

## = Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin =

Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin is a large 15th @-@ century oil and tempera on oak panel painting , usually dated between 1435 and 1440 , attributed to the Early Netherlandish painter Rogier van der Weyden . Housed in the Museum of Fine Arts , Boston , it shows Luke the Evangelist , patron saint of artists , sketching the Virgin Mary as she nurses the Child Jesus . The figures are positioned in a bourgeois interior which leads out towards a courtyard , river , town and landscape . The enclosed garden , illusionistic carvings of Adam and Eve on the arms of Mary 's throne , and attributes of St Luke are amongst the painting 's many iconographic symbols .

Van der Weyden was strongly influenced by Jan van Eyck , and the painting is very similar to the earlier Madonna of Chancellor Rolin , usually dated to around 1434 , with significant differences . The figure 's positioning and colourisation are reversed , and Luke takes centre stage ; his face is accepted as van der Weyden 's self @-@ portrait . Three near contemporary versions are in the Hermitage Museum , Saint Petersburg , the Alte Pinakothek , Munich , and the Groeningemuseum , Bruges . The Boston panel is widely considered the original from underdrawings that are both heavily reworked and absent in other versions . It is in relatively poor condition , having suffered considerable damage , which remains despite extensive restoration and cleaning .

The painting 's historical significance rests both on the skill behind the design and its merging of earthly and divine realms . By positioning himself in the same space as the Madonna , and showing a painter in the act of portrayal , Van der Weyden brings to the fore the role of artistic creativity in 15th @-@ century society . The panel became widely influential with near copies by the Master of the Legend of Saint Ursula and Hugo van der Goes .

## = = Commission = =

There are no surviving contemporary archival documents for Rogier van der Weyden 's Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin , but art historians agree that it was almost certainly painted for the Brussels painters ' guild , for their chapel at the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula , where van der Weyden is buried . It may have been commissioned to celebrate the artist 's appointment as city painter for Brussels . Luke the Evangelist was thought to have been a portraitist , and Northern European painters ' guilds were considered to be under his protection .

In the 15th @-@ century images of Luke painting the Virgin were more commonly found in Northern rather than Italian art . Luke was credited with painting the original of the immensely popular Italo @-@ Byzantine Cambrai Madonna , to which numerous miracles were attributed . The original of that work was taken to France from Rome in 1440 , and within four years at least 15 high quality copies had been made . It was regarded as an example of St Luke 's skill , and contemporary painters strove to emulate him in their depictions of Mary . Popular belief held that the essence of the Virgin was captured in Luke 's portrait of her .

## = = After van Eyck = =

Van der Weyden closely follows van Eyck 's c . 1435 Madonna of Chancellor Rolin , though there are significant differences . The landscape in the van der Weyden is less detailed , and its top gives less of an illusion of openness than van Eyck 's . The most obvious similarity is the two figures standing at a bridge , who may not carry specific identities ; those in the van der Weyden are sometimes identified as Joachim and Anne , the Virgin 's parents . In van Eyck 's painting the right hand figure wears a red turban , a motif widely accepted as that artist 's indicator of a self @-@ portrait ; similar images can be found on the London Portrait of a Man and the reflection in the knight 's shield in the Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele , Bruges .

In the van der Weyden , the positioning of the main figures is reversed from the van Eyck ; the Virgin appears to the left , a positioning that became predominate in later Netherlandish diptychs . The colours in this work are warmer than those in the van Eyck . Van der Weyden switches the colours of their costumes ; Luke is dressed in red or scarlet , Mary in the more typical warm blues .

The Virgin type has further been changed , here she is depicted as a Maria Lactans ( " Nursing Madonna " ) . This is one of the standard depictions of her , different from the Hodegetria ( Our Lady of the Way , or She who points the way ) Virgin type most usually associated with Byzantine and Northern 15th @-@ century depictions of St Luke . This depiction of Mary 's motherhood stresses the " redemption of mankind by Christ as human ... [ and ] spiritual nourishing " .

= = Description = =

The panel comprises four individual pieces of oak , painted over a chalk ground bound with glue . The preparation wood is dated to around 1410 , giving an estimated date for the Van der Weyden in the mid @-@ 1430s . The dominant pigments are lead white ( often used in the panel to highlight blue and green passages ) , charcoal black , ultramarine , lead @-@ tin @-@ yellow , verdigris and red lake . There has been some discolouration ? some greens are now brown , including pigments used to depict grass in the background .

Mary sits under a brocade canopy or cloth of honour , painted in brown hues which have since discoloured to dark green . The canopy hangs down to a wooden bench attached to the wall behind her . Mary 's hair is loose and she wears an embroidered dress lined with fur . Around her neck is a light veil , and she is shown in the act of nursing . Her dress is a centrepiece of the panel , composed of a variety of blues overlaid with lead white and deep blue lapis lazuli highlights . The inner parts of her robe contain violet coloured fabrics , lined with greyish blues and purples .

Luke is positioned on a green cushion , between the heavenly figure and the small study behind him . He is either rising from a kneeling position or about to genuflect . His eyes fix on her attentively , and he seems near hypnotised . Jesus is similarly transfixed . Hall describes Luke 's hands as floating before him , holding the tools " with the same delicacy that an angel might hold a lily or sceptre " . Mary has turned her face so that he can depict her in near full profile , a rare honour , while Luke 's kneeling position is closely analogous to that of a typical donor portrait in the presence of the Virgin .

Luke is beardless and in his early 40s , close to van der Weyden 's age in the mid @-@ 1430s . His face is not idealised ; he is middle @-@ aged with light stubble and greying hair . The room behind him contains his attributes including an ox and an open book representing his Gospel . He is painted with more naturalism than Mary ; his eyes in particular are more realistically drawn . Christ 's conform to the then idealised form , as simple crescents . Mary 's are formed from curved lines typical of late Gothic ideals of feminine beauty . Compared to contemporary paintings of this type , the work is unusually free of inscriptions ; they appear only on items in Luke 's study , dimly perceived on his right : on a book , on an ink bottle , and on a scroll emanating from the mouth of his ox , beneath the small desk .

The scene is set within a rather narrow interior space , with a barrel vault ceiling , patterned floor tilings , and stained glass windows . The outer wall opens to the midground , with a patch of grass and plants , and has a view of a river or inlet . Art historian Jeffrey Chipps Smith notes how the transition between the grounds establishes a " complex spatial space in which [ van der Weyden ] achieved an almost seamless movement from the elaborate architecture of the main room to the garden and parapet of the middle ground to the urban and rural landscape behind " .

Two figures in the mid @-@ ground stand at a battlement wall overlooking the water , their backs turned against the viewer , the male pointing outwards . They are framed by columns , and are looking towards the detailed city and landscape in the background . The figures seem preoccupied with " looking " , which Carol Purtle believes , to van der Weyden , was a form of devotionism ; through meditating on an image , the " beholder experienced visions of transports of ecstasy " . Technical analysis shows that both figures were heavily reworked both in the underdrawing and the final painting ; the hood of the figure on the right was originally red , but over @-@ painted as black , amongst many other differences .

The positioning of these figures closely resembles that of two persons depicted in the van Eyck panel . In that painting the right @-@ hand figure turns to face his companion , gesturing at him to look outwards . In the van der Weyden , the equivalent figure seems protective of his friend , who

here is female , while the left @-@ hand figure in the earlier panel might represent a tribute to the artist 's brother Hubert who had died in the 1420s . A red headdress was an indicator of self @-@ portraiture for van Eyck . As in the van Eyck , the figures act as examples of repoussoir , in that they draw our attention to the picture 's underlying theme ? the painting 's ability to visualize the infinity of the world in the landscape . The painting may allude to the concept of paragone ; the man points to the landscape , perhaps highlighting the ability of painting , unlike sculpture , to supply its foreground with background .

Examination of the underdrawing shows that the artist intended a van Eyckian angel crowning the Virgin , but this was omitted from the final painting . He heavily reworked the positions of the three main figures even towards the end of completion . The draperies of the mantles were at first larger . Christ 's body at first faced Luke , but was later tilted in the direction of his mother . The mother and child were brought closer together . Luke 's head was at first level with the Virgin 's , but in the final painting is raised slightly above . The differences extend beyond those in the foreground . The fortifications of the inner courtyard have been enlarged , while the two figures looking out over the river were smaller , the river itself narrower .

= = Self @-@ portrait = =

Luke 's face is widely considered to be a van der Weyden self @-@ portrait . He may have wanted to associate himself both with a saint and with the founder of painting . This is reinforced by the fact that Luke is shown drawing in silverpoint on white paper ; an extremely difficult medium that demands high concentration , and is normally used only for preparation . The artist is boldly emphasising his ability and skill with preparatory sketches ; a single surviving silverpoint drawing attributed to van der Weyden , now in the Louvre , contains a female head very similar to Mary 's in the Boston panel .

Van der Weyden appears intelligent and handsome , but weather @-@ worn . He inserted a self @-@ portrait into one other work ; the lost Justice of Trajan and Herkinbald , known through a tapestry copy in the Historical Museum of Bern . Later northern artists followed his lead , using self @-@ portraits in their own depictions of Luke .

What biographical details are available place the artist as a devout Catholic , deeply influenced by mystical and devotional texts , familiar with 12th and 13th century female theologians such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hildegard of Bingen . They believed that contemplating devotional images whilst meditating might lead to a vision or a state of ecstasy . It is possible from these teachings that van der Weyden developed a set of devotional motifs such as The Magdalen Reading . The importance of St Luke in Christian art is underscored in St Luke Painting the Virgin , while affirming " the role of art within the context of meditation and contemplation . "

The self @-@ portraiture achieves a number of purposes . It acts as a tribute to his own ability , as a measure of his skill against van Eyck , and as a case for the legitimacy of the craft of painting . By portraying himself as St Luke in the act of drawing rather than painting , De Vries believes van der Weyden reveals an " artistic consciousness by commenting upon artistic traditions and by doing so presents a visual argument for the role and function of the artist and his art , one at that time still predominantly religiously defined . "

Smith describes the panel as an " exposition of the art of painting " , observing that van der Weyden records the essential skills any successful artist should master while claiming to be an heir to St Luke . He works in silverpoint ? and thus is unencumbered with the paraphernalia of painting ; an easel , seat or other items which might clutter the composition , or more importantly place a physical barrier between the divine and earthly realms .

= = Iconography = =

The painting is rich in both actual and implied iconography . Van der Weyden presents Mary as the Maria Lactans virgin type , a symbol of " Mother Church " especially popular at times of plague or famine , the implication being that she cares for all and no one will go hungry . This notion ties in

with Luke 's dual roles of physician ( and thus healer ) and artist . Van der Weyden had earlier portrayed Mary breast @-@ feeding in his Virgin and Child Enthroned , which depicts equally detailed carvings carrying significance , but is reduced in size and in its cast of characters , and omits the act of beholding .

The architecture of the enclosed space suggests a church . The Virgin sits beneath a canopy , perhaps symbolic of the sacred space , and the spatial separation between the celebrant and the congregation , usually by a Rood screen . The small room to the right could symbolize the vesting chamber . The arms of her throne are painted as carved with figures including Adam , Eve and the serpent before the fall from Paradise . The room faces towards an enclosed garden , another emblem of the Virgin 's chastity . Though Mary is positioned by a throne and under a canopy , indicating her role as Queen of Heaven , she sits on the step , an indication of her humility .

The Virgin occupies an earthly space as opposed to a sacred one , but remains aloof . This approach is emphasised by secondary midground figures who are out in the open air , while the main figures are positioned in an elevated room containing a throne , grand arches and wood carvings . Van der Weyden 's setting is less artificial than van Eyck 's ; here Luke and Mary face each other as equals , rather than in van Eyck 's painting where , as Blum describes " a divinity and a mortal " face one another . Van der Weyden omits the winged angel holding a crown hovering above the Virgin ; the figure was included in the underdrawings , but eventually abandoned . The landscape is more secular than van Eyck 's , which is dominated by church spires .

In the late @-@ 13th century , many of the newly emerging painter 's guilds were nominating Luke as their patron saint . The van der Weyden panel is among the first known depictions of St Luke painting the Virgin in Northern Renaissance art , along with a similar work , a lost triptych panel by Robert Campin . Van der Weyden presents a humanised Virgin and Child , as suggested by the realistic contemporary surroundings , the lack of halos , and the intimate spatial construction . Yet he infuses the panel with extensive religious iconography .

= = Attribution and dating = =

During the 19th century the painting was at times associated with Quentin Massys and Hugo van der Goes . In the early 1930s , based on x @-@ radiographs , art historian Alan Burroughs attributed the Boston painting to Dieric Bouts " under the supervision " of van der Weyden . He later revised his opinion to van der Weyden , but art historians remained unsure as to which of the four panel versions was the original or prime version and which were copies . Infrared reflectography has revealed underdrawing in the Boston version which contains heavy redrafting and re @-@ working . This is absent in the other versions , strong evidence the Boston panel is prime . The approach to the underdrawing is very similar to the paintings where attribution to van der Weyden is established , such as the Descent from the Cross in Madrid , and the Miraflores Altarpiece in Berlin . They are built up with brush and ink , with the most attention given to the outlines of the figures and draperies . Hatching is used to indicate areas of deep shadow . In each , the underdrawing is a working sketch , subject to constant revisions , which continued even after painting had begun . The drawing of Mary is similar to the Louvre 's silverpoint drawing of 1464 attributed to his circle . Both are of a type van der Weyden was preoccupied with , showing " an ongoing refinement and emphasis on [ Mary 's ] youthfulness ... [ which is ] traceable throughout his work " .

Art historians gradually revised their dating from 1450 to the currently accepted 1435 ? 40 , earlier in the artist 's career . This estimate is based on three factors ; the dating of the Rolin Madonna , van der Weyden 's opportunity of viewing that panel , and his ability to produce his own work after such a viewing . He is known to have visited Brussels ? where van Eyck kept his studio ? in 1432 and again 1435 . Erwin Panofsky suggested c . 1434 as the earliest possible date , and that the Rolin panel was completed in 1433 or 1434 . Julius Held was sceptical of this early dating , noting that if true we are " forced to assume that within one year of Jan 's work Rogier received a commission which gave him an opportunity to adopt Jan 's compositional pattern while subjecting it at the same time to a very thorough and highly personal transformation , and all this in Bruges , under Jan 's very eyes " .

Held , as a lone voice and writing in 1955 , argues for a date between 1440 and 1443 , seeing the work as more advanced than other paintings by the artist from the mid @-@ 1430s , and believes it contains " considerable differences " when compared to other early works , especially the Annunciation Triptych of c . 1434 . He further observes that although the painting became highly influential , copies did not appear until the mid @-@ century .

Dendrochronological examination of the growth rings in the panel 's wood suggests that the timber was felled around 1410 . In the 15th century , wood was typically stored for around 20 years before use in panel painting , giving an earliest date in the mid to late 1430s . Analysis of the Munich version places it in the 1480s , around 20 years after van der Weyden 's death . The panel in Bruges is in the best condition and of exceptional quality , but dates from c . 1491 ? 1510 .

= = Provenance and conservation = =

Despite the eminence of the painting and its many copies , little is known of its provenance before the 19th century . It seems likely that it is the painting Albrecht Dürer mentions in his diary recollection of his visit to the Low Countries in 1520 . It is probably the same work recorded in an 1574 inventory of Philip II , kept at the Escorial . The painting is recorded in 1835 in the collection of Don Infante Sebastián Gabriel Borbón y Braganza , a grandnephew of Charles III of Spain and himself an artist . Gabriel 's inventory notes described the panel in detail , attributed it to Lucas van Leyden , and suggested an earlier restoration . It was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in 1893 by Henry Lee Higginson after his purchase at a New York auction in 1889 . Photographs from 1914 show it in an ornate , decorative frame which is probably the same as in Gabriel 's 1835 description .

The panel is in poor condition , with substantial damage to its frame and surface , despite at least four restorations . The earliest recorded restoration was in 1893 , the year it was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts , but there are no surviving records of the treatment . In the early 1930s , the museum 's curator of paintings , Philip Henry , described the painting as an original van der Weyden , but gave the opinion that its poor condition was hindering wider acceptance of the attribution . On this basis , it was sent to Germany in 1932 to undergo conservation . The effort was led by the restorer Helmut Ruhemann , who described the panel as " structurally sound " , and removed layers of discoloured varnish and " crude overpainting " , while filling in some areas of paint loss . Ruhemann believed he had found evidence of at least two major 19th @-@ century restorations , one of which was probably that carried out in Boston in 1893 . Ruhemann 's cleaning and restoration was widely praised , and contributed to the acceptance of the panel as the original by van der Weyden .

The MFA undertook a third restoration in 1943 , when some yellowing of the glaze was repaired . Most recently , the painting was cleaned in 1980 when small amounts of grime were removed , some losses were filled in , and a light coat of varnish was applied .

= = Influence = =

The painting established van der Weyden as a progenitor and " inventor [ of ] authoritative models ... at the foundation of Netherlandish art " . If it was in the Guild of Saint Luke 's chapel in Brussels , then many near @-@ contemporary artists would have been able to view it . Van der Weyden 's interpretation was hugely influential during the mid @-@ 15th and early @-@ 16th centuries , both in free and faithful adaptations and copies , examples of which are in Brussels , Kassel , Valladolid and Barcelona . This reflects its quality , and the fact that he presents an ideal image of an artist as a self @-@ portrait , legitimising and elevating the trade . Also influential was his Madonna type , which he used again for the c . 1450 Diptych of Jean de Gros . That painting features a ' Virgin and Child ' wing directly modelled on his St Luke panel , extending the devotional aspect to include a donor who appears in the same panel with her . In combining the patron with the Virgin , the " artist has made that personal devotion an integral part of the image . "

Depictions of Luke drawing the Virgin rose in popularity in the mid @-@ to @-@ late 15th century ,

with van der Weyden 's panel the earliest known from the Low Countries ? Campin 's earlier treatment was by then lost . Most were free copies ( adaptations ) of van der Weyden 's design . The anonymous painter known as the Master of the Legend of St. Ursula incorporated the Maria Lactans type for his Virgin and Child , now in New York . Other artists producing works directly influenced by van der Weyden 's portrait include Hugo van der Goes , Dieric Bouts , Derick Baegert and Jan Gossaert . Some artists copied van der Weyden by placing their own likeness in place of St Luke , notably Simon Marmion and Maarten van Heemskerck . By representing themselves as Luke , artists implied a depiction of the Virgin based on first hand contact and thus giving her true likeness .

Van der Goes 's is the earliest extant autographed version , and one of the most important . This panel was originally a diptych wing of which the accompanying panel of the Virgin and Child is lost , and was probably made for a guild . Luke is dressed in a heavy red robe , draws a preparatory sketch in silverpoint , and wears a melancholy expression . Building on van der Weyden 's theme of the role , practice and craft of an artist , van der Goes places pieces of charcoal , a knife and the feathers of a small bird in front of the saint . The similarities to the van der Weyden are many and striking , and include the painting utensils , red robes , physician 's cap and blue mantle . The figure has the same middle @-@ aged facial type and his pose , kneeling on a green cushion , although reversed compared to van der Weyden 's , is the same . Van der Goes 's adaption both increased van der Weyden 's standing in the eyes of the later artist 's followers , and led to a new group of copies that were modelled on the later painting .

A tapestry version woven in Brussels c . 1500 is now in the Louvre . It was probably designed using a reversed drawing of the painting .

= = = Left panel = = =