# Gallery Guide

**Northern European Collection**

# Beliefs and Borders

The term 'Northern European' refers to a huge geographical area, covering parts of modern day Germany, Holland, Belgium, Britain, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia. During the period 1450-1650 many of these territories belonged to the Holy Roman Empire, ruled by the Habsburg Emperors.

Religion was one of the most important features of life in early modern Europe. The Christian faith was predominant, although there were also Jews and Muslims living in Europe at this time. The Catholic Church held great power, but this was increasingly criticised and attacked by reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546).

Religious commissions accounted for much of the artistic output at the time, from large altarpieces for churches to small works for private devotion. Artworks functioned as aids to worship for those who could not read, by picturing key scenes from Christ's life, including his birth, crucifixion and resurrection. Art was both a source of artistic inspiration and a cause of great conflict: 'iconoclasm' refers to the deliberate destruction of religious images. This deliberate destruction, combined with the ravages of time, means that many of the works in collections were damaged, then broken up and dispersed across Europe.

MARTIN SCHONGAUER (ABOUT 1435/50-91), GERMAN
*The Virgin and Child Crowned by Angels,* oil on softwood panel, about 1470-5

# Map of The Holy Roman Empire



ENGLAND

London

NORTHERN
NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam

Wittenberg

Antwerp

SPANISH
NETHERLANDS

Brussels

Cologne

Leipzig

Frankfurt

Prague

Paris

Strasbourg

Nuremberg

KINGDOM OF
HUNGARY

FRANCHE–
COMTE

Ulm

Regensburg

Basel

Augsburg

Zurich

Vienna

Lucerne

FRANCE

SWITZERLAND

TYROL

Lyon

Venice

Milan

Florence

Rome

**Key**

Spanish Habsburg Territory

Austrian Habsburg Territory

----- Boundary of the Holy
Roman Empire

○ Cities under Protestant
control for part of
the 1500s

Most of the items in this collection were made in Germany
and the Netherlands between 1450 and 1650.

At the time much of Germany and the Netherlands were part
of the Holy Roman Empire, divided into a series of free imperial
states and others governed by regional princes. This division
of power often led to violent disputes between these ruling
factions about territorial control and religious practice.

Despite this political turbulence, the position of many of these
areas along major trade routes allowed wealthy cities such as
Nuremberg, Augsburg, Cologne and Bruges to develop into
major artistic hubs. These centres flourished under the patronage
of provincial rulers, wealthy merchants and religious institutions.

Significant changes to social, political and religious attitudes
during this period affected the artistic climate of Northern
Europe in a dramatic and permanent way.

## HANS THOMAN (ACTIVE ABOUT 1514-25), GERMAN
### *God the Father* and *God the Son*
Polychrome limewood with silver and gilding, about 1510-25

These sculptures were once part of a larger altarpiece depicting the Coronation of the Virgin, the other parts of which are now in Germany. God and his son, Jesus, have been designed to be seen from below. God raises his right hand in blessing while Jesus holds the orb of the world in his hand. Both figures are placed on tight ribbon curves representing clouds. A sculpture of the Virgin, flanked by two pairs of saints, would have appeared below these figures.

Hans Thoman has been identified as the Master of Ottobeuren. He was working in the early decades of the 16th century in Memmingen in Swabia.



## ATTRIBUTED TO THE CIRCLE OF THE MASTER I.P
## GERMAN, DANUBE SCHOOL
### *The Holy Kinship*
Polychrome limewood relief, about 1520

In this carved fragment from an altarpiece, baby Jesus looks up at his grandfather, Saint Joachim. On the right sits his grandmother, Saint Anne, behind her is Joseph, and on the left is Mary. The man on the far left is believed to be the donor of the altarpiece as his face is more life-like than the others, possibly because it was meant to represent a particular individual. It was a common practice for donors to be represented in the artwork they commissioned; this could serve multiple purposes including encouraging people to pray for their souls and showing off their social standing.

Lingering traces of polychrome (many coloured paints) show that the sculpture would originally have been painted. It was made by someone who was familiar with the work of the Master I.P., a sculptor working in South Germany in the 1520s.



## MARTIN SCHONGAUER
## (ABOUT 1435/50-91), GERMAN
### *The Virgin and Child Crowned by Angels*
Oil on softwood panel, about 1470-5

The small scale of this painting suggests that it was made for private devotion, possibly as part of a diptych (double portrait) that included a portrait of the owner. Mary's facial expression combines tenderness with sorrow, showing her awareness of her son's ultimate fate. Her red robes project from the niche, as if inviting us to touch them.

Paintings attributed to Martin Schongauer are incredibly rare, and he is best known for his engravings. As one of the most important artists of the German Renaissance, Schongauer's work went on to inspire many artists, including Albrecht Dürer. This painting is probably based on an earlier engraving made around 1470. Schongauer made numerous engravings depicting the Virgin within an architectural enclosure such as a window.

Research into this panel has revealed more about how it was made. Infrared reflectography enables us to see through the surface of paint, uncovering how works were put together.

A mysterious small cross was revealed in the lower right corner under the paint surface, not visible in the finished painting. Although no artist's preparatory sketch - underdrawing - was revealed in this infrared, the very great care the artist took became apparent in the way the figures are painted very closely into the reserves of the dark background paint.



Infrared reflectography of
*The Virgin and Child
Crowned by Angels*
© Tager Stonor Richardson

## NETHERLANDISH
### *The Virgin and Child*
Oil on panel, mid-16th century

Baby Jesus throws his arms out in a dramatic foreshadowing of his crucifixion on the cross. The winding landscape vista behind the figures is typical of Netherlandish art, and the objects in the foreground are common symbols in Christian art. The lilies represent the Virgin Mary's purity, while the bread and grapes refer to the body and blood of Christ.

Small, intimate images of the Virgin and Child were very popular during this period. Artists would meet this demand by producing numerous copies of the same design, some with subtle variations in detail, for sale at art markets. The warm tones and *sfumato* (hazy forms) effect of this picture, with the figures seated in a domestic interior, make this an especially tender example.

Research into this panel has revealed more about how it was made. Infrared reflectography enables us to see through the surface of paint, uncovering how works were put together.

The infrared analysis of this small panel picked up evidence of a technique called pouncing, where an artist created a new image from an existing one by pinpricking holes around the motifs. This was then transferred onto a new surface by dusting charcoal through the holes to leave an outline. So this must have been a pre-existing image, which is typical of the collaborative artistic practice at this time. Evidence of freehand preparatory sketches - underdrawing - were also found, showing changes made by the artist to Mary's headdress and skirt.

Infrared reflectography of
*The Virgin and Child*
© Tager Stonor Richardson
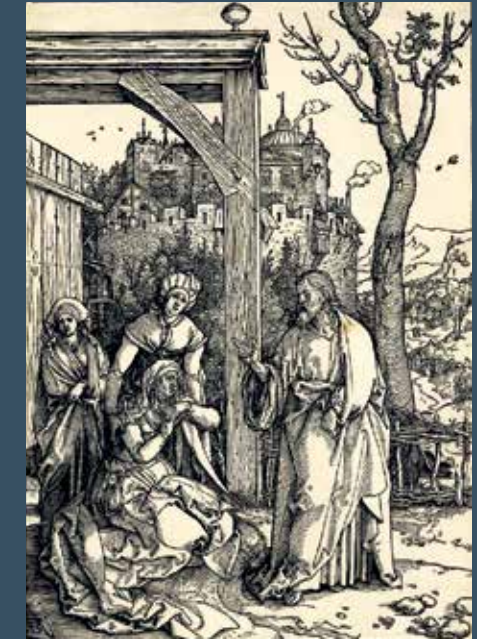
## MASTER OF THE SCHWABACH ALTARPIECE (ACTIVE 1505-8), GERMAN
### *Christ Taking Leave of his Mother*
Oil and gold on limewood panel, 1506

Christ is shown departing for Jerusalem, where he knows he will be tortured and crucified. Bidding farewell, he blesses his mother, who is overcome with grief. The kneeling figures at the base of the painting commissioned the work, and have been identified as the Lochner von Huttenbachs, a wealthy Nuremberg family. It is likely that this panel was commissioned by Catarina the Elder to commemorate the death of her husband, Michael, in 1505.

The artist has based his composition on a woodcut of the same subject by Albrecht Dürer dating to about 1504. It is thought the Schwabach Master worked in the studio of Michael Wolgemut, where Dürer also worked as a young artist. This painting would have originally been flat, but the wooden panel has become warped over time.

Infrared reflectography has revealed more about how this panel was made, by allowing us to see through the surface of the paint to uncover elements which the artist never intended us to see. This panel was able to reveal a great deal about artistic practice.

Above right: ALBRECHT DÜRER, *Christ Taking Leave from his Mother*
Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Although some of the artist's underdrawing (preliminary sketch) is visible with the naked eye, infrared revealed more extensive variation than expected between the underdrawing and the finished work. The artist made many changes to both the foreground and background, altering the position of rocks and trees.

Particularly fascinating were discoveries about alterations to the four small kneeling figures at the sides: the Lochner von Huttenbach family who commissioned this painting. The two women we see on the right were originally envisaged as a woman with a young girl.

Infrared reflectography details of *Christ Taking Leave of his Mother* © Tager Stonor Richardson

ATTRIBUTED TO THE WORKSHOP OF TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER (ABOUT 1460-1531), GERMAN
*Vesperbild (Pietà)*
Polychrome limewood, about 1510-20

Small wood sculptures like these were made specifically for religious devotion during the evening service, known as Vespers, and are called Vesperbild. The grief expressed by the Virgin was intended to encourage contemplation of Christ's suffering and sacrifice, and would have been even more dramatic when lit by flickering candlelight.

This type of sculpture was extremely popular in the 16th century. This sculpture appears to have been based on an earlier example by Tilman Riemenschneider in the parish church of Grosslangheim, just east of Würzburg in Germany. The wood of this later sculpture was originally left exposed in the style championed by Riemenschneider, but was painted at a later stage to suit the tastes of its owner at the time.



STRASBOURG SCHOOL, GERMAN
*The Scene at Golgotha*
Polychrome wood high relief, about 1470-80

This scene shows a crowd gathered at the site of Christ's crucifixion. The figure of Christ on the cross is missing; Mary Magdalene clutches at the base of the cross and looks upwards. It is likely the figure of Christ was detached from the rest of the sculpture during the height of the German Reformation when there was destruction of many religious artworks.

Most of the people who crowd the scene are looking up towards the area where we can now only imagine the figure of Christ. Some look out of the composition towards the viewer, however. The most striking example of this is the man on the right-hand side whose hand is raised towards Christ. The letters 'E' and 'A' and a crown have been carved on to the leg of the man next to this figure. They could be the initials of a princely patron.

Traces of polychrome (many coloured paints) and gilding can still be seen and hint at how vibrant the sculpture would originally have looked. This is known as a 'high relief' sculpture because the figures appear almost separated from the background.



ENGLISH
*The Resurrection*
Nottingham alabaster relief, 1400s

The resurrection of Christ after his crucifixion is one of the foundations of the Christian faith. Here Jesus is shown bursting from his tomb and overcoming the Roman soldiers who had fallen asleep while guarding him.

Traces of the original brightly coloured paint can still be seen on the surface of the work. Nottingham was a renowned centre for the production of alabaster sculptures. Alabaster is a soft stone to carve, and was especially popular with sculptors and their patrons.



SOUTH GERMANY (PROBABLY ULM)
*Noli me Tangere*
Polychrome wood low relief, about 1500

This moment in the story of Jesus' life is often represented in art. The Bible tells that after his resurrection, Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden outside his tomb. Mary initially mistook him for a gardener but upon realising his true identity, she went to embrace him, to which Christ responded *noli me tangere* ('touch me not'). Mary Magdalene can be identified by the jar of ointment she used to anoint Christ's feet.

This is known as a 'low relief' sculpture because the design projects only slightly from the background.

PIETER HUYS (ABOUT 1519-84), NETHERLANDISH
### *The Descent into Limbo*
Oil on panel, about 1547-77

According to legend, after his crucifixion and before his resurrection, Christ descended to the edge of hell (limbo) to free the 'good' people. The story enabled artists to depict hell populated by hybrid monsters and fantastical beasts.

This painting is based on work by Huys' predecessor, Hieronymus Bosch (1474-1516), but the horror is not all imaginary. Huys worked in Antwerp, where religious tensions often sparked violent outbursts, and the picture also reflects this climate. Huys was a successful artist in his own right who chose to sign some of his pictures with his own name rather than attempt to pass his work off as an original by Bosch, as many other artists did.

CARINTHIAN, AUSTRIAN
### *Vesperbild (Pietà)*
Limestone, about 1410-20

The Virgin's grief is vividly shown in the tear rolling down her cheek. Christ's bleeding wounds suggest that these figures are meant to be seen as part of a crucifixion scene, his body having just been taken down from the cross.

This is one of the earliest works in the collection. It is an example of a horizontal vesperbild that exaggerated the elongation of the figures, suggesting courtly beauty rather than a realistic portrayal of death.

WORKSHOP OF THE MASTER OF FRANKFURT (ACTIVE ABOUT 1480-1520), NETHERLANDISH
### *The Lamentation*
Oil on panel, about 1500

'The Lamentation' is the term for a scene showing the moment that Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and mourned by his family and friends. His upper body is supported by Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, while Nicodemus, a Pharisee, kneels at his feet.

The Virgin is supported by Saint John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene is on her left, holding a jar of ointment used to anoint Christ's feet. Here the artist depicts two later events in Christ's story: on the left he appears to Mary Magdalene in a garden, and on the right he emerges from his tomb while the guards sleep.

This painting was once owned by the author Roald Dahl.

CIRCLE OF CHRISTIAN JORHAN THE ELDER (1727-1804), GERMAN
### *Saint John of Nepomuk*
Polychrome on oak, about 1770

Saint John of Nepomuk (1345-1393) was a canon of Prague Cathedral. When he refused to reveal a confession made to him by the wife of King Wenceslaus, the king had him bound, gagged and thrown into the Vltava River from a bridge. As a result, he became the patron saint of bridges and floods. The Saint wears a priest's cassock and his biretta (a square hat worn by Catholic clergymen) is placed on the ground by the base of the cross. The letters 'INRI', pinned to the top of the cross, stand for the Latin declaration of 'Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.'

This sculpture would have been displayed in a niche and used for private devotion. Christian Jorhan the Elder was a sculptor who worked in Landshut, Bavaria during the 18th century. 'Circle of' describes an artist who was working during the lifetime of the master artist and was influenced by their style but was not necessarily their pupil.

FRANCONIAN
*Saint Christopher Carrying the Infant Christ*
**and** *Saint George and the Dragon*
Oil on panel, about 1519-27

*Saint Catherine* **and** *Saint Barbara*
Oil on panel, 1519

These are two parts of a three-piece altarpiece. Displayed in a church, these double-sided panels would have been opened and closed at different times of worship. The missing central image shows a Lamentation of Christ, and is now in the National Galleries of Scotland.

Both sides of the panels are decorated with saints. The female saints on the outer wings would only have been seen when the altarpiece was closed. On the left, Saint Barbara holds a chalice and a palm branch, which identifies her as a martyr. On the right, Saint Catherine is shown with her symbol of the wheel on which she was tortured. The male saints on the reverse (inner) wings can be identified as Saint Christopher and Saint George. The style of the depictions of these two male saints suggest the unknown Franconian artist had been inspired by the work of Albrecht Dürer.



**FRANCONIAN MASTER,** *The Lamentation of Christ with a Group of Donors*
Oil on panel, about 1515. Image © The National Galleries of Scotland

# Makers and Buyers

During the period 1450-1650 many Northern artists journeyed across the Alps to borrow ideas from their Italian counterparts. The invention of the printing press in 1455 revolutionised the circulation of images, with printed woodcuts and engravings allowing for artistic ideas to be easily shared.

Some Northern artists, such as Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), successfully developed a distinctive brand. Many others remain anonymous, or are identifiable only by their most famous creations. An individual artist's name was less important in a climate where production was controlled by guilds, and artworks were produced collaboratively in workshops by a master and his assistants.

Increasingly portraiture came to stand as an art form in its own right. Portraits were made of the ruling elites, but they were also sought by Europe's growing merchant class. These sitters used portraits to convey their status and wealth, and to mark important occasions, such as marriage.

AMBROSIUS BENSON (ABOUT 1495-1550), NETHERLANDISH
*Portrait of a Gentleman,* oil on panel, about 1525-45

MASTER OF THE POLLING ALTARPIECE
(ACTIVE 1440s), GERMAN
**Saint Peter** and **Saint Paul**
Oil on panel, about 1440

Saint Peter holds the key of heaven and is dressed for his role as the first Bishop of Rome, while Saint Paul holds the sword by which he was martyred. Blurring the boundaries between painting and sculpture, the artist has placed the saints in architectural niches, which are elaborately decorated with Gothic vaulting, brightly-coloured tiles and a rich, tooled gold-leaf background. The artist is named after an altarpiece made for the Augustinian Monastery in Polling in Bavaria.
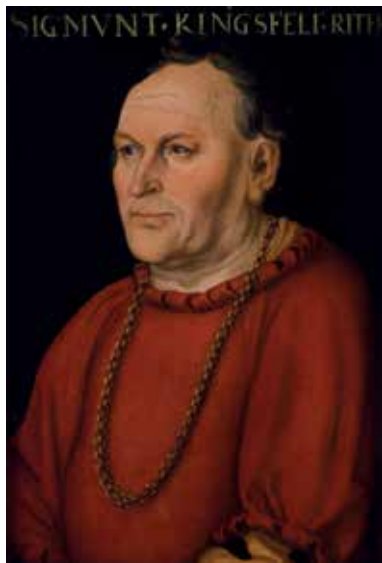


LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553), GERMAN
**Portrait of Sigmund Kingsfelt**
Oil on panel, about 1530

One of the most versatile artists of the German Renaissance, Lucas Cranach the Elder established a successful workshop and produced a variety of paintings, book illustrations and prints. This sitter can be identified as Sigmund Kingsfelt by the inscription at the top of the panel, although nothing else is known about him. The term RITER, included in the inscription, usually referred to a German knight, but Kingsfelt's outfit suggests that he held an administrative rather than a military role. Cranach skilfully portrays the man's pale, watery eyes and fleshy jowls.



LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553), GERMAN
**Venus and Cupid**
Oil on beechwood panel, about 1525

Mythological subjects became increasingly popular with wealthy patrons during the 1520s when Christian images were being destroyed by religious reformers. Cranach became renowned for his distinctive and sensual depictions of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Here she is shown with her with her son, Cupid. Wearing jewellery and a hat (which has since been painted over), Venus holds a transparent veil, which highlights her nudity.



LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553), GERMAN
**Lot and his Daughters**
Oil on panel, about 1530

Cranach paints the Biblical story of Lot and his daughters, who are shown after fleeing from the evil city of Sodom. Behind them the city is being destroyed by fire and brimstone, and Lot's wife, who paused to look back, has been turned into a pillar of salt. Believing their father to be the last surviving man, Lot's daughters have decided to get him drunk and seduce him so they can bear his children.

This painting follows the theme of 'Weibermacht' (the power of women over men), which was popular among Cranach's patrons. The women are depicted wearing clothing of the Saxon court, which would have given this picture even more contemporary appeal.



LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553), GERMAN
**Hercules and Antaeus**
Oil on panel, about 1530

In classical mythology, the giant Antaeus challenged all to a fight to the death, confident that he could win so long as he remained in contact with the earth, his source of eternal strength. Understanding the giant's secret, the Roman god Hercules lifted him up off the ground and crushed him to death.

Cranach often depicted nude figures on a stony strip of ground against a black background, as can also be seen in his picture of Venus and Cupid in this collection. In this picture the dark background accentuates the mottled skin tones of the two figures.

This is one of only two known depictions of this subject by Cranach. The other example is in the Fine Arts Academy in Vienna.

### GALEAZZO MONDELLA, CALLED MODERNO (ABOUT 1467-1529), ITALIAN
**Hercules Overcoming Antaeus**
Bronze plaquette, about 1488-9

This bronze plaquette is believed to have been used by Cranach as the basis for the design of his painting of Hercules and Antaeus in this collection. The small size of these plaquettes and the speed with which they could be produced meant they were portable and accessible throughout Europe. Many artists, including northern artists like Cranach, would have used these designs as inspiration for their own work.

Galeazzo Mondella, called Moderno meaning 'modern', was one of the largest producers of these small plaquettes working in Italy. Among his best work were scenes from the Twelve Labours of Hercules, of which this is an example.



### TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER (ABOUT 1460-1531), GERMAN
**A Female Saint**
Limewood, about 1515-20

The identity of this saint is unknown, but it is likely that she originally held a symbol in her right hand to enable worshippers to identify her. Her hand was most likely lost during an act of iconoclasm during the German Reformation. The woman may be Saint Barbara, who was often depicted with a book in one hand and a model of a tower in the other, alluding to her imprisonment in a tower by her pagan father. Carved from a single piece of limewood, this female saint would have originally formed part of an altarpiece, and was probably left unpainted intentionally. It is likely the sculpture was part of an ensemble of female saints.

Tilman Riemenschneider ran a large and successful workshop in Würzburg. He was one of the very first artists to finish his wooden sculptures with a simple brown glaze rather than the traditional polychrome.



### MIDDLE RHINE, GERMAN
**Saint Apollonia, Saint Dorothy of Cappadocia, and a Female Saint** and **Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Anne with the Infant Mary and the Christ Child, and Saint Barbara**
Oil on panel, about 1490

These panels originally formed part of a high altarpiece in the church of Bassenheim, near Koblenz. The emphasis on female saints suggests that the panels may have originally flanked a central image of the Virgin and Child.

The left panel shows three saints: Saint Apollonia, who was tortured by having her teeth were pulled out, is shown with pliers, while Saint Dorothy holds the basket of roses which were sent by angels to her tormentor after her death. The Saint on the right has not been identified.

In the right panel Mary Magdalene clutches the jar of ointment she used to anoint Christ's feet. Saint Anne holds on to the Christ Child and her daughter, the Virgin Mary, who are both depicted as infants. Saint Barbara can be identified by her bread and wine, symbols of her work for the sick and poor. The stone parapet on which the saints stand gives the illusion of depth.

BARTHEL BRUYN I (1493-1555), GERMAN
**Portrait of Gerhard von Westerburg, Aged 38**
Oil on panel, 1524

The crest on this man's signet ring identifies him as Gerhard von Westerburg, a lawyer and theologian from Cologne who was born in 1486. This portrait was commissioned to commemorate Gerhard's marriage to Gertrude von Leutz in 1524. Her portrait, in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, is dated the same year and would have originally hung next to this picture. These portraits are Bruyn's earliest known dated pictures and one in which this artist establishes a format he would go on to use frequently.

Barthel Bruyn was a leading painter working in Cologne in the first half of the 16th century. He was the foremost portrait painter of the day and founded a school of portraiture in the city that was continued by Bruyn's sons after his death.



GERMAN OR NETHERLANDISH
**Ewer and Basin, silver and silver-gilt**
About 1580-1600

This highly decorative ewer and basin would have been used for hand-washing at important banquets, and would have been positioned prominently on a sideboard when not in use. The ewer displays imagery of the four seasons, the handle taking the form of a three-headed dragon. The basin is decorated with detailed scenes from the Book of Genesis, including, at the lower edge, Noah's Ark.

Once thought to have been made by the celebrated Italian goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini, analysis of these objects show them to be German or Netherlandish in origin. The depiction of some of the biblical scenes precisely replicates bronze models associated with the workshop of Hans Jamnitzer, a goldsmith who worked in Nuremberg in the late 16th century.



*Portrait of Gertraude von Leutz, wife of Gerhard von Westerburg*, 1524
Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands

## HANS BESSER (ACTIVE 1537-58)
### *Portrait of Ludwig VI, Count Palatine, Aged 10*
Oil on paper on wood panel, 1549

As a court painter, Hans Besser painted numerous portraits of German princes, including this one of Ludwig VI, which is the only known work by Besser in a UK public collection. Ludwig VI was a German prince who succeeded to the title of Elector Palatine in 1576 and ruled over the fragmented territory of the Upper Rhine in the Holy Roman Empire. It was typical of aristocrats such as Ludwig VI to commission a portrait to display their status and refined tastes. In this portrait the prince wears a cap decorated with gold petals and around his neck hangs a pendant and a hunting whistle. The green damask background is typical of Besser's work.



## AMBROSIUS BENSON
## (ABOUT 1495-1550), NETHERLANDISH
### *Portrait of a Gentleman*
Oil on panel, about 1525-45

The identity of this man is unknown. His luxurious clothing and fine jewellery, including the intricately enamelled buttons adorning his doublet, suggest that he may have been a jeweller or goldsmith. Alternatively, this could be a marriage portrait, with the man offering a ring to his betrothed.

Ambrosius Benson was born in Lombardy in Italy but he spent his career in Bruges. He started out in the workshop of the leading painter in the city, Gerard David, and then went on to run his own successful workshop. Benson mainly painted religious paintings but he was also a skilled painter of portraits. His painting style can be distinguished by his delicate application of highlights, the intense contrast of light and shadow, and his masterful depiction of different textures.

This picture was once owned by the ballet dancer, Rudolf Nureyev.
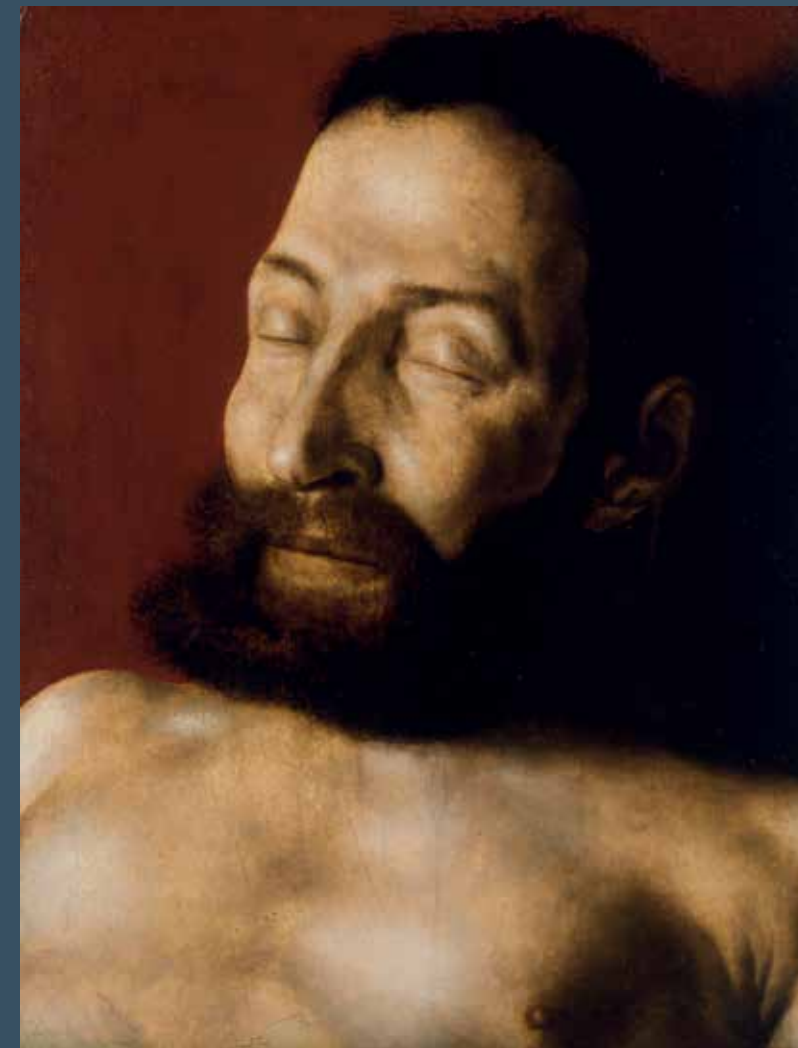


## NORTH NETHERLANDISH SCHOOL
### *Death Portrait of an Unknown Man*
Oil on oak panel, about 1530

The style of this man's beard helps to date the work, and suggests that it is one of the earliest surviving examples of a deathbed portrait, or Totenbildnis. Produced immediately after someone had died as a way to memorialise them, deathbed portraits usually show figures in their best clothes. This man's nakedness is unique, and evokes images of Jesus taken down from the cross, but the subtle upturn of his lips suggests a peacefulness not present in depictions of Jesus' body.

# The Artistic Climate of Northern Europe

Most artists working at the time were members of a workshop, with designs and tasks shared out in a collaborative way. Workshops were run by a master craftsman who employed journeymen (qualified artists) and apprentices. This allowed the exchange of styles and ideas to spread throughout Northern Europe. Large and successful workshops, such as the one run by Lucas Cranach the Elder in Wittenberg, could produce artworks of a consistently high quality. Some works would be made to specific commissions, whereas others were produced for sale on the open market.

A northern style developed largely independently of the southern Renaissance and is characterised by its elongated and elegant forms. Artists working in Germany were influenced by the intense realism and depiction of fine details found in Netherlandish art, by painters such as Jan Van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden. Northern artists paid particular attention to the depiction of landscapes in their portraits and biblical scenes, which ultimately lead to the development of the genre of landscape art in its own right.

The new medium of printing also flourished at this time, with printed images readily available and affordable, enabling an exchange of artistic ideas. German sculpture also went through a period of transition, with the adoption of classical forms and introduction of unpainted sculpture that moved away from the tradition of elaborate polychrome (many coloured paints) and gilding.

LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553), GERMAN
*Lot and his Daughters,* oil on panel, about 1530

# Religious Unrest and the Reformation

In the 16th century there was significant religious unrest throughout Northern Europe. In 1517 the religious reformer, Martin Luther, published his Ninety-five Theses outlining his criticism of corruption in the Church. This act is popularly considered to mark the beginning of the German Reformation which sparked religious reform throughout Northern Europe.

Reformers criticised the wealth and hypocrisies of the Church, issues which naturally brought into question the purpose of elaborate, expensive art works commissioned by members of the clergy. The function of these objects was questioned and many were condemned as idolatrous. Many artists saw their main patron, the Church, withdraw commissions, and countless existing artworks destroyed in frenzied attacks of iconoclasm.

In order to survive, artists had to adapt to the changing climate and produce artworks that responded to new demands. They began to develop a 'Lutheran' iconography in their works in response to these criticisms, inspired by a wide-spread desire for a return to a simpler and more personal form of worship. This coincided with an increased interest in classical antiquity and humanist teaching that also influenced art produced at the time.

MASTER OF THE POLLING ALTARPIECE (ACTIVE 1440s), GERMAN
*Saint Paul*, oil on panel, about 1440

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