

Art in the Netherlands.

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The art of the Netherlands is the art of Belgium and of Holland, represented by the Flemish school and the Dutch school. Obscurity shrouds the beginning of art in the Netherlands. Though there were examples of more or less merit previously, it was not until the beginning of the fifteenth century that a distinct Flemish school arose under the leadership of the Van Eycks, Hubert, Jan, and a younger sister, Margaret. With their advent the Flemish school at once became prominent. Hubert was born in 1366, and he and Margaret died about the year 1426. Jan died in 1440.

Flemish art may be said to begin in the fourteenth century and end in the seventeenth century. Fromentin says of Flemish art in this period: "At the two extremities of this brilliant course we are struck with the same phenomenon—rare enough in such a little country—we see an art which was born of itself, on the spot; and an art which was born again when it was thought to be dead. Van Eyck is recognized in a very fine Adoration of the Magi; Memling is suggested by certain portraits; and there, at the very end, a hundred and fifty years later, Rubens is preceived—each time a sun rises and then sets with the splendor and brevity of a beautiful day without a morrow."

The Van Eycks established themselves in Ghent in 1420, among a corporation of painters then existing there. The triptych of St. Bavon is their work, but it is not known what part each painted. Their work was wonderful for the time, and it and the works of their pupils display the qualities that have since been considered characteristic of the entire Flemish school—tendency to naturalism, imitation of nature, sensitiveness to color at the expense of purity and grace of line, accuracy of finish, and, in the earlier period, profound religious feeling. Hubert Van Eyck is credited with the discovery of the mixing of oil colors, and the applying them to canvas much as we do now. This discovery, long and carefully guarded by the Van Eycks, drew immediate attention to them and their works.

Memling, who painted about forty years after the Van Eycks, was perhaps the greatest of the earlier painters of Flanders. In his theme and manner he was much like the Van Eycks, but his was an advance. They copied nature accurately with an echo of the engraver and the enameleer in their style; he copied accurately, but he idealized. They have the gleam of gold, the polish of marble, the brilliant

carpet tints, the sheen of velvet and pearl; Memling has all these, but in his work are misty passages and half-tints of which the Van Eycks knew naught.

It is wonderful that, in a time so marked by violence, stratagem, superstition, dissoluteness, ecclesiastical parade, royal pageants, feasts, carousals and glitter of gold and gems, there should have sprung into being a wonderful and unexpected art-life.

In its social and religious character, Flemish art stands between the art of Italy and the art of Holland. The influence of the church is seen throughout the whole of Italian painting in its best period, and never more conspicuously than when the faith of the people was beginning to fail. In Flemish art one sees rather the influence of religion than of the priesthood. There is a sturdy national characteristic about it, and a leaning toward literal reproduction of subject.

In the sixteenth century there began a gradual decline in Flemish art, due to the powerful influence of Italian renaissance. In striving to imitate a foreign art, with which it had no real sympathy, Flemish art ceased to be national. This decadence was checked in the seventeenth century by the advent of the greatest of all Flemish painters, Rubens. He formed a school of his own, and in that school the greatest pupil was Van Dyck.

After the death of Rubens and the dispersion of his pupils, the art of Flanders ceased to form a distinct school; and when Rembrandt arose, the art-centre of the Netherlands was transferred to Holland.

The works of the Flemish artists are to be found in galleries everywhere. Some of the more important artists are: Hugo van der Goes, 1482; Geerardt David, 1455-1523; Jan Gossart de Mabuse, 1470-1532; Paul Bril, 1556-1626; Jan Fyt, 1609-1691; Casper de Crayer, 1582-1669; David Teniers, 1582-1649; Jan (called "velvet") Breughel, 1589-1642; Aelbert Cuyp (Kuypp), 1606-1691; Jacob Jordaens, 1523-1678; David Teniers (younger), 1610-1694; Pieter van der Faes (Sir Peter Lely), 1618-1680.

In the Metropolitan Museum, Central Park, New York, are many paintings of the Flemish school. To the casual observer most of them are not calculated to arouse a great deal of enthusiasm. I have heard visitors in the museum remark, "Never mind these queer old pictures, let us go and look at the modern pictures." But there is a wealth of interest and beauty in those old Flemish paintings, albeit one might find lack of refinement of feeling, or even