

# Countenances of the deepest attentiveness: the historical reputation of Jan van Scorel's portraits\*

Albert Godycki



Figure 1 Jan van Scorel, *Twelve Members of the Utrecht Brotherhood of Jerusalem Pilgrims*, c. 1525. Oil on panel. Utrecht: Centraal Museum.

The historical fame of Jan van Scorel (1495 - 1562) can be said to rest on two factors: his earliest biographers emphasised his sojourn in Italy and marked him out as the bringer of a 'new style' back to his native Netherlands; for more recent art history, it is the privileged position which Alois Riegl accorded to the painter as the first artist to have created an autonomous group portrait.<sup>1</sup> It is then perhaps to be expected that the bulk of Scorel's output has been in the past interpreted through either or both of these methodological lenses. Yet, with all long-term historiographies the inevitable fluctuations in academic and more broadly social circumstances have variably conditioned the understanding and position of Scorel's oeuvre in art historical narratives, not least in that of portraiture which is the concern of the present paper. By drawing attention to early biographers' statements on Scorel, and by expanding Riegl's analysis to include other portraits, not just the oft-cited series of Jerusalem Pilgrim portraits (fig. 1)<sup>2</sup>, this paper aims to examine how an illustrious

*\* I wish to thank the conference organisers, Doctor Mateusz Grzeda and Professor Marek Walczak, for the opportunity to participate in the conference, and for the stimulating exchanges which it generated. This paper greatly benefited from those exchanges. My thanks also to Professor Joanna Woodall, whose patience seems to know no bounds.*

<sup>1</sup> What exactly was meant by Scorel's 'new style' (*nieuw manier*) as Karel van Mander described it, is discussed in E. R. Meyer, 'Jan van Scorels "Nieuw Manier"', *Oud Holland*, 70: 4, 1955, 189-93. Alois Riegl published his hypothesis in Alois Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> On these portraits see Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 84-94. More recent studies on the series are to be found in Joanna Woodall, 'Painted Immortality: Portraits of Jerusalem Pilgrims by Antonis Mor and Jan van Scorel', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 31, 1989, 155-56; Louise Van Tongerloo, 'Grablegung und Totengedenken bei Pilgerbruderschaften in Utrecht, mit einer Neuinterpretation von Scorels und Mors Bildnisreihen von Jerusalemfahrern,' *Care for the Here and the Hereafter: Memoria, Art and Ritual in the Middle Ages*, edited by Truus van Bueren, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, 221-45. Molly Faries and Liesbeth M. Helmus, eds., *Catalogue of Paintings, 1363-1600: Centraal Museum Utrecht*, Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2011, cat. nos 21a-b, 26, 29.

historiographic pedigree has influenced the understanding of Scorel's portraiture, and calls for a reevaluation of his contribution to this genre and of his significance as a portraitist for future generations of Netherlandish painters. Scorel was an outstandingly complex individual living in outstandingly complex times, and he actively engaged in depicting people of myriad social and intellectual backgrounds with whom he had varying degrees of personal familiarity. His portraits emerged at a time when Europe was entering the so-called early modern period, which would see a revolution (even a liberation) of the individual in relation to long-standing institutions and assumptions.<sup>3</sup> It thus seems pertinent to reconsider Scorel's approach to portraying the individual.

The earliest biographical mention concerning Scorel is probably the epigrammatic poem written during the artist's lifetime by his friend the humanist poet Janus Secundus (1511-1536).<sup>4</sup> As would be the case for most of the accounts of Scorel's life throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Secundus' praise for his fellow countryman orbits around Scorel's Roman sojourn. Departing the Netherlands sometime before 1518, the young artist made an extended journey south to Italy, passing through, among other places, Cologne, Strasbourg, Basel, and Nuremberg (he is said to have met Albrecht Dürer), before arriving in Venice from where he set off on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Upon his return to Italy in 1521, Scorel landed a job as curator of the Belvedere Collection under the patronage of the Dutch pope, Adrian VI (1459-1523), a post previously held by Raphael.<sup>5</sup> The pope's death in 1523 cut-short Scorel's employment and his stay in Rome, precipitating his return to Utrecht where he completed the *Twelve Members of the Utrecht Brotherhood of Jerusalem Pilgrims* around 1525 (fig. 1). Nevertheless, this short stay - including the high-profile appointment - was impetus enough for Secundus to herald Scorel as the 'divine renewer of art' ('divinae renovator artis') who defined a new beauty in Netherlandish painting as a result of his travels along the Rhine and his stay in Rome.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On portraits and the concept of individuality see Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. On the changes in the position of the individual within society and the challenges faced by these changes see most recently Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014; and Hilary Gatti, *Ideas of Liberty in Early Modern Europe: From Machiavelli to Milton*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> On Secundus see George Clarence Schoolfield, *Janus Secundus*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980; Clifford Endres, *Joannes Secundus: the Latin Love Elegy in the Renaissance*, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1981; and David Price, *Janus Secundus*, Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer suggested that Scorel's stay in Rome was more the result of his prestigious contract with the Vatican rather than an outright interest in studying Classical and contemporary Roman artistry; Meyer, 'Jan van Scorels', 190.

<sup>6</sup> 'I, fausto pede, patrias ad urbes / Divinae renovator artis. Pictorum sublimis honos, columenque virorum / Artificum rudibusque novum decus edite terris / Qui procul ad patrios orbis monumenta Latini / Fers agros Rhenique locas ad flumina Romam.' Quoted in Arnoldus Buchelius, *Res Pictoriae*, edited by G.J. Hoogewerff and J.Q. van Regteren Altena, S'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1928, 28-9, n. 2.

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Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the leitmotif of Scorel as 'renewer of art' was further emphasised by the antiquarian Aernout van Buchel (1565-1641). Aware of Secundus' lines about Scorel, Buchel added that the painter equals other artists he referred to as Apelles (including Maarten van Heemskerck, Jan Gossaert and Albrecht Dürer).<sup>7</sup> These statements, however, which appear in Buchel's catalogue of painters compiled between 1585 and 1590, had a limited audience not like the popular editions of Hieronymus Cock's (1518-1570) *Pictorum aliquot celebrium Germaniae inferioris effigies* published ten years after Scorel's death in 1572 with verses by Dominicus Lampsonius (1532-1599). Comprised of a series of engraved portraits now attributed to Johannes Wierix (1549-1618), Scorel's image carries an inscription written in the first person, and is again centred around his stay in Rome; Scorel's voice tells the viewer of the importance of using 'a thousand pencils and pigments, and [to] paint pictures in that [i.e., Roman] school' in order to become a truly gifted artist.<sup>8</sup>

In 1604 Karel van Mander sourced these earlier biographies when he compiled his own account of the artist's life, and when speaking of Scorel as the 'torch-bearer' ('Lanteeren-drager') and 'road-maker' ('Straet-maker') for 'our art in the Netherlands' ('onser Consten in den Nederlanden') Van Mander seems to be picking up directly from Secundus.<sup>9</sup> Although in stating Scorel was the first to visit Italy Van Mander neglects his own comments to the same degree on other artists, his praise reflects Scorel's widespread influence on the current and later generation of painters labeled Romanists.<sup>10</sup> According to Van Mander, Scorel's fusion of the Italian manner with the diligent practices of a Northerner, revealed the 'correct essence and the best appearance of figures' as already accomplished by the Italians.<sup>11</sup> Evidently following Vasari's general line of thought on artistic practice, Van Mander promotes the notion that a discriminating artistic judgment is developed not only by simply working from life (for nature can be both beautiful and ugly), but by the careful and repetitive study of classical sculptures best done

<sup>7</sup> Buchelius, *Res Pictoriae*, 33-4, n. 4.

<sup>8</sup> 'Primus ego egregios pictura invisere Romam / Exemplo docuisse meo per secula Belgas / Cuncta ferar ; neque enim iusti dignandus honore / Artificis, qui non graphidas, pigmentaque mille / Consumpsit, tabulasque schola depinxit illa.' Translation by Joanna Woodall. See the excellent on-line resource and e-publication on the *Effigies* by Woodall and Stephanie Porras; <http://www.courtauld.org.uk/netherlandishcanon/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> These phrases are apparently attributable to the Antwerp painter Frans Floris who reported them to Van Mander. Karel van Mander and Hessel Miedema, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the Schilder-Boeck (1603-1604): Preceded by the Lineage, Circumstances and Place of Birth, Life and Works of Karel Van Mander, Painter and Poet and Likewise His Death and Burial, from the Second Edition of the Schilder-Boeck (1616-1618)*, Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994, 197, fol. 234v.

<sup>10</sup> The artists Van Mander mentions having made journeys to Italy are Jan van Hemsen (fol. 205r), Barend of Brussels (fol. 211r), Pieter Koeck (fol. 218v), Michiel Coxcie (fol. 258v), Lambert Lombard (fol. 220r), Gossart (fol. 225v) and Swart (fol. 227v). This incongruence is revealed in Van Mander and Miedema, *The Lives*, 268, 270.

<sup>11</sup> Van Mander and Miedema, *The Lives*, 194, fol. 234r.

with a visit to Rome.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Van Mander distinctly highlights that a Netherlander's, and particularly Scorel's act of copying from life ('nae bootsen') was a more probing and inquisitive study of the nature of a subject.<sup>13</sup> Commenting on Scorel's *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1528, Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) painted a few years after his return from Rome, Van Mander observes in this work 'some finely drawn women, with very graceful, Raphaellesque faces' ('gracelijcke Raphaelsche tronikens').<sup>14</sup> These graceful faces likely reminded Van Mander of the works of art he saw during his own stay in Rome between 1574 and 1577. And, indeed, Scorel would have known, in his capacity as curator at the Vatican, Raphael's contributions to the decoration of the Loggia at the Villa Farnesina and the papal Stanza di Eliodoro, in which the figures carry an affinity to certain men and women seen in the Haarlem *Baptism*.<sup>15</sup>

As the records show, each of these biographers credited Scorel with bringing Italian artistic innovations back to the Netherlands. Although the impact of Rome's patrimony and Scorel's custodianship over its most prized specimens is detectable in some of the paintings he produced after his return to Utrecht, the majority of his portraits retained what might be described as the precision of a northern, and were more influenced by Venetian portrait practices than by any Roman examples.<sup>16</sup> These historical statements, made at a time of pronounced social upheaval in the Netherlands and in the nascent Dutch Republic in particular, are perhaps easier to attribute to their authors' pride of place or poetic licence than to an account

<sup>12</sup> Van Mander and Miedema, *The Lives*, 194, fol. 234r.

<sup>13</sup> Van Mander uses the term 'nae bootsen' rather than 'conterfeyten' to mean copying which highlights this difference. The significance of this lexical choice was observed by R. Hoecker, *Das Lehrgedicht des Karel van Mander; Text, Uebersetzung und Kommentar, nebst Anhang ueber Manders Geschichtskonstruktion und Kunsttheorie*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1916, 445-446 n. 343; See also Van Mander and Miedema, *The Lives*, 274.

<sup>14</sup> Van Mander and Miedema, *The Lives*, 201-202, fol. 235v-236r.

<sup>15</sup> Discussed in greater detail in Albert Godycki, *Between Tradition and Innovation: Jan van Scorel and Portraiture in the Early Sixteenth-century Netherlands*, unpublished MA dissertation, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, 2010, 14.

<sup>16</sup> See note 5 above, Meyer, 'Jan van Scorels', 190. In the three-quarter view, the engaging gaze, and the landscape background of Scorel's *Portrait of a Man, Aged Thirty-Two* (1521, Paris, Musee du Louvre) painted during his stay in Venice, Molly Faries sees parallels with portraits by Antonello, Bellini, Giorgione, and particularly with a work by Marco Basaiti today in Philadelphia; Molly Faries, 'Made in Venice, Jan van Scorel's Earliest Portraits', in *Face Book, Studies on Dutch and Flemish Portraiture of the 16th-18th Centuries, Liber Amicorum Presented to Rudolf E.O. Ekkart on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Leiden: Primavera, 2012, 31-2. Scorel's Venetian portraits, Faries has even argued, would come to define the rest of Scorel's portrait practice back in the Netherlands, beginning with the Pilgrim portraits. Faries - an authoritative Scorel scholar noted for her comprehensive technical investigation of the artist's oeuvre - also observed what Meyer suggested in 1955: that the innovations Scorel introduced back to the Netherlands and which Van Mander labelled as his 'beautiful new manner' ('schoonder nieuw manier') were the result of technical improvements - in composing and physically executing the painting - rather than stylistic deviations; Meyer, 'Jan van Scorels', 190.

regulated by purely factual concerns.<sup>17</sup> It is especially tempting to read those remarks made towards the end of the sixteenth century (Van Buchel and Van Mander) as accented with nationalistic fervour and the desire to bolster a national identity through the territory's artistic heritage.<sup>18</sup>

Only in the later nineteenth century did the focus and tone of the writings on Scorel's oeuvre appear to begin to change. In fact, a shift away from the biographical approach in art history towards one more inclusive of general artistic concepts, such as genre and style, was characteristic of the methods practiced by the so-called Vienna School of Art History around the turn of the nineteenth century; here Alois Riegl was one of its foremost practitioners.<sup>19</sup> In 1902 Riegl published *The Group Portraiture of Holland* in which he extolled upon the evolution of this genre beginning with Scorel's pilgrim portraits and culminating with Rembrandt's and Frans Hals' late group portraits. The fact that Riegl does not compartmentalise the history of Dutch portraiture into the *de facto* national history of the Dutch Republic, with its origins in the 1580s, but expands his temporal field of analysis to include Scorel (and actually to begin with an artist active in the fifteenth century) is indicative of the holistic tone of his writing.<sup>20</sup> Riegl's analysis, which focuses exclusively on the pilgrim portraits and does not include any of Scorel's single-figure works, not only placed these them within the greater context of the group portrait genre, but crucially established them as its first exponents. Because of their compositional divorce from a religious narrative as seen in a work by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (1465-1495)<sup>21</sup>, Scorel's pilgrim portraits stand as the earliest autonomous group portraits.<sup>22</sup> As such, Riegl claimed, they better reveal the artist's treatment of individual physiognomies.

<sup>17</sup> With the exception of Van Mander and Lampsonius who were born in Flanders. Van Mander fled to Haarlem in 1583 while Lampsonius' *Pictorum* was widely disseminated in the Northern Netherlands.

<sup>18</sup> On such cultural propaganda in the Netherlands, especially in the early years of the Republic see Truus van Bueren, *Tot lof van Haarlem: het beleid van de stad Haarlem ten aanzien van de kunstwerken uit de geconfisqueerde geestelijke instellingen*, Hilversum: Verloren, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher S. Wood, ed., *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, New York: Zone Books, 2000, 9-30. Specifically, Riegl was departing from biographical art history of the type practiced by the German Carl Justi.

<sup>20</sup> By situating his 'first period' of the group portrait in Holland in 1526-66 and thus not concurrent with the raise of the Dutch Republic, Riegl distanced himself from the type of nationalist tone in the writing on Dutch art that characterised Fromentin's *Les maîtres d'autrefois* published in 1877. As has been recently noted, Fromentin's approach had long-lasting consequences which 'distorts in a number of ways the story of the Dutch Golden Age'; Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., 'Wtewael's Historical Reputation', in *Pleasure and Piety: The Art of Joachim Wtewael*, edited by James Clifton, Liesbeth M. Helmus, and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, 40. On the equally nationalistic 'Rembrandtomania' of the nineteenth century and Riegl's relationship to it see Diana Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905: An Institutional Biography*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014, 231-34.

<sup>21</sup> Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *Burning of the Bones of St. John, Lamentation Altarpiece*, c. 1485, oil on panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

<sup>22</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 84.

*Group Portraiture of Holland* also included what was perhaps Riegl's greatest contribution to the practice of art history, namely introducing a theory of reception. As Wolfgang Kemp notes, 'art history on the basis of the "relation to the beholder" was first practiced... [here]'.<sup>23</sup> The origins of this 'relation' Riegl identified in Scorel's portraits. Scorel's greatest achievement according to Riegl took place in the individualised depiction of demeanour and psychological character. Thus the portraits expressed 'attentiveness' to the outside world, allowing the sitters to communicate with it. In later developments of the group portrait, Riegl would name this link with the outside world as the characteristic feature of the Dutch version of this genre.<sup>24</sup> Diana Cordileone has recently observed that Riegl was interested in how 'the beholder could communicate with an artwork across time and space';<sup>25</sup> in Cordileone's words, Riegl defined attentiveness as 'an attitude of resignation and assimilation towards the world.'<sup>26</sup> Riegl found that a northern version of spirituality was expressed uniquely in Scorel's pilgrim portraits; as he stated, 'the men's countenances express the deepest attentiveness, an inner calm and at the same time an openness to the outer world that we would call soul.'<sup>27</sup> Riegl here creates an opposition between the willingness to communicate with the viewer depicted in the pilgrim portraits and their precedents (Geertgen's *Lamentation Altarpiece*) which had either been closed off to the external world by lack of eye-contact or by subordination to a subject within the pictorial scene: 'Insofar as they [i.e. the pilgrim portraits] consciously suppress the expression of will, they no longer achieve pictorial unity through subordination, but through a far deeper psychological expression of subjectivity.'<sup>28</sup> Riegl proposed Scorel to be the innovator who brought to portraiture what the secularising tendencies of the Reformation brought to the individual: the representation of self liberated from an institutional framework.<sup>29</sup> That Scorel's portraits manifested not only their sitter's likenesses but their will was in Riegl's view a crucial factor in the evolution of (group) portraiture.

### Excavating Scorel's method for portraiture

In calling to reevaluate Scorel's portraits and their impact, Riegl's analysis of the group portraits is an important starting place. Although he never examines other works, it is clear that, through the example of the pilgrim portraits, Riegl considered Scorel skilfully able at depicting the individual.<sup>30</sup> Concerned with both the formal aspects and the functional reach of the pilgrim portraits, Riegl established through *Group Portraiture of Holland* a crucial position for Scorel in the evolution of the Dutch

<sup>23</sup> See the introduction in Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> According to Margaret Iversen, this was Riegl's whole premise; Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art history and Theory* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993, 93.

<sup>25</sup> Cordileone, *Alois Riegl*, 217.

<sup>26</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 92.

<sup>29</sup> See Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, especially chapters 24, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 369, n. 8; this was in contrast to Carl Justi's assessment of Scorel; see Carl Justi, *Briefe aus Italien*, Bonn: F. Cohen, 1922.

genre. Possibly as a result of this, later scholars began to incorporate Jan van Scorel more substantially into their research: G. J. Hoogewerff published in 1923 the first monograph on the artist, while in 1935 Max Friedländer would include Scorel (an artist he had long studied) in a substantial section of his *Altniederländische Malerei*.<sup>31</sup> In his famous survey of Netherlandish painting, Friedländer referred to Scorel's group portraits as 'our point of departure' for the study of the rest of his portrait art.<sup>32</sup> When Riegl assessed the quality of Scorel's portraiture, his conclusion is twofold, essentially locating Scorel as both a traditionalist and an innovator. On the one hand the sombre quality of the sitters' faces bespeaks a typically 'Nordic' manner;<sup>33</sup> while on the other, Italian influences penetrate and are revealed in the 'sculptural' treatment of certain heads.<sup>34</sup> The observation of sculptural qualities in Scorel's depiction of the human head would be a trope carried into later analyses of his portraits, including those carried out by Friedländer. For Riegl at least, Scorel advanced the art form significantly in this respect, making innovative strides which were at the vanguard of visual techniques.

Then again, the formal improvements Scorel applied served to intensify the concept of attentiveness which Riegl's identified as operating in the group portraits. The extension of this concept into other works is also possible; Scorel's portrait of his long-time companion Agatha van Schoonhoven (fig. 2; 1529, Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj) and the *Portrait of a Man* (fig. 3; c. 1529, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) are just two works which might be said to exhibit attentiveness, 'human will and cubic three-dimensionality'.<sup>35</sup> In Agatha's portrait, elements such as the tilted head, the suggestive smile, the hand pointing towards her heart, and the peculiar edit of her bonnet concealing part of her left eye, depart from the stiffness and presumed

<sup>31</sup> G.J. Hoogewerff, *Jan van Scorel, peintre de la renaissance hollandaise*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1923. Max J. Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel and Pieter Coeck van Aelst', *Early Netherlandish painting*, Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1967-1975.

<sup>32</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 72. For Faries the group of portraits that effectively served as the prototypes for Scorel's later portraits were the works executed during the artist stay in Venice under the influence of Bellini and others; Faries, 'Made in Venice', 31.

<sup>33</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 94. Especially in the portrait of *Five Members of the Utrecht Brotherhood of Jerusalem Pilgrims* (Utrecht, Centraal Museum) which Riegl attributes to Scorel's pupil Anthonis Mor though it is generally agreed to be a work executed by Scorel, possibly with the assistance of Mor; see Joanna Woodall, *Anthonis Mor: Art and Authority*, Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2007, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 92. He also refers to the 'intensified relief' of the portrait as an innovation pointing to Italian sources, particularly Michelangelo (and he may here have in mind Michelangelo's marble relief *The Battle of Cascina*). For historical comments on the quality of Scorel's portraits: Friedländer 'Jan van Scorel', 71; a legation from Venice visited Scorel's studio in Rome in 1523 where they viewed two portraits of the pope, remarking how they are superior to the effigies on sale in Rome. The likeness was apparently so convincing that the legates were able to comment on the pope's character, complexion and heath; Marino Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto (MCCCCXCVI-MDXXXIII) dall' autografo Marciano ital. cl. VII codd. CDXIX-CDLXXVII*, edited by Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, and Marco Allegri, Venice: F. Visentini, 1879-1903, 42.

<sup>35</sup> '...especially in regard to reobjectifying the human figure, and depicting human will and cubic three-dimensionality.' Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 90.

formality seen in the portraits created by Scorel's predecessors such as Cornelisz. van Oostanen (his one-time teacher in Amsterdam) and Gossaert. (Indeed, this constellation of elements led Friedländer to describe Agatha's character as one of 'conspiratorial roguishness'.)<sup>36</sup> In the *Portrait of a Man* similar elements can be identified in the furrowed eyebrows, and again the angling of the head, and the gesture of the hand to the heart - a sign which seems to convey self-affirming empathy, here in the wake of a now absent Virgin and Child.<sup>37</sup> But where might Scorel have learnt such techniques?

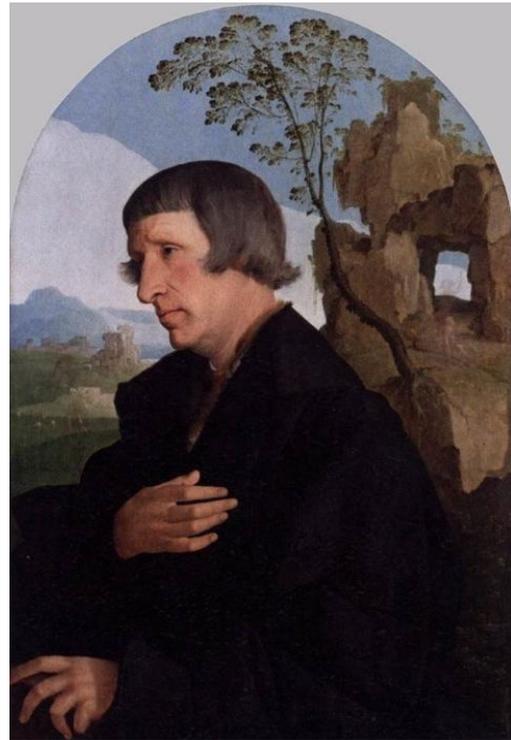


Figure 2 Jan van Scorel, *Portrait of Agatha van Schoonhoven*, 1529. Oil on panel. Rome: Galleria Doria Pamphilj.

Figure 3 Jan van Scorel, *Portrait of a Man*, c. 1529. Oil on panel. Berlin: Staatliche Museen.

Lorne Campbell once concluded that by the close of the sixteenth-century most of the formal innovations in the genre of portraiture had, to a certain degree, been exhausted.<sup>38</sup> A significant amount of reform seems to have been in effect around the first two decades of the century, when Scorel was traveling and visiting the studios of Gossart at Wijk bij Duurstede, Hans Baldung Grien at Strasbourg, Hans Holbein the Younger at Basel, and Dürer at Nuremberg among others.<sup>39</sup> A

<sup>36</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 73.

<sup>37</sup> The *Portrait of a Man* in Berlin was once a diptych with a *Virgin in Child* now in the Kartinnaja Galerija, Tambov. Another example is Scorel's *Portrait of a Man*, c. 1540, York Art Gallery, York.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, *Renaissance portraits*, (see Introduction).

<sup>39</sup> Molly Faries, 'Scorel, Jan van', *Dictionary of Art*, edited by J. Turner, London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 1996, vol. 28, 215. On the influence of Scorel's first teachers see, J.A.L. de Meyere, *Jan van Scorel Schilder voor prinsen en prelaten*, Utrecht: Centraal Museum Utrecht,

humanist education and extensive travel at a time when ideas were slow to cross national borders appear to have been two other major factors in the development of Scorel's particular mode of portraiture. In matters of artistic theory especially there is a strong possibility that much of what Scorel incorporated into his portrait practice came from the influence of Dürer, and at the very least from the widespread impact his works and his ideas had on artists across the continent from around the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

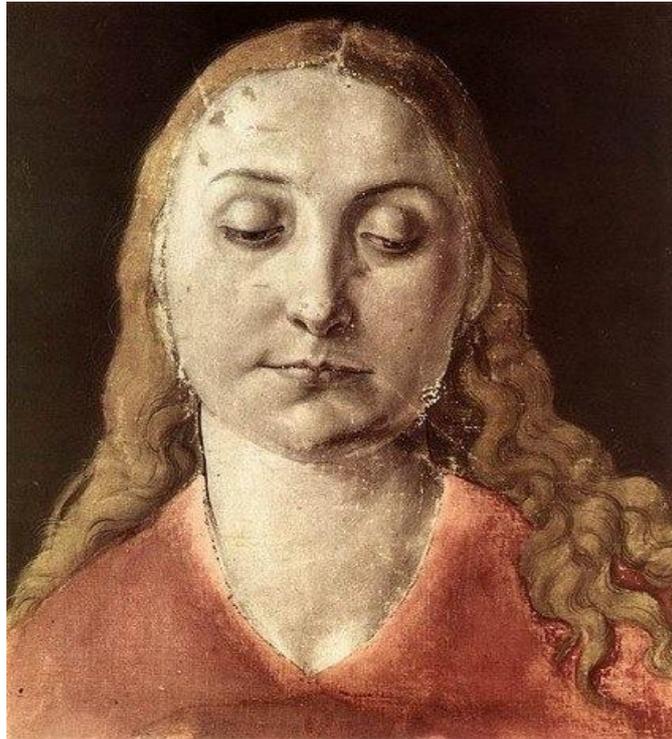


Figure 4 Albrecht Dürer, *Head of a Woman*, 1520. Tempera on canvas.  
Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

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1981, 5-6, Faries, 'Scorel', 215, and Molly Ann Faries, 'Jan van Scorel in Venice: Crosscurrents of Influence and Technique', *Nord/Sud, Presenze e Ricezione Fiamminghe in Liguria, Veneto e Sardegna, Prospettive di Studio e Indagini Tecniche*, Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2007, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955. Whether or not Scorel encountered the works of the Danube School painter Marx Reichlich is uncertain; however, given Scorel's extended stay in this area, necessitated by the altarpiece commission and a striking visual affinity between Reichlich's strongly modelled portraits and Scorel's practice in this genre, the possibility can here be presented. On Reichlich's portraits see E. Egg, 'Marx Reichlich, der Meister des Angererbildnisses', *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, XIV, 1960, 1-18.



Figure 3 5. Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of a Man*, 1521. Oil on panel. Madrid: Prado.

Scorel's encounter with Dürer in 1518 may have sparked his interest not only in the German's paintings, but significantly in his writings about art. Coincidentally, it was during this period that Dürer began to concentrate on the production of portraits and on the formalisation of his aesthetic principles. Scorel would almost certainly have become familiar with Dürer's influence either through his paintings and prints or, crucially, through the widely disseminated editions of his writings, above all the *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* printed in Basel in 1528. Dürer's increased production of portraiture in the later years of his life was accompanied by an inspired interest in theoretical principles underlying the mechanical construction of images. Erwin Panofsky interpreted the artist's desire towards such explanations as a need 'to clarify and master reality' and he characterised this late style as 'cubistic', stressing angulature rather than curvature in prints and achieving a 'stereometric simplification' in his approach to the human head as seen in the *Head of a Woman* of 1520 (fig. 4; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France).<sup>41</sup> A visual comparison can here be drawn between Dürer's portraits (i.e., fig. 5, *Portrait of a Man*, 1521, Madrid, Prado; *Portrait of the Emperor Maximilian I*, 1518, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), which reveal 'enhanced and renewed plastic values of the portrait itself' and Scorel's *Portrait of a Man* of 1529 now in Frankfurt (fig. 6; Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum).<sup>42</sup> A drawing, from around 1519 (Dresden, Sächsische Landsbibliothek), shows that in order to achieve volumetric three-

<sup>41</sup> Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 200-202.

<sup>42</sup> Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 200.

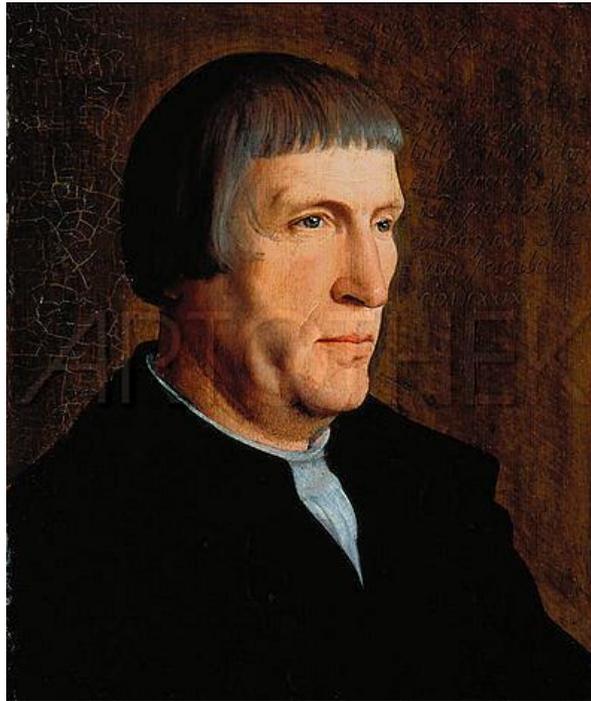


Figure 6 Jan van Scorel, *Portrait of a Man*, 1529. Oil on panel.  
Frankfurt am Main: Städel Museum.

dimensionality Dürer reduced the head to a group of angularly joined facets, modelled in light and shadow with the addition of parallel hatchings.<sup>43</sup> Riegl listed among Scorel's artistic preoccupations a 'cubic three-dimensionality' which reveals his mission to depict 'human will' and to '[reobjectify] the human figure' and in so doing bring Netherlandish art 'up-to-date'.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, several times in his analysis of Scorel's portraiture, Friedländer comments on the geometric appearance of his portraits: of the Haarlem group (c. 1528, Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) he states they are 'constructed of light and dark planes, inserted softly, occasionally at almost crystalline angles to one another'.<sup>45</sup> He (like Riegl before him) also attributes the modelled, sculptural effect of the portraits to Scorel's use of light: 'Light shines in from the left in such a way that the deepest shadows gather at and under the nose and especially the cheeks, the jawbone being set off sharply at the throat'.<sup>46</sup> In Scorel's early *Portrait of a Man* of 1521 (Paris, Louvre) for instance the sitter's face is modelled in 'ponderous, sharply demarcated shadows'.<sup>47</sup>

A reasoned and systematically applied theory permeates Dürer's oeuvre from around 1518 onwards. Yet, the construction of a face was not solely based on the random grouping of geometric shapes and shaded planes; this was the method extolled in Dürer's treaties of 1528, relying on orderly, mathematical principles.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Illustrated in Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, fig. 312.

<sup>44</sup> Riegl, *Group Portraiture*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 78.

<sup>46</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 72.

<sup>47</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 79.

<sup>48</sup> Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 204.

The construction of a third dimension and of cubic effect was dependent upon Dürer's theory of parallel projection, which in essence served as matrix for the depiction of any object in three-dimensional conviction.<sup>49</sup> A head, for example, could be made to appear illusionistic in a two-dimensional medium if its profile or *en face* contours are placed on an axial grid; a second contour of the opposite type is then prepared and the same grid transposed. From these two images a composite can be created on one grid and thus give the effect of three-dimensionality. Importantly, the method facilitates minute adjustment to facial features into the appropriate perspectival illusion. It is a theory which resounds with compelling effect in Scorel's portraits. With the subtle nuances of the face described by the artist, the sitter appears less rigid and more spontaneous. Whilst painting her portrait, Scorel raised Agatha van Schoonhoven's headdress, revealing more of her forehead; he also widened her right cheek so to give the impression that she is at a lower level while turning to catch the viewer's gaze with her eyes.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, the spontaneity and casualness witnessed in Dutch portraits of the seventeenth century were described so contemporaneously; recently, Christopher Atkins has cogently argued that the desire to depict individuals as they may be seen in a given moment relates to a growing interest in the concepts time and self in the early modern period.<sup>51</sup> An individual at any given moment was thought to express a collection of previously experienced moments, and thus a depiction (Atkins is referring to Frans Hals specifically) which captures the sitter's temporal reality (and the accumulation of moments during the course of a sitting) is most revealing of that sitter's character. In portraits executed by Hals, it was the artist's characteristic spontaneity in paint handling that conveyed the sense of liveliness in his sitters. Interestingly, Friedländer attributes a characteristic spontaneity to the handling of the painted surface in Scorel's portraits, which not only evokes the sentiments embodied by its subject, but recalls the pilgrim portraits in their 'casual brush' of the rendering of hair and flesh.<sup>52</sup> His portraits are intimate, spontaneous, revealing of character and appear to have been swiftly executed, 'tossed off casually'.<sup>53</sup> Such tendencies, in Friedländer's examination, contrast the patron-conditioned circumstances of portrait production by Scorel's contemporaries; Scorel painted

<sup>49</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Dürers kunsttheorie, vornehmlich in ihrem verhältnis zur kunsttheorie der Italiener*, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915., 51-52, 56. See also Max Steck, *Albrecht Dürer als Kunsttheoretiker. Die geistes- und problemgeschichtliche Stellung seiner Proportionslehre im Kunstraum der Renaissance*, Zürich: Verlag Bibliophile Drucke von Josef Stocker, 1969.

<sup>50</sup> Infrared photographs which confirm this procedure by Molly Faries are now in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague; see Lorne Campbell, ed., *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, London: National Gallery, 2008, cat. no. 37 n. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher D. M. Atkins, *The Signature Style of Frans Hals. Painting, Subjectivity, and the Market in Early Modernity*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012. See also the present writer's review of former in *The Burlington Magazine*, February, 2014, 156: 1331.

<sup>52</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel' 73, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 84.

people 'for the sheer pleasure of recording a dear image rather than because he was being paid to do so.'<sup>54</sup>

A similar method to the one observed by seventeenth-century commentators on Hals' vivid portrayals appears to be at play in Scorel's portraits, one, however, that can be traced to early sixteenth-century practices of rhetoric. Concurrent to Scorel creating portraits was Erasmus reformulating the principles of rhetoric. In order to construct a new literary composition, Erasmus recommended an author pick out the best features from a variety of sources rather than follow one model. In Erasmus' view expressed in a dialogue entitled *Ciceronianus* and published in 1528 (the same year as Dürer's *Vier Bücher*) the direct imitation of a model stifled the humanist project.<sup>55</sup> Instead, he posited a free interpretation of various authors that selects what is best in each text in order to rework it into something new and better.<sup>56</sup> In this way the creator develops a sense of when to use one arrangement and when another; in short, it is a sense of judgment of what is most appropriate and when, a sense that both Vasari and Van Mander prescribed for the proper development of aesthetic taste.<sup>57</sup> The novelty of Dürer's idea of parallel projection laid in the very construction and presentation of the ideas contained in it: no longer providing model-books or templates from which artists could copy and thus rely mainly on their imaginations for the invention of figures, these properly humanist theories furnished artists with a matrix, a guide and a formula with which to approach a variety of unforeseeable tasks and situations (such as unique physiognomies) requiring two-dimensional visualisation.<sup>58</sup>

Scorel can thus be seen as adjusting that which is the established best of each feature in a portrait – eyes, nose, lips, etc. The execution of such a portrait came down to the selection of a sitter's best features; and perhaps what the viewer encounters is not the sitter's momentary appearance, but rather a consolidation of moments selected by the artist during the actual painting process. As with a growing number of portraits in the early modern period, the composition of Scorel's portraits would often radically change from that of the initial underdrawing, suggesting not only an intimate observation of the model, but a constant adjustment of the painted surface to garner the effects of physiognomic character as Dürer and Erasmus advise.<sup>59</sup> Such a process thus reflected what Erasmus prescribed through the act of informed imitation to create a 'living image of inner feelings'.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> As opposed to the portrait practices (i.e., what Friedländer reads in them) of Joos van Cleve, Jan Gossart or Quentin Massys who sought to 'read their character'. Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 73.

<sup>55</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Ciceronianus or a dialogue on the best style of speaking*, edited by Paul Monroe and translated by Izora Scott, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1908.

<sup>56</sup> Erasmus, *Ciceronianus*, 19-29.

<sup>57</sup> Van Mander and Miedema, 194, fol. 234r.

<sup>58</sup> This view is sustained by Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 242-243.

<sup>59</sup> Molly Ann Faries, 'Underdrawings in the workshop production of Jan van Scorel – A study with infrared reflectography', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 26, 1975, 97-99.

<sup>60</sup> Erasmus, *Ciceronianus*, 19-29.

Sometime around 1530, Janus Secundus, the poet who so highly praised Scorel in verse, sent his friend a portrait medal of his own making which depicted Secundus' beloved Julia, requesting the painter's expert opinion.<sup>61</sup> He did the same a while later with a medal of Jean de Carondelet, a powerful ecclesiastic, whose portrait Scorel also painted. In the letter to Scorel accompanying the medal of Carondelet, Secundus implores his friend to rely on his well-formed aesthetic judgment, to 'judge it sincerely, for I am hardly persuaded that the opinion you offered me concerning my portrait of Julia was accurate. Perhaps her image dazzled your eyes as it did mine.'<sup>62</sup> The poet's attempt to capture Julia's 'portrait' as opposed to her image which dazzles the eyes, thus reflects the notion that portraiture went beyond – or tried to go beyond – the plain mimeticism of external appearances. Thus composition (or manipulation) was a search for psychological depth as expressed through a particular physiognomy. In his *Elegies*, Secundus does in fact speak of the impossibility of portraying Julia's countenance:

But as I gaze, and more closely regard your eyes  
(whose glances rival Apollo the sun god's rays),  
my eyes cannot withstand your face beaming  
darts,  
and my listless hand lets fall the familiar chisel.

My courage fails, benumbed, forsakes my art,  
and loses even the memory of itself.  
Ah! it is forbidden mortals to portray goddesses!  
My wits reel, I am dumbstruck, alas! and stolen  
from myself.<sup>63</sup>

The anxiety - expressed here with overt poetic zeal - recalls the more ubiquitous contemporary debates over the superiority of artistic media (*paragone*) and, in the genre of portraiture, their ability to emulate a sitter's qualities, both those explicitly external and perceptively internal.<sup>64</sup> According to Leonardo's theory of the *paragone*, literary art falls short in descriptive eloquence when compared with painting.<sup>65</sup> Then again, the Northern sentiment expressed by Erasmus and his circle held that only an individual's writings could reveal true character, a belief reiterated in a portrait medal of Erasmus by Massys inscribed with the Greek phrase, 'His

<sup>61</sup> Price, *Janus Secundus*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Price, *Janus Secundus*, 36.

<sup>63</sup> Elegy 1.6: "Sed dum te video, et propius tua lumina specto, / Aemula Phoebis lumina luminibus, / Ferre negant oculi jaculantem spicula vultum, / Caelaque nota negat languida ferre manus. / Deficit et torpet, nec jam sibi conscius artis / Ullius est animus, nec memor ipse sui. / Ah! nulli fas est mortali effingere divas! / Mens cadit, obstuqueo, heu! et mihi surripior". Endres, *Joannes Secundus*, 97-98.

<sup>64</sup> For an excellent overview of these debates see Mary Rogers, 'Sonnets on female portraits from Renaissance North Italy', *Word & Image* 2: 4, 1986, 291-305.

<sup>65</sup> J.P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939, vol. I.

writings will present a better image'.<sup>66</sup> Like Secundus' portrait of Julia on the medal, the truer image of Erasmus is a notion in flux, vacillating between what is describable in words and what is conceivable in pictures.



Figure 7 Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Boniface Amerbach*, 1519. Oil on panel. Basel: Kunstmuseum

Returning to Scorel's portrait of Agatha van Schoonhoven, it becomes clear how this image of the artist's close female confidant was forged in the climate of expressive intimacy and representational paradoxes. Considering Scorel's time in Venice, perhaps the portrait is to some extent indebted to the tradition of the independent female portrait found in that Italian milieu.<sup>67</sup> Regardless the sources, works such as the portrait of Agatha exhibit what Craig Harbison and Mark Roskill described as the 'affinity of means and communicative ends between media – say

<sup>66</sup> Portrait medal of Erasmus by Quentin Massys, 1519, bronze. Diam 10.5 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Obverse: Portrait of Erasmus; reverse: Terminus (Erasmus' symbol of the classical deity).

<sup>67</sup> Then again, its technical construction can perhaps further elucidate the complexities of this condition. As opposed to Scorel's portraits of men in which facial features were rendered in a strong, angular "cubic" fashion, his portrait of Agatha is characterised by a softer blending between impasto highlights of the forehead and around the eyes and the delicate glazing around the cheeks. Campbell, *Renaissance Faces*, cat. no. 37. Although a smooth application of paint was typical of Scorel's technique, the absence here of any discernible hatching or direct applications of paint is evocative of an approach mimicking the notions of ideal female beauty, similarly practiced by Italian painters. On how surface quality was stressed and manipulated in the female portraits of Leonardo, Bellini and Titian see Rogers, 'Sonnets on female portraits', 294. At least some of the black chalk contours and outlines that define the sitter's features are visible to the naked eye. The application of such lines under colours that are by their nature more transparent (red lakes, flesh tones) may suggest that they were intended to be seen on the finished works, a possibility voiced by Faries, 'Jan van Scorel in Venice', 108.

painting and poetry – by artists exposed to processes of verbal expression'.<sup>68</sup> This 'affinity' applies to Holbein's portrait of the poet Boniface Amerbach (fig. 7; 1519, Basel, Kunstmuseum), which Scorel may even have seen during his visit to Holbein's studio in Basel in 1519.<sup>69</sup> Some of Amerbach's Latin (and partly Greek) couplets feature on a tablet affixed to a tree behind his image. The lines give the poet's likeness a voice, at the same time merging and distinguishing it from the artifice of the painting and the image it presents. In so doing, 'what belongs to nature [can be] actively expressed in the workings of art'.<sup>70</sup> According to Roskill and Harbison, this interplay between poetic composition and accurate likeness not only associates Holbein's authorship with that of another composer, but also 'parallel[s] in visual form the thrust of Amerbach's couplets'.<sup>71</sup> Directly related to this early sixteenth-century formula of blending visual and textual material into a portrait are Scorel's series of pilgrim portraits (fig. 1) in which the *cartellino* beneath each pilgrim address the viewer in the first-person, referring to the sites seen in the Holy Land and imploring God for compassion.

### A subtle afterlife

Locating the influences Scorel's portraits cast on later generations of painters can help better assess his eventual reputation in this genre. The frozen constellation of the sitter's inner qualities outwardly expressed which Scorel captured - reflective of actual and lived sentiment - bring to mind later developments in Dutch art which considered the expressive potential of the human face, most notably in the portraits by Frans Hals, already discussed.<sup>72</sup> A direct corollary to Scorel's Haarlem milieu are the works of Maarten van Heemskerck, whose portrait of a family (once attributed to Scorel; c. 1530, Kassel, Staatliche Museen) repeats his one-time collaborator's gestures (man), figural arrangement (woman with child) and smiles (children).<sup>73</sup> The

<sup>68</sup> Craig Harbison and Mark Roskill, 'On the nature of Holbein's portraits,' *Word & Image*, 3: 1, 1987, 1-26; the authors examine Holbein's portraits in relation Renaissance notions of metaphor and simile.

<sup>69</sup> A possibility voiced by Meyer, 'Jan van Scorel', 189. Maryan Ainsworth has linked certain physiognomical patterns in Hans Holbein's Basel period portraits to the artist's painterly technique which allowed him to shift a sitter's features depending on the contextual need of the representation. Like Holbein, Scorel in one instance used a sheet of foil to transfer the essential structure of a sitter's visage onto the Haarlem group portrait and from there produce slight modifications which were to emphasise the individual character; Maryan Ainsworth, "'Paternes for Phiosioneames": Holbein's Portraiture Reconsidered', *The Burlington Magazine*, 132: 1044, 1990, 173-186.

<sup>70</sup> Harbison and Roskill, 'Holbein's portraits', 12.

<sup>71</sup> Harbison and Roskill, 'Holbein's portraits', 12.

<sup>72</sup> Hals was almost certainly well acquainted with Scorel's paintings from his Haarlem sojourn in between 1528 and 1534, paintings which were in the early seventeenth century hanging in the city's Prinsenhof; Pieter Biesboer and Carol Togneri, eds, *Collections of Paintings in Haarlem 1572-1745*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002, 60-62.

<sup>73</sup> Friedländer, 'Jan van Scorel', 86. A smiling face has been variously interpreted over the centuries, but it was in the Renaissance that this physiognomic peculiarity began to appear in greater quantities and with greater emphasis in the visual art. And like the symbolic

coalescence of such fleeting elements as smiles and glances in Scorel's portrait of Agatha van Schoonhoven recalls portraiture in an age (the seventeenth century) when moral values and transience were accentuated with less symbolic and more naturalistic or allegorical visual tools: the portrait of Susanna Lunden (c. 1622-25; London, National Gallery) by Peter Paul Rubens (who knew and sketched figures from Scorel's works)<sup>74</sup> might perhaps be viewed in this heritage; and further onto a fully fledged self-portrait by Hals-inspired Judith Leyster (c. 1630; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art), whose self-affirmation as an artist coupled with the spontaneity of her pose seem to engage in the same material/image duality inherent in the portraiture of Scorel's day. If considered in its original arrangement, Scorel's portrait of a man now in Berlin (fig. 3) with the Virgin and Child in Tambov recall, in subject, composition, and gesture the sentiment of Anthony Van Dyck's *Virgin and Child with Donors* painted about a century later (c. 1630, Paris, Louvre).

Like so many cultural artefacts, the understanding of Scorel's portraits was profiled by the volatility of historical method. Today what emerges is an oeuvre of subtle artistry and intellectual sophistication garnered from far-reaching inspiration. Scorel's act of copying from life (*nae bootsen*) was a more probing and inquisitive study of the nature of a subject that also came to characterise his painterly examination of the individual. His portraits are the result of acute study and application of burgeoning ideas concerning the construction of a human countenance, but they are also connected to a broader humanist project entailing art theory, amatory poetry and rhetoric. Considering Scorel's absorption of influences during his travels, Dürer's theories, or Erasmus' analysis of rhetoric reveal that Scorel's portraits were properly part of a pan-European humanist project; this was an endeavour in which the individual (the artist) recognised both the volatility of the ever-changing external world in which the artist is not only capable of mimetic reproduction, but of intelligent and informed invention. Portraiture of an individual became an increasingly exacting study of the sitter's features in an effort to bring to the painted surface his or her subjective characteristics. Indeed, portraiture became a humanist pursuit and one in which Scorel engaged as an well-informed and highly cultured practitioner.

**Albert Godycki** is completing his doctoral thesis on the Dutch Mannerist Nude at The Courtauld Institute, London. Previously he was Harry M. Weinreb Curatorial Assistant at the National Gallery in London where he contributed to the exhibitions, *Late Rembrandt and Vermeer and Music*, in addition to carrying out research on the permanent collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings. He studied art history in New York, Krakow and Paris.

Albert.Godycki@courtauld.ac.uk

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momento mori it was perceived as a physical, gestural one.; See generally, Angus Trumble, *A Brief History of the Smile*, Oxford: Oxford Publicity Partnership, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> See the drawing in the Louvre c. 1605 illustrated in De Meyere, *Jan van Scorel*, 38. On Ruben's appreciation of Scorel see H. Vlieghe, 'Rubens en Van Scorel', *Oud Holland*, 94, 1980, 32-6.



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