456), Apostolic Commissary for the Observance from 1430 to 1438.⁴⁹⁸ Capestrano appears to have had amicable relations with Werl, at least initially, as is clear from a surviving letter addressed to Werl dated 1443, praising the Cologne friar's treatise on the defence of the faith among other things.⁴⁹⁹ However, during the same era, Capestrano also preached with vehemence against luxury and ostentation. A contemporary biographer Nicolaus de Fara records him advocating for "a return to former modesty in

⁴⁹⁴ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 69. Cf. Schlager, *Beiträge*, 147.

⁴⁹⁵ Alejandra Sahli, "The Meaning of the Habit: Religious Orders, Dress and Identity, 1215-1650" (PhD diss., UCL, 2017), 227-75 (231).

⁴⁹⁶ Viallet, *Sens*, 103.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. the length in Rogier van der Weyden's St John Altarpiece.

⁴⁹⁸ Vincent Fitzgerald, *Saint John Capistran* (New York: Longmans, Green: 1911), 34-35.

⁴⁹⁹ See Gedeon Gál et al., eds., "A Provisional Calendar of St. John Capistran's Correspondence," *Franciscan Studies* 49 (1989): 308 (no. 164). Cf. Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 68.

correcting the excessive style of dress, both of men and women, especially their head-gear”.⁵⁰⁰ His pronouncements were part of a broader pattern of anti-luxury sentiment in the mendicant Orders, and related events and writings, in the years immediately preceding, maybe even coinciding, with the production of the *Werl Altarpiece*.⁵⁰¹

In his *Tractatus generalis de usu cuiuscumque ornatus*, produced c.1434-37, Capestrano left a statement of his views on visual culture, ostentation and aesthetics.⁵⁰² Structured in seven questions, the treatise emphasised the need for *convenientia* or suitability in ornamentation. Capestrano rails against indecorousness and superfluosity in preciousness, pleasingness and curiosity.⁵⁰³ In this he reflects the will of St Francis who promoted Holy Simplicity

⁵⁰⁰ Mary Allies, *Three Catholic Reformers of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Burns and Oates, 1878), 193. Note the painting (Sebald Bopp?, Historisches Museum Bamberg, 1470-80) commemorating a bonfire of the vanities (with especially visible women’s headgear, high-heeled shoes, artificial hair and ornamental pins) in front of a preaching Capestrano in Bamberg city square May 15 and 20th 1452.

⁵⁰¹ Giovanni da Capestrano, *S Giovanni da Capestrano Trattato degli Ornamenti Specie delle Donne*, trans. Aniceto Chiappini (Siena: Cantagalli: 1956), 9-10 (translator’s introduction). Due to the publication’s rareness, I have only been able to consult this introduction. My thanks to Ang Li for its supply.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 173 and following for subtitles for some of the individual sections covered by the treatise, cited in Gerhard Jaritz, “Von der Objektkritik bis zur Objektzerstörung. Methoden und Handlungsspielräume im Spätmittelalter,” in *Bilder und Bildersturm im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Bob Scribner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990), 37: “Del superfluo rispetto alla preziosità, rispetto alla superfluità dei piaceri, rispetto alla curiosità, rispetto alla ricamature, frappe, e simili, rispetto alla curiosità dell’utente, rispetto alla grandezza delle vesti, rispetto alla loro molteplicità, rispetto all’onestà quanto agli uomini, rispetto all’onestà quanto alle donne, rispetto al coloramento dei capelli, rispetto alle parrucche, rispetto alle pianelle delle donne, rispetto al coprimento del capo, rispetto all’ornamento della testa muliebre, rispetto alla superfluità degli edifici, rispetto all’onestà degli edifici, rispetto all’apparato dei letti, rispetto all’apparato dei banchetti, rispetto all’apparato dei cavalli e dei servi” (Of superfluity regarding preciousness [costliness]; regarding superfluity in pleasures; regarding curiosity; regarding embroideries, trimmings and the like; regarding curiosity in utensils; regarding grandeur of garments; regarding their multiplicity; regarding dishonesty [indecorousness] in women; regarding colouring of hair; regarding wigs; regarding women’s footwear; regarding head-covering; regarding the ornament of the female head; regarding superfluity of buildings; regarding dishonesty in buildings; regarding the furnishing of beds; regarding banquets; regarding dressing of horses and servants”, and see 36-37 for discussion of the treatise in the content of the vice of *luxuria*.

above “ornaments and embellishments, display and curious inquiry”.⁵⁰⁴ Using the convention of sumptuary legislation, but converted into the form of a moral treatise, Capestrano particularly targets women’s fashion. But he reproaches not only a personal use of extravagant jewellery and clothing, but also manifestations of luxury more generally in a person’s surroundings: in superfluous and indecorous buildings, and in the ornamentation of the domestic environment (beds, banquets, buildings, etc.).⁵⁰⁵

Capestrano’s writing is conceived directly in the tradition of *contemptus mundi* (scorn of the world) literature.⁵⁰⁶ The most influential example was *De miseria condicionis humane* (“On the wretchedness of the human condition”, also known as *Liber de contemptu mundi, sive De miseria humanae conditionis*) written in 1190s by Lotario dei Segni, Pope Innocent III (1160/1-1216).⁵⁰⁷ The text’s second part (of three), on humankind’s empty ambitions, external riches and material things, is most pertinent to representations of domestic interiors in Franciscan art

⁵⁰⁴ Thomas of Celano, *The Lives of S. Francis of Assisi*, trans. A. Ferrers Howell (London: Methuen, 1908), 318.

⁵⁰⁵ It is likely the perception of ‘vanities’ in Capestrano (and mendicants more generally) bore significant similarities with – were even to some extent conditioned by – sumptuary law, on which see Gábor Klaniczay, “Disciplining Society through Dress: John of Capistrano, the ‘Bonfire of Vanities’ and Sumptuary Law,” in *The Grand Tour of John Capistrano in Central and Eastern Europe (1451-1456): Transfer of Ideas and Strategies of Communication in the late Middle Ages*, ed. Pawel Kras and James Mixson (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 99-116. For a recent introduction to sumptuary legislation, see Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, eds., *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c.1200-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁵⁰⁶ On Franciscan *contemptus mundi* sentiment, see David Foote, “Mendicants and the Italian Communes in Salimbene’s Cronaca,” in *The Origin, Development, and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald Prudio (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 232-33.

⁵⁰⁷ Lotario dei Segni, *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*, ed. Robert Lewis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 3, says approximately 672 manuscripts are extant. For the influence of the text, extending from Chaucer to Montaigne, see Lothario [Lotario] dei Segni, *On the Misery of the Human Condition. De Miseria Humane Conditionis*, ed. Donald Howard and trans. Margaret Dietz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), xiii-xv, and see xxiv-xxx on the broader medieval tradition.

and likely to have fuelled Capestrano's attitude to extravagances and luxuries, especially its final sections which deal with the topics of superfluous adornment of the person, table and house: *Contra superfluum ornatum* (chapter 38) and *De ornatu persone mense et domus* (chapter 40).⁵⁰⁸ After an indictment of clothing, jewellery and make-up, the writer – like Capestrano – shifts to target exactly the kind of domestic accoutrements we encounter in the Flémalle Group interiors: “What then is more vain than to decorate a table with pictured cloths, ivory-handled knives, gold vases and silver vessels, goblets and cups, platters and dishes, salvers and spoons, forks and salt-cellars, basins and pitches, boxes and fans? What good does it do to paint chambers and embellish porches, decorate an entrance, cover a floor, stuff a bed with feathers and cover it with silks, enclosing it with a curtain of canopy? For it is written: ‘When he shall die, he shall take nothing away; nor shall his glory descend with him’ (Psalm 49:17).⁵⁰⁹

In his preaching and writing, Capestrano is said to have appropriated the traditional theme of ‘vanities’ to mount an innovative critique of the economic factors at work behind luxurious living.⁵¹⁰ The vanity of riches was an especially crucial topic for the Franciscans; members of the Order were not allowed to physically touch money.⁵¹¹ Especially important for our understanding of the triptych is Capestrano's overt scorn, not simply for wealth, but also its trappings, their representation on and around the person and in their domestic sphere.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 61-65.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

⁵¹⁰ Cited in Hélène Angiolini, “Giovanni da Capestrano, santo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 55 (2001), https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-da-capestrano-santo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

⁵¹¹ Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 30-31.

Before the content, perhaps the altarpiece's commission itself would have met with disapproval by those on the Observant side. A critique of the products of artists was also likely implied by the treatise's professed attitude; Capestrano's biographer writes: "Devotion to art often threatened to degenerate into senseless luxury. Capestrano... excelled as preacher against this aberration".⁵¹² The Conventual Werl had a patently different outlook on the Order's relation to wealth and art. The Conventual path was theoretically outlined by John XXII (1244-1334, Pope 1316-34), with an emphasis placed on a "community of goods, income and property as in other religious Orders, in contradistinction to Observantism".⁵¹³ In effect, this created a loophole whereby Conventual Franciscans could receive gifts and maintain possessions, so long as they were held *in communi* (hence this main body of the Order was known as the Community or *Fratres de Communitate*).⁵¹⁴ Art, to a certain ambiguous extent, became permissible. A lax element prevailed.⁵¹⁵ Indeed, travelling through Antwerp in the late 1430s, Spanish nobleman Pero Tafur noted that "pictures of all kinds are sold in the monastery of St Francis".⁵¹⁶

Both in theory and reality, Franciscan patronage was a complex phenomenon, rife with hypocrisy.⁵¹⁷ The conflicting sentiments were already present in St Francis,

⁵¹² Hofer, *Capistran*, 95.

⁵¹³ Michael Bihl, "Order of the Friars Minor," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Appleton, 1909), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06281a.htm>.

⁵¹⁴ Bourdua, *Franciscans*, 21-22.

⁵¹⁵ Hofer, *Capistran*, 33.

⁵¹⁶ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures 1435-1439*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London: Routledge, 1926), 203.

⁵¹⁷ For sketches of the various contradictory sentiments towards money, art and property in the late medieval history of the Order, see Bourdua, *Franciscans*, 1-31 and William Cook, "Introduction," in *Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, ed. William Cook (Leiden: Brill, 2005), vii-xi.

who was deeply suspicious of goods, property and superfluity, yet allowed some preciousness with regard to churches and ornaments.⁵¹⁸ The Rule's strict constitutions on property and receiving alms were debated and reinterpreted throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, no definitive policy emerged, and much art was also patronised. There were many who opposed the embroilment of the Minorites with art; images were consistently restricted, criticised for excess curiosity or preciousness.⁵¹⁹ In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the popular Observance reform movement, of which Capestrano became a leading figure, emerged as a strong critical response precisely to these issues surrounding Franciscan finances and luxuries.⁵²⁰ But even notoriously strict Observants like San Bernadino accepted property, to some extent. Bernadino allowed friars moderate use of certain worldly possessions and even the "fine and well-furnished buildings" that had been bestowed upon them. "Three things are needful for the spiritual life", he preached, "one within you, one beside you and one without. Within, your own good will is needful; beside you, good company, for he who falls down cannot get up alone. And the third need, externally, is a suitable place – for one cannot meditate in the Mercato Nuovo!"⁵²¹

Even so, what would Observants like Bernadino or Capestrano have made of the triptych's not merely 'suitable' but actually opulent settings? It is possible that the painting's details may have appeared 'worldly' to adherents of the Observants' thinking, especially as even the figures of the hallowed saints themselves seem

⁵¹⁸ Bourdua, *Franciscans*, 22-23.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵²¹ Iris Origo, *The World of San Bernadino* (London: Reprint Society, 1964), 215.

virtually to preach an opposite creed: the figure of John the Baptist, the supposedly austere and abstemious man of the wilderness, pictured next to a plush sofa, and reflected in a glinting mirror, while a row of four coats of arms adorn the windows above him.

That such evocations were liable to criticism at the time is entirely conceivable. In the medieval iconography of the ‘Good and Bad Prayer,’ the ‘bad’ prayer was customarily directed towards images of houses and domestic possessions (see [2.18]).⁵²² And it is interesting that a later date (1505-10), in the famous *Seven Deadly Sins* table, Hieronymus Bosch’s *Superbia* [2.19] seemingly explicitly draws on the established genre of the fifteenth-century Marian interior, an iconography surely recognisable for beholders versed in the artistic products of the preceding century.⁵²³ His painting includes a compilation of items found in the Werl panels: a dresser, a mirror, a small table, a vessel of flowers, metal ewers, a large window with glass, a lit fire in a capacious fireplace in its side-room; even the truncated beginning of a barrel vault crowning the scene. By his explicit critique, Bosch reveals a host of pejoratively ‘worldly’ undertones existing in the interiors of the Flémalle Group and van Eyck. Like the *Mérode Altarpiece*, there is a latticed window shutter and majolica vase; like the *Arnolfini Portrait*, a piece of fruit appears on the windowsill and a mirror assumes a prominent position – as it does

⁵²² On such late medieval images of material vanity, see Jaritz, “*Ira Dei*,” 19-21.

⁵²³ On this depiction, and the connection between Pride and mirrors, see Sibylle Appuhn-Radtke, “*Superbia*” in RDK Labor (2021), <https://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/Superbia.>, which states that along with the peacock, the mirror was Pride’s “most important attribute”, and see esp. fn166-69 in the same article for literature on Bosch’s image (but note the attribution to Bosch is debated). Appuhn-Radtke notably discusses the close relationship between the iconographies of *Superbia*, *Divitiae* (Wealth), *Luxuria* and *Frau Welt* (Lady World).

in the *Werl Altarpiece*.⁵²⁴ The patrons of such works are likened, indirectly, to the woman who we see from behind, looking into the mirror – and hence into the painting as into a mirror.

Bosch's iconographic reversal does not unmask the *Werl Altarpiece* as an overt statement of material concupiscence, neither do Capestrano or Lotario's tirades. Rather – at the very least – they attest to the worldly connotations the inclusion of such a setting and such objects may have provoked in the mind of contemporary beholders. The correspondence between Werl's and Bosch's *profusion* of objects, and the marked distaste for *superfluity* in the treatises is especially noteworthy.

The *Werl Altarpiece* may well have had a secular benefactor. Although friars sometimes found ways to finance artworks themselves, Franciscan art was most frequently endowed by external patrons who would facilitate any economic transactions on the Order's behalf.⁵²⁵ Donor portraits featured prominently in the wall paintings of the Cologne Minorite Church. Kneeling donors clad in armour were included in the east wall crucifixion [2.16], along with coats of arms belonging to the Hardevust family (wealthy merchants and bankers) on the far left and right.⁵²⁶ Similarly, a coat of arms was visible above the wall painting of the two crowned female saints, Apollonia and Ursula, located in the south aisle.⁵²⁷ Many Cologne families, both noble and bourgeois, endowed altars or had their final

⁵²⁴ Calkins, "Secular," 201-02, on early Netherlandish depictions of interiors and *Vanitas* connotations.

⁵²⁵ Bourdua, *Franciscans*, 25-31.

⁵²⁶ Clemen, *Monumentalmalereien*, 222-23. The Hardevusts also seem to have endowed the Crucifixion painted on the east wall. For the Hardevusts as art patrons, see Corley, *Painting*, 28; 30.

⁵²⁷ For an image, see Clemen, *Monumentalmalereien*, 224 (fig. 35).

resting places in the Minorite church.⁵²⁸ Indeed, the church apparently contained so much heraldry that a seventeenth-century historian reported that it was colloquially known as “der Ritter Kirch” (the knights’ church).⁵²⁹

One of the four stained-glass coats of arms in the left-hand panel has been identified as belonging to the Cologne Bleyman family, who in the seventeenth century are recorded as caring for a St Barbara altar at the Franciscan church in Cologne; the back coat of arms is that of the Holy Roman Empire, the penultimate is of the painter’s guild of St. Luke, the fourth is unidentified.⁵³⁰ Due to the inclusion of their heraldry, it is conceivable that the Bleymans were involved in the financing and contracting of the *Werl Altarpiece*, acting as necessary intermediaries between church and artist. However, Werl was more likely responsible for setting the terms of the commission, for Werl is the subject of the inscription; his is the portrait.

In fact, there are few (if any) directly comparable donor inscriptions in contemporaneous Netherlandish painted altarpieces, especially those endowed by ecclesiastics. For example, in altarpieces either from the Flémalle Group or by Rogier, donor inscriptions are seemingly very rare. The word “effigies”, having associations with royal funereal practices, is apparently seldom encountered.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ See Eubel, *Geschichte*, 45-48.

⁵²⁹ Aegidius Gelenius, *De Admiranda, Sacra, et Civili Magnitudine Coloniae...* (Cologne: Jodocvm Kalcovim, 1645), 4:476.

⁵³⁰ Kemperdick, “Rogier,” 64, adding that in the seventeenth century, the Bleymans are recorded caring for the altar of St Barbara in the Cologne Minorite church.

⁵³¹ Jansen, “Kölner,” 22 stresses that *effigiem* (*effigies*), the term Werl chose to refer to his representation, was more often used in conjunction with royal funereal ceremonies. On monarchical effigies and the ‘double body’ theory (one royal body perishing on earth, another spiritual body

What is more, early Netherlandish donor inscriptions more usually refer to the whole work (*hoc opus...*) and might invoke God or the saints to stimulate prayers.⁵³² Werl's self-contained inscription, however, points specifically to *his* wing of the triptych, 'here' (*hic*), and hence to Werl himself.⁵³³ For any Franciscan patron, whether Observant or Conventual, this likely expressed an unorthodox amount of self-regard.⁵³⁴

That Werl ordered a donor portrait and indulgent inscription, both so palpably boastful, can be interpreted as an admission of concern for temporal reputation and social ostentation. Perhaps Werl commissioned the picture with an upcoming Provincial Chapter in mind; one was held in Cologne on St Anne's Day, 1440 (as when in the early 1430s the Abbot of Saint-Vaast commissioned painter Jacques Daret of the Flémalle Group to paint the wings of an elaborate altarpiece to be "shown off" to cardinals and other visiting clerics during the 1435 Arras Peace Congress).⁵³⁵ In view of the evidence of the second portrait in the Sacristy window,

enduring perpetually), see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 419-37.

⁵³² For example, the inscription on the lower border of Jan van Eyck, *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele* (Bruges, Groeningemuseum, 1434-6), in the context of other inscriptions referring to the Virgin and the lives of the depicted saints, Donatian and George, reads: "HOC OP FECIT FIERI MAGR GEORGI DE PALA HUI ECCLESIE CANONI P IOHANNE DE EYCK PICTORE . ET FUNDAVIT HIC DUAS CAPELLIAS DE I GMO CHORI DOMINI . M . CCCC . XXXIII . PL AU . 1436." (Master Joris van der Paele, canon of this church, has had this work made by the painter Jan van Eyck, and he founded here two chaplaincies [to be served by] the clergy of the choir, [in the year of] our Lord 1434, but the work was completed in 1436), on which, see Douglas Brine, "Jan van Eyck, Canon Joris van der Paele, and the Art of Commemoration," *Art Bulletin* 96, no. 3 (2014): esp. 268.

⁵³³ Of course, we do not know whether the lost central panel bore an inscription and, if so, which kind. In view of extant altarpieces made by the Flémalle Group or Rogier van der Weyden, it is unlikely any lost inscription bore the artist's name, as in some of van Eyck's religious works (which would have diluted focus on Werl).

⁵³⁴ I am grateful to Professor Christopher Norton for discussing the inscription in email messages, 12 and 22 February 2020.

⁵³⁵ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 70. For the St Vaast commission see Campbell, "Art Market," 196; Henri Loriguet, *Journal des travaux d'art exécutés dans l'Abbaye de Saint-Vaast, par l'Abbé Jean du Clercq (1429-1461)* (Arras: Répressé-Crépel, 1889), 69-72.

this was possibly not the only instance of flagrant self-regard on the friar's part (that is, if the window was not a later commission).⁵³⁶

Werl's biographers all attest to his lasting fame and multi-faceted talents as an orator, philosopher and polemicist, leaving behind a variety of writings, some of which remain today.⁵³⁷ The word *egregius* (eminent) is consistently employed to describe him.⁵³⁸ Johannes Trithemius remarked on Werl's great fame "in the time of the Council of Basel" (1431-1449).⁵³⁹ Werl had achieved a certain celebrity: these portraits can be seen as parallel legacies along with his writings, by-products from the career of this former ecclesiastical luminary.

The painting's materialistic elements – the mirror, the fabrics, the metal and glass vessels – also conceivably suggest Werl's involvement with, and reliance on, temporal wealth and power. Indeed, Werl may have come from a wealthy family, or possessed wealthy connections; he appears to have paid for his university matriculation, which was unusual for a mendicant.⁵⁴⁰ Cologne was then by far one of the largest and economically strongest cities in the German-speaking lands, a major transport hub on the Rhine and a centre of agricultural trade and cloth production, famous also for its manufacture of metal goods and armaments. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the population reached around at least 40,000,

⁵³⁶ Note Jansen, "Kölner," 11-12.

⁵³⁷ Schlager, *Beiträge*, 241-42. Cf. Sbaraleae, *Supplementum*, 340; Antonii Possevini, *Apparatus Sacri ad Scriptores Veteris, & Novi Testamenti...* (Venice: Societatem Venetam, 1606), 2:22.

⁵³⁸ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge," 68.

⁵³⁹ Johannes Trit[h]emius, *Catalogus Illustrum viro[rum] Germania[m] suis ingenijs et lucubrationibus omnifariam exornantium...* (Mainz: Friedberg, 1495), 42b: "claruit tempore concilii basiliensis".

⁵⁴⁰ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge," 61.

a number maintained until well into the eighteenth century.⁵⁴¹ Travelling through Cologne in 1495, the same Hieronymus Münzer who praised the Ghent Altarpiece noted the significant wealth of commercial activity:

But the citizens, of whom it has so many, live by mutual trade, by the commodity of the Rhine and the sea, and especially by commerce. For it has the richest merchants from every country, bringing various commodities by land and sea, like spices and silks from Venice, cloth and wool from England, fish of different kinds from Holland, and different kinds of grain and other things, in particular oxen, sheep, and horses from Friesland and elsewhere...⁵⁴²

As a Conventual Franciscan living and preaching within the urban community, Werl would not have lived unaffected by this atmosphere.⁵⁴³ Indeed, Werl's position underneath the various coats of arms appears to underline his proximity to such sources of lay wealth and power.

⁵⁴¹ (With brief decrease in the later fourteenth century after the Black Death). On the Cologne economy and population statistics, see Franz Irsigler, "Kölner Wirtschaft im Spätmittelalter," in *Zwei Jahrtausende kölnischer Wirtschaft*, ed. Hermann Kellenbenz (Cologne: Greven, 1975), 1:217-319. At that date in the Holy Roman Empire, only Prague rivalled Cologne for number of inhabitants. Compare Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres, then among the most populous cities of Northern Europe, maintaining during the fourteenth century c.64,000, c.46,000 and c.30,000 citizens, respectively (Buylaert, "Lordship," 50).

⁵⁴² E.-Ph. Goldschmidt, "Le voyage de Hieronimus Monetarius à travers la France (Fin)," *Humanisme et Renaissance* 6, no. 4 (1939): 535: "Cives autem, quos sine numero habet, vivunt mutuis commertiis, commoditate Rheni et maris et maxime ex mercatura. Habet enim mercatores ditissimos afferentes ex omni regione et terrestri et maritima varias merces, ut aromata, setam ex Venecijs, pannos et lanam ex Anglia, pisces diversi generis ex Holandia, et diversa frumenta et alia et precipue boves, oves, equos ex Frisia et alia..."

⁵⁴³ From the High Middle Ages, Cologne's economy was determined to a significant extent by the needs of monasteries, chapters and convents like that of the Minorites – just as much as the rapidly rising ruling classes of merchants and wealthy burghers (Herbert Eiden and Franz Irsigler "Environns and Hinterland: Cologne and Nuremberg in the Later Middle Ages," in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration c.1300-1600*, ed. James Galloway (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2000), 46).

Netherlandish works with comparable settings contemporary with the *Werl Altarpiece* were commissioned mainly by distinguished, wealthy individuals, the majority of them merchants or court officials. For example, the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] may have been commissioned by the Engelbrechts or Ymbrechts of Cologne and Mechelen, a family of merchants of high standing.⁵⁴⁴ The *Salting Madonna* [2.4] has been connected with the Balbiano family from Chieri, Lombard moneylenders and pawnbrokers.⁵⁴⁵ Rogier van der Weyden's *Annunciation* [2.8], closely related to the *Werl Altarpiece* by motifs such as the brass pitcher and probably painted shortly afterwards in c.1440, has an overpainted coat of arms in the left-hand panel (now in Turin) belonging to the de Villa family, bankers from Chieri near Turin.⁵⁴⁶ Four further altarpieces commissioned by the de Villa family from Netherlandish artists have survived, among which is the *Abegg Triptych* [2.20] featuring a donor in the left-hand panel kneeling in a barrel-vaulted loggia, much like the kneeling *Werl*.⁵⁴⁷ Rogier's *Middelburg Altarpiece* was most probably commissioned by Pieter Bladelin, son of a Bruges crane operator, who became an extraordinarily wealthy financial administrator, eventually ennobled by Philip the Good.⁵⁴⁸ And Rogier's *Columba Altarpiece* (see [2.26]) may have been ordered by the wealthy Cologne merchant Johann Rinck.⁵⁴⁹ By this conspicuous instance of sophisticated patronage, *Werl* was intentionally placing himself among these

⁵⁴⁴ Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 192-201, esp. 197 (no. 4). The male donor's costume is usually recognised as belonging to the mercantile classes: cf. Lacroix, *Manners*, fig. 424.

⁵⁴⁵ Campbell, *National Gallery*, 92-99, esp. 98-99.

⁵⁴⁶ Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 304-07 (no. 26).

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 306 (no. 26); *Abegg* at 328-32 (no. 31).

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 337-40 (no. 33).

⁵⁴⁹ Kemperdick, "Tableau," 130.

cosmopolitan ranks.⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, Werl even *looks* comfortable. As von Tschudi remarked on his appearance, “you would esteem him more a finely formed Epicurean than a mendicant”.⁵⁵¹

Werl’s artistic sophistication could have been taught elsewhere. He may have travelled substantially. He possibly attended the Council of Basel during the 1430s, which moved to Ferrara and to Florence.⁵⁵² In 1443 we encounter Capestrano exhorting Werl to be present at the next general chapter to take place at Padua.⁵⁵³ Indeed, Werl’s twentieth-century biographer hypothesised that he carried out his *studium generale* in Italy c.1428, possibly in Bologna, because of the Italian provenance of three of his manuscripts.⁵⁵⁴ As we have said, Trecento Italian painters were chiefly responsible for initially establishing the iconography of familiar, contemporary domestic interiors in religious art.⁵⁵⁵ Werl might even have brought back a taste for such domestic interiors and their contemporary furnishings from the southern regions.

The altarpiece’s appearance would seem to cohere with the broader aesthetic fashions evident in the more successful Netherlandish workshops of the same date, which tended to disregard gold grounds with increasing regularity. Painters found alternative ways to honour their subjects: manipulating, for example, the particular

⁵⁵⁰ A summary of important Cologne patrons of panel paintings from 1300 to 1500 lists 2 artists, 8 merchants or bankers, 7 patricians or nobles, 5 university scholars and 3 state officials (Corley, *Painting*, 306-12, and cf. 21-35).

⁵⁵¹ Von Tschudi, “*Meister*,” 21.

⁵⁵² Clasen, “Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß),” 67. Châtelet, *Campin*, 223-25 suggested Robert Campin may have gone to the Council of Basel to obtain artistic commissions.

⁵⁵³ Gál, “Calendar,” 308.

⁵⁵⁴ Clasen, “Walram,” 115.

⁵⁵⁵ Kemp, “Beziehungsspiele,” 18 and see p39-40 above.

components (textiles, benches, fireplaces) of well-described and apparently well-observed architectural settings. Interestingly, the same was not happening in Cologne – or it was happening in a far slower, more restrained manner.

Balanced against the artistic context in Cologne, the work's artistic constitution – especially its elaborated indoor setting – must also be seen as a cognisant decision on Werl's part. A realistic domestic interior occupying substantial portions – very possibly the whole – of an altarpiece such as this was an unusual occurrence at this date, especially in 1430s Cologne.⁵⁵⁶ The surviving visual evidence suggests that the kind of domestic interiors produced by the Flémalle Group and van Eyck in the 1430s only became more widely adopted in Northern Germany from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards.⁵⁵⁷ The very first (extant) Cologne works incorporating Netherlandish-style interiors appear to date to the 1440s.⁵⁵⁸

Cologne painting retained a comparably traditional appearance throughout the fifteenth century.⁵⁵⁹ Use of gold backgrounds and tooled, ornamental paint surfaces were prominent features in the work of Stefan Lochner, the foremost Cologne painter of the 1440s, and that of his associates and followers like the Master of the Heisterbach Altarpiece.⁵⁶⁰ Compare, for example, the substantial

⁵⁵⁶ Note, however, the Rhenish Master picture cited above in fn461.

⁵⁵⁷ See fn374 above.

⁵⁵⁸ See Daniel Levine, "New Discoveries in Stefan Lochner's 'Saint Jerome in his Cell'," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 65 (2004): 289-99 and "St. Jerome", on Stefan Lochner's *St Jerome* (North Carolina Museum of Art, dated insecurely c.1440-45); Levine perceives resemblances in the painting of St Jerome and St Barbara's draperies.

⁵⁵⁹ Corley, *Painting*, 99: "the Courtly Style... rarely gained, as far as we can tell today, as sustained and exclusive a foothold elsewhere as it did in Cologne." Lochner was first documented in Cologne in 1442 and is sometimes elided with the so-called Dombild Master.

⁵⁶⁰ On the Master of the Heisterbach and Lochner, see *ibid.*, 118-31 and 133-68, respectively.

gilding in Lochner's *Virgin in the Rose Bower*, dated directly after the Werl panels [2.21].⁵⁶¹ The Virgin sits among the lush grass and flowers, but this landscape is simply an island of paradisaical foliage floating in a gilded nowhere. The tooled gold ground behind the group acts like a magnification of the substantial gilded nimbuses which surmount the heads of the Virgin and Child – instead of a setting, there is a kind of fathomless, all-encompassing, extended halo. In his *Annunciation* of c.1442-4 [2.22], which appears to emulate van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* exterior, Lochner cloaks the domestic room – and presumably its wood, stone, windows and shutters, too – with a gilded hanging.⁵⁶² In this slightly later work, he seems to offer a compromise, incorporating something of the new taste for descriptive backgrounds while at the same time crucially maintaining the impression of a gilded backdrop. By contrast, gilding of all kinds provably waned in Netherlandish painting during the 1430s and 1440s.⁵⁶³

Among Werl's stricter ecclesiastical contemporaries, extensive use of gilding would surely have sometimes provoked *contemptus mundi* connotations: Lotario's chapter 'On the Evil Possession of Riches' is full of biblical references to the corruption of gold.⁵⁶⁴ Interestingly, there are significant instances of the deliberate erasure of elements of gilding from Netherlandish paintings around the 1430s.

⁵⁶¹ On which see Roland Krischel *et al.*, "Stefan Lochners 'Muttergottes in der Rosenlaube': Ikonographie, Bildgeometrie und Funktion," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 67 (2006): 123-60.

⁵⁶² Comparable to one of the few early Netherlandish works of the same period that seems to make a pointed use of such strategies (use of real gilding) to communicate both on behalf of the patron and the subject matter: Rogier van der Weyden's *Last Judgement Altarpiece* (Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune, c.1443-51). It displays gilded applied relief on the exterior (in the brocade hanging behind the patron, Rolin) and gold leaf for the eschatological scene on the interior. On this work's seemingly deliberate manipulation of old and new aesthetic strategies, see Nuechterlein, "Medieval," 34-36; 60.

⁵⁶³ On this phenomenon generally, with reference to certain notable exceptions, see *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ Lothario, *Misery*, 40: "Gold and silver have destroyed many'. 'He who loves gold shall not be justified'..."

Metal foil coated with yellow glaze originally appeared in the windows of the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] (as in the Brussels *Annunciation* [2.6]) but was subsequently painted out in favour of a blue sky; in Rogier's workshop *Crucifixion* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1425-30 or 1440s), the gilded background was replaced by a landscape in aerial perspective; the same happened in an Eyckian Altarpiece in Spain contracted in 1443 – and when it was already “agreed” in the contract “that all the backgrounds of the said retable, except those places where shall be painted the said images... be completely gilded with good and beautiful gilt of fine Florentine gold”.⁵⁶⁵

Nuechterlein has also drawn attention to the almost comprehensive, sudden evaporation of gold's use, and to a certain extent also gold-coloured features, in the products of major early Netherlandish painters' workshops at some point between the 1420s to 1430s, which she recognises as a “highly conscious decision”.⁵⁶⁶ This historically specific Netherlandish abandonment of gilded pictorial elements in the second quarter of the fifteenth century is a remarkable phenomenon in the history of art which cannot be easily explained, as if the painters had internally enacted their own sumptuary legislation. That supply or economic factors are likely not responsible is evident from the continued use of gold in Cologne painting. Could moral scruples have sometimes played a role in these aesthetic differences? In a

⁵⁶⁵ Respectively, Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 196-97; De Vos, *Rogier*, 175-8; Anne Fuchs, “The Virgin of the Councillors by Luis Dalmau (1443-1445): The Contract and its Eyckian Execution,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 99 (1982): 46.

⁵⁶⁶ Jeanne, “Medieval,” 14-15.

curious incident – particularly enigmatic – van Eyck painted over the purse originally affixed to Chancellor Rolin’s waist in his picture of c.1435.⁵⁶⁷

Given the surviving visual evidence of other paintings of the Flémalle Group or Rogier, it is highly unlikely the *Werl Altarpiece*’s missing centre panel was substantially gilded. In the left-hand panel in particular, the most visible materials are the bare wood of the partition and ceiling, the stone tiles underfoot and the plain stone or plaster of the walls (and the few gold or brass metallic highlights in the mirror, ewer, Barbara’s book and cloak, are all – as far as I know – achieved by oil-based pigments). Although the panels’ household fittings would have been highly familiar to Cologne beholders, on another level their aesthetic (especially on that size) probably made a rather unusual impression – producing, in combination, something of an ‘unfamiliar familiarity’, with homely, recognisable elements, painted with great attention to their visual appearance, but presented – conceivably – with strange facility. In the medieval scale of values, wooden furnishings occupied a relatively humble position as opposed to textiles and plate.⁵⁶⁸ Of the *Méroude Altarpiece*’s composition, Pächt maintained, “we can probably form no conception, today, of the sheer audacity involved in putting in the centre not only a large piece of still-life but a piece of neutral colour”.⁵⁶⁹ Of course, we can only hypothesise about how Werl’s central panel might have appeared – and occupying a side rather than a central panel, the ‘audacious’

⁵⁶⁷ Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 279.

⁵⁶⁸ Penelope Eames, “Documentary Evidence Concerning the Character and Use of Domestic Furnishings in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Furniture History* 7 (1971): 41.

⁵⁶⁹ Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 59.

neutrality of Werl's wooden partition conceivably may have worked for the donor, helping to convey a humility relative to whatever may have occupied the middle space (a notion further explored in the following section). In essence, however, Werl's commission appears to have emphatically contravened his city's fondness for gilded images: when viewed alongside their Cologne contemporaries, his panels must have appeared atypically brown and grey and curiously populated with non-human objects and motifs (of a luxurious variety). In this way, against this artistic context, something of a complex balance between honour and humility is maintained by a considered, close interconnection of aesthetic and content.

An additional obvious divergence from the local tradition is Werl's ample physical size. This is in keeping with contemporaneous Netherlandish examples but not Cologne painting.⁵⁷⁰ In pictures of a similar date produced in the Rhineland [2.23], the donor figures customarily appear in reduced scale relative to the sacred figures, after the Byzantine fashion.⁵⁷¹ And in the Cologne Minorite Church itself, Werl would have appeared abnormally substantial against the comparatively diminutive donors in the wall paintings [2.16]. Werl's inflated size must have surprised Westphalian beholders. Indeed, Werl may even be a little larger than his triptych's saintly protagonists.

⁵⁷⁰ Alarich Roach, *Stifterbilder in Flandern und Brabant: Stadtbürgerliche Selbstdarstellung in der Sakralen Malerei des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1988), 14-31 on the scale of early Netherlandish donors. Jacobs, *Opening*, 41 believes Werl to be larger than Barbara. For more recent scholarship on early Netherlandish donor portraits, see Falque, *Devotional*.

⁵⁷¹ Corley, *Painting*, 285n21.

Considered together, in comparison with Cologne painting, these various stylistic divergences and aesthetic idiosyncrasies give the impression of a highly conscious commission, designed with some sophistication, intended to distinguish the patron that the picture so ostentatiously displays. It appears as if the artist of the *Werl Altarpiece* replaced one kind of visual ornament with other subtler kinds – and in this was able to shift from one sense of artistic ‘value’ to another.⁵⁷² Instead of the relative blankness of the traditional setting, “that miserable background of gold or carpets” as Goethe once called it, we encounter a recognisably domestic architectural location, spatially extended, and fleshed out with objects.⁵⁷³ The interest in the attentive description of an honourable setting and decorous items, drawn from earthly precedents, superseded the more customary gilded lustres of genuine material value deemed appropriate for augmenting an object’s religious aura.⁵⁷⁴ Werl’s commission is strongly implicated within these adaptations. The donor makes his presence palpably equivalent to the objects and the holy persons. Werl is not a relegated footnote, he is wholly integrated within the pictorial content, in front of the door, upon the steps, with his habit’s hem visible in the mirror reflection. Sacred and secular entities share his picture plane, interlaced together into a web of extraordinary mutuality.

Thus, when viewed against the historical context, Werl’s decision to commission an interior setting in a descriptive style seems a rich and complicated matter – in terms of both Franciscan politics and Cologne artistic environment. On the one

⁵⁷² On these shifting values, see Nuechterlein, “Medieval,” 1-9.

⁵⁷³ Cited in Giorgio Faggin, *The Complete Paintings of the Van Eycks* (New York: Abrams, 1968), 10.

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. Belting, *Likeness*, 424.

hand, in their rejection of gilding the painted settings of the *Werl Altarpiece* seem to pronounce a certain material humility. On the other hand, in their admission of worldly secular elements they promenade a wilful luxury. We need not decide either way. Perhaps this pictorial statement of apparently brazen self-interest was, alongside the choice of a flagrantly worldly aesthetic, commissioned knowingly in response to the moral and aesthetic rifts within the Order; perhaps its flagrancy was consciously stipulated to make a statement in the affirmative on the part of the Conventuals, on the side of temporal, urban implication.

After the preceding investigation, it remains difficult to properly grasp the true status – the actual tone – of these panels in their historical reality. It is in fact more plausible that they attempt to satisfy a number of desires. Possibly in fact the pictures attempt to express the very contradiction so visibly outlined in the inscription: that Werl is both Minister and Magister, servant and master, humble and grand – just as Christ was.⁵⁷⁵

Greatness and straitness: Werl's paradox of lowliness and elevation

As outlined earlier, some scholars see temporal and celestial intentions as inseparable and therefore not properly in conflict. However, I suggest that art has a particular capacity to absorb contradictions, but superficially. Artworks can make

⁵⁷⁵ This famous double designation is taken from Matthew 23:10-12: "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master [magister], Christ. He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant [minister]. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Werl may well have been known to contemporaries explicitly by this convenient, relatively rare titular combination – a form of epithet – implied by the front matters of some of the surviving manuscripts with his written output (see Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge"; "Walram).

their motivational constitution appear seamless where in fact they are not. The donors of early Netherlandish paintings were, in their day, “neither nameless nor timid”: dubious, complex figures like Chancellor Rolin who “always harvested on earth as if for him the earth were eternal”.⁵⁷⁶

With the help of early twentieth-century cultural historians, whose interests in ‘character’ are now somewhat unfashionable, we can recall something of the psychologies of prominent fifteenth-century patrons. Georges Doutrepoint believed Philip the Good was *the* exemplary late medieval “homo duplex” whose markedly divergent bibliographic interests (“bizarre assemblage... strange contradiction!”) reflected the divides deep within his character:

To see him... one would believe him the best of Christian princes, who possesses or has written a number of works of devotion, who serves and fears God, worships the Virgin, watches over the youth, gives abundant alms, protects the faithful of the West and the East, prepares a crusade against the Turks. But as well as recalling his qualities, we should also state that he suffered, in Chastellain’s words, ‘the vice of the flesh’, and that his private ‘mores’ were more than blameworthy.⁵⁷⁷

These fifteenth-century art patrons displayed, according to Huizinga, “stark contrasts of pride, greed, and luxury with strong faith”; “there are so many in

⁵⁷⁶ Blum, *Triptychs*, 2; *Oeuvres de Georges Chastellain*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels: Heussner, 1863-7), 3:330: “messonnoit tousjours en la terre comme si terre lui eust esté perpétuelle”.

⁵⁷⁷ Doutrepoint, *Littérature*, 519.

whom, among the most outrageous sins, even apparent unfaith, the deepest piety rested”.⁵⁷⁸ Werl may be interpreted as another such devotee of early Netherlandish painting directed by tensions between the world and the heavens. Indeed, the entertainment of deeply contradictory motivations may well be key to properly accounting for an artistic commission like Werl’s.

In the next two sections we extend the argument that contemporaneous social pressures behind a work’s particular patronage conceivably had an imprint upon that work’s appearance, focusing on points of tension in pictorial composition and motifs within the left-hand panel: first, between the vault and partition; second, the mirror and partition. In approaching the sometimes perplexingly *temporal* appearance of religious paintings of the time, it remains useful to reach for Huizinga’s model of late medieval motivational inconsistency: “better”, he wrote, “to try to understand the man of the fifteenth century in his tremendous contradiction”.⁵⁷⁹

Within altarpieces with multiple components, early Netherlandish painters could manipulate compositions and content to provoke connotative difference. In his pioneering essay on Bouts’ *Holy Sacrament* [0.14], Lefever suggested that the artist had, for typological reasons, introduced subtle sociological variations across his depicted domestic interiors.⁵⁸⁰ Compared to the central New Testament Last Supper, the room in which the Old Testament Passover Feast takes place, on the

⁵⁷⁸ Huizinga, “Kunst,” 455.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. I again cite Jaritz, “*Ira Dei*”, on contradictions between worldliness and piety in the later Middle Ages.

⁵⁸⁰ Lefever, “Huisinterieurs,” 178-79.

bottom left, is more spatially restricted, with a lower, unbeamed ceiling and smaller windows; and the participants stand because they are in a hurry. In this regard, it is notable that Werl's chamber is full of intentional visual obstruction and overlapping. Elements encroach upon one another; the upper masonry and risen floor squeeze the picture plane; the wooden partition impedes the beholder's gaze.⁵⁸¹ There is hardly any room to stand. The ceiling bars get in the way of the statue, and the bench intervening between the two figures is barely visible, hidden by the door and the patron saint. In Barbara's panel, it is quite opposite.⁵⁸² Elements give each other breathing space and we apprehend the picture from within rather than without; our standpoint floats above floor level.

As alluded to, some explain the differences between the two panels through the hypothesis of several hands of varying calibre from the same workshop acting in collaboration.⁵⁸³ The left-hand panel is routinely dismissed as a poor spatial composition: Mojimír Frinta called it a "bizarre conformation" where "a partition blocks off the rear of the room and the bench crowded in obstructs the full opening of the door – if one applies logic", indicative of a "spirit of mediocrity".⁵⁸⁴ But the hypothesis of a lesser hand for the left wing does not account for some passages of immense precision. A recent technical study attests: "painting a curved mirror with the degree of accuracy demonstrated... requires an extraordinary effort".⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ Cf. the wall composition in Rogier van der Weyden, *Crucifixion Diptych* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, c.1460).

⁵⁸² Cf. Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 59: (on the Werl right wing) "the surface of the picture seems far less crowded; there is more air in the room."

⁵⁸³ See earlier fn420-24.

⁵⁸⁴ Mojimír Frinta, *The Genius of Robert Campin* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 73-74. Cf. Campbell, *National Gallery*, 28; 405.

⁵⁸⁵ Antonio Crimini et al., "Reflections of Reality in Jan van Eyck and Robert Campin," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 37, no. 3 (2004): 114, who

Consider, also, the great care that has gone into rendering Werl's physiognomy. Clearly, accomplished hands contributed to both left- and right-hand panels.

What if (at least some of) these pejorative attributional judgements were misdiagnosing a correctly identified set of symptoms? Possibly, these dynamics are the outcome of an attempt to fulfil a number of different desires by including different motifs, some apparently incompatible, pulling and pushing the beholder, as it were, in opposite directions; in the left-hand panel: the halting partition, the expansive vault; the curtailing arch, the extending mirror; the squeezed bench, the open door; the coats of arms, the Virgin's statue.

The combination of vault and cubicle is particularly curious. In nineteenth-century inventory descriptions, the room is named as a "cell", and more recently by Hans Belting.⁵⁸⁶ Medieval screens were generally used for purposes of separation.⁵⁸⁷ And the combination would seem to signal, in abbreviated form, a space in which a number of divided premises are joined together under the same roof, as in the traditional architecture of medieval monastic institutions and hospitals. The fifteenth century saw an intensification of such divisions, seemingly indicative of a desire for more privacy.⁵⁸⁸ For instance, the dormitory in the well-preserved Cistercian monastery at Bebenhausen [2.24] was originally a large communal hall capped by a wooden barrel vault. However, spurred by the monks' demands for

argue (117) that Werl's panel plainly evinces "naturalism", it being "inconceivable" that the mirror was rendered without direct observation.

⁵⁸⁶ See fn427 above and Belting, *Spiegel*, 146.

⁵⁸⁷ Michael Mennim, *Hall Houses* (York: William Sessions, 2005), 159; Margaret Wood, *The English Mediaeval House* (London: Phoenix House, 1965), 146.

⁵⁸⁸ Nicola Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137-38.

increased personal space, a later Abbot Johann von Friedingen (1458-1534) converted the hall, adding half-timbered individual cells and transforming the vault into a flat-beamed ceiling.⁵⁸⁹

The tight architectural space depicted may well have borne additional connotations for a Minorite viewer. Spatial metaphors of narrowness and stricture were commonly used to articulate Franciscan ideals of poverty and humility.⁵⁹⁰ Clement V's bull 'Exivi di Paradiso' at the Council of Vienna on 5th May 1312 stipulated the Franciscan *usus arctus* (a corruption of *artus*, literally tight or narrow) meaning simple or strict use of goods wherever the rule prescribed it.⁵⁹¹ In his treatise against ornament, Capestrano communicates an emphasis on personal modesty through metaphorical straitness. His tract begins, *quoniam ut ait dominus: Quam angusta porta et arta via que ducit ad vitam.*⁵⁹² It is a quotation from Matthew 7:14, meaning "how narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life". Capestrano qualifies: *necesse est ut per angustam et artam viam salutis diligentissime... incedamus* ("it is necessary that we pass most diligently through the narrow and strait way of salvation...")

⁵⁸⁹ "Das Dormitorium," Kloster und Schloss Bebenhausen, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, accessed May 23 2021, <https://www.kloster-bebenhausen.de/erlebnis-kloster-schloss/kloster-schloss/klosteranlage/dormitorium>. On this phenomenon in monastic architectural history, with written evidence supporting material findings, see David Bell, "Chambers, Cells, and Cubicles: The Cistercian General Chapter and the Development of the Private Room," in *Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude: Essays on Cistercians, Art and Architecture in Honour of Peter Fergusson*, ed. Terry Kinder (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 187-98.

⁵⁹⁰ Narrowness was a widely used metaphor for the religious life: Chaucer's Monk hypocritically "took the world's more spacious way", as opposed to a narrower cloistered existence (*The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 24).

⁵⁹¹ Bihl, "Friars Minor".

⁵⁹² Latin cited in Karin Schneider ed., *Die Handschriften der Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, Band II: Die lateinischen mittelalterlichen Handschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 1:211.

These are only conjectural prompts: without the centre, we naturally cannot hope to fully encompass the original connotations attached to the altarpiece's appearance. Even so, the apparently mixed semantics of Werl's architectural space warrant extra attention – especially the contrast of these compartmentalisations below with the relatively airy ceiling above: a barrel vault with two substantial crossbars. In early Netherlandish painting, wooden barrel vaults seem to have been used for a number of different purposes: secular and sacred, public and seclusionary [2.25-27].⁵⁹³ In built architecture, barrel vaults could feature in domestic chapels or oratories.⁵⁹⁴ Though a ribbed wooden vault, the surviving ceiling for the oratory at Bruges' Gruuthuse (built 1470s) may give an impression of how such a space appeared [2.28]. But the wooden barrel seems also often to have featured in large, public secular spaces. In illuminated manuscripts, such vaults were used to signify grand courtly interiors [2.29]. Good examples of panelled barrel ceilings survive in two Burgundian *Hôtel-Dieus*, one at Tonnere built 1293 and the *Hôtel-Dieu* at Beaune (a pointed barrel) founded 1453 [2.30-31].⁵⁹⁵ Indeed, by its two crossbeams, the Werl ceiling seems to imply a more expansive spatial environment than visibly apparent.

⁵⁹³ E.g., Flémalle Group, *Mass of St Gregory* [2.25] (Thürlemann, *Campin*, 331-32); Rogier's *Columba Altarpiece* [2.26] and the Beheading from Rogier's *St John Altarpiece* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1455); Dirk Bouts, *Christ in the House of Simon* [2.27] and the Annunciation from Bouts' *Triptych of the Life of the Virgin* (Prado Museum, c. 1445); Master of 1499, *Annunciation Diptych* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1500); Hieronymus Bosch, *Death and the Miser* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1490-1516).

⁵⁹⁴ Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 229, and cf. the illustration in Philippe Contamine, "Peasant Hearth to Papal Palace: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *A History of Private Life. II: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 504.

⁵⁹⁵ See Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture*, 11. Cf. the Palais de la Cité's Grand Salle, Paris, built by Philip the Fair (1268-1314), destroyed by fire in 1601 and the later, surviving (pointed barrel) ceiling of the Salles des Procureurs at the Rouen Palais de Justice, 1507-17.

Penelope Eames wrote of an immense flexibility of use in late medieval rooms and furnishings, “the secular mingling with the ecclesiastical in a way that shows no strict barriers existed between the two”.⁵⁹⁶ Painters might feasibly exploit this ambiguity for their own ends. Rather than definitively categorise it as ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’, perhaps it would be more relevant to draw attention to a pictorial vault’s honorific effect, compositionally enacted. Interestingly, the extended space in Werl’s mirror reflection [2.32] is not similarly vaulted: its ceiling appears to descend towards the back wall and terminates horizontally rather than at a semi-circle. This virtual place, it seems, is not capped by the same ceiling. Werl’s vault thus additionally plays the role of an architectural “halo” worn at some distance above his scholar’s cap, similar to pictorial motifs like a canopy, a cloth of honour, a fireplace, a firescreen or indeed a bed – all in their own way forms of compositional honour woven into interior settings.⁵⁹⁷ In the January miniature of the *Très Riches Heures* [2.5], the patron Jean de Berry appears compositionally aggrandised by a combination of such elements.

It is sometimes said that early Netherlandish painters – the Flémalle Group significantly – have an uncanny capability to conjure something of the genuine ambience of a built space.⁵⁹⁸ Here, ambience is manipulated for a complex effect: it is as if the intention was to confer opposing connotations of greatness and straitness upon the patron and saintly companion – an opposition potentially

⁵⁹⁶ Eames, “Documentary,” 54. Cf. Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture*, 11, on Tonnere as a “fusion” of sacred and secular.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Birkmeyer, “Arch motif,” 3 (on proscenium arches) “serving, so to speak, as halos for the figures”.

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. Pächt, *Van Eyck*, 43.

analogised, as already noted, through their habits' different lengths. The vault aggrandises the Provincial Minister: Thomas of Celano, St Francis' first biographer, records that the saint would have his Provincial Ministers "treated with all honour and valued, as those who bore the burden of care and toil".⁵⁹⁹ But equally, the small cubicle denotes a space of restriction, bringing out another aspect of Minorite values. As it was written in the rule, St Francis wished his followers to be called minors or 'lesser brethren' ("and be they lesser"); "Truly", writes Francis' biographer, "they were 'lesser'", "subject to all", "founded on the solid basis of true humility".⁶⁰⁰ For Werl to opt for John the Baptist as his patron saint, despite the unmatching first names, further indicates his desire to be viewed, partially, in an austere light. He wants to be seen as a man of great humility (as prescribed by St Francis) but one who is also simultaneously prominent to his secular contemporaries of note.

Accordingly, his 'cell' is far from any kind of puritanical asceticism, with its lavish round mirror and plushly upholstered bench. Because of the furnishings, one scholar recently called the location a "residential building".⁶⁰¹ This would leave the exact status undetermined – an ambivalence the painter perhaps intended to embrace. Philippe Contamine draws attention to the fact that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, monastic and mendicant institutions provided increasingly more private space for their inhabitants, and those occupying higher offices could sometimes establish substantial, well-furnished apartments.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ Celano, *Lives*, 316.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁰¹ Kemperdick, *Flémalle*, 285 (no. 22).

⁶⁰² Contamine, "Peasant," 485-89.

We might thus characterise the panel's disjunctive aspects as approaching a pictorially achieved "paradox of lowliness and elevation".⁶⁰³ For Millard Meiss, much late medieval religious art found ways to explore this Christian "polar thinking" in iconography and composition alike.⁶⁰⁴ These disjunctions in space and motifs were conceivably soldered together in an attempt to encompass the paradoxical ambitions of a worldly Minorite who attempts to seem both Minister and Magister, lesser and greater; they evoke not a rural monastery, but a Franciscan convent woven into an urban fabric. Indeed, the tie beams of the Werl barrel vault are structurally unsound and therefore fictitious, as if fabricated from impractical elements just for the painting alone.⁶⁰⁵

A 'convenient' mirror

One can appreciate the painter's special attention to the orchestrations of interior space even more forcefully in the mirror [2.32]: a domestic setting in itself and a microcosmic symbol of the pictorial synthesis between figure and environment. By its reflected image of two Franciscan friars entering Werl's abode, the mirror conveys and implicates the patronage at a secondary virtual level. The reflection seems fundamentally at odds with the partition wall: the one indicating privation,

⁶⁰³ Millard Meiss, "Highlands' in the Lowlands: Jan van Eyck and the Master of Flémalle and the Franco-Italian Tradition," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 57 (1961): 276, and see Erich Auerbach, "Sermo Humilis," in *Literary Language & Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in The Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 25-66, where this concept is notably explored.

⁶⁰⁴ Millard Meiss, "The Madonna of Humility," *Art Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (1936): 462.

⁶⁰⁵ I am grateful to Professor Christopher Norton for discussing this in person, 11 February 2020. By contrast, the barrel vault in Rogier van der Weyden's *Columba Altarpiece* [2.26] has its tie beam resting on stone corbels, a much more plausible structural solution.

the other the space's permeability. Belting writes of this particular coincidence between opacity and transparency as a point of "profound antithesis".⁶⁰⁶

In scholarship on early Netherlandish religious pictures, domestic interiors are regularly interpreted through the metaphor of the 'house' or 'cloister of the soul', which by the end of the Middle Ages had become "one of the most useful and hence most familiar of devotional devices".⁶⁰⁷ These texts are said to epitomise a late medieval "technology of inwardness".⁶⁰⁸ One can see how a work such as the *Annunciation* [2.6] might be seen to reflect such pictorialized introversion. A major thrust of the arguments of Georges Duby's *History of Private Life* and of Richard Sennett's researches on interiority is that the evolution of a modern sensibility to internalised individuality is coeval with the early modern development of private domestic space, and that a formative conceptual tributary can be recovered in late medieval lay spirituality.⁶⁰⁹ For instance, a fourteenth-century French devotional text recommends, "you shall retire into your room as soon as possible and you shall close the door behind you; and you must do so spiritually as well, that is, you must withdraw and gather your senses to you, which have been occupied and scattered throughout the day".⁶¹⁰ In the metaphorical 'soul-houses' of the era, then, communication happened between human and God

⁶⁰⁶ Belting, *Spiegel*, 146.

⁶⁰⁷ Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 156. On house and cloister metaphors in early Netherlandish devotional artworks, see Falque, *Devotional*, 133-43; Falkenburg, "Household".

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁰⁹ See Georges Duby, "Solitude: Eleventh to Thirteenth Century," in Duby, *Private*, 509-33 (esp. 509; 514; 528-23) and Sennett, *Conscience*, 21-30.

⁶¹⁰ Translated in Robert Clark, "Constructing the Female Subject in late Medieval Devotion," in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert Clark (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 172.

in solitary fashion, as in Matthew 6:6 “when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret...”, a Bible quotation that became particularly well-liked in the later middle ages.⁶¹¹ But the tension between outer and inner life has been called one of “the great paradoxes of Christian history”.⁶¹² Towards the end of the Middle Ages especially, the opposing existential philosophies of the *vita solitaria* und *vita communis* tended increasingly to intermingle and contradict each other in theological thinking.⁶¹³ By extension, with its many perforations, Werl’s domestic architecture, its soul-structure, seems pointedly *not* secluded and withdrawn – so much so that we might wonder whether it was orchestrated in conscious opposition to such concepts. Kneeling on the threshold, Werl seems poised between two worlds.

The point of this section, then, is to try to understand Werl’s panel by a more outward-looking, sociable light than the usual ‘interiorising’ interpretative model; to see the depicted motifs working in support of this. The interiority Werl’s dwelling stages is less solipsistic, more communal and relational. Rather than interpreting his depiction as one of exclusionary, interiorised piety, as can often be assumed the intention of such early Netherlandish indoor portrayals, we should adjust our expectations for this unusual picture, testing the pictorial appearance

⁶¹¹ Cf. the instructions in Jean Gerson’s *Mountain of Contemplation* (1400) in *Early Works*, trans. Brian McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 96-97 and Danielle Régnier-Bohler, “Imagining the Self,” in Duby, *Private*, 357.

⁶¹² Owen Thomas, “Interiority and Christian Spirituality,” *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2000): 51; cf. John Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: the Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Rome: Oriental Institute, 1987), 253-68.

⁶¹³ Nikolaus Staubach, “‘Vita Solitaria’ und ‘Vita Communis’: Der Innenraum als Symbol religiöser Lebensgestaltung im Spätmittelalter,” in Staubach, *Außen*, esp. 287.

against what we know of Werl's historical situation. He was not famous for his asceticism; on the contrary, he was one of the foremost communicators of his age.

Scholars have consistently given attention to the mirror in the Arnolfini Portrait but written little about that in the Werl panel, sometimes even misreading the reflection; however, in some ways the Werl motif is more remarkable for its featuring in a picture meant for an ecclesiastical setting.⁶¹⁴ The location of the left-hand panel is made emphatically contingent by the mirror's presence, which stimulates the visual interest like a target, pulling – on close inspection – the social world into the picture, making the panel a staged, virtual occasion as well as a representation. A convex mirror is a particularly striking motif for an altarpiece wing panel, where mirrors generally do not appear. The motif is so dominating of the small space as to be almost jarring, so prominent that it cannot have been a mere whim of the painter, but at the very least sanctioned by the patron, possibly even his deliberate request. We might call it Werl's 'attribute'.

According to Wolfgang Kemp, the real "energies" of early Netherlandish interior scenes' spatial choreographies emerge from the depths; this is where the beholder can find themselves experientially implicated within the work.⁶¹⁵ In Werl's panel the wooden screen halts vision, yet the mirror reveals that there is more space than can immediately be perceived. The archway also marks the painting as an architectural location in itself, but this effect becomes destabilised through the

⁶¹⁴ But note the (less prominent) convex mirror in Derick Baegert and workshop, *St Luke Triptych* (Stolzenhain Parish Church, later fifteenth century), whose central panel is estimated to faithfully resemble a lost work by the Flémalle Group of c.1430 (Thürlemann, *Campin*, 274-75).

⁶¹⁵ Kemp, *Räume*, 109.

reflection. Belting explains: “The stone façade, with which the image terminates in front, belongs to the fiction of the painting, whereas the cell’s real door, through which we can see two monks enter, is only visible in the mirror. Place and image are here differentiated in a subtle manner”.⁶¹⁶ Werl’s cubicle is revealed as fully porous, really no cubicle at all, and opens onto a long room which includes another window, now-indistinct wooden furniture (possibly a *dressoir*), and eventually another entrance, the door left emphatically *open* (with its mirror, door, cupboard, windows and archway, Werl’s panel actually abounds in openings). The painted space acts as a kind of antechamber to the central scene, and the reflected space – notionally that of the beholder – is made *virtually* attendant on the antechamber. The stone façade separates the world of the beholder from the image-world, but the mirror paradoxically binds them together. In this clash of motifs, the Werl panel strives to make the viewer aware of two distinct kinds of location, here pressed into mutual interaction: the “picture as place” and the “place within the picture”.⁶¹⁷ Herein lies its ‘energy’.

Within the mirror image, two friars dressed like Werl (brown, hooded, but tonsured without scholar’s caps) look to be approaching the patron and his picture, one larger in height, one smaller. Their hands clasp the white cords at their waist. We sense that they are in movement towards the image because the smaller friar lags behind the larger one, and they both appear to put one foot in front of the other.

⁶¹⁶ Belting, *Spiegel*, 175-76.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The painting's reception is totally coloured by the content of the mirror's reflection: we, the beholder, stand notionally in place of the approaching Minorites. If you are a Minorite and look into the mirror, you will find a version of yourself occupying an equivalent position. In this hypothetical instance, the mirror has confirmatory force: it would attest to a mode of being. If you are not a Minorite, you may look into the mirror and feel something of the frisson of disquiet that accompanies experiencing an unequal reflection. The fact that *two* friars are painted rather than one gives a flavour of virtual presence.⁶¹⁸ By its aura of implicit company, the mirror makes the triptych into a social event, a multi-dimensional sacra conversazione.

The motif is often said to be a respectful citation of that used in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [2.33] painted four years earlier in 1434.⁶¹⁹ It is possible that both motifs derive from the same lost source, but perhaps more likely that the Flémalle Group painter was familiar with the portrait – even had studied it intensively. As in the *Arnolfini*, a circular convex mirror is in the centre of a panel, carefully nestled between two bodies, its reflection showing the same figures from behind and further figures on the approach having entered the same room, and with shuttered windows visible from the perspective of the beholder on the left-hand side. As in the *Arnolfini*, the motif is placed directly above a seat facing parallel to the picture plane with one cushion visible, the view of which is obstructed by the figures.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸ Cf. the cameo pairs of figures in Jan van Eyck, *Rolin Madonna* (Louvre Museum, c.1435), Rogier's *St Luke* (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, c.1435-40) and Petrus Christus, *Goldsmith* [0.13] – the latter pair similarly reflected in a mirror.

⁶¹⁹ Kemperdick, "Rogier," 64.

⁶²⁰ See p158 above for Eyckian borrowings.

But the Werl painter has cleverly adjusted the mirror image due to its location on the altarpiece's left wing. Just as when one looks at a convex mirror askance in reality, the reflection shows much more of the left side of the room, its curvature microcosmically compressing a considerable amount of space into a contained area, much like the setting itself.

Panofsky was so hoodwinked by the two mirrors' similarity that he mistook the figures in the reflection of the *Werl Altarpiece* as a "man and a boy – presumably the painter and his small assistant – as they enter the room".⁶²¹ Panofsky's error is revealing: this was a sensitive *imitatio* on the part of the Werl painter, employing the same composition as the *Arnolfini* but changing the figures. Both reflections describe encounters, but whereas the *Arnolfini* shows a secular, bourgeois meeting, the altarpiece enacts a shrewd *détournement* of the profane prototype by illustrating in its stead friars converging on their Provincial Minister and an accompanying saint.⁶²² Indeed, it is somewhat uncanny to see John the Baptist reproduced in the mirror from behind, generating two saints from one, and having

⁶²¹ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:174; see 1:203 for his description of the Arnolfini reflection. Panofsky may not have ever visited the Prado (Susie Nash, "Erwin Panofsky's Early Netherlandish Painting," in *The Books that Shaped Art History*, ed. Richard Shone and John-Paul Stonard (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 94).

⁶²² Jan van Eyck also painted a mirror (with very obviously profane symbolism) in his lost painting of a woman bathing, described in 1456 by Bartolomeo Fazio as in the collection of Ottaviano della Carda, nephew of Federigo da Montefeltro: "... one of them he has shown only the face and breast but has then represented the hind parts of her body in a mirror painted on the wall opposite, so that you may see her back as well as her breast." (Michael Baxandall, "Bartholomaeus Facius on Painting: A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *De Viris Illustribus*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964): 102). A work of a similar subject considered to have been an original by van Eyck, but only showing one woman at her toilet and the mirror in a different position, was depicted in Willem van Haecht, *Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (Rubenshuis, 1628), with a later copy in the Harvard Art Gallery; for these pictures, see Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 206-11.

the curious effect of thickening the saintly aura while at the same time also fragmenting it.

Within Werl's mendicant sphere, what might this apparently deliberate secular appropriation have been seen to connote? Mirrors appearing in fifteenth-century Netherlandish paintings are slippery entities. The convex mirror in the *Arnolfini Portrait* has been interpreted variously as a symbol of the Virgin, the terrestrial world, a reflection of the visible world, and as an unsymbolic visual aide added to produce the pictorially impossible – a fully visible room.⁶²³ But by its contents, Werl's motif seems to have a directive function; via the striding intent of the reflected Franciscans, it generates a dynamic target-like force.⁶²⁴ Around 1400, the Dominican preacher Fra Giovanni Dominici recommended pictures of the Christchild or young John the Baptist should be shown to children “still in swaddling bonds” in order to encourage imitation, since “like calls to like”.⁶²⁵ In the Werl panel, the notional Franciscan beholder looks at the Franciscans reflected, looking at Werl, their Provincial Minister, who in turn looks at whomever was in the centre panel. The obvious difference in height between the reflected Franciscans transmits an educative thrust: the taller, older friar (who appears to have grey hair) leads the smaller, younger friar in the direction of the painting, of Werl, and of worship: a call to approach and to pray, betraying an apostolic flavour (in the Acts of the Apostles, there is constant emphasis on congregation).⁶²⁶

⁶²³ David Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 84.

⁶²⁴ Belting, *Spiegel*, 146.

⁶²⁵ Quoted in Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Daily Life in a Medieval Italian City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 238.

⁶²⁶ E.g., Acts 1:13; 2:1; 2:46.

This is the motif apprehended from the point of view of the notional Franciscan beholder, perhaps the work's 'ideal' beholder. But the mirror is also closely linked to Werl; it is, as was proposed, something like his attribute. In the Middle Ages, mirrors appear to have had two opposing principal symbolisms: one pejorative, concerning luxury and vanity (see [2.19]); the other positive, related to understanding and good example.⁶²⁷ 'Speculation', seeing something as in a mirror, was indelibly linked to knowledge.⁶²⁸ Medieval philosophers and theologians frequently used *specula* to entitle treatises of instruction, signifying paradigms to be reflected by readers.⁶²⁹ St Francis' life was one such paradigm: one of his early biographies was called the *Speculum perfectionis* (mirror of perfection).⁶³⁰ By extension, his followers were all supposed to be exemplary: St Francis is said to have wished for his Provincial Ministers "that their life should be a mirror of discipline for the rest".⁶³¹

Consequently, this painted *speculum* may well encompass two further things: both the Provincial Minister's status as a living *exemplum* and, also, something of the philosophy underpinning the Conventual way of life. Of the three religious vows pertaining to the mendicant Orders in this period, chastity, poverty and obedience,

⁶²⁷ On mirrors and vanity, see Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katharine Jewett (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22, and note fn523 above.

⁶²⁸ Melchior-Bonnet, *Mirror*, 195-7 on knowledge and speculating.

⁶²⁹ For the numerous *speculum*-themed titles, see Ritamary Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Mediaeval Literature," *Speculum* 29, no. 1 (1954): 100-15. Cf. Nancy Frelick ed., *The Mirror in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Specular Reflections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 1-28.

⁶³⁰ Translated as Thomas Okey, ed., *The 'Little Flowers' & the Life of St Francis with the 'Mirror of Perfection'* (London: Dent: 1912).

⁶³¹ Celano, *Lives*, 316.

the Observants fiercely emphasised poverty. But the Conventuals promoted obedience; Werl in particular, as is clear from his later writings.⁶³² Most important at this time was the desire for unity: to bring the disparate elements of the Franciscan Order together in a true ‘convenience’.⁶³³

Although we have been using the term ‘Conventual’ to describe this particular branch of the Order, in fact they were called as such in the official documents from only 1431 onwards.⁶³⁴ The terminology came into being almost in parallel with the beginning of Werl’s ministership (1432) and with the rifts within the Order. Use of the word “Conventual” created a literal labelling of these urban Franciscans by a brotherly ‘convenience’ or ‘coming together’ and as such refers to certain elements of St Francis’ early teachings. Celano writes of how Francis first moulded those entering the new religion, saying “they came together with longing, they dwelt together with delight”, “whenever they came together in any place, or met one another in the way, (as is usual) there sprang up a shoot of spiritual love”.⁶³⁵

The Cologne convent was a sociable place. In the early fourteenth century it already accommodated as many as 300 bodies – a striking amount – both friars and university students.⁶³⁶ This idea of co-habitation complemented the Conventual philosophy of maintaining possessions in common, as their initial appellation the ‘Community’ would suggest.⁶³⁷ Celano emphasised this aspect, writing that the

⁶³² Viallet, *Sens*, 100-01.

⁶³³ Clasen, "Heinrich... Beiträge (Schluß)," 70.

⁶³⁴ Paschal Robinson, "Order of the Friars Minor Conventuals," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Appleton, 1908), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04344a.htm>.

⁶³⁵ Celano, *Lives*, 38-39.

⁶³⁶ Eubel, *Geschichte*, 49.

⁶³⁷ Hofer, *Capistran*, 33.

early members of the Order “poured forth their whole affection in common, the business of all alike was to give up themselves as the price of supplying their brethren’s need”.⁶³⁸ As already noted, the Conventuals were city dwellers as opposed to the Observants. In the picture, the neighbouring buildings, especially those clearly viewable in the reflection, give an impression of a built environment; there are two reflected gables just as there are two reflected friars. This, then, is an opposite kind of propaganda to (Flémalle Group) Jacques Daret’s panels from the *Arras Altarpiece* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Thyssen Museum, Madrid, Petit Palais, Paris, c.1434), which, de Rock argues, used an idealized landscape in order to connote landed prestige and define an urban environment as comparatively volatile.⁶³⁹ Indeed, it is said that mendicants conceived of heaven as a distinctly urban location.⁶⁴⁰

Pictorial techniques and motifs such as those discussed may thus not simply explain but also suggest models of viewing – even of living.⁶⁴¹ Early Netherlandish domestic interiors may be employed to communicate metaphorical, spiritual interiority, but this does not mean that they exclude the world. In fact, the world is routinely pointedly admitted, sometimes at a remove, other times more proximately.⁶⁴² Indeed, Belting writes of early Netherlandish interiors’ great emphasis on locational (and existential) contingency: “each different location is

⁶³⁸ Celano, *Lives*, 39.

⁶³⁹ De Rock, *Image*, 219-54.

⁶⁴⁰ Ulrike Wuttke, *Im Diesseits das Jenseits Bereiten* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2016), 138.

⁶⁴¹ On the panels’ suggestion of visual techniques cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 162 and Heike Schlie, “Wandlung und Offenbarung: Zur Medialität von Klappretabeln,” *Das Mittelalter* 9 (2004): 33-34.

⁶⁴² De Rock, *Image*, 95-102.

situated always in the world and hence brings into play the very same world in which the human exists”.⁶⁴³ This panel uses this capacity to stage the Order’s brotherly, communal aspect through the mirror, where the reflected friars appear suspended in the act of ‘coming together’; the indistinction of facial features in the reflected Minorites make the figures ripe for projection and identification. In collaboration with the interior, the mirror is made into a Conventual symbol. Werl is very much not praying alone; the picture of interiority staged by his altarpiece panel is essentially outward facing. But even among its warm communalities there is still a definite hierarchy. The converging Franciscans cannot yet see what Werl sees: this vision is only available to him, to St John, and to ‘us’ – the viewers of the painting before the central section was lost.

The contemporary as vernacular communication

Keeping the sense of communication and connection in mind, our final section turns to focus on St Barbara’s thoroughly described interior [2.1c], returning to some of the introduction’s themes. Apart from her archaic clothing, this saint is intended to be perceived as communing with and in the patron’s world, in 1438.⁶⁴⁴ The decision to place the religious picture so forcefully in the present day, a hallmark of the Flémalle Group, finds further resonances in its Franciscan patronage – especially in Werl’s strong commitment to vernacular communication. What follows will be less a precise interpretation but more a preliminary inducement to read the familiar, contemporary contents of such religious paintings

⁶⁴³ Belting, *Spiegel*, 125 and cf. 88.

⁶⁴⁴ Jeanne, “Medieval,” 40.

as having a special communicative force, socially adapted, which a comparison with Franciscan preaching will help us explore. I will begin analysis of this panel with the view out of Barbara's window before coming in due course to the objects in the room.

It is difficult to spot the saintly attribute. For this reason, nineteenth-century cataloguers mistook the figure for the Virgin.⁶⁴⁵ But just above Barbara's head there is a tower with much activity [2.34]. At least four masons gather around it digging, lifting, axing, operating a crane. There are three well-dressed figures: a man gesticulating at the work and two women with long trailing dresses. This vignette may describe the beginning of the saint's life when St Barbara descends from the tower to petition the workmen (one of whom now transformed into a gentleman-architect) to add a third window.⁶⁴⁶ The second woman remains inexplicable, however. A comparable version of St Barbara with attribute under construction was made by van Eyck in 1437 [1.32], one year before, and conceivably had an influence on the Werl panels; this work also has potential links to Cologne in that its depicted tower may represent the city's cathedral.⁶⁴⁷ In van Eyck's version there is another mixture of classes: besides the workmen, there are a group of elegant visitors in conversation as they look at the viewer (three women with long trains, sporting 'pair of temples' hairstyles and bourrelet headdresses, and a well-dressed man with a large hat), the kind, said Elisabeth Dhanens, that "love to see a building

⁶⁴⁵ *Catalogo*, 331 (no. 1403): "Nuestra Señora leyendo en un libro..."

⁶⁴⁶ See Jacobus de Voragine's *Life of St Barbara* in Frederick Ellis ed., *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton* (London: Dent, 1900), 6:198-204.

⁶⁴⁷ Carol Purtle, "Intention and Invention in Jan van Eyck's 'Saint Barbara'," in *Invention: Northern Renaissance Studies in Honor of Molly Faries*, ed. Julien Chapuis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 50-63.

project”.⁶⁴⁸ In the Werl panel, the male figure is clearly wearing a two-colour contemporary *houppelande* with a modishly low-slung belt. In both pictures, these unusual saintly attributes have been absorbed into the fictions of their pictorial worlds and given interesting social dimensions; there are few precedents for such contemporary narrativizations of Barbara’s tower.⁶⁴⁹ As, arguably, a saintly attribute’s primary function was to enhance that saint’s identity, we have to wonder, here, what was the purpose behind this atypical treatment of Barbara’s iconographic tradition.⁶⁵⁰

In her study of early Netherlandish altarpieces, Schlie makes the statement that we still know very little about the reception of religious pictures in the late medieval era.⁶⁵¹ Modern scholarship can sometimes be guilty of assuming a (perhaps anachronistically) passive, enwrapped, uncompromisingly reverential attitude on the part of every hypothetical beholder. But this is to treat such altarpieces purely as functional images, disregarding their other capacities. These pictures also accompanied life; they were apprehended routinely, conversed about, through and (in a sense) with. Peter Parshall gestures at such underplayed receptive dimensions when he suggests that the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2], in view of its composition and motifs, functioned not only as an object of devotion but almost certainly also a

⁶⁴⁸ Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 254-65 (258). On these headdresses, see Lourdes Font, “1430-1439,” in *Fashion History Timeline* (FIT, State University of New York, 2018), accessed May 23 2021, <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1430-1439/>.

⁶⁴⁹ On men’s *houppelandes* and low-slung belts in the 1430s, see *ibid.* Cf. the reading of van Eyck’s Barbara in Christopher S. Wood, “Van Eyck out of Focus,” in *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, ed. Amy Golahny et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 477-78.

⁶⁵⁰ Hans Wentzel, “Attribut,” in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* (1937), 1:1212-20, in RDK Labor, <https://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/Attribut>: “an attribute is the pictorial form of a statement that characterises the bearer and is unique to them, by which they can be recognised”.

⁶⁵¹ Schlie, *Corpus*, 14.

facilitator for discussion.⁶⁵² Such uncommon elements in the Werl panels like the mirror and Barbara's narrativized attribute may conceivably have been included to trigger conversational effects. Indeed, the device of an open window or door, the unusual motif facing Werl (used also in the *Mérode*), is often employed in Pentecostal iconography.⁶⁵³ It symbolises the holy spirit passing through the dwelling where the disciples gathered, infusing them with ability to preach the word in different languages. And St John's attribute, the lamb on a closed book, may also bear a symbolism associated with preaching the divine word.⁶⁵⁴ Werl's door contains two opening mechanisms, both of which are in use; and unlike in the *Mérode*, Werl's door is fully open.

Much of Werl's celebrity rested on his talent for communication and teaching.⁶⁵⁵ Sixteenth-century Westphalian historian Hermann Hamelmann called him "learned in divine scripture and not ignorant of secular philosophy, excelling in character and eloquence".⁶⁵⁶ Werl is remembered as a distinguished (*insignis*) master of theology and philosopher, famous in discourse (*conversazione clarus*).⁶⁵⁷ Minorites and students would have relied on him for education; his Cologne convent was the Franciscan province's chief seat of learning, accommodating a

⁶⁵² Parshall, "Commentary," 19.

⁶⁵³ See Acts 1:1-4; Colossians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12. Cf. Colijn de Coter, Pentecost (National Museum Warsaw, c.1500); Girolamo da Cremona, Pentecost, (Getty Museum, c.1460-70). On Werl's panel's many "openings" see Jacobs, *Opening*, 57.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. e.g., the iconography in the alabaster sculpture: English School, *St John the Baptist Preaching* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, c.1450-1500) (for identification: inv. A.161-1946).

⁶⁵⁵ Lampen, "Fratres," 475: "excelluit tam praedicando quam docendo et scribendo"; Eubel, *Geschichte*, 288.

⁶⁵⁶ Hermann Hamelmann, *Illustrium Westphaliae Virorum libri sex*, ed. Karl Löffler (Münster: Aschendorff, 1908), 11: "in divinis scripturis eruditus et saecularis philosophiae non ignarus, excellens ingenio et eloquio".

⁶⁵⁷ Sbaraleae, *Supplementum*, 340: "Magister insignis, Philosophus, vita, & conversatione clarus, necnon Ecclesiastes conspicuus cum provinciae Coloniensi annos 32. Præfuisse..."

mixture of friars and university students.⁶⁵⁸ But his instruction reached beyond the convent walls; he was also among the greatest popular preachers of the age.⁶⁵⁹ At the end of the fifteenth century, Johannes Trithemius described him as “a sharp debater and distinguished preacher of the divine word”, mentioning a volume of “many elegant sermons addressed to the community”.⁶⁶⁰ Antonio Possevino made reference to these numerous sermons, one entitled “Of the Passion of Christ” which was particularly “greatly esteemed” (*magnopere probatur*).⁶⁶¹ Among Werl’s varied writings, a *Clarificatorium in Opus Prædictum*, and *Sermones de Tempore, & de Sanctis* were also recorded.⁶⁶²

Although scripted in Latin, Werl’s sermons would ordinarily have been conducted in the vernacular tongue to maximise their influence. The vernacular was deemed crucial for preaching; only certain figures preached in Latin, among them notably Capestrano who made use of an interpreter when taking the pulpit on his tour of the German-speaking lands.⁶⁶³ For Franciscans, preaching was a labour that bridged the divide between contemplation and action.⁶⁶⁴ The sermon was a

⁶⁵⁸ Eubel, *Geschichte*, 49.

⁶⁵⁹ Florenz Landmann, *Das Predigtwesen in Westfalen in der letzten Zeit des Mittelalters. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1900), 9. Cf. Anscar Zawart, *The History of Franciscan Preaching and of Franciscan Preachers (1209-1927)* (New York: Wagner, 1928), 346.

⁶⁶⁰ Trit[h]emius, *Catalogus*, 42b: “disputator acurus et divini verbi praedicator egregius”; “sermones quos ad populu[m] et plures et elega[n]tes”.

⁶⁶¹ Possevini, *Apparatus*, 2:22: “... scripsit In Sententias Mag. Lib. 4. De potestate Ecclesiastica, lib. I. Sermones quoque varios: Quorum, qui de Passione Domini est scriptus, magnopere probatur. Quæstiones item in vniuersalia Porphyrij. Viuebat Eugenio Pont. Max. ac tempore Florentini Concilij”.

⁶⁶² Sbaraleae, *Supplementum*, 340.

⁶⁶³ Schlager, *Beiträge*, 167. Cf. Victor Green, “Franciscans in Medieval English Life,” *Franciscan Studies* 20 (1939): 31: “[Franciscans] preached in the vernacular and probably, for the most part, never wrote the sermons”; cf. Gerald Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c.1350-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 223-27 on the custom to record sermons only in Latin.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Claire Waters, “The Labor of Aedificatio and the Business of Preaching in the Thirteenth Century,” *Viator* 38, no. 1 (2007): 167-89.

“principal duty” for Conventuals and Observants alike: if there was a choice, San Bernadino advised, “you should let the mass go rather than the sermon”.⁶⁶⁵

Werl’s sermons have been lost, but we may conjecture in these some similarity to those written by another Cologne Franciscan, Johannes von Werden (d.1437), presumably Werl’s direct contemporary and described by biographers as of comparably broad learning.⁶⁶⁶ Trithemius praised Werden in similar fashion to Werl as “a most famous speaker of popular sermons of our time”.⁶⁶⁷ In Werden’s compilation – given the amusing title (shorter form) *Dormi Secure* (sleep soundly) – the “demanding methods of strict scholastic preaching are practically abandoned”.⁶⁶⁸ Simple three- or four-part sermons gave a structured explanation of provocative imagery derived from, for instance, the popular apocrypha or saints’ lives. Franciscan historian Patricius Schlager describes one of these at length (the twenty-fifth of the first part) which makes recurrent use of the metaphor of sounding bells: “the bells are quiet, because the bell of faith lost its ring when the Lord was denied...”⁶⁶⁹

Regular preaching had been encouraged since the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council; the period from c.1350-1450 was preaching’s “golden age”.⁶⁷⁰ The impact

⁶⁶⁵ Rudolf Cruel, *Geschichte der deutschen Predigt im Mittelalter* (Detmold: Meyer’sche, 1879), 609; A. Ferrers Howell, *S. Bernadino of Siena* (London: Methuen, 1913), 219.

⁶⁶⁶ For Werden, about whom little is known, see Franz Worstbrock, “Johannes von Werden,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 4:812-13 and Schlager, *Beiträge*, 164-66.

⁶⁶⁷ Trit[h]emius, *Catalogus*, 35: “declamator sermonum popularium suo tempore celeberrimus”.

⁶⁶⁸ Worstbrock, “Werden”.

⁶⁶⁹ Schlager, *Beiträge*, 166.

⁶⁷⁰ Patrick Horner ed., *A Macaronic Sermon Collection from Late Medieval England. Oxford, MS Bodley 649* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006), 21.

of preaching was considerable: “We, readers of newspapers”, writes Huizinga, “can hardly imagine anymore the tremendous impact of the spoken word on naïve and ignorant minds”.⁶⁷¹ In order to enhance educational impact, late medieval preaching was routinely comprised of *exempla* and allegories drawn from even the more mundane aspects of everyday life, making use of tropes based on familiar and mutual conversation.⁶⁷² Patrick Horner draws attention to the span of worldly analogies featuring in a significant collection of early fifteenth-century macaronic sermons, ranging from birds and hunting dogs to tavern games.⁶⁷³ Vernacular speech was essential to the preacher’s arsenal.⁶⁷⁴ In a sermon on the Nativity, Geert Grote captured something of the vernacular’s special, ‘primordial’ resonance in the later Middle Ages: “When a learned man... hears something sacred expressed in his mother tongue, he seems to conceive in his mind something new or fresh by way of that mother tongue, first impressed on his mind when he was a boy still ignorant of letters... newer and fresher than if the same thing were said to him in the accustomed Latin way”.⁶⁷⁵

It has been noted that art historians have been slow to integrate research on medieval sermon literature into their study of early Netherlandish painted altarpieces, although their rhetorical structures often seem eminently comparable.⁶⁷⁶ Perhaps, however, a thoroughgoing equation of like-for-like

⁶⁷¹ See Huizinga, *Autumn*, 4-6.

⁶⁷² Claire Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 70.

⁶⁷³ Horner, *Macaronic*, 21.

⁶⁷⁴ Waters, *Angels*, 57-72.

⁶⁷⁵ Van Engen, *Devotio*, 109.

⁶⁷⁶ Schlie, *Corpus*, 97 and 97-107 for preliminary thoughts concerning sermon *exempla* and early Netherlandish painting. Note Robert Suckale, “Rogier van der Weyden: Die Johannestafel. Das Bild als stumme Predigt (1995),” in *Stil und Funktion: ausgewählte Schriften zur Kunst des*

between sermons and images would produce the same problems of traditional iconological research: namely, that particular citations or texts often seem insufficient to wholly account for works of art; that one specific parallel regularly seems just as easily replaced by another. To read each vase, bench or floor tile in the *Werl Altarpiece* as a didactic allegory would fall into this trap; in any case, without the central iconography, it is even more difficult to make such judgements. My intention, however, is to offer the preliminary hypothesis of a kind of ‘structural affinity’ between preaching and painting, to read analogies into modes of expression rather than particular references.

The pictorial language of the domestic setting may be related to this widely held impulse to communicate theological truths more manageably and effectively through the vernacular tongue, a sort of pictorial translation from Latin into the vernacular.⁶⁷⁷ We have seen that in the 1430s, Franciscan friars customarily translated Latin sources into the vernacular to assist Flemish painters with their religious iconographies.⁶⁷⁸ Works of art were certainly employed to demonstrate sermons in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, bringing them more forcefully before the eyes as well as the ears.⁶⁷⁹ In the case of the Werl panels’ interior settings,

Mittelalters, ed. Peter Schmidt and Gregor Wedekind (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008), 433-72, esp. 454-56. Cf. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 48-56 (49): “the preacher and painter were *repetiteur* to each other.” For comparable thoughts on the potential affinities between mendicant preaching and the pictorial language of (Italian) domestic interiors c.1400-1450, see Luke Syson, “Representing Domestic Interiors,” in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (London: V&A, 2006), 97-100.

⁶⁷⁷ For introductory material on this broad topic, see especially the “Introduction” in Joost Keizer and Todd Richardson eds., *The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in Early Modern Arts* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1-23.

⁶⁷⁸ See p169-70 above.

⁶⁷⁹ Landmann, *Predigtwesen*, 113n6. Rudolf Berliner, “A Relief of the Nativity and a Group from an Adoration of the Magi,” *Art Bulletin* 35, no. 2 (1953): 146 notes demonstrations could be made via “living images” – i.e., persons acting the roles of the sermon.

however, the relationship between pictorial language and sermon is conceivably less direct, more in the sphere of shared attitude, in terms of ‘popular’ resonance and the tendency for tangible metaphors – like Augustine’s famous “cup of cold water”, used to demonstrate how a humble, everyday thing can be made lofty in the service of Christian teaching and preaching.⁶⁸⁰

Some scholars have gestured at similar hypotheses. In an essay comparing the domestic interiors of Fra Lippo Lippi with those of the early Flemish painters, Jeffrey Ruda considered the question of why certain still-life elements apparently based on real-life precedents appear to recur at about the same time by widely separated artists but “without direct visual connections among some of them”. He concluded with the conjecture that “itinerant preachers” using a “common vocabulary... based on Latin texts and interacting with the vernaculars” must have played a significant role in producing a climate hospitable to pictorial imagery taken from contemporary life.⁶⁸¹ In a like manner, Carol Purtle read the domestic iconography of the Flémalle Group as “Flemish translations”, iconographic conventions given regional seasoning in order to make the contents “more familiar to northern households”, comparing with texts of religious instructions written to target a wide audience such as Jean Gerson’s ‘ABC of Simple People’ (1401-2).⁶⁸² Robert Calkins, too, conceived such contents as we see in the *Werl Altarpiece* operating on an instantaneous experiential level, a “means of immediate communication, the words of contemporary language that almost everyone in the

⁶⁸⁰ See Auerbach, “Sermo Humilis,” 36-37.

⁶⁸¹ Jeffrey Ruda, “Flemish Painting and the Early Renaissance in Florence: Questions of Influence,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 47, no. 2 (1984): 232.

⁶⁸² Purtle, “Iconography,” 176.

fifteenth century who was interested... would have understood” – in effect, almost a kind of pictorial ‘kitsch’.⁶⁸³

Indeed, many late medieval people seem to have been “fascinated” by household furnishings (as seen in Werl’s panels).⁶⁸⁴ Linguists customarily foregrounded descriptive lists of such household items in educative manuals of conversation composed to teach and translate the various vernaculars.⁶⁸⁵ For instance, one of the most influential of such manuals in the fifteenth century, translating from French into Flemish and based on a source text executed in Bruges sometime after 1367, commences with greetings and pleasantries, names the various members of a family, then directly describes the “essential things one uses around the house” (*des choses necessaires / que on use aval une maison... vanden dinghen noodzakelic / die men bezeght achter huse*): the windows, chambers, beds, upholsteries, benches, chairs, tables, chests, basins, pots, pans, cans, bottles, etc.⁶⁸⁶ There is palpable relish taken in the enumeration of these items; their use in this context betrays an obvious recognition of the value of such “dinghen noodzakelic” in triggering immediate comprehension – establishing shared ground – across linguistic and micro-cultural divides.

⁶⁸³ Calkins, “Secular,” 203.

⁶⁸⁴ Contamine, “Peasant,” 489-90.

⁶⁸⁵ For such fourteenth-, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century conversational handbooks foregrounding discussions of household items, see Jean Gessler, ed., *Le livre des mestiers de Bruges et ses dérivés. Quatre anciens manuels de conversation* (Bruges: Maîtres Imprimeurs de Bruges, 1931), 6 vols. and Simon Jervis, “Les Blasons Domestiques by Gilles Corrozet,” *Furniture History* 25 (1989): 5-35.

⁶⁸⁶ Gessler, *Livre*, esp. 1:7-10 (possibly based on a Bruges text of c.1300-10). On its dating, see Philip Grierson, “The Dates of the ‘Livre des Mestiers’ and its Derivatives,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 35 (1957): 778-83.

Rhineland domestic culture was perhaps not so different to that of the Low Countries. The mid-fifteenth-century Westphalian copyists of the Flémalle Group domestic interiors use remarkably similar pictorial ingredients, seemingly indicating the transferability between these proximate localities.⁶⁸⁷ For the northern beholder used to a colder climate, a wooden interior with a roaring fire would conceivably have evoked a deep resonance at once embodied, cultural and iconographic – a kind of vicarious visual “comfort”, echoing the traditional image long used for depictions of February in the labours of the months, of a person sat in a chair warming themselves by a fire [2.35].⁶⁸⁸ Furnishings, like paintings, circulated in the fifteenth century; the Abbess of Flines’ contract (cited already) specified the representation of Brabantine chairs, Flines being c.50-70 miles southwest of Brabant.⁶⁸⁹ Travelling in the early sixteenth century, Antonio de Beatis saw Cologne, its dwellings, fashions, behaviour and hygiene, as somewhat different to the rest of high Germany and more similar, in fact, to the Low Countries.⁶⁹⁰ “From Cologne”, he writes, “begins the general use of fireplaces in rooms and large windows suited to the summer, as opposed to the very small ones used in Germany. Different manners and a different tongue; better clothes and great cleanliness. The women and the men are better-looking than in high Germany” – presumably, this ‘Flemish-like’ superiority was due to Cologne’s impressive wealth and commercial activities. Consequently, the spatio-temporal relevance that the Werl interior attempts to achieve can conceivably be interpreted thus: as a vernacular style of

⁶⁸⁷ See fn374 above.

⁶⁸⁸ Panofsky, *Renascences*, 143n3.

⁶⁸⁹ See fn473 above.

⁶⁹⁰ Antonio de Beatis, *The Travel Journal of Antonio de Beatis: Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, France and Italy, 1517-1518*, ed. John Hale (London: Hakluyt Society, 1979), 83-84, and following.

communication aimed to excite devotion and understanding, but also – importantly – to broadcast an aura of a certain social status relevant to the donor.

In an influential essay on the sociological reality of the Flémalle Group domestic settings, Catherine Reynolds suggests that in costume and context, the protagonists of such interiors (like the National Gallery's 'Salting Madonna' [2.4]) would have been perceived as stratospherically wealthy and unapproachably exalted. This, she says, contradicts the traditionally perceived tone of these settings as "humble" and "bourgeois".⁶⁹¹ The Barbara in the Werl Altarpiece is certainly made in the model of these Virgins of high social status. She is finely dressed; her large fireplace is comparable to that used to illustrate palace interiors; her windows are half-glazed, a relative luxury.⁶⁹² But such lavishness would not necessarily have prohibited communicative efficacy.

In fact, some scholars have more recently proposed a broader conception of the sociological connotations of these domestic interiors – and of the term 'bourgeois'. De Rock draws attention to recent scholarly reappraisals of material culture evidence, suggesting "noble and non-noble urban elites largely shared the same kind of residential architecture, material culture, and types of conviviality, to such an extent that it is hard to discriminate noble culture from 'common' or 'bourgeois'

⁶⁹¹ Reynolds, "Reality," 188-89: "Contemporaries would have seen, in these plausibly real and very grand settings, grandly dressed ladies who flagrantly break the conventions of the real world... No fifteenth-century non-regal mother could have decently appeared with her head uncovered." For a 'bourgeois' reading, see Craig Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism* (London: Reaktion, 1991), 95-96.

⁶⁹² Cf. the fireplace in Herod's Palace in Rogier van der Weyden, *St John Altarpiece* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, c.1455).

culture”.⁶⁹³ Among the burgher classes, a fashion to aspire to ‘live nobly’ was, during this period, apparently particularly manifest (while also remaining, as Colin Eisler has said, one of “the most obvious rules of human behaviour”).⁶⁹⁴ Already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Christine de Pisan described the lavishness of the bedroom of a humble retail dealer, apparently so “large and well-appointed” as to be worthy of being immortalised in some book.⁶⁹⁵ There was evident consistency in furnishings used by noble and non-noble classes alike; in the contract for the Abbey of Flines just cited, “lords and burghers” seem to have employed the same kind of bed.⁶⁹⁶ Such pictorial contents thus conceivably reflect a shared urban consumer culture, and reveal an intensive interest in luxurious household items on the part of burghers and ecclesiastics alike.

Although taking a rarefied form, such contemporary settings would presumably have still resonated with beholders from a spectrum of social classes. Various scholars have shown that the household elements found in paintings like the *Ghent Altarpiece*’s Annunciation [o.8], *Mérode Altarpiece* [o.2] or Dirk Bouts’ *Holy Sacrament* [o.14] were real artifacts and widely used.⁶⁹⁷ Although in lavish guises,

⁶⁹³ De Rock, *Image*, 102, with references. Cf. Jeanne, “Domesticity,” 71; 75; Contamine, “Peasant,” 466-70.

⁶⁹⁴ Colin Eisler, “Review of *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages* by Jean Wilson,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 1629-31. On fluidity in the social dynamic, see Frederik Buylaert, Wim de Clerq and Jan Dumolyn, “Sumptuary Legislation, Material Culture and the Semiotics of ‘vivre noblement’ in the County of Flanders (14th-16th centuries),” *Social History* 36, no. 4 (2011): 393-417 and cf. Wilson, *Painting*, 2-84, for the hypothetical influence of that aspirational drive on art patronage.

⁶⁹⁵ Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or The Book of the Three Virtues* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 194.

⁶⁹⁶ See fn473 above: “... les couches des seigneurs et bourgeois...”

⁶⁹⁷ Heike Zech, “Reflected Reality. Depictions of Metalwork and Glass in Van Eyck’s Ghent Altarpiece,” in Martens, *Van Eyck*, 390-401, esp. 392; Calkins, “Secular,” 193; Lefever, “Huisinterieurs,” 4-12 The latter thought (125) that because of structural idiosyncrasies, Bouts based his architectural elements on those seen and understood in life.

many of the furnishings and objects shown in Barbara's panel – Werl's too – would have been a domestic reality for bourgeois classes. Barbara's curious bench with adjustable backrest (*keerlys* or *banc tourné*) was an item used by wealthy burghers at the time.⁶⁹⁸ Mirrors regularly occurred in household inventories of the upper middle and the "middle of the middle" classes in fifteenth-century Bruges, as did cupboards or *dressoirs*, and silver and pewter tableware objects.⁶⁹⁹ A wealthier burgher Marie Dewlighe is recorded in 1439 as having two goblets and one plate placed on a cupboard, and owning a further forty pewter dishes of varying sizes.⁷⁰⁰ These categories of objects were clearly routinely encountered in fifteenth-century Flanders; in fact, depictions of the Virgin in more obviously humble environs might include a variety of metal plates and vessels [2.36].⁷⁰¹

Even people of a "lower social strata" were able to afford comforts like cushions, chairs and benches.⁷⁰² Cushions of red, green or blue fabrics could be regularly found in Flemish homes in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁷⁰³ Wooden benches with reversable backs seem to have been used by different sectors of society; "there was", said Jozef de Coo, "no piece of furniture with a more homely, more familiar character".⁷⁰⁴ In 1439 Kallekin, illegitimate daughter of the wife of John de Dievele, of a relatively humble class of Bruges citizenry, had three chairs

⁶⁹⁸ De Coo, "Medieval".

⁶⁹⁹ De Groot, "At Home," 275-76 (see graphs 19 and 20).

⁷⁰⁰ Inneke Baatsen et al., "Single Life in Fifteenth-Century Bruges: Living Arrangements and Material Culture at the Fringes of Society," in *Single Life and the City 1200-1900*, ed. Isabella Devos et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 191.

⁷⁰¹ Calkins, "Secular," 188-91; cf. Baatsen, "At Home," 200-03 on ownership of similar household items by a range of classes in the fifteenth-century Netherlands.

⁷⁰² Baatsen, "Single," 192.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁰⁴ De Coo, "Medieval," 115-16; 119.

(one possibly high-backed, like that neighbouring the bed in the *Arnolfini Portrait*), a dressed bed, various chests, a bench with storage space, textiles, and blue cushions.⁷⁰⁵ In 1440-1 Margaret Bazalis, a relatively poor Bruges burgher, owned a number of stools, one chair and two benches with storage space.⁷⁰⁶

The point here is that, whether sociological distinction is conveyed through the material contents either implicitly or explicitly, this does not substantially detract from their contemporary status. The saints are decorously given comfortable surroundings, but the contents are still – even in a more august guise – familiar. The key is their present-day recognisability. The picture may show an exalted sphere – but still a fundamentally *earthly* one. But the altarpiece’s unusual aesthetic, diverging from Cologne painting, conceivably brought a tension to this recognisability, expressing the familiar in an unfamiliar mode, and thus enlivening it for the Rhenish viewer.

We can envisage that the use of recognisable, vernacular motifs might have cohered with Werl’s passion for preaching to the wider populace in the mother tongue, helping to teach whatever the centre panel depicted. Late medieval preachers exploited the impact of such familiarity effects for pious ends. But, as we have seen, the vernacular contents of Werl’s panels also ‘preached’ about interests that exceeded or lay behind a front of religious instruction. The roaring hearth, wooden panels, stone walls, metal vessels, and comfortable bench, were likely not only employed for reasons of sacrality. Using this particular collection of pictorial

⁷⁰⁵ Baatsen, “Single,” 192.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

contents, immediately recognisable components of the secular world, the picture also overtly signalled Werl's social status and sophistication, his embroilments with secular power, his position at Cologne University, and his outspoken authority within the Conventual branch of the Franciscan Order. The church may have skilfully co-opted these profane impulses and vernacular constituents that waxed in early Netherlandish painting, employing them for devotional purposes; but this did not prevent the co-option becoming in turn appropriated by canny patrons like Werl. These realisms may not therefore have achieved their lasting popularity exclusively as devotional aids, but also because patrons saw in them a reflection of their own worldly, selfish interests and an effective means of communicating these concerns to their milieu and to posterity. "The social significance of art", Huizinga reminds us, "regardless of whether it is ecclesiastical or luxury art, remains above all pomp: the accentuation of personal importance, not of the artist... but of the founder".⁷⁰⁷ These temporal ends were all the more effective for their being 'disguised' and thus enabled by religious symbolism.

Conclusion

The forceful insertion of recognisable contemporary elements into early Netherlandish religious iconographies in the 1420s and 1430s poses an enduring enigma. In order to better evaluate what may have prompted one particular ecclesiastical patron, the Minorite Heinrich von Werl, to commission such a well-described, recognisably contemporary domestic setting from an early

⁷⁰⁷ Huizinga, "Kunst," 451-52.

Netherlandish brush, and which *values* such a choice may betray, it was necessary to carry out a forensic focus on this unusually well-known and (for such pictures) unusually well-documented patron within his particular social and ecclesiastical milieu.

Appearing substantially unlike the typical style then available in Cologne, the panels parade an overt self-consciousness on the patron's part, much of their contents likely sanctioned or stipulated. Of relevance also to the painting's appearance during the first half of the fifteenth century are the seismic political rifts between Conventual and Observant followers of the Franciscan Order. This conflict had strong philosophical, aesthetic and moral ramifications which would have influenced the Minorites' already contradictory involvements with art patronage. So, it is unlikely that the altarpiece was commissioned by its Conventual patron without full awareness of how such indicators as it contained, of a comfortable, even luxurious interior lifestyle, might challenge the preaching of charismatic and influential Observants like John Capestrano. It is surely no coincidence that the altarpiece appeared during a peak moment of anti-aesthetic sentiment in the Observantist camp.

The panels' portrait and self-interested inscription, the coats of arms and elaborated settings: these all make a pronounced statement about the patron's interests, complementing – but in other ways potentially frustrating – their ostensibly primary religious functions. In a symbol of Conventual life, the mirror demonstrates a coming together of mendicant friars, following and joining their Provincial Minister; the other vernacular features that make up the interior

surroundings can be appreciated as in keeping with Werl's strong interest in popular communication; he enjoyed great fame as a preacher. But these secular elements resonate beyond the simply religious.

Artifacts such as the mirror, the brass ewer and the glass carafe must have borne a whole series of immediately recognisable *social* connotations, like a pictorial recognition of contemporary values. They broadcast a particular societal status, a certain participation in temporal affairs.

The panel appears to play a dual role therefore, apparently offering us an instructive spiritual narrative but at the same time, replete with Werl's own personal propaganda, informing the viewer of the patron's refined taste and urbane ways. These advertisements may well have partially suited the philosophy of Werl's city-dwelling, 'social-working' Conventuals at this moment, but they also suited the patron himself, acting as an announcement of power, sophistication and celebrity.

In a recent article on depictions of similar furnishings in fifteenth-century alabasters, Sarah Stanbury argues that "domestic and devotional economies" can be seen to "comfortably converge".⁷⁰⁸ Perhaps Werl wanted to make this statement of secular embroilment all the more flagrant precisely because of the Observants' attacks. Perhaps he had encountered such 'realistic' works on his travels and detected in them a powerful means of communication, relevant for his intentions

⁷⁰⁸ Sarah Stanbury, "The Bourgeois Bedroom in Alabaster Adorations of the Kings," in *Reassessing Alabaster Sculpture in Medieval England*, ed. Jessica Brantley et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 227-28.

and legacy. To commission a work of art possibly to be displayed in the church used by a hefty percentage of Cologne's wealthy burghers, the Minister Werl surely thought carefully about the messages such a painting might project.

These hypotheses would benefit from further investigation by comparing against a wider spectrum of patrons of similar pictures. But in contributing to the broader, fundamental problems for the field outlined in the introduction, concerning the use of early Netherlandish realism in religious contexts – whether realism amounted to a ‘secularisation of the sacral contents of imagery’ or a ‘sacralisation of the visible world’ – the Werl Altarpiece is particularly exemplary. The religious picture's ostensible patron is neither merchant nor noble, but ecclesiastic. Hence, we are able to target more specifically the contention, influential in the scholarly field, that realistic depictions were co-opted by the church for expressly *spiritual* ends, and that the temporal and the spiritual were inseparable and therefore not opposite. Co-option, I maintain, is surely a circular process. The church may have exploited realism for religious ends, but patrons may well have made use of that very exploitation, appropriating it in turn for personal gain.⁷⁰⁹ Artworks effectively absorb such conflicts. Huizinga once wrote that “in history, one must perpetually accept unresolved contradictions”: during this era perhaps even more than others, a most ethereal and pious spirituality, and a most dense and base materialism, provide the extremes that touch.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. The telling hesitation in Jaritz's conclusion (“*Ira Dei*,” 27): “Material objects and their use influenced spiritual life and spiritual life determined – or at least was supposed to determine – the use of material objects.”

⁷¹⁰ Huizinga, “Kunst,” 453.

I come to the end of the second third of my circuitous response to the Portrait of Edward Grimston. The next chapter moves beyond prehistorical factors to tackle his emergence directly.

Chapter 3. ‘The Room makes the Man’: the Emergent ‘Milieu Portrait’ in Petrus Christus’ *Portrait of Edward Grimston*

Every corner... is the germ of a room, or of a house... the corner is a haven that ensures us one of the things we prize most highly – immobility. It is the sure place, the place next to my immobility.

- Bachelard, *Poetics*, 155-6.

One forms an image of a person’s nature and character according to his place of residence and the neighbourhood he inhabits.

- Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 78.

Introduction

This chapter examines three portraits by Petrus Christus (1410-1475) incorporating interior settings, among which is that of Edward Grimston. Christus was a painter active in Bruges from at least 1444; the portraits’ dates span 1446 to c.1447.⁷¹¹ In the previous chapter, Werl had not yet claimed his profane setting for himself; he shares it with the saintly figures, on whom he attends deferentially. It is only a small (but significant) art historical step for these aggrandised profane settings to be extracted, liberated from their dependence on ‘higher’ contexts,

⁷¹¹ For Christus’ biography, see Maximiliaan Martens, “New Information on Petrus Christus’s Biography and the Patronage of His Brussels Lamentation,” *Simiolus* 20 (1990-91): 5-23.

religious or otherwise, and employed for overtly temporal ends in the genre of portraiture: in essence, for house of God to become house of man. This chapter investigates two things: how the first known examples of architectural environments in the history of portraiture were constituted and how they could be motivated to complement a particular sitter.

In 1434 Jan van Eyck produced the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], possibly the earliest surviving secular double portrait on panel set in a domestic interior.⁷¹² But it is likely that Christus' portrait of Henry VI's ambassador Edward Grimston [3.1a-c] is the earliest surviving securely dated Netherlandish panel painting to portray a *single* secular individual in a defined architectural setting, alongside his *Portrait of a Carthusian* [3.2] painted in the same year (1446, via inscriptions).⁷¹³

⁷¹² Campbell, *National Gallery*, 174-211, for bibliography up until that date and difficulties conclusively pronouncing the work an innovation.

⁷¹³ On loan to the National Gallery from the Earl of Verulam, inscribed *PETRVS XPI ME FECIT Ao 1446* on its reverse [3.1b], Grimston's portrait may also be the earliest surviving single-sitter panel portrait of a non-royal English person. The reverse also bears the sitter's coat of arms with helmet and decoration [3.1c]. The Grimston arms are argent, on a fesse sable with three mullets pierced or, with an ermine spot sable to denote Edward's particular junior branch of the family (A. Franks, "Notes on Edward Grimston," *Archaeologia* 40, no. 2 (1866): 455-70 (455)). The inscription is accompanied by a peculiar device like a heart crossed with a windlass, apparently reminiscent of goldsmiths' and illuminators' devices found in guild records, also found on Christus' *Portrait of a Goldsmith* [0.13]; for Grimston's reverse see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 30 and 64n23, who believes the inscription may have been added by a later owner to retain the words inscribed on the original frame, which no longer exists, conceding analysis is further complicated by the inscription's partial removal during a "careless cleaning". See also Jos Koldeweij, "Review of *Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges* by Maryan Ainsworth," *Simiolus* 23, no. 4 (1995): 270n23, who presumes the Grimston windlass was added later than the inscription. On the Grimston portrait generally, see: fn2 above; Richard Marks and Paul Williamson, eds., *Gothic. Art for England 1400-1547* (London: V&A, 2003), 296 (no. 161); Ainsworth *Christus*, 30, 46-53 and 94; Joel Upton, "PETRVS.XPI.ME.FECIT. The Transformation of a Legacy," in *Petrus Christus in Renaissance Bruges. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Maryan Ainsworth (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 53-63; *Petrus Christus: His Place in Fifteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1990), 22-32 Peter Schabacker, *Petrus Christus* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1974), 25; 83-85 (no. 4); George Scharf, "Observations on the Portrait of Edward Grimston," *Archaeologia* 40 (1866): 4711-82. First recorded among Tudor and Stuart portrait heads in Lady Grimston's dressing room at Gorhambury House, Hertfordshire, in Thomas Pennant, *Journey from Chester to London* (London: Wilkie and Robinson, 1811), 333-36. The Carthusian is inscribed *PETRVS XPI ME FECIT Ao 1446* on its simulated frame, the date

With these two works, Christus is often praised for producing “a great innovation in the history of Occidental portraiture”.⁷¹⁴ It has, however, been said that they need not be taken as “landmarks” and it may be mere coincidence that these particular examples survive – in fact, comparable innovations seem to have occurred in Florence at a curiously coincident time in the portraiture of Filippo Lippi [3.3].⁷¹⁵ The point for this chapter is not to determine whether Christus’ portrait are “landmarks” but to investigate what they surely represent: namely, relatively fresh conceptions of how to produce portraits through employing interior settings. In these early experiments, I argue, architectural settings would not have appeared as indifferent pictorial elements devoid of impress, but rather strongly charged visual assertions forming an intersubjective dialogue with the sitter. Christus enhanced his sitter by a surrounding, and that surrounding in turn became symbolically motivated through a sitter’s presence.

Let us quickly summarise the history of the portrait background. There are apparently no painted architectural backdrops for single-sitter portraits on panel from the first surviving instances in the fourteenth century until the middle of the

a later addition possibly added when the original frame was removed (Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93-95 (no. 5)).

⁷¹⁴ Charles Sterling, “Observations on Petrus Christus,” *Art Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (1971): 1-26 (18); Schabacker, *Christus*, 24-5; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:316; Otto Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting from Rogier van der Weyden to Gerard David*, trans. David Britt (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 1997), 89; Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93; Robert Suckale et al., eds., *Gothic* (Cologne: Taschen, 2006) 84.

⁷¹⁵ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 115-16. And note Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Lady* (Gemäldegalerie Berlin, c.1445); on Lippi’s portraits, both dated via stylistic means, see Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelmann, eds., *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 96-101 (no. 6-7). See Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 212 for a hypothesis about the influence of Netherlandish portraits on Lippi. Cf. Ernst Buchner, *Das Deutsche Bildnis der Spätgotik und der frühen Dürerzeit* (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1953), 19, for interior settings in later fifteenth-century German portraiture.

fifteenth century (see [3.4]); flat, one colour backgrounds remained the most common choice even beyond that date.⁷¹⁶ In portraits executed by Christus' Netherlandish predecessors, sitters appear to float in a rectangle of unreality, filling their picture planes almost to bursting point: consider the pair of c.1435 in the National Gallery [3.5a-b], or the *Portrait of Lysbeth van Duvenvoorde* of c.1430 [3.6].⁷¹⁷ Van Eyck's single-sitter portrait backgrounds are similarly constituted, though typically allow more space around the sitter.⁷¹⁸ The very indeterminacy of early portrait backgrounds may have been useful for encouraging the sitter's prospective adulation. Excised from their historical environs, they could be seen in otherworldly terms. It is important to note that the bust-length single-sitter portrait was itself a kind of pictorialized "panegyric" derived, ultimately, from icons or 'portraits' of saintly figures.⁷¹⁹ In line with the exalted affiliations of the half-length form, some of the earliest extant secular portraits show their sitters depicted "like saints", occasionally against gilded backgrounds.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ On the earliest surviving late medieval painted portraits on panel, like those of *John the Good* (Louvre Museum, c.1360) and *Rudolf IV of Austria* (Dom Museum, Vienna, c.1360-5), see Perkinson, *Likeness* and Stephan Kemperdick, "Vor Dürer: Die Anfänge der deutschen Porträtmalerei," in *Dürer. Cranach. Holbein. Die Entdeckung des Menschen: Das deutsche Porträt um 1500*, exh. cat., ed. Sabine Haag et al. (Munich: Hirmer, 2011), esp. 49-51, and cf. Haag, *Dürer*, 55-56 (no. 22). In the Netherlands, darker background colours were often used; in Germany and Italy, lighter ones (Buchner, *Bildnis*, 18).

⁷¹⁷ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 61: "sitters... generally seem somewhat constricted in their frames"; "Campin's Portraits," in Foister, *Campin*, 123-35; cf. Bart Fransen, "The Making of Portraits before Jan van Eyck: the Case of Wenceslaus of Luxemburg," in de Mey, *Vision*, 115-28.

⁷¹⁸ Resulting in a "sense of free existence in space" (Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:172).

⁷¹⁹ Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doornstijk: Davaco: 1984), 39-52; Alexander Nagel, "Icons and Early Modern Portraits," in *El Retrato del Renacimiento*, exh. cat., ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Prado, 2003), 421-25. Cf. Belting, *Likeness*, 78-101.

⁷²⁰ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 112.

But practical motivations are also important to consider: plain backgrounds were easiest for painters and most affordable for patrons.⁷²¹ Why undergo the extra cost, time, effort and invention of a described architectural environment? Why dispense with the otherworldly pretensions of the established convention? Settings were not unequivocally productive; they often resulted in the sitter having to sacrifice visual attention.⁷²² Otto Pächt claimed that Christus' works showed a "marked subordination of individual figures to the overall space", as if the complementary surrounds spoke louder than the subjects themselves.⁷²³ What was it that caused patrons and painters to desire the space around the sitter to be injected with further information?

To interrogate this, we must first think more broadly about fluctuating artistic conventions at the time, sketched out within the previous chapter. Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen has recently addressed what she calls a moment of significant art historical "destabilisation" at the beginning of the early modern period, a "transformative period in the history of painting", when "nonhuman pictorial content, previously consigned to the margins or 'backgrounds' of figural panel paintings or murals, emerged as 'figures,' autonomously framed and featured".⁷²⁴ In this, she discerns a point of empathic – indeed almost spiritual – reconfiguration between human and non-human, acted out at the level of form. Coming from a more modern perspective, her argument may overemphasise the

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Ibid., 115; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:290.

⁷²³ Pächt, *Rogier*, 79. Cf. Ursula Panhans-Bühler, *Eklektizismus und Originalität im Werk des Petrus Christus* (Vienna: Adolf Holzhausens, 1978), 112.

⁷²⁴ Butterfield-Rosen, "Hierarchy," esp. 76-78.

historical rupture, and perhaps finds less relevance for the often-profound concentration on human form in Italian painting of the same era; and yet, she points to something ineluctably significant. Butterfield-Rosen estimates the moment to begin “around 1500” but in fact the roots can be traced further back, having a particular resonance in Christus’ oeuvre.⁷²⁵

As I noted in the introduction, traditions of pictorial composition conventionally placed the highest value on the human figure.⁷²⁶ On the rare occasions that a surviving fifteenth-century contract particularises a setting, it is customarily itemised after the principal figures and with far less consideration.⁷²⁷ This hierarchy endured, but over the course of the fifteenth century, extra-figural content was, as we saw, infused with extended attention. In the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], Mario Praz observed that “a strange transference has taken place; the objects have become invested with personality, the persons have become objects furnishing a room”.⁷²⁸ Christus, who may have had contact with van Eyck or his workshop (they use comparable compositions and motifs), particularly absorbed the older master’s redress of this figure-object balance.⁷²⁹ Christus makes frequent

⁷²⁵ We might trace it back further still: to the rhetorical practice of *prosopoeia* or *conformatio* (personification) condoned in medieval poetry. In the early thirteenth century, Geoffrey of Vinsauf writes, “Colouring even inanimate objects with yet another freshness, I sometimes, by giving speech to something which nature denies the power of speech, form a new ‘person’” (James Murphy, ed., *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 79. For the classical precedent, see [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), iv, 53.66 (398-401) (which text was widely used in the Middle Ages). Pächt considered such inanimate “colourings” detectable in the International Gothic style c.1400: *Österreichische Tafelmalerei de Gotik* (Augsburg: Filser, 1929), 8-10.

⁷²⁶ Stumpel, “On grounds”; Thomas Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting, 1400-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 97-122.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Fuchs, “The Virgin,” 46 and Pinchart, *Archives*, 1:42-47, both cited earlier.

⁷²⁸ Mario Praz, *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America* (London: Methuen, 1971), 59.

⁷²⁹ On Christus’ possible contact with van Eyck, see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 53-60.

use of highly skilled, expansive spatial configurations in pictures across all of his genres, from portraits to religious scenes; he is often called the first Netherlandish artist to use techniques resembling vanishing-point perspective.⁷³⁰ In pictures like the *Holy Family in a Domestic Interior* [3.7], human figures, architecture and objects are assimilated with remarkable equilibrium: the bed, the fireplace and the book pronounce almost as conspicuously as the Virgin and Child. In such works, said Pächt, Christus “[stood] on its head the relationship between the animate and inanimate matter”.⁷³¹

Through this rebalancing, Christus’ pictorial environments and interior furnishings assumed a magnified significance in many of his works. Max Friedländer thought that in Christus’ work especially embryo genres began their “shy” gestation: “[Christus] was most successful in two areas of painting that had not yet achieved legitimate and autonomous status – still life and landscape”.⁷³² But it was a false – or at least compromised – freedom for the ‘extra-figural’. Such ‘liberations’ of information extraneous to the figure had significant ramifications for portraiture, particularly influencing the way painters could present their sitters and enhance the impression of their autonomy. These exaggerated attentions to the inanimate were bent to serve sitters’ own wills; the figures drew strength from *their* objects. Through the inclusion of detailed spatial spheres under their own

⁷³⁰ Cf. e.g.: *Goldsmith* [0.13]; *Holy Family* [3.7]; *Death of the Virgin* [3.42]. On Christus’ apparently rigorous perspectival methods in, for instance, the Frankfurt *Virgin* [2.9], see Panofsky, *Perspective*, 129n53; *Early Netherlandish*, 1:309; Panhans-Bühler, *Eklektizismus*, 109-36; Upton, *Christus*, 35-43. For a summary of opinions, see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 43-5, especially interested in [3.7].

⁷³¹ Pächt, *Rogier*, 54. Cf. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:290; 1:316: “... distracted by a multiplicity of equally competing details”. Analogously, Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:89, remarked upon Christus’ “scrupulous objectivity towards the inanimate”.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 1:89; cf. Max Friedländer, *Art and Connoisseurship* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1942), 109.

ostensible control, a sitter could be indirectly elevated to a position as apparently ‘rich’ and deserving of “worship” as the religious or princely figures customarily portrayed in half-length format.⁷³³ This is the point at which a typically plain portrait background could be refashioned into a complementary ‘social background’.

Though the interpretation of these early ‘social backgrounds’ lies arguably at the heart of the early Netherlandish scholarly field (a pivotal theme in Erwin Panofsky’s essay on the *Arnolfini Portrait*), described single-sitter portrait settings typically have not received much scholarly attention, as noted in the introduction. In histories of Renaissance portraiture, indoor environments typically merit only a few pages.⁷³⁴ And our scholarly understanding of Christus’ early, experimental contributions relies essentially on some brief thoughts written by Panofsky. In his early essay on perspective, Panofsky coined the term “‘corner-space’ portrait” to characterise these settings, a development of his ‘box-space’ or *Kastenraum* metaphor, used to describe Trecento painters’ three-dimensional articulations of interior space.⁷³⁵ He later explained the value of Christus’ new “tendency” in terms of viewer reception. The interior gave the impression, said Panofsky, of “admitting the beholder to the intimacy of the sitter’s domestic surroundings”; the “corner-space” was thus able to place the visual relationship “on an entirely new

⁷³³ Literally ‘worth-ship’, used in the fifteenth century to denote secular honour and religious reverence equally: “worship, n”; “worship, v,” in *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (December 2021), <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/Entry/230345?rskey=GeFHvx&result=1&isAdvanced=false>; <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/Entry/230346?rskey=GeFHvx&result=2&isAdvanced=false>.

⁷³⁴ Cf. Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 112-21.

⁷³⁵ Panofsky, *Perspective*, 129n53.

psychological basis”.⁷³⁶ This opinion is often repeated without much elaboration or pursuit of its context, yet there is so much contained, compressed, implied within these few sentences.⁷³⁷

This chapter, therefore, enlarges upon Panofsky’s judgements, providing Christus’ compositions with a more substantial artistic and historical context by looking at the effects of patronage and the production of social connotation. In thinking about the complex constitution of these portrait interiors, I take inspiration from the research of Holger Kuhn who recently provided a symbolic reading of the indoor setting in Quinten Massys’ *Moneylender and his Wife* [0.11], combining the synchronic with the diachronic: a sensitivity to socioeconomic factors with an understanding of the setting’s potential roots in religious iconography.⁷³⁸ In conceptualising an interior’s sociological qualities, this chapter has also followed scholarship relating to material culture and, in particular, late medieval sumptuary legislation (the ruling authorities’ societal stratification of particular materials, goods and – especially – attires).⁷³⁹ Although often only loosely enforced or observed, these regulations provide a useful window into the aesthetically attuned social environments of late medieval urban centres, and the considerable constraints that might accompany conspicuous acts of self-representation. Fashion can be a relatively underplayed interpretative tool for accessing such paintings; fashion, as Alexander Nagel explains, has traditionally been at odds with art history, whose notion of ‘style’ was deemed almost spiritually superior to mere

⁷³⁶ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:310, and further (1:316) “... [it] made the individual accessible to us at the price of forcing us to divide our attention between the figure and its surroundings”.

⁷³⁷ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93; Upton, *Christus*, 28-29.

⁷³⁸ Kuhn, “Household,” 231-32; see also Larry Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys with Catalogue Raisonné* (Montclair: Allanheld & Schram, 1984), 136-40.

⁷³⁹ For a recent overview, see Riello, *Right*.

‘fashion’.⁷⁴⁰ Yet Christus’ interior settings are rather like fashion items. In viewing them in this manner, we understand something of their special ‘charge’ – not as passive ‘backgrounds’ but as, in a sense, ‘second clothings’. Thus, for single-sitter portraiture on panel, a very minor pictorial genre in Christus’ lifetime, a setting was perhaps viewed as a new, exciting tool through which to convey and identify a sitter, a powerful yet subtle means to further radiate their being.⁷⁴¹

I wrote that scholars have not much attended to these settings; however, in an infrequently cited essay on the historical evolution of fifteenth-century Netherlandish portraiture, Gustav Künstler made some efforts to realise the complex potential capacities of Christus’ early portrait settings, drawing attention to the fact that “the problem of environment” was only sporadically explored by portrait painters at this early stage (“... seemingly only Petrus Christus recognised the necessity to represent each sitter in their own corresponding concrete surrounding”).⁷⁴² He expressed surprise that art historians had paid scant attention to this general theme (“perhaps this circumstance has hitherto been considered too self-evident to specifically investigate”). “In fact”, Künstler claimed, “it marks a fundamental clarification... if and as long as the goal is to achieve a realistic appearance, the representation of a visible environment around the depicted sitters absolutely must not be divorced from the pictorial possibility of their portrayal”.⁷⁴³ The setting not only embellished the figure like an attribute, but

⁷⁴⁰ Nagel, “Fashion,” esp. 33-34.

⁷⁴¹ On pictorial genre statistics, see De Groot, “At Home,” 189. On radiation and embellishment, see Georg Simmel’s “Excursus on Jewelry and Adornment” in his *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, trans. and ed. Anthony Blasi et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 332-41.

⁷⁴² Künstler, “Einzelbildnisses,” 50-51; 54-55.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50-1.

had the visual effect of *producing* the figure's presence; it held a persuasive *existential* quality. Therefore, as I will argue, early settings had a special facility for conveying information relating to the sitter's social standing at a particular moment in history. Rather than a symbol of the house of God or the 'convenience' of God and man through devotion, in Christus' portraiture, the erstwhile pictorial house could be adapted to suit worldly, proprietorial demands. A portrait background could now appear visually governed by its sitter – as a kind of surrogate, virtual domain.

Recent scholarship has stressed the difficulty of truly understanding an early Netherlandish portrait without the original context of function and reception. Within the restricted formal bounds of a half-length portrait, pictorial language can be ambiguous, with similar devices co-opted for dissimilar uses.⁷⁴⁴ This chapter begins with a group of three Christus portraits featuring similarly conceived 'corner-space' settings, a stimulating opportunity for comparative research. While I cannot hope to definitively recover their original functions, by close attention to detail and composition we might appreciate how an interior's pictorial composition and specific contents could be manipulated to recall the sitter's standing and meaningfully evoke the social world they inhabited. Only one sitter's identity is established: Edward Grimston. As with the *Werl Altarpiece*, his is another valuable case for a more extended examination of an artwork alongside patronage; he is "the best documented" of Christus' patrons and, by extension, probably among the best

⁷⁴⁴ Maximiliaan Martens et al., "Introduction," in Martens, *Van Eyck*, 22; Borchert, "Form and Function", 220-1; cf., for example, the rings used in van Eyck's *Jan de Leeuw* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1436) (professional?) and *Man with a Blue Chaperon* (Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu, c.1430) (nuptial?).

documented of any early Netherlandish painting prior to 1450.⁷⁴⁵ But his portrait has yet to be extensively studied because it remains in private hands, although on long-term loan to the National Gallery.⁷⁴⁶

These discussions will spark a final reflection on the broader significance of portraiture's adoption of interior settings. Christus realised, either consciously or intuitively, that an elaborated background powerfully contributed to a portrait's capacity for continuous self-definition.⁷⁴⁷ With a setting, a portrait would not require a specific architectural location to determine its coherence.⁷⁴⁸ This became its own prerogative: by making a 'place' of itself, it could dictate its own context.

Christus' 'portrait boxes': a compositional comparison

In this section I explore how the composition of an interior setting could be adapted to suit the needs of a particular sitter. Three of Christus' portraits – *Edward Grimston* (inscribed 1446) [3.1a], the *Carthusian* (inscribed 1446) [3.2] and the *Falconer* (dated c.1447) [3.8] (see [3.9] for comparison) – use a structurally near-identical angular setting with differentiation in architectural detail, facial features and costumes. They show, respectively, a member of England's minor nobility, a Carthusian lay brother and a man of some undetermined high status; the latter is obviously a drawing not a painting.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁵ Lorne Campbell, "Approaches to Petrus Christus," in Ainsworth, *Interdisciplinary Approach*, 2.

⁷⁴⁶ Referenced only as a comparative in the catalogue accompanying the 1994 monographic exhibition: Ainsworth, *Christus*, 52-53.

⁷⁴⁷ And in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], also van Eyck before him.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Bauch in fn99 above.

⁷⁴⁹ A fourth instance possibly exists: the *Portrait of a Knight of the Golden Fleece* (Prince de Ligne collection, Beloeil), sometimes called Philip the Good, perhaps a copy after a lost original by

Christus appears to approach these portraits in a systematic and comparative way, like alternative solutions to the same pictorial problem.⁷⁵⁰ The settings diverge crucially in their detail; consequently, the sitters can use the same essential structure to communicate in distinct ways. I will consider the technical solutions Christus proposes in terms of each ‘box’, its corresponding figure and the interrelation between them. Witnessing the significance of each subtle change provides insight into the artist’s compositional thinking and the differences he perceived between the sitters.⁷⁵¹

First, however, where does the ‘corner-space’ originate? The ‘corner-space’ is something like the architectural elaboration of portraiture’s three-quarter view, complementing the sitter’s slant-wise angle of apprehension.⁷⁵² Two portraits by van Eyck executed early in his career already employ parapet or aedicular structures to form architectonic space around the sitter: the lost *Isabella of Portugal* of c.1428-9 known through a contested copy [3.10] and the man in the

Christus, likely cut down on the left-hand side, on which see Schabacker, *Christus*, fig. 55 (no. 31); Koldewej, “Review,” 272n33; Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:pl. 108A. Christus’ fragment, possibly of a devotional diptych, also situates its sitter in a corner: a *Portrait of a Young Man* (National Gallery, London, 1450-60). On Grimston, see fn2 above and fn712 below. On the Carthusian, see Emma Capron, “Paintings, Prayers, and Salvation: The Jan Vos Virgins in Context,” in *The Charterhouse of Bruges: Jan van Eyck, Petrus Christus and Jan Vos*, ed. Emma Capron (London: Giles, 2018), 31-3; Ainsworth, *Christus*, 92-95 (no. 5). On the Falconer, see *ibid.*, 187-89 (no. 24); Fritz Koreny, ed., *Early Netherlandish Drawings from Jan van Eyck to Hieronymus Bosch*, exh. cat. (Antwerp: Rubenshuis: 2002), 64-66 (no. 12).

⁷⁵⁰ Not all of Christus’ indoor portraits are placed in angular settings: note the later *Portrait of a Young Woman* [3.25].

⁷⁵¹ Künstler, “Einzelbildnisse,” 55.

⁷⁵² Likely drawing inspiration from oblique viewpoints used by fourteenth-century painters for rendering architecture: Upton, *Christus*, 28n15; cf. Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Boucicaut Master* (New York: Phaidon, 1968), fig. 31; 33.

National Gallery of 1432 [3.11].⁷⁵³ Christus employs the parapet formula in his *Portrait of a Goldsmith* [0.13], *Young Woman* portrait drawing [3.12] (whose right arm is posed in comparable fashion to Grimston) and *Man of Sorrows* [3.13]. But as Charles Sterling once recognised, Christus' 'corner-spaces' actually seem to directly derive from exteriors of painted early Netherlandish altarpieces, where saints or donors are set within shallow niches, often in grisaille.⁷⁵⁴ It is the spatial setting of the imitation-ivory Annunciation on the exterior of van Eyck's *Dresden Triptych* [3.14] that perhaps most satisfactorily prefigures the 'portrait boxes' in Christus' portraits of the 1440s. Such containers provided their occupants with an ideal, unspecific location, a pictorial rendition of the inhabited niches one might encounter on a church façade. In Christus' portraiture, however, these boxes are 'earthed' (the Carthusian's perhaps not as much), translated into worldly terms, dressed as might befit the particularities of his sitters.

Christus' sitters appear to derive from the same model, adjusted in physiognomy, architectural detail and spatial composition to form the different portraits in their interior settings.⁷⁵⁵ Adaptations to their surroundings should be considered in parallel with the adaptations to the figures.

⁷⁵³ On Isabella's portrait, see Bauch, "Bildnisse," 85-91. Schabacker, *Christus*, 24-25, notes the influence on of the so-called "diaphragm arch" on Christus' portraiture. Cf. Nuttall, *From Flanders*, 210-14 on parapet portraits, note especially the c.1400 illumination of Lord Lovell at an aperture (fig. 226).

⁷⁵⁴ Sterling, "Observations," 18n67. Cf. Flémalle Group, *Betrothal of the Virgin* (exterior) [1.7]; Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* (exterior) (St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent, 1430-32); Rogier van der Weyden, *Last Judgement Altarpiece* (exterior) (Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune, c.1443-51).

⁷⁵⁵ Similarities also noted in Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93-5 (no. 5); 188-89 (no. 24); and Koreny, *Drawings*, 64-66 (no, 12).

Grimston and the Falconer share high cheekbones and mollusc-shaped inner ears. Grimston and the Carthusian have arched eyebrows, sideways eyes with wrinkled eyelids, long noses and thin lips. They also share facial inconsistencies: the faces of Grimston and the Carthusian are comparatively square, their noses comparatively oblique (the Falconer's face is more wholly oblique).⁷⁵⁶ Technical studies show that originally, the Carthusian's head was the same inflated size as Grimston's but made subsequently smaller.⁷⁵⁷ Perhaps Grimston provided the model for the Carthusian. There is evidence, notably in the absence of underdrawing in Grimston's face, that inferior care and attention has gone into the modelling of his features.⁷⁵⁸ Christus may not have spent an extended amount of time on Grimston's facial portrayal, which Maryan Ainsworth suggests could be because the sitter was on a diplomatic visit. Furthermore, owing to the profound level of detail in the Carthusian portrait, Ainsworth wonders if Christus knew him in person. It cannot be determined, however, whether there was another lost model which formed the basis for each of the portraits.

As with the physiognomies, the three portraits' spatial compositions appear to derive from the same model. The three right-angled 'portrait boxes' are defined by straight lines that meet in the upper right corner of the picture plane, made even more palpable by the subtle differentiations in colour between the corner's two walls and the ceiling. To accomplish these corners, Christus likely used a 'straight-edge' tool at the underdrawing stage, the custom for architectural elements, rather

⁷⁵⁶ Campbell, "Approaches," 8.

⁷⁵⁷ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 49-50; 94.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

than composing the lines graphically.⁷⁵⁹ The attempt to produce a three-dimensional effect is emphasised by the hint of shadow falling on the wall behind the sitter, a device that would become popular in German portraiture in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁷⁶⁰

We have relatively little information about how and if the appearance of such painted portraits were commissioned.⁷⁶¹ A contract was likely drawn up, but it is difficult to determine from surviving evidence how much of the outcome would have been specified.⁷⁶² In most cases the artist would have studied the subject in the flesh with the face excerpted from its surroundings. This is visible in rare instances of portrait drawings for which we have the corresponding finished work in paint, such as van Eyck's silverpoint study of *Cardinal Albergati* (?) [3.15-16].⁷⁶³ Christus' *Young Woman* [3.12] shows a similar excerption of the figure from its surrounding.⁷⁶⁴ When Albrecht Dürer made a study of Emperor Maximilian, he inscribed the drawing with the place of its execution: "high up in his small chamber in the tower at Augsburg".⁷⁶⁵ But none of this circumstantial detail translates to Dürer's visual record, only the body – and none, for that matter, makes it to the finished painting [3.17-18].

⁷⁵⁹ Rachel Billinge and Lorne Campbell, email messages to the author, 2 June 2021.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. Haag, *Dürer*, 61-64 (no. 27-29).

⁷⁶¹ Lorne Campbell, "The Making of Portraits," in *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, exh. cat., ed. Lorne Campbell et al. (London: National Gallery, 2008), 32-45.

⁷⁶² Few (if any) substantial contracts for portraits survive from the era. On fifteenth-century contracts, see Maximiliaan Martens, "Artistic Patronage in Bruges Institutions ca.1440-1482" (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1992), 26-45 (for Bruges) and Campbell, "Art Market," 192-94.

⁷⁶³ Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 287-90.

⁷⁶⁴ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 184-87 (no. 23).

⁷⁶⁵ (*Das ist kaiser maximilian din hab ich albrecht durer zw awgspueg hoch obn Awff dir pfalz in seim kleinen stübli küntefett do man zalt 1518 am Mandag Nach Johannis tawffer AD*).

Consequently, if a setting was desired, it was likely devised following the initial study and preceding the execution of the painting. Taking Christus' Falconer as a surviving example of this rarely documented in-between stage, the basic spatial arena appears to have been demarcated only after blocking in the figure, with ruled lines delimiting the space, and then dressed or ornamented with motifs and details with extreme sensitivity to the position of the sitter (the line marking the ceiling's edge continues onto the sitter's hat).⁷⁶⁶ Infra-red reflectography of the *Edward Grimston* [3.19] indicates that the setting was also executed after the figure, revealing many significant changes to the architectural elements.⁷⁶⁷ Similarly, in the *Goldsmith* [0.13] (and Falconer), Christus appears to have blocked the figures in first and then formulated the space – ceiling, walls and shelves – around them.⁷⁶⁸

Christus' portrait architecture is revealed to be additive rather than intrinsic as one might suppose it to be, infusing the surroundings with a certain adhering 'force', semi-analogous to the traditional attributes held by a sitter or a saint.⁷⁶⁹ This reflects the artist's working process in interior scenes in other genres, for example his *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Francis* [3.20].⁷⁷⁰ The settings would have been based on a consolidation of different motifs, fictional combinations of realistic elements studied separately from the sitters they surround.⁷⁷¹ Perhaps some of this extraneous information was ordered – or at least approved – by the

⁷⁶⁶ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 187-89, esp. 189 (no. 24).

⁷⁶⁷ Infra-red reflectogram taken September 1993 in National Gallery Picture File (L3), discussed with Rachel Billinge and Lorne Campbell, email messages to the author, 2 June 2021.

⁷⁶⁸ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 96-101, esp. 100 (no. 6).

⁷⁶⁹ On the comparatively modern method of laying down spatial setting before figures, see Stumpel, "Grounds," 243.

⁷⁷⁰ Jochen Sander, *Niederländische Gemälde im Städel 1400-1550* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1993), 164-9; Ainsworth, *Christus*, 38; Koreny, *Drawings*, 64-66 (no. 12).

⁷⁷¹ Kemperdick, "The Workshop," 106.

patron. Evidence from the Falconer suggests that it might have been usual to leave the remaining portions in an abbreviated form, “minimally describing the formulaic setting that Christus would work up more elaborately in the final portrait”.⁷⁷² Conceivably, a similar drawing was made for Grimston and the Carthusian to approve, sketchily transmitting the portrait’s supplementary architecture and other ‘extras’ that were tailored to the particular sitter and refined at the painting stage.

While we do not know their exact chronology, we may assume that these three portraits were in a kind of direct dialogue, perceived by the artist, or even artist and patrons, as responses to one another. The portraits of Grimston and the Carthusian were made concurrently or almost concurrently; the Falconer, attributed to Christus by stylistic means, may have been executed at a similar point. If, for example, Grimston’s portrait was in Christus’ studio at the time of the Carthusian’s commission, it is conceivable that the new patron expressed their desires using the example of the older portrait, or vice versa. This plausible scenario makes their comparison even more demonstrative.

In adapting the archetypal schema to suit the idiosyncrasies of his individual sitters, Christus made use of panels of different measurements and formats. His two painted portraits are different sizes (see [3.21] for scaled comparison): Grimston’s portrait has significantly larger dimensions than the Carthusian’s (32.5x24cm compared with 29.2x20.3cm). The Falconer drawing is smaller at

⁷⁷² Ainsworth, *Christus*, 189.

18.9x14.3cm, presumably for scaling up. The painted portraits also differ in height-to-width ratio: Grimston's panel has a format comparable to the Falconer but the Carthusian's has substantially narrower proportions. Part of the Carthusian's surface area is taken up by the trompe-l'oeil painted frame, apparently added last in the painting process, consequently tightening the composition.⁷⁷³

Differences of size and proportion subtly affect the ostensible capacities of the interior settings and impact the corporeal impressions made by the sitters along with their outfits. Where Grimston's side wall is especially ample, the Carthusian's side wall is slender. As Grimston spreads out over the two converging walls, the Carthusian mainly occupies the back wall. More of Grimston's torso is on display, his epaulets give an amplified demeanour, and his face appears large in comparison to his body. He imposes upon his picture, pressed right up against the plane. Likewise, the hatted Falconer extensively fills the drawing's frontal plane. The Carthusian, however, is volumetrically less expansive and also more reticent both in terms of bodily comportment and physical position. He is subtly set back, the fictive frame painted inside the panel increasing the sense of distance and remove. He is swathed in – almost swamped by – his uniform white habit; his head is set slightly lower, relative to the other sitters; his neck is invisible. He is comprised purely of face, beard and garment. Significantly, his hands are not included.

Thus, the sensitive alterations in format, composition and physicality endow each portrait with a distinct aesthetic. Through intuitive sense or deliberate decision, or

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

a mixture of the two, Christus designed different compositional recipes to reflect something about the sitter: namely, their particular social standing (then potentially overriding – and intricately bound up with – individual character). According to Thomas Aquinas, the cultivation (*cultus*) of a person’s exterior could define their *condicio humanae* or *condicio personae* – in effect their particular worldly estate.⁷⁷⁴ How, therefore, might the cultivation of external, formal differences in Christus’ portraiture relate to the *condicio* of the various sitters? And how might the different architectural and decorative dressings of their spatial settings interact with their separate existences? First, I will first explore these questions in relation to the two anonymous sitters, the Carthusian and Falconer, using the visual information. In the subsequent section I will mount a more sustained investigation into the portrait of Edward Grimston.

Suitable spaces: *The Carthusian* and *The Falconer*

The Carthusian [3.2] appears in a kind of cell or confessional box, spare other than the rich red colour and dramatic lighting. He is surrounded by a fictive frame of marble finished at the bottom edge with red stone bearing the trompe-l’oeil carved inscription of the artist’s name and date.⁷⁷⁵ A fly rests on this painted ledge, emphasising the illusion that the sitter is actually present and augmenting the

⁷⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae. Secunda Pars secundae Partis*, ed. and trans. Roberto Busa (Rome: Corpus Thomisticum, 1895-99), <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org>: (section beginning) “Deinde considerandum est de modestia secundum quod consistit in exteriori apparatu...” [Part IIb, q.169].

⁷⁷⁵ On the Eyckian device of a painted stone frame, giving the portrait the character of a memorialising epitaph, see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93 and fn363 above.

spatial setting's *'hic et nunc'* immediacy.⁷⁷⁶ Neither tonsured nor clean-shaven, he must be a lay Carthusian and not a monk. Scholars associate the portrait with the Genadedal Charterhouse just outside Bruges, of which Jan Vos was prior from 1441 to 1450.⁷⁷⁷ Vos is known to have made the roughly contemporary commissions of at least two significant works of early Netherlandish painting: one the early 1440s commemorative Eyckian *Madonna* [3.22], the other a small devotional panel by Christus commissioned just before 1450 [3.23].⁷⁷⁸

No one has yet provided a decisive reason for the rich wine-red colour of the sitter's setting, a rarity in Netherlandish portraiture.⁷⁷⁹ Perhaps it concerns a sanguine nature, or the Order's strong connection with winemaking and distillation (today we still drink Chartreuse, made by Carthusians since 1737) or the dark pink flower known as a Carthusian or German pink (*Dianthus Carthusianorum*). Perhaps, even, it has something to do with the Order's bloodletting prescriptions, five times a year for monks and four times for lay brethren, for which participants received extra food and wine.⁷⁸⁰ It may be intended simply as a visual function, allowing the

⁷⁷⁶ Capron, "Paintings," 31, suggests the fly (Flemish *vlieg*) may refer to the name *De Vliegheer*. Other theories range from allusions to trompe-l'oeil references in classical literature (Pliny, Philostratus), decay and transience, the devil or a motif relating to the artist (see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 94). Flies are used in various fourteenth- and fifteenth-century portraits, possibly bearing a range of symbolic meanings, e.g.: Swabian Artist, *Portrait of a Woman of the Hofer Family* (National Gallery, c.1470).

⁷⁷⁷ Capron, "Paintings," 31-33; Hendrick Scholtens, "Petrus Christus en zijn Portret van een Kartuizer," *Oud Holland* 75 (1960): 59-72.

⁷⁷⁸ See Capron, "Paintings," 13-67 and Ainsworth, *Christus*, 72-78 (no. 2); 102-06 (no. 7).

⁷⁷⁹ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 95n8, knows of only two other Netherlandish examples showing red backgrounds: *Louis de Gruuthuse* (Groeningemuseum, Bruges, 1472-82); copy after Master of Flémalle, *Virgin and Child* (Groeningemuseum, Bruges).

⁷⁸⁰ James Hogg, "Everyday life in the Charterhouse in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Klösterliche Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters. Internationaler Kongress Krems an der Donau 18. Bis 21. September 1978* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 136.

white of the habit to stand out.⁷⁸¹ A number of mid-to-late fifteenth-century central and South-German portraits share warm, shadowy backgrounds.⁷⁸²

Though the sitter is not a monk, his setting seemingly converts Carthusian ideals into aesthetic terms. Deprivation and hence spatial enclosure were important to the Order.⁷⁸³ Charterhouses were “distinguished architecturally by a vast, empty cloister”.⁷⁸⁴ Joel Upton attests that Christus succeeded in “communicating, at least by implication, the wordily renunciation and contemplation for which the founder of the Order, Saint Bruno, was venerated”.⁷⁸⁵

Looking at Christus’ two other Carthusian pictures [3.22-23], we see that each places an emphasis on separation from the world in its own way. The works associated with Vos show the ‘world’ at a level far below the events of the picture. The Carthusian in the portrait is cut off from the world in another way, as the space around him is left unpopulated by objects or architectural features. However, there is a flavour of affectation to the portrayal, as if the asceticism were a pose rather than a reality. Lay brothers did not live in cells but in “obediences” or workshops connected with the cloisters.⁷⁸⁶ Emma Capron suggests the New York portrait was

⁷⁸¹ Buchner, *Bildnis*, 18, mentions that for visual reasons Munich portrait painters tended to set sitters wearing black against yellow backgrounds.

⁷⁸² Cf. Haag, *Dürer*, 61-64 (no. 27-29).

⁷⁸³ On the architectural format of medieval Carthusian charterhouses and cells, see Francesca Breeden, “Communal Solitude: the Archaeology of the Carthusian Houses of Great Britain and Ireland 1178-1569” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2018), 84-95. On Carthusian spirituality, see Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 27-45.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁸⁵ Upton, *Christus*, 26.

⁷⁸⁶ Brantley, *Reading*, 39-40; Douglas Webster, “The Carthusian Order,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1908), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03388a.htm>.

intended for a secular setting because it “lacks the modesty and sense of decorum traditionally associated with devotional portraiture”.⁷⁸⁷ Judging by the palpably elite patrons of Christus’ other portraits, this man likely came from a family of some standing, and the portrait may have been a commission for a private residence for commemorative purposes.⁷⁸⁸

Christus’ Carthusian is executed with a luxurious degree of attention, precision and finish. But this jewel-like sumptuousness, in fact the object as a whole, is at odds with traditional Carthusian principles.⁷⁸⁹ At the revision of its statutes in 1367 (the *Statua Nova*), the Order decreed: “in many establishments of our order in the provinces panels painted with curious images are multiplying on altars, along with other diverse pictures with escutcheons and coats-of-arms of laymen and with female figures, in glass windows and other places, against the holy simplicity and humility of the order and against the statutes, by which notable men are not a little scandalised; we ordain that all such painted tablets and other curious pictures be removed, as instructed”.⁷⁹⁰ So persistent were the problems that they felt the need to revisit them in a chapter of 1424, which passed an ordinance against, “‘curiously’ painted pictures on the altars of some of the charterhouses, and other paintings in windows and elsewhere with coats of arms of secular persons and figures of women, all contrary to ‘the holy simplicity and humility of the Order’”.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁷ Capron, “Paintings,” 31.

⁷⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 31-33.

⁷⁸⁹ Christopher S. Wood, “Curious Pictures and the Art of Description,” *Word & Image* 11, no. 4 (October-December 1995): 337-38; Brantley, *Reading*, 59-61.

⁷⁹⁰ Translated in Wood, “Curious,” 337-38.

⁷⁹¹ Cited in Margaret Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London: Church Historical Society, 1930), 266.

Carthusian aesthetic doctrine did not prevent the portrait from coming into being but may have influenced its appearance. The injunction against the representation of heraldry, closely intertwined with the painting of human likeness, is relevant to Christus' portrayal.⁷⁹² Grimston's portrait, its painted surface, reverse and frame, incorporates multiple coats of arms –as if it were a portrait of insignia as much as of the person. Whether this Carthusian came from a family with heraldry, his portrait very obviously sheds any supplementary items and objects. Whereas Grimston's heraldry adorns the wall behind him, the Carthusian leaves an empty space. It is the artist's name and not the sitter's that is inscribed into the lower band of the fictive frame.⁷⁹³ Perhaps the fly is another kind of modesty formula painted precisely to draw attention to this dearth of extraneous embellishment: in lieu of a coat of arms, a small insect.

This absence of distinguishing details in the surrounding space is accentuated by the tighter spatial composition. When compared to the other two portraits, whose heads are substantially occupied by grand headgear, the vacant space above the Carthusian's head becomes motivated. He is emphatically *not* wearing a hat; he wears nothing – a pronounced nothing. In fact, at some point in the subsequent history of the portrait, this gap above the head was deemed so lacking that it was capped with an erroneous halo [3.24], bestowing a false sanctity upon him until he was 'defrocked' by restorers in the later twentieth century.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹² See Dülberg, *Privatporträts*, 107-16, for the intertwining.

⁷⁹³ Cf. van Eyck's *Jan de Leeuw* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1436).

⁷⁹⁴ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93; similarly, the case for Christus' *Goldsmith* [0.13] (*ibid.*, 96).

Furthermore, the other portraits are also more manually active – one holds a chain, the other a bird of prey. Christus' Carthusian does not visibly hold anything; his hands are absent. In Netherlandish portraiture of the era, handless or manually passive formulae seem to have been deemed suitable for certain sitters. Van Eyck's *Albergati* (?) [3.16] which is our Carthusian's direct precursor in format and tone (Albergati was a member of the Carthusian Order), has no hands.⁷⁹⁵ Christus' later *Portrait of a Young Woman* (also in an interior) [3.25] is similarly handless, cropped above the elbows. In the Carthusian lay brother, handlessness redirects attention to the face and eyes, and hence the 'spirit', creating a contemplative mood. Poets of the era figured their spiritual or mental interior as a kind of spatial container, as in Charles d'Orléans' (1394-1465) description of a "chamber of thought", accessed through the "windows of [his] eyes".⁷⁹⁶ It is tempting to see the Carthusian's space as a one such prosthetic "ich-raum" or "space of the self", potentially drawing on allusions to the intensive reflexivities of Carthusian spirituality.⁷⁹⁷ However, Carthusian lay brothers were actually intended to perform manual activities and keenly discouraged from the more spiritual pursuits, leaving these to the monks.⁷⁹⁸ This potential contradiction will have to remain unresolved.

⁷⁹⁵ The identity of the sitter is debated, some hypothesising a secular individual, on which see John Hunter, "Who Is Jan van Eyck's 'Cardinal Nicolo Albergati'?", *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 2 (1993): 207-18. Borchert, "Function," 222 notes this handless formula is unique among van Eyck's portraits. But note: After/Workshop of Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Monk* (Musée Ingres-Bourdelle, Montauban) and After (?) Jan van Eyck, *Head of a Man* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin); their dates and attributions are debated. In *Margaret van Eyck* (Groeningemuseum, Bruges, 1439) and the female sitter in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], hands are rendered inactive.

⁷⁹⁶ *Poésies de Charles d'Orléans*, ed. Jean-Marie Guichard (Paris: Gosselin, 1842), 55: "... Par les fenestres de mes yeulx. / Lors la chambre de ma pensée..." (Ballad 45), On the metaphor, see Karen Newman, "Mind's Castle: Containment in the Poetry of Charles d'Orléans," *Romance Philology* 33, no. 2 (November 1979): 317-28.

⁷⁹⁷ See Mechthild Albert, "En la chambre de ma pensée': Interiorität und Subjektivität bei Charles d'Orléans," in Staubach, *Außen*, 265-277. On Carthusian spirituality, see Brantley, *Reading*, 27-45.

⁷⁹⁸ Thompson, *Carthusian*, 271, cites an ordinance of 1432: "the status of the converses is to be occupied in labours and not in letters, wherefore according to the statutes they are not permitted to have books..."

The interior setting contains no content about the sitter apart from that it is bereft of information. The chosen space reminds one of the exterior grisaille box-niches referenced earlier.⁷⁹⁹ Why did Christus not use an undifferentiated, non-descript background for this portrait? Perhaps, it was to emphasise the absence of worldly information: without the setting, there would be nothing to make empty. Vacuity is the wrong concept here; this is a rather sunny, warm atmosphere of enclosure, *bereft* of extraneous information but *full* of colour and light. It is almost as if the actual space of representation, the hollow cell, becomes the significant object of the figure's possession.⁸⁰⁰

Christus' Falconer [3.8], however, is especially full of content. In various ways, Christus communicates the man's high position in society.⁸⁰¹ He wears a hefty hat, luxuriously made from two kinds of fur, coarser like that of beaver for the crown and finer like that of sable, marten or *gris* (squirrel) for the rim.⁸⁰² He dons an overgarment with a collar and sleeve, again of finer fur.⁸⁰³ A falcon perches on his gloved left hand, garnished with jets and bells, which fall illusionistically over what was probably to be a fictive frame.⁸⁰⁴ The drawing's background shows the vertical lines of embryonic, floor-to-ceiling wooden wainscoting and a flat wooden ceiling

⁷⁹⁹ See p250 above.

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. Künstler, "Einzelbildnisse," 54.

⁸⁰¹ Koreny, *Drawings*, 64-66 (no, 12).

⁸⁰² Sable and marten furs were preferred to squirrel by fifteenth-century English and Burgundian elites, about which, and late medieval fur consumption generally, see Veale, "Fashions".

⁸⁰³ Cf. the fur trimmings to the male figure's outfit in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10], possibly sable (Campbell, *National Gallery*, 190-91), and the illustration of "Bürger der Stadt Ravensburg (1429)" in Wilhelm Diez et al., *Zur Geschichte der Costüme. Colorierte Ausgabe* (Munich: Braun & Schneider, 1861-80), no. 1208. In the prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, published c.1400, the merchant wears "upon his head a Flemish beaver hat" (*Canterbury Tales*, 26).

⁸⁰⁴ Albert Cels, "L'homme au faucon et le lieu d'origine possible de Jean van Eyck," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts* 7 (1958): 29.

with subtly articulated joints between the boards; to the side, two wooden shelves at head height are bedecked with the ghostly outlines of an array of items.

Again, we are interested in the degree of complementarity between costume, attributes and setting in announcing, directly or indirectly, the sitter's status. There was actually no encompassing sumptuary legislation in the Burgundian Netherlands until the end of the century, but, for instance, Edward IV's 1463 English regulations decreed: "No knight, under the estate of a lord, nor his wife, shall wear...any fur of *sables* under the penalty of twenty marks... No man, not having the yearly value of forty pounds, shall wear any fur of *martins*, of *pure grey*, or of *pure minever*; nor shall the wife, the son, the daughter, or the servant of such a man..."⁸⁰⁵ Fur was expensive, and the wearing of it was often restricted, garnering certain connotations of wealth and standing.⁸⁰⁶ Compare the capacious fur hats in van Eyck's *Baudouin de Lannoy* [3.26] and the Eyckian *Man with a Carnation* [3.27]. De Lannoy, Lord of Molembais, was Burgundian ambassador to England during Henry V's reign (1413-22), an elite noble, made one of the first Knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece in the early 1430s (he wears the Order's chain). We do not know exactly who the Man with a Carnation might have been, but he bears the medal of the prestigious Order of St Anthony (the 'tau' cross), founded in 1382 by Duke Albrecht of Bavaria, Count of Hainault.⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁵ Joseph Strutt, *A Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England* (London: Bohn, 1842), 2:108-09. For the Burgundian Netherlands, see Buylaert, "Sumptuary," 401-03.

⁸⁰⁶ On the Netherlandish lack of comprehensive sumptuary legislation for most of the fifteenth century and their more scattered, localised micro-legislations, see Isis Sturtewagen, "All Together Respectably Dressed: Fashion and Clothing in Bruges during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2016), 187-93 (e.g. (191) in 1354 Margaret of Hainault issued a regulation targeting excessive luxury in servants' clothes, namely the "use of linings and edgings of vair, ermine or weasel").

⁸⁰⁷ Dhanens, *Van Eyck*, 371-72.

With this socioeconomic awareness, the rest of the Falconer's supplementary visual information undergoes a potential sociological activation. The shelves' contents have an altogether different status to traditional 'attributes' that might be depicted in the vicinity of saints and rulers; they are material possessions: books on the lower shelf, on the higher a metal vessel, a container, a hanging pendant, possibly even an orange.⁸⁰⁸ Some of these can be compared with items on shelves in Christus' *Goldsmith* [0.13] and the Eyckian *St Jerome* (historically occasionally attributed to Christus) [3.28], settings that denote a merchant's shop and a scholar's study.⁸⁰⁹ Painted, the room's setting would appear wholly dressed in wood panelling, similar to later depictions of scholars and shops [0.11].⁸¹⁰ Perhaps the particular nook represented should be considered a kind of amalgamation of the two: the office and study. The Medieval Dutch word *contoor* used to encompass this dual meaning.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁸ Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 68-69, on shelving.

⁸⁰⁹ On the 'shop-piece' genre and its influence on the half-length indoor settings of van Eyck and Christus, see Panhans-Bühler, *Eklektizismus*, 91-100. Note the lost half-length 'shop-piece' by van Eyck recorded in Milan in 1530 by Marcantonio Michiel: Theodor Frimmel, *Der Anonimo Morelliano: Marcanton Michiel's Notizia d'opere del Disegno* (Vienna: Graeser, 1888), 54: "el quadretto a meze figure, del patron che fa conto cun el fattor fo de man de Zuan Heic, credo Memelino, Ponentino, fatto nel 1440".

⁸¹⁰ Note the extensive wainscoting in the settings of Barthélemy d'Eyck (?), *Portrait of a Man* (Liechtenstein Collection, Vienna, 1456); French (?), *Man with a Glass of Wine* (Louvre Museum, Paris, c.1460); Master of the Mornauer Portrait, *Portrait of Alexander Mornauer* (National Gallery, London, c.1464-1488).

⁸¹¹ Thornton, *Scholar*, 8; 77-97. On the Netherlandish *contoor*, see de Groot, "At Home," 95-6: "intriguingly, when scanning through the Bruges sources, it seems that the Middle Dutch word for 'study', i.e., *studoor*, was, like the Italian word for 'office', virtually non-existent. What we do find in these Bruges sources [are] references to rooms that were labelled solely as *contoor*... If the functionalities of both a businesslike office and a scholarly study were combined in the *contoor*, then this space was, even more than other spaces, a threshold between 'outside'- and 'inside'-focussed occupations..."

In her analysis of early modern *studioli*, Dora Thornton suggested that such visible assemblages of objects could express a certain “social value – or social virtue”.⁸¹² The combination of decorations, fittings and furnishing communicated an owner’s *gentilezza*, “that cult of decorum, refinement and good manners” deemed necessary to elevated status.⁸¹³ But is our sitter noble or an elite bourgeois? Philippe Contamine advised that, in fifteenth-century France, the subtle differences in material possession and representation between the two ranks were most noticeable in indoor areas of business and commerce.⁸¹⁴ Nobles might be seen to have studies but not counting rooms; the bourgeoisie either proudly displayed these arenas or, if they had a high enough status to merit such concerns, cannily concealed them.

The Falconer clearly wanted to be represented among his property, itself a form of “adornment”, which the interior setting facilitates.⁸¹⁵ Flanders was still a very prominent commercial centre; its population surrounded by wealth and produce. The Spanish traveller in Bruges c.1435, Piero Tafur, reported that “without doubt the goddess of luxury has great power there... any one who has money and wishes to spend it, will find in this town alone everything which the whole world produces. I saw there oranges and lemons from Castile, which seemed only to have just been gathered from the trees, fruits and wines from Greece, as abundant as in that

⁸¹² Thornton, *Scholar*, 6.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸¹⁴ Contamine, “Peasant,” 466 notes, “it was ‘bourgeois’ to have a *comptoir*, a counting room, rather than an *ouvroir*, a workroom, and even more bourgeois to have a study instead (or in addition to) a counting room.”

⁸¹⁵ The psychological relationship between adornment (*Schmuck*) and personal property (*persönliches Eigentum*) is highlighted in Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1908), 2, remaining a central theme of this history of art collecting.

country...”⁸¹⁶ In a charter of Philip the Good dated 5th November 1441 regarding a dispute between Bruges and Sluys, we get a taste of the abundance of merchandise moving through Bruges at the time. The following goods benefitted from trading privileges:

oranges and pomegranates, olives, lemons, limes and similar, rose water and damask rose and other aromatic essences, preserves and jams... monkeys, bears, lions, marmosets, falcons, parrots and all other manner of birds and strange savage beasts, onions and Spanish reeds, velvet [or rough] carpets [or hangings], woven mats, mirrors called *speghelharst* in Flemish, earthenware called *valenschwerc* in Flemish, sponges, glass vessels and the like novelties which the galleys and carracks bring.⁸¹⁷

The falcon is named one of these exotic possessable wares, as are oranges – and mirrors. (Indeed, in the mirror leaning on the foreground counter of Christus’ *Goldsmith* [0.13], two modishly dressed figures appear, one holding a bird of prey: one fashionable possession literally mirroring another.)

⁸¹⁶ Tafur, *Travels*, 200.

⁸¹⁷ Louis Gilliodts-van Severen, *Inventaire des archives de la ville de Bruges publié sous les auspices de l’administration communale. Section première: inventaire des chartes* (Bruges: Gaillard, 1876), 5:245: “... pommes dorenges et de grenate, oliues, citrons, limons et les semblables, eaues roses et de damas et autres eaux aromatiques, succades et confitures... cinges, ours, lyons, marmotes, faulcons, papegaulx et toutes aultres manieres doiseaulx et destrainges bestes sauuages, oignons et roseaulx Despaigne, tapiz veluz, nates, arpoix appelle en flamenc speghelharst, vaisselle de terre appelle en flamenco valenschwerc, sponges, vaiselle de voires et semblables nouuellitez que les gales et caraques ameinent...”

In the drawing, Christus' sitter also demonstrates a skill: he masters an animal.⁸¹⁸ A falcon was an easily recognisable medieval status symbol; the practices of owning a falcon or keeping a falconer were associated with nobility and most often with the court.⁸¹⁹ Compare, for example, the destroyed "Rogierian" drawing of Philip of Brabant (1404-30) [3.29] who brandishes a bird of prey; or the several birds of prey among the courtly retinue in the Eyckian drawing of a fishing party in the Louvre [3.30].⁸²⁰ Some early twentieth-century scholars even wondered if Christus' sitter was William II, Duke of Bavaria (1365-1417).⁸²¹

The bird's almost uncomfortable presence indoors among the books and trinkets heightens the display of control and command. The baton or *brochette* denotes that he is a working falconer.⁸²² The animal's *chaperon* blinds the creature to keep it calm. In the discussion of the art of falconry in the *Livre du Roy Modus et de la Royne Ratio*, a popular text likely written by the Normandy nobleman Henri de Ferrières c.1350-70, of which Philip the Good owned four copies, the *brochette* is

⁸¹⁸ James Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck* (London: John Lane, 1908), 24-26 wondered whether the drawing could be connected with the Jagermeester Henri van Eyck, in the service of John of Bavaria at the same time as Jan van Eyck; Cels, "L'Homme" drew attention to the possibility that the man came from the distinguished Arendonck dynasty of falconers, which included the van Eyck family, one of whom could be portrayed in the drawing – perhaps Henri's father.

⁸¹⁹ See Robin Oggins, *The Kings and their Hawks, Falconry in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁸²⁰ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:pl. 100A. Anne van Buren, "The Canonical Office in Renaissance Painting, Part II: More about the Rolin Madonna," *Art Bulletin* 60, no. 4 (1978): 630 suggests the lost drawing (for Louis de Mâle's tomb) may show Philip of Brabant as he was dressed in the 1420s.

⁸²¹ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 187, with references. This was based on a comparison with the statue of William II with staff (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), one of ten mourners from the tomb of Isabella of Bourbon (1436-65), marked with a number '3' (inv. BK-AM-33-B for identification), now believed to be his ancestor Albert of Bavaria (1336-1404) who wears the chain of the Order of St Anthony that he founded. The Falconer wears no such chain.

⁸²² Noted also in Koreny, *Drawings*, 64-66 (no. 12). Koreny adds another scholar's suggestion that the training of birds may have been a metaphor for marriage.

said to keep the animal from biting and the hand from staining the feathers.⁸²³ Regular stroking, especially in the first days of manning, makes the bird feel secure (*asseure*); the falcon's sureness (*seurté*) was of paramount importance to the training process.⁸²⁴ This man is depicted in the very act of stroking his falcon, and this is curiously analogised through his setting: the falcon is made secure by the man, just as the man is made secure – metaphorically stroked – by the corner of the room and his many things. His room, his pictorial space, is thus converted into another one of his possessions.

This Falconer appears large, almost too large, bursting out of his chamber's confines. This inflation effect was likely consciously produced for this finished drawing. Like Grimston, figure and clothing are magnified, complementing the rhetoric of high status conveyed by his outfit and setting. The man is portrayed as occupying a high position in Burgundian society: he is either a member of the nobility or a significantly wealthy burgher. Perhaps the latter is most likely since the setting incorporates no heraldry and the man does not sport an insignia like the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

In summary, from the evidence of their palpable similarities, these backgrounds are certainly artificial (not holistic real-life studies, but assembled from fragmented components). But in their differences, they are revealed to be carefully, thoughtfully contrived; they are not merely superfluous, passive 'paddings'. As the

⁸²³ Cited in Herman Roodenburg, "Still Be Mindful on You," in *Visual Engagements: Image Practices and Falconry*, ed. Yannis Hadjinicolaou (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 62-63.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, 63; note the use of *brochettes* in a miniature from a fifteenth-century copy of *Les Livres du Roy Modus et de la Roynne Ratio*, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, MS. 10218-19, fol. 61.

visual comparison demonstrates, an exchangeable prototype archetypal box-setting may have been specifically adjusted to suit the requirements of the different sitters – in a sense ‘tailored’ to the sitters in the manner of an outfit. But the ‘corner-space’ motif is inherently limited. Indeed, by the time Christus painted his later *Portrait of a Young Woman* in an interior (c.1470) [3.25], he had refined his technique, clearly feeling able to dispense with the corner solution (and ceiling), with the apparent result of heightening the locational ambiguity.

One of the most interesting characteristics of this group is how similar these settings essentially are, and how the artist masterfully, subtly presses them to communicate differently despite the restrictions of volume and expressive possibility. The vacuity of the Carthusian’s setting speaks (curiously) of worldly renouncement, material austerity and contemplative ideals. Whereas in his display of expertise, material possessions and bookish interests, the Falconer highlights aspects of an active, proprietorial, fashionable and refined life.

Our conclusions are in the realm of hypotheses because we do not know who the sitters were, only who they *seem* to have been. In the next section I will test these theories by examining Grimston’s setting considering what we know of his life and career.

The room makes the man: *Edward Grimston*

Portraiture was not a popular genre in fifteenth-century panel painting. Inventories of middle-class Bruges households of the period, statistically analysed

by Julie de Groot, include mention of a variety of genres of panel paintings; however, until the sixteenth century, portraits seldom feature.⁸²⁵ As late as the early seventeenth century, portraits were considered a rarity and a privilege. The definition of a portrait in Covarrubias's Castilian Dictionary of 1611 is "the representation of a person of rank and standing whose effigy, resemblance and likeness deserve to be remembered for posterity".⁸²⁶

Larry Silver once observed: "portraits of the early fifteenth-century masters are meant to be understood as assertions of some kind of power or importance"; "not mere likenesses, but... statements, even assertions, about dignity and the worthiness of the individual portrayed"; "the very act of making a portrait already says something important about the worth of the individual".⁸²⁷ Hans Belting reiterated this view when, in the context of van Eyck's portraiture, he described the "Bildrecht" or "right of an individual to be represented" and connected this with the struggle of a burgeoning bourgeois class to establish itself between the twin authorities of the court and the church.⁸²⁸ In the first half of the fifteenth century, then, commissioned, single-sitter panel portraits were emphatic visual statements made on the part of patrons, with more automatic significance for sitter and artist than we might easily grasp. A portrait signalled that its sitter *deserved* to be portrayed per se and warranted the particular visual outcome.

⁸²⁵ De Groot, "At Home," 189 (and 'graph 11'), with the admission that portraits are especially difficult to identify, and may feature in diptychs, triptychs or single panels.

⁸²⁶ Cited by Jennifer Fletcher, "The Renaissance Portrait: Functions, Uses and Display," in Campbell, *Renaissance Faces*, 46.

⁸²⁷ Silver, *Massys*, 161-62.

⁸²⁸ Belting, *Spiegel*, 45; 55-57. But see de Rock, *Image*, 37 and 88-93 for a more recent approach to the question of class and the Eyckian style's emergence.

Consequently, the device of an interior setting, fashioned to suit a particular sitter, fed these social and existential assertions in an indirect manner. A setting reinforced a patron's ostensible right to be represented by allowing the sitter to be apprehended accompanied by their own surroundings. The development of a distinct, complementary setting could also heighten a single-sitter portrait's aspirations to independent status as an artwork; it could be an insurance against instrumentalization or homogenisation. With a depicted architectural environment germane to it alone, a portrait became more difficult to absorb seamlessly into a larger cycle, frustrating a work's discreet assimilation within an actual location.⁸²⁹ This capacity for self-sufficiency may arguably be *the* principal reason why a patron would choose such a device, since the depicted sitter could absorb the atmosphere of autonomy triggered by a distinctive setting: the individual could be subtly augmented, radiating outwards into the surrounding pictorial environment.

Such a facility was perhaps more important than usual in the case of Edward Grimston (*d.* 1478) [3.1a], then “very much a young courtier on the make”.⁸³⁰ His interior setting, I will argue, is especially pertinent because of Grimston's social position and proprietorial concerns – he was not a member of the higher nobility or parliamentary peerage but an esquire from a junior branch of a ‘gentle’ (literally high-born), landed family claiming to bear arms dating back to before the Norman conquest. He then became a successful court official in the service of Henry VI.⁸³¹

⁸²⁹ Although some architectural settings are also ways of joining portraits together into larger cycles; see, for example, the cycle of famous classical thinkers and sibyls by Ludger Tom Ring, possibly after an original 1430s cycle by the Flémalle Group (Thürlemann, *Campin*, 141-54).

⁸³⁰ Lorne Campbell, “Approaches,” 3.

⁸³¹ Franks, “Notes,” 455-56.

‘Esquire’, was a middle rank of the gentry, below knight and above gentleman.⁸³² Esquireship could be conferred on those providing services to the crown; it could also result from a certain income. But the factors determining someone’s gentle status also customarily exceeded riches, encompassing also cultural values and ideology.⁸³³ The portrait shows Grimston to be a wealthy patron, but he is also sophisticated, active on the continent, attuned to the latest artistic fashions, and aware of a portrait’s powerful facility for assertion and memorialisation, especially through the inclusion of complementary visual information.

Beginning with an extended description of the picture, I will consider how this early example of an interior setting enhanced the other communicative systems at work in the portrait, such as costume and attributes. I will make reference to two connected primary documents: a legal testament written by Grimston in 1449, particularly revealing of the outlook of someone of his standing, and a proprietorial transaction carried out during c.1446-7, virtually simultaneous with the portrait’s commission. Both artist and patron seem to have realised, somewhat ahead of time, that a described environment was a particularly effective means to convey – among other things – the rhetoric of power and possession, calling to mind the saying (in use in England c.1400) about the equivalence of being and appearance, *vestis virum facit* or “Euer maner and clothing makyth man”.⁸³⁴ In these early

⁸³² Peter Coss, “The Formation of the English Gentry,” *Past & Present* 147, no. 1 (May 1995): 38-64 (50-51); K.B. Mcfarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 6-8.

⁸³³ Jeremy Goldberg, *Medieval England. A Social History 1250-1550* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 114-15.

⁸³⁴ John Simpson and Jennifer Speake, “Clothes make the man,” in *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (2009), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199539536.001.0001/acref-9780199539536>. Note “maner” may play on both manners and manor (grand house). On the classical epideictic topic of describing a person by their house, popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Don Allen, *Image and Meaning: Metaphoric Traditions in Renaissance*

‘milieu portraits’, the clothes are not the only outfit; in a subtly different manner, the room also ‘makes’ or articulates the person – becoming “the mirror of its owner”.⁸³⁵

Grimston is positioned in the corner of a room. We presume he is standing (or very tall) as his head appears to almost graze the ceiling. The painting shows losses, especially in the glazing of the upper half, and the face is now partly abraded.⁸³⁶ Yet, a certain archness of character is still apparent in the raised brow, the side-long gaze, the prominent nose, tight lips, strained smile and defined chin. The gold chain Grimston wears around his neck, peeping from underneath his doublet, and the other smaller silver chain of ‘esses’ snaking around the fingers of his right hand, are particularly eye-catching, neither painted using any gilding.

Christus gives attention to details of contemporary fashion in an particularly specific manner. Grimston wears a sumptuous outfit: a plaited white linen shirt, an orange-red silk velvet doublet with stretched red lacing (its sleeves are made in two parts, full above and fitted below), and a bright green pile-on-pile velvet *keerel* or *houppelande* (outer gown, in his case most probably a short *haincelin*) with slit sleeves.⁸³⁷ This may be the earliest depiction of sleeve “puffs”, shortened versions of the “Lombard” style.⁸³⁸ He is capped by a sizeable black *chaperon à bourrelet* –

Poetry (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1960), 191-96, and 196n15 for the theme’s early modern revisitations.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁸³⁶ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 51.

⁸³⁷ Sturtewagen, “Dressed,” 129n56 and 54-60; cf. costumes in *Roman de Girart de Roussillon*, c.1448, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS. 2549, fol. 9v.

⁸³⁸ Anne van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands 1325-1515* (London: Giles, 2011), 168; Margaret Scott, *The History of Dress Series: Late Gothic Europe 1400-1500* (London: Mills & Boon, 1980), 159.

the portrait's loudest feature – a hooded headwear formed by a scarf, possibly also silk.⁸³⁹ The long appendage or *liripipe* hangs in front of his shoulder, giving a subtle differentiation in the planes of the body.

The setting's box-like form, emphasised by the play of light and shade, establishes his locative presence. There are two light sources: from outside the picture, falling on the sitter's face and inside from the high *oeil de boeuf* or leaded round oculus window, falling on the fixtures and fittings. Christus has taken pains to fit the whole window to demonstrate the three-dimensional width of the wall; it is seen at a slant, as in the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2]. The double shadows cast by the ceiling beams, caused by the various light sources, are virtuosic in the manner of the *Werl Altarpiece* [2.1c]. One of the shields bearing his coat of arms reflects a metallic glint; their incorporation demonstrates that the room is supposed to be the sitter's own dwelling – though as Christus likely never went to England this is a fictional evocation, even if the contents were stipulated. Still, in the interaction of figure, definite setting and specific light, we sense the implication of a specific moment and time of day – as if apprehended in the world at the time of the portrait's execution. Setting out some of the details of Grimston's life will help our interpretation of this singular portrait.

By 1446, Grimston was an ambassador for Henry VI, having been previously in the household of the powerful Earl of Suffolk where he is first recorded in 1437.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁹ For another sizeable hat, cf. After Rogier van der Weyden, *Portrait of Philip the Good* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, c.1450).

⁸⁴⁰ Davies, "Grimston"; Franks, "Notes", which follows (and refers to) this transcribed document concerning Grimston's involvements in the trade negotiations in 1449: William Thoms,

Grimston made missions to the continent throughout the 1440s to meet French and Burgundian representatives for a number of purposes.⁸⁴¹ In 1441 he is recorded travelling to the Duchess of Burgundy in the King's service, probably to negotiate a commercial treaty between England and Flanders (Burgundy, once allied with England in the Hundred Years War, had switched allegiance at the 1435 Council of Arras). These negotiations were designed to aid unrestricted commerce between the two powers and temper the misconduct of merchants. In 1444-5, Grimston brokered the marriage between Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou as a preliminary to peace with France; Grimston may have accompanied Margaret on her journey to England.⁸⁴² Alice, Grimston's first wife (of three), later became gentlewoman to the Queen.⁸⁴³ In 1446, the date of the portrait, Grimston travelled again to the continent and it is likely that he was in Brussels at the renewal of the truce between the two countries on 12th July.⁸⁴⁴ He may have sat for Christus there or met the

"Instructions Given by King Henry VI. to Edward Grimston and Others, His Ambassadors to the Duchess of Burgundy, 1449...." *Archaeologia* 40, no. 2 (1866): 451-54. Among the interesting biographical details from the 1440s concerning the sitter, unmentioned in Franks' biography, are that two years after the portrait was executed in 1448, Grimston was granted the joint office of Treasurer of the Chamber and Keeper of the King's Jewels with John Merston: "March 9. Westminster. Grant in survivorship during good behaviour to the king's serjeant, John Merston, and Edward Grymeston, esquire, of the office of treasurer of the chamber and keeper of the king's jewels, with the usual wages, fees, vesture of the livery of the household and all other profits, as John has had the same; in lieu of a grant thereof to John by letters patent, surrendered. By K. etc." (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office. Henry VI* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1909), 5:130). These offices were twinned until 1465; Edward IV's *Liber Niger* or Household Ordinances states, "This officer taketh by indenture, betwixt him and the King, all that he finds in his office of gold, silver, precious stones and the marks of everything", cited in Arthur Percival Newton, "The King's Chamber under the Early Tudors," *English Historical Review* 32, no. 127 (July 1917): 351n8. In 1449 Grimston took letters and instructions to the King of France: John Ferguson, *English Diplomacy, 1422-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 180 and 189. Grimston is also involved in payments in the 1450s concerning Sir John Fastolf: *The Paston letters 1422-1509 A.D.*, ed. James Gairdner (Edinburgh: Grant, 1910), 1:393-4 (no. 287; 288) (and see fn848 below). For further biography, see fn840, fn842, fn844 below.

⁸⁴¹ On the commercial relations of the Low Countries with England, see Nelly Kerling, *Commercial Relations of Holland and Zeeland with England* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 51; 77-80.

⁸⁴² Compton Reeves, "The 1450 Purge of the English Royal Circle," *Medieval Prosopography* 33 (2018): 112. The truce was signed on May 28th 1444 and the Queen arrived on April 9th 1445.

⁸⁴³ Davies, "Grimston".

⁸⁴⁴ The 1439 treaty for English commercial intercourse with Flanders was due to expire on 1st November 1447 and needed prolonging. For this reason, Grimston and others met at Calais in 1446

painter on his return journey passing through Bruges, where Christus kept his workshop.⁸⁴⁵ The rest of his life was not uneventful – around 1450, after the downfall of the Duke of Suffolk, Grimston was accused of treason – but that does not concern us here.⁸⁴⁶ Grimston must have commissioned another memorial towards the end of his life: his tomb effigy was in the church of Thorndon in Suffolk, but it has since been removed.⁸⁴⁷

Grimston's portrait can be conceived as a by-product of the ambassadorial and artistic relations between England and the Burgundian Low Countries.⁸⁴⁸ Sitter or artist may have taken inspiration from portraits of diplomats like that of *Baudouin de Lannoy* [3.26], Burgundian ambassador to England during Henry V's reign (1413-22).⁸⁴⁹ Fifteenth-century portrait painters sometimes played a part in foreign policy.⁸⁵⁰ Van Eyck fulfilled a role for the Burgundian court as both painter and diplomat. He executed portraits of Philip the Good's bride-to-be, Isabella

and on 4th August the treaty was extended for twelve more years. Concurrently, a truce between the two countries, first negotiated in 1443, was renewed in 1446, appearing in the Duchess of Burgundy's declaration at Brussels of 12th July 1446. On 14th July Henry VI issued letters patent demonstrating the truce and appointing lawyer Master Thomas Kent and Edward Grymeston, "ad tradendum et deliberandum..." (Franks, "Notes," 457-59).

⁸⁴⁵ Schabacker, *Christus*, 84 (no. 4): "there would have been no need for Christus to travel to Brussels as Bruges would have been the likely point of debarkation and embarkation of the English party."

⁸⁴⁶ Reeves, "Purge".

⁸⁴⁷ Franks, "Notes," 470.

⁸⁴⁸ For the considerable exchange of art objects between England and the Low Countries in the fifteenth century, see Catherine Reynolds, "England and the Continent: Artistic Relations," in Marks and Williamson, *Gothic*, 76-85, esp. 79 on manuscripts and panel paintings; Marie-Rose Thielemans, *Bourgogne et Angleterre, relations politiques et économiques entre les Pays-Bas bourguignons et l'Angleterre (1435-1467)* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires, 1966), 232-33, on tapestry. Grimston may conceivably have been informed about the Netherlandish artistic scene by John de Surenceurt, esquire of renowned art patron René of Anjou, whom Grimston was employed to pay in 1445 (Frederick Devon ed., *Issues of the Exchequer: Being a Collection of Payments made out of His Majesty's Revenue from King Henry III, to King Henry VI, Inclusive* (London: Murray, 1837), 452).

⁸⁴⁹ Upton, *Christus*, 27-28.

⁸⁵⁰ Fletcher, "Portrait," 48-51 and Miguel Falomir, "The Court Portrait," in Campbell, *Faces*, 67-68.

[3.10], on ambassadorial duty in Portugal in 1428-9.⁸⁵¹ In 1442, four years before Christus' portrait, an equivalent episode took place in England when Henry VI's ambassadors were instructed to obtain likenesses of the count of Armagnac's three daughters.⁸⁵² Another painted by-product of mid-fifteenth-century diplomatic relations between England and the continent survives in the National Gallery [3.31]. It depicts the future 73rd Doge Marco Barbarigo (c.1413-1486) who was in London from 1445 and the city's Venetian Consul from 1448 to 15th February 1449.⁸⁵³ He bears a letter inscribed "the eminent and distinguished lord Marco Barbarigo" with the address "Londonis" visible behind his fingers. These kinds of portraits do more than simply record likenesses; they are also statements of activity, visual dispatches in effect. Grimston's portrait, so obviously in the Flemish style, may be seen in a similar light, conveying his cosmopolitanism.

Given Grimston's involvement in foreign diplomacy, the attention bestowed upon lavish garments is potentially revealing, particularly since he was involved in brokering economic treatises involving the cloth trade. Anne van Buren proposed that the outfit may have been newly tailored upon Grimston's arrival in the Low Countries, suggesting a reciprocity between the two commissions: his suit and his picture.⁸⁵⁴ Silk velvet was the height of contemporary fashion, imported from Italy and Spain and procured by the elite. Between 1430 and 1455, the amount of silk clothing purchased by the Burgundian Court more than doubled.⁸⁵⁵ In the famous

⁸⁵¹ Bauch, "Bildnisse," 85-91.

⁸⁵² Nicholas Nicolas, *A Journal by One of the Suite of Thomas Beckington* (London: Pickering, 1928), 9-95. The artist Hans is described as the bearer of diplomatic correspondence (61).

⁸⁵³ Campbell, *National Gallery*, 224-27.

⁸⁵⁴ Van Buren, *Fashion*, 168.

⁸⁵⁵ On silk in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Netherlands, see Sturtewagen, "Dressed," 125-30, esp. 129n56. Similar velvet garments are worn in the artist's *Goldsmith* [0.13] and by the

miniature of Jean Wauquelin presenting his ‘Chroniques de Hainault’ to Philip the Good of 1447-8 [3.32], the courtiers are arrayed in rich velvets and damasks.

Grimston’s choice of clothing would have been significant, especially in England where new sumptuary legislations were decreed at various points throughout the fifteenth century.⁸⁵⁶ Indicative of the on-going vogue for velvet and other silk garments, a (later) act was passed in April 1463 during Edward IV’s reign (from which I have already cited in the context of the Falconer):

No bachelor-knight, nor his wife shall wear any cloth of velvet upon velvet, under the forfeiture of twenty marks... No esquire or gentleman under the rank of knight, nor their wives, shall wear any velvet, or figured satin, nor any counterfeit resembling velvet, or figured satin, nor any counterfeit cloth of silk, nor any *wrought corses*, under the penalty of ten marks...⁸⁵⁷

Costume, therefore, would have played a crucial role in directly dictating Grimston’s social standing to his contemporaries through the medium of the portrait (although a later law, note that Grimston was an esquire).⁸⁵⁸ By choosing

husband in the *Arnolfini Portrait* [0.10] (a purple silk velvet tabard over a doublet possibly of silk damask). On the *Arnolfini*, see Campbell, *National Gallery*, 190-91. On the *Goldsmith*, see Lourdes Font, “1440-1449,” in *Fashion History Timeline* (FIT, State University of New York, 2018), accessed May 23 2021, <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1440-1449/>; Madison Migliaccio, “1449-Petrus Christus, A Goldsmith in his Shop,” in *Fashion History Timeline* (FIT, State University of New York, 2018), accessed 24 May 2021, <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1449-petrus-christus-a-goldsmith-in-his-shop/>. Pennant, *Journey*, 336, even believed Grimston’s portrait to depict Philip the Good.

⁸⁵⁶ No official sumptuary legislation existed in the Netherlands until the late fifteenth century, as noted in fn805 above.

⁸⁵⁷ Strutt, *Dress*, 2:109.

⁸⁵⁸ (Ibid., also importantly stipulating leniencies for royal household officers.) For an example of enthusiasm for expensive clothing by English knights and esquires of the period: from the year

to present himself layered in velvet, Grimston sought to fix his elevated status for posterity.

But the portrait also communicates his position in other ways. Like the “little clues” or “definite signs” employed by late medieval poets for the delineation of character, a concept known as *notation*, Grimston proffers his chain, is surrounded by heraldry and arguably even ‘wears’ his spatial location, depicted with particular attention to architectural features.⁸⁵⁹ Before analysing the potential connotations of these features, however, the more obvious attributes should be considered.⁸⁶⁰ How and what might these other forms of *notation* signify, in light of what we know about Grimston, and how do they interact with the setting?

Consider the two chains. The gold chain worn around Grimston’s neck is an obvious sign of some status. Hugo van der Velden pointed out its similarity to the chain sported by the lavishly dressed husband in the Portrait of a Goldsmith, possibly James II of Scotland [0.13].⁸⁶¹ And livery collars of ‘esses’ like the one Grimston holds were customarily given by Lancastrian monarchs to ennobled men for special services rendered.⁸⁶² The ‘s’ stood for either the Lancastrian motto *souveyne vous de moi*, ‘remember me’, or *sovereign*, referring to the monarch.⁸⁶³

1448, the winter robes given yearly to one Sir Thomas Tuddenham, actually a known associate of Grimston (see p295-300 below), were to be lined with skins of 360 marten (Veale, “Fashions”).

⁸⁵⁹ Murphy, *Three Medieval*, 79; [Cicero], *Rhetorica*, iv, 49.63-51.65 (386-95).

⁸⁶⁰ On portrait attributes, devices, emblems etc. in the early-to-mid fifteenth century, see Dülberg, *Privatporträts*, 127-30 and following.

⁸⁶¹ Van der Velden, “Defrocking,” 253-54.

⁸⁶² For an example, see Marks, *Gothic*, 206 (no. 71); cf. Matthew Ward, *The Livery Collar in Late Medieval England and Wales: Politics, Identity and Affinity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 26.

⁸⁶³ Or a combination of *sainteté*, *sagesse*, *sapience*, *seigneurie* (Ronald Lightbown, *Medieval European Jewellery* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), 249).

Gold was for the more esteemed members of the nobility, present in Hans Holbein's portrait of Sir Thomas More, worn around the chest [3.33]; silver was likely given to men of the 'esquire' rank. That Grimston's right hand hovers so obviously over his breast is potentially also significant. A similar manual position has been interpreted as "proprietary" and "the conventional posture of the dignified citizen".⁸⁶⁴ Others have identified the gesture with humility or virtue.⁸⁶⁵ But more important than the gesture is the function of the hand, resting robustly on the frame, as a vessel for proffering the collar and thus for asserting his esquireship and service to the House of Lancaster. Fitting that a continental artist should represent him thus, for his attainment of the collar possibly came as a direct result of foreign affairs.⁸⁶⁶

Christus uses the pointed combination of green and red elsewhere in his painterly oeuvre, but the colour scheme may also suit a communicative purpose in the portrait.⁸⁶⁷ In the depiction of Henry VI enthroned from the 'Talbot Shrewsbury Book' of 1444-5, green and red are prominent [3.34].⁸⁶⁸ Thus, perhaps the costume

⁸⁶⁴ Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art. The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy, 1963), 49.

⁸⁶⁵ Christiansen, *Renaissance Portrait*, 99 (no. 7). Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 27 warns against simple codifications of gesture.

⁸⁶⁶ Might the attainment have caused the portrait? See Upton, *Christus*, 27n13; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:198.

⁸⁶⁷ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 180n13.

⁸⁶⁸ On the illuminations, see Catherine Reynolds, "The Shrewsbury Book, London, British Library, Royal MS 15 E VI," *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology at Rouen, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions* 12 (1993): 109-16. Red and green are associated with the Lancastrians and afterwards with the Tudors. In the series of dynastic portraits associated with the British crown owned by Charles I and inventoried in his Privy Gallery at Whitehall Palace c.1639 (no. 24-36), red and green backgrounds predominate, on which see the Privy Gallery in Niko Munz ed., "The Lost Collection of Charles I," Royal Collection Trust (2018), accessed May 21 2021, <https://lostcollection.rct.uk/van-der-doort-locations/privy-gallery>; for inventory references, see "Abraham van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I," ed. Oliver Millar, *Walpole Society* 37 (1958-60): 27-29 (no. 24-36). Cf., particularly, examples of surviving portraits from the same hang: British School, *Henry V* and *Henry VI* (Royal Collection, 16th c.; inv. 403443; 403442).

denotes allegiance to the current Lancastrian monarch in a similar fashion to the chain. The book, containing various *chansons de geste*, romances and didactic treatises and the statutes of the Order of the Garter, was presented by John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, to Margaret of Anjou on her marriage to Henry VI. As noted, Grimston was involved in brokering this marriage in 1444-5, the years directly preceding Christus' portrait, perhaps even bringing the new Queen to England. Furthermore, he may have seen or even been involved in the delivery of this very manuscript.

The true nature of nobility was a topic of discussion among the Burgundian, English and French courtiers at that particular time.⁸⁶⁹ The same manuscript contained a long didactic poem by Alain Chartier, *Le bréviare des nobles*, composed between 1422 and 1426 detailing twelve chivalric virtues: nobility, loyalty, honour, rectitude, prowess, love, courtesy, diligence, nicety (refinement), largesse, sobriety and perseverance.⁸⁷⁰ The portrait's inclusion of heraldry particularly marks Grimston's noble lineage.⁸⁷¹ Grimston is styled "armiger" (entitled to bear hereditary arms) in a contemporary document.⁸⁷² Like the setting, this heraldry surrounds him. It appears on wall-mounted escutcheons either side

⁸⁶⁹ On nobility at the Burgundian court, see Charity Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967): 33-48 (in 1449 Jean Miélot translated Italian humanist Buonaccorso da Pistoia's *De Nobilitate* for Philip the Good, concerning nobility of birth as opposed to the nobility of virtue).

⁸⁷⁰ For a transcription, see Winthrop Rice, "Deux poèmes sur la chevalerie. *Le Bréviare des Nobles* d'Alain Chartier et *Le Psaultier des Viliains* de Michault Taillevent," *Romania* 75 (1954): 54-97 (*noblesse, lëaulté, honneur, droiture, proesse, amour, courtoisie, dilligence, netteté, largesse, sobriété, perseverance*).

⁸⁷¹ A "venerable Norman family": Sylvester de Grimston was "standard-bearer and chamberlain to William I" and the coat of arms was "borne by Monsieur Gerrard de Grymeston in the reign of Richard II", on which see Evelyn Shirley, *The Noble and Gentle Men of England* (Westminster: Bowyer, 1866), 293-94. See fn712 above for heraldry description.

⁸⁷² Charles Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1913), 365.

of his body and on the panel's verso in roughly the same position as his head, above Christus' signature. It appears on its older frame no longer used, four times [3.35] (not original but perhaps recalling some of the original's design).⁸⁷³

In the late medieval era, a realistic portrait likeness painted on panel was one relatively new, infrequently used sign system; other forms of identity conveyance like heraldry and emblems were more established and prominent.⁸⁷⁴ Considering the apparently conscious conjunction of the escutcheons with Grimston's head and mouth, it is notable that the late medieval coat of arms is said to have functioned like another body.⁸⁷⁵ Fifteenth-century books on heraldry like the *Book of St Albans* took the view that the law of arms was part of the law of nature.⁸⁷⁶ Belting writes that in Grimston's portrait particularly, "the natural and the heraldic body" interact, forming "a contradictory emblem".⁸⁷⁷

The interior consequently takes on another function: not only housing the body of the sitter but also housing the coat of arms. Medieval funerary monuments in stone

⁸⁷³ National Gallery L3 Conservation File (April 1988) records traces of older decoration on the earlier (non-original) frame. See Dülberg, *Privatporträts*, 177 (no. 4) for further information.

⁸⁷⁴ Michel Pastoureau, "L'effervescence emblématique et les origines héraldiques du portrait au XIVE siècle," *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 1985 (1987): 108-15, esp. 113-14.

⁸⁷⁵ See Belting, *Spiegel*, 55-64; *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 62-83. The French *portrait* and *portraiture* were used to describe the painting of heraldic designs just as equally as the painting of faces (Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 1). For a painted example of the conjunction between head and heraldry, see the painted memorial tablet of *Four Men from Montfoort* (Rijksmuseum, c.1400), illustrated in Bauch, *Grabbild*, 212 (fig. 329).

⁸⁷⁶ Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 305. The heraldry section of *The Boke of Saint Albans by Dame Julian Berners containing treatises on Hawking Hunting and Cote Armour* (London: Stock, 1881), printed 1486, written probably a few decades earlier, promises information on "how gentleman shall be known from ungentle men" (15).

⁸⁷⁷ Belting, *Anthropology*, 75.

and brass were similarly typically formed as symbolic houses for the body of the deceased and – if possessed – their coats of arms [3.36]. At his death on 23rd September 1478, Grimston was interred in the wall of the chancel of the parish church at Thorndon. The tomb no longer exists but a 1618 description by Robert Reyce notes “there lieth in armor, having an escocheon of Grimeston on eache shoulder”.⁸⁷⁸ Thus, flanked by two escutcheons either side of his neck, Grimston’s portrait may well draw inspiration from comparable orchestrations of figural memorials and heraldry that Christus could have seen in churches at the time.⁸⁷⁹

But in the painted portrait, the Gothic micro-architectural encasement has undergone a contemporary translation; similarly, the heraldry does not float upon the background in an abstract manner, as in the later *Margaret of Austria* [3.37] or the earlier *Lysbeth van Duvenvoorde* [3.6]. Instead, like Barbara’s tower in the *Werl Altarpiece* [2.34], it is integrated into the plausible fiction of pictorial location, reflecting conventions of interior decoration in built architecture: painted shields were hung on or incorporated within walls from at least the late thirteenth century.⁸⁸⁰ An interesting contemporaneous incorporation of figures and heraldry

⁸⁷⁸ Reyce also includes the epitaph, *Hic jacet Eduardus Grimeston armiger quondam de Rishangles Lodge qui obiit die mercurii viz. vicessimo tertio die mensis Septembris anno domini 1478. Cuius anime propitietur Deus. Amen.*, noting four other coats of arms, including those of his wives, in the corners (cited in Franks, “Notes,” 470).

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. the Netherlandish examples in Bauch, *Grabbild*, 264-65 (fig. 388-89). If the use of serial coats of arms on the Grimston portrait’s older frame, surrounding his bodily image, recalls the original frame (see fn872 above), this may similarly have echoed funereal monument formats where heraldry frequently encircles the figure on an outer band: e.g., *ibid.*, 283 (fig. 420). Cf. An old hypothesis that the *Arnolfini Portrait*’s [0.10] “hieratic” full-length presentation in an architectural space may recall the character of late medieval tomb monuments, formulated by Panofsky, “Arnolfini,” 125; Helen Rosenau, “Some English Influences on Jan van Eyck,” *Apollo* 36 (1942): 125-28; Kauffmann, “Arnolfinihochzeit,” 45.

⁸⁸⁰ Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 400 and 358-59. Wood states that in the 1450s at Ockwells Manor in Berkshire, Sir John Norreys, another of Henry VI’s esquires, used the glass in his hall to convey the arms of his Lancastrian monarch, his family and associates. The walls of Guines Castle, south of Calais, were decked with escutcheons in Edward IV’s time (c.1460s-1480s), on which see

within a portrait's architectural setting occurs in the enigmatic *Graf Schenk von Schenkstein* portrait of c.1440/45 [3.38].⁸⁸¹ In a contemporaneous illumination showing the presentation of the 'Roman de Girart de Roussillon' to Philip the Good [3.39], heraldry surrounds the scene on a decorative border and also features within the depiction on the throne canopy – the central escutcheon playfully straddling both. In integrating Grimston's figure and coats of arms with the architectural location, Christus signals forcefully that the structure belongs to the sitter – that the painted dwelling is a 'house' with both physical and dynastic connotations.⁸⁸² And through these heraldic incorporations, Grimston's setting is activated, made explicitly part of the portrait's signification system.

This instance of integration in setting and arms, I argue, suggests that Christus is interested in exploring a communicative middle ground between denotative and connotative signifiatory materials, between unequivocal, conventional attributes such as coats of arms and the more indirectly signifiatory pictorial contents found in architectural elements. Features of interior decoration are often subtle and frequently also often persuasive precisely because of their diverse functions: namely, acting as an embellishment to the sitter that could be sociologically motivated, while also structuring the illusion of a plausible spatial environment.

Howard Colvin et al., *History of the King's Works* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963), 1:453); cf. Anthony Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3:475.

⁸⁸¹ Kemperdick, "Vor Dürer," 52; cf. the heraldry draped over the windowsill in Fra Lippo Lippi, *Man and Woman at a Casement* [3.3] and for other examples, see Dülberg, *Privatporträts*, 112.

⁸⁸² On architectural metaphors and dynastic *maison* in French and Burgundian literature, see Cowling, *Building*, 88-101. For Philip the Good's metaphorical *maison*, see Lettenhove, *Oeuvres*, 7:218: "Tint les piliers de sa maison en estat, et le comble de son edifice sans ruine" (he withheld the pillars of his house and state, and the roof of his edifice from ruin).

Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis of photography can help conceptualise the indirect communicative status of Grimston's setting, especially Barthes' explication of connotation as opposed to denotation.⁸⁸³ The photograph and the early portrait have affinity: both pretend to function at an expressly denotative level, promising an untainted conveyance of a represented object. However, this ostensibly trustworthy message is accompanied by a secondary structure of communication consisting of "connoted" elements – and a paradox occurs because the "connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*".⁸⁸⁴

Barthes gives an example of a composition of objects read first in terms of denotation: "a window opening on to vineyards and tiled roofs; in front of the window a photograph album, a magnifying glass, a vase of flowers"; then connotation: "Consequently, we are in the country, south of the Loire (vines and tiles), in a bourgeois house (flowers on the table) whose owner, in advancing years (the magnifying glass), is reliving his memories (the photograph album)".⁸⁸⁵ He explains: "the connotation somehow 'emerges' from all these signifying units which are nevertheless 'captured' as though the scene were immediate and spontaneous, that is to say, without signification".⁸⁸⁶ In other words, observed by the eye, the photographic tableau tends to be automatically apprehended as persuasively denotative if all the elements are germane to the type of scene, credible in themselves, and plausibly orchestrated. It is only once dissected and interrogated

⁸⁸³ Barthes, "Photographic Message," esp. 199-207.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 202

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

that the specific features betray their secondary level of signification, through which they evoke social, biographical or geographical information, etc. – and this connotative level is in Barthes' opinion historically and culturally specific. It is important to stress that Barthes' structuralist carving of experience into steps or levels cannot fully encompass the genuine syntheses of lived reality but are more a helpful tool for retrospective analytical categorisations; in reality, the 'secondary' can be completely bound up in the 'primary'. Still, Barthes' analysis helps us perceive that in the case of Grimston's portrait, the connotative 'level' of signification is especially active in the architectural and spatial constitution, generating emphasis precisely from interaction with the more straightforward ('denotative') sign systems (costume, heraldry, chain).

As mentioned, Christus cannot have been familiar with the actual appearance of the ambassador's English residence and perhaps contrived the location perhaps based on high-status dwellings of his own acquaintance. But to give a flavour or impression of the kind of setting that might be appropriate, Grimston could have supplied him with specific material for its execution – his coat of arms, at least, is evidence of a transfer of supplementary information. I aim now to analyse the individual architectural elements and consider how they interact with the pictorial composition as a whole. Why have these elements been included? Which social and spatial sphere were they meant to evoke? I begin with the painter's obvious inclusion of wood panelling.

Wood panelling or wainscoting (literally wall-protector) developed in Europe in the thirteenth century, principally in royal residences.⁸⁸⁷ Alongside hangings, dwellings might be clad with wood panelling up to a certain height capped by a dado rail, or occasionally filling the entire wall. This fitting served practical and aesthetic purposes as a form of insulation and to beautify the room.⁸⁸⁸ Some Netherlandish paintings surviving from the earlier part of the fifteenth century such as the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] lack wainscoting. This could indicate a certain architecturally communicated sociological distinction.⁸⁸⁹ Wood-panelling was a fashionable choice of wall covering for fifteenth-century grand houses, used for high-status interiors in the Burgundian Netherlands, in palaces and residences of court officials.⁸⁹⁰ A c.1600 inventory of William of Cröy's (1458-1521) residence at Heverlee describes the wood panelling on the walls carved with the owners' initials.⁸⁹¹ During the fifteenth century, there are examples of wood-panelling in presentation miniatures for courtly manuscripts [3.39]. In fact, the walls of the above-mentioned miniature attributed to Rogier are covered completely in wood, from floor to ceiling [3.32]; the entirely wainscoted *Man Reading* from Rogier's workshop [3.40] may reflect a similar court location.⁸⁹² Thus, the wood panelling

⁸⁸⁷ Emery, *Medieval Houses*, 3:475; Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 395-97; Nathaniel Lloyd, "Medieval Wainscoting and the development of the linen panel," *Burlington Magazine* 53 (1928): 231.

⁸⁸⁸ Panelling was an enviable commodity. Records document the theft of such boards in England c.1300 (Lloyd, "Medieval Wainscoting", 231). Mennim, *Hall Houses*, 177-79 states wainscoting's purpose was to "cover, insulate and enhance the interior of rough external and internal walls".

⁸⁸⁹ Jacques Daret?, *Virgin and Child in an Interior* (National Gallery, before 1432) and Rogier van der Weyden, *St Luke Drawing the Virgin* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, c.1435-40) are early and subtle instances of wainscoting used to denote a high-status interior; Rogier reprises the feature in the *Columba Altarpiece* [2.26].

⁸⁹⁰ Emery, *Medieval Houses*, 3:475.

⁸⁹¹ Krista de Jonge, "Ceremonial 'Grey Areas': On the Placing and Decoration of Semi-Public and Semi-Private spaces in Burgundian-Habsburg Residences in the Low Countries," in *The Interior as an Embodiment of Power: The Image of the Princely Patron and its Spatial Setting (1400-1700)*, ed. Stephan Hoppe (Heidelberg: Palatium, 2018), 31-56 (39).

⁸⁹² On Rogier's workshop portraits, *Isabella of Portugal* [3.41] and *Man Reading* [3.40], both with floor-to-ceiling wainscoting, see, respectively, Diane Wolffthal and Catherine Metzger, *Los Angeles*

in the Grimston portrait, and especially in the masterfully frugal setting for Christus' later *Young Woman* [3.25], is an obvious yet understated way of signalling that these are interiors of some importance.

Christus did not choose floor-to-ceiling panelling, perhaps so that Grimston's wainscoting might additionally fulfil a formal-compositional function, causing a delicate division of the picture plane. The artist conceived many of his compositions in an ostensibly geometric fashion, in portraiture and other genres.⁸⁹³ In Grimston, Christus positions and delineates with a rigorous attention to symmetry and formal correspondence: the rafters' foreshortened diagonals subtly interact with the horizontal bands of cornicing on the ceiling and wainscoting, relaying the vertical lines of the wood panelling and the oblique piping of his outer *keerel* or gown; Grimston's lips are level with the heraldic mullets. Equivalent correspondences between architecture and sitter occur in the artist's *Young Woman* [3.25], notably between the wainscot groove and line of the lips. For Christus, architecture and sitter were compositionally correlative. His mathematical approach may well be intuitive, drawn from his sensitivity to surroundings: the terminating panelling adds a linear distinction to the upright figure just as it does in an actual room.

Museums. Corpus of Early Netherlandish Painting (Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2014), 190-205 (note the possibility the wainscoting was added later in "Portrait of Isabella of Portugal," Getty Museum, accessed May 21 2021, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/651/workshop-of-rogier-van-der-weyden-portrait-of-isabella-of-portugal-netherlandish-about-1450/>) and Campbell, *National Gallery*, 433-39.

⁸⁹³ Noted by Campbell, "Approaches," 8.

Christus balances his motifs – architectural and otherwise – with a special sensitivity to awkwardness and overcrowding, but they appear executed in a trial-and-error manner, a supposition supported by the evidence of the infra-red reflectography [3.19] which supposedly shows a number of abandoned attempts to design the spatial setting: a network of fallow construction lines and an unidentifiable, three-dimensional object or furnishing roughly in place of the window (but not resembling a window).⁸⁹⁴ Indeed, Belting and Christiane Kruse were right to assert that the interior designs of the portraits of Grimston and the Carthusian were somewhat “tentative”, as if not yet fully perfected.⁸⁹⁵ The woodpanelling does not continue onto the perpendicular wall, possibly because it would be too pictorially confusing; as well as in shadow, the coat of arms nearest the window looks a little pinched for space. Conceivably for compositional reasons, too, Christus chose to double the heraldry, perhaps because he realised that the corner area would have to be darkly illuminated. It could also have been for reasons of symmetry.⁸⁹⁶ With only one escutcheon the painting would feel unbalanced. And the perhaps slightly too-abrupt kink on the proper left-hand side of Grimston’s face, delineating the mouth, must surely exist to prevent infringement upon the heraldry and vice-versa? In this localised instance, the heraldry warps physiognomic concerns.

⁸⁹⁴ Rachel Billinge and Lorne Campbell, email messages to the author, 2 June 2021.

⁸⁹⁵ Belting and Kruse, *Erfindung*, 196 (no. 124): “It is the painter’s first [sic], tentative attempt to transpose the depicted sitter from van Eyck’s indefinite murky spatial sphere into an interior.” And see their analysis of Grimston’s space in 196-97 (no. 125): “... the painter reveals a sense of uncertainty regarding his own invention.”

⁸⁹⁶ On symmetry and the “heraldic style”, note Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 47: “symmetry... proves to be an immanent postulate of all decorative art, ingrained in human beings since the very beginning of artistic activity.”

On the other hand, the motifs seem artfully spaced, manipulating the viewer's spatial impressions. The doubling of heraldry on either side additionally implies a serial logic, pointing to the unseen room beyond the picture where shields might continue at regular intervals along with wainscoting.⁸⁹⁷ This impression of extension coheres with the three ceiling beams. They make the room emphatically truncated – merely a slice of a larger space. The room hints at the sitter's position as master of an expandable domain which, by its foreshortened beams, appears to stretch out beyond the sitter, gathering the beholder under the same roof – a roof possibly of some size.⁸⁹⁸

The structure these rafters imply is not immediately obvious, especially given the murky state of the upper part of the panel. Some Christus scholars neglect to describe them.⁸⁹⁹ In fact, they are crucial for the portrait's spatial implications. The gap between the beams and the wooden ceiling above indicates that they are crossbeams. Compared against interior settings of the same period – the *Werl Altarpiece* among others – they seem to suggest the beginnings of a (large) barrel vault.⁹⁰⁰ At their centre one can make out the barrel's join as it curves upwards.

A barrel vault is confusing considering the restricted space of the portrait. Wooden barrel vaults, as seen in chapter 2, were used as ceilings for large, public, secular spaces, *hôtel-dieus* and also churches and domestic oratories. Some examples

⁸⁹⁷ Künstler, "Einzelbildnisses," 55.

⁸⁹⁸ The *Arnolfini Portrait* similarly employs the device of 'inclusive foreshortening' with a flat wooden ceiling.

⁸⁹⁹ Upton, *Christus*, 22-29.

⁹⁰⁰ Noted by Schabacker, *Christus*, 83-85 (no. 4); Künstler, "Einzelbildnisses," 55. Not noted by Upton, *Christus*, 22-29, or Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish*, 1:310.

survive to this day.⁹⁰¹ These vaults sometimes structure sacred space.⁹⁰² We encounter another vault later in Christus' oeuvre in the *Death of the Virgin* [3.42], again in a curtailed and suggested form. This vault appears to be made of multiple barrels and conceivably fulfils an honorific and sacred function, befitting the grand proportions of this public bedroom.⁹⁰³ But religious symbolism would not make much sense in Grimston's portrayal.

These grandiose connotations give the form a particular resonance when employed in a restricted pictorial realm. Grimston is probably meant to be interpreted as standing in a compressed version of a capacious public space like a hall. With its escutcheons, Christus' architecture may actually recall a 'hall of arms' or *Wappensaal*, a usually voluminous space adorned with numerous painted coats of arms, often also vaulted (see [3.43]).⁹⁰⁴ By succinctly locating the sitter in such a space and under such a vault, Christus brings notions of honour, spaciousness and also potential sociability to bear on the picture, positing a hint at the societal spaces and spheres in which the sitter acted.

The oculus window should be considered as a complement in this regard. Glass windows were still a luxury in the fifteenth century, affordable only for the nobility,

⁹⁰¹ See p203-04 above.

⁹⁰² Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 229; 234-35.

⁹⁰³ On the public nature of late medieval bedrooms, see Campbell, *National Gallery*, 190.

⁹⁰⁴ On the vaulted *Wappensaal* at Albrechtsburg, see Stefan Bürger and Günter Donath, "Zeugnisse werkmeisterlicher Betätigung—Die Werksteine des Jakob Heilmann im Wappensaal der Albrechtsburg," in *Werkmeister der Spätgotik: Personen, Amt und Image*, ed. Stephan Bürger et al. (Darmstadt: WB, 2010), 232-43; cf. that in the east wing of Lauf Castle (*Wenzelschloss*), also vaulted, built by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV near Nuremberg in 1356 (hall 1360), whose 112 painted arms were uncovered in 1934, for which see Georg Grossman et al., ed., *Burg Lauf a. d. Pegnitz: Ein Bauwerk Kaiser Karls IV. (Sonderband 2 der Forschungen zu zu Burgen und Schlössern)* (Regensburg: Wartburg-Gesellschaft, 2006).

gentry and richest merchants.⁹⁰⁵ Oculus or rose windows are often used to signal palatial or grand spaces in early Netherlandish panel paintings.⁹⁰⁶ The placement of Christus' oculus window is notable. Circular windows were often set high up underneath gables and ceilings.⁹⁰⁷ Mirroring the placement of rose windows in ecclesiastical architecture, they could also be situated above entrances. One example shows Margaret of York, wife of Charles the Bold, in a later fifteenth-century illumination [3.44] worshipping the risen Christ in a grand bedchamber with barrel vault, crossbeam, oculus window and half-wood panelling. The 'Talbot Shrewsbury Book', mentioned earlier, also shows a scene of the Order of the Garter with St George killing the dragon [3.45], where we see Henry VI and courtiers entering beneath a barrel vault and oculus window.⁹⁰⁸ Christus makes use of another round window in his *Exeter Virgin* [3.23] only a few years after Grimston's portrait, where it is placed in this palace-chapel's clerestory, high above its notional entrance.⁹⁰⁹ The artist's addition of the oculus window to Grimston's portrait thus makes use of the architectural feature's material associations to confer social distinction and spatial connotation, as if the sitter were standing at the entrance to his hall, waiting to greet visitors. It also signals to further space, beyond itself.

⁹⁰⁵ Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 358.

⁹⁰⁶ Among other examples, the Virgin's palace in Rogier's *St Luke* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, c.1435-40) is capped by a circular window, as is the Annunciation from Rogier's *Columba Altarpiece* [2.26]; Hans Memling, *Donne Triptych* (National Gallery, London, 1470-78) shows a hint of an oculus window; Carpaccio, *The Dream of St Ursula* (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 1495) shows a high oculus; the *Mérode Altarpiece* [0.2] contains two lozenged oculus windows, very similar to the Grimston portrait.

⁹⁰⁷ Wood, *Mediaeval House*, 357; Mennim, *Hall Houses*, 165: "circular windows were frequently used in the gables of halls". Cf. Hudson Turner, *Some Account of Domestic Architecture in England from Edward I to Richard II* (Oxford: Parker, 1853), 73, with references to *rotundas fenestras*.

⁹⁰⁸ Cf. the oculus window and barrel vault in Liévin van Lathem, Aristotle presenting his manuscript to Alexander the Great, *Secretum Secretorum*, c.1470, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris MS. fr. 562, fol. 7.

⁹⁰⁹ Cf. van Eyck's *Lucca Madonna* [2.9].

Without an awareness of the social implications of the various sign systems at work in Grimston's portrait – from architecture to costume and chain – and of Christus' truncations and compositional manipulations, the picture could be misunderstood. Its grubby and discoloured condition does not help. Whereas a viewer unaccustomed to fifteenth-century painting might see the setting as almost cell-like, cramped and gloomy with a – by our standards – diminutive leaded window too high to see through, this is likely not what the painter intended. Grimston's barrel vault, oculus window, wainscoting and heraldry announce him as a member of the nobility in an active, public role. His setting conforms to the so-called "aristocratic style" detected in miniatures of the time.⁹¹⁰

Like the other two portraits, the interior is not a neutral backdrop, but an environment chosen and composed to suit the sitter. The infra-red reflectography would support this hypothesis of the painter's considered orchestration of the spatial environment.⁹¹¹ Künstler was already, prior to these technical studies, sensitive to the painter's careful articulation of the spatial surrounds, but he hesitated to label it an 'attribute' in a traditional sense: "it is", says Künstler, "meaningfully attached to him, in a sense attributed, and this probably happened at the request of the patron".⁹¹² Künstler's "in a sense" (*gewissermaßen*) is

⁹¹⁰ Gloria Fiero, "Courtier and Commoner: Two Styles of Fifteenth Century Manuscript Illumination," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 2, no. 1 (1975): 17, highlighting the genre of the courtly Presentation Miniature (often featuring similar architectural features to Grimston – barrel vault, wainscoting, etc.) Cf. Workshop of the Master of Girart de Roussillon, *Livre de l'instruction d'un jeune prince*, The Author Presents his Book to Philip the Good, c.1449-54, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, MS. 10976, fol. 2r.

⁹¹¹ See fn766 above. Cf. the apparent construction lines in the Falconer's ceiling.

⁹¹² Künstler, "Einzelbildnisse," 55.

revealing. From the beholder's point of view, it is precisely this hesitation as to the status of the architectural dressings that give them their potency for signification: they lie somewhere between vested attribute and plausible backdrop – part personal possession, part compositional complement. This interplay, I suggest, was especially appropriate for conveying some of the proprietorial concerns that might have especially occupied someone of Grimston's position.

An important set of surviving documents relating to Grimston's biography are worth briefly exploring before concluding the section. They have not before been cited or considered in the context of the portrait; also, they feature neither in the nineteenth-century biography, customarily referenced, nor in the most recent twenty-first century biographical entry on the sitter.⁹¹³ Yet they seem indicative of the young courtier's concerns in the 1440s, especially in view of the form his portrait takes. The records outline a chain of events pertaining to the purchase of a property, and traceable to at least 1447, the year following the portrait's execution.

The most notable document in this series is Grimston's "will", dated 28th March 1449, three years after the painting's execution, written apparently in his own hand and once marked with his heraldic seal.⁹¹⁴ It was transcribed in the nineteenth century and then seemingly unremembered by subsequent scholars. Grimston, it appears, made the will out of apprehension, lest his ambassadorial duties in France

⁹¹³ See Davies, "Grimston"; Franks, "Notes".

⁹¹⁴ Joseph Jackson Howard, "An Holograph Will of Edward Grimston, Esquire, made in 1449," *Archaeologia* 45, no. 1 (1877): 124-26.

and Burgundy bring him into “jeopardies and perils”. He was then still a relatively young man, so the document is even more poignant, believably the product of temporally specific concerns rather than the more traditional wishes for insurance accompanying old age. I quote some important sections:

Be it knowen to all manere of men that yn as miche as I Edward Grymeston am commaunded and ordeigned by the kinge oure sovereign lord and by my lordes of his Councill at this tyme to go over the see on the Kinges Ambassade as well to his uncle of Fraunce as to the duchesse of Bourgne &c., considering the juperdiez and perilles that often tyme falle to the unsuerte of manez lyffe as well by see as by lande and specially yn suche viagez – I thereupon willing and desiring what so ever oure lord do with me that Alice my true and bestbeloved wiffe may by the grace of god stande suere of such pouer lyvelode [i.e. property] as she and I have truely boghte and purchaced :- Confesse therefore and knowledge that myn hole and full wille ys that whereas Sir Thomas Tudenham knight hath made a joint astate as well by deede as by fyne to me and to my seid wiffe to Thomas Grymeston, Piers Grymeston, and Sir William Lacy, of all the right title and clayme that he hadde or might have yn the maner and lordshipp of Elstanwik yn Holdrenes yn the Counte of Yorke, yn the whiche deede and fyne the seid Thomas Pers and William bene cofeffed with us of trust as well for hir suerte as for myn... For what so ever falle of me my hole wille and entent ys that she rejoyssse the seid maner and lordshipp with thappertenaunces with alle that I have yn Rysanglez and Thorndon yn the Counte of Suffolke for terme of hir lyffe and so to the heiers betwix us of our bodyez begotten... And if yt fortune me and

my seid wiffe to decesse withowten heiers betwix us lawfully begoten, yiff so be that my brother the seid Pers Grymeston wil lawfully be maried to any gentilwoman of name and of Auncestrie, I will then that the Reversion or Remynder of the seid maner and lordship of Elstanwik after the decese of me and my wiffe be unto my seid brothir and to the heiers of his body so yn gentille blode lawfully begoten... Written and signed with myn own hande and under the Seale of myn armez At London the xxviiij day of March the yere of oure lord M^lcccc.xlix. and of Kinge Herry the vj^{te} ye xvij^{te}.^a E. Grymeston.⁹¹⁵

The will's explicit purpose was to ensure that, in the event of his death, Grimston's property pass to his wife, Alice. Grimston is obviously particularly concerned that the Manor of "Elstanwick" (Elstronwick) in Holderness, Yorkshire (no longer extant), conveyed by Sir Thomas Tuddenham, knight, to Edward Grimston and Alice, jointly with Thomas Grimston, Piers Grimston (brother of Edward), and Sir William Lacy, be held in trust. He intends that this property and "thappertenaunces", as well as his other English estates at Rishangles and Thorndon, Suffolk, should go to his wife for life, with the remainder to his bodily heirs.

These intentions are by no means extraordinary for a fifteenth-century nobleman, but the document provides a window into Grimston's priorities in the later

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 125-26.

1440s.⁹¹⁶ Chiefly, he was concerned above all with securing the future of his property (“lyvelode”), namely the “lordship” of his estates. He needs to guarantee that this was legally and safely secured to his family. If Edward and Alice have no children, it was especially important that the Manor of Elstronwick, and similarly of Rishangles and Thorndon, only go to his brother (and heirs) if married to “gentilwoman of name and of Auncestrie”. Otherwise, his wife Alice had the authority to dispose of the estates for pious ends. His concern was with standing, and his insurance, along with his possessions, of a dynasty of sorts; his good “name” must be secured to survive along with his property.

The written declaration adds colour to this portrait of a nobleman standing proudly in a well-appointed dwelling of possibly some size, marked as his own by his twin coats of arms set into the wainscoting. This is not to say that the portrait is a document, but rather that it makes a future-oriented statement of material possession analogous to the testament, branded similarly with Grimston’s proprietorial heraldic stamp.⁹¹⁷

The portrait becomes more tightly associated with these concerns when we consider a set of related records, part of the same chain of events as the will, archiving the transaction between Edward Grimston and the same Sir Thomas Tuddenham (1401-1462). Tuddenham, another servant of the House of Lancaster

⁹¹⁶ Compare the wills in Nicholas Harris, *Testamenta Vetusta: Being Illustrations from Wills, of Manners, Customs, &c...* (London: Nichols, 1826).

⁹¹⁷ Cf. the famous reading: Panofsky, “Arnolfini”. On the documentary portrait, see Dülberg, *Privatporträts*, 71-72.

and ally of the Duke of Suffolk, was probably an amicable associate.⁹¹⁸ The record, a ‘dispute’ known as a ‘foot of fine’, is dated 25th November 1447, the year following the portrait: “Manor of Elstanwyke, with £12. 2s. 6d. rent there: Quitclaimed to Edward and Alice for £100” (in abstract).⁹¹⁹ Such ‘disputes’ were actually a fictitious formality contrived to leave a legitimate record of ownership, a form of ‘conveyance’ or legal transfer of the title of property.⁹²⁰ Tuddenham recognises that the house and rent of the Manor of Elstronwick are to be the right of Edward, his wife Alice, and their heirs, forever.

In view of the unappraised material evidence that patently exists, more work remains to be done on Grimston’s biography, and on his dealings in the years surrounding the commission of his portrait. I cannot draw any definitive conclusions from this material without more sustained analysis – but perhaps I can make some preliminary speculations that might illuminate our understanding of the commission of this unusual depiction. According to Wolfgang Kemp, “the interior, like still life, is the genre of taking possession and displaying ownership” (see [2.18]).⁹²¹ With an interior setting, beyond any other kind of painted environment (such as a landscape), the sitter can more effectively be seen both to

⁹¹⁸ Helen Castor, “Tuddenham, Sir Thomas (1401-1462),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004),

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50241>. The transcriber wondered if Alice was Tuddenham’s daughter but noted her tomb’s arms were inconsistent (Howard, “Holograph Will,” 125).

⁹¹⁹ I have thus far only consulted these documentary records’ abstracts: Hull University Archives (GB 50 U DHO/16/85); National Archives (PRO CP 25/1/280/159, no. 57). Cf. the Archives and Cornish Studies Service (AR/19/7/1, 2) for, among others, a deed of gift of fee (land, estate, property) dated 12th November 1446 concerning property relating to Thomas Tuddenham and Edward Grimston; cf. AR/19/4-6; AR/19/2; AR/17/75 (same archive). On the ‘foot of fine’, see Chris Phillips, “Abstracts of Feet of Fines: Format of the records, 1360-1509,” *Medieval Genealogy*, accessed May 23 2021, <http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/fines/format.shtml>.

⁹²⁰ Alan Dibben, *Title Deeds, 13th-19th Centuries* (London: Historical Association, 1968), 17-19.

⁹²¹ Kemp, *Räume*, 105.

govern their pictorial domain – and by extension the panel as object – and to retain hence their “right to be represented”.⁹²² The interior setting establishes this “right” by visual terms – and almost automatically.

Could one speculate that Grimston’s unusual portrait is a by-product of this especially aspirational, acquisitive time for the young courtier – a commemorative, *surrogate* house of a kind? He was clearly proud of his new manorial purchase of Elstronwick: another acquisitive document dated immediately afterwards during 1447-48, and granting Grimston papal indulgence for a portable altar, sees him styled as “nobleman, esquire (*armigero*), lord of Helstwerwyk” (not, it should be noted, after his already existing estates).⁹²³ Elstronwick was only a few miles southwest of Grimston Garth in Holderness, ancient seat of the more senior branch of the Grimston family, a locality which Edward’s father (a second son) had probably departed earlier in life.⁹²⁴ Could the portrait, confidently branded with the arms of Edward’s cadet branch, have borne a resonance in the context of his return to the ancient familial seat and to a manor only recently belonging to Tuddenham, one superior in social rank? Peter Coss writes that a key attribute of English gentility was “a clearly recognised central residence, preferably located in a settlement from which was derived one’s name”.⁹²⁵ And with Elstronwick, Grimston seems to have acquired (another?) seignorial lordship; this distinction

⁹²² Cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 56.

⁹²³ J. Twemlow, *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1915), 10:305, listed as “1447[-8]. 17 Kal. April. (16 March.) St. Peter’s, Rome. (f.315d.)”.

⁹²⁴ Davies, “Grimston”; Franks, “Notes,” 455; Howard, “Holograph Will,” 125.

⁹²⁵ Peter Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England 1000-1400* ((Stroud: Sutton, 1995), 2.

was, apparently, “the only element that did function as a decisive marker between nobles and commoners”.⁹²⁶

Leaving aside these more hypothetical correlations, I can at least now maintain that the interior setting is employed and manipulated by the painter to convey a set of concerns especially relevant to someone of Grimston’s position. The fifteenth-century English nobleman, it was said, was obsessed with his property.⁹²⁷ Poggio Bracciolini, who visited England 1425 as guest of Cardinal Beaufort, wrote later in his dialogue on nobility: “the nobles of England... estimate the degree of a man’s nobility by the extent of his estates”.⁹²⁸ Thus, although pictorially innovative, from another perspective the picture’s visual rhetoric also appears characteristic of the society. This is where the painter has particularly succeeded: in achieving the semblance of suitability and making the new forms express long-established cultural ideas in a powerful, persuasive – indeed almost ‘natural’ – manner.

When Grimston surveyed this portrait of himself in the corner of his virtual hall, we can imagine him relishing the image of himself as a gentleman encapsulated in a space that connoted for him a kind of symbolic ‘house’, at once a physical property and a dynasty oriented towards posterity. Without the painted location that Christus provides – the corner space, wainscoting, rafters, barrel vault, oculus window – the painting could not communicate so emphatically its key message: an

⁹²⁶ Buylaert, “Sumptuary,” 396; 411; cf. “Lordship,” 37, and 68-71 on the importance of property rights to late medieval England’s nobility.

⁹²⁷ Colin Richmond, “The Visual Culture of Fifteenth-Century England,” in *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. A. Pollard (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 208.

⁹²⁸ William Shepherd, *The Life of Poggio Bracciolini* (London: Harries Brothers, 1837), 127-28.

individual who matters in the England of 1446 is someone of property, power and status. The interior setting has a double status as both the sitter's personal attribute, and as structuring the virtual environment of their embodied appearance; this twofold constitution determines the setting's potency, especially in the case of this portrayal. The existential and the sociological are thereby exquisitely synthesised: Grimston commands both the architectural elements that compose the location and the airy, immaterial pictorial space structured by the same features; the whole portrait establishes, with more visual force, Grimston's 'right' to be represented. In a transmission to the future, Grimston's setting visually asserts the rhetoric of property ("lyvelode"), of residence ("manor"), and "lordship" at the date of execution, inscribed as 1446.

Conclusion

Across these three portraits, then, a relatively restrictive pictorial formula demonstrates remarkable elasticity for expression: the device of an interior setting that was to be more widely explored by painters of the following centuries, crystallising over time into the genre of the 'milieu portrait' [3.46].⁹²⁹ Such a location, Christus seems to realise, is not as directly communicative as a costume or an attribute; it is an unstable symbol, specially connotative precisely because of

⁹²⁹ On the 'milieu portrait', see Kemp, "Beziehungsspiele," 17; Richard Weisberg and R. Hansen, "Collaboration of Art and Science in Albert Edelfelt's Portrait of Louis Pasteur: The Making of an Enduring Icon," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89 (2015): 59-91, esp. 86-87. In 1943 Rudolf Wittkower organised an iconographic exhibition on portraiture at the Warburg Institute, its image-atlases preserved in reproductions. One of his themes, 'The Social Background of the Sitter' [3.46] essentially traces the 'milieu portrait' from Quinten Massys' *Erasmus* (Royal Collection, 1517) to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "The Warburg Iconographic Database," accessed May 23 2021, https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/subcats.php?cat_1=12&cat_2=1393.

this instability, simultaneously bringing the figure forth and acting as an adornment. In Grimston, we see a sophisticated articulation of the setting's parallel facilities for social connotation and presence production, manipulated by the artist to stand for the concerns of this landed esquire. The painted room defines Grimston's image for posterity not only through its specific architectural dressings, but also through its physical capacity: the imperceptible space between the walls acts as a potent symbol of his possessions. The Falconer, too, appears to cohere with this proprietorial rhetoric, but the use of the interior setting in the anonymous Carthusian remains unresolved, enigmatic. The painter manipulates the same pictorial formula – the 'corner-space' – to suit a different purpose: the spatial cocoon acts as an extension and enhancement of the depicted individual, but the sitter's pronounced lack of complementary content provides a curious antithesis to Grimston and the Falconer.

Perhaps with the Carthusian – once capped by an inauthentic halo – we more explicitly witness the general phenomenon interesting for the broader themes of the thesis: how painters, inspired by the shrine formula that had for so long been used to bolster the presence and prominence of the saints, began to motivate the architectural presentation of the figure for more earthly ends. Writing of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Margaret Aston argued, "Image making was changing, and new kinds of art (particularly portraits of courtiers) were inaugurating new forms of image use... images of temporal lordship seemed to gain at the expense of the spiritual".⁹³⁰ To return to an introductory question: why, then,

⁹³⁰ Margaret Aston, "The Use of Images," in Marks and Williamson, *Gothic*, 74.

the added time and expense involved in producing an ‘extra’ interior setting? Precisely, I contend, to demonstrate the excess cost and consideration – and to benefit, rhetorically, thereby. What the sitter loses in otherworldliness is reclaimed through the force and fixity of time and place.

Till-Holger Borchert has highlighted the difficulties encountered in definitively classifying the original functions of many early Netherlandish portraits.⁹³¹ It is often demonstrable that “a variety of different portrait-concepts... seem to have been applied in accordance [with] the appropriateness of the commission”.⁹³² The interior setting as it is introduced into single-sitter portraiture is rather like one of these portrait-concepts that might be adaptively employed to different ends; but the setting also differs crucially from the attribute or singular motif. In fact, the architectural background does something significant for a picture’s susceptibility to loss of its function or context. To a certain extent, a described location makes the portrait capable of dictating its own context – endlessly.⁹³³ This is surely one of the fundamental purposes of the interior setting, and key to Panofsky’s claim of a “new psychological basis”.

As Kurt Bauch wrote, “in the Middle Ages, every representation’s primary condition was its architectural location”.⁹³⁴ In portraiture this was very much the

⁹³¹ Borchert, “Function”.

⁹³² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁹³³ Bauch, “Bildnisse,” 81-82 detects this already nascent in van Eyck’s portrait compositions and framing devices, which allow more space around the sitter. These devices, apparently, foster a new liberation of the individual from any higher religious or political context. The depicted people grow in autonomy, differentiated from whatever the conditions of their display happen to be; they are “in their own world”, in “the particularity of the individual themselves, seen from an intimate proximity”. Cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 33-54; 55-57.

⁹³⁴ Bauch, “Bildnisse,” 81, and cf. fn99 above.

case: the funereal monument, arguably the principal mode of medieval portraiture, was thoroughly defined by its physical site, with its range of expressions accordingly limited and codified. This is similarly the situation for late medieval portrait cycles produced for genealogical or official reasons [3.47].⁹³⁵ But then, with the development of a setting, architecture became the prerogative of the painted portrait.⁹³⁶ Depicted place began to replace, or even controvert, the object's physical location. And something of this previous locational fixity – and the automatic honour thereby conveyed – is transposed, aestheticized, given portability.

It is important not to overemphasise, however. An architectural setting remains a relative rarity in portraits until the latter part of the century, when it begins to appear more regularly, in the work of Hans Memling [3.48], among others. Christus himself appears to disregard settings in several of his likenesses, including his *Portrait of a Man* [3.49], and a tentatively assigned lost pair depicting the Genoese banker Pieter Adornes and his wife Elisabeth Bradereyck (known via copies).⁹³⁷ They include non-descript, block-colour backgrounds like those used by earlier artists. What is more, all three of these portraits appear to suggest dates later than the Grimston and the Carthusian (the pair c.1450, the man c.1465).

⁹³⁵ Annamaria Ersek, "Between Place and Function: Notes on the Portrait Galleries in Charles IV's residences of Karlstein and Prague," in Hoppe, *Embodiment of Power*, 15-30. Cf. Falomir, "Court Portrait," 66 and Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 41-2, for similar galleries. Examples of early non-courtly portrait galleries, such as that of professors who founded Vienna University (in St Stephen's Cathedral apostle's choir, c.1360-70), mentioned in Bauch, "Bildnisse," 80. See also Campbell, "Art Market," 189.

⁹³⁶ Falomir, "Court Portrait," 66 discerns a "liberation of the portrait from its architectural setting", c.1400.

⁹³⁷ For the Los Angeles portrait, see Ainsworth, *Christus*, 154-57 (no. 16). For the pair, see Lola Gellman, "Two Lost Portraits by Petrus Christus," in Ainsworth, *Interdisciplinary Approach*, 101-14.

Hence, it appears unlikely that the use of a setting was an ‘achievement’ reached after a period of evolution and elaboration on the part of the painter; the artist also reprises more established modes of rendering a portrait’s background. Rather than a definite progression, then, the use of a defined setting during the mid-fifteenth century could be better perceived as an exploratory option, likely hinging on the proclivities of a specific patron.

Nevertheless, a described environment, however synecdochally defined, later became a – occasionally *the* – preferred option for early modern portraiture (see [3.33], [3.46]), invested with an exceptional connotative capacity through its parallel functionality. It not only embellished the sitter, but also produced the pictorial location, and with it the illusion of presence. With these means, the portrait could present an apparent synthesis between human and world as never before.

Conclusion: *Homo Habitans*

Even for our grandparents a 'house', a 'well', a familiar tower, their very clothes, their coat, were infinitely more, infinitely more intimate; almost everything a vessel in which they found the human and added to the store of the human...

We are perhaps the last still to have known such things. (1925)

- *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Jane Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: Norton, 1947), 2:374-5

Imagine, if you will, a hypothetical wall in a hypothetical museum, bare but for our three case studies: the *Norfolk Triptych*, the Werl panels, and *Edward Grimston*. To the casual viewer, such a combination may seem incongruous. What could link an object resembling a miniature casket of jewels painted to look like a cathedral façade, with a small painting of a room dominated by a man's head and shoulders? And then, hanging between those panels, are two larger panels, wings of an altarpiece busy with people and place.

Yet, equipped with the knowledge that these three panel paintings were produced within c.30-35 years of each other by three (or more) highly skilled, geographically proximate painters whose careers overlapped, their assembly is transfigured: the works begin to converse, telling of many a similarity in their conception, as well as some important differences. They each show figures in architectural surrounds, pictorial houses of sorts. But there is significant variation in the kind of house and the type of figure. In one, saints occupy a heavenly Gothic shrine, in another, a friar

kneels in a well-furnished domestic space accompanied by and looking towards saints situated likewise; in the final featured panel, the scene becomes more familiar, as a mere unanointed mortal is beheld within his own secular domain.

The latter type of representation, the ‘milieu portrait’, had only recently become imaginable and would still have appeared slightly bewildering to viewers of the time. Writing on this phenomenon, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood state: “Throughout the Middle Ages, painted portraits of living people had appeared as attendant, marginal figures of larger scenes, with only a few exceptions in the category of ruler portraits. To extract the portrait of a living individual from such a scene and make him or her the sole subject of a panel painting was a radical step”.⁹³⁸ But accustomed as we have been for the past five hundred years to this genre’s many permutations, the significance and original visual effect of this transformation may now lack the excitement and novelty which it deserves. Nevertheless, if momentarily dispossessed of this familiarity, we might begin to appreciate the audacity of these early experiments. Something of how this new representation of mortal man might have been received can be gleaned, by analogy, from the effect on Byzantine prelates arriving in Western Europe during the first half of the fifteenth century: for the first time confronted by painted holy images in contemporary guise, they found these dear and familiar saints, now distorted and disturbing, even brazenly fashionable, especially – we might imagine – in the unseemly surroundings of such well-described everyday objects.⁹³⁹

⁹³⁸ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 118; cf. Belting, *Spiegel*, 55.

⁹³⁹ See Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 250-54; cf. Andrew White, “What the Archbishop Saw: A

Likewise, the introduction of the secular fifteenth-century person, the noble or burgher, into a contemporary setting must necessarily be measured against – necessarily was measured against – the holy figure as they appeared in an interior setting. For it is almost as if the mortal individual becomes, at a certain point in the history of panel painting, *permitted* to enter and command their own contemporary environment.

This is an uncanny angle from which to view the domestic setting – to see it as something that had to be claimed (or re-claimed) from religious iconography, rather than from the world of lived experience. Indeed, one of the most intriguing aspects of Petrus Christus' portraits in interior settings is that some famous examples – the Carthusian and the Goldsmith – were dishonestly or mistakenly canonised at a later point in their histories via the addition of false halos [3.24].⁹⁴⁰ It is as if certain subsequent owners could not license the secular figure from the mid-fifteenth century to be portrayed in this manner, and wished the sitters – and by extension their interior settings – to be retrospectively sacralised. Conversely, subsequent collectors and vendors appear to have doctored religious early Netherlandish paintings by extracting figures from their original devotional

Byzantine Christian Watches Catholic Sacred Plays," *Ecumenica* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 27-38 on an analogous disturbance of Byzantine propriety caused by seeing religious mystery plays.

⁹⁴⁰ Ainsworth, *Christus*, 93 and 96; cf. van der Velden, "Defrocking." And note also the similar fabrication of immortality committed when two portraits by the Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden in interior settings were given additional inscriptions possibly around 1600, transforming a *Man Reading* [3.40] into a 'St Ivo' (possibly) and *Isabella of Portugal* [3.41] into a Persian Sibyl. Dendrochronology shows that the portraits have supports from the same tree; they are also nearly the same size. A supplementary halo was also granted to 'St Ivo' at the same time as the inscription; both inscription and halo were removed when the picture was cleaned in 1971 (Campbell, *National Gallery*, 433). In Panofsky, "Arnolfini", the classic essay providing spiritual readings of everyday items, the author attempted, by his interpretation, to append a retrospective halo of sorts to the couple and their scene.

compositions in order to retrospectively, and falsely, secularise them – to make single-sitter portraits out of religious scenes. This is especially the case for fragmented diptychs: marooned without anyone to worship, praying figures could easily, and misleadingly, be taken for portraits of solipsistic self-regard.⁹⁴¹ In a way, this reveals something of what they were all along.

It must have been discomfiting to see represented in a painting at this time, not a saint, or a prelate, as was usual, nor even a ruler or a mythical god, but a member of the populace and in his or her own room, surrounded by his or her own possessions. The question that I sought to answer, but which still persists, is why, in the history of panel painting, is it only during these particular few decades that this genre of painting becomes visible? The arrival of this extraordinary moment in art history, and potentially in the evolution of human self-awareness, has underlined this study: the interrogation of a highly significant span of c.30-35 years in the history of representation, when established conventions in images of sacred figures were impelled with often exceptional vehemence into a visual collision with secular reality, provoking an array of possibilities in the depiction of saintly and mortal figures alike.

Chapter one began with the late medieval resolution of the hieratic architectonic frame into a spatial setting, an important preliminary art historical phenomenon.

⁹⁴¹ Dirk Bouts, *Portrait of a Man* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, c.1470). The collection entry states, “the panel has been cut down on all sides; it is unclear whether this is an independent portrait, or if it once formed part of a religious triptych or larger composition” in “Portrait of a Man,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed May 23 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435761>. Cf. Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Young Man* (National Gallery, c.1450-60), about which there are similar misgivings (Campbell, *National Gallery*, 104-09).

Here, Kurt Bauch considers the matter an appropriate introduction to an essay on van Eyck's portraiture (significant in view of my thesis' arc of investigation):

In Gothic painting, pictorial architecture in the form of chapels in which the figures appear had developed out of the canopies of medieval statues, rich in tectonic and iconographic significance. Jan van Eyck, however, depicts his interior in the light of this world: through the bullseye windowpanes one can look out onto the brightness of the day and the outlines of other, similar buildings...⁹⁴²

These broad concerns – the resolution of the frame and the consonant housings of sacred and secular figures – return in various guises throughout my thesis, where they are melded with another important phenomenon which cannot be precisely accounted for, either historically or art historically: the burgeoning attention given in early-to-mid fifteenth century panel painting to inanimate pictorial surrounds, often at the figures' expense. Attending to this array of conundrums has produced methodological problems for every chapter.

Like much in history, the central enquiries I pose in this thesis cannot be resolved with certainty. But using some of the more reliable evidence from this period has allowed my thesis to form a robust scaffolding upon which we may project some reasonable probabilities, through description of the visual information in the pictures, references to contemporary inventories and contracts, and, especially in

⁹⁴² Bauch, "Bildnisse," 83 (again emphasising van Eyck's *Virgin* [0.12]).

the last two chapters, biographical and contextual historical information. These self-contained pursuits may have occasionally appeared fragmented, but my intention, via a number of parallel tracks of enquiry, has been to encompass different methodological approaches and investigative arenas, just as there are variant modes of art historical writing (describing a painting as opposed to citing sources). Enquiries were adapted to the evidence available: where patronage was insecure (chapter one), the chapter pursued questions of form, format, iconography and wider morphological and medial comparisons; where patronage was securely known (chapters two and three), the investigation leant on biographical information and the historical context of the commission. This, therefore, is an apology for disjunction, and a hope that divergences, when they occurred, still contribute to the environment wherein we may find some conclusions to our enquiry.

As a whole, this thesis attempted to focus art historical attention on architectural components and decorative dressings, pictorial substance often overlooked by scholarship, apprehended in the guise of ‘staffage’. I argue that a setting could play a pivotal role in determining the significance and effect of a work of early Netherlandish panel painting. Integrated with the figural content in the manner of a symbolic attribute, these inanimate elements were “infinitely more” than we might routinely acknowledge.⁹⁴³ They were active and expressive rather than passive; they complemented and conveyed the content. Yet architectural

⁹⁴³ See Contamine, “Peasant,” 489: “Medieval men and women, acutely aware of living in an impoverished world in which every object had value, seem to have been fascinated by household furnishings.”

surrounds and interior furnishings crucially differed from traditional attributes; they also formed the picture and structured the locations in which the figural contents could manifest themselves. A setting, therefore, had an ambiguous nature: part-attribute, part-compositional means. Something of its especial, multivalent, ‘charged’ capacities could be recovered, I have argued, if we attended to the architectural framing practices of precedent periods, comparing these against other object categories. Projected forward, then, these late medieval architectonic concerns can be discerned in a reconceived manner in subsequent generations and genres like the ‘milieu portrait’. This recognition lies at the heart of this thesis’ redefinition of the significance of the ‘house interior’ in Netherlandish panel paintings c.1400-1450.

I will state some of this thesis’ findings and contributions to the field. In search of the special significance of pictorial architecture for early Netherlandish painting, I began my study with an investigation of the micro-architectural feats of some pre-Eyckian painting, and the interaction between architectonic frame and painted interior setting in the *Norfolk Triptych*. The architectural frames of early panels are taken to be integral to their significance. The late medieval enthusiasm for architectural form across a whole range of objects, and the interesting literature that responds to the phenomenon, has been substantially neglected by historians of early Netherlandish painting. Micro-architectural dynamics are routinely considered as incompatible – *retardataire* even – compared to the illusionistic spatial feats of the *ars nova* generation of painters. But this betrays a mindset still beholden to a ‘medieval-versus-Renaissance’ conception of art historical periodisation. In fact, there is every reason to study the two together, as my chapter

one aims to articulate. Only by considering the painted panels of the previous generations against the broader context of late medieval architectural objects can we begin to understand the persistent conception of many panel paintings as ‘little houses’, an architectonic comprehension strange to us now but lingering with significant effect in the fifteenth century and beyond.

My second chapter on the *Werl Altarpiece* is a similar attempt to reconfigure understanding and appreciation. Art historians have been unkind to these panels, typically viewing them as uncomfortable ‘pastiches’ of Eyckian, Flémallesque and Rogierian motifs with awkward spatial constitutions. Compared to the *Mérode Altarpiece*, for instance, the amount of literature on the Werl panels is miniscule. In fact, as the only pictures associated with the Flémalle Group whose donor and date can be securely identified (and among the very few of the 1430s more generally), they provide a rich opportunity to investigate their distinct and detailed appearance against the historical circumstances surrounding their patronage.

Marshalling evidence from contemporary contracts, this chapter claims that contemporary, domestic settings such as these, which are frequently treated as if they were impartial iconographic transcriptions, could be purposefully stipulated, with present-day details likely specified. I argue for the potential value of interpreting the picture’s setting and idiosyncratic contents in light of the religious, social and aesthetic climate pertaining specifically to the panels’ patron and likely location. I cite and articulate contextual material relating to the Cologne Minorite Order and Werl himself, much of which has not before been considered in relation to the picture. Furthermore, these interior settings, often viewed as emblematic of

private devotion, as secluded households of the soul, are revealed as considerably more public and sociable in intent.

My third and final chapter addresses oversight of the importance of interior settings through focusing on *Edward Grimston* by Petrus Christus, yet to receive substantial critical treatment presumably because it remains in private hands. In fact, this is an extremely significant work, both for the history of early Netherlandish interior scenes and for art history more generally. It is possibly the earliest surviving single-sitter portrait on panel of a figure in a described architectural environment specific to them and also perhaps the earliest surviving of a non-royal English person. Not only has this portrait been relatively avoided by scholarship, but the phenomenon that it stands for has also been overlooked: i.e., the emergence of the ‘milieu portrait’ in the middle of the fifteenth century.

By its reconsideration of the ‘corner-space’, this chapter attempted to rectify this oversight. It does not read the portrait as an ‘innovation’ in itself, rather sees it as part of an experimental dialogue between at least three surviving ‘corner-space’ works by Christus, in which we witness the artist endeavouring to fit the architectural environment to the specific needs of the sitter, delicately adjusting already-existing iconographies and motifs. This has a great bearing on my thesis more generally, in that, as we have will have already seen in Chapter 2 and the *Werl Altarpiece*, it further demonstrates and amplifies the important role of interior settings communicating on behalf of the sitter or patron – in the case of portraits, broadcasting social connotations. The chapter also includes new documentary evidence pertaining to Grimston and relevant to the picture’s interpretation. It is

hoped that this chapter provides material on which further pursuits of this important development in the history of portraiture – the inclusion of a spatial surround – might be built.

Thus, we can determine three key functions of the house interior in Netherlandish panel painting c.1400-1450, pursued through my three chapters. First, the interior is a structure that locates and frequently also honours the figures within. Second, it forms a stage for the persuasive synthesis of authoritative sacred convention and worldly, contemporary detail. Third, it permits a subtle communication of social connotations related to the figures within.

My thesis then has been an attempt to recall the spirit of an older way of art historical seeing outlined in the introduction, creating a fusion with a newer art history sensitive to social context. This was enacted in the hope that we might better apprehend the architectural and interior fascinations of these works diachronically and synchronically, both against the complicated flows of art historical time and in relation to the sociological concerns of their specific era. I have aimed to see the pictorial house as a concept at once ancient and enduring, and specific and adaptable. It is powerful, I argue, precisely because of this simultaneity.