

= Léal Souvenir =

Léal Souvenir (or Timotheus or Portrait of a Man) is a small 1432 oil @-@ on @-@ oak panel portrait by the Early Netherlandish painter Jan van Eyck . The sitter has not been identified , but his individualistic features suggest a historical person rather than the hypothetical ideal usual in contemporary northern Renaissance portraiture ; there is a contradiction between his unassuming appearance and deceptively sophisticated expression . The portrait is set within an imitation parapet which contains three layers of painted inscriptions , each rendered look as if chiseled onto stone . Van Eyck did not have full command of either classical Greek or Latin , and made errors , so readings by modern scholars are divided . The first inscription is in a form of Greek and seems to spell " TY?.????C " , which has not been satisfactorily interpreted but has inspired some to title the work Timotheus . The middle lettering is in French , reads " Leal Souvenir " (Loyal Memory) and indicates that the portrait is commemorative , completed after the man 's death . The third records van Eyck 's signature and the date of execution in somewhat legalese wording , prompting some to think the man was involved in that profession .

The sitter 's features have been described as " plain and rustic " , yet he is presented as thoughtful and inward @-@ looking . A number of art historians have detected mournfulness in his expression , perhaps as art historian Erwin Panofsky suggests , he suffers from " loneliness " . The panel was acquired in 1857 by the National Gallery , London , where it is on permanent display . He was apparently significant enough a member of the Burgundian prince Philip the Good 's circle that his court painter would have portrayed him and aligned him with a figure from antiquity . The 19th @-@ century art historian Hippolyte Fierens Gevaert identified the lettering " TY?.????C " with the Greek musician Timotheus of Miletus . Panofsky drew the same conclusion , eliminating other Greeks bearing the name Timothy ; they were of religious or military background , professions that do not match the dress of the sitter . Panofsky believed the man was probably a highly placed musician in Philip 's court . More recent research focuses on the apparent legalese of the inscriptions , and favours the idea that the man was a legal adviser to the crown , perhaps even reporting to van Eyck himself .

= = Description = =

Léal Souvenir is one of the earliest surviving examples of secular portraiture in medieval European art and one of the earliest extant unidealised representations . This is apparent in its realism and acute observation of the details of the man 's everyday appearance . Van Eyck worked in the early Renaissance tradition , and pioneered the manipulation of oil paint . Oil allows smooth translucent surfaces , and could be applied across a range of thicknesses . It could be manipulated while wet , allowing far more subtle detail than available to previous generations of painters .

= = = Parapet = = =

The parapet simulates marked or scarred stone . The decay allows van Eyck to display his skill at mimicking stone chiseling . The construct evidences the influence of classical Roman funerary art , particularly stone memorials . The parapet serves a number of functions ; mostly it provides a sense of gravitas ; the illusion of chips and cracks conveying a sense of the venerable , or according to art historian Elisabeth Dhanens , a sense of the " fragility of life or of memory itself " .

The man 's torso is undersized compared to his head , and that the parapet dominates the portrait , and given that the work is only the second of van Eyck 's known portraits , speculate if this is due to inexperience and poor design . Meiss wonders if he didn 't " lose control of [the] design as a whole by indulging his astounding virtuosity . " The panel 's ground is made from chalk . Infrared photography shows traces of short vertical hatching , and underdrawings of the face , arms and hands , which were repositioned in the final painting ? originally the fingers were shorter , his right thumb was raised and the parapet was lower . Analysis of the pigment shows that the flesh of his face is painted with whites and vermilion , and traced with greys , blacks , blues and some

ultramarine over a red @-@ lake glaze .

= = = Portrait = = =

The man is positioned within an undefined narrow space and set against a flat black background . Typically for van Eyck , the head is large in relation to the torso . He is dressed in typically Burgundian fashion , with a red robe and a green wool chaperon with a bourrelet and cornette hanging forward . The headdress is trimmed with fur , fastened with two buttons , and extends to the parapet . His right hand might be holding the end of the cornette . Neither the shape of his head nor his facial features correspond to contemporary standard types , let alone canons of ideal beauty . The sitter appears to be bald , although there are some faint traces of fair hair , leading Erwin Panofsky to conclude that his " countenance is as ' Nordic ' as his dress is Burgundian . " He has neither eyebrows nor stubble , while it is believed the eyelashes were added by a 19th @-@ century restorer . Van Eyck 's cool observation of the man 's narrow shoulders , pursed lips and thin eyebrows extends to detailing the moisture on his blue eyes . He holds a scroll that might be a legal document , letter or pamphlet . In his early portraits , van Eyck 's sitters are often shown holding objects indicative of their profession . The scroll contains six lines of illegible writing . The abbreviations are more prominent and seem to be in Latin , but may be vernacular .

Light falls from the left , leaving traces of shadow on the side of his face , a device commonly found in van Eyck 's early portraits . The man is youthful , his face has a soft fleshiness achieved through shallow curves and flowing harmonious brushstrokes giving the appearance of a relaxed , warm and open personality , which Meiss describes as evoking an almost " Rembrandtesque warmth and sympathy . " The man is not handsome ; he has a flattish face , stubby yet pointed nose and cheekbones that might , according to Panofsky , belong to a " Flemish peasant . " Dhanens describes him as having a " snub " nose , " prominent " cheek bones , and an honest expression .

A number of art historians have noted the apparent contradictions in the man 's plain looks and enigmatic expression . Meiss describes him as " plain and rustic " , and finds resemblance between his rather generic face and a number of figures in the lower portions of the " Adoration of the Lamb " panel in the Ghent Altarpiece . He concedes to Panofsky 's view , observing a " thoughtfulness on the high , wrinkled forehead , visionary force in the dreamy yet steady eyes , [and] a formidable strength of passion in the wide , firm mouth . " According to Panofsky , the man 's face is not that of an intellectual , yet he detects a pensive and lonely nature , " the face of one who feels and produces rather than observes and dissects . " Unlike Rogier van der Weyden , who pays especially close attention to detail in the rendering of his model 's fingers , to van Eyck hands were often something of an afterthought . They are generically rendered , do not contain much detail and may have been a later addition by his workshop . Yet they are very similar to those of the sitter in his c . 1435 Portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy . Given the clutched scroll , it is accepted that he was a legal professional for the Dukes of Burgundy , and given van Eyck 's high position , may worked as agent for the artist . In either case , although he is not grandly dressed and is probably a member of the middle class , he must have been highly regarded in Philip 's court , given that such portraits rarely depicted non @-@ nobles .

= = = Inscriptions and identity of sitter = = =

The parapet has three horizontal layers of inscription , with smaller lettering on the top and lower levels that is often not visible in reproductions . In places the Greek characters are unclear , and have been widely speculated on by art historians , not least due to van Eyck 's sometimes erratic spelling and unusual spacings . Panofsky notes that many of the errors in the work appear in Byzantine script , most likely was his source , while in instances there are no definitive formations of characters for some of the constructs he appears to be use .

The top lettering is in chalk white and in Greek script reads " TY?..???C " . However the last character is deliberately concealed by a chip in the imitation stone , a touch described by Panofsky as a " terminal flourish " . This makes the meaning of the inscription overall difficult to discern . A

general consensus has formed that the final character is a square C or sigma sign . Campbell cautions that the inscriptions are in Greek indicates their meaning was probably intended " to be obscure " , and that there may be a significant reason why the final character is partially illegible in such a deliberate way . He cautions that it is " rash to attempt to supply the missing verb " .

" TY?.????C " was interpreted in 1857 by Charles Eastlake as " Timotheos " , a proper name . However , if this was the intended meaning , more correct lettering would have read " TIM.O?EOC " , which suggests van Eyck introduced spelling errors . One proposal is the inscription meant to read " Honour God " , or " Be Honored , O God " , written in the passive imperative . Panofsky considers the hypothesis that the final letter is a " N " , and that the lettering forms two words rather than one . In this interpretation , the letters spell TY?? ???N , meaning " Honour God " . While he admires the convenience of the interpretation , and the fact that it would make explanation more straightforward than if we accept " Timotheus " , he rejects the possibility . He writes that " the presence of a shorter horizontal line connecting with the slightly tapering top of the vertical stroke and completing it into a ? form ... evidently precludes a " N " . Dhanens suggests the inscription can be read as " Time Deum " (" Fear God ") , a known motto of the Vilain family .

Eastlake 's translation as " Timotheos " is generally accepted , although the possibility of it being a variant of " Timothy " has been discounted , as that word was not used in Northern Europe before the Reformation . There is no Germanic name which might , given the lettering in which it inscribed , imply a humanistic imitation of a Greek word . As such , art historians have sought to identify the man from Greek history or legend . Although some have advanced Athenian and Syrian generals , these have been discounted as the sitter is not wearing military clothing . Saint Timothy , first Bishop of Ephesus and associate of Saint Paul , has been suggested but eliminated as he is not dressed as a high cleric .

The larger middle inscription is in French , using a 12th @-@ century script . It reads " LEAL SOUVENIR " (Loyal Remembrance , or Faithful Souvenir) , and painted to give the impression that it was carved into the parapet . In 1927 , Hippolyte Fierens Gevaert put forward Timotheus of Miletus , a Greek musician and dithyrambic poet born c . 446 . Gevaert held that the portrait was a commemoration of a court artist who had recently died , and that the classical reference was intended to flatter his memory . Panofsky largely went with this position in 1949 . He speculated that the sitter was the celebrated musician Gilles Binchois , by 1430 a canon at St. Donatian 's Cathedral , Bruges . Campbell is skeptical , disclaiming that the sitter " is not dressed as a cleric " . Other theories include that the man was a Greek or Lucchese merchant , Henry the Navigator , Jean de Croÿ , or , less likely , that it is a self @-@ portrait . Though much disagreement exists , it is probable that he was a native French speaker , and a notary , poet or member of the Compagnie du Chapel Vert (" Society of the Green Hat ") at Tournai . Elisabeth Dhanens rejects the theory that the man was a musician on the basis that van Eyck would have made this explicit , portraying him holding a device or emblem clearly symbolizing music . She concludes that he is an accountant or lawyer holding a legal or financial document .

From the first two inscriptions the panel is generally accepted as a posthumous portrait . Roman tombstones often showed a representation of the deceased behind a parapet with a carved inscription , and van Eyck may have known of these from travels to France . The lower inscription reads " Actu [m] an [n] o d [omi] ni.1432.10.die ocobris.a.ioh [anne] de Eyck " (These are done in the year of our Lord 1432 on the 10th day of October by Jan van Eyck) . Campbell observes that the phrasing of this extended signature is surprisingly reminiscent of legalese , and that van Eyck seems to be reinforcing that the man was a legal professional . Jacques Paviot notes that it is written in the Gothic cursive script Bastarda , then favoured by the legal trade .

= = Condition = =

The panel consists of a single 8mm (0 @.@ 3 in) vertically cut oak board , cut down close to the painted surface . It has a small unpainted area at the upper left . The support 's encasing was probably changed in the 19th century ; today four of the eight supports are fixed to the edges of the interior borders , forming inner mouldings . The other four act as inner pins . The varnish is severely

degraded , with key areas of paint and ground either removed or overpainted . Infrared photography of the reverse reveals underdrawings , but they do not give any hint as to the identity of the sitter . Its ground is mostly chalk based , the pigments are predominantly blacks , red lake and blues . The final portrait differs in many ways from the underdrawing ? the fingers are shorter , his right arm once extended over a larger area . In the final portrait the ear is elevated , and the scroll occupies a larger pictorial space .

It is not particularly well preserved . There are yellowish layers of glaze over the face , probably later additions . The varnishes have degraded and lost their original colors . The panel has undergone a number of detrimental retouchings . In instances these have altered the sitter 's appearance , most especially the removal of strands of fair hair below the chaperon . It has sustained structural damage , especially to the marble on the reverse . The National Gallery repaired some " slight injuries " when it came into their possession in 1857 . Campbell notes a number of efforts by later restorers were imperfect and " rather disfiguring " , including touchings to the man 's nostrils , eyelashes and tip of his nose . There is a yellowish glaze over the eyes that seems to be either damage or overpaint . The panel is discoloured overall and suffers from aged and degenerated varnishes which make the original pigments hard to discern .

= = Provenance = =

The painting was widely copied and imitated during the 15th century . Near exact copper reproductions were recorded in Bergamo and Turin . Petrus Christus borrowed the illusionistic carving on the parapet for his 1446 Portrait of a Carthusian . A c . 1449 ? 50 portrait of Marco Barbarigo attributed to a follower of van Eyck is heavily indebted , in that it is also unusually tall and narrow , with a large space above the sitter 's head .

The painting is first recorded in the National Gallery 's collector and later director Charles Eastlake 's notes from its acquisition that year . He mentions that it had been in the possession of the Scottish landscape painter Karl Ross (1816 ? 58) " before 1854 " . Like many of van Eyck 's works and those of the Early Netherlandish painters in general , the painting 's provenance is murky before the 19th century . Two near @-@ contemporary copies in copper were recorded that year in Bergamo and Turin when the National Gallery was verifying attribution . The first was found by Eastlake in the collection of the Lochis family of Bergamo in Italy . A second copy was located in Turin , belonging to a Count Castellane Harrach , also on copper and described as smaller than the original , and " very weak " . Both are now lost .

Ink markings on the marble reverse show a small cross which may record a merchant 's mark or emblem . Although it is incomplete and no identification has been made , W. H. J. Weale detected the mark of " an early Italian , probably Venetian owner " . An early provenance in Italy would not imply that the man came from that country ; van Eyck 's works were often purchased by collectors from that region .