

St Petersburg – offers advantages to both parties. Mikhail Piotrovsky intends to make the Hermitage a ‘global museum’. He views the branch in Amsterdam as a visiting card. He hopes, with these exhibitions in the Netherlands, to arouse people’s interest in visiting St Petersburg. There is also a minor financial benefit for the Russians – from each ticket sold, 1 euro goes to the museum in St Petersburg. The proceeds will be put towards the much-needed restoration of works of art in its collection.

Jan Van Hove

*Translated by Gregory Ball*

[www.hermitage.nl](http://www.hermitage.nl)

Exhibitions:

Matisse to Malevich. Pioneers of Modern Art from the Hermitage (6 March 2010 - 17 September 2010).

Alexander the Great. The Road to the East (18 September 2010 - Spring 2011).

## **‘Van Eyck to Dürer’**

### **A Matter of Influence**

In 2002, as a major attraction for Bruges’ year as Cultural Capital of Europe, the city’s museums mounted the exhibition *Van Eyck, early Netherlandish painting and the south, 1430-1530*. It clearly showed that in the fifteenth century what was called the *ars nova* of the Low Countries, which started with Van Eyck’s generation, had a fundamental influence on painting in southern Europe – Italy, southern France, Spain and Portugal – and was seen as an inspiring source of renewal. This reversal of the traditional image of the development of Renaissance art – although it is of course well known and has been regularly studied – was a revelation to the many art lovers who poured into the exhibition. It was a huge success and the catalogue has become a standard guide to this subject.

At the end of 2010, the *Groeninge Museum* will, as a sequel to the 2002 exhibition, be taking up an even more complex challenge. Under the title *Van Eyck to Dürer* it will outline the artistic exchanges between the Netherlands and Central Europe from about 1420 to 1530. In this instance, Central Europe is defined geographically on the basis of the Holy Roman Empire and its immediate sphere of influence, and so – although the present national borders bear little similarity to the situation at that time – it extends roughly from the Baltic States through Poland and Germany south to the northern part of Romania and parts of the Balkans. In terms of dates, the exhibition starts with the generation that included Van Eyck, Campin and Rogier Van Der Weyden and ends with the decade following Albrecht Dürer’s celebrated journey to the Low Countries in 1521, a journey which was this German master’s homage to the pictorial culture of the Flemish Primitives, but at the same also marked the triumphant entrance of a new type of Renaissance artist. In contrast to the 2002 exhibition, this complex artistic interaction is shown not only by means of paintings, but miniatures, prints and drawings, and to a lesser extent sculptures, will also help tell the story.

After a brief introduction describing the late mediaeval ‘international style’ that prevailed all over



Anonymous, *Portrait of a Woman* (c. 1480) © Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Europe, the first part of the exhibition will emphasise the rapid spread of the *'ars nova'* between 1420 and 1450, Van Eyck's huge reputation, and his influence on his contemporaries (including such German artists as Konrad Witz, Stephan Lochner, Conrad Laib and countless other, often anonymous, artists who are hardly known except to specialists, but whose works undoubtedly hold some surprises). A number of thematically arranged ensembles will make it clear how both technical and stylistic elements (painting methods, concept of space, detailing, naturalism, etc.) and specific motifs and iconographic inventions were systematically imitated, sometimes quite literally, al-

most slavishly, but just as often in a much freer, more indirect manner.

In the period following this (roughly 1450-1500) the picture became significantly more complex and it was much less a matter of one-way traffic. Processes of mutual artistic interaction took shape, largely stimulated by travelling artists and by the great and rapid boom in printmaking, which enabled motifs and styles to be distributed at lightning speed. Such painters as Michael Wolgemuth, Martin Schongauer and Hans Holbein the Elder travelled to Flanders from every corner of the Holy Roman Empire and their work was demonstrably influenced by the masters of the Low

Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of an Unidentified Man* (1521)  
© Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid.



Countries. Some of them, Hans Holbein for instance, settled permanently in the Southern Netherlands and themselves even became part of the canon of the Flemish Primitives. But it is equally characteristic of this period that the work (especially the prints) of such masters as Schongauer Israhel von Meckenem and the Hausbuchmeister influenced artists in the Low Countries. The culmination of this process was the printed work of Dürer, which was exceptionally popular in the Low Countries and all over Europe in the first few decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is with this artist that the exhibition ends, and the influence he had on the generation that included Jan Gossaert, Joachim

Patinir, Barent van Orley and Quinten Massys. In this third wave, the influence came mainly from the East to the Netherlands, thus reversing the process that started with Van Eyck.

In addition to showing these three successive stages of artistic exchange, the aim is also to turn the spotlight on four other topics: the conspicuous and large-scale export of Flemish art, throughout the period covered by the exhibition; differences and similarities in patronage between towns and the middle class on the one hand and courts and the aristocracy on the other; the various means of distribution (drawings, copies, prints, etc.); and lastly the assimilation of the influence

of the Flemish Primitives in such diverse regions as the Baltic States, Poland, Hungary, Transylvania and Bohemia.

It is obvious that this exhibition is not lacking in ambition, more so because the subject has never yet been the subject of an exhibition and has been examined only in sections of specialist studies in the academic literature.

Manfred Sellink

*Translated by Gregory Ball*

*Van Eyck to Dürer, at the Groeninge Museum in Bruges from 29 October 2010 to 30 January 2011.*

[www.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be](http://www.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be)