

Books

German Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1350–1600. By Maryan W. Ainsworth and Joshua P. Waterman, with contributions by Timothy B. Husband, Karen Thomas *et al.* 376 pp. incl. 215 col. + b. & w. ills. (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013), £55. ISBN 978-0-300-14897-8.

Reviewed by STEPHAN KEMPERDICK

IN THE LONG-GONE days of great art collectors and a large variety of first-rate works on offer, late medieval and Renaissance German paintings were not nearly as coveted in the United States as Italian or Netherlandish works from that period. Works from the German-speaking regions are therefore not very well represented in American museums, particularly when compared to, for instance, the extraordinary collections of early Netherlandish paintings in New York and Washington. However, in North America there are some substantial holdings of early German paintings, especially at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Those at the latter have now become much better available in the sixty-three entries in the handsome catalogue here under review.

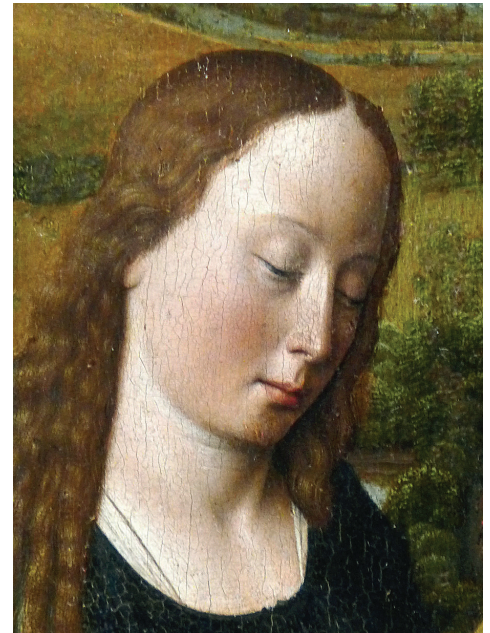
Most works in the Metropolitan's collections, including those in the Lehman Collection and the Cloisters, come from southern German regions, while there are no examples of the prolific late Gothic Cologne workshops. Likewise, the early sixteenth century is better represented than the fifteenth. The collection nevertheless covers several phases in the development of Northern painting: the new style of the mid-fourteenth century, the International Style of c.1400, the 'new realism' of the second third of the fifteenth century and its aftermath around 1500, early Renaissance and Mannerism. It also covers most types of paintings: altarpieces, objects of private devotion and portraits. The earliest work discussed is a somewhat naive but charming panel of c.1360 from Nuremberg (cat. no.57). It is not quite right to count it among the earliest surviving German panels (p.248) – there are in fact eleven such thirteenth-century examples in existence – but it is certainly one of the oldest northern European panel paintings in America. Renaissance painting is very well represented: three paintings by Dürer; four given to Hans Holbein the Younger and six that might be by his workshop; eighteen works by Cranach the Elder, his workshop or his circle; as well as works by Hans Baldung, Hans Süss von Kulmbach,



52. Detail of the *Virgin and Child*, from the workshop or circle of Hans Traut. c.1500. Panel, 39.7 by 30.8 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

Barthel Beham, Bernhard Strigel and Hans Schäufelein (his important large fragment of the wing of an altarpiece was acquired as recently as 2011). A few works that used to appear in earlier catalogues of the Museum as German have not been included, especially two panels once attributed to a Swabian 'Master of the Bidpai', which have recently turned out to be Netherlandish.

The entries on the individual works, some of which comprise two or more panels, start, as is usual in collection catalogues, with extensive documentation, including physical data, inscriptions (also in translation) and heraldry, notes on the frames, provenance and a section devoted to technical aspects of the painting and its state of preservation provided by Karen Thomas. The entries are not subdivided under headings such as 'description', 'attribution' etc., as has become the norm in recent scholarly catalogues. This is, however, no problem at all as the texts have an average length of two or three pages and it is easy to spot where the various aspects are discussed. Notes have been relegated to the back of the book, certainly benefiting the layout but making it difficult for the reader to consult them. The reproductions are generally excellent, and the same applies to the technical images, especially some wonderfully clear infra-red reflectograms. However, not all the results of technical examination are included: sometimes only part of an extensive underdrawing is reproduced (e.g. no.60), while at other times the underdrawing is briefly described but not illustrated (e.g. no.57). Most entries also include comparative illustrations and details. In some instances more such details would have been welcome, for example of the unfinished face of Dürer's *Salvator Mundi* (no.23), whose extremely fine and detailed underdrawing, lying bare, can hardly be seen in the overall illustration.



53. Detail of the *Virgin of the Visitation* from the triptych of the Virgin's life, circle of Dirk Bouts. c.1460–70. Panel, 80 by 217 cm. (Museo del Prado, Madrid).

Likewise, it would have been better had a detail of one of the nine figures on the 300 cm. wide interior of the Burg Weiler Altarpiece (no.47) been included, especially as this little-known but impressive triptych is in such pristine condition.

The entries themselves are excellent. That for the Hamburg triptych of c.1573–82 (no.55) is a model of precise scholarship. The triptych is also an astonishing work, assembling seven members of a bourgeois family around the figure of Christ. Their severe faces may not instantly appeal, but they are rendered with an intense realism that calls to mind certain stylistic tendencies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. On the strength of the costumes worn by the women and the view of the city of Hamburg in Christ's orb, the triptych, which had been attributed to a Westphalian artist, can now be securely located in the Hanseatic town. Furthermore, its peculiar iconography of Christ in the company of a secular family finds a convincing explanation in orthodox Lutheran thought prevalent in Hamburg in the late sixteenth century.

Fifteenth-century German painting was heavily inspired by the innovations in Netherlandish art, but in Bavaria ties to Italy also played a role, albeit to a lesser degree. An outstanding example is the panel of the *Virgin with St Jerome and a donor* (no.49) in which the Virgin is seated in an unusually relaxed pose, her legs crossed. The painting bears all the hallmarks, in both technique and style, of the so-called Master of the Munich Marian Panels, an artist active c.1450 in the Bavarian capital. However, as the panel is made of poplar and its ground contains gypsum rather than chalk – two distinctly Italian features – it is now convincingly argued that the painting was executed in Italy. To this may be added that the costume of the donor looks Italian

too, especially the half-bombard sleeves tight around the forearm – a fashion that can be found, for example, in Antonio Vivarini's *St Peter Martyr healing the leg of a young man* of the 1450s, also at the Metropolitan Museum. Thus no.49 seems to represent the extremely rare instance of an easel painting made by a Bavarian artist in Italy and for an Italian patron. When in 1959 Friedrich Winkler compared the Metropolitan painting to the Munich Marian panels, he argued that they and other works belonged to the *œuvre* of Jos Amman of Ravensburg, a south German master who in 1451 painted a large fresco of the *Annunciation* in S. Maria di Castello, Genoa. The works in question seem too heterogeneous to form a coherent group, as the present catalogue rightly remarks (p.315). And yet, in the light of the newly established Italian origin of this Bavarian-style panel, it might be worthwhile to consider the possibility of a connection with Amman's Genoa workshop, the more so because the master could well have brought some assistants along from Germany. The facial types in the Metropolitan's panel are not completely incompatible with the archangel in the Genoese fresco or with some of the prophets depicted in the vaults of the loggia in front of that *Annunciation*.

An interesting Netherlandish connection can be observed in a *Virgin and Child* (no.53) painted on limewood and thus in all probability made in southern Germany. It is deeply indebted to creations from the circle of Dirk Bouts, whose works have inspired both the background, composed of the corner of a room with a cloth of honour and a window to the left, and the parapet at the lower edge of the picture. But while these parts of the painting do not show a Boutsian painting technique, the opposite is true for the Virgin's head, whose smooth, enamel-like modelling and whitish flesh tones with some faint red hues are extremely close not just to Boutsian female heads in general but to the head of the Virgin in the *Visitation* that forms part of the triptych in the Museo del Prado, Madrid (Figs.52 and 53), which was produced in Dirk Bouts's workshop or by a close follower c.1460–70. Guido Messling already noted in 2010 that the fine landscape in the window of the Metropolitan's panel is entirely in the style of the Nuremberg artist Hans Traut, and that the Virgin's face can also be compared to works in Traut's *œuvre*, especially the female saints of the Augustinian Altarpiece of 1487. The catalogue under review shares Messling's ideas. However, the female faces in Nuremberg look much less Netherlandish, despite the fact that some of them, above all St Catherine's, clearly follow the same type. On the other hand, the flat, angular drapery and details such as the disk-like flat beads of the rosary in New York only bear a slight resemblance to the properly three-dimensional and much more confidently drawn figures in the Augustinian Altarpiece. The New York panel is thus a strange combination of rather stiff draughts-

manship and a very close emulation of a Netherlandish technique in the face of the Virgin and, to a lesser degree, the Child. The suggestion that the painter was merely working from model drawings after Netherlandish works (p.231) is therefore not very convincing. The setting and the drapery show what the painter was capable of when he was not copying, while the Virgin's head seems to have been executed with a Boutsian painting as its model – either the *Annunciation* now in the Prado or a very similar work by the same hand. Earlier attributions of the New York panel to a Netherlandish master – especially to Albert van Ouwater, whose style is very close to the Boutsian triptych in Madrid – underline this aspect. Maybe the painting is too easily classified as a slightly pedestrian example of 'Netherlandish influence'. The possible intentions of the painter – who might well have come from Traut's circle – and the circumstances of the painting's production could prove to be more complex.

If pessimists are to be believed, this kind of printed collection catalogue could well be a dying species. However, the pleasure of holding such a beautifully produced book in one's hands could not easily be replicated in another format; it invites the reader to see the better-known works in a new light, and to discover some lesser-known ones. It is safe to say that the wealth of insights presented by its authors ensures that this publication is nothing less than a milestone.

Dürer and Beyond. Central European Drawings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1400–1700. By Stijn Alsteens and Freyda Spira, with contributions by Maryan W. Ainsworth, Dirk H. Breiding, George R. Goldner, Guido Messling, Marjorie Shelley and Joshua P. Waterman. 256 pp. incl. 318 col. + 8 b. & w. ills. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012), £45. ISBN 978-0-300-17951-4.

Reviewed by TILMAN FALK

IN THE LAST few decades the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, has significantly strengthened its holdings of Central European drawings. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, paved the way: in the 1970s it started to expand its collections in this field, which continues there today under the curatorship of Andrew Robison. In this book Stijn Alsteens and Freyda Spira present exactly one hundred drawings spanning the fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth century in a beautifully produced and easy-to-handle catalogue which accompanied an exhibition held at the Museum in 2012.

The somewhat belated endeavours in New York are the result of the history of the department, which has existed in its present

form only since 1993, when the prints and drawings held in the institution's various departments were merged. This means that some drawings were acquired by the Department of Paintings or even that of Arms and Armour. In his introduction, Alsteens traces this history, the first German drawing entering the Museum only in 1906 (Albrecht Altdorfer; cat. no.18), and the first Dürer in 1919 (cat. fig.1). A Department of Drawings was established only in 1960. By far the most important bequest of drawings was that of Robert Lehman in 1975, catalogued in 1999 by Fritz Koreny and others and including some twenty fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German sheets, among them four by Dürer. When George Goldner became Chairman of the newly formed Department in 1993, Central European Drawings before 1700 numbered fewer than one hundred. It now amounts to more than 325, which is quite an accomplishment, given how rarely Central European drawings of museum quality appear on the market.

The catalogue has been divided, not unlike Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's exhibition *Drawings from the Holy Roman Empire* (1982–83),¹ into sections determined by chronology, region or function. This review concentrates on the most remarkable discoveries (many sheets are unpublished) and works that merit further discussion. As for the catalogues entries, no stone is left unturned, although not every scribble and note on the verso is equally important and less would perhaps have been more. It is unfortunate that details of provenance are hidden in small type at the end of each entry.

The first section includes five fifteenth-century drawings, two of them from the Lehman bequest (nos.3 and 5). The wonderful Austrian *Madonna with donor in a quatrefoil* from that bequest was not included in the selection; instead we find more recent acquisitions such as two heads from a model book from the so-called Bohemian group: a *Head of a bearded man* (possibly as early as the fourteenth century) and a very tender and charming *Head of a woman* (nos.1 and 2). Both belong to the earliest examples of autonomous drawings. Although the attribution of *Bust of a man in a hat gazing upwards* (no.5; Fig.54) to Martin Schongauer has recently been doubted, this reviewer believes with Koreny and the author of the catalogue under review that its small hatchings and details such as the slightly opened lips are of such high quality that it can only be autograph.

The 'Dürer' section contains all four works from the Lehman collection, followed by the panel of the *Salvator Mundi* (no.8), included because of its partly visible underdrawing. The most remarkable drawing is Dürer's double-sided sheet with studies of pillows on one side and on the other a self-portrait whose somewhat sombre expression confirms the seriousness of this seemingly light 'study' (no.6). There are characteristic examples by his pupils Hans von Kulmbach, Hans Schüffelein, Hans Baldung and, a surprise,