





100

Master-  
pieces

CODART  
Canon

Dutch and  
Flemish Art

1350-1750



HÆC EST SPECIOSIOR SOLI ET SUP OËM STELLARÛ DISPOSICÛE IUSTI

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JAN VAN EYCK

(Maaseik 1390/1399 – 1441 Bruges)

HUBERT VAN EYCK

(Maaseik 1366/1370 – 1426 Ghent)

► Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (detail of Mary) 1432

Oil on panel | 375 × 520 cm

St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent



# Foreword

**Maartje Beekman**

Director CODART

‘Wouldn’t it be interesting if CODART, as a worldwide network of curators of Dutch and Flemish art, could put together a canon –a selection of masterpieces?’ The question arose during a dinner following a CODART focus study day in Malines in 2018. It turned out to be a fine topic for discussion at the table, and as the evening progressed, the attendees became increasingly enthusiastic about the idea. The honor of igniting the flame goes to Luc Devoldere, then editor-in-chief of *Ons Erfdeel*. The flame still burns, and with this book, we hope to pass it on to many readers.

This is not the only respect in which the CODART Canon project, which we started in 2019, feels like an Olympiad. An intense period of preparation, a short sprint, the results of which could be followed live, press coverage, comments from the sidelines –all have passed in review. Luc told us how he had collaborated on a literary canon of Dutch literature from a Flemish perspective. A starting point was that the canon itself consists of discussion about the canon. It does not seek to proclaim absolute truth or to impose anything; rather, it seeks to stimulate reflection on what is valuable, what is important, and why. In the case of the CODART Canon, this discussion was also conducted at length by members of the program committee who made the first selection, by members of CODART who passed on their own selections, and by the public, who could vote and thus guide the outcome.

The CODART Canon has turned out to be a well-considered selection: a list of one hundred Dutch and Flemish masterpieces from various disciplines from the period from 1350 to 1750. Although painting predominates, we have deliberately made a weighted distribution so that sculpture, prints, drawings and the applied arts are also represented. All information about the process and the criteria can be found on the Canon website: [canon.codart.nl](http://canon.codart.nl).

The CODART Canon is, like any canon, a snapshot. It says something about the time in which we live. Had we compiled the list a year later, it would undoubtedly be different, and who knows how we will look at this list in fifty years’ time? In any case, it is certain that each of us looks at works of art in a different way, regardless of the facts we learn about them. An exceptional work of art can touch you; it can stun you, make you curious, or inspire you. It can make you long for a place you have never been, as the former chair of our Friends of CODART Foundation writes in her contribution on Hobbema’s *The Avenue at Middelhamis*.

I thank our Friends, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Brussels, without whom this book could not have been made, and I thank all the members of CODART who have generously contributed to the book now before you: one hundred curators from 78 museums in twenty countries. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and passion. I hope that you, the reader, enjoy this special selection and the stories about these wonderful works of art.

RACHEL RUYSCH

(The Hague 1664 – 1750 Amsterdam)

► Flower Still Life (detail) ca. 1726

Oil on canvas | 75.6 x 60.6 cm

Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH, USA

(purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment,

Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey)





# The Making of a Canon: Work in Progress

**Quentin Buvelot & Friso Lammertse**

Chairman and Former Chairman  
CODART Program Committee

Everyone makes up a list now and then, if only to remind themselves which errands still need to be run or whom to call or email. Some use lists for much more than that, for organizing their work, their lives, or the world around them. Renowned writer Umberto Eco (1932–2016), who devoted his 2009 book *The Infinity of Lists* to the subject, even considered drawing up a list as the beginning of culture. He emphasized that it is precisely in art history that the list becomes an essential means of ordering, of getting a grip on an almost infinite number of possibilities.

The book before you is just such a list, a list of one hundred masterpieces created in the Low Countries between roughly 1350 and 1750, or made elsewhere by artists from the present-day Netherlands and Belgium. These are crucial works for this period. It takes some insolence—some would say arrogance—to declare such a collection a canon. After all, a canon is a list of considerable pretension and claims a certain authority. If, however, there is one group of people who should be able to make such a selection, they are the curators who are the guardians of old Dutch and Flemish art in their museums around the world. This group has been united in CODART since 1998. It was therefore self-evident that this would be the organization to take on such a project.

If all our members were to make lists of their own, there would be as many lists as there are members, with a great deal of overlap, but also many differences. The final choice is consequently a compromise, the result of countless lists, gatherings and meetings, the latter sometimes with heated arguments among the members of the CODART program committee. Eventually, during a publicly accessible symposium at the Rijksmuseum on November 18, 2019, the lively discussion continued. After the last round, in which the public could also vote, the members of CODART made their final selection.

From the beginning, it was certain that this would be a canon of works of art, not of artists. By nature of their profession, curators are object-oriented. The makers are important, of course, but the primary concern is the physical work itself. This moreover offers the possibility of including anonymous works, such as the beaker decorated with apes from about 1425–1450 (p. 26), and the influential series of prints of landscapes whose unknown maker was given the acquired name—a typical art-historical phenomenon—Master of the Small Landscapes (p. 88). It also means being able to add precisely that single superior piece by an artist whose other work does not show the same excellence, such as the breathtaking still life by Pieter van Anraedt in the Mauritshuis (p. 188).

In the earliest plans, the Canon was to include only paintings. On closer consideration, it seemed more interesting and surprising to include other art forms that likewise belong to the activity of CODART's curators—sculptures, drawings, prints and the decorative arts. With a percentage of sixty out of the hundred, painting still

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN  
(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

► Isaac and Rebecca

known as 'The Jewish Bride' (detail) ca. 1665–1669

Oil on canvas | 121.5 x 166.5 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

(on loan from the City of Amsterdam,

A. van der Hoop Bequest)

10 predominates. This seems justified to us because painting has almost always, and certainly in recent centuries, enjoyed the most attention and the greatest influence.

What is it that makes a work of art crucial; what are the reasons for including it in this list of one hundred objects? Although the CODART Canon is, to the best of our knowledge, the first of its kind, there is a long tradition in the ranking of art of the Low Countries, which has been reflected, among other things, in the numerous retrospective surveys of Dutch and Flemish art. In fact, the ordering usually began the moment the work entered the world, and when selecting these one hundred works of art, it is important to be aware of this history. What we now find important or beautiful is still determined by traditions that took shape in centuries past. A large number of works of art produced in the Low Countries found new owners outside the region, which considerably increased the appreciation of these objects.

At the end of the eighteenth century, it was the collectors who could really make their mark, because it was then that the finest collections of Old Masters found their way into the art market as a result of uncertain times in Europe, following the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and the Napoleonic Wars from 1792 onwards. For a few years, the Musée Napoléon, housed in the Louvre, was a kind of ideal museum, bringing together an enormous number of Old Master paintings from various European countries. For a long time, this museum determined the canon, as it were, partly due to the publication of the *Galerie du Musée Napoléon* (ten volumes, 1804-1815). These illustrated catalogues also include masterpieces by Dutch and Flemish masters, including Potter's *Bull* (p. 162). Because of its mundane subject matter in such a large format and with such extensive detail, the painting gained enormous fame as it remained on view in the Louvre for twenty years, after the French had removed it from The Hague to Paris as spoils of war. It was one of the most famous Dutch paintings in France. That status may have declined somewhat since the nineteenth century, but the painting is nonetheless included in the CODART Canon.

In the nineteenth century, popular taste was not only determined by museums and private collectors, but also by art dealers. It is worth noting that one of them, the English dealer John Smith (1781-1855), published extensively on paintings by Dutch and Flemish artists. His bulky *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters* (nine volumes, 1829-1842) was for a long time the art collector's bible. It would determine the canon of Dutch and Flemish painting for quite some time. Smith catalogued the work of many Dutch painters, starting with Gerard Dou, who was then very popular. Among the representatives of Flemish painting, he limited himself to Coques, Van Dyck, Rubens, and Teniers. In many collections formed in Europe at the time, including those of museums, we can see the influence of Smith's catalogues.

ALBERT ECKHOUT  
(Groningen ca. 1610 – 1666 Groningen)  
► *Dance of the Tapuyas* ca. 1640-1650  
Oil on canvas | 172 x 295 cm  
Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen



Artists such as Johannes Vermeer or Frans Hals, whom we consider great artists, are missing from Smith's volumes. They were yet to be 'rediscovered' by the French art historian and critic Théophile Thoré (1807-1869), who himself frequently consulted Smith's volumes. The Frenchman's vision of the art of the Low Countries still resonates in our views today. Thoré's taste comes to the fore in his publications, and it was also expressed in his private collection. This included paintings by Vermeer (his work was still available at the time), and also Fabritius' *Goldfinch*, a painting that is still very popular today (p. 178).

It is clear that reputations come and go, including those of Dutch and Flemish masters. Their fame was and is determined within the Netherlands and Belgium, but also beyond those borders. In the eighteenth century, English art lovers took a special interest in monumental Dutch landscapes, in particular those of Aelbert Cuyp (p. 184). Vermeer's fame only began to grow after 1850, with French admirers such as Thoré, and later Marcel Proust (1871-1922). American collectors at the beginning of the twentieth century ensured that the Delft painter was assigned a permanent place on the 'Painter's Parnassus'. Every age has its own favorites and preferences. Who and what they are can be ascertained, but they are never clearly defined. Certain tendencies can be discerned, but the moment you want to capture them, they turn out to be elusive. Every choice has to do not only with the chosen starting point, but also with personal preferences, with the value that is attached to existing traditions or historical views, or—on the contrary—to new developments.



The CODART Canon has been compiled by museum curators. Their choices cannot be seen in isolation from the ideas of other art historians and exhibition makers, nor from those of journalists, writers, dealers, artists, and museum visitors. It is an interaction that depends on countless factors and is always developing along different paths. As a result of recent exhibitions, publications and high-profile restorations, the paintings of fifteenth-century artists, such as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling, are once again receiving attention from art lovers. Research and exhibitions on underexposed groups of artists in Dutch painting in recent decades have nonetheless not always led to greater appreciation by a general public. Pieter Lastman, Rembrandt's most important teacher, is still not a celebrity, despite the attention being paid to the so-called 'Pre-Rembrandtists'. The same is true for Caesar van Everdingen, the foreman of Dutch classicism (p. 168), although his work is greatly appreciated among specialists. Research and exhibitions on the *fijnschilders* failed to restore to Gerard Dou the immense fame he enjoyed from the seventeenth until well into the nineteenth century. Adriaen Coorte, on the other hand, has been embraced by countless admirers. In general, it seems that the virtuosity of the artist is less important today; a certain simplicity seems to be appreciated. Hence, there is a great deal of interest in Coorte's simple compositions (p. 210), but not in the colorful still lifes of Jan Davidsz. de Heem, who excelled in craftsmanship and abundance.

As mentioned in the foreword, every canon is a snapshot, and that is its power. It can therefore function as a reference point for what is considered important at a particular moment. If such a list had been drawn up ten years ago, it would have looked quite different. For instance, it seems unlikely that all the female artists who have now been selected would have been included. What the list will look like in ten years' time is difficult to say. Will Rembrandt's *Night Watch* (p. 156) still be there? The committee that drew up the first draft of the current Canon had not selected it, convinced as they were that Rembrandt's *Jewish Bride* (p. 8) is currently more appreciated. But in the second round, when the members of CODART gave their reactions, this decision was immediately overturned. The committee had also selected Albert Eckhout's *Dance of the Tapuyas*. That painting—a rare and special work that offers a glimpse of the colonial past in Dutch Brazil—did not, however, survive the second round.

Because there are only a hundred works involved, many—indeed, a great many—did not make the final selection. An attempt was made to select works of art from smaller institutions, but the majority are in the large and famous museums—this is unavoidable. The CODART Canon is not about unfamiliar masterpieces, but about works that have often reached iconic status because they are mentioned over and over again. We hope that many will enjoy studying the list and the texts, and will be inspired to look at the works in real life. But there will undoubtedly also be people who are disappointed, if not indignant, because certain works are not in the selection. Others will reject the whole idea of a canon in the belief that art is something that we should not classify, certainly not according to national borders.

The CODART Canon has been put together by members of CODART, so the decision to limit it to the Low Countries was obvious. It certainly has nothing to do with nationalism—after all, most CODART members do not even have a Dutch or Belgian background. Instead, it stems from admiration and astonishment at the exceptional art production of these areas during those years. Generally, only a selection of a museum's collection is on display, with a significant portion stored away in depots. In the permanent galleries themselves, certain works of art are given a place of honor, while others have to make do with a dark corner. Even in the heftiest overviews of Dutch and Belgian art, countless artists and beautiful works of art have to be left out. We cannot escape order and selection.

This canon hopes to give a picture of what is currently considered important in the art of the Low Countries before 1750. Due to the limited number of works, it is a highly focused choice. Perhaps too highly focused, in your eyes, but then there is nothing standing in your way: make up your own list!



CODART Canon

1350-1750

## 1350

- 16 **Bust of Saint Frederick**  
Elias Scerpswert
- 18 **Retable of the Crucifixion**  
Jacques de Baerze & Melchior Broederlam
- 20 **Chandelier**  
Anonymous
- 22 **The Well of Moses**  
Claes Sluter

## 1400

- 24 **Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry**  
Limbourg Brothers
- 26 **Beaker with Apes**  
Anonymous
- 28 **The Flémalle Panels**  
Master of Flémalle
- 30 **Adoration of the Mystic Lamb**  
known as 'The Ghent Altarpiece'  
Jan & Hubert van Eyck
- 32 **Portrait of Giovanni (?) Arnolfini  
and his Wife**  
known as 'The Arnolfini Portrait'  
Jan van Eyck
- 34 **Descent from the Cross**  
Rogier van der Weyden
- 36 **Triptych of the Last Supper**  
Dieric Bouts
- 38 **Reliquary Shrine of Charles the Bold  
with Saint George**  
Gérard Loyet
- 40 **Portrait of a Young Girl**  
Petrus Christus
- 42 **The Adoration of the Kings**  
known as 'The Monforte Altarpiece'  
Hugo van der Goes
- 44 **Two Peasants Quarreling over  
a Game of Skittles**  
Master FVB
- 46 **Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy**  
Master of Mary of Burgundy
- 48 **Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove**  
Hans Memling
- 50 **Tomb of Mary of Burgundy**  
Renier van Thienen & Jan Borman (II)
- 52 **John the Baptist in the Desert**  
Geertgen tot Sint Jans
- 54 **Saint George Altarpiece**  
Jan Borman (I) ? & Jan Borman (II)
- 56 **The Garden of Earthly Delights**  
Hieronymus Bosch

## 1500

- 58 **The Owl's Nest**  
Hieronymus Bosch
- 60 **Study sheet with the Spinario,  
boots, helmets and lion heads**  
Jan Gossart
- 62 **Triptych with the Family  
of Saint Anne**  
Quinten Massys
- 64 **The Milkmaid**  
Lucas van Leyden
- 66 **Enclosed Garden with  
Saints Elizabeth, Ursula and Catherine**  
Anonymous
- 68 **Charon Crossing the River Styx**  
Joachim Patinir
- 70 **Danae**  
Jan Gossart
- 72 **Battle of Pavia series**  
Willem & Jan Dermoyen
- 74 **Pieter Jan Foppesz. and his Family**  
Maarten van Heemskerck
- 76 **Stained-Glass Windows and Cartoons  
of the St John's Church in Gouda**  
Dirck & Wouter Pietersz. Crabeth,  
Joachim Wtewael and others
- 78 **Brothel Scene**  
Jan Sanders van Hemessen
- 80 **Tapestry Cartoons for  
The Conquest of Tunis by Charles v**  
Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen
- 82 **Meat Stall with the Holy Family**  
Pieter Aertsen
- 84 **Customs and Fashions of the Turks**  
Pieter Coecke van Aelst
- 86 **Fall of the Rebel Angels**  
Frans Floris
- 88 **Small Landscapes series**  
Joannes & Lucas van Doetecum
- 90 **Portraits of Sir Thomas Gresham and  
his Wife Anne Ferneley**  
Anthonis Mor
- 92 **Hunters in the Snow**  
Pieter Bruegel the Elder
- 94 **The Beekeepers**  
Pieter Bruegel the Elder
- 96 **Self-Portrait**  
Johan Gregor van der Schardt
- 98 **The Four Disgracers**  
Hendrick Goltzius
- 100 **Mercury Abducting Psyche**  
Adriaen de Vries

## 1600

- 102 **Sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus**  
Hendrick Goltzius
- 104 **Karel van Mander on his Deathbed**  
Jacques de Gheyn (II)
- 106 **Winter Landscape with Ice Skaters**  
Hendrick Avercamp
- 108 **Naer het leven series**  
Roelant Savery
- 110 **The Elevation of the Cross**  
Peter Paul Rubens
- 112 **Plaisante plaetsen series**  
Claes Jansz. Visscher
- 114 **Lidded Ewer**  
Adam van Vianen (I)
- 116 **Tomb of William of Orange**  
Hendrick de Keyser
- 118 **Still Life with Cheeses,  
Almonds and Pretzels**  
Clara Peeters
- 120 **The Mocking of Christ**  
Gerard van Honthorst
- 122 **The Five Senses series**  
Jan Brueghel the Elder & Peter Paul Rubens
- 124 **Four Market Scenes**  
Frans Snijders
- 126 **Nicolaas Rubens with  
Coral Necklace**  
Peter Paul Rubens
- 128 **A Pair of Wedding Gloves**  
Anonymous
- 130 **Portrait of Tieleman Roosterman (?)**  
known as 'The Laughing Cavalier'  
Frans Hals
- 132 **Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene**  
Hendrick ter Brugghen
- 134 **The Mossy Tree**  
Hercules Segers
- 136 **Iconography series**  
Anthony van Dyck
- 138 **The Picture Gallery of  
Cornelis van der Geest**  
Willem van Haecht
- 140 **Saint Susanna**  
François Du Quesnoy
- 142 **The Young Flute Player**  
Judith Leyster
- 144 **The Three Graces**  
Peter Paul Rubens
- 146 **Portrait of Saskia**  
Rembrandt van Rijn
- 148 **Charles I at the Hunt**  
Anthony van Dyck
- 150 **The Smokers**  
Adriaen Brouwer
- 152 **Breakfast Piece**  
Pieter Claesz.
- 154 **The King Drinks**  
Jacob Jordaens
- 156 **Militia Company of District II  
under the Command of  
Captain Frans Banninck Cocq  
known as 'The Night Watch'**  
Rembrandt van Rijn
- 158 **The Three Trees**  
Rembrandt van Rijn
- 160 **View of Haarlem and the  
Haarlemmermeer**  
Jan van Goyen
- 162 **The Bull**  
Paulus Potter
- 164 **Banquet of Civic Guardsmen in  
Celebration of the Treaty of Münster**  
Bartholomeus van der Helst
- 166 **Household Tasks series**  
Geertruydt Roghman
- 168 **Oranjezaal (Orange Hall)**  
Jacob van Campen,  
Jacob Jordaens, and others
- 170 **Tribunal**  
Artus Quellinus (I)
- 172 **Interior of St Odolph's Church  
in Assendelft**  
Pieter Saenredam
- 174 **The Threatened Swan**  
Jan Asselijn
- 176 **Dog at Rest**  
Gerard Dou
- 178 **The Goldfinch**  
Carel Fabritius
- 180 **Gallant Conversation**  
known as 'The Paternal Admonition'  
Gerard ter Borch
- 182 **The Jewish Cemetery**  
Jacob van Ruisdael
- 184 **View of Dordrecht from the North**  
Aelbert Cuyp
- 186 **The Courtyard of a House in Delft**  
Pieter de Hooch
- 188 **Still Life with Earthenware Jug and  
Clay Pipes**  
Pieter van Anraedt
- 190 **The Milkmaid**  
Johannes Vermeer
- 192 **View of Delft**  
Johannes Vermeer
- 194 **Man Writing a Letter and  
Woman Reading a Letter**  
Gabriel Metsu
- 196 **Self-Portrait with Two Circles**  
Rembrandt van Rijn
- 198 **The Feast of Saint Nicholas**  
Jan Steen
- 200 **View of the Golden Bend  
in the Herengracht from the East**  
Gerrit Adriaensz. Berckheyde
- 202 **The Avenue at Middelharnis**  
Meindert Hobbema
- 204 **Tulip Vase**  
'Grieksche A' - Workshop  
led by Adrianus Kocx
- 206 **The Dollhouse of  
Sara Ploos van Amstel-Rothé**  
Anonymous

## 1700

- 208 **Pomegranate and  
Menelaus Blue Morpho Butterfly**  
Maria Sibylla Merian
- 210 **Still Life with Wild Strawberries**  
Adriaen Coorte
- 212 **Flower Still Life**  
Rachel Ruysch
- 214 **Pulpit**  
Laurent Delvaux

(Utrecht 1320/1330 – 1387 Utrecht)

► **Bust of Saint Frederick** 1362

Partially gilt silver | 45.2 × 24.2 × 17.5 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

(purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt and the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap)

In 1578, fate dealt the city of Utrecht a blow. Because of the ongoing struggle between the Spaniards and the insurgents, the Republic was in deep financial crisis. The churches of Utrecht were summoned by the States General in Brussels to donate all their gold and silver objects to the defunct state treasury. In just three months, nearly all the works of medieval goldsmiths disappeared into the smelters of the local mint. The end of Utrecht's cathedral and church treasures was a fact. The beautiful reliquary holder for the skull of Saint Frederick—now in the Rijksmuseum—managed to escape. How was this possible? And what makes it so special?

Thanks to a unique inscription on the base plate, we know a great deal about the creation of the bust. In 1362, the chapter of the Church of Old Munster, or St Savior's Church, commissioned the local goldsmith Elias Scerpswert to make this reliquary shortly after the opening of the tomb of Bishop Frederick (ca. 780–838). At the time, Scerpswert was one of the city's leading gold- and silver-smiths. The refinement and expression of the bust are outstanding. The stylistic influence of prominent Western European art centers, such as Cologne and Paris, is unmistakable. The reliquary is the best documented medieval work of art from Utrecht to have been handed down to us, enabling us to follow it through the centuries after its fabrication.

At the end of the sixteenth century—after the Reformation and the Great Iconoclasm—St Savior's Church was threatened with demolition. In 1578, shortly before the confiscation of church valuables, the chapter decided to embrace fate. It gathered all its treasures in nine coffers. The bust, however, was missing. Shortly before, the chapter had hidden away the best pieces with confidants in Emmerich, Germany. In the centuries that followed, many Catholics who remained true to their faith took care of the bust. In the nineteenth century, the Rijksmuseum purchased the bust, and the rest is history.

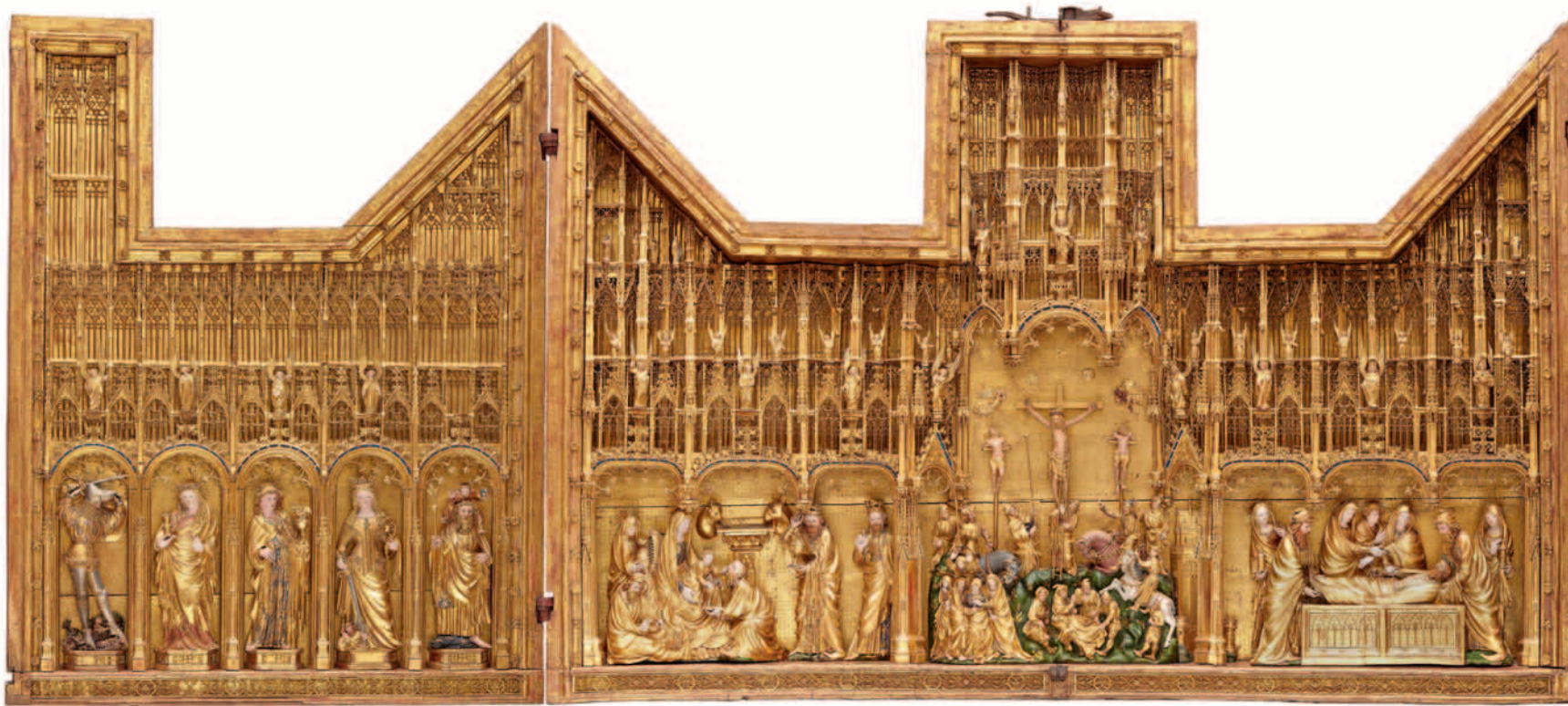
In 2019, I curated *De Münster Domschat*, an exhibition that highlighted the story of the lost treasures of Utrecht's churches. I have so often mourned the great loss suffered by this city. As the seat of a bishopric, in the Middle Ages, Utrecht had a flourishing artistic climate. The many Utrecht masterpieces in museums worldwide bear witness to its former glory. They are masterpieces in wood, stone, parchment, and silk—but because of the unfortunate meltdown, very rarely of silver or gold. Fortunately, there is always Frederick, which means we can still stand face to face with a magnificent example of Utrecht's mastery and catch a glimpse of what added luster to the religious experience of our ancestors.

Annabel Dijkema Head of Museum Affairs  
Slot Loevestein, Poederrijen









JACQUES DE BAERZE

(active before 1384 – after 1399)

MELCHIOR BROEDERLAM

(Ypres ca. 1355 – ca. 1411 Ypres)

► **Retable of the Crucifixion** 1391–1399

Oil on panel, painted and gilded wood | 167 × 502 cm

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon



Duke Philip the Bold (1342–1404) founded Chartreuse de Champmol, a Carthusian cloister near Dijon, in the final quarter of the fourteenth century and commissioned prominent artists to decorate it. In 1390, he saw two carved wooden altarpieces by Jacques de Baerze in the Bijloke Abbey in Ghent, which prompted him to commission two altarpieces by the same master for Champmol—one with martyrs and saints, one with the crucifixion. This commission is particularly well documented. It is known that De Baerze delivered the two altarpieces from Dendermonde to Dijon in 1391, after which they were taken to Ypres in 1393 to be polychromed by Melchior Broederlam. In 1399 the altarpieces were installed in the chapter house and the monastery church.

More than 600 years later, only the crucifixion triptych has been preserved in its entirety. The panels painted by Broederlam form an iconographic whole with the sculptures by De Baerze. In terms of scale, the paintings and sculpture fit together well. Art from the late fourteenth century is scarce, and sculpture with original polychrome painting is very rare. It is exceptional that this altarpiece has been handed down to us in good condition.

It is also one of the few remaining testimonials to the breathtaking quality of late fourteenth-century art. Finely carved niches with rosette windows, pinnacles, and hovering angels crown figures depicting three scenes from left to right: the Adoration of the Magi, the Crucifixion, and the Entombment. Heavy robes with round folds give the figures volume and detach them from the architecture. But it is above all the movements and emotions of the figures that make the work so powerful. The hand of the infant Jesus on the cheek of the kneeling king is particularly touching, as is the support offered the Virgin by John and Mary Magdalen during the burial.

This interest in the human aspect can also be found in the painted wings by Melchior Broederlam, depicting the Annunciation, Visitation, Presentation in the Temple, and the Flight into Egypt. Joseph stands still to empty his water bottle into his mouth, and Mary tenderly shelters her baby under her cloak. This is paired with a realistic painting style, the suggestion of depth, and subtle incidental light. The painter placed the figures in innovative spaces that—although not accurately painted in terms of perspective—still give a strong impression of depth. The landscape, which presents itself as a mountain that is difficult to climb, is also characterized by the meticulous and realistic rendering of natural details. The painting is a feast for the eyes and in many ways foreshadows the art of the Flemish primitives.



Anne van Oosterwijk Head of Collections

Musea Brugge, Bruges

Guelders (Zutphen)

► Chandelier ca. 1395

Iron, probably originally (partially) gilded and painted |

270 cm, ø 264 cm

St Walburga's Church, Zutphen

In St Walburga's Church in Zutphen, the Netherlands, a monumental chandelier from around 1395 hangs at a height of a few meters. Above the heads of churchgoers, an intriguing spectacle of black silhouettes unfolds, including unicorns, deer, hunters, dancers and loving couples. This late fourteenth-century pictorial narrative is located on the lower register of the tiara-shaped chandelier and comprises a sequence of courtly scenes forged in iron. Below them is a frieze with the names of the twelve apostles, Christ and Mary. The whole gives us a glimpse of the fourteenth-century noble imaginary, its profane as well as its religious aspect.

With the exception of a brief outing to an exhibition in 2018, the chandelier has hung in situ without interruption for more than six centuries. For the Netherlands, the fact that this famous specimen of the blacksmith's art survived the religious unrest of the sixteenth century is extraordinary. Moreover, the medieval ironwork represents one of only six 'Jerusalem chandeliers' preserved in Europe. These chandeliers are characterized by their dodecagonal layout with architectural elements and symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem. The descent of this eschatological city at the end of time is described in the biblical Book of Revelation (21–22). Other examples include the famous Barbarossa chandelier in the Palatine Chapel in Aachen and the one in Hildesheim Cathedral. Because of its high, tiara-like shape and the scenes adorning it, the Zutphen chandelier occupies a unique place within the small group of surviving Jerusalem chandeliers.

It is above all the special decorative design that makes this chandelier part of the canon of Dutch and Flemish art before 1750. The twelve friezes depict a variety of aristocratic pastimes, including deer hunting with hunters, dogs and horn blowers. The hunt can also be seen as a reference to the game of love in which the heart of a woman has to be conquered. The same is true for the many unicorns that can be seen on the friezes, which are also being hunted. These mythological creatures could only be captured by a virgin, in whose lap the unicorn would lay its head. From a Christian perspective, this can also refer to Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary. The unicorn would thus refer to Christ's becoming human. The courtly character of the visual narrative is also expressed by a loving couple under a tree. Perhaps it is a representation of the legend of Tristan and Isolde, a popular love story during the Middle Ages. Who actually commissioned the Zutphen chandelier is unfortunately not clear, although the answer undoubtedly lies within the ducal court of Guelders.

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