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**DIJON**  
musée des Beaux-Arts

# Maitres et merveilles

Peintures germaniques des collections françaises (1370-1530)

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## Masters and marvels. Germanic Paintings in french collections (1370-1530)

As a political entity, the Holy Roman Empire consisted of a mosaic of principalities that shifted with the times. Both secular and religious local powers had great autonomy from the Emperor. Successive emperors struggled to maintain control of their provinces in a difficult political and social climate that was plagued by wars, highway robberies, and revolts.

Yet in the Empire – as in the Western world as a whole – the 15th century was nonetheless a time of major change in the arts. Religious sensibilities and practices had been evolving in northern Europe since the second half of the 14th century. Leading centers of handicraft emerged and artistic personalities asserted themselves throughout the Empire, while human migrations and the circulation of artworks increased. The territories located between present-day Germany, northern Switzerland, Alsace and Austria, thus became the site of intense creative activity.

The exhibition presents a fragment of this history through the prism of paintings that form one of the strong pillars of the museum's collection thanks to Marie-Henriette Dard's 1916 bequest. The exhibition is thematically structured so as to help understand the importance of these works in the late Middle Ages. It also provides an overview of recent research into questions of style and attribution, taking us on a journey from the investigation of the "hands" and masters who have often fallen into oblivion to the discovery of those rare "marvels" that continue to astonish and arouse our curiosity.

### 1 - International Gothic

Between roughly 1380 and 1430, art in Central and Western Europe shared a relatively homogeneous formal language: shimmering colors, sinuous lines, elegant figures, ornamental refinement, and a taste for familiar detail. Not only are the origins of this aesthetic varied; syncretism also happened in a number of European centers and major sites where Flemish, Iberian, French, German, Bohemian and Italian artists worked together. Since the 19th century, this community of style – fostered by the roaming of artists, the trading of works of art, and the circulation of models – has been referred to as "International Gothic". In the Empire, works attributed to Master Bertram, who was active in Hamburg, are typical of this movement.

### 2 - Devotional paintings

Many of these paintings are fragments of altarpieces that have been dismembered and removed from their original settings, which often makes it impossible to determine their initial meaning. However, they served a specific purpose in medieval society. Most were offerings to God that were meant to glorify him and obtain his favors, or to specific patron saints. These paintings, which were in turn stored or displayed following the liturgical calendar, guided the worshippers' prayers. By using from the most naïve to the most brutal formal means to arouse emotion, awaken terror, and inspire repentance, they helped guide the faithful in their devotion, encouraging them to contemplate the immaterial realities of which they are intended to offer a material manifestation. Lastly, while these paintings magnify divine glory, they also celebrate the earthly power and wealth of their religious and lay patrons. The latter would thereby ensure that, after they died, their memory would live on in the prayers of the living.

### 3 - In the painter's workshop

In the 15th century city, craftsmen's workshops were places of creation, collaboration, training, and trade. These were generally "shops" where already finished works, produced in a back room, were displayed. When it came to painting on wood panels, mastering the various stages of production required several years' apprenticeship with a master. His style was recognizable on all the pieces that came out of his workshop, which his journeymen and apprentices also worked on. His personal imprint colored the existing models that circulated through drawings and engravings. Several masters would sometimes work together. Only in exceptional cases did artists sign their creations, which is why today their identities are often lost.

## 4 - Questions of style

In the Southern Netherlands of the early 1430s, a break in the representation of reality was introduced with the art of the Master of Flémalle, Jan van Eyck, and, in the following generation, Rogier van der Weyden. Thanks to their skillful use of oil as a binding agent and meticulous observation of detail, these artists conveyed a new vision of the world. They soon inspired artists working in Strasbourg and Basel – such as Konrad Witz – or in Cologne – like Stephan Lochner. These painters focused on rendering materials and fabrics, as well as on imitating optical phenomena such as brilliance or transparency, thus producing seductive trompe-l'oeil effects. They recreated volumes, textures and depth. Some artists developed a palette of precious, contrasting tones. Artistic centers and individual artists emerged in all regions of the Empire, regardless of political and territorial divisions.

### Forms and uses

In the 15th century, if commissions still came from both religious and princely sources, trade guilds, religious brotherhoods and wealthy citizens became more important actors. Under the impetus of these urban elites, the already significant production of altarpieces increased. These central pieces of church furniture, placed above and behind the altar, reflected the growing importance of images in devotional practice.

In the Empire, they often took the form of a “winged” altarpiece: on ordinary liturgical days, they were closed by means of painted movable wings; on feast days, opening the wings revealed the other painted or sculpted scenes on the inside. The *Devotio Moderna* movement, which encouraged a more personal form of piety, also fostered the production of small objects intended for domestic use or travel. At the same time, votive paintings and epitaphs, preserving the memory of the dead, came to adorn the church walls and pillars.

### Reading paintings

Fifteenth-century devotional practices encouraged a direct and emotional relationship with the sacred. Images thus became privileged tools of prayer as they invited the faithful to imagine the episodes of Christ's life, particularly of the scenes of the Passion, as though they were direct witnesses sympathizing with his suffering.

The taste for narrative, anecdote, familiar detail and expression, all particularly evident in Germanic painting, served these practices well. These scenes tell a story, offering both comfort and reminding the viewers that death is there, lurking, and that one should be prepared for it at any age. The cult of the saints, who protect the faithful intercede for them, is also at the source of many images. Some saints, identifiable on the paintings through recognizable attributes, were venerated throughout Christendom, while others are specific to particular regions.

### Models

Engraving –in the form of woodcut, and later on, copperplate– was one of the great technical achievements of the 15th century. Several hundred copies of the same image could be printed from a single matrix on paper of an increasingly better quality. Since these prints were moveable and relatively inexpensive, they circulated easily and were appreciated by the artists who used them as repertoires of compositions, characters, and motifs.

They complemented the collections of drawings that were already commonly used in the workshops. Works seen and copied on their travels added to this visual culture. The painters enriched this collection with their own inventions, which were subsequently adapted by their collaborators and successors as needed.

## The artist's identity

Until the 16th century, it was uncommon for artists to sign their works so that the identity of the creator is generally unknown. The archives contain names that may sometimes be linked to the paintings preserved. More often than not, however, it is stylistic analysis that enables us to formulate hypotheses about their authorship. Most of the painters remain anonymous, and art historians have compared styles to group works together under conventional names attributed to unidentified masters (the "masters of..."). In some cases, it is possible to identify differences in "hands" within a single composition, which constitutes a visible trace of the division of labor within the workshop.

## Painting on wood

A wood painting consists of a support made of several boards glued together and covered with a ground layer of paint. Recognizing the type of wood is clues as to where the work was produced, since the artist often bought his wood locally. Oak predominated in the north of the Empire, lime in the south, while fir and spruce were found in mountainous regions, particularly in Bavaria and Austria. Artists never painted directly on this medium. After gluing the boards, the painter spread a ground layer -usually white- consisting of a mixture of chalk and glue. Gold leaf was then laid on a red undercoat (the bowl) made from clay and iron oxide.

On the white ground layer, the artists would draw with black stone, charcoal, bone black or carbon black. Then they applied the colors obtained from a mixing of binder and pigments, which generally consisted of mineral powders but sometimes also of vegetable or animal dyes. From 1430 onwards, the most common binder used in Germanic painting was oil, but egg was still used occasionally and sometimes in conjunction with it.

Painting in oil, which dries slowly, made it possible to work in successive layers, to modulate tones and transparency using glazes, and to reflect light more effectively. Molded relief decorations (known as "applied brocades") could also be added to imitate luxurious fabrics. As a final step, the paint was protected by a varnish that evened out the surface, enhancing the contrasts and saturation of the colors.

## Illusions and realities

Despite the persistence of medieval conventions of representation, figures soon acquired a new density and were staged within a space that was conceived of and depicted as having true depth. At the crossroads of the Netherlands and Italy, German artists were sensitive to new ways of representing reality, such as perspective techniques.

Previously, the vanishing lines sometimes led to a point at the front of the painting, towards the viewer, and the size of the figures frequently corresponded to their place in the celestial or terrestrial hierarchy. In the 15th century, architectural lines hollowed out the interiors and the gradual gradation of colors at horizon level restored the staggered depth of the planes in the background. However, the gold background was kept inside the altarpieces, favored for both symbolic and material reasons because it contributed to the play of light within the church.

## Artistic centers

In an attempt to characterize the artistic geography of medieval German painting, art historians of the 19th and 20th centuries defined regional "schools" determined by an aesthetic uniformity within a given territory. In recent decades, this notion has been questioned, allowing us to better understand how the circulation of works and artists accounts for the intermingling of styles. Some are gentle and refined, whereas others are powerful or even harsh. The French collections, which are the subject of a research program run by the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, are representative of this diversity.

## The Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire spanned almost nine centuries, from the coronation of Otto I in 962 to the abdication of Francis II in 1806. In the 12th century, the addition of the adjective “holy” placed the Empire under divine right and the adjective “Roman” traced its heritage back to Antiquity. It wasn't until 1441 that the phrase “of the German Nation” was added. The borders of the political entity were fluid. By 1500, it encompassed a large part of northern and central Europe and extended into the heart of Italy to the south. The Empire was composed of countless secular and ecclesiastical principalities whose varying statuses influenced its politics. The “King of the Romans” was appointed by the prince-electors before being crowned emperor by the Pope. Although it was sometimes governed by great figures, the Empire suffered from struggles with the Pope and internal conflicts over territories or the imperial throne.

## Light

The Middle Ages conceived of light in a singular way. Everyone saw it as the manifestation of the divine and the glories of the hereafter. Consequently, artists used light as a material in its own right in their work. Nowadays, the environments in which we view these paintings are different. Museum uniform electric lighting cancels out the changing effects of natural light and the flickering of flames that originally accompanied the display of altarpieces. Illuminated by the “light” of the church – oil lamps, torches, tallow candles, wax tapers – the gilded backgrounds gave form and life to the figures that stood out against them.

## In Switzerland

In a vast area encompassing the west and north of present-day Switzerland, the artists grouped together under the convention name of Masters of the Carnation of Bern, Baden and Zurich were active roughly between 1480 and 1510. The significance of the carnations that were depicted and sometimes crossed with a sprig of lavender at the bottom of the panels has not yet been fully clarified. With their different variations, they seem to refer to a connection between several painters and workshops, but they may also testify to a shared way of working. These masters, who freely took engravings by the ES Master and Martin Schongauer as their models, painted in a varied and expressive manner. Heinrich Büchler, who worked in Baden, displayed a delightful naivety in his attention to detail, for example.

## Elsewhere in the Empire

In the Middle Ages, artistic production was concentrated in a small number of towns that were particularly dynamic economically and connected to their respective surrounding areas. In present-day Germany, these included Frankfurt on the Middle Rhine, Nuremberg in Franconia, Munich in Bavaria, and Ulm and Augsburg in Swabia. The diversity of styles to be found in these centers results from a blending of local traditions, the artists' personal temperaments, and the expectations of their clients who wished to follow custom while asserting their knowledge of contemporary trends. In some cross-route places, artists were open to outside influences. In the Tyrol for instance, they were curious about innovations from Italy and the Netherlands.

## In Cologne

In a city with a long artistic tradition such as Cologne, the influence of art from the Netherlands was particularly strong, as geographical proximity favored exchanges. Situated on the Lower Rhine, the city was a key gateway on the route from the north to the south of Europe. Local painters trained in Flanders, while some Dutch painters settled in this metropolis, one of the most populous cities in the empire. Flemish and Dutch works can also be seen here. In this context, between 1460 and 1510, several masters designated by names of convention given by art historians worked together, in particular the Master of the Life of the Virgin, the Master of the Legend of Saint Ursula, and the Master of the Altarpiece of Saint Bartholomew. They executed commissions from a demanding clientèle.

## Visuals available for the press



Maître du panneau votif de Saint-Lambert *Le Christ au jardin des oliviers* Vers 1425-1435 Peinture sur bois (résineux) Colmar, musée Unterlinden, inv. 2002.11 © Musée Unterlinden, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image musée Unterlinden de Colmar



Autriche ? *La Vierge à l'écrioire* Vers 1420 Peinture sur bois (tilleul) Paris, musée du Louvre, inv. RF 2047 © RMN - Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot



Suisse, Anonyme *Saint Jérôme et saint Christophe avec donateurs* 1516 Peinture sur bois (tilleul) Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts, Legs Marie-Henriette Dard, 1916, inv. DA 105 A et B © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Atelier du Maître d'Attel (Sigmund Gleismüller ?) *La Flagellation* Vers 1490 Peinture sur bois Marseille, Musée Grobet-Labadié, inv. GL 256 © Ville de Marseille, Dist. RMN Grand Palais / David Giancatarina



Hans Traut *Saint Jean l'Évangéliste* Vers 1490 Peinture sur bois (résineux) Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. D 4069 MNR 345 attribué au musée du Louvre par l'Office des Biens et Intérêts Privés en 1950 ; dépôt de l'État, 1953 © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Johann Koerbecke *La Résurrection du Christ* 1456-1457 Peinture sur bois Avignon, Musée Calvet, inv. 834.4.5 © Ville d'Avignon / Musée Calvet



Maître de la légende de sainte Ursule de Cologne et atelier *L'envoi des ambassadeurs de la cour du roi païen* Entre 1492/93 et 1496/97 Peinture sur toile Paris, musée du Louvre, inv. RF 969 © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Jean-Gilles Berizzi



Nikolaus Schit *Saint Georges combattant le dragon* Vers 1500 Peinture sur bois Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 1542 © Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts / François Lauginie



Bavière *Saint Florian* Vers 1460 Peinture sur bois (chêne) Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2021-5-1 Achat avec l'aide de l'État et de la Région Bourgogne-Franche-Comté dans le cadre du FRAM, et du Cabinet Cléon Martin Broichot et Associés © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay

## Visuals available for the press



Konrad Witz *L'Empereur Auguste et la sibylle de Tibur* Vers 1435 Peinture sur bois Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts Legs Marie-Henriette Dard, 1916, inv. DA 161 A © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon/François Jay



Konrad Witz *Saint Augustin Vers* 1435 Peinture sur bois Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts Legs Marie-Henriette Dard, 1916, inv. DA 161 B © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Atelier de Hans Traut *Saint Jacques le Majeur Vers* 1490-1500 Peinture sur bois Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts, D 4031 MNR 15, attribué au musée du Louvre par l'Office des Biens et intérêts Privés en 1950 ; dépôt de l'État, 1952 © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Entourage de Michael Wolgemut *Vierge de douleur Vers* 1485 Peinture sur bois (sapin) Paris, musée Jacquemart-André, inv. MJAP-P2622 © Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André - Institut de France / Studio Sébert Photographes



Maître de la Passion de Darmstadt *Sainte Dorothee et sainte Catherine Vers* 1460 Peinture sur bois (sapin) Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts Don Albert Joliet 1907, inv. 1943 © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Entourage de Wolfgang Katzheimer *Retable de l'Adoration des mages Vers* 1490 Peinture sur bois (résineux) ; sculptures en bois (feuillu) polychromé Metz, musée de La Cour d'Or, inv. 11396



Atelier du Maître à l'oeillet et au brin de lavande de Baden (Thüring Meyerhofer?) *Deux volets d'un retable de la Passion Vers* 1500 Peinture sur bois(sapin) Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts Legs Marie-Henriette Dard, 1916, inv. DA 105 C, D, E, F © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Atelier du Maître à l'oeillet et au brin de lavande de Baden (Thüring Meyerhofer ?) *Sainte Barbe et sainte Ursule ; au revers : Visitation Vers* 1500 Peinture sur bois Dijon, musée des Beaux-Arts Legs Marie-Henriette Dard, 1916, inv. DA 187 A et B © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon / François Jay



Maître Arndt de Kalkar et Zwolle (sculpteur) Rhin inférieur (Nimègue, Arnhem ?) (peintre) *Retable de la Passion Vers* 1483 Peinture sur bois (chêne), sculptures polychromées et dorées Paris, musée de Cluny - Musée national du Moyen Âge, inv. Cl.3269 © RMN-Grand Palais (musée de Cluny - Musée national du Moyen Âge) / Jean-Gilles Berizzi

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### Opening hours of the museum

Open every day except Tuesday  
from 1 October to 31 May: from 9.30 am to 6 pm  
from 1 June to 30 September: from 10h to 18h30  
Closed on January 1st, May 1st and 8th, July 14th,  
1 and 11 November, 25 December

Free all year round, the permanent collections are free for all.

### Exhibition rate

Full price: 9 euros  
Reduced price: 5 euros  
Conditionally free  
Detail on [musees.dijon.fr](http://musees.dijon.fr)  
Free on the 1st Sunday of each month

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