

Master of the Aachen Altarpiece, working as an artist around 1480-1520

Accession number - 1225, 1226 (wings)

Size - 109.1x54.2cms; 106.8x54cms

The central panel is on loan from the National Gallery, London (No 1049)

107.3 x 120.3 cms

Oil and tempera on panel

The family of the deceased Burgermeister (Mayor) of Cologne, Hermann Rinck, commissioned this triptych around 1505. It was painted by a leading local artist, whose identity is unknown, for the altar of their family chapel in St Kolumba's Parish Church, Cologne. Rinck, his wife and three of their sons are seen on the back of the wings. They are praying in front of the miraculous sixth-century mass when Christ appeared to St Gregory.

The busy front panels show nine episodes in the Passion of Christ centred around the Crucifixion. The triptych shows the distinctive, agitated and expressive figures for which the anonymous artist is known. The centre panel now belongs to the National Gallery, London, and the wings to the Walker Art Gallery. They were separated sometime between 1810 and 1820.

Timeline

1496

Hermann Rinck died. The altarpiece was probably painted after his death.



Around 1480-1520

The Master of the Aachen Altarpiece was working as an artist in Cologne. Because his identity is unknown he is referred to by another of his known works, the altarpiece with

scenes from the Passion, which was painted around 1510 for the Carmelite church in Cologne and is now in the Cathedral Treasury at Aachen in Germany.

Around 1505

The altarpiece was commissioned for St Kolumba's church.

Around 1810-20

The panels were likely to have been separated, as the altarpiece is thought to have been brought from **Flanders** to England at the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

Around 1820s-30s

The centre panel was acquired by a Manchester dealer who sold it on to Joseph Dixon of Newcastle upon Tyne.

1843

First appearance of the wings, in the **Liverpool Royal Institute** catalogue. It was likely that they were purchased as a pair in 1842 to be shown in a gallery newly built by LRI for the Roscoe collection.

1847

The centre panel was bought from Mr Dixon's executors by Edward Shipperdson, who presented it to the National Gallery, London.



1948

The Liverpool Royal Institute presented the wings to the Walker Art Gallery along with the rest of the LRI's collections.

1962

Conservation of central panel.

1963

Discovery of images on the back of the winged panels.

2000

Entire triptych moved to National Gallery, London, during the refurbishment of the Walker Art Gallery.

2001

Triptych returned to the Walker in time for its reopening.



Exhibition History

1857

Manchester 'Art Treasures' Exhibition, Nos. 405-6.

1868

Leeds 'National Exhibition', No. 512a (1225).

1881

Royal Academy, London, 'Winter Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters', Nos. 228 and 23.

1899

New Gallery, London, 'Winter Exhibition', Nos. 19 and 248.

1957

Exhibition of European Masters at Manchester Art Gallery, for anniversary of 1857 exhibition.

1961

The altarpiece was lent to the Cologne Exhibition at Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Nos. 40b and 40c.

The Story of the Passion of Christ

The Passion of Christ refers to the suffering and death of Christ on the cross, and the events leading up to and following the crucifixion, including:

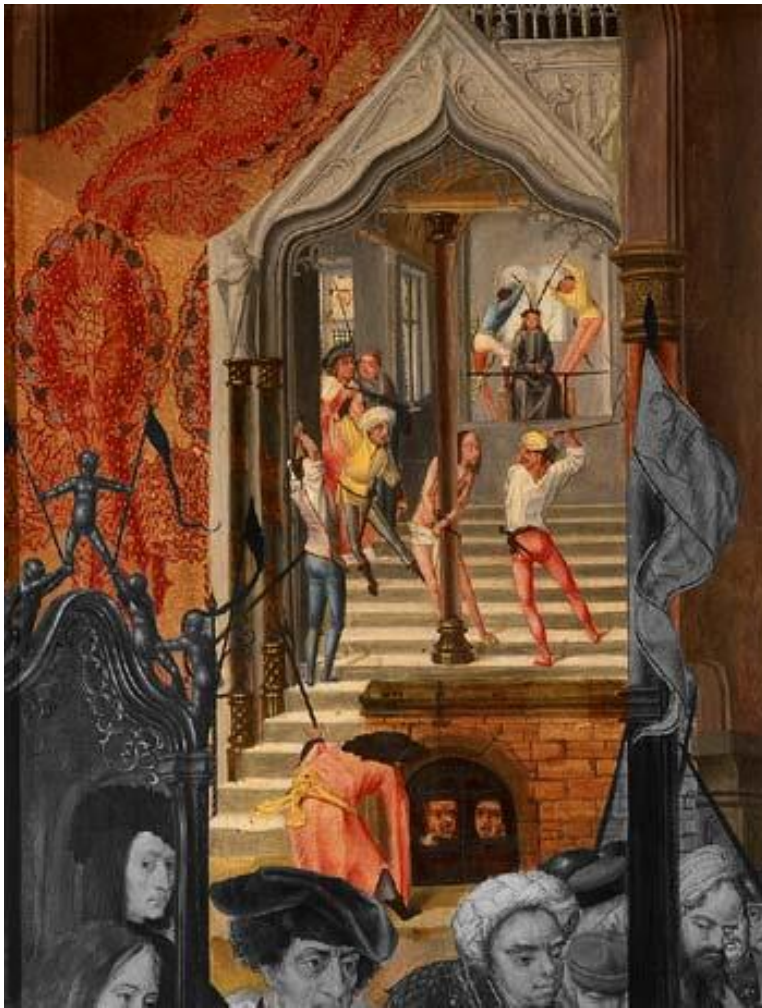
The Trial of Christ / Christ in front of the people



The main scene on the left panel shows the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate sentencing Jesus. Pilate thought Christ was innocent, but according to the Gospels, the High Priest Caiaphas insisted he was guilty.

It was customary at Passover to release a prisoner chosen by the people, so Pilate asked the crowd, shown in the middle of the background, whether he should free a thief named Barabbas or Jesus. The mob shouted for Barabbas to be saved and Jesus to be crucified. Pilate gave way but symbolically washed his hands in public to show his refusal to be held responsible for the choice. These two events are in the left wing of the triptych.

Christ's Flagellation



It was the usual practice in crucifixions that before a prisoner was killed he would be bound to a pillar and flogged. Jesus can be seen receiving this punishment near the top of the left panel.

Road to Calvary



Christ had to carry his cross to the hill of Golgotha, where the crucifixion took place. He was followed by two condemned thieves and a crowd of women.

This scene is found in the left background of the centre panel, behind the crucifixion. The emphasis is on Christ's suffering under the weight of the cross. Although it was accurate that the Romans made condemned men carry their own cross, they only took the horizontal piece to the execution site, where the upright post was already fixed in the ground - a fact perhaps not known by the artist here.

The Crucifixion



The death of Christ on the cross is the central image in Christian art. The Crucifixion is often visually and symbolically linked to original sin and the Fall of Man. Some people thought that Jesus' cross was made of wood taken from the tree that bore the forbidden fruit eaten by Adam and Eve. There is a skull at the foot of the cross. This not only identifies the hill as Golgotha, the 'place of the skull', but also represents Adam, since the site of the Crucifixion was believed to be Adam's burial place.

On either side of the cross are the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. Christ asked John to care for his mother after his death. She is traditionally shown in a blue robe. The inscription on Mary's gown is from the Latin prayer 'Stabat Mater', that was sung in the Middle Ages as a popular hymn. It reads in an abbreviated form *QUIS (E)ST HOM VI NON FLE MATREM CRISTI S(I) VI(D) IN TANTO SU(P)*, which translates as 'What man is not moved seeing the mother of Christ in such distress?'

The other crucified men are the good thief and the bad thief. They are tied rather than nailed to their crosses in order to distinguish them from Jesus. On Christ's right side is the good thief. He condemned the other thief, saying that their punishment was deserved but Christ was innocent, and was told by Jesus, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise."

Also to Christ's right is Longinus, the lance-bearer. On the order of Pilate, this blind soldier pierced Christ's side so as to quicken his death and end his suffering. The blood from the wound ran down the lance of Longinus and covered his hands. When he raised them to his face, this blood cured him of his blindness. He later became a missionary for the early Christian Church.

Joseph of Arimathea caught some of the blood from Christ's side in a chalice. This act is the basis of Catholic Mass, or the Eucharist. Here, wine is drunk as if it were literally the blood of Christ. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea took the chalice with Christ's blood to England and founded the first church there at Glastonbury. The chalice is also known as the Holy Grail.



Bulging varicose veins on soldier's leg

At the front of the scene, soldiers throw dice to decide who will keep the tunic they have stripped from Jesus. Another soldier stands with his back to us. His varicose veins, bulging from his left leg, are just one of the sharply-focussed realistic details for which the artist was known.

Three holy women mourn to Christ's right. They are Mary, mother of the apostles James and Joseph; Salome, the wife of Zebedee; and Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' followers, who wears red to symbolise her human frailty. These three women are often referred to as the 'Three Marys'.

Descent from the Cross



Joseph of Arimathea was a rich and respected member of the Sanhedrin. He was secretly a disciple of Christ's, and obtained permission from Pontius Pilate to remove Jesus from the cross after he had died.

Joseph brought a linen sheet, and with Nicodemus, who brought myrrh and aloes to preserve the body, wrapped them around Christ's body.

In the scene, found to the right of the Crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea takes the upper portion of Christ's body, Nicodemus the lower. Artists often show Joseph with pliers and nails in his hands.

Pieta / Lamentation of the Dead Christ



Mourners surrounded Christ's body immediately following the descent from the cross. Those present include the Virgin Mary, St. John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. Christ's stigmata are visible. The stigmata are the wounds inflicted upon Jesus by his nailing to the cross.

The Resurrection



This scene on the top of the right hand panel shows Christ emerging from his tomb and startling two men, whose armour indicates they are likely to be Roman soldiers.

The Ascension



Ascension is the term used for the last 'appearance' of Christ to the Apostles after his Resurrection, when he was taken up to heaven on a cloud. This occurred 40 days after the Resurrection. With his right hand, Jesus blesses his followers, whilst on earth, the Apostles stand gazing up in awe at the departing figure.

The idea of Ascension was not confined merely to Christian belief. It was also used in classical mythology, where it depicted a mortal being received into heaven into the presence of a god. The term for a mortal being received into heaven in this way was 'Apotheosis'.

Altarpieces

The altarpiece's origins can be seen in the function of the altar. This was traditionally a square block, usually the primary focus of the church. By 1000AD the altar developed into a rectangular form with a defined front and back. Changes in the altar's form led to the development of the altarpiece, a panel decorated with sacred figures. The emergence of the altarpiece marks a significant development in the history of the altar and highlights its importance as an element of the church's architecture.

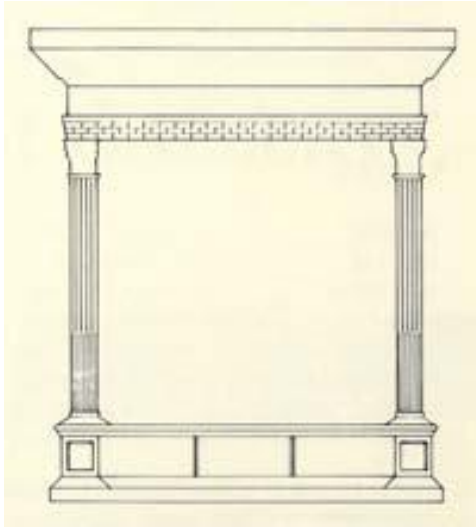
An altarpiece is a structure bearing an image, positioned on the rear of the altar. An inscription on the altarpiece sometimes identified to which saint or mystery the altar was dedicated.

Altarpieces were made from stone, wood and metal but wooden altarpieces were predominant all over Europe. The content and form of the altarpiece can give clues about who the patrons were.

The winged altarpiece was developed in Germany in the 14th century. Movable wings made it possible to vary the imagery of the altarpiece in relation to the changing requirements of public worship. The back of the wings usually showed further religious scenes or the coat of arms of the owner. This part would only be seen if the wings of the triptych were closed. The status and quality of carved wooden altarpieces in Germany was high. As a result this led to sculpted altarpieces being made for display without paintings or gilding.

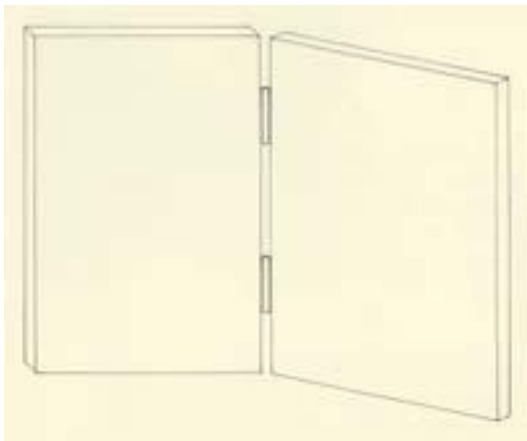
Different types of altarpiece

Experiments with the format of altarpieces led to the creation of many different types:



Pala

A single, unified, large framed panel. The pala involved changes in both the altarpiece's construction and pictorial element. Here emphasis was placed on the painted image.



Diptych

A two panelled altarpiece. These were often portable and for private devotional use.



Triptych

A three-panel altarpiece, often with folding wings that may be shut to cover the central panel for ceremonial purposes. The Walker's Altarpiece is a triptych.

Dossal

A horizontal panel. Often composed of several panels joined together.



Polyptych

An elaborate structure that encompasses several individual vertical compartments. This multi-tiered design usually incorporates a predella.

Altarpiece examples from the Walker Art Gallery's collection

Room 1



'Descent from the cross', after Robert Campin
Painted around the 1460s, an example of a triptych.

'St Peter and St Paul', Studio of Bicci di Lorenzo
1373-1452

Both paintings are likely to come from a large panelled altarpiece or polyptych.

Room 2



'St Leonard'



'Virgin and Child in Glory'



'St Catherine of Alexandria'

Painted 1541-42

These three panels formed part of an altarpiece for the church of Leonard near Palermo, Sicily.

Painting Techniques and Processes

Tempera is a term used to describe paint made by binding pigments in a water-based emulsion medium. In the 15th century egg yolk was often employed as this binding medium and the resulting technique was called egg tempera painting.

Colours could not be blended on the surface when using tempera, as the medium dries very quickly after each brushstroke. Each different colour had to be mixed up in the medium in advance and applied in sequence to achieve the desired modelling. A small amount of drying oil could also be added to the egg tempera for certain areas of a painting.

From the 16th century onwards, painting techniques began to change as oil painting methods were introduced from northern Europe. The new drying oil medium began to be used in preference to egg tempera. As painting practices changed, egg tempera was sometimes used for certain layers of a composition, and drying oil paints used for other layers of the same painting.

Conserving a Panel Painting

There are many factors that affect the condition and survival of a panel painting. If the wood used for the panel support was carefully chosen and the surface properly prepared, this gave it a better chance of survival over time. Likewise, sound painting technique and the use of high quality materials can give similar benefits. However, wood is also a moisture absorbing material that will change shape in response to different environmental conditions (dryness or damp). It is also subject to insect or fungal attack (woodworm, and mould).

The movement of the wood support often causes cracks to appear in the paint and ground following the grain of the wood. These cracks are quite fine, usually visible to the naked eye and often stable. However, if there is too much movement in the support, areas of the paint and ground layers can eventually detach and flake off, resulting in localised losses.

Applying paint too thickly or adding other layers such as varnish in between paint layers can cause other surface problems in the paint, such as localised contraction (or shrinkage) cracking.

Conservation of a panel may involve resolving a variety of structural problems with the wood support, re-attaching lifting or flaking paint and removing discoloured layers of varnish and any overpaint. In order to prevent problems re-occurring, it is important to keep the panel in very stable environmental conditions providing both even temperature and humidity.

Restoring the Walker Art Gallery's Altarpiece

In January 1962 the conservator Jack Coburn Witherop examined the Walker's two wings by the Master of the Aachen altarpiece.



Christ's torso

How was the painting produced?

Under examination the paint was found to have complex layers of alternating tempera and oil media. It is thought that the gold haloes and the embroidery on the garments would have been applied last. The ornament on the armour was applied using impasto and other areas of similar texture were applied in a thick tempera medium. This had sometimes been applied over oil glazes and sometimes underneath them.

Which areas needed restoring?

The varnish layer was discoloured and there were poorly colour-matched retouching in damaged areas. Small areas of the ground layer were found to be flaking around the edges where the panel's original frame was once positioned. Damage was discovered on the torso of Christ where the joints of the panels were weak. Small areas of blistering were found on the head and shoulders of St Joseph, which are thought to have been caused by an altar candle being placed too close to the painting.

How were the damaged areas treated?

Loose fragments of ground were re-secured to the support with an adhesive and the level restored with a small amount of filling material. The discoloured varnish was removed with a solvent in two ways, with a cotton wool swab for large areas and a sable brush for smaller areas. The discoloured re-painting was then removed with a scalpel. Finally the painting was re-varnished with a layer of synthetic resin.

Cleaning the Altarpiece's wing panels

An exciting discovery was made during treatment of the work in 1963. When the conservator J C Witherop examined the reverse of the altarpiece wings he saw signs of a raised design in gesso underneath a thick layer of dark brown paint. This paint was covered in a variety of exhibition labels dating back to 1857. Cleaning tests revealed that both reverse surfaces had originally been painted with images of the donors of the altarpiece and their coat of arms.



Labels on the reverse of the altarpiece

To reveal his discovery he used a wax paste prepared by 'emulsifying bleached beeswax with ammonia'. This was applied to the surface in small areas at a time and left on for some minutes to help soften the paint layer. Once the brown paint layer was swollen, it could then be carefully peeled away using a scalpel.

How were the painted images covered?

The images had been covered over by a thick layer of dark brown paint. This was first thought to be a protective layer, applied to prevent moisture damage to the panel. However, this dark brown paint may have been deliberately used to hide the paintings.

Notes on J.C. Witherop and the conservation work on the wings of the Altarpiece

Jack Coburn Witherop undertook the cleaning of the Walkers' side panels of the Crucifixion triptych by the Master of the Aachen Altarpiece in 1963.

Witherop was a private restorer based in Liverpool who did a lot of work on paintings in the Walker's collection between the late 1940s and the late 1970s. It was not unusual at this time for major galleries to have work carried out by private restorers, as institutions rarely had permanently employed conservation staff. This is a relatively recent phenomenon in most museums and galleries.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the beginnings of the conservation profession as we might recognise it today. Articles relating to conservation issues across a number of specialisms, including paintings, began to be published in a variety of journals.

The importance of detailed study of both the materials and techniques employed to create works of art and the materials used for conservation was beginning to be recognised. At a basic level, old established practices were sometimes being questioned in the light of new thinking, and certain traditional practices were beginning to be thought unsuitable. New materials for conservation were also being tried.



Inspecting the panels

None of the formal conservation training that exists today was available then except perhaps for learning while in the job at one of the major London institutions. Jack Witherop was a practising artist, from which he would have had some knowledge of artists' materials, but the only other training in restoration he is known to have had early in his career was a brief placement at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. He was quite forward thinking for the time in terms of his adoption of conservation principles, and his awareness of the published literature about suitable materials and techniques.

His important discovery regarding the Walker's altarpiece wings was that the reverses had been completely covered over by someone in the past. It was only while examining the panels that this became clear. Witherop's decision was to reveal what lay beneath. The conservation records from 1963 refer to the removal of the overpaint with 'an emulsified wax - ammonia solvent'. This would have been a kind of thick paste applied to the surface of overpaint in small sections at a time to soften it, making it easier to remove.

Nowadays, ammonia in this kind of paste form would not be chosen for cleaning due to its high alkalinity. Recent developments have focused on the use of much less alkaline alternatives, including a variety of aqueous solutions tailored for particular uses and gelled organic solvent mixtures.

Why might the images have been concealed?

The back panels show further religious scenes that include the Rinck family, intended to be visible when the triptych was closed. Covering these images would have prevented the identification of the Cologne patrons through the presence of their coat of arms. It also succeeded in obscuring possible information about the altarpiece's origins and history.

It is possible that the altarpiece's exporters in the 19th century might have deliberately concealed the scene to ease its transfer out of the country.

Restoration of the uncovered panels

Once the images had been revealed, the heads of the donors appeared to be the worst affected by previous damage and wear. The damaged areas were restored using thin glazes of pigment in a resin-wax medium, soluble in white spirit. No attempt was made to restore the section of the painting that had probably been burned by an altar candle. This is still visible today and can be seen on the back of the left wing, the Mass of St Gregory.

Panel Painting



Rear panels

In Western and Northern Europe wood was the most widely used painting support until the emergence of woven canvasses in the 17th century. In early Renaissance panel painting the frame was an important part of the image, often an integral part of the whole construction. Frames, especially if elaborate, were expensive, sometimes costing almost half the amount of the altarpiece itself.

Due to the complexity and size of polyptychs, they were often divided into separate units and assembled on the altar once the painting and gilding was complete. In the 16th century, altarpieces were less likely to be free standing and were instead incorporated into the architecture of the church. The design and construction of the panels became more complex.

In the 17th century, wood panels continued to be widely used in **Flanders** and Holland for landscapes, portraits, genre scenes and devotional works. The Walker's triptych is most likely made from oak.

Constructing a panel painting

The choice of wood used to make a panel painting depended largely on its availability. In Germany artists used a wide range of timbers including oak, beech, chestnut, walnut, lime and cherry. In Italy, poplar wood was commonly used. It was important to choose woods with good properties of even grain, stability and durability. The method in which planks of wood were cut from the logs also affected their quality. Arrangements for the construction of an altarpiece were often made before the painting had even been commissioned.

Problems conserving panel paintings

The structure of panels can cause a variety of problems for the conservator, particularly if they have joints. In panels with one or more planks, it was important to construct them with the grain of the wood running in the same direction in each plank. If joints begin to fail, these often have to be re-aligned and re-glued by the conservator.

Larger altarpieces could be quite heavy once installed, and their weight can cause problems. Also, struts or battens attached to the reverse of panels can cause large stresses in the support, often resulting in splits. This will also lead to surface problems in the paint layers. The response of the panel to changing levels of moisture in the air (churches in northern Europe are often cold and damp) could result in splits or cracks across the surface and cause flaking and losses to the paint and ground. Some splits and cracks were found during the examination and conservation of the Walker's Altarpiece in 1962-63.

Surface preparation of a panel painting

A ground layer of **gesso** (calcium sulphate and animal glue) was usually applied to a panel to give a smooth painting surface. Sealing the wood surface in this way also helped to reduce the

shrinking or swelling of the wood in response to moisture changes in the air. However, if only one side of the panel was coated with a ground layer, the uncovered reverse side was likely to lose or absorb moisture at a different rate, often causing the wood to warp.

Church life and religious belief in 15th century Cologne



Inside St Kolumba's Church

The back of the right panel of the triptych displays a typical church scene from the era. The church is St Kolumba's in Cologne, Germany, and it was the parish church that the Rinck family attended. Hermann Rinck, the man dressed in black in the foreground, was Burgermeister (Mayor) of Cologne on three separate occasions in 1480, 1483 and 1488.

His likeness painted here is the earliest known portrait of any Burgermeister of that city. Shown in prayer next to him is his wife, Gertrud von Dallem. The couple had eleven children together. The eldest of their four sons was born in 1458, and the youngest in 1472. They also had seven daughters.

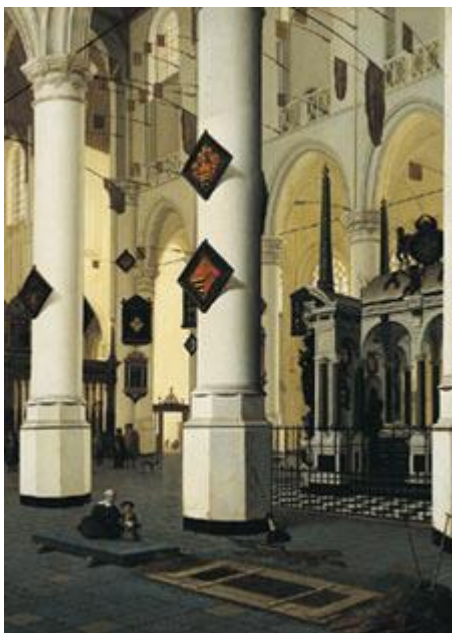
However, only three sons appear in this picture; they can be seen in a pew in the right-hand background. It is possible that the missing son is Hermann Rinck the younger, who was based in England from 1502 as Imperial Envoy to the court of Henry VIII. As well as the human visitors to the church, two of the family's pet dogs are also present. Their contrasting white and black colours suggest they had some symbolic meaning, yet as church going was a family activity, taking pets with you was not unusual in the 15th century.

When the wings are both closed, the Rinck family are seen to be praying within the same church as the miraculous Mass of St Gregory, where Christ appeared to the 6th century Pope. Gregory, Pope from 590-604 AD, prayed to convince a monk of the real presence of Jesus' blood and body in the consecrated bread and wine. The story relates that Christ stepped out of a depiction on the cross and poured his blood into a chalice. The imagery was a popular choice for altarpieces, since it reminded people of the significance of the Eucharist. The scene both reveals the true usage of the triptych as an altarpiece and identifies its patrons.

This theme was possibly chosen and painted after Hermann Rinck's death in 1496 in order to pay penance for sins and intercede for his swift admission to heaven. Purgatory, the place where souls wait before entering heaven, was an important part of theological teaching in the era.

It was thought that commissioning splendid works of religious art like this altarpiece could speed up the soul's passage through purgatory. The patron was more important than the artist was at this time. We can therefore identify Rinck but the artist he commissioned remains anonymous.

Heraldry



'Interior of the New Church at Delft' with heraldry

Coats of Arms or 'heralds' are personal pictures and symbols that were often painted onto shields and flags. Originally, they identified what family a person came from when they went into battle. Later on they became used for all sorts of purposes, for example as seals on documents or purely for decoration. The Rinck Family herald and that of Rinck's wife Gertrud Von Dallem

appear on the back of the triptych. Rinck's shows an eagle with a ring in its mouth, whilst Gertrud's depicts three bears. Heraldry was a complicated language, with quite rigid forms and conventions. Some of these are:

Shield

The shape of the herald relies upon the shield. It varied throughout the ages, depending on fashion and usage. Diamond-shaped heralds traditionally mean that the herald belonged to a woman.

Field

This was the name given to the whole background of the shield. It could be just a single colour or divided into several colours.

Tinctures

The form of the different backgrounds were known in heraldry as 'tinctures'. There were three main groups of tinctures: the metals, 'Or' (gold) and 'Argent' (silver); the colours, 'Gules' (red), 'Azure' (blue), 'Sable' (black), 'Vert' (green) and 'Purpure' (Purple); and the furs, 'Ermine' (stoat) and 'Vair' (squirrel).

Charges

Any shape, line or image placed on top of the field was called a 'charge'. Dividing lines were the most common charges. They were known as 'partitions', or if they were different colours they were called 'ordinaries'. As well as simple lines and crosses, all sorts of animals and plants appeared in heraldry as charges, from domestic pets to mythical creatures like dragons and unicorns. Natural colours for animals and plants were deliberately avoided as the heraldic painter tried to make them as striking and unusual as possible. An Italian heraldic artist, Bartolo Di Sasso Ferrato wrote in 1347, instructing on how animals should be painted:

'The said animals ought to be depicted according to their noblest act, and also where their strength is displayed... Draw, therefore, the lion erect stretching out, biting with its mouth, tearing with its teeth'

Often the choice of charges could be a pun on the family name, as is the case here where the ring in the eagle's mouth is a pun on the family name 'Rinck'

Dexter and Sinister

Rather than use the words left and right, heraldry uses 'dexter' and 'sinister' to describe the position of charges. 'Dexter' refers to the viewer's left and 'sinister' to the viewer's right. In reality however the words actually mean the opposite, since the position of items upon a herald was read from the point of view of the knight holding the shield!

Blazon

A 'Blazon' was like a manual for a particular herald. It was a text so accurate that an artist would be able to reproduce the coat of arms without having seen it beforehand.

Supporters

In some heralds, the central shield is held up by figures on either side called 'supporters'. Supporters could be humans, angels, or mythical half-humans such as mermaids, but were more usually animals like lions and eagles, or imaginary beasts such as dragons and griffins.

Heraldry also appears in the galleries in the following works:

Room 1

'Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I' attributed to Nicholas Hilliard

Room 3

'King Charles II' by Godfrey Kneller

Room 4

'Interior of the New Church at Delft' by Hendrick Cornelisz

Room 8

'Elaine' by Sophie Anderson

Glossary

Adam - According to the first book of the Old Testament, Adam was the first man. God formed him in his own image from the dust of the ground and gave him life by breathing the 'breath of life' into his nostrils. The name Adam derives from the Hebrew word for 'earth'.

Altarpiece - An image-bearing structure positioned on the rear of the altar.

Altar - A table or raised structure used for sacrificial, Eucharistic and other religious purposes.

Ammonia wax - A paste-like solution that causes swelling to the paint layer.

Apostles - From the Greek 'apostolos', meaning a person 'sent out' or 'messenger'. It was the name given to the twelve chief disciples and other early Christian missionaries who were charged with spreading the message of Christianity after Jesus' death and Resurrection.

Ascension - Jesus' return to Heaven at the end of his life on earth.

Barabbas - Barabbas was a robber released in preference to Jesus. Pilate initially tried to release Jesus, but the priests stirred up the crowd against him.

Bitumen - A dark brown, sticky, tar-like solution, used as brown paint from the 17th to 19th centuries.

Blistering - Raised areas of paint that have separated from the ground due to technique or unstable environment.

Caiaphas - Caiaphas was the High Priest before whom Jesus was interrogated. He found Jesus guilty and sent him to Pilate for sentencing.

Calvary - The place of the Crucifixion, also known as 'Golgotha', of which Calvary is a Latin translation.

Ciborium - A canopy usually supported by four pillars which covers the altar.

Communion - Another name for the Eucharist.

Conservation - A process of cleaning and stabilisation for objects including works of art.

Crucifixion - An execution performed upon a cross.

Diptych - A two-panelled altarpiece. These were often portable and for private devotional use.

Disciple - Meaning 'student', this word usually refers to the twelve men that Jesus chose to live and work with him.

Donor - Historically, this word referred to the person who commissioned the artwork from the artist. In a religious painting the donor may be portrayed kneeling in prayer as part of the scene. Hermann Rinck was the donor of the Master of the Aachen Altarpiece triptych. The word donor also refers to a person who donates artworks to a museum or any other institution.

Dossal - A horizontal painted panel, often composed of several panels joined together.

Encaustic painting - A method of painting with molten wax. Dry pigments are mixed with molten wax on a warm palette and then applied to a ground or surface.

Eucharist - From the Greek word for 'thanksgiving', it is the central Christian ceremony when bread and wine are eaten in church to signify the body and blood of Jesus. It also commemorates the Last Supper, the meal Jesus had with his followers.

Film - A thin layer or coating of paint.

Flaking - A loss of paint fragments.

Flanders - An ancient country that was situated between the borders of northern France and Germany, it now forms part of modern-day Belgium and Holland.

Gesso - A white coating used as a ground for painting, also used to prepare wood for gilding.

Gilding - The decoration of works of art and architecture with gold, silver or other metals.

Glastonbury - A town in rural Somerset, said to be the site of the first Christian church in England, it was also important to pagan druids. It now hosts an annual music festival.

Glaze - Used to cover a painted surface with a thin, transparent layer of colour.

Golgotha - The site of Jesus' crucifixion is named 'Golgotha', which means 'skull' in Aramaic.

Gothic Period - Used to describe a style of architecture characterised by pointed arches.

St. Gregory the Great - Pope from 590-604, he was the most important of the numerous saints called Gregory. Born around 540 AD he was the son of a Roman senator and the great grandson of a former Pope. He established a Benedictine monastery on his own estate, and in 597 AD sent the first Christian missionaries to Britain. Gregory was a prolific author and revised the Church liturgy and established Gregorian chant. He is one of the four Doctors of the Church, along with Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose and Jerome.

Ground - A layer coated onto the support to prepare the surface for the paint. Term used for the priming of an oil or tempera painting.

Holy Grail - The Holy Grail was a chalice in which Joseph of Arimathea was thought to have caught Christ's blood. Some Christians believe Joseph brought it to Glastonbury, England and formed a church there.

Impasto - Paint that is applied thickly to a canvas or panel so that it stands out in relief, retaining the marks of the brush or palette knife.

Jerusalem - Originally established as capital of the ancient kingdom of Israel by King David around 1000 BC, it was enlarged and fortified by King Solomon who built its great Temple, of which the Wailing Wall is the last remaining remnant. Jerusalem became central to the Christian religion since it was the place where Jesus was crucified and buried.

Jesus Christ - Jesus was born around 4 BC and died around 30 AD. According to the Christian faith, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Jesus is also known as Christ, Greek for the Hebrew word Messiah - 'the anointed one' - standing for the future (non-divine) leader of the Jewish people. The term Christ was later used by the Church to mean the saviour of humankind.

St. John the Evangelist - John the Evangelist is the traditional name given to the anonymous author of the fourth Gospel in the New Testament. The repeated reference in the work to the 'beloved disciple' has led many people to identify this as John, son of Zebedee, youngest of the original twelve disciples of Jesus. Evangelist is from the Greek for 'good news'.

Joseph of Arimathea - Joseph was a well-respected and affluent member of the Sanhedrin who gave his tomb for Christ's burial. He secured Pontius Pilate's permission to take the body of Jesus after the Crucifixion, and buried him with the help of Nicodemus.

Liverpool Royal Institute (LRI) - A permanent art gallery opened in 1817 with the help of William Roscoe (1753-1831). The work displayed in the gallery showed the rise of painting from the 14th to 17th centuries in Europe and much of it had once belonged to Roscoe. The Master of the Aachen Altarpiece wings appeared in the LRI catalogue in 1843.

St. Longinus - Roman soldier who pierced Christ's side with a lance, curing his own blindness and becoming a follower. His name comes from the Greek word for a lance.

The Virgin Mary - According to Christian faith, Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit of God and gave birth to Jesus. As Jesus' Mother she is an important figure for the Christian Church as a link between human kind and God.

Mary Magdalene - Mary Magdalene received her name from the village of Magdala, now in modern Israel. A reformed sinner, she once washed Christ's feet with her tears and dried them using her long hair. She was also the first person to see Jesus after his Resurrection, although she initially mistook him for a gardener.

Modelling - To create a three-dimensional effect using different shades and tones of paint.

Myrrh and Aloes - These were ointments used in the preparation of dead bodies. Aloes are bitter juices taken from the bark of the Agalloch tree, also known as eagle-wood. Myrrh is a gum resin from the plant Sweet Cicely that was used for making perfumes and incense.

Nicodemus - A Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, he was taught by Jesus secretly at night. Nicodemus also helped Joseph of Arimathea to bury Christ after the Crucifixion.

Oil painting - A method of painting using pigments dispersed in oil.

Pala - Italian term for a large altarpiece, a large, unified framed panel.

Panel painting - Painting on a wooden support.

Passion - From the Latin for 'suffering', this refers to Jesus' suffering leading up to the Crucifixion.

Passover - Passover is one of the chief religious festivals of the Jewish faith. It became linked to the story of the escape from slavery in Egypt, when God killed the first-born of the Egyptians, but 'passed over' the Israelites and granted their release. It is celebrated in early spring.

Patron - Owner or commissioner of a piece of art work. Hermann Rinck, mayor of Cologne, was the patron of the Master of the Aachen Altarpiece triptych.

Pentimento - Visible evidence of an alteration to a painting or drawing that indicates the artist changed their mind while executing the painting. This can leave an effect where 'ghosting' lines from the original design can be seen through the thinning paint.

Pharisee - The Pharisee were members of a strict traditionalist Jewish sect that was determined to uphold Hebrew law and ritual in everyday life. The name is Hebrew for 'interpreter'.

Pieta - This is Italian for 'lamentation' and is a term used to describe the scene immediately following the descent from the cross, in which mourners surround the body of Christ, stretched out on the ground.

Pigment - Fine powder (in a range of colours) that is bound with oil, yolk, or water in order to be used for painting.

Pontius Pilate - Pilate was Roman procurator of Judea from 26-36 AD. He presided over the trial of Jesus.

Polyptych - An elaborate structure made up of several vertical individual panels, often with wings.

Predella - A step or platform upon which an altar is placed.

Priming - A white paint layer used to prepare the support surface before painting.

Resin - Used to make varnishes.

Restoration - Repairing missing areas, retouching and painting them.

Roscoe - William Roscoe (1753-1831) was a self-educated lawyer and author, and campaigner against the slave trade. He promoted art education in Liverpool and helped form many of the cultural and scientific institutions in the city in the early 19th century, including the Liverpool Royal Institute. He formed a pioneering collection of early Renaissance Italian and north European paintings, drawings and prints, some of which were acquired for the LRI and are now in the Walker Art Gallery.

Salome - husband to Zebedee, mother to John and James, she was one of the 'Three Mary's' present at the Crucifixion. She may possibly have been Jesus' aunt.

Sanhedrin - The Sanhedrin were the council of Jews at Jerusalem. They had some powers of their own, although their decisions were subject to the approval of the governor, Pilate.

Stigmata - Wounds caused by crucifixion - holes in the hands and feet from nails.

Tempera - A painting medium used to bind pigments. By the 16th century the term was known as egg tempera, a paint that uses egg yolk as the binding medium.

Tonality - Softening and harmonising the colouring of a painting.

Triptych - A three-panel altarpiece, often with folding wings, that may be shut to cover the central panel for ceremonial purposes.

Varnish - A layer used to protect the paint layers of a painting, usually the cause of discolouring the paint.

Wing - A side panel of the altarpiece usually hinged to the adjacent panel.

Zebedee - Father of St John and James, two of the apostles.