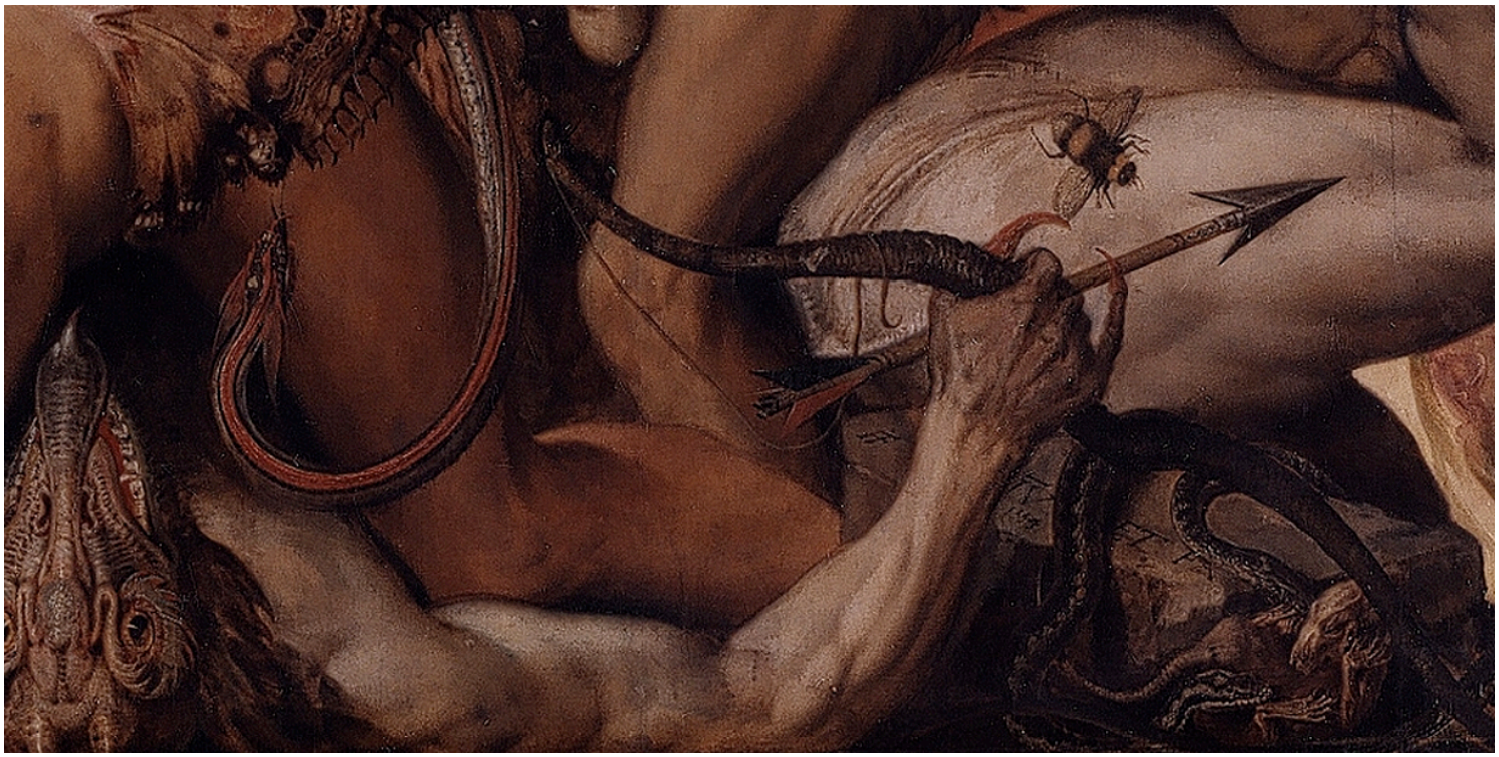
SIGN OF THE TIMES

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE SIGNATURE IN NETHERLANDISH PAINTING 1432-1575



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“Wenn eine Wissenschaft so umfassend, wie die Kunstgeschichte es tut und tun muß, von Hypothesen jeden Grades Gebrauch macht, so tut sie gut daran, die Fundamente des von ihr errichteten Gebäudes immer aufs neue auf ihre Tragfähigkeit zu prüfen. Im folgenden will ich an einigen Stellen mit dem Hammer anklopfen.”

Dehio 1910, p. 55

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I. INTRODUCTION

Investigating signatures touches upon the real core of art history: connoisseurship. The construction of oeuvres is one of the basic tasks of art historians. Besides documents, they therefore inevitably have to make use of signatures. However, several great connoisseurs – Berenson, Friedländer – emphasize that signatures are faked quite often. Consequently, an investigation of signature practices can easily be criticized for the mere fact that it is very difficult to be sure of the authenticity of all the studied signatures. Indeed, in my case it is impossible to study all the signatures first hand, and even then, their authenticity is not easily established or proven.

It would be all too easy, however, to just accept this difficulty and neglect signatures altogether when it comes to attribute a painting. After all, even documents cannot absolutely prove the authenticity of paintings, because of the ever present possibility of workshop collaboration. Since the basic corpus of paintings of a certain artist cannot just come out of the blue, documents and signatures are the only points of reference we have. Therefore, we need a better understanding of what it meant to sign a painting, i.e. we need to know how the Old Masters conceived their signatures. For that purpose signatures have to be examined critically, which implies the necessity of a general comparative study. It is striking that for a very long time this necessity was not fulfilled. Only recently signatures have received the necessary attention, especially for the Italian peninsula. Unfortunately, the Low Countries remain terribly understudied in these matters, hence the motivation for this research. So although I am aware of the difficulties of the research – especially because of the inevitable presence of un-unmasked fake signatures – I am convinced of its possibility and its necessity. By studying a broad range of artists within a certain period and a certain region, it should be possible to gain insights in used practices, and consequently maybe, to distinguish genuine from fake signatures.

As already remarked by several authors, the placing of a signature is indeed a “conscious act” and they are doubtlessly “meant to be read.”[1] That is why they are often well thought-out inscriptions, either tightly linked to a tradition or precisely consciously dissociated from certain traditions. Yet, it is not so easy to exactly define ‘signatures’. Pioneering authors on the subject such as André Chastel or Tobias Burg often used a rather broad definition, including traditional signatures, monograms, initials and self-portraits.[2] Such a broad scope might at first sight seem pointless and even problematic, since it is not always clear at all whether a figure in a painting is a self-portrait or whether a letter functions as a signature or merely has a decorative function. Nevertheless, in order not to be too selective at the start already, this broad definition was also used during this research. In several cases, this proved to be a rewarding approach, since it possibly helped to contextualize some cases where self-portraits seem to have been used as substitute signatures, for example in the case of Joos van Cleve. After all, as will be demonstrated further on, already from antiquity onwards a link existed between signatures and self-portraits.

[1] Respectively by Matthew 1998, p. 616, and Goffen 2001, p. 305.

[2] “Si l’on définit comme signature toute indication sur l’auteur de l’oeuvre fournie par un procédé signalétique autre que les resources memes de l’art, l’auto-portrait – assorti ou non du nom – constitue l’une des articulations-limite, l’inscription sur le cadre étant l’autre.” Chastel 1974, p. 11. This definition is also used by Burg 2007, see esp. p. 13.

During the last fifteen years signatures in Italian painting have been well-researched, resulting in a good knowledge of the developments.[3] They appear in the early fourteenth century, although they are still only rarely applied. Giotto di Bondone (1266/67-1337) was one of the first major artists to inscribe his name on several paintings, and it is already interesting to note that at least two signed works produced during his later career were clearly made with help of workshop assistants.[4] In other words, already from the outset of the use of signatures onwards, their use was apparently not necessarily restricted to completely autograph works. This idea will frequently recur throughout our research. Anyhow, in the course of the fifteenth century their use gained popularity, especially in Venice where from around 1440 onwards they developed into a more or less systematic aspect of the art market. Mainly applied by the commercially successful workshops, they grew out to become trademarks.[5] Yet, there are exceptions, since in the city of Florence painters only rarely signed. This immediately illustrates the importance of civic habits and traditions when it comes to signing, something which also has already been noticed in northern painting. Dehio, for example, remarked that in the fifteenth century there were significantly more signatures in Ulm, when compared to the relative contemporary anonymity in cities as Cologne or Bruges.[6] Strikingly, in the sixteenth century the practice of signing quite generally passed into disuse on the whole of the Italian peninsula, and especially after around 1540 it seems to have been not fashionable anymore, even in Venice.[7] The common explanations given for this abandonment are twofold: on the one hand signatures were quite probably considered as disturbing elements in the painting, diminishing the impression of space, but on the other hand signatures might also have been associated with artisans, an image of which a lot of sixteenth-century artists precisely wanted to get rid of.[8]

It is remarkable that a lot of opinions or explanations are given for signatures in Netherlandish paintings, while no comprehensive study of the origins and development of the signature in the north has been done, like it has been done for Italy. The current, traditional views on Netherlandish signatures are basically twofold. On the one hand, there is a lot of distrust, mostly on the part of connoisseurs, who emphasize that they are easily forged, or that they can be used as workshop signs. On the other hand, a lot of authors gave rather Italocentric explanations. Most of the time the old cliché of the so-called growing self-consciousness of the artist as a genius rather than a craftsman is repeated over and over again. This, in turn, is based on the no longer tenable, Romantic image of the artist who produces all his masterpieces completely on his own, adding the signature to the painting in order to reassure the buyer of its complete autography. While it is already highly doubtful whether such an image can be used for the explanation of the emergence of signatures in Italy – the great Giorgione never signed a painting – it is completely wrong to blindly apply the same notion to Netherlandish art. Almost as a rule, special cases are taken as examples, almost always Jan van Eyck, who himself must have been a sort of walking exception at the time. And it is precisely that which is very dangerous in the absence of a broader study of signatures in general.

[3] The most important and focused publications include Matthew 1998, Gilbert 2000, Goffen 2001, Rubin 2006, Burg 2007 and Deitl 2009.
[4] Goffen 2001, p. 309.
[5] Matthew 1998, p. 616, and Rubin 2006, p. 570.
[6] Dehio 110, p. 58.
[7] Matthew 1998, p. 641.
[8] Burg 2007, pp. 294-296.

In my opinion the emergence of a signature practice can not merely be explained by the growing self-consciousness of artists. It seems too clichéd and Italocentric, taking the idea of the anonymous medieval artist for granted, which precisely has been proven to be wrong in recent years.[9] Two examples that strengthened my conviction can suffice to illustrate what is at stake. Joos van Cleve never really signed his paintings, only applying about three very small monograms, high up on his altarpieces. As a result, his signatures must have been completely invisible for spectators in the church where the altarpiece was installed. Applying the principle of the growing self-consciousness of the artist, this would mean that Joos was not a very self-conscious artist, an idea which – in my opinion – is hardly tenable for this artist, who depicted himself life-size as a saint on the outer shutters of one of his altarpieces. A second example is Pieter Coecke van Aelst, a court artist who received the most prestigious commissions of his time and translated treatises by Serlio and Vitruvius. Coecke never signed a painting at all, but at the same time he might be given as a textbook example of the so-called Renaissance artist. In sum, as Burg already concluded, the growth of the amount of signatures in a certain time and space is not univocally to be explained as a proof of the growing self-consciousness of artists.[10]

This study traces the developments of the signature in the Netherlands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in order to get a better understanding of how and why painters signed their works. Inevitably, however, the main focus is on sixteenth-century Antwerp painting: in fifteenth-century Netherlandish art the signature is virtually absent – with the most notable exceptions of Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christus – and in the sixteenth-century Antwerp is doubtlessly the main artistic center within the Low Countries. Nevertheless, it was necessary to make excursions to other cities and regions. On top of that, also other media – especially prints and drawings – were studied.

Here, a note on the used geographical terminology is necessary. For the studied area, the terms 'Netherlands' and 'Low Countries' are used interchangeably. However, slight preference is given to 'Netherlands', which completely corresponds to how the area was called by the autochthonous inhabitants well into the seventeenth century: '*de Nederlanden*' in the vernacular, which corresponds to '*Belgica*' in Latin.[11] The term 'north' or 'northern' is here mostly used to refer more generally to north-western European regions, in most cases as opposed to the Italian peninsula. In maintaining this terminology, I deliberately avoid two frequently recurring, though wrong and anachronistic appellations. At first, there is no distinction made between the so-called Northern and Southern Netherlands, since this extremely arbitrary distinction was non-existing at the time.[12] And secondly, also the unpleasant misusing of the term 'Flemish' was avoided. It is a result of the *pars pro toto* the Italians used already in the sixteenth century on the one hand, and certain political developments in the nineteenth-century on the other hand. Nevertheless, although the term is still widely used among scholars in the field, 'Flemish art' can only refer to art that originated in the County of Flanders, to which cities such as Antwerp, Louvain and Brussels did not belong.[13] Consequently, we

[9] See most notably Burg 2007 and Deitl 2009.
[10] Burg 2007, p. 544.
[11] For example in Lampsonius' *Pictorum aliquot celebrium germaniae inferioris effigies* (Antwerp 1572). Van Mander 1604 uses '*de Nederlanden*' consistently throughout his book. Interestingly, it seems that he only wrongly used 'Flemish' (*Vlaams*) when he got his information from an Italian source – mostly Vasari. Indeed, Italians consistently used a wrong *pars pro toto,* calling all the inhabitants of the Netherlands *fiamminghi*, which can explain van Mander's error.
[12] See especially Blankert 1995.
[13] See also Billen 1995.

will try to avoid the term 'Flemish Primitives' in the text, instead mostly indicating this group of painters as the 'Old Masters', as they were quite likely also perceived by mid-sixteenth-century Netherlandish painters.

The used chronological limits might also need some further explanation and justification. As noted above, Italian artists generally stopped signing in the early sixteenth century. Remarkably, it is at exactly this moment that artists in the Netherlands started signing. Indeed, the first decades of the sixteenth century form a turning point in the history of the Netherlandish signature. Of the fifteenth century we only have a handful of signatures, while in the sixteenth century their number increases impressively: there are more signing artists who at the same time sign a larger share of their production. Of course, this in itself is already worth investigating and deserves at least an attempt to an explanation. It should however be noted that, although it constitutes a turning point in history, there is no clear 'point' in time when it suddenly changes. It is more like a gradual change, a shift from a period where it was no habit to sign paintings, to a period in which it precisely becomes one. Such moments are especially rewarding to study practices or traditions in the past. Usually, they are difficult to grasp and to study. For contemporaries habits are obvious, so almost as a rule there are no concrete writings on such processes, in spite of the no small number of art theoretical treatises produced in the sixteenth century. Although there are several northern art theoretical writings, the largest part was written by Italian authors, and it must come as no surprise that it is there that a few exceptions to this overall silence about the signature can be found. Apart from a few references to a classic passage in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* – to which we will return – there are only two other authors that briefly touched upon the subject. The dialogue in Paolo Pino's *Dialogo di Pittura* of 1548 – where it is advised to sign paintings – implicitly illustrates that by that time signing was considered old-fashioned, while cardinal Gabriele Paleotti straightforwardly rejects the practice in his *Discorso intorno alle imagine sacri et profane* of 1582, stating that it does not lead to an increased piety.[14] In the north the silence really seems to be complete, since even an extensive work such as Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* of 1604 barely mentions signatures, and never makes remarks providing insights into the matter.

Thus, in order to get a good understanding of what it meant to sign a painting, it is necessary to trace its earliest roots. In a prologue the fifteenth-century developments outside of Antwerp will be discussed, starting with van Eyck's possible first signature (1432). Subsequently, the focus will shift to Antwerp, starting with the earliest known painters in the city on the river Scheldt. The end date 1575 is more problematic and artificial, since it does not represent a marked change in signature practice. Nevertheless, it is consciously chosen for various reasons. In the first place, it was of course necessary to limit the amount of material. Therefore, the methodological decision was taken to study all the free masters up to and including 1551, as a result of which the important generation of mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp painters was included, such as Frans Floris, Pieter Bruegel and Willem Key. Most of these painters died around 1570-75, giving way to a younger generation of artists with a different artistic character, making 1575 a likely end date.[15] This time scope at the same time made it possible to consider the influence of Hieronymus Cock's printing business, who collaborated with several of the artists in question. Furthermore, the period up to around 1566 has already been identified as the flourishing period of the Antwerp art market, that after that date came into a

[14] See, respectively, Goffen 2001, p. 324, and Burg 2007, pp. 293-296.
[15] On the different character of the post-1575 generation, see for example Freedberg 2012.

crisis.[16] A last fact that made me choose 1575 as end point is the law issued by the city government in that year, prohibiting the production of forgeries, which entailed some change in the distribution of art works, that were from then on also increasingly sold via specialized art dealers. So although the time scope of the present dissertation is 1432-1575, free masters registered after 1551 are unfortunately not included.

Some further notes on the method used might be useful. Unsurprisingly, the basic and primary activity for this research was the collection of the extant signatures of the period in question. Initially, this seemed a hell of a job, but along the way it gradually appeared that it was not that impossible. For the fifteenth century, the basic overview was provided in Folie's article of 1963. It proved to be a good starting point, and the information was easily supplemented by information found in more recent literature. For the sixteenth century it was less easy. I decided to create a checklist, based on the Antwerp *Liggeren*. Systematically reading the whole lists through from the early beginning until 1551, I selected all the known artistic personalities with an attributed oeuvre. This provided a useful starting point. Next, I collected the extant signatures with the help of *catalogue raisonnés*, supplemented by the information found in other reference works such as Wilenski's *Flemish Painters* or online databases of for instance the Royal Insitute for Cultural Heritage in Brussels (IRPA/KIK) or the Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague (RKD). Unfortunately, it was impossible within the time limits to create a similar systematic list of painters for the other cities in the Netherlands. Inevitably the studied masters were chosen much more arbitrarily, although I tried to include all the major figures, especially those related in any way to Antwerp – which often proved to be the case, such as Heemskerck in Haarlem, Lombard in Liège and Orley in Brussels. Subsequently, their signatures were collected in the same way as those of the Antwerp painters. This mass of material was organized into a more or less manageable database, that proved to be very useful. Finally, the material was organized on a timeline, which provided interesting insights. A simplified version of this timeline is to be found in the appendix, as well as a list with signatures by Marinus van Reymerswale and Michiel Coxcie, two artists about whom there still is no *catalogue raisonné* available. For all the other artists mentioned in this dissertation, we refer to the basic monographies, since it was impossible to provide all the collected material as appendix. At the same time it was of course necessary and of equal importance to pursue the negative line of reasoning, i.e. to consider the unsigned works, which were therefore taken into consideration as much as possible throughout the whole research.

From the start onwards, I was aware of various problems and throughout the research I encountered others. As already briefly touched upon above, one of the most obvious problems involved in this kind of research is the inescapable fact that it is impossible to check every selected signature's authenticity. Because of the sheer mass of material it was impossible to study all the paintings first hand, and even then their authenticity is not easily established. Thus, I am aware of the very probable possibility that several fake signatures slipped into the database. Yet, several oeuvre catalogues – especially the most recent ones – express opinions about the authenticity of inscriptions, increasingly with the help of scientific methods, which were always taken into consideration in this research.[17] Furthermore, the early provenances of the lion's share of the studied works – both signed and unsigned – are unknown, although very often this would be of extreme

[16] See especially Vermeylen 2000.
[17] Splendid examples include the Patinir (Vergara 2007) and the Gossart catalogues (Ainsworth 2010a).

interest in order to strengthen certain interpretations. The ignorance makes it very difficult to generalize. A third problem that has also been briefly touched upon above is the nearly complete lack of written sources that could provide direct information. And of course, it makes it also impossible to check or strengthen the advanced hypotheses. Finally, throughout the research I was well aware of the enormous bias we have regarding the original art production. A lot of works got lost throughout the ages, and it is almost sure that the more inexpensive works were less preserved than the very costly ones.[18] Also a lot of original frames on which signatures might have been put, such as is often the case in the oeuvre of Jan van Eyck, got lost. On the other hand, a lot of signatures have doubtlessly still not yet been discovered, being hidden under layers of dirty varnish and retouchings or invisible in dark churches. For all these reasons it was only possible to make some general comments and to formulate some possible hypotheses. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to completely explain everything. Nevertheless, it is possible to provide a chronologically organized overview of the developments, which in turn can provide insights in different habits, i.e. the signing practice. Or like Rubin remarked: "Precisely because [signatures] are attached to products of ingenuity and invention, the rules that might be suggested about signing have many exceptions, but some general practices or principles can be given."[19]

Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide a complete bibliographical and historiographical survey of the subject. Nevertheless, I would briefly like to draw attention to some of the main publications that were either pioneering with regards to the subject, or largely helped to shape my thoughts on the matter.[20] Burg's *Die Signatur* (2007) was probably the most important source for this research. It is a very recent work, providing a wide survey of the topic, and therefore it was vital for this dissertation. Initially his book put me in doubt whether I could make a valuable contribution to the subject. But just because it is such a wide survey, it also has some shortcomings. Precisely because of the wide geographical, chronological and medial scope, it was impossible for Burg to go into detail in several places where he should have, in my opinion. Furthermore he also seems to have made some strange selective decisions. He wanted to treat whole Europe, but for some reason he does not include France and Spain. And he studied a variety of media, such as manuscripts, paintings, architecture and sculpture, but drawings and prints are almost never touched upon. Specifically concerning the part he wrote on the fifteenth- an sixteenth-century Netherlands, he used a lot of out-of-date literature. Almost as a rule he refers to Friedländer's *Die altniederländische Malerei* and only rarely uses more modern artist's monographies. On top of that, he left out a number of important artists such as Coxcie, Lombard and Vermeyen, and he never considered the evolutions within the oeuvres of the various artists. So although I straightforwardly acknowledge the importance of the publication, I felt I could make some contributions. Secondly, Louisa C. Matthew's article on signatures in Venice from 1998 proved to be very inspiring. Besides her fantastic work mapping the developments in the lagoon city which allowed me to draw several interesting parallels, she also provided me with some general ideas that appeared to be very useful in my own research. Lastly, I want to draw attention to Georg Dehio's article *Über einige Künstlerinschriften des deutschen 15. Jahrhunderts*, published in 1910. Although it is already more than a century old, to me it still seemed incredibly fresh and inspiring for my own ideas on the matter. On the basis of several examples he demonstrated that

[18] Montias 2001, p. 62.
[19] Rubin 2006, p. 566.
[20] A recent summary bibliography is provided by Gludovatz 2011, pp. 9-26. Furthermore, the bibliography at the end of this dissertation includes the most important publications on the subject.

fifteenth-century so-called 'artist's inscriptions' cannot unconditionally be taken for signatures of the principal maker. They can equally refer to the patron of the work, or to the maker of another part of the work, such as the frame. He argued that the general rule seems to have been that the principal contractor signed the final work, even if there were more artists that worked on it: '*die Inschrift ist Geschäftsinschrift.*'[21] He identified the inscriptions as trademarks or brand names. Dehio's pioneering article proved to be very inspiring for my own ideas presented in this dissertation, which moreover is written with the same point of departure in mind, namely the modest will to subtly review traditional art historical ideas by granting the material in question the scientific attention it deserves.

I came up with the idea for this research already quite some time ago, around the time when I graduated from Ghent University to be precise. Although I did start collecting material and examples that I randomly came across, I never really had an opportunity to start a systematic investigation, mostly because of the fact that it was simply a huge topic, implying a lot of material to be collected and analyzed. Yet, around the same time that I started my wonderful internship at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, I came up with the idea to draw up a proposal for a PhD-project on this topic. But things did not go as smooth as I wanted them to, and after repeated critical, questioning and somehow discouraging remarks, I was happy to join another very interesting PhD-project at Ghent University. However, I could not abandon all the questions I had, and finally I decided to tackle the issue in my master paper. Once again, I bravely started reading and collecting material, and as I progressed, gradually the structure of the paper-to-be grew clearer in my mind. But euphoric moments alternated with moments of serious doubt, because I also started realizing that – as a lot of people already tried to make clear to me from the start – it indeed *was* a huge, ambitious and difficult subject to treat. Yet, all along the line there were also people encouraging me, who sincerely believed in it and in me, and here I wish to express my deepest gratitude to them all. In the first place I warmly wish to thank my supervisor Peter Hecht for the numerous discussions we had on the topic, for allowing me to spend some extra time working on it, and in general for wisely guiding me both through the months of the investigations for the master paper and through these wonderful two years of the research master. In this respect, I also have to thank my parents for allowing me to continue my studies for two years – two fantastic years that proved to be very rewarding at that. Also my friends and fellow students deserve to be mentioned here, not only for their comments and remarks, but also for the necessary recreations throughout the sometimes stressful times. And finally, my loving thanks goes to my dear Claire, for her encouraging words in moments of doubt.

ΑΛC IXH XAN
Utrecht, 2 August 2013.

[21] Dehio 1910, p. 58.

II. PROLOGUE

Although the main focus of this study is the meaning and use of signatures in sixteenth-century Antwerp painting, it is necessary to touch upon the preceding developments of its use in the Low Countries. After all, since we will try to show that the signing of paintings only started to become a habit by the mid-sixteenth century, it must be shown that this was not the case previous to that. In this prologue we will therefore briefly consider the rare earlier signatures and attempt to explain the discrepancy between what is signed and what is not. Furthermore, as will be shown in the next chapter, the roots of some aspects of signature practice in the sixteenth century can be traced to the preceding one.

In recent years the cliché of the anonymous medieval artist has been repeatedly proven to be wrong and based on a cult of the Renaissance in the spirit of Vasari and Burckhardt.[22] For example, after 1300 manuscript illuminators and writers increasingly signed their works, not in the least for economical reasons, since the importance of monastic scribes and illuminators diminished, creating opportunities for civic craftsmen.[23] The Flemish city of Bruges provides a case in point. By 1400 it had developed itself into one of the most important centers for the production of illuminated manuscripts, calling for a specialization and a quicker and more economic production process. Miniatures were sometimes painted on separate sheets and books could be freely compiled according to the wishes of the client. On the other hand, however, this situation stimulated import and it also created tensions within the existing guild structure, as a result of which protectionist measures were taken. Among others, as of 1427, illuminators were obliged to employ an identifying mark on their sheets, a practice which can indeed be observed in Bruges manuscripts from the second quarter of the fifteenth century onwards.[24] Yet, the formerly supposed medieval anonymity does seem to apply partly to the art of painting in the Low Countries. From the fourteenth century, for instance, not a single artist's name is mentioned on an extant panel painting.[25] Even in the corpus of works by the so-called Flemish Primitives – who were, for that matter, not so Flemish nor primitive as their given name would lead one to suspect – there are only a handful of authentically signed paintings. In a 1963 article, Jacqueline Folie provided an overview of the authenticated works by these masters, consisting of works documented by archival sources, works documented by early literary sources and signed works. Of the fifteen known artistic personalities she brought together, evidently excluding the huge number of masters with provisional names, only five artists are known by means of their signatures, and two of them seem to have signed only rarely, being two or three times. Considering the total number of paintings attributed to this group of artists, this means that only 25 or 26 works were completed with a signature.[26] This small number is astonishing, especially in comparison with contemporary practice on the Italian peninsula, where in general up to one third of the paintings is signed, and in Venice even half of the painted production that we know.[27] Thus, it is clear that the signing of paintings was very rare in the Low Countries throughout the whole fifteenth century.

[22] See, most recently, Burg 2007, p. 14, and Deitl 2009, pp. 11-35, esp. pp. 12-13.
[23] Burg 2007, pp. 80-81.
[24] Smeyers and Cardon 1990. The same authors point out that after mid-century the stipulation was not followed anymore, even after a second confirmation of the law in 1457. According to them, this had to do with an altered social and corporative situation.
[25] Burg 2007, p. 395.
[26] Folie 1963. The signing artists are Jan van Eyck, Petrus Christus, Hans Memling, Jheronimus Bosch and Colijn de Coter. For Memling and de Coter she only recorded two and three signatures, respectively.
[27] Burg 2007, p. 390.

Bruges was undoubtedly the absolute center of the artistic production within these lands during the fifteenth century. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the exceptions to the rule are to be found there. Within an overall anonymity, three artists emerge that are known to have signed at least some of their works, the most famous being doubtlessly Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1400 (?) – 1441). From the approximately twenty extant works nowadays attributed to his hand, eleven carry an inscription. Two of these, the infamous quatrain on the *Ghent Altarpiece* and an inscription on the *Ince Hall Madonna*, have meanwhile been proven to be materially inauthentic, and are therefore not to be considered as signatures.[28] Consequently, we are left with the impression that almost half of his extant oeuvre is signed. In form as well as in contents these signatures differ greatly, and Jan never really standardized his way of signing. Nevertheless, some general and recurring aspects can be noted. The inscriptions – always accompanied by a date – range from 1432 until 1439 and are mostly composed in Latin, except for the *Portrait of Jan de Leeuw* (Vienna, KHM) which bears an inscription in the vernacular.[29] Furthermore, only two of the signatures are placed on the painted surface, whereas all the others are carefully painted on the frame as illusionistic carvings.[30] A description dating to 1705 of the *Rolin Madonna* (Paris, Louvre) mentions a similar inscription on the – now lost – original frame, and it is highly likely that some other unsigned van Eyck paintings initially bore signatures on their lost original frames too. Only two of the twelve extant original frames do not contain a signature.[31] In their formulations the texts display a great variety, but most of the time they contain the form "me fecit" or "me complevit". Finally, four signatures contain Jan's famous motto "*Als ich can"* ("As I can") in pseudo-Greek characters.

Much ink has already been spilt on Jan van Eyck's signatures and their possible meanings, providing both interesting insights and implausible interpretations. Unfortunately it is impossible to give an in-depth analysis of them here, but nevertheless some points should be raised briefly. The aspect that is most commented upon is without a doubt his motto. Often cited and mostly interpreted as an unmistakable proof of his self-consciousness and status, "*Als ich can"* is best to be translated as 'to the best of my abilities', which at first seems very modest, but simultaneously betrays a certain pride about the work in question. This typical mixture is a formula that was already developed in ancient rhetoric, but was still being used by late medieval copyists. Furthermore, written in Greek letters, the motto displays van Eycks learning.[32] After all, van Eyck's contemporary Bartolomeo Facio claimed that the painter had read Pliny.[33] On the other hand, it has also been connected to the habits at the Burgundian court, where all the rulers and courtiers had such a heraldic device. Therefore Jan van Eyck, as Philip the Good's *valet de chambre* and intimate for many years, could equally have taken on his motto to express his status, since he must have been familiar with the usage.[34] Although this is all very plausible, it must be noted that he did not use this motto in his most ambitious works. Only four

[28] Folie 1963, pp. 192-203, esp. pp. 193-194. On the quatrain on the frames of the Ghent Altarpiece, see most recently van der Velden 2011, esp. p. 38. He states that the text is authentic in its contents, but that the inscription is not.

[29] "Jan de [Leeuw, represented by the sign of a lion] op Sant Orsolen dach / dat claer eerst met oghen sach 1401 / Gheconterfeit nu heft mi Jan / van Eyck wel blijct wanneert bega 1436."

[30] The two exceptions are the *Tymotheos* and the *Arnolfini portrait*, both in London (National Gallery).

[31] These are the *Madonna in the Church* in Berlin (Gemäldegalerie) and the *Annunciation Diptych* in Madrid (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza). For the inscription on the *Rolin Madonna*, see Dhanens 1980, p. 266. For a list of unsigned van Eyck-paintings without their original frames, see Burg 2007, p. 396, note 7.

[32] Scheller 1968.

[33] Baxandall 1964, p. 102.

[34] Künstler 1972, esp. pp. 114-115, and Keller 1981, p. 217.

paintings are signed with the device, of which two are very personal paintings: the portrait of his wife Margaretha at Bruges (Groeningemuseum, figs. 1a-b) and the so-called *Man in the red turban* (London, National Gallery), possibly his self-portrait. The two other works are only small devotional paintings: the small triptych in Dresden and the *Madonna at the fountain* in Antwerp (RMFA). This led Gustav Künstler to believe that he may only have used it in a very intimate circle to demonstrate his noble status in a middle-class environment.[35] Although it is difficult to prove this hypothesis since the provenance of the works in Antwerp and Dresden is unknown, it is indeed striking that he does not seem to have used this very self-conscious motto in what arguably were his most important commissions. Without denying its existence, these remarks should at least diminish the over exaggerated proportions of van Eyck's self-consciousness.

Secondly, as appears from the dates given in the inscriptions, all the signed works date from after Jan van Eyck's settlement in Bruges, where he installed his workshop in 1431/32. Although not much is known about the size and functioning of his studio, all the evidence seems to suggest that in the last ten years of his career to a lesser or greater extent his workshop participated in the production of paintings.[36] Furthermore, it can be deduced from several payments that in 1432 he had twelve assistants.[37] According to the Bruges norms of the time that is a lot: painters were only allowed to have one pupil at a time, and more than 40% of the masters worked on their own.[38] It is therefore tempting to suppose that his use of the signature at least had got something to do with him entering a civic, and thus competitive marketing context. A market, moreover, in which at exactly the same time the manuscript illuminators were obliged to mark their works.

These remarks notwithstanding, it is unique that van Eyck signed his works at all, especially with a possible ratio of approximately 50%. For inspiration he seems to have drawn from two sources. On the one hand, the very practice of signing, his use of the motto and his documental tendency points to a familiarity with manuscript production.[39] Although nothing is known about his training, it has already been suggested that he started his career as a manuscript illuminator, possibly the so-called Hand G in the Turin-Milan Hours, which would explain his familiarity with this custom.[40] On the other hand, he seems to have had a knowledge of practices in Italian art, where signing paintings was becoming the norm by this time. Different scholars have already proposed that van Eyck possibly went to Italy in the 1420s in the context of one of the famous secret missions for Philip the Good.[41] However, in form as well as in placing he did not follow the latest Italian examples: he still signed his works on their frames and he kept using the "me fecit" form, both features being in use in Italy only until the 14th century.[42] In sum, it thus appears that he probably signed for various reasons: inspired by two different traditions, he used his signature as an expression of his self-consciousness and

[35] Künstler 1972.
[36] Borchert 2002, pp. 14-15.
[37] Borchert 2012, p. 86.
[38] Wilson 1990, p. 621, and Welzel, p. 143.
[39] Scheller 1968.
[40] Borchert 2002, p. 24, and Kemperdick and Lammertse 2012, pp. 98-102.
[41] See, among others, Meiss 1956, p. 60, and Borchert 2012, p. 85. Meiss even suggested an influence in both ways, explaining the Italian *cartellino* as being of Netherlandish inspiration. See therefore also Meiss 1960.
[42] Burg 2007, pp. 413-414.

learning, but he perhaps also used the display of his name and its associated status as a mercantile stratagem, trying to turn his name into a brand.[43]

Just a few years after Jan van Eyck's death another artist, active in the city of Bruges, started signing a substantial number of his works. Although Petrus Christus (c. 1410 – 1476/77) is often presented as Jan's only documented pupil, this assumption has convincingly been proven wrong: Christus only acquired the Bruges citizenship in 1444 by purchase. This rules out the possibility of him being already present in the city before 1441, since one of the other means to acquire citizenship was to stay within the city walls for one year, after which it was granted by the authorities. Consequently, we do not know where and with whom he received his artistic training.[44] Although his signatures and his works make clear that he was deeply influenced by van Eyck, this again is hardly surprising since every Bruges artist after van Eyck inevitably carried the legacy of this artistic giant, though the specific aspects of his influence vary from person to person.

Some inscriptions are nowadays considered inauthentic in their current form, but they are mostly believed to have been genuinely restored or copied from the now lost original frame. Eight inscriptions are known to this day, as a result of which Christus seems to have approximated van Eyck in his frequency: on a total oeuvre of some 21 extant works, he would have signed 38%.[45] More than van Eyck, however, Christus standardized his signatures. Although they vary in location and typeface, their content is consistent throughout all the known examples. His Christian name is always given in Latin ('Petrus'), while his family name is represented by the Greek characters XPI. The phrase always contains "me fecit", accompanied by a date. These are all clear parallels to van Eyck's signature, and it has already been demonstrated that also in the compositions of some signed paintings Christus clearly refers to his illustrious predecessor.[46]

With such small extant oeuvres it is of course difficult to generalize, but it seems that Petrus Christus was more than van Eyck inclined to sign the artwork on the picture surface itself. As noted above, this is in tune with the recent developments in Italy, but it also seems completely consistent with his own artistic development. As Joel Upton aptly demonstrated, Christus significantly transformed the artistic legacy of Jan van Eyck. Where the latter's painting displays an artistic remoteness, a conscious discrepancy between the illusory space of the painting and the real space of the beholder, Christus' art tries to establish continuity, a dynamic interaction or even a confusion between these two. And in this transformation the inscriptions play a role as well, because they are convincingly included in the painted reality, in various cases shaded by objects in the painted space (figs. 2a-b).[47]

Just as with Jan van Eyck, it is not entirely clear just why he signed his paintings. Nevertheless, the similarities between these artists' inscriptions indicate Christus' familiarity with van Eyck's practice. Furthermore, it is striking that the extant signatures on Christus' paintings all date approximately from the first decade of his career: settled in Bruges, he started to sign his paintings in 1446 – the *Portrait of Edward Grymeston* (London, National Gallery) and the *Portrait of a Carthusian* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, figs. 3a-b) – and he continued to do so until 1457 in his *Virgin and Child enthroned with Saints Francis and Jerome* (Frankfurt, Städelsches Kunstinstitut). From the last fifteen

[43] Borchert 2002, p. 17 used the term 'trademark'.
[44] Martens 1994, p. 15.
[45] Burg 2007, p. 397.
[46] Ainsworth 1994, pp. 27-33.
[47] Upton 1995, esp. p. 57.

years of his career, however, not a single signed painting is known or documented. Therefore, it is tempting to assume that by signing his paintings in a very similar way, Christus tried to capitalize on the vacancy in the niche market left behind by the death of Jan van Eyck in 1441.[48] In that context it is striking that almost immediately after the installation of his workshop in Bruges in 1444, Christus received some major commissions, some even coming from the circle Philip the Good, the former patron of Jan van Eyck. In 1446 Christus signed and dated the *Portrait of Edward Grymeston,* who was the ambassador of the English king at the Burgundian court. Furthermore, he might have also adapted the style of his signatures to the wishes of the client. For instance, the Frankfurt *Virgin and Child enthroned with Saints Francis and Jerome*, generally thought to have been commissioned by an Italian, is signed with an illusory carved inscription on the lowest step of the throne, which was the contemporary Italian way of signing.[49] Here again, it is not impossible that the artist at least partially used the signature as a mercantile stratagem.

Except for Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christus there is not a single painter in Bruges that is known to have signed his works on a more or less regular basis, and an incredibly large number of painters with provisional names such as the Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy will probably remain anonymous forever. However, although he does not seem to have signed with any regularity, within the oeuvre of Hans Memling (c. 1430/10 – 1494) two signatures are known, constituting, as a matter of fact, the basis of all the attributions, because of the lack of archival sources that might be connected to extant works by this painter. Both inscriptions are to be found on the original frames of paintings dating to 1479, and both works were made for the Hospital of St John in Bruges, the city where Memling had already been working from 1465 onwards. The inscription on the frame of the famous *St John Altarpiece* (Bruges, Memlingmuseum) has been proven not to be original in its present form, but it is still thought to repeat at least the contents of an original one. The inscription on the *Floreins Triptych* (Bruges, Memlingmuseum, fig. 4a) on the other hand, is authentic.[50] Still, the *raison d'être* of this inscription is very probably the quest for fame on the part of the donor, since the artist's name only has a subordinate role in it, being displayed only on the lower side of the right wing's frame:

DIT . WERCK . DEDE . MAKEN . BROEDER . IAN . FLOREINS . /
ALIAS . VANDER . RIIST . BROEDER . PROFFES . VANDE(N) . HOSPITALE . VAN . SINT . IANS . IN .
BRVGGHE . . ANNO . M CCCC LXXIX / OPVS . IOHANIS . MEMLING .

Interesting to note is that in both inscriptions Memling integrated a sort of monogram in his family name: the first letter of the word is in fact a strange mixture between an H and an M, combining his initials (fig. 4b).[51] Whatever the case, these two inscriptions appear to be more of an archival reference or a curiosum for the potential viewer, and thus are not signatures in the same sense as those by van Eyck or Christus, since Memling's inscriptions the name of the artist could have just as well been omitted. Precisely this is the case in his *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, which bears a similar text as the *Floreins Triptych*, only here put in Latin: "*HOC . OPUS . FIERI . FECIT . MARTINUS*

[48] As suggested by Ainsworth 1994, p. 27.
[49] Ainsworth 1994, p. 30, and Burg 2007, pp. 414-416.
[50] The signature on the *St John Altarpiece* is placed on the lower side of the frame of the center panel, and reads ". OPVS . IOHANNIS . MEMLING . ANNO . M . CCCC . LXXIX . 1479 ." See Folie 1963, pp. 225-229, and de Vos 1994, pp. 352-354.
[51] De Vos 1994, p. 353. Strangely enough, the author gives another instance in which this typical character is used for an H in the word "ghedaen", in the painting of 1480 that gave the name to the anonymous Bruges Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy (Bruges, St Jacobs).

.D. NEWENHOVEN . ANNO . DM . 1487 ."[52] Whereas the name of the patron, and thus sitter, is carefully shown on the frame, that of the artist is missing. This type of donor's inscriptions, written down primarily to document the commission of an artwork on the part of the donor, was not uncommon at all in Bruges, nor elsewhere in fact. Sometimes the commissioner seems to have been generous enough to allow the artist to include his name, perhaps especially when its presence could enhance the former's status too. After all, Jan van Eyck's inscription on the *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* tells us more about the donor's foundation than about the artist, and it uses a similar wording as the inscriptions in Memling's oeuvre: "*hoc op(us) fecit fieri mag(iste)r georgi(us) de pala hui(us) eccles(iae) canon. P(er) johanne(em) de eijck pictore(m) . et fundavit hic duas Capellania(s) de gremio chori, a^{o} domini mccccxxxiiii . (complevit) an 1436.*"[53] The artist's name seems to be almost mentioned fortuitously, and it is therefore hardly surprising that similar inscriptions are found on works without mentioning its author. A case in point is the triptych in the church of San Lorenzo della Costa, south of Genoa, by the anonymous painter who was given the highly original name of Master of San Lorenzo della Costa. This triptych bears the inscription "*HOC OPVS FIERI FECIT ANDREAS DE COSTE A^{O} 1499 BRVGIS*".[54] For this Genoese merchant it was apparently of higher importance – more prestigious? – to mention the geographical origins of the work than the name of its maker.

Considering the evidence at hand, it seems that in the fifteenth century the practice of signing paintings seems to have been a predominantly Bruges phenomenon within the Low Countries, and even there it never developed into a widespread habit. From Gerard David, for instance, we know of no signed work. And while other Netherlandish cities as Brussels, Ghent or Tournai were also places with significant painting traditions bringing forth a multitude of great masters who were already internationally renowned during their lifetimes, not a single signed work is known by these famous men. Although all kinds of hilarious attempts have been made to discover hidden signatures in decorative inscriptions in compositions attributed to the Master of Flémalle, the identity of this mysterious master and his relation to Rogier van der Weyden remains as yet unknown.[55] Also the currently known oeuvres of the Ghent master Hugo van der Goes and the Louvain painter Dieric Bouts do not contain signed works, even though about the latter Karel van Mander writes:

> "In Leiden I have seen a triptych by his hand […] which bore the following Latin inscription in gilded letters: in 1462 AD Dieric, who was born in Haarlem, made me in Louvain, let him find eternal peace."[56]

Although the work he describes is not known anymore, and the authenticity of the mentioned inscription thus cannot be verified anymore, it is a very interesting passage. It probably was an inscription not unlike the ones used by Jan van Eyck, since it is said to have contained the phrase "me

[52] Friedländer 1967-1976, vol. 6a, cat. 14.
[53] For the inscription see Folie 1963, p. 196.
[54] For that painter, see *The Grove Encyclopedia of Northern Renaissance Art* (http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100441317), consulted 26 June 2013.
[55] See for example de Bruin 1965.
[56] "Ick hebbe ghesien binnen Leyden, van hem een stuck met twee deuren: in't midden was een tronie van eenen *Salvator,* in d'een deur eenen S. *Petrus,* in d'ander een S. *Paulus* tronie, waer onder stondt met gulden letters gheschreven in Latijn dees meeninghe: Duysent vier hondert en twee en tsestigh Iaer nae *Christus* gheboort, heeft *Dirck,* die te Haerlem is gheboren, my te Loven ghemaeckt, de eeuwighe rust moet hem ghewerden." See van Mander 1604, fol. 206v.

fecit," and it seems that van Mander means that it was to be seen on the lower edge of the frame. The mention of the city of production is, however, something new, but can be easily explained by the fact that the work was in all probability made for Leiden. Therefore, this documented signature is perhaps an early illustration of the later practice of signing works for 'foreign' destinations – a practice to which we will return.

Where Jan van Eyck varied the form and the wording of his signature throughout his career, Petrus Christus varied only its location and appearance, while always repeating the same wording. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, an artist appeared who developed a completely new conception of what a signature should look like. Not only being a visionary artist, Jheronimus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) was also far ahead of his time in the way he signed his pictures. In fact, his standardized signatures anticipate seventeenth-century ones, which, in turn, became the models for artists' signatures up to this day. Although it is very likely that he signed on a more or less regular basis, the total number of paintings in Bosch' oeuvre is subject to considerable variations, ranging from some 25 up to 50.[57] It is therefore very difficult – if not impossible – to gauge the share of signed paintings, a problem that is even worsened by the unusual high amount of copies and imitations bearing Bosch' name as well. Nevertheless, there seems to be a consensus about eight of these inscriptions being authentic, which can therefore be seen as genuine signatures.[58] On top of that, it has already been suggested that a number of only fragmentarily preserved works also carried signatures originally.[59]

Although his paintings are never inscribed with a date, from a stylistic and dendrochronological point of view it seems that Bosch started to sign his works around 1490. Because he maintained a constant standardization, his signature remained the same throughout his career, and it is precisely this standardization which is so radically new.[60] First of all, he restricted his signature to his name only, to which he moreover applied an unusually coherent spelling, always writing it as 'Jheronimus Bosch'.[61] He never added a verb to it, and he did not integrate the inscription in the depicted reality. The signature is thus always put *on* the picture surface and it is always on the lower left or right hand side. On top of that, it is always rather big, which makes it even more eye-catching. Finally, he always used a late gothic font, resembling a written text on paper. As a result, all these elements together offer striking parallels with an officially signed document, parallels which are arguably intentional. It appears that Bosch conceived his signature as an invariable trademark, being a sign of authenticity and quality in one.[62] Again, it seems that the signature is not merely an expression of an artistic self-consciousness, but rather it is a guarantee.[63]

The supposition that Bosch' signature served economical purposes is further supported by the fact that he never used his old family name 'van Aken', but a new one clearly indicating the place where he was working: the city of 's-Hertogenbosch, which was – and is – colloquially called Den Bosch. An extremely interesting document of 1510 shows that even by then – i.e. after approximately twenty

[57] Burg 2007, pp. 403-404.
[58] Folie 1963, pp. 233-240, esp. p. 233, note 2. In note 4 she mentions 14 inscriptions on copies or imitations.
[59] Vermet 2001, p. 95.
[60] Burg 2007, pp. 427-433.
[61] There is only one minor exception, being the triptych with the *Martyrdom of St Ontcommer* in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, on which his Christian name is spelled 'Jheronymus'.
[62] Burg 2007, p. 433.
[63] Vandenbroeck 2001, p. 190 interprets it as a combination of the two.

years of signing with the surname 'Bosch' – he was still officially known by his old family name, since there he is called "Jheronimus van Aken, painter, who writes his own name as 'Jheronimus Bosch'." [64] Apparently his 'new' family name was the one he himself mostly used when writing, and perhaps the said document is even specifically referring to his way of signing. The change is easy to understand: as his old name was a topical reference to the city of Aachen, he wanted to be clear about the city in which his workshop was located, in order not to create a confusion for potential clients. The early provenance of Bosch' work is unfortunately not known with certainty, but in this view it is not unthinkable that the signed works were commissioned for places outside Den Bosch' city walls.[65] It has already been suggested that the signed triptych with the *Martyrdom of St Ontcommer* (Venice, Palazzo Ducale) was painted for a north Italian patron and the triptych with the *Haywain* (Madrid, Prado, figs. 5a-b), which is also signed, was possibly commissioned by the Spanish courtier Diego de Guevara.[66]

It is not clear where Bosch got his inspiration from. Parallels with contemporary Italian practices have however been drawn, especially with Bellini.[67] And it is indeed true that Giovanni Bellini too restricted his signature to the bare essence, dropping verbs and dates and usually signing with "Ioannes Bellinus", only sometimes accompanied by a 'P' for 'pinxit'. But in these Venetian pictures Gothic script is specifically abandoned in favor of Roman capitals, and the signature is always part of a painted illusion, either being engraved in stone or written down on a cartellino.[68] As a result, Bellini's signatures are never as personal as Bosch'. On the other hand, Vandenbroeck has interestingly noted that in contemporary Spanish painting too large and conspicuously placed signatures in Gothic letters were used.[69] This Spanish link is especially interesting, since the Spanish art collecting courtier Diego de Guevara (c. 1450-1520) is known to have been a member of the prestigious Brotherhood of Our Lady in 's-Hertogenbosch, the society in which Bosch also is registered from 1488 onwards. This leaves no doubt that the two must have known each other. On top of that, de Guevara possessed no less than six works by the artist, of which the signed *Haywain* was one.[70] It is therefore not impossible that de Guevara brought Bosch in contact with signature practices in the courtier's home country. In any case, whatever his source of inspiration may have been, there is no doubt that Bosch thoroughly reflected upon how to sign his pictures, and probably it was quite effective during his lifetime. Ironically enough, however, it is precisely Bosch' extremely personal signatures that were notoriously faked already in the middle of the sixteenth century. Around this time there was a genuine Bosch-revival, prompting few creative workshops to start producing variants or reproductions of the popular originals, but also absolute forgeries.[71] In his *Comentarios de la Pintura*, written around 1560, Don Diego's son Felipe de Guevara (1500-1563) famously mentions the production of fake Bosch paintings, which were given an older look by being

[64] "Jheronimus van Aken, schilder ofte maelder die hem selver scrift Jheronimus Bosch." Geciteerd naar Koldeweij 2001, p. 21.
[65] The earliest documents that can be linked to extant works date to the second half of the sixteenth century, see Folie 1963, p. 233.
[66] See therefore Vandenbroeck 2007, § I.
[67] Burg 2007, p. 428.
[68] See especially Matthew 1998, esp. pp. 620-624.
[69] Vandenbroeck 2001, p. 189. Unfortunately, he does not give examples or references.
[70] Vandenbroeck 2007, § I.
[71] On that phenomenon, see among others Van den Brink 2003.

smoked in chimneys and falsely inscribed with Bosch' name.[72] So while Bosch wanted his signature to be a mark of authenticity, arguably more so than his few signing contemporaries, this stratagem turned out to be very weak and easy to copy. It was, in fact, to become the tragic fate of all signatures eventually.

It would be necessary to know much more about certain aspects of the artistic production or the early provenance of signed paintings to fully understand the discrepancy between signed and unsigned paintings. But although it is impossible to make generalizations, this short overview allows us to draw several provisional, but nonetheless interesting conclusions. Although in the fifteenth century there were already several painters who signed on what might be called a more or less regular basis, it is impossible to speak of a signing habit. The mere figure of 25 or 26 extant Netherlandish signatures for the whole century makes this abundantly clear. Moreover, the known signatures display a variety of formal characteristics and a diversity of inspirational sources, raising different questions as to their use. Thus, the Italo-centric view of Netherlandish artists purely following Italian examples cannot be maintained. Habits in local manuscript production, for example, appeared to have been a source of inspiration too. In sum, by the beginning of the sixteenth century it is still impossible to speak of an established signing tradition in the Low Countries. Concerning the reasons for signing, the cliché of the increasing self-consciousness of the artist cannot sufficiently be demonstrated, although it might partially be true. On the other hand, it seems that the signatures cannot be seen as serving merely decorative purposes either, as Folie suggested.[73] In all probability the motives for signing paintings were multiple. Nevertheless it seems that an economic rationale was always involved: signatures were quite possibly used as a mercantile stratagem, by exploiting a known name and its connected status or reputation. Although much knowledge about early provenances is lacking, it seems that paintings for 'foreign' destinations were signed more often than others, which might indicate that the painter in question tried to make his name known in another city, too, in order to bring in other potential clients. Furthermore, on several occasions it is clear that the signature answers the aspirations or assumptions of the patron. Unfortunately, due to lack of sources this is all indemonstrable, but the same goes for the ever-supposed increasing self-consciousness.

[72] "Ansi vienen á ser infinitas las pinturas de este género, selladas con el nombre de Hyerónimo Bosco, falsamente inscripto; en las quales á él nunca le pasó por el pensamiento poner las manos, sino el humo y cortos ingenios, ahumandolas á las chimeneas para dalles autoridad y antigüedad." De Guevara 1788, p. 42.
[73] Folie 1963, p. 186.

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN ANTWERP

By the time Bosch began to sign his works, Antwerp was superseding Bruges as commercial center of the Low Countries. Political events with economical consequences led to the development of the city on the river Scheldt into a mercantile metropolis. For Bruges, things started to go awry after the death of Charles the Bold in 1477. Cities all over the Burgundian territories started to strive for ever more privileges, which were often rashly granted by Charles' only daughter Mary of Burgundy, in search for the acceptance and recognition of her power. But because of her sudden death in 1482 after a fatal spill of her horse during a hunting party, her husband Maximilian of Austria was appointed regent to their underage son Philip. Maximilian again strived for a serious establishment of the central power, which created considerable tensions with the cities. A conflict between the two parties originated, and while prosperous Bruges took the lead of the rebelling cities, the quietly developing city of Antwerp chose to take the side of the mighty regent, which was subsequently rewarded with various important privileges. Bruges, on the other hand, was severely punished, because in 1488 Maximilian forced the foreign merchants to leave the city. And since Antwerp meanwhile had been developing a serious economic potential too, most of them chose for a permanent settlement there. Increasingly from the 1490s onwards, Antwerp became the dominant trading place for a wide array of incredibly desired international products, such as papal alum, English cloth and colonial spices.[74]

As Karel van Mander already wittily noticed as early as 1604, art desires to be with wealth.[75] And he was right: already from the 1470s onwards, artists from all over the Low Countries followed the merchants to the city that would soon become the capital of capitalism.[76] A quick look at the entries in the *Liggeren* makes this abundantly clear, since in many cases the names of the registered members indicate their region of origin. Not only southern Netherlandish towns as Bruges, Brussels or Louvain are represented, but also cities from the region north of the big rivers, such as Amsterdam and Leiden.[77] Thus, the various artistic traditions from the different cities of origin were interbred in a city with no such considerable tradition, accounting for the early eclecticism in Antwerp's artistic production. The example of the Brussels tradition is an interesting case in point. Artists coming from that city were trained in a still very strong *rogeresque* tradition, but the contact in Antwerp with Dürer's graphic works allowed them to free themselves from this stylistic idiom.[78] Already by the 1510s and 1520s a distinctive Antwerp style had been formed out of these different traditions, now generally known as 'Antwerp mannerism'. By this time, Antwerp had taken over from Bruges the lead role as center of artistic production within the Netherlands, and as the Antwerp market already had a strong international allure, the artistic production quickly followed suit. Antwerp altarpieces – whether carved, painted or a combination of the two – were exported all over Europe, and are still found nowadays in churches from up north in Sweden down to Italian and Spanish towns. The absolute summit of these exporting activities was in the 1510s and 1520s, not accidentally coinciding with the heyday of the Antwerp mannerist style.[79]

[74] For these events and developments, see among others van der Wee 1963; Arblaster 2006, pp. 108-113; Born 2011, pp. 83-84.
[75] In the life of Joachim Patinir: "De vermaerde heerlijcke stadt Antwerpen, door de Coopmanschap in voorspoet wesende, heeft over al tot haer gewenct d'uytnemenste onser Consten, die veel hun tot haer oock begeven hebben, om dat de Const geern is by den rijckdom." See van Mander 1604, fol. 219r.
[76] Born 2011, p. 44.
[77] Rombouts and van Lerius 1864-1876, vol. 1, passim.
[78] Born 2011, pp. 56-57.
[79] Born 2011, pp. 101-105

Of course, these growing productive capacities were not possible without a steady growing number of artists in the city. Here again an analysis of the *Liggeren* provides interesting insights: in the period between 1490 and 1530, an incredible number of 545 new free masters and 478 apprentices was registered in the Antwerp guild of Saint Luke. The master painters represented approximately 40% of the overall number of masters in the guild. The total number of painters – both masters and apprentices – started growing around 1500, a development which lasted until around 1520.[80] Maximiliaan Martens took these statistical calculations further, and tried to make more precise distinctions between master painters registered in Antwerp on the one hand, and active painter's workshops on the other hand. According to his observations and estimations, the evolution was as follows: in 1490, there were around 70 master painters registered in Antwerp, a number which grew to 100 in 1508, to 150 in 1520 and eventually up to 180 in 1528. On the other hand, he considered the number of active painter's workshops to be around 56 in 1490, 100 in 1515 and 120 in 1525.[81] This enormous growth was unparalleled at the time in north-western Europe and the phenomenon was undoubtedly stimulated by the growing international demand for Antwerp artworks, but it must be emphasized that the vast majority of these members were mere artisans, and only a very small portion of the total number of members would nowadays be considered as talented figurative artists.[82] There is no doubt that this at least partially accounts for the fact that so many names in the archives remain unconnected to extant artworks. In fact, of the more than 300 known painter's names from the period between 1490 and 1530, only seventeen are known artistic personalities, representing only a scanty 5,5%.[83]

Seen from the other side, with these numbers and reflections in mind, it is not surprising at all that a large part of the extant artworks produced in Antwerp in the late fifteenth or the early sixteenth century remain unattributed and classified as anonymous. On the one hand, a huge number of artworks was produced for the open market – 'on spec' – as a result of which they cannot be linked to archival documents revealing the name of the author. But on the other hand – and here we come to our main topic again – there was no tradition of signing artworks, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Of the said seventeen known artistic personalities, only four left behind genuinely signed works, and two of them did so only once in a blue moon: of both Quinten Metsys and Joachim Patenir we only have six signatures, among them some of which the authenticity is even debated. Only Jan Gossart and Jan Sanders van Hemessen signed on a more or less regular basis.[84] To all of them we will return.

[80] Martens 2004/2005, pp. 48-49.
[81] Martens 2004/2005, pp. 56-57.
[82] Born 2011, pp. 109-110.
[83] Martens 2004/2005, p. 67. He lists as known artistic personalities: Hendrik van Wueluwe (as the Master of Frankfurt), Goossen van der Weyden, Joos van Cleve, Jan de Beer, Jan Wellens de Cock, Dirk Vellert, Adriaen van Overbeke, Jan Mertens van Dornicke (as the Master of 1518), Quinten Metsys, Jan Gossart, Lieven van Lathem, Jacob Cornelisz van Amsterdam, Jan van Amstel, Jan Sanders van Hemessen, Joachim Patinir, Valentijn van Orley and Pieter Coecke van Aelst.
[84] Jacob Cornelisz van Amsterdam – whom Martens included in his list of known artistic personalities – is not considered here, since he worked in Amsterdam. Nonetheless, he will be treated further in this chapter.

SOME ENIGMATIC LETTERS

And yet an interesting and not fully studied phenomenon can be noticed when studying the art production of these early years of Antwerp's economic prosperity. Several works that should clearly be attributed to Antwerp workshops contain monograms, letter combinations or figures highly likely to be self-portraits. In some cases a combination is known too. The earliest examples stem from the workshop of the Master of Frankfurt, reasonably identified with Hendrik van Wueluwe (active 1483-1533).[85] This master did not really sign his works: in his oeuvre there is only one portrait carrying a partial inscription '*…*W*1518*', which is generally taken as the remnants of a monogram, the W referring to his supposed family name 'van Wueluwe' (figs. 6a-b).[86] However, from about 1490 onwards every now and then he includes a clearly identifiable self-portrait in his works (figs. 7-10b). The supposition that it indeed is a self-portrait is corroborated on the one hand by the fact that it recurs in his oeuvre, and on the other hand by the double portrait in Antwerp (RMFA, fig. 11), reasonably attributed to the same master, in which the figures are identified as the artist and his wife, the features of the man being the same as those of the supposed self-portraits included in the said paintings. The fact that on the top of the panel the coat of arms of the Guild of St Luke is represented, in combination with the device of the guild '*wt Jonsten versaemt*', makes this identification almost irrefutable. Upon taking a closer look it is striking that the self-portraits are either included in works with a strong personal value, like the *Festival of the archers* (fig. 7), or – and this is important – in works that were destined for a place outside of Antwerp, like Frankfurt or Watervliet (figs. 8 & 10).[87] Something similar can be noted in the oeuvre of Joos van Cleve (c. 1485-1540/41). While he already included his first self-portrait in a work on which he collaborated as a pupil in the workshop of his supposed master Jan Joest in Kalkar (fig. 12), he continued doing so while he had his own workshop in Antwerp from 1511 onwards. Four further supposed integrated self-portraits are known from his studio, and here again the hypothesis that these are genuine self-portraits is corroborated on the one hand by their recurring character and on the other hand by an autonomous portrait, clearly by Joos van Cleve, of a man with the same features, thus generally identified as a self-portrait (Madrid, Museo Thyssen Bornemisza, fig. 13).[88] Far more important for the construction of the identity and the oeuvre of van Cleve, however, was the monogram 'I VA b' he included in some of his paintings. After all, until the late nineteenth century the artist was only known under the provisional name of the Master of the death of the Virgin. By the correct interpretation of the monogram as Joos van der Beke, alias van Cleve, the previously anonymous master finally received a name in 1894.[89] The monogram is included in three, possibly even five, paintings, and in the famous *Saint Reinhold Altarpiece* (Warschau, Muzeum Narodowe, figs. 14a-b) it is combined with one of his self-portraits (figs. 14c-d).[90] Once again, it is striking that the self-

[85] For that identification, which is now generally accepted, see Delen 1949; Goddard 1983a; Goddard 1983b.
[86] Published by Goddard 1983b.
[87] See Goddard 1984, respectively catalogue numbers 1, 67 and 104. The early provenance of the Adoration in Antwerp (RMFA) (cat. 79) is unfortunately not known.
[88] For the self-portraits by Joos van Cleve, see Hand 2004, catalogue numbers 8, 16, 22, 73 and 74. See also Bialostocki 1995; Scailliérez 1991, pp. 62-64; Scailliérez 2011, pp. 87-90; Leeflang 2003; Leeflang 2007, pp. 50-60; Leeflang 2011.
[89] Firmenich-Richartz 1894.
[90] For the paintings with monograms, see Hand 2004, catalogue numbers 7, 8 and 61.1. On Hand's cat. 46, a painting possibly made for a church in Agaete on Gran Canaria, there is an inscription he quotes as 'A h (?)' on the purse of a boy, which might in my view possibly be the remnants of his common monogram. Finally,

portraits and monograms are included in paintings commissioned for places outside of Antwerp's city walls. The *Triptych with the death of the Virgin* was commissioned by a Cologne merchant, the *Saint Reinhold altarpiece* was made for a confraternity in Gdánsk and the so-called *Large adoration* (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie) and the *Lamentation altarpiece* were very probably made for clients in Genoa.[91] On top of that, all monograms and self-portraits seem to stem from the period before circa 1525, which was the period in which van Cleve primarily produced relatively large-scale and valuable altarpieces, partially made for the export. As an answer to the economic crisis that struck Antwerp around 1525, he re-organized his workshop and changed his marketing strategy and his type of production, switching to *Andachtsbilder* produced for the open market.[92]

Besides these two well-known masters, similar – though much more problematic – examples can be found in the oeuvres of other Antwerp painters active in the same period. From the workshop of the Master of 1518, who is quite possibly identical to Jan Mertens van Dornicke (c. 1470-c. 1527), we know of two works carrying letters that are sometimes interpreted as monograms.[93] In the 1518 dated work that gave the master his name and which is still to be seen in its original location in Lübeck (Church of Our Lady), a combination of letters in an architectural cartouche is represented on the upper left inner shutter (figs. 15a-c). Its reading, however, is not entirely clear: 'P' or 'R' and 'C' or 'G'. Whatever their interpretation, these letters are incompatible with the master's supposed name. The reading of the letters as PC would allow us to see it as a monogram of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, who was his son-in-law and very probably also his pupil, but then again Coecke's presence in the city around 1518 has not yet been proven by other documents.[94] Another painting from the circle of the Master of 1518 or that of Pieter Coecke, a *Resurrection* (Rodez, Musée Fenaille), carries another monogram on the armor of the sleeping soldier, which can be read as 'L c' or 'L d' (figs. 16a-c). But here again, the letters have not yet been convincingly connected to a name.[95] A similar situation occurs in the oeuvre of the still anonymous Master of the Antwerp adoration. In the *Triptych with the adoration of the Magi* in Brussels (RMFAB) attributed to this master, a letter 'G' was put in the lower left corner during the painting process. On top of that, a figure looking straight at the viewer on the right wing has been identified as a self-portrait of the painter (figs. 17a-c).[96] When this was discovered in 1958, this elicited enthusiasm from art historians, since it was thought to be the key to discovery of the identity of the master. But some years later another supposed monogram and self-portrait was discovered on another work attributed to the same Master of the Antwerp adoration, the *Passion altarpiece* stemming from the Cologne Kreuzbrüderkirche (now Wallraf-Richartz-Museum). Here the monogram read as 'TNP', and the supposed self-portrait on the Cologne panels did not resemble the one in Brussels.[97] From the better known Adriaen van Overbeke (active 1508-1529) there are several documented works and also three possible candidates as monogrammed

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Leeflang 2007, p. 40, mentioned another monogram on a *Virgin with child* (Madrid, Collection Theotokópoulos), but unfortunately nothing is further known about this painting.

[91] The early provenance of the *Small adoration* in Dresden (Gemäldegalerie) is unfortunately not known. That van Cleves works with self-portraits were destined for foreign destinations was already noted by Justi 1895. Interestingly, if the inscription on Hand's cat. 46 is accepted as a monogram, than it would equally fit into this hypothesis, since it was very probably made for a church on Gran Canaria. See note 90.

[92] See Leeflang 2011, esp. pp. 145-147.

[93] The identification of Jan Mertens van Dornicke as the Master of 1518 was first proposed by Marlier 1966.

[94] Born 2011, pp. 142-143. Born does not consider it as a monogram.

[95] Born 2011, p. 274. In this case, Born does seem to consider it as a genuine monogram.

[96] Vanaise 1958, esp. p. 140.

[97] Leeflang 2004/2005, pp. 243-244.

works, but the situation is as problematic as the two previous cases. The monogram most likely to be genuine is found on the *Kleppingaltar* (Soest, St Petri) that was made in Overbeke's workshop: on the left wing there are letters that can either be read as 'AD' or 'AO' in ligature, thus possibly indicating Adriaen van Overbeke's initials.[98] But on other works from this same workshop there are unexplained letter combinations as 'MDENI' or – on a workshop copy of that work – even unidentified letters.[99] Finally, a last known example is found on the anonymous *Saint Agilolphus altarpiece* dating to 1521 (Cologne, Cathedral), containing the supposed monogram 'HA' – again, as yet unconnected to a known name.[100] In strong contrast to the oeuvres of the Master of Frankfurt (Hendrik van Wueluwe) and Joos van Cleve, this last set of examples appears much more problematic, and their interpretation as signatures does not seem tenable.

Nonetheless, there are interesting parallels between the first and the last group of examples. They all seem to belong to a similar group of inscriptions. Perhaps they are indeed not to be seen as signatures in the strict sense of the word, but nevertheless it seems that by looking at the whole group of inscriptions, those 'signatures' by the Master of Frankfurt and Joos van Cleve can be contextualized. It is striking that, just as demonstrated above for paintings by the Master of Frankfurt and Joos van Cleve, all the mentioned works of which the early provenances are known were commissioned by non-Antwerp patrons for places outside of Antwerp's city walls. The altarpiece of the Master of 1518 was commissioned for Lübeck, the *Kleppingaltar* from van Overbeke for Soest and finally the 'TNP' monogrammed work by the Master of the Antwerp adoration and the anonymous 'HA' monogrammed work both for Cologne.[101] It thus seems that especially – perhaps even only – works destined for 'foreign' cities were being monogrammed or completed with a self-portrait. This has already sufficiently been suggested in the case of van Cleve's self-portraits, but not for his monogrammed paintings, nor for the other examples.[102] But, as Scailliérez had already rightly suggested, this hypothetical practice never really was applied as a constant rule, since other known examples in the oeuvre of van Cleve that were certainly destined for foreign cities do not contain a monogram nor self-portrait.[103] The second triptych van Cleve painted for the Cologne Hackeney-family is a case in point, since it does not bear a monogram.[104]

Until now monograms and self-portraits were treated together, but that might not seem very logical at first sight. And yet, already in antiquity there was a link between signing and self-portraits.[105] A well-known passage in Cicero, for example, recounts that the famous sculptor Phidias put his self-portrait on the shield of his Minerva sculpture, because he was not allowed to put his name on it for religious reasons.[106] In Italian painting they were increasingly used to substitute or supplement signatures from the early fifteenth century onwards.[107] There are also some fifteenth-century

[98] Lohse Belkin and van Hout 2005, p. 176.
[99] Lohse Belkin and van Hout 2005, p. 178.
[100] Stechow 1942.
[101] Unfortunately, the provenances of the other given examples are unknown.
[102] See especially Scailliérez 2011, pp. 87-90, and Leeflang 2007, pp. 50-60.
[103] Scailliérez 1991, p. 64.
[104] Hand 2004, cat. 46.
[105] Burg 2007, p. 13.
[106] *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I, 34: "opifices post mortem nobilitari volunt. quid enim Phidias sui similem speciem inclusit in clipeo Minervae, cum inscribere (nomen) non liceret." Quoted from the online edition on http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/tusc1.shtml (consulted 3 July 2013).
[107] Ames-Lewis 2000, pp. 212-215, and Burg 2007, p. 393.

northern examples, although their identifications are sometimes highly debated.[108] Besides, there does not seem to be any general system that can be deduced from their use and concerning fifteenth century north-European painting it would be unjustified to claim that all the works with an integrated self-portrait were destined for export. Nevertheless, there seem to be some interesting antecedents for the supposed early sixteenth-century Antwerp practice. Although the topic of self-portraits in the oeuvre of Hans Memling is one of constant debate, the only more or less generally accepted example was made for outside Bruges' city walls, namely the *Donne Triptych* (London, National Gallery, figs. 18a-b) commissioned by John Donne from Wales.[109]

So how should we interpret these letters or monograms? All the collected examples are altarpieces, some of them rather large, produced in Antwerp in the 1510s or 1520s, which was the heyday of the city's art exporting activities. In order to get a better understanding of how these retables were produced, it is necessary to have a look at the working methods and composition of the Antwerp workshops in this period. Studies show that after a first phase from approximately 1490 to 1515 characterized by a constant growth of the quantity of painter's workshops, a second phase followed, going from about 1516 until 1525, during which primarily the quantity of one-man workshops increased. Thus, the dominant workshop model in Antwerp between 1490 and 1530 was that of a shop run by only one master painter, without pupils or assistants.[110] The big workshops were doubtlessly the exception to the rule: in the period between 1490 and 1530 only 42,7% of the master painters had one pupil registered, and in the period between 1500 and 1539 only 3,4% of the masters registered three pupils throughout their whole career.[111] The situation is therefore highly comparable to that in Bruges, where in the same period 77,1% of the master painters did not take on an apprentice.[112] It does not come as a surprise that especially these masters are completely unknown and without an attributed oeuvre today.[113] The best known artists with the most substantially reconstructed oeuvres are those of the bigger workshops, that is to say: Jan Mertens van Dornicke (probably the Master of 1518), Hendrik van Wueluwe (probably the Master of Frankfurt), Goossen van der Weyden, Adriaen van Overbeke and Jan de Beer.[114]

In combination with the steady growth of one-man workshops, a considerable rise in the employment of temporary labor is noted in exactly this same period too.[115] And here we touch upon the essence of Antwerp's artistic production in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Because of the high international demand for large and valuable altarpieces, Antwerp artists developed the habit of subcontracting work, as a result of which the artworks were often made in cooperation with different workshops. This was done for several reasons. In many cases, the commissioned works were complex, large and costly, and the production of such works thus involved considerable financial input, something which not all workshops could afford, especially not the small one-man workshops. On the other hand, the deadlines stipulated in contracts sometimes created a rather high pressure of time, and not complying with the contract could create serious trouble. In order to spread those risks, the big commissions were split up between different workshops. This at once

[108] See for examples Ainsworth 1998a, pp. 78-81.
[109] De Vos 1994, pp. 352-354.
[110] Martens 2004/2005, pp. 57-58; Born 2011, p. 118.
[111] Martens and Peeters 2006a, pp. 216-218.
[112] Martens 1998, pp. 24-25.
[113] Born 2011, pp. 118-119.
[114] Born 2011, p. 121, and Leeflang 2004/2005, passim.
[115] Martens 2004/2005, p. 58.

explains the presence of different hands in various altarpieces from the period. The contractor that accepted the commission could be a painter, a sculptor or a specialized contractor-art dealer. This means that the contractor could be the principal artist of the work, but that was not necessarily the case. Nevertheless he was always the one with the final responsibility.[116] There are examples of known painters who assumed the role of such a contractor, like Jan Mertens van Dornicke in 1512 and Adriaen van Overbeke in 1522. But other names from the period are exclusively known as contractors, and not as an artist as such. Dierick Proudekin is a case in point: from the extant archival documents one gets a rather clear image of him as an important contractor with international contacts.[117]

There thus were two big types of artistic production. On the one hand, it was possible to commission specific artworks directly from a workshop or a contractor, but on the other hand, artworks were also increasingly made 'on spec', i.e. for the open market, without a specific commission. The guild itself made a similar distinction in its regulations. In the statutes of 1470, for example, specific distinction is made between works on commission and '*coopwercke*', for which the guild laid down more rigorous rules. Just like the guilds in other cities the Antwerp guild arranged a system to have the produced artworks marked or valued – '*geteyckent*' or '*gewardeert*' – with a quality stamp in order to protect the client and the artisanal reputation of the city. The regulations are not entirely clear, but it seems that this system was especially applied to works produced on spec.[118] This would be logical, since the agreements regarding quality of the works on commission would be stated in the contract, as a result of which the city's approval would become unnecessary.[119] Although the guild strictly decreed that unmarked works may not be sold as marked ones, just how this whole system worked is not entirely clear and various lawsuits related to it seemed to have been taken to court.[120] In any case it is clear that it was not obligatory for works to carry a quality mark if the buyer was informed about that.[121]

But let us return to the given examples. The works considered above were almost certainly all made on commission, and interestingly enough they either came out of the large workshops at the time, or out of the workshops about which is known that they worked with the subcontracting system. Even in Joos van Cleve's *Saint Reinhold altarpiece*, for example, it is clear that he must have worked in intense collaboration with his own workshop, and it is likely that he even subcontracted part of the work to other studios.[122] Unfortunately we do not know a lot about how these commissions and the subsequent deliveries actually were organized, but in all probability the client came to the master's shop to discuss the product and to draw up the contract. The client – or a representative – and the producer thus met at least once. The workshop then began producing the work, which could take quite a long time when a complex work was ordered. One of the few completely documented altarpieces from the early sixteenth century, commissioned from the workshop of van Overbeke, is known to have been finished in only one year, and this is considered to be rather quick.[123] Concerning the delivery, in some cases it was stipulated in the contract that the work had to be

[116] See for this phenomenon especially van der Stock 1993, and Leeflang 2004/2005.
[117] For these examples, see van der Stock 1993.
[118] Van der Straelen 1855, pp. 13-15.
[119] Leeflang 2004/2005, pp. 271-274.
[120] Van der Straelen 1855, p. 20; van der Stock 1990, esp. p. 137; Born 2011, pp. 97-100.
[121] Van der Stock 1990, p. 134.
[122] Leeflang 2011, p. 139.
[123] Leeflang 2004/2005, pp. 266-267.

installed *in situ* by the contractor himself.[124] This was probably especially the case with the combined and more complex altarpieces, but it seems difficult to imagine that it happened all the time. A painter like Joos van Cleve is very unlikely to have accompanied the finished work for every foreign commission he received. Moreover, the fact that it was explicitly stipulated in the contract, could also indicate that it was no habit at all.

Is it then perhaps possible to interpret the letters or monograms on the paintings as signs on the part of the contractor meant for the client to guarantee the right origin and authenticity, and to prevent fraud? This could make sense, since as demonstrated above the works in question were commissioned, and as a rule were thus not marked or valued. On top of that they were made for abroad, as a result of which the direct contact between client and contractor upon arrival of the work is not to be taken for granted. Such an interpretation would place them in the tradition of hallmarks, already existing in the Middle Ages, reassuring the client that what he gets really comes from the producer of his choice.[125] In the preceding centuries a whole range of such marks had been developed throughout Europe, and they all had a specific meaning or function. But what most of them had in common was that they were able to show the origins of the marked product, that they stood for a certain quality and that they could even possess juridical authority. Trademarks or maker's marks were one of the many types, and they functioned as an advertisement for the workshop and the product.[126] These marks were apparently also used by painters in late 15th-century Bruges, as shown by the example of the Master of the Saint Godelieve Legend, a painter who seemed to have worked primarily for export. On the back of the *Triptych with the Passion of Christ* he painted for the parish church of Salinas de Añana in Spain he put two similar, painted marks, very probably his personal trademark.[127] Again, this work was made for export. Furthermore, trademarks are also found in the oeuvres of the sixteenth-century Bruges painters Ambrosius Benson, Pieter Pourbus and Jacques van den Coornhuizen.[128] In the same way of thinking the included self portraits could perhaps be seen as skilful and ingenious mark of authenticity, since the client in his destination abroad would immediately recognize the face of the artist he commissioned the work with.

Consequently, with this interpretation the monograms are not seen as a mark for the work being autograph, but as a mark of responsibility, guaranteeing the right origin. Also here the self portraits seem to fit in. For example, the *Triptych with the Deposition,* painted for the church of Watervliet by a collaborator from the shop of the Master of Frankfurt, does contain a portrait of the master, but strictly speaking is no autograph work (figs. 10a-b).[129] This all completely corresponds to how the workshops really worked, as demonstrated above. As Born noticed, the notion of a work being autograph becomes obsolete when one considers the working methods and the compositions of the workshops.[130] And already in 1910 Georg Dehio ingeniously demonstrated in a pioneering article, that a lot of inscriptions on fifteenth-century German artworks cannot just be taken as signatures as

[124] Examples given by Asaert 1972, p. 50, and Leeflang 2004/2005, p. 252.
[125] Van Vlierden and Smeyers 1990, pp. IX-X.
[126] See, among others, Gamber 1980; Schmidt-Wiegand 1989; Engel 1992; von Stromer 1992.
[127] Peralta Ballabriga 1967-1968, vol. 3, pp. 339-343. Further information on this painter is provided by Haverkamp Begemann 1955.
[128] Van Vlierden and Smeyers 1990, p. XIV.
[129] Goddart 1984 identified the painter of this triptych as a collaborator in the shop of the Master of Frankfurt, whom he called the Watervliet painter. He also attributed a number of other paintings from Master of Frankfurt's shop to him.
[130] Born 2011, pp. 125-126.

such. He concluded that the main rule seems to have been that the principal contractor signed the work, even if more artists worked on the piece. He also added that the location where the inscription was placed did not depend on the profession of the contractor. Thus, sculptor could equally sign on a painted part.[131]

If one accepts this interpretation, it would explain several things. At first, the relative invisibility of some of the marks would be more understandable, since in this line of thought they would not be meant to be read by every spectator. On the contrary, they would have primarily been meant to be read by the client upon the arrival of the artwork, i.e. before its installation. Born, for example, did not accept the letters in the Lübeck altarpiece by the Master of 1518 as a monogram, since they were too invisible.[132] But the two small monograms high up in the stained glass windows in the oeuvre of van Cleve appear as least as invisible, and it is very doubtful whether they were legible at all when the work was installed on an altar. Furthermore, it would explain why not all letters on the artworks correspond to the name of the supposed maker, since the principal maker was not necessarily the contractor. Finally, it would explain the different monograms that appear in the oeuvre attributed to one workshop. After all, one artist, or even an entire workshop, could work for different contractors. But there are also some problems involved with this hypothesis. Firstly, and most importantly, there are no written sources that can confirm this practice. Secondly, there are only few examples known, which makes it very hard to check the hypothesis. Although Dehio provided parallel examples in the German area, and although there might be some parallels in Bruges painting too, there are unfortunately never consequent monograms to be found. All the letter combinations are different, so not a single name can be connected to them.

THE EARLIEST SIGNATURES

Regardless of the interpretation of these letters, it is very striking that works destined for abroad where marked more often, either with letters or a self portrait. Here some examples given in the previous chapter should be remembered. The Bouts signature on the triptych in Leiden that van Mander described, fits in the same line of thought, and also Bosch' signature practice seems to point in the same direction. Moreover, here also the first 'real' signatures in Antwerp painting come in. One of the earliest known examples is unfortunately only known through references in literature. Gillis van Everen (active 1465-1512) is primarily known as the teacher of the better known Jan de Beer, but he seems to have been one of the major figures in early Antwerp painting. He ran a large workshop and was elected dean of the guild of Saint Luke three times.[133] Unfortunately, no works by his hand are known or identified today, although several commissions are documented. Still, when Georg Kaspar Nagler compiled his *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon* in the early nineteenth century, he knew about a work in Nuremberg that was signed '*Aegid van Everen Belga P.*'[134] So although this signature and its authenticity can unfortunately not be verified, it seems to fit in with the other examples, since the addition of 'Belga' logically would also point to a destination outside of

[131] Dehio 1910, esp. pp. 58-60.
[132] Born 2011, p. 143.
[133] See especially Ewing 1978, pp. 17-18.
[134] Nagler 1835-1852, vol. 4, p. 171.

the Low Countries.[135] Other examples include the signed works of Colijn de Coter (active 1493-1511), who in all probability primarily worked in Brussels, but registered in the Antwerp painter's guild too in 1493, probably in order to get access to the market there.[136] Three signatures are known in his oeuvre, all depicted as embroidered on clothes and all using the same formula '*COLIJN DE COTER PINGIT ME IN BRABANCIA BRVSELLE.*'[137] First of all, his works are illustrative examples for the absence of a signing tradition, since all his signatures contain the formula '*pingit me*', a form that is to be found nowhere else. But more interesting here is the fact that they all contain the specification that the paintings in question were painted in the town of Brussels, within the duchy of Brabant. It has already been demonstrated that in Italian painting such specifications were typical for works destined for other city states.[138] Also in the case of de Coter these specifications led scholars to believe that they were painted for abroad, and the early provenance of at least two of the three signed works indeed seem to confirm this.[139] The early *Saint Luke painting the Virgin* (Vieure, Church of Our Lady, fig. 19) is said to have been given to the church by a local patrician already in the early seventeenth century.[140] Besides, the two panels now in Paris (Louvre, figs. 20 & 21) are the two remaining parts of what once was a *Triptych with the Holy Trinity*, commissioned by Antoine II d'Averhoult, *seigneur* of Helfaut, and according to a local tradition the work was subsequently donated to the church of Saint Denis in Saint-Omer by his son Antoine III d'Averhoult in 1533.[141] On the other hand, the fact that other paintings commissioned for destinations within the Duchy of Brabant and generally attributed to de Coter's workshop, such as the series of panels depicting the *Life of Saint Rumbold* (Mechelen, Saint Rumbold's Cathedral), do not contain signatures, might also be considered as significant. In sum, without wanting to see a general rule in it, it seems fair to say that in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century signatures were more likely to be used on works destined for abroad, whether still in the Low Countries or further away. This would make sense in the context of the growing importance of the export of artworks. As a matter of fact, this export does not necessarily mean outside of the Low Countries. Various known contracts from the early sixteenth century indicate a far greater mobility between different Netherlandish cities than in the previous century. So also within the Netherlands commissioners increasingly went to other cities to order artworks.[142]

Seen within this context, the earliest known signature of Quinten Metsys also fits in. Between 1507 and 1509 he painted the *Saint Anne altarpiece* (Brussels, RMFAB) for the Confraternity of Saint Anne in Louvain, and signed it on the left outer shutter '*QUINTE METSYS SCREEF DIT 1509*'. Furthermore, the man on the right inner shutter looking straight at the viewer is generally accepted as a self-portrait of the founder of the Antwerp school of painting.[143] Although the distance between Antwerp and Louvain is not as great as that between Antwerp and Frankfurt or Gdánsk, strictly spoken Louvain is outside of Antwerp's city walls. And the conclusion that Metsys signed the painting for

[135] As briefly pointed out in the introduction, in the sixteenth century *Belgica* was the Latin term used to designate the Netherlands.
[136] Rombouts and van Lerius 1864-1876, vol. 1, p. 46.
[137] See for the three exact transcriptions Folie 1963, pp. 247-249. For an extensive discussion of the signed works, see Périer-d'Ieteren 1985, pp. 55-71.
[138] Goffen 2001, p. 308.
[139] Maquet-Tombu 1937, pp. 17-18, and Périer-d'Ieteren 1985, p. 55.
[140] Périer-d'Ieteren 1985, p. 141.
[141] Adhémar 1962, pp. 77-78.
[142] Dijkstra 1990, p. 11.
[143] Silver 1984, cat. 10.

Louvain and even added a self-portrait to it, while not doing so in the *Saint John altarpiece* (Antwerp, RMFA) painted in the same period for his hometown, seems to put this example in the same line as the Master of Frankfurt and Joos van Cleve's foreign commissions.[144]

Metsys seems to be part of the group of painters working in Antwerp that started to apply signatures in the strict sense on several paintings. Nevertheless, his signatures are quite problematic. The authenticity of at least two signatures has already been questioned: that of the *Diptych with Christ and the Virgin* (Madrid, Prado) and that on the *Old Man* in Paris (Musée Jacquemart-André, fig. 22). The latter was questioned because of the Latin inscription being unique in his oeuvre: *'QUINTINUS METSYS / PINGEBAT ANNO 1513'.* Silver, on the other hand, states that the inscription appears to be authentic and he interestingly notes that the Latin inscription may even point to a commission by an Italian or humanist patron. He found support for this hypothesis in the fact that the portrait is painted on paper, which might indeed point to a foreign commission. Reis-Santos already proposed the painting to have been commissioned by Erasmus as a gift for the newly elected pope Leo X.[145] This all might be very tempting to believe in the context of the preceding line of reasoning, but the fact is that the painting and its relation to the variant unsigned portrait in a New York private collection (fig. 23) remains problematic and unclear.[146] In total, five signatures by Metsys are known, but they are all different and spread out over his career, which makes it difficult to generalize or to check their authenticity.[147] Signing never seems to have become a habit for Metsys, and the fact that he signed several early works in the vernacular again indicates the absence of a signing tradition, since all the preceding examples seemed to have been put in Latin. Furthermore, the early provenances of the works are unknown, so it is not possible to check how they would fit in the above theoretical model either. About the Badminton double portrait, Silver noted that perhaps the high status of the depicted couple – deducible from their clothes and jewels – prompted Metsys to sign the panel, an unusual thing to do in portraiture.[148] Finally, it is interesting to note that the *Moneychanger and his wife* (Paris, Louvre, fig. 24) is thought to have been based on a now lost Eyckian example, thus possibly signed. Also Petrus Christus' version of the theme (New York, Metropolitan, fig. 2a) – which Metsys might have known – is signed, and later also Marinus van Reymerswale painted variations on the theme, six of which he signed (figs. 25a-b).[149] Maybe the fact that the model was signed inspired Metsys to do so too, as appears to have sometimes been the case for Christus too.

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[144] For the *Saint John altarpiece*, see Fabri and van Hout 2009, p. 81. Another large altarpiece painted in Metsys' workshop around the same time and also a foreign commission is the *Madre de Deus altarpiece* (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga). Nowadays there is no signature to be found on the painting, but the altarpiece already underwent several alterations, among others a considerable reduction of the center panel.

[145] Silver 1984, p. 234.

[146] Campbell 2008, p. 228 considers the Paris portrait a worked up study for the New York version.

[147] The signed works are in Silver 1984, catalogue numbers 10 (*Saint Anne altarpiece*), 16 (*Moneychanger and his wife* (Paris, Louvre) 'QUINTEN MATSYS / SCHILDER 1514'), 48 (*Rattier Madonna* (Paris, Louvre), 'Qu. M. *1529'), 49 (*Diptych with Christ and the Virgin* (Madrid, Prado), 'OPUS QUINTINI METSYS AN MDXXIX'), 54 (*Old Man* (Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André), 'QUINTINUS METSYS / PINGEBAT ANNO 1513') and 55 (*Double portrait* (Badminton, private collection), 'Q. Matsys').

[148] Silver 1984, p. 234.

[149] The group thus interestingly constitutes half of the signed oeuvre of Marinus van Reymerswale, containing twelve authentically signed pieces in total. Furthermore, Marinus even signed in the same way as van Eyck usually did, using the 'me fecit' formula. See Appendix II.

Joachim Patinir (c. 1490-1524) is another early example. Of him van Mander recounts that he had the habit of putting a defecating figure in his landscapes, but not a single extant example of this supposed habit is known.[150] If he ever did it at all, it was probably more meant as a game than as a signature, since he also signed with his name.[151] On a total of 29 unanimously accepted works, there are six known signed works. They are all in the form '*IOACHIM D. PATINIR*', in four cases preceded by '*OPVS*'.[152] The meaning and presence of the 'D' in his signature has already been explained in various ways – as an abbreviation of '*Dionatensis*', '*dictus*' or just '*de*' – but no consensus has yet been reached on that matter.[153] None of the early provenances of Patinir's works are known, nor are his works dated, but Koch and Ewing both explained his signatures primarily as a marketing strategy, since they are all supposedly concentrated in the beginning of his career, in which he still pursued a position on the mass-market. After all, when he obtained the status of free master in Antwerp in 1515, he saw himself in a difficult position on a very competitive market. Later on in his career, he married himself into a rather wealthy family, which could have meant that financially he became less dependent of his artistic production.[154] Another interpretation, primarily regarding his supposedly earliest signature – that on the *Landscape with Saint Jerome* (Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle) – explains the presence of the signature as a conscious break with tradition, since Patinir was the first to paint a landscape with Saint Jerome, rather than a traditional Saint Jerome in a landscape.[155] The emphatic '*opus*' would then specifically and consciously claim the painting as a work of Patinir.[156] Although it is – again – very difficult to generalize with such a small oeuvre and so little signed works, Patinir's signatures appear much more standardized than those of Metsys. It is not known for sure where Patinir was trained, but it is interesting to note that it has already been suggested that Patinir was trained in Bosch' workshop in 's-Hertogenbosch.[157] If this is true, than that could at least account for the standardization of his signatures and even for the fact that he signed at all, since he would have been acquainted with the practice in his master's workshop.

GOSSART'S 'HUMANISTIC' SIGNATURE

Patinir thus signed approximately 20% of his oeuvre, but it should be obvious that one has to be very careful with this proportion, representing only six works. A similar but more accurate proportion can be observed in the oeuvre of his contemporary Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532), an oeuvre containing by and large double the amount of works of Patinir. Gossart registered as a free master in the Antwerp

[150] Van Mander 1604, fol. 219r: "Hy hadde voor ghewoonte in al zijn Landtschappen erghen te maken een Manneken zijn ghevoegh doende, waerom hy den kacker wiert gheheeten: dit kackerken was t'somtijt te soecken, ghelijck het Wlken van *Hendrick* met de Bles."

[151] Burg 2007, p. 426.

[152] The signed works are in Vergara 2007, catalogue numbers 3, 11, 14, 18, 20 and 23. Number 23 is an incomplete signature, consisting only of 'OPVS'. Apart from these works, Koch 1968, p. 7, note 23 mentions two other paintings carrying a similar inscription, but attributed to the workshop or a follower.

[153] See for an overview Martens 2007, pp. 49-50. He states that he does not know of similar examples for the French preposition or Dutch article 'de' being abbreviated to a D, but Michiel Coxcie too seems to have done it several times – see Appendix IV.

[154] See especially Ewing 2007, p. 94, and Martens 2007, p. 54.

[155] See Vergara 2007, cat. 18 for a discussion of that work, where the signature is again explained as a marketing strategy focusing on name recognition.

[156] See Gibson 1989, p. 5; Koch 1968, p. 22; Ewing 2007, p. 94.

[157] For example, by Winkler 1924, p. 215. See also Martens 2007, p. 50.

guild in 1503 and probably remained in the city until 1508, when he joined the delegation sent by Margaret of Austria to Pope Julius II in Rome, headed by Philip of Burgundy.[158] Gossart thus was possibly the first Netherlandish artist who crossed the Alps and studied the antique remains in the Eternal City, but at the same time came into direct contact with the contemporary Italian artists. Burg therefore stated that Gossart brought the habit of signing paintings with him from the Italian peninsula, but although it is tempting to believe, it does not seem to do justice to the historical truth.[159] On the one hand, there are two signatures known by Gossart that very probably antedate his Italian sojourn, both integrated on the clothes of figures in drawn composition designs (figs. 26-27b).[160] On the other hand, his early signature style after his Italian sojourn completely corresponds to his early signatures and to a great extent also to the signature practices of his Netherlandish contemporaries. Firstly, he consistently signed with only a form of his name in the vernacular – '*Iennin Gossart*' – and the signature is always illusory integrated in the composition. By means of comparison, Metsys' vernacular signatures can be brought to mind, but also the only known signed painting in the oeuvre of Jan de Beer (c. 1475-1528) is instructive. Apart from the study sheet in London (British Museum, fig. 28) which bears the autograph signature of de Beer – probably added when de Beer gave the drawing to Patinir – the only signature on a finished work in the oeuvre of de Beer is found on his *Crucifixion* in Munich (Alte Pinakothek), and much alike in Gossart's works it consists of a vernacular form of his name, '*HENIN*', illusory placed on Longinus' gown.[161] Secondly, his earliest known signed paintings dating to approximately 1510-15 are all thought to have been painted for places outside of Middelburg, where he probably worked from 1509 onwards: the *Malvagna triptych* (Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, fig. 29) is thought to have been commissioned by Sforza-secretary Antonio Siciliano, the *Adoration of the Kings* (London, National Gallery, figs. 30a-b) was supposedly made for Saint Adrian's Abbey in Geraardsbergen, and the altarpiece with *Saint Luke drawing the virgin* (Prague, Národní Galerie, fig. 31) was placed on the altar of the guild of Saint Luke in Mechelen.[162] This again seems to correspond completely to early Antwerp signature practices, as demonstrated above. Finally, it is supposed that two of these early signed works – the *Malvagna triptych* and the London *Adoration of the Kings* – were made in collaboration with the Bruges painter Gerard David.[163] Still, it was only Gossart who signed. A similar case is known in the oeuvre of Patinir. His *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (Madrid, Museo del Prado, fig. 32) was made in collaboration with Metsys, but here too only Patinir signed the painting.[164] This can almost certainly be explained by the assumption that it was the artist who had received the commission – the contractor – that signed the final artwork. This at once reinforces and extends the preceding hypothesis about the early monograms and signatures: they were no signs of authorship, but of responsibility. In sum, Gossart's early signatures display a continuity before and after his Italian sojourn, and moreover they correspond in many ways with contemporary Antwerp signing

[158] For biographical details about Gossart, see Ainsworth 2010b.
[159] Burg 2007, pp. 416-418.
[160] Ainsworth 2010a, cat. 69 (*The mystic marriage of St Catherine*, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, "IIENNING.OSAR") and cat. 91 (*Emperor Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl*, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, "ANWER … IENNI").
[161] See for de Beer's signatures Ewing 1978, pp. 41-50 and cat. 6, pp. 225-229.
[162] Ainsworth 2010a, respectively cat. 6 ("…NNI/..GO…" in sculpted letters on the steps in front of the Virgin), cat. 8 ("IENNIN/GOSS…" on the collar of Balthasar's attendant, and "IENNI/GOSSART/DEMABU…" on Balthasar's hat) and cat. 9 ("GOSSAR…" on the belt of Saint Luke).
[163] See for this collaboration Ainsworth 2010b, pp. 12-14.
[164] Vergara 2007, cat. 14.

practices. So although the Italian journey might have been an extra impulse for the artist to sign, Burg's statement nonetheless seems to be incorrect.

More than his contacts with Italian art, Gossart's fixed appointment at the court of Philip of Burgundy in Souburg in 1516 appears to have been a turning point, both for his art in general and his signing practice specifically. Where he was still closely linked to the Antwerp painters and their habits before 1516, afterwards he developed a new and strictly consistent signing habit. At once he started to depict mythological subjects and completely in line with that he designed himself a Latin signature that he would keep on using until the end of his career: '*IOANNES MALBODIUS PINGEBAT*'. He Latinized his vernacular name Iennin Gossart de Mabuse into Ioannes Malbodius, and he chose to add a verb, the imperfect form of *pingere*, to paint. This is not without connotation. A famous passage in Pliny's introduction to his *Naturalis historia*, recounts that Apelles signed nearly all his works with *faciebat*, i.e. the imperfect form of the verb *facio*, meaning 'Apelles worked on this', thus expressing the understanding that art is never finished.[165] The passage was rediscovered by humanists in the late fifteenth century and various artists started using the formula with the imperfect verb to associate themselves with illustrious Apelles. Agostino Poliziano is traditionally credited with having discovered an antique inscription with the verb *faciebat*, and subsequently to be the first to have linked it with Pliny's passage. It was probably via Poliziano that his friend Michelangelo came into contact with it, and his 1499 *Pieta* – the only signed work in his entire oeuvre – carefully makes use of the *topos* (fig. 33). Very soon the knowledge also spread to the north. The Nuremberg Humanist Wilibald Pirckheimer is reputed to have suggested Dürer to use the *faciebat*-form, what he consequently also did several times in the period 1506-1511. Soon after, Christoph Scheurl also advised Cranach to use it.[166] There is almost no doubt that Gossart had the passage in mind in creating his new signature and he probably wanted to create a link with Apelles, but at the same time he did not slavishly use the verb from the text.[167] He chose the specific verb *pingere*, and in this he was possibly helped or inspired by the humanists at the court in Souburg, most notably Gerard Geldenhouwer (1482-1542). Philip of Burgundy sought to establish the ancient history of the island of Walcheren, and in this he was assisted by various learned men. There thus was a strong antiquarian interest and it seems hardly surprising that this influenced Gossart's choice to consistently depict his signatures as engraved in stone.[168] His signature became an expression of and answer to the humanist and antiquarian interests and aspirations of his patron. Gossart distanced himself from the tradition in which he worked during the first years of his career. This is not only to be seen in the form of his signature, but also in the destinations of the signed works, because not only the works for abroad are signed anymore. The best example is his *Neptune and*

[165] "Me non paenitet nullum festiviorem excogitasse titulumet, ne in totum videar graecos insectari, ex illis mox velim intellegi pingendifingendique conditoribus, quos in libellis his invenies absoluta opera et illa quoque, quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut "Apelles faciebat" aut "Polyclitus", tamquam inchoata semper arte et inperfecta, ut contra iudiciourum varietates superesset artifici regressus ad veniam velut emendatura quicquiddesideraretur, si non esset interceptus. Quare plenum verecundiae illud, quod omnia opera tamquam novissima inscripsere et tamquam singulis fato adempti. Tria non amplius, ut opinor, absolute traduntur inscripta "ille fecit", quae suis locis reddam."

[166] See especially Juren 1974c. On Michelangelo's signature, see especially Pon 1996. For the seven paintings by Dürer using the verb faciebat, see Anzelewsky 1971. For the Scheurl's advise to Cranach, see Rupprich 1956-1969, vol. 1, pp. 292-293.

[167] Ainsworth 2010a, cat. 30, p. 217.

[168] Bass 2011, pp. 64-67.

Amphitrite (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, figs. 34a-b), the oldest extant work in which he used his new signature, which was almost certainly hung in Philip's castle in Souburg.

The humanistic *pingebat*-signature appears to have been quite popular in court circles in the early sixteenth century. The first northern use of it might have been a few years before Gossart in Quinten Metsys' *Old Man* of 1513, although this inscription is not accepted as authentic by all scholars, as pointed out above. Nonetheless it is interesting that it has already been suggested to be a posthumous portrait of Cosimo de' Medici or to have been commissioned by Erasmus as a gift for the Pope, which would both completely correspond to the other milieus for which this signature was used. After all, Metsys was acquainted with humanists like Erasmus and Peter Gillis, which could explain his knowledge of the term and its related story.[169] Anyway, it seems that it was Gossart who influenced most painters in using the term and almost immediately after his first use of the form, associated artists working for highly ranked patrons started using it too. Jan van Scorel (1495-1562), who after Gossart's move to Wijk bij Duurstede in 1517 might have been in his studio for some time, used it in the earliest of his rare signatures. The center panel of the *Triptych with the Holy Kinship* in Carinthia (Obervellach, St Martin, fig. 35), which he painted for a member of the powerful Frangipani-family, bears the elaborate inscription '*Joannes Scorel hollandius pictorie artis amator pingebat 1520*'. Although the exact circumstances of the commission are not entirely clear – he probably painted it on his way to Italy – here again a work destined for abroad is signed, while Scorel only rarely did so at all throughout his career.[170] Another artist, doubtlessly acquainted with Gossart via Margaret of Austria's court in Mechelen, was Bernard van Orley (c. 1490-1541). Both painters worked for the same patrons, such as the influential politician Jean Carondelet, for whom Gossart painted a marvelous portrait diptych (Paris, Louvre, fig. 36), of course signed with his usual *pingebat*-inscription. Van Orley did not sign a lot of his paintings and never really developed a consistent formula: only six signed paintings are known in his nonetheless quite extensive oeuvre, and they all date to the first decade of his career. The first two signatures dating to the period before his appointment as court painter by Margaret of Austria in 1518 consist of the armorial bearings of the van Orley family, in one case accompanied by his name in the vernacular, '*BERNART VAN ORLEI*'.[171] Immediately after his official appointment, however, he signed some pictures in Latin, all of them with an imperfect verb form. In all probability this has everything to do with van Orley entering the humanist court context. Three of them contain '*faciebat*', but there is one *Holy Family* (Paris, Louvre, fig. 37) that is signed '*BERN. ORLEYN PINGEBAT . ANNO VERBI 1521*'.[172] On top of the choice of the verb, the fact that the inscription is depicted as if engraved on the stone parapet seems to be an obvious reference to Gossart. Unfortunately, the commissioner of this work is unknown. A last artist that can be mentioned in this context is Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (1500-1559). Gossart's stylistic influence on Vermeyen is generally acknowledged, but their exact relationship remains unclear. Nevertheless, it appears that the two at least knew each other and perhaps worked closely

[169] Interesting to note is that Peter Gillis (1486-1533) edited the letters of Angelo Poliziano (*Epistolae lepidissimae*, Antwerp 1510).

[170] Wilenski 1960, vol. 1, p. 649. Scorel will be touched upon again further on in this chapter.

[171] These are *The Apostle Matthew on the throne* (c. 1513, formerly Plausdorf, Collection von Goldammer, signed only with the weapon) and *Scenes from the life of Saints Thomas and Matthew* (c. 1512-15, Vienna, KHM). For biographical details about van Orley, see Farmer 1989, pp. 14-18.

[172] The other three signed paintings are *Joris van Zelle* (Brussels, RMFAB, '*GEOR / DE / ZELLE / PHYSICVS / AETAT + 28 / BERNARDUS . DORLEII . FACIEBAT / BRVXELL / M.D.XIX*'), the *Virtue of patience triptych* (Brussels, RMFAB, '*BVO BERNARDVS. DORLEY. BRVXELLANVS. FACIEBAT / A° DNI. M° ccccc° . XXq iiii A MAY / BVO*') and the *Holy Family with angels* (Madrid, Prado, '*BER. ORLEIY / FACIEBAT / A.N. 1522*', fig. 38).

together.[173] Vermeyen monogrammed various of his drawings and etchings, but he never took over Gossart's habit of signing paintings, and as a consequence his painted oeuvre is quite difficult to define. Only two signed paintings are known, one of them containing his habitual monogram (fig. 39).[174] The other painting, however, is a much more interesting case for our purposes. It is the *Holy Family* (Rijswijk, Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, fig. 40) that once formed a diptych with the *Portrait of Érard de la Marck* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, fig. 41), who was the powerful prince-bishop of Liège and an advisor to Regent Margaret of Austria.[175] The diptych was probably painted around 1528 and thus originated in the same milieu as a number of Gossart's and van Orley's creations. Interestingly, while being an exception in Vermeyen's oeuvre, this painting too is signed with the *pingebat*-form, again on a stone parapet: '*IOHNES / VERMEI PI / GEBAT*'. These examples all seem to illustrate Gossart's early influence on other court artists, not only stylistically, but in some cases apparently also in signature style. A few years later, Jan Sanders van Hemessen also started consistently using the *pingebat*-formula, but this seems to have been for different reasons, which we will explore later on.

By studying Gossart's signatures one can also trace another important development in Netherlandish signature practice. In the early 1520s, Gossart experimented with printmaking. There are at least two engravings known that were made by Gossart himself, both carrying a monogram IMS, '*Iohannes Malbodius Sculpsit*'. One carries the date 1522 and the other probably was made in the same period (fig. 42).[176] The monogram is depicted in a tablet, doubtlessly an obvious reference to Dürer, who did the same in a lot of his prints (fig. 43).[177] But there is more going on. The date of the prints do not just randomly indicate a moment in time. In fact, these prints were created immediately after Dürer's visit to the Netherlands in 1520-21. It has already been pointed out by various authors that Dürer's immediate presence in the Low Countries stimulated a number of artists to start experimenting with printmaking too. At once, several artists who initially practiced other arts started to produce prints, on which they also immediately put a monogram. The dates of their earliest prints are telling in this context: Gossart's, Dirck Vellert's and Frans Crabbe van Espleghem's earliest dated prints were all made in 1522, and also the prints of the recently rediscovered artistic personality Jan Rombouts seem to fit in here.[178] Dürer's visit to the Netherlands thus gave rise to the appearance of the earliest 'peintre-graveurs' in the Southern Netherlands. Whereas Gossart and Vellert already signed their artistic production of before 1522, this does not seem to be the case for Crabbe and Rombouts. Crabbe was already active as a painter in the 1510s, but no painted works by him are known today. The painted works by Rombouts, on the other hand, do not carry dates, but it is not inconceivable that they were made in the early 1520s. Perhaps the practice of making prints – which by now traditionally carried monograms – prompted the artist to start signing his painted production too.[179] More to the north a more or less opposite development occurred, but it seemingly originated because of the same impulse. Artists both active as painters and printmakers already way before

[173] Ainsworth 2010b, p. 22.
[174] This is the recently rediscovered *Judith* in a private collection. The monogram is to be found on the knob of the sword, and Ainsworth 2010b, p. 22 claimed to read "remnants of the word Beverwijk" on the blade.
[175] Hand, Metzger and Spronk 2006, cat. 35, pp. 236-239.
[176] Ainsworth 2010a, cat. 112 and 113.
[177] Orenstein 2010, p. 105.
[178] See in general Orenstein 2010 and van Grieken 2012. On Vellert as printmaker, see Popham 1925. On Crabbe van Espleghem, see Popham 1935a and 1935b. And for the engravings of Jan Rombouts, see van Grieken 2012 and Bruijnen 2012, pp. 169-195.
[179] For the paintings of Rombouts, see Bruijnen 2012.

1520, and already signing their graphic production, now started inscribing their monograms on their paintings too. Two examples can illustrate this. The earliest woodcuts of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen (c. 1465/70-1533) date to 1507 and they immediately carry his usual monogram. However, although he already painted in that time, he only seems to have started monogramming his paintings after 1523.[180] The same development can be observed in the oeuvre of Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533), whose earliest prints date to 1508, which are – again – immediately monogrammed, while his paintings only bear monograms from 1522 onwards.[181] These dates again seem to indicate that the presence of Dürer – who signed both paintings and prints – prompted the artists to sign their painted work too. Although the influence of Dürer on the signing practices should perhaps not be exaggerated, it seems that his visit, and thus his actual presence in the Netherlands initiated a change in the perception of art and artist. As Woods rightly remarked, "Dürer's career provided a model for northern artists."[182] After all, Dürer succeeded in breaking through Nuremberg's oligarchy and was consequently seen as an artist instead of a craftsman.[183] He created art in general, in a variety of media, and consistently claimed his authorship. And it seems that precisely this idea was spread in artists' circles through his actual presence in the Low Countries around 1520-21. Artists started experimenting in new techniques and consequently exported habits from the one to the other.

INCREASING NUMBERS

Quantifying the artistic production of a certain period is an incredibly difficult task which one has to carry out with the greatest caution, since history provided us only with samples of the original set. Nonetheless, it can prove to be rewarding in a comparative way, because especially then the numbers gain on contextual significance and can be checked one against the other. Furthermore, in combination with a qualitative approach one can often make quite safe deductions, providing interesting insights. Considering Gossart's extant oeuvre, it appears that he signed approximately 20% of his paintings.[184] In all probability this makes him one of the most consistently and frequently signing artists of the early sixteenth-century Low Countries. Yet, this percentage of signed works will continue to rise throughout the sixteenth century. Especially from the late 1530s onwards, several large workshops originate in which still higher proportions of the painted productions are signed. There thus are more signing artists, signing a larger share of their production.

An early example of this is Marinus van Reymerswale (c. 1490-before 1566), albeit a rather problematic one. His life, career and the working of his workshop are not well known, and his authentic oeuvre has still not clearly been defined yet. Although he never enrolled as a free master in

[180] For the graphic oeuvre of Jacob Cornelisz, see Steinbart 1937. For his painted oeuvre, see Steinbart 1922, pp. 152-158, who catalogues five signed paintings, dating to 1523 until 1533.
[181] Three signed paintings by Lucas van Leyden are known, all carrying his L-monogram. See Smith 1992, cat. 7, pp. 101-103 (1527); cat. 14, p. 113 (1522); cat. 25, p. 139 (1531).
[182] Woods 1999, p. 104.
[183] Grote 1964.
[184] The *catalogue raisonné* of Gossart's oeuvre in Ainsworth 2010a collects 62 paintings, of which 12 are signed (19,35%). In this calculation the controversial and enigmatic inscription in cat. 57 is not considered, while the later inscription, probably copied from the original now lost frame, in cat. 50 is. If the three inscriptions on copies are considered as signatures initially placed on the now lost original frames of the original paintings too (cat. Nos. 17, 21 and 27), than the percentage would rise to 24,4%.

Antwerp and his workshop was not located there, he had considerable ties with the city. On the one hand, he is registered as a pupil in the *Liggeren* of 1509 and thus was trained there.[185] On the other hand, the iconography and style of his paintings indicate an influence of several Antwerp painters, most notably of Quinten Metsys, so that it is sure that he knew what was going on in the Antwerp art scene. Later on in the century, a lot of the types he created were repeated, very likely for a large part in Antwerp workshops. Marinus probably combined various professions and it seems highly likely that he was active in the juridical sphere, maybe as a lawyer. After all, he is known to have registered as a student at the University of Louvain in 1504. It is therefore assumed that he only ran a painter's workshop in the period between 1533 and 1545, before and after which he occupied other professions.[186] All of his signed works – twelve in total – are dated between those two years, and therefore it seems that these represent a large proportion of his total oeuvre. Interesting to note is that between 1533 and 1540 he signed five works, the signatures of four containing the addition '*Reymerswale*', the town where he was working in the period. In 1540 he moved to Goes and from then on all the signatures are in the reduced form '*Marinus me fecit*', accompanied by a date.[187] It thus seems that in the beginning of his career he wanted to be clear about the location in which he was working towards potential clients, which makes it all the more likely that his paintings were very quickly already sold in places further away from the otherwise small and insignificant town of Reimerswaal. Finally, as already touched upon above, the phrase which he used in his signatures might indicate an Eyckian influence, since on the one hand Marinus – like Metsys – seems to have based his *Moneychanger and his wife* type (figs. 25a-b) on an Eyckian prototype, and on the other hand van Eyck used to sign his works with the same formula. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Marinus signed his versions in very much the same way as Metsys did. In Marinus' versions as well as in Metsys' painting the signature is written on a piece of paper or parchment, lying on the top shelf in the depicted room.

Other workshops, located in Antwerp itself, can illustrate this development of increasing numbers more clearly and securely, because of their more clearly defined oeuvres. Approximately 40% of the extant paintings produced in the workshop of Jan Sanders van Hemessen is signed, around 50% of that of Jan Massys and around 53% of that of Frans Floris. Each individually these workshops provide interesting case studies, that will be explored more in detail here.

Jan Sanders van Hemessen (c. 1500-c. 1556/57) is one of the most underestimated early Antwerp painters and it is striking that his life and oeuvre remain terribly understudied. Enrolled as a pupil in the Antwerp guild in 1519, he took on his first pupil himself in 1524 and consequently must have attained the status of free master somewhere in between, probably around 1523. An Italian sojourn and a trip to Fontainebleau have already been suggested, but although this is quite possible, there is unfortunately no documentary evidence for that. Anyway, he seems to have set up a rather important workshop in Antwerp, producing numerous popular compositions.[188] His earliest signed picture dates to 1525 and he continued to sign until his death. Overall, almost 40% of his total oeuvre

[185] Rombouts and van Lerius 1864-1876, vol. 1, p. 71.
[186] Mackor 1995.
[187] I would like to kindly thank dr. Adri Mackor, who is preparing a dissertation on Marinus, for providing me with this information. He currently accepts some 43 works to be by Marinus, which would mean that he signed around 28%. See Appendix II.
[188] For biographical details about Hemessen, see Wallen 1983, pp. 9-24.

bears a signature.[189] While the spelling of his name always remained the same throughout his career – always put in Latin, *Ioannes de Hemessen*, and only rarely with the patronymic addition '*Sanders*' – he was not very consistent in the formulations he used in the first decade of his career.[190] The first signature dating to 1525 reads '*JOANNES DE HEME/SSEN ME FECIT*' (fig. 44), while the three following ones contain *pinxit* as a verb. From 1536 onwards, however, he interestingly started to consistently use *pingebat* in his signatures.[191] Burg stated that this reflected the influence of Gossart on Hemessen.[192] Indeed, from a stylistic point of view it is undeniable that the young Hemessen underwent a strong influence of Gossart, which is especially noticeable in the late 1520s. It is even possible that the former was now and then working for the court in Mechelen in these years, a place where also Gossart was no unknown guest around this time.[193] Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Hemessen only started to use '*pingebat*' later on, using other forms before, in the years that he might have met Gossart. So it seems that there is something else at stake here. To judge by his extant painted production and the number of copies, it appears that Hemessen's workshop was bigger and more thriving than before from around 1535 onwards. There are more extant copies or workshop replica's of his works known, and in these years he took on at least two extra pupils.[194] It might therefore be possible that the consistent change in Hemessen's signature formula reflected changing workshop procedures. Something similar has already been suggested in relation to Raphael's studio. The two famous paintings that Lorenzo de' Medici commissioned from the Italian master as gifts for the French King Francis I and Queen Claude, the so-called *Holy Family of Francis I* and the *St Michael fighting the Devil* (both Paris, Louvre, fig. 45), are both signed '*RAPHAEL . VRBINVS . PINGEBAT . M.D.X.VIII*'. While the designs for these paintings are likely to have been Raphael's, large parts of the execution are attributed nowadays to the workshop, and it has already been suggested that the signatures might be an ironical reference to their specific genesis on the part of the master.[195] Indeed, the formulations used – *pingebat*, was painting this, instead of *pinxit*, painted this – are perfectly compatible with this line of reasoning, since with the former one can honestly indicate that at least parts, but not necessarily the entire picture, were painted by the one who signed it, which might lead one to suppose the participation of workshop collaborators. This assumption seems reasonable considering the composition of Hemessen's workshop in the years he started using the formula. Does this mean that it were Raphael's paintings for the French court that inspired Hemessen to do so? It seems at any rate that Hemessen indeed knew the paintings. They were brought from Amboise to the royal castle at Fontainebleau sometime between 1530 and 1537, and it is exactly in this period that Hemessen's supposed trip to Fontainebleau took place.[196] On top of that, two clearly Netherlandish copies of the *Holy Family* exist (Bruges, Groeningemuseum and Antwerp, St Jacob, figs. 46 & 47) that might perhaps be attributed to Hemessen.[197] Yet, in spite of this, it is not necessarily the case that Hemessen took the specific idea from Raphael. By the mid-1530s the use

[189] Calculations based on the *catalogue raisonné* in Wallen 1983. He lists 66 paintings of which 25 carry a signature (37,88%). However, there are various copies included – sometimes signed too. Neglecting these copies, there are 54 'original' paintings, of which 21 are signed (38,89%).
[190] The only signatures containing '*Sanders*' are Wallen 1983, cat. Nos. 11 and 12.
[191] An early exception is Wallen 1983, cat. 11, dating to 1532.
[192] Burg 2007, p. 418.
[193] Wallen 1983, pp. 12-13, and Ainsworth 2010b, p. 16.
[194] In 1535 and 1537. See Wallen 1983, pp. 15-16.
[195] Goffen 2001, p. 320, note 76.
[196] Cox-Rearick 1995, cat. VI-2 and cat. VI-3, pp. 203-211, and Wallen 1983, p. 9.
[197] The copy in Bruges was attributed to Hemessen and dated to c. 1535-36 by Wallen 1983, cat. 14. The author does not refer to the copy in Antwerp.

and meaning of the term had in the meantime probably become ready knowledge among artists. And of course, the question remains as to what extent it was common knowledge that Raphael's paintings were not completely autograph. Whatever the truth, Hemessen kept on using the term until the mid-1550s, when he suddenly switched to using the more elaborate formula '*inventor et pictor*' until the end of his life.[198] It might appear rather strange that an artist in his mid-50's after a career of thirty years suddenly changes his habits, but it seems that he here reacted to the innovations introduced by an artist of a younger generation that came to dominate the Antwerp art scene by this time. Frans Floris, to whom we will return more in detail, used a similar two-part signature – *'invenit et fecit*' – from the outset of his career onwards. His signature implied a division of the work of the artist: the invention on the one hand and the actual execution on the other. This was based on the Italian workshop conception. So although the formulation in Hemessen's signature changed, the implication probably remained the same.

The case of Jan Massys (c. 1509-1573) bears various close similarities to that of Hemessen, but also some differences. Approximately 50% of his paintings is signed, but almost all the signatures date to the second half of his 40-year career.[199] More than in Hemessen's case, this seems to be tightly linked to events and developments in his life. The Antwerp *Liggeren* do not mention him as a pupil, which has lead scholars to suppose that he was only trained in the workshop of his famous father. Considering his early style, lying clearly in the same stylistic line, this appears very plausible. In 1531, i.e. almost immediately after their father's death, both Jan and his younger brother Cornelis were registered as masters painters.[200] This is hardly surprising: suddenly the established workshop lost their skilful leader, which forced both sons to attain the legal status of free master, enabling them to gain a living of their own and to sell paintings under their own name. Initially, especially Jan seems to have taken advantage of the popularity of their father's types and style. The paintings from the first decade of his career are primarily copies of or variations on types created by his father Quinten and consequently do not display an own specific style (figs. 48 & 49). In this view it must not come as a surprise that none of his early paintings are signed, since he continued his father's tradition, who, for that matter, never made a habit of signing his paintings either.[201] Strikingly however, one of the first paintings in which he displays a proper style of his own, evidently anticipating his characteristic sensual and erotically-charged style that he would develop later on, the 1543 *Judith with the head of Holofernes* (Boston, MFA, fig. 50), is immediately signed: '*OPVS IOANNES MATSIIS*'.[202] A year later, however, he got banished from the city on suspicion of Lutheran sympathies, and he seems to have taken advantage from the situation to travel widely. Unsurprisingly, documentary evidence is lacking and his exact itinerary is consequently unknown, but several hints point to a visit to Genoa – a portrait of the Genoese *condottiero* Andrea Doria is attributed to him – and various elements in his later style clearly indicate a strong influence of the Fontainebleau school, which makes a stay at the French royal castle very likely. In any event, he returned to Antwerp in 1555 and it is only then that he, inspired by what he saw on his journeys , seems to have entered a period of an extensive artistic

[198] Wallen 1983, cat. 47 (1555), 48 (1556) and 54 (1557).
[199] Calculations based on the *catalogue raisonné* in Buijnsters-Smets 1995. She compiled 62 works in total, of which 31 are signed (50%). One signature (cat. 8) is unanimously rejected as false.
[200] Rombouts and van Lerius 1864-1876, vol. 1, p. 117.
[201] In Buijnsters-Smets 1995 there are two exceptions to be found: cat. 8, falsely signed 'QUINTEN MATSIIS 1514' and cat. 11, a *Hieronymus* after Quinten Metsys, dated to 1539 and carrying the unique monogram 'J.M.'
[202] Buijnsters-Smets 1995, cat. 18.

production, lasting until his death in 1573.[203] Initially, he did not yet standardize his signature, but he mostly signed with his name only, without a verb. In four early cases in this period, he added a reference to his famous father, like '*IOANNES QUINTINI MASSIS*', which he likely did to establish a link with the founder of the Antwerp school of painting, arguably to attract or to appease potential clients during the years of establishment of his own shop.[204] For some reason the year 1561 meant a turning point, which can be deduced from two facts. On the one hand at once he standardized his signature, consistently adding *pingebat* to his name until the end of his career.[205] The grounds for this choice might have been the same as supposedly was the case for Hemessen, but again it is impossible to make certain statements on this matter. On the other hand, however, at the same time he started signing nearly all his paintings. Where only a meager 16% of his extant paintings from before 1561 are signed, afterwards this figure rises up to 80%.[206] Unfortunately, almost nothing is known about the composition of his workshop in these years. We know that he took on another pupil in 1569, but no others are documented. Nonetheless, his production includes numerous repetitions and workshop copies, which might lead one to suppose that he had a number of assistants. In that case, it is quite possible that his signature had the same meaning as that of Hemessen, namely a sign of responsibility, and not necessarily of authorship.

During Massys' exile, a by then relatively unknown man returned from his Italian sojourn and settled in Antwerp. The tide would quickly turn, however: within a few years after his return, Frans Floris (1519/20-1570) would dominate the Antwerp art scene of the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Born in Antwerp, he had spent some time in the workshop of Lambert Lombard in Liège in 1539, to subsequently become a free master in his native city again in 1540/41. Immediately afterwards, he set out for Italy for a for that time exceptionally long period, and only returned in 1547.[207] His assimilation of antique sculpture and mastering of contemporary Italian painting would greatly contribute to his popularity and influence all over the Netherlands. But besides his stylistic crossover between northern and Italian painting, one of the most renewing aspects of Floris' production was his workshop conception, which he devised and organized according to the Italian model of painters like Raphael and Giulio Romano. As already briefly touched upon above, in essence it comes down to a theoretical division between the invention of the *istoria* and the actual execution of the artwork in question. Throughout the sixteenth century, as a part of the changing status of the artist, more and more the *inventio* was considered to be the essential creative act. As a consequence, in a way the actual execution being – at least partly – given to assistants received a theoretical basis and approval. Although it is quite sure that already before Floris painters entrusted parts of the execution to assistants, the mere scale on which Floris seems to have done this was without precedent.[208] If we are to believe Karel van Mander, he had more than 120 assistants in total, and even though this

[203] For biographical details of Jan Massys, see Buijnsters-Smets, pp. 13-17.
[204] Buijnsters-Smets, cat. nos. 25, 31, 33 and 35. The example given is in cat. 31.
[205] One exception might be Buijnsters-Smets 1995, cat. 37, of which the signature does not include a verb nowadays. However, the signature is only partly legible nowadays, and it is quite possible that it originally contained '*pingebat*'.
[206] Calculations based on the *catalogue raisonné* in Buijnsters-Smets 1995. There, 37 paintings are dated before 1561, of which 6 are signed (16,21%), and 25 paintings are dated to or after 1561, of which 20 are signed (80%).
[207] For biographical details, see van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, pp. 21-47.
[208] On the working of Floris' workshop, see Van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, esp. pp. 68-71 and pp. 99-106, and Filipczak 1987, p. 32.

might be a rhetorical exaggeration, it is doubtlessly rooted in truth.[209] Van Mander uses the term '*discipulen*', but this cannot be equated with 'pupils': with one exception, none of the names that the author mentions are registered as such in the *Liggeren*. Floris consciously chose already trained artists to come and work for him, which illustrates to what extent his workshop was carefully thought out and consciously organized.[210]

His signature too appears to have been carefully thought out. In the first place, from the outset of his career onwards, Floris used a very consistent signature, not fundamentally changing it ever at all. Mostly it is in the form of '*FFF ET IV*' or '*FF IV ET FA*', respectively standing for 'Frans Floris fecit et invenit' or 'Frans Floris invenit et faciebat'.[211] Secondly, such a twofold signature including the concept of invention was without precedent, especially so consistently written in an abbreviated form, so much so that it becomes a kind of logo.[212] And finally, every type of painting got its proper signature: whereas history paintings are usually signed with the aforementioned twofold signature, portraits and study heads are consequently signed only with '*FFF*' – 'Frans Floris Fecit' – since there was no invention as such involved in these types.[213] Regarding the overall percentage of extant signed paintings, Floris comes close to Massys: 53% of his extant paintings carry a signature.[214] More specifically, 42% of his study heads and 68% of his history paintings are signed. To judge by its form, Floris' signature reflected his workshop practice, since it implies that he not only worked on the painting itself, but more importantly also was responsible for the invention of the idea behind it.[215] Furthermore, also links with Hieronymus Cock (1517/18-1570) and his printing business *Aux Quatre Vents* have been suggested, since in the prints he published from 1548 onwards he consistently distinguished between the invention and the execution of the prints.[216] Finally, Floris might also have taken inspiration from his teacher Lambert Lombard (1505/06-1566). Although no signed paintings are known from his hand, various of his drawings bear inscriptions like '*Lambertus Lombardus fecit inventor*'. Furthermore, sometimes he abbreviated his name to 'LL', which might have inspired Floris to do so too.[217]

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[209] Van Mander 1604, fol. 242v: "Het is eens gheschiet, dat eenighe van Fransen oude Discipulen by een comende, berekenden meer als hondert en twintigh Discipulen, waer van icker sommighe sal noemen."
[210] Van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, pp. 100-102.
[211] Some minor variations occur, but these are probably due to disintegration and restorations, which caused letters to be erased or replaced by others.
[212] An early – unique – precedent might be Pieter Coecke van Aelst's drawing of a *Tavern scene* (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, figs. 61a-b), which is signed '*Petrus van Aelst – Inv. & F.*' The date of this drawing is sometimes given as 1529, but there is no firm evidence for that. See the online catalogue entry by Peter van der Coelen at http://collectie.boijmans.nl/nl/work/MB%20330%20(PK)?research=1 (consulted 17 July 2013).
[213] Floris usually never signed his portraits. Of the nine portraits attributed to him by van de Velde, only one pair bears a signature (cat. S112). The signature on S111 is inauthentic.
[214] Calculations based on the *catalogue raisonné* in van de Velde 1975. He collected 196 paintings, of which 32 are lost works, 8 are lost mural paintings and 27 are ephemeral works for the Joyous Entry of Philip II in Antwerp in 1549. If these paintings are neglected, and if furthermore triptychs, cycles and pendant portraits are considered as one 'commission', then there are 100 commissions in total, of which 53 carry a signature.
[215] Filipczak 1987, pp. 31-39.
[216] Weissert 2003, pp. 39-42. On Cock and his printing business, see most recently Luijten, van der Stock and van Grieken 2013.
[217] Denhaene 1990, pp. 274-311, passim. It should however be noted that the dates of various drawings are unknown, and strictly spoken it might be possible that Lombard only started using that type of signature after Floris.

Frans Floris is the only Netherlandish painter of the period in question about whom we possess an early document providing insights in the meaning of signatures, albeit very modest. On 7 January 1576 – that is six years after his death – Frans I Francken and Frans I Pourbus, who were both former assistants of his, were summoned to authenticate a painting by their former master. After having seen the painting, they declared that Floris "made it in order and signed it himself with his common sign FF IN. ET F.A."[218] This is an extremely interesting document. Firstly, it implies that Floris' typical signature was more or less well-known in the late sixteenth-century artistic scene. This hints at name recognition, to which we will return. Furthermore, it should be clear that the word 'signature' is not used here. Indeed, for painter's signatures, in the sixteenth century Netherlands the term 'sign' – '*teecken*' – was used. This appears also from the rare uses or references to signatures by Karel van Mander in his *Schilder-boeck*.[219] And finally, the original text uses the word '*opgemaect*', the past participle of the verb '*opmaken*'. It seems that this meant 'to make in order' or 'to bring in a good condition', rather than simply 'to make'.[220] This term could thus correspond quite well to Floris' supposed studio practice, as it is generally accepted that his assistants had a large share in the production of paintings. There are numerous works that carry Floris' signature, but that were unmistakable made in an advanced collaboration with his workshop. For the early years of the studio's activity, Carl van de Velde still seems to believe in a signature that honestly indicates how the picture was made, but after a closer look this hypothesis cannot be maintained. There seems to be no consistent system that defines the exact composition and sequence of the signature. One work clearly made with workshop collaboration is signed '*FFF*', while another, also clearly for a large part executed by assistants, is signed '*FF IV*'.[221]

Floris' influence was enormous, not only stylistically, but also regarding his signature practice. The idea of the twofold and abbreviated signature including the function of inventor is taken over by various of his assistants in their later careers, such as Marten van Cleve (c. 1527-1581), Lucas d'Heere (1534-1584) (figs. 51a-b) and Frans Pourbus (1545-1581) (figs. 52a-b). But besides his direct collaborators, he also seems to have influenced artists that were not directly connected to his workshop. As demonstrated above, the twenty years older Jan Sanders van Hemessen was one of them, but also Lambert van Noort is a case in point. He never developed a standardized signature such as Floris, but various paintings bear signatures often including '*inventor pingebat*'.[222]

A final example that can illustrate the new trend in signature practice in the middle of the sixteenth century is Pieter Aertsen (c. 1508-1575). As Wouter Kloek has already aptly demonstrated, his oeuvre is particularly difficult to put together, but it is precisely for that reason that he will prove to be a fruitful example.[223] Although he came from Amsterdam and eventually died there, around the middle of the century he stayed for two decades in the city of Antwerp. He is registered as a free master in the *Liggeren* in 1535, consequently became a citizen only in 1542 and returned to his native city around 1556.[224] Some sixteen pictures contain his typical monogram, consisting of a trident or

[218] For the original text, see Appendix III.
[219] Van Mander 1604, fol. 204v, fol. 205r, fol. 208r-208v, and fol. 213v.
[220] According to the online Middle Dutch dictionary of the Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie: http://www.wnt.inl.nl/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=MNW&id=39488&lemma=opmaken (consulted on 11 July 2013).
[221] Van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, p. 103. The two examples given are cat. Nos. S42 and S54.
[222] Van Ruyven-Zeman 1995.
[223] Kloek 1989.
[224] Rombouts and van Lerius 1864-1876, vol. 1, p. 124, and Wilenski 1960, vol. 1, p. 482.

woolcomb – referring to his family's trade – in the middle, completed with his initials P and A on both sides, but sometimes he also signed with his full Christian name (figs. 53a-b).[225] The fact that the lion's share of Aertsen's signed paintings dates to 1552 until 1562 might indeed indicate that he was influenced in his decision to do so by the great Antwerp painters, among whom it by middle century started to become a habit.[226] Yet, the body of works nowadays attributed to him displays an unusual variety of quality and even style, which makes it incredibly difficult to compile a *catalogue raisonné* of his paintings. Friedländer still allowed some 50 works, while more recent attempts to catalogue his works include only 30 paintings.[227] Thus, the overall percentage of signed works might range from 30% to 50%, self-evidently depending on the total number of accepted paintings. The extremely heterogeneous nature of his oeuvre points to an ample collaboration of the workshop in the execution, completely in line with what happened in Floris' workshop around the same time. In various cases, the signature does not at all appear to be a mark of a work being autograph. Indeed, as Kloek pointed out, it should rather be seen as a mark of the workshop.[228] Thus, Aertsen is again a case in which the signature seemed to have counted as a mark of responsibility. Not only paintings made by his own hand, but also paintings that were made under his supervision, had the right to bear a mark.

Before trying to give some explanations for the observed changes, it might be useful to first compare these examples. Apart from the relatively high share of signed paintings, there are various parallels to be observed in the case studies treated above. At first, all these artists seem to have pursued a certain standardization of the form of their signature and a consistency in their use. While a painter like Metsys did not have the habit of signing paintings, and always used a different formulation and even various spellings for his name, these later painters at some point in their career developed a signature that they would use over and over again. In the case of Reymerswale, Hemessen and Massys, this happened only halfway their careers, but Floris and Aertsen did so already from the outset, around 1550. This in itself might indicate that Floris and Aertsen at that point already realized the potential of a standardized signature. Here it should be noted that the given case studies represent the big workshops in Antwerp at the time, that were – just as demonstrated above for the decades before – still more of an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, the situation is highly comparable to that in Venice in the second half of the fifteenth century. From c. 1440 onwards the number of signatures increases in the lagoon city, and they are principally used in the large workshops and the big painter's dynasties, where assistants had a considerable share in the painted production. Here, too, the signatures were standardized, and thus used as a trademark. Indeed, as Matthew remarked: "A standardized signature increased the recognizability of a painter's pictures, and in the traditional fashion no differentiation would have been made by many patrons between the various hands – masters, assistants, and apprentices – within a single shop."[229] Another interesting parallel example is the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Whereas before 1517 signatures are quite rare on his works, they increasingly appear after that date. Interestingly, it is from this date onwards that sources reveal the existence of a considerable workshop that

[225] For examples, see Wilenski 1960, vol. 1, p. 482. The examples he gives date to the period 1552 until 1562.
[226] As suggested by Burg 2007, p. 405.
[227] Burg 2007, p. 405.
[228] Kloek 1989, pp. 1 and 9-10.
[229] Matthew 1998, esp. pp. 619-20 and 624. Quote on p. 627.

intensively participated in the production. And just like in Venice and Antwerp, the signature got standardized.[230]

Secondly, there are parallels between what the painters preferred to sign and what not. This is most clearly to be seen in portraits, which are almost never signed, by neither of the considered painters. Of course, this contributes greatly to the often difficult task of attributing portraits and explains the conspicuous anonymity of certain specialized portrait painters of the time, such as the Master of the 1540s. For example, on a total of 25 portraits, Gossart signed only four, of which one is enigmatic and therefore not unanimously accepted as a signature. Another is signed on the frame (*Diptych of Jean Carondelet*, Paris, Louvre, fig. 36), just as probably was the case for the third one too. The fourth one, finally, is the only one for sure signed in the painted reality, namely on a letter held by the sitter, just like Metsys did in his only signed portrait.[231] Hemessen signed two of his seven attributed portraits and Floris one out of nine.[232] Here again, signature practice in Italy is similar: if portraits were signed at all, then it was mostly indirectly, on a possession of the sitter.[233] This is linked to the contemporary ontological status of portraits as compared to history paintings. Portraits, in contemporary sources referred to as '*conterfeytsel*', were indeed "witness to material fact." They were supposed to be an objective representation of the sitter and the representation thus had to be transparent, not showing signs of personal invention. This stood in strong opposition with the *istoria*, which was an invented image. In a manner of speaking, authorship had to be denied in portraits.[234] Therefore, it is not surprising that there were no signatures placed on the picture plane. It is quite possible that there were various portraits signed on their frames, as demonstrated by the example of Gossart. This solution runs parallel to the solution for signing religious paintings in Italy in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when pictures were signed on the frame as a sort of 'religious compromise'.[235] To use Belting's words, portraits – just like old devotional images – "promised a harmony between world and subject," whereas the artist "assumes control of the image" in art, which here could be equated to the *istoria*.[236] This illustrates that by placing a signature, the artist claims the responsibility for the composition, which is evidently impossible in portraiture, at least, in the way it was regularly practiced in the mid-sixteenth-century Netherlands.

Finally, and most importantly, all the above cases illustrate that signatures were not necessarily considered as a mark of a work being autograph by the master himself. Rather, they should be seen as a mark of responsibility, a trademark indifferently used by the workshop to indicate and guarantee the origins. All the above cases were the big workshops in Antwerp at the time, and it is quite sure that signed paintings were also worked on by assistants. In mentality this seems to be a continuation of the previous practice of trademarks that can be observed in the early years of Antwerp painting, which was treated above. But here they were more standardized and recurring, which makes it all the more likely that they were trademarks in the sense of brand names indicating a certain style and quality. In this context it is interesting that 'signature' is not used as a term in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Instead, both in the document recounting the authentication of the Floris

[230] Liebmann 1973, pp. 133-134.
[231] Ainsworth 2010a, resp. cat. nos. 57, 40, 50 and 44. The Metsys portrait is Silver 1984, cat. 55.
[232] Wallen 1983, cat. nos. 11 and 28, and van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, cat. S.112.
[233] Matthew 1998, p. 635.
[234] See on these categories Parshall 1993, and Woods-Marsden 1998, p. 9.
[235] Lecocq 1974a, p. 16.
[236] Belting 1994, pp. 15-16.

painting and in van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* the term '*teecken*' is used, a term which was also traditionally used to indicate quality marks on the part of the city and trademarks, in use since the middle ages.[237]

It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint exact causes for this change and extension of signature practice. Explanations are not easy to give and must remain hypothetical because of the lack of contemporary written sources that expand on the matter. Nevertheless, two fundamental changes that occurred during the period in question can interestingly be related to the phenomenon, which might consequently lead to a better understanding. Firstly, there is a growing art historical consciousness among artists and patrons, and in relation to that the Old Masters enjoyed a renewed interest. Wealthy rulers such as Mary of Hungary and Philip II began hunting down churches and chapels all over the Netherlands in search for masterpieces to add to their collections. Famous paintings by founding fathers such as Jan van Eyck's *Ghent altarpiece* (Ghent, St Bavo) and Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion* (El Escorial, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial) or *Deposition* (Madrid, Prado) were either bought or copied.[238] Automatically, this contributed to the creation of a canon of great masters – a canon that inherently consists of names. A first high point of this development is the compilation of the *Pictorum aliquot celebrium germaniae inferioris effigies* by Hieronymus Cock and Domenicus Lampsonius in the 1560s and its subsequent publication in 1572.[239] And there is no doubt that this made artists realize the importance of their names being well-known. But at the same time it is clear that practice of signing paintings did not count as a safeguard to the canon: while both the little known Lucas Gassel and the completely enigmatic Jan van Amstel are included in Lampsonius' *Pictorum*, Jan van Hemessen, who signed a high percentage of his paintings, is not and van Mander only devotes one erratic sentence to him in his *Schilder-boeck*.[240]

On the other hand, various profound changes in the working of the art market can be noted during the period in question. These changes occurred in all three aspects of the market: the production, the distribution as well as the consumption. This is more complex to discuss, so we will go more into detail on these different aspects separately. As the demand is the driving force of the economy, we will start the overview with discussing the changes that took place on the consumer's side. Firstly, there is a remarkable change that had to do with the quality of the production. In early contracts, drawn up between the painter and the client, it were mostly the costly materials that had to be used that were of primary importance in the agreement. However, parallel to what happened in Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century, notions of 'skill', 'authorship' and 'authenticity' become more and more important in these agreements – in the Netherlands this is to be noted from the late fifteenth century onwards, and increasingly in the early sixteenth century.[241] An early example of this might be the contract drawn up in 1464 with Dieric Bouts for the production of the *Triptych with the Last Supper* (Louvain, St Peter), which stipulated that he had "to make this altarpiece to the best of his ability, to spare neither labor nor time, but to do his utmost to demonstrate in it the art which

[237] See for examples van der Straelen 1855, pp. 13-15, and Engel 1992.
[238] For their collections, see respectively Kerkhoff and van den Boogert 1993, and de Antonio 1998.
[239] Meiers 2006.
[240] Van Mander 1604, fol. 205r.
[241] For Italy, see Baxandall 1976, pp. 14-16.

God has bestowed on him."[242] Although it is not literally mentioned, it implies a considerable demand for the painting to be autograph for a large part. And unlike other contracts from the period, there is no mentioning of the materials he had to use.[243] In early sixteenth-century contracts, however, this requirement is increasingly mentioned in an explicit way, either for the whole painting, or for certain parts, which appears to have been the case mostly.[244] In a 1517 contract with the painter Aelbrecht Cornelis, the Bruges guild of St Francis demanded that he himself would "paint with his own hand, well and skilful, all the nudes and the principal parts."[245] And by the mid-sixteenth century also documents regarding the transactions of works of art start mentioning the authorship of paintings.[246] Nonetheless, it should briefly be noted that the mere fact that these requirements are explicitly mentioned in the contracts might as well indicate that collaboration with assistants was the norm rather than the exception in the painter's workshops. Of course, this growing demand for skill and autography is doubtlessly correlated to the use of signatures, but there has to be more at stake, since not a single extant signed work is known by either Bouts or Cornelis. There is also a quantitative change to be noted on the consumer's side. Studies of judicial inventories of Antwerp houses, dating to the period 1532-1567 have revealed interesting information on the differentiation of the consumption of paintings in the city. From around 1530 an increasing demand for art is to be noted on the part of the growing middle class, so much so that by the 1560s an incredibly high percentage of the Antwerp population possessed paintings. So during the mid-sixteenth century a new group of the civic population appears as clientele for painters, on top of the civic elite as traditional buyers, which entails a growing overall demand for paintings.[247]

Logically, this growing demand affected the production of paintings. In order to be able to meet the needs of the market, the workshops had to change their organization and production methods. Studios became more specialized and took on more apprentices, noticeable from the increasing number of them registered in the *Liggeren*. Interestingly, the peak of this development is clearly to be seen in the 1550s, the decade with the highest amount of apprentices in the Antwerp guild of the whole sixteenth century.[248] Here it is useful to stress the difference with cities as Bruges or Brussels, where it was only allowed for painters to take on one apprentice at a time.[249] In Antwerp, on the other hand, there were no such restrictions, and various studios are known in which for sure more than one pupil was trained at the same time.[250] Moreover, apart from pupils, painters also hired journeymen – '*knaepen*' – to assist them with their work. Unfortunately, their number is much more difficult to grasp, since they were not registered in the guild archives.[251] But as demonstrated above in the case of Frans Floris, their number could rise to considerable heights, which makes it all the more likely that their presence in the workshops was the rule rather than the exception. Thus, the

[242] "Ende heeft die voirscreven meester dieric aangenomen dese tafele te makene na allen synen besten vermoegen egheenen arbeit cost noch tyt dair inne sparende Mars zyn uterste macht na de kunst die hem god verleent heeft…" Published in Schöne 1938, p. 240. English translation in Stechow 1966, pp. 10-11.
[243] Welzel 1997, p. 148.
[244] Muller 1989, p. 141, and Dijkstra 1990, esp. p. 12.
[245] "…metter hand, wel ende constich werken soude alle de naecten ende tprincipale werc van den voorseiden tafele…" Quoted from Dijkstra 1990, p. 12. Other examples are given in Woods 1999, p. 121.
[246] Vermeylen 2001, p. 54.
[247] Martens 2004/2005, p. 58, and Martens and Peeters 2006b, p. 50.
[248] Vermeylen 1999, pp. 15 (Graph) and 16.
[249] Wilson 1990, p. 621.
[250] Born 2011, p. 121.
[251] Van der Stock 1993, pp. 47-48.

workshops grew larger, but also the number of workshops rose considerably during the sixteenth century. Around 1560, Guicciardini famously stated that there were around 300 painters and sculptors, a number that exceeded the quantity of bakers.[252] Here again, this might be a rhetorical exaggeration rooted in truth. Statistical calculations indicate that around 1525 the number of active workshops in Antwerp was around 120 – an equally astonishing number.[253] Consequently, it must be clear that in Antwerp the competition was enormous for artists, more so than in other cities in the Netherlands.[254] Collaboration between different workshops diminished, but within the workshop it became more important.

Finally, also the way in which artworks were distributed underwent considerable changes during the period in question. This has to be seen in relation to the market in Antwerp in general. Initially, the success of Antwerp as a mercantile city was for a large part built on the success of its bi-annual fairs, lasting only several weeks, but by the early 1530s the city got reputed for its annual fairs developing into permanent fairs.[255] In that context, there were also profound changes in the art market. Vermeylen distinguished three different phases in the development of the sixteenth-century Antwerp art market: a first period from c. 1490 to c. 1520 in which the market matured, characterized by a rationalization and standardization of the production; a second phase of stagnation and decline from c. 1520 to c. 1535; and finally a second period of growth from c. 1535 to c. 1565, which he also characterized as the "consolidation of Antwerp as a permanent international market."[256] During this last phase, proportionally more works were made on spec compared to the works made on commission.[257] A crucial date in this phase is 1540, the year in which the *Pand* in the New Bourse opened its doors, which led to a centralization of a permanent market for paintings. Here again, comparison with Bruges is illustrative: there the *Pand* was only opened during the annual fairs.[258] Beforehand, this was the case in Antwerp too. Our Lady's *Pand*, the most important of the Antwerp *Panden* – courtyards mostly specialized in selling luxuries – was also only opened during the annual fairs. Constructed by the Church of Our Lady in order to finance the work on the building, it opened its doors in 1460. Artists could rent stalls in the building to display their on spec produced works to potential clients. Consequently, it was the "first showroom in post-Classical Europe to be constructed expressly for the exhibition and sale of works of art."[259] This importance notwithstanding, the installation of the *Pand* in the New Bourse created a strong competition between the two, and although Our Lady's *Pand* quickly switched to a permanent opening too, the former soon eclipsed the reputation of the latter and entered history as the first permanent art fair in Europe.[260]

We are quite well informed about the working of the *Pand*. There are various lists documenting the names of the tenants, and it is striking to notice that nearly all these names are completely unknown to us today. These artists remain without an attributed oeuvre, and just as is the case in the Bruges

[252] Guicciardini 1567, p. 100.
[253] Martens 2004/2005, pp. 53-57.
[254] Burg 2007, pp. 401-402.
[255] Dubbe and Vroom 1986, p. 15.
[256] Vermeylen 2000, pp. 194-197.
[257] Vermeylen 1999, pp. 14-15.
[258] Wilson 1990, p. 624.
[259] Ewing 1990, p. 558.
[260] Ewing 1990, pp. 569, and 577-578, and Vermeylen 2000, pp. 207-212.

Pand, the big artist's names such as Floris or Hemessen are completely absent from the lists.[261] On top of that, it also seems that the paintings displayed there were only accompanied by a label containing just the description of the subject, not indicating the painter's name.[262] In all probability, therefore, the production sold at the *Pand* consisted of small works of mediocre quality, repeating more or less standardized iconographical themes.[263] It seems very likely that the artists who rented stalls in the *Pand* probably did not have the financial means to run a shop of their own.[264] Yet, the big painters such as Floris or Hemessen are also known to have painted works on spec. This led Ewing to suppose that their established reputations and workshops allowed them to sell their works immediately from their stores.[265] This is very likely. For example, in a 1551 document, Jan Sanders van Hemessen's profession is referred to as a 'business in painting.'[266] Although there was another possibility to sell artworks indirectly via specialized art dealers, it is only from around 1570 onwards that a substantial number of men with this specific profession are registered in the *Liggeren*.[267] Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that around mid-century, artists could only sell their works in two ways: either via the permanent and centralized *Pand* or directly from the workshop. And it seems that the big and well-known workshops consciously tried to dissociate themselves from the anonymous production sold at the *Pand*.

By inscribing their names on the artworks that left their workshops, artists made sure that their name became known. On the one hand, the growing art historical awareness that took shape in these years could have prompted them to do so, since it could have been an attempt to have their name and fame included in the future canon of great artists too. At the same time, it also set them apart from the anonymous production that was sold at the *Pand*. But there is more. As the 1576 document describing Floris' signature indicates, his specific signature or '*teecken*' was relatively well-known. This was only possible because it was standardized, just like present-day logo's. As demonstrated above, this standardization was the same in the other big shops, and in fact became one of the main characteristics of the signature around the middle of the sixteenth century. It thus seems that the artists used this sort of branding as a means to create name recognition and subsequently establish a firm reputation. Indeed, the big workshops were real and well-known names on the art market. Put in a slightly disrespectful way, artist's names – and thus the signatures – became a sort of brand, that in turn stood for a certain style and quality. For instance, if a client wanted a painting depicting a copious marketing scene, he would go to Pieter Aertsen's shop rather than to Floris', where one would in turn rather go to order a large-scale mythological piece. The hypothesis that artist's names really stood for a certain quality, is again confirmed by various early sixteenth-century contracts. In order to determine the quality of the work a lot of these documents refer to previous works made by the same artist, which implies that the artist got reputed for a certain quality.[268] Therefore, in a way signatures could be seen as a further development of or supplement to the quality marks that were applied by the guild itself. As indicated above, they were meant to ensure the material quality of the work in question. This is to a certain extent an objective

[261] Ewing 1990, pp. 571-574, and Wilson 1983, p. 479.
[262] Ewing 1990, p. 564.
[263] Wilson 1990, p. 625.
[264] Born 2011, p. 96.
[265] Ewing 1990, pp. 572-574.
[266] "Handel van schilderen," see Wallen 1983, p. 22.
[267] Vermeylen 1999, p. 17.
[268] Examples given in Dijkstra 1990, pp. 14-15.

judgment, because there are certain aspects with which the materials have to comply. However, there were also various holes in this whole regulation, since for example there was no control of the pigments used in the painting, nor of the conformity of the final product with what was desired by the client.[269] Indeed, the artistic qualities of a work are much more subjective to judge, and there was no quality mark for that. As Woods remarked, "guild regulations stress quality of materials and workmanship, relating not to the concept of art as an intellectual pursuit but to the craft tradition."[270] Here it should be remarked that two developments on the consumer's side described above led to a contradictory situation. The increasing demand for paintings in general on the one hand, and the growing importance of a work being autograph on the other hand, doubtlessly led to a situation in which complete autography could not always be guaranteed. As demonstrated, the workshops of painters grew larger and the participation of assistants increased. And since even paintings made in collaboration with the workshop were signed, it seems reasonable to assume that signatures can be interpreted as a sort of substitute quality marks on the part of the master painter himself. By applying his signature on the painting, he assumed the full responsibility for the work leaving his studio, in a way stating that for him it fulfilled the stylistic and material qualities set by his shop. According to this interpretation, the signature at once fulfills two functions that are inseparably connected the one with the other: spreading the artist's name and fame as a brand, and at the same time guaranteeing the related quality.

In order to make this interpretation more plausible, it is interesting to note that the visibility of the signatures increases in the oeuvres of the painters discussed above, which is, of course, a necessary condition to accept the interpretation of a signature functioning partly as a brand. The early examples discussed in this chapter were all rather invisible, such as the small mysterious letters on the early Antwerp retables and the monograms by van Cleve high up and very small in the altarpieces. In fact, it is very doubtful if they were legible at all once they were installed in the church. Also Quinten Metsys earliest signature on the *Saint Anne altarpiece* is only to be found in small letters high up on the triptych. After 1516, Gossart already started to put them in increasingly large letters on the lower edge of his paintings. More and more the signatures are to be found in places where they are to be expected, such as on a stone, on a piece of paper depicted in the painting, on a wall or on a table. They grow bigger, and they are mostly put on the lower side of the paintings, especially in the case of altarpieces or history pieces. In the oeuvres of Hemessen and Floris, for example, this almost seems to be an unwritten rule (figs. 54a-55b).

That signatures could be used as mercantile stratagem became already clear in some fifteenth-century examples, such as Petrus Christus or Jheronimus Bosch, albeit in two different ways, the former probably wanting to capitalize on the gap in the market left by van Eyck, the latter conspicuously authenticating the paintings that left his workshop. For the sixteenth century it is interesting to trace the continuation of certain workshops, which happened frequently and might of course imply a conscious continuation of a certain style and quality. The new leader of the workshop uses the reputation and fame established by the former, which in some cases is clearly reflected in the signatures used. The most extreme, but at the same time also the most illustrative example is doubtlessly the workshop of Willem Key (1516-1568).[271] The most talented pupil that he trained in

[269] Born 2011, p. 100.
[270] Woods 1999, p. 119.
[271] Willem Key is nowadays primarily known as a portrait painter, but he must have been a quite important history painter as well. Unfortunately a lot of that part of his production was destroyed during the 1566

his studio was arguably Adriaen Thomasz. (c. 1545-c. 1589), who after the death of Willem in 1568, continued the workshop and for that purpose explicitly assumed the family name Key, a name he did not use at all before. This change was also reflected in his standardized '*ATK*' signature, using his new initials. By doing this, he consciously continued the 'Key' trademark, which almost certainly was perceived as standing for a certain style and quality.[272] The assuming of a completely new family name was unique in the sixteenth century, but other interesting examples can be given in order to illustrate the phenomenon. Various cases are known of signatures in which artists refer to their famous predecessors. One of the earliest examples is a documented inscription – thus unfortunately not verifiable – on a now lost painting by Goossen van der Weyden (c. 1465-after 1538), Rogier's grandson. Although nowadays not a single signature is known by him, a description dating to 1790 of a *Triptych with the death and Ascension of Mary* in the abbey church of Tongerlo, mentions the following signature: "*Opera R.P.D. / ARNOLDI STRETYERII hujus Ecclesiae Abbatis hanc depinxit posteritatis Monumentum tabulam GOSWINUS VANDER WEYDEN septuagenarius sua canitie, quam infra ad vivam exprimit imaginem artem sui avi Rogeri, nomen Appellis suo aevo sortiti, imitates, redempti orbis anno 1535.*"[273] Thus, Goossen explicitly associated – and apparently also depicted – himself with his illustrious grandfather. As illustrated above, Jan Massys did something similar, because in the earliest works after his exile – during the establishment of his new shop in Antwerp – he adds his father's name to his signature. Another mid-sixteenth-century, but more special, example is Catharina van Hemessen (1528-after 1567), who also is known to have added '*filia Ioannis*' in some of her signatures.[274] The conscious continuation of family traditions can also be illustrated by the two great painter's dynasties in late sixteenth-century Antwerp. Although strictly spoken they lie beyond the time scope of this paper, they might more clearly illustrate what was at stake. The successors to the great Pieter Bruegel – to whom we will return – were his two sons Pieter the Younger and Jan. Although both in a different way, they clearly continued the tradition and reputation established by their father. Nevertheless, in their signatures they subtly made clear that they were of a different generation, by consistently spelling their family names as 'Brueghel', instead of 'Bruegel' favored by the Pieter the Elder.[275] The other great dynasty of painters was that of the Francken family, originating in the second half of the sixteenth century, but extending well into the seventeenth century. They, too, were renowned for having a developed the typical 'Francken-style', but they also clearly distinguished between the different members of the family. Already in his 1597 *Road to Calvary* (Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen) Frans I Francken (1542-1616) signed with the addition 'the Elder' – '*den Ouden*' – in order to make a distinction with his eponymous son Frans II (1581-1642), who at the same time adds 'the Younger' to his signature. Consequently, after Frans I had died in 1616, Frans II himself started using the addition 'the Elder'.[276] In sum, all the above examples illustrate in various ways that workshops and family traditions were continued, and that

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Beeldenstorm. The *catalogue raisonné* in Jonckheere 2011 included 97 paintings, of which 7 are signed (7,2%) and one includes a self-portrait. According to the norms of the time, none of the 69 portraits is signed. However, 7 of 28 history or devotional paintings is signed (25%). If one accepts the self-portrait as a substitute signature, this figure rises to 28,6%. Although smaller, these figures approximate those of Key's contemporaries.

[272] Jonckheere 2007, pp. 20-21, and Jonckheere 2011, p. 18.

[273] Quoted from Heylen 1837, p. 160.

[274] De Clippel 2004, cat. nos. A8, A9 and B4.

[275] Sellink 2007, p. 39. See in general also van den Brink 2001-2002.

[276] For the examples given, see Peeters 1999, resp. pp. 67 and 78, n. 82. On the Francken signatures in general, see Härting 1989, pp. 28-31.

this continuation or these bonds with predecessors often had their expression in the signatures used. This, in turn, might lead to a better understanding as the signature as a sort of brand, standing for a certain tradition of quality and style.

This all being said, it is still not clear why certain paintings in the oeuvres of signing painters carry signatures and others do not. Worse still, it seems that no firm answer can be given to this question. Where in the beginning of the sixteenth century it seems that artworks destined for abroad were sooner completed with a signature, from around 1530 onwards this principle does not seem to count anymore. Floris' *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (Antwerp, RMFA, fig. 55a) – signed and dated 1554 – was painted for the altar of the Antwerp Fencer's Guild in Our Lady's church, and his equally signed *Awakening of the Arts* (Ponce, Museo de Arte, fig. 56) originally hung in Nicolaes Jongelinck's country house in Antwerp.[277] Nevertheless, paintings destined for abroad can in some cases be detected in other ways. To continue with the case of Floris, the example of his *Last Judgment* in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum, fig. 57) can be given. This painting is conspicuously signed '*FF. ANTVERPIEN. INVE. FAC. 1565*', the reference to the city of Antwerp being unique in Floris' oeuvre. This led van de Velde to assume that it was originally destined for a place outside of the city – a reasonable assumption indeed.[278] Other examples can be found in the oeuvre of Michiel Coxcie, who for instance signed his *Flight to Egypt* (Funchal, Catedral Sé Santa Maria Maior, fig. 58) with the Spanish addition '*pintor*' instead of the Latin '*pictor*' he regularly used.[279] Also the previous distinction between commissioned works that were signed, while works produced on spec were not, does not seem to count anymore. Of course, it is difficult to identify works produced on spec as such, but it might work the other way around. Hemessen's *St Sebastian Triptych* (Paris, Petit Palais) or his *Rockox Triptych* (Antwerp, St Jacob) were both clearly commissioned, but neither carries a signature.[280] Here again a parallel with Italian painting can be drawn, since the long-held assumption that Titian preferred to sign more ambitious works destined for faraway places was plausibly refuted by Creighton Gilbert.[281] In sum, it seems very difficult to present rules for motivation of the signing of pictures. Indeed, it might be true that "precisely because they are attached to products of ingenuity and invention, the rules that might be suggested about signing have many exceptions," as Rubin remarked.[282] For example, Giorgio Vasari repeatedly wrote in his *Vite* that the artist added his name to an artwork – '*pore il nome*' – if he was satisfied with the result.[283] If this really was the case, and if it moreover also counted in the north, is impossible to find out. But of course, along the same line as the interpretation given above it would be very logical that an artist put his name on a work with which he was satisfied, rather than on a work with which he was not, since in a serious case this could harm his reputation.

[277] For these paintings, see van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, S62 and S120.
[278] Van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, S180. Something similar has been suggested for Italian paintings with the addition of a city in the signature, see Goffen 2001, p. 308.
[279] See for a discussion of that painting Martens 2010, pp. 187-195.
[280] Both works probably date to the 1530s. For these paintings, see respectively Wallen 1983, cat. Nos. 9 and 17.
[281] Gilbert 1980, esp. p. 74.
[282] Rubin 2006, p. 566.
[283] Rubin 2006, p. 571. Examples include Vasari 1998, vol. 1, pp. 307 and 604, vol. 5, pp. 405-406.

PROVERBIAL EXCEPTIONS

Although the examples given above demonstrate that by mid-century the signing of paintings came more and more in use, it would be wrong to state that every Netherlandish painter active around 1540-50 signed his works. There are several examples known of big workshops, both in Antwerp and elsewhere, that did not make a habit of it at all. Nevertheless, these might be the proverbial exceptions that confirm the general rule. All of these artists, who traveled widely and besides painters were learned men too, arguably can be described as so-called 'self-conscious artists', but neither of them signed on a regular basis, which illustrates that this self-consciousness cannot be regarded as the founding principle of signing practice. A notably absent figure in the above overview is Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550). Born in the city of Aalst, he was probably trained in Bernard van Orley's workshop in Brussels. Later on he moved to Antwerp, where he became a free master in 1527 and subsequently took over the workshop of his father-in-law Jan Mertens van Dornicke, who is – as noted above – probably identical to the Master of 1518, one of the major figures in early sixteenth-century Antwerp painting. In all probability he travelled to Rome and Constantinople, and later on in his career he translated architectural treatises by Vitruvius and Sebastiano Serlio. The most important part of his career Coecke spent in the city of Antwerp, only to move to Brussels in 1546 where he died four years later, sadly enough just after being appointed court painter to Emperor Charles V.[284] Coecke's workshop grew out to be one of the most flourishing in Antwerp during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, and it is very likely that his studio counted numerous assistants.[285] This would make Coecke's profile highly comparable to that of the examples given above, who also ran the big workshops of the time. Yet, in strong opposition with them not a single signed painting by Coecke is known, neither the somewhat dry and repetitive paintings clearly produced on spec, nor the more qualitative works doubtlessly made on commission (figs. 59 & 60).[286] At first sight this might seem to weaken or refute the above interpretation, but that is not necessarily so. It has already been suggested that the paintings that left Coecke's workshop were only complementary to what should have been the master's main activities, namely the creation of tapestry designs or monumental windows and the translation of the treatises.[287] Indeed, Coecke's name and fame were primarily based on these activities. This could explain why, unlike his contemporaries, he did not need a brand or marketing name. A similar case, albeit outside of Antwerp, is Jan van Scorel (1495-1562). After having travelled to Rome and Jerusalem in the 1520s, he settled permanently in Utrecht in 1530 and set up a large workshop that – just like Floris – was designed after the principles of the big painters in Rome.[288] However, he clearly did not have the habit of signing his works. Only three paintings in his oeuvre containing somewhat 90 works carry a signature.[289] Moreover, all of these three works predate his permanent settlement in Utrecht and are in fact all special cases. Apart from the 1520 *Triptych with the Holy Kinship* discussed above, he signed the 1529 *Portrait of Agatha van Schoonhoven* (Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, fig. 62) '*per Scorelium pictorem.*' But since the latter was his mistress, the work in all probability was a very

[284] Devisscher 1995, p. 152, and Turner 1996, vol. 7, pp. 518-520.
[285] The idea was first formulated by Marlier 1966. On the workshop, see also Jansen 2003 and Jansen 2006.
[286] There are only two signed drawings known: *Tavern scene* (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, figs. 61a-b), signed '*Petrus van Aelst – Inv. & F.*' and *The apostle Paul before King Agrippa* (Vienna, Albertina), signed '*Peter van Aelst*' on the lower edge of the foremost column.
[287] Jansen 2006, p. 180.
[288] Faries 1975, and Filedt-Kok, Halsema-Kubes and Kloek 1986, vol. 1, pp. 63-68.
[289] Burg 2007, p. 404.

personal one, and thus to be considered an exception. The third and last work carrying an inscription is the *Group portrait of the Haarlem Brotherhood of Jerusalem Pilgrims* (Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum, fig. 63) of around the same time. Here however, he did not really sign the painting as such, since just like he depicted the other members he included his own portrait and name, precisely because he was a member of the Brotherhood. None of the extant paintings that must have left his shop after 1530 carries a signature, in sharp contrast to Frans Floris, who had a workshop that used similar working methods. Therefore, it might appear strange, but it must be remembered that apart from his activities as a painter, Scorel had another job as a canon in Utrecht, with increasing duties in the 1530s. On top of that, from early in his career onwards, he had good connections with the high nobility and other important persons of influence, via whom he continued to receive commissions.[290] Thus, it seems that he was not only financially depending on his workshop, just like Coecke. A last striking example is the Liège-born artist Lambert Lombard (1505/06-1566). Although he himself was not at all the greatest painter that would emerge in the Netherlands, he was a quite important figure. Possibly trained in Antwerp, he returned to his native city where by 1532 he was the court painter to Prince-Bishop Erard de la Marck. It was at the latter's behest that the artist travelled to Rome in 1537-38.[291] Upon returning to Liège again, he trained both Frans Floris and Willem Key, two of the painters that grew out to be among the most important Antwerp artists around mid-century.[292] Whereas Floris and Key signed their paintings, Lombard never did.[293] He did sign a lot of his drawings, though, and it seems that just like Coecke his primary activity was that of a designer of works in other media, for which he would consequently primarily be known by contemporaries. On top of that, it can also be pointed out that, not dissimilar to Coecke and Scorel, his various successive prestigious positions as court painter or municipal master builder allowed him considerable financial freedom, not forcing him to establish a strong reputation for his workshop.

It is striking that other contemporary court painters do not match the profile of the regularly signing artist as sketched above either. They sign in a much more irregular and inconsistent way. Here, the examples of Mor and Coxcie can be given as illustrations. Anthonis Mor van Dashorst (c. 1517-c. 1576) was born in Utrecht, but soon went to Antwerp where he was registered as a free master in 1547. However, he quickly embarked upon a career working as a portraitist for various European courts. In 1549 he came into the service of the Cardinal Granvelle, who in turn recommended him to Mary of Hungary and the Emperor Charles V. On the latter's behest, he travelled to Spain and Portugal in the early 1550s. After a stay at the English court, he returned to the Spanish court for several years around 1560.[294] In sum, Mor was continually on active service in the higher circles in Europe. Although he signed approximately 25% of his works, he deviates from his contemporaries in two ways.[295] On the one hand he regularly signed portraits, which was not the norm at the time. Yet, as his main activities consisted of painting portraits, this is quite understandable. But on the other hand, he never standardized his signature, varying his name as well as the verb used, and sometimes using special phrases displaying his learning or skill.[296] He did not develop a recurrent and

[290] Filedt-Kok, Halsema-Kubes and Kloek 1986, vol. 2, pp. 179-180.
[291] For biographical data, see Denhaene 1990, pp. 13-25.
[292] Van de Velde 1975, vol. 1, pp. 25-27, and Jonckheere 2011, pp. 15-16.
[293] Denhaene 1990, p. 273.
[294] Groenveld 1981.
[295] Calculations based on Marlier 1934, who collected 56 works (among which two pairs of pendants), of which 13 are signed (24%). Burg 2007, p. 404 compiled 17 signed works among a total of 64 (26,5%).
[296] For an overview, see Marlier 1934.

recognizable sign to establish his reputation. This is understandable too: since he was travelling all the time and never really set up a workshop, he did not need such a mark – he would even draw little benefit from having one. The same goes for Michiel Coxcie (c. 1499-1592). Probably trained in the Brussels workshop of Bernard van Orley, Coxcie travelled to Italy for an exceptionally long time, most probably from the late 1520s to 1539. Quite soon after returning to the Netherlands, he was recruited by the Habsburg court, since he was one of the first northern artists to have mastered the pure High Renaissance style. At first, he worked for governor Mary of Hungary, but after her abdication he came into the service of King Philip II of Spain. Both patrons provided him with multiple prestigious commissions.[297] Although at the same time he accepted numerous orders from civic groups or the bourgeoisie, he did not sign on a regular basis, and if he did, he signed in a huge variety of ways, sometimes even using the signature to boast, among others about his position at court or, during the later part of his life, about his high age.[298] A striking example is the signature he put on the *Triptych of St Gudula* (Brussels, Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula, fig. 64): '*Me Michael van Coxie Pictor Regius me fecit anno salvtis 1592. Aetatis vero svae 92*.' Their positions at court gave them considerable financial freedom, which in turn made them quite independent of the free market. Consequently, they needn't develop standardized and instantaneously recognizable marks. When they signed, they often displayed much more self-consciousness or conceit in comparison to other signatures of the period. Once again, these observations run parallel to some Italian examples, where court painters signed considerably fewer. As Matthew stated: "Artists at court under the patronage of a prince did not need signatures as a form of promotion to nearly the same degree as an artist running a busy commercial workshop. Signatures were, nevertheless, a form of self-reference, and what few signatures there are in Mantegna's work after the 1450s were very self-consciously placed with regard to meaning and visual illusion."[299] Another illustrative, this time northern European, example is that of Hans Holbein the Younger (c. 1497-1543), who often signed while still working in Basel. However, after his move to London and his subsequent appointment at the English court, he almost stopped doing so, in all probability because it was not necessary anymore.[300]

A PRACTICE SPREADS

These exceptions notwithstanding, it should be clear that by the mid-sixteenth century the habit of signing paintings spread among artists. This is even illustrated by the last two examples given, albeit in an exceptional way in comparison to their contemporaries. Soon the habit also spread to other cities such as Bruges or Haarlem, where there was much less competition than in Antwerp. In Bruges, Pieter Pourbus (c. 1524-1584) was the first one who after the fifteenth-century pioneers in the city regularly started signing again.[301] His slightly older co-citizens Ambrosius Benson (before 1505-1550) and Lanceloot Blondeel (c. 1496-1561) only rarely did so and in the few cases it was only restricted to monograms accompanied by a trademark. Two examples by Benson are known and both are signed

[297] Van den Boogert 1992, and van den Boogert 1993. For Coxcie's whole biography, see Jonckheere and Suykerbuyk forthcoming.
[298] See Appendix IV.
[299] Matthew 1998, p. 622. See also Burg 2007, p. 390.
[300] Burg 2007, p. 519.
[301] Burg 2007, p. 398.

with the monogram 'AB'.[302] Two examples are also known by Blondeel, but these works are in fact two sides of what originally was one work, namely the 1545 banner of the Bruges Guild of St Luke: the *St Luke painting the Virgin* (Bruges, Groeningemuseum) and the *Virgin with Child* (Bruges, St Salvator). Both sides are signed with the monogram 'LAB', accompanied by a trowel (figs. 65a-b). The presence of this object in Blondeel's monogram is explained by van Mander as being a reference to his old profession as a mason.[303] It was Blondeel who is thought to have trained his son-in-law Pourbus, who was probably born in Gouda, but came to Bruges and entered the Guild of St Luke as a master in 1543. In various cases Pourbus continued the trademark tradition which – as illustrated above with the Master of the Saint Godelieve Legend – was no uncommon practice in Bruges in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. However, he also started signing in full again. As a rule, from around 1550 onwards, his paintings are signed and dated.[304] For history and devotional pieces, he quite consistently used *faciebat* from 1556 onwards (figs. 66a-b), and – unlike his Antwerp contemporaries – he regularly signed his portraits too, which normally carry his usual monogram and trademark (figs. 67a-68b).[305] Again, this is not really surprising, since they constitute a large share of his overall production. In Haarlem, it is Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574) who started signing regularly, as civic predecessors such as Geertgen tot Sint Jans or Jan Mostaert did not inscribe their names on their paintings at all.[306] Overall, around 39% of Heemskerck's production is signed, and it is very interesting to notice that from around 1550 onwards a lot more extant painting carry signatures. Where in the period from 1525 until 1549 approximately 26% is signed, this figure rises up to 65,5% in the period from 1550 until 1567.[307] It would be nonsense to state that this is the result of his trip to Italy. Just like in Gossart's case, this change does not seem to have anything to do with his Italian journey, which Heemskerck undertook in 1532-37. He already signed before he left and the figure does not start to rise immediately after his return. Thus, this seems more to be an expression of the changing habits of the time and, in fact, it might even be due to his increasing engagements with Cock's printing business starting in the early 1550s. On top of that, just like his Antwerp contemporaries, he rarely signed his portraits: only two signed examples are known, of which one is a very personal work, namely the portrait of his father (New York, Metropolitan, fig. 69), and the other is signed on the frame.[308] Yet, he never standardized his signature, varying the spelling of his name constantly, as well as the verb or the tense he chose.

The extant oeuvres of the big Antwerp workshops of Hemessen, Massys, Floris and Aertsen all consisted of approximately 40 to 50% of signed works. Of course, there are various workshops of the same period with figures at both far ends of the scale. At the high end stands Pieter Bruegel (c.1525/30-1569), who signed almost everything, with approximately 90% of his extant paintings

[302] The *Triptych of Anthony of Padua* (Brussels, RMFAB) and the *Holy Family* in Munich (Alte Pinakothek).
[303] Van Mander 1604, fol. 204v: "Oudts tijts is te Brugghe gheweest eenen Lansloot Blondeel, welcken in zijn jeught was gheweest een Metselaer: daerom hy een Schilder wesende, altijt in zijn wercken voor een teecken stelde een Truffel, oft Truweel."
[304] Huvenne 1984, pp. 23-24.
[305] There is still no *catalogue raisonné* available of Pourbus' oeuvre, making it impossible to make general and statistical statements. However, the exhibition catalogue Huvenne 1984 provides a representative selection.
[306] Winner 1959, however, published a painting by Mostaert that might carry a monogram. In any way, this seems to be unique in Mostaert's oeuvre.
[307] Calculations based on Grosshans 1980. He collected 101 works, of which 39 are signed (38,6%). 69 works are dated to the period 1525-1549, and 18 of them are signed (26%), while 32 works are dated to the period 1550-1567, of which 21 are signed (65,5%).
[308] Respectively Grosshans 1980, cat. nos. 15 and 25.

carrying a signature.[309] This high figure can be explained in two complementary ways. Firstly it must be remarked that Bruegel initially started out as a print designer for Hieronymus Cock's enterprise *Aux Quatre Vents*. After a probable training in the workshop of Pieter Coecke van Aelst around 1545-50, he enrolled as a free master in the Antwerp guild in 1551. It is very likely that his first contacts with Cock date to the following year, the year to which also his first drawings belong. Although his first paintings date to 1557, he continued to work for Cock, until in 1562 he moved to Brussels and shifted his focus to producing paintings. This start in the printing business probably prompted him to sign his whole artistic output. As already briefly touched upon above, the mentioning of the makers name was a habit way earlier in the graphic arts in comparison to painting. Initially this was mainly done by recurring monograms, but towards the middle of the sixteenth century this was increasingly done with full names. On top of that, the distinction was also made between the inventor of the composition and the maker of the print. An early northern example of this is Cornelis Massys (1513-1579), who in the late 1530s made some prints after Italian examples, in which he clearly identified the inventor (figs. 71a-b). Toward 1550 this was almost institutionalized by Cock and his enterprise, modeled after the example of Raphael and Il Bavieri. Artists were increasingly asked to make drawings specifically for publishing.[310] As a result, they increasingly added their names to their designs, which was subsequently repeated on the plate. It is interesting to note that in various cases it were precisely these artists who were engaged in the printing business who increasingly signed their painted production, too. Famous examples include Heemskerck and Floris, and as demonstrated here Bruegel too. He signed approximately 70% of his drawings, and the evolution in his drawn signatures corresponds to the evolution in his painted signatures, which illustrates the continuity and indicates that he treated both media equally in terms of signing.[311] Throughout his short career, he used a remarkably consistent signature, very much in the line of Bosch: he only signed with his family name and a date, never adding a verb.[312] A second, additional explanation for the high number of signed paintings might be his profile and network. He was not the artist who was given commissions for great altarpieces in dark churches and chapels, nor did he seem to have painted works on spec. Rather, he was an artist working mainly for the top clientele in the Netherlands, with patrons such as Abraham Ortelius, the Antwerp mint masters Jean Noirot and Nicolaes Jongelinck and the immensely influential Cardinal Granvelle. And quickly after his death his paintings were already in high demand, suggesting that he produced only a rather limited oeuvre. Seen in this light, it would not be surprising if the signatures were highly appreciated by the patrons, who could subsequently boast with having a real Bruegel in their collection.

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[309] Calculations based on Sellink 2007. He accepted 40 works as autograph, of which 35 are signed (85,4%). To this must be added the recently discovered *Wine at St Martin's feast* (Madrid, Prado), which is signed '*BRVEGEL / M.D.L…*' (figs. 70a-b). However, cat. 134 (unsigned) comes out of a cycle of six paintings of which one is lost and the other four are signed. Furthermore, cat. 151 does carry a date, which might indicate that there originally was a signature too, and cat. 168 is possibly only a study head. Counting only the commissions and accepting that cat. 151 was originally signed too, this would make the figure rise to 92,5%.

[310] Luijten 2013, p. 30.

[311] Calculations based on Sellink 2007. He listed 63 drawings, of which 42 are signed (66,66%). To his must be added the recently discovered landscape drawing (Antwerp, private collection), on which traces of a signature are to be seen ('*UEG*') (see Martens and Sellink 2012, pp. 70-75). Three of the unsigned drawings in Sellink are figure studies and another unsigned drawing is a design for a print in a cycle for which the other designs are signed. Considering only the finished drawings and print designs, the figure rises to 70%.

[312] Burg 2007, pp. 431 and 434-435. In a nutshell, the evolution of Bruegel's signatures comes down to the following: '*Brueghel 15..*' (1552-1558), '*BRVEGHEL 15..*' (1558), '*BRVEGEL 15..*' (1559-1560), '*BRVEGEL M.D…*' (1562-1569).

At the other end of the scale stand the numerous masters of which not a single signed work is known, or only one. Of course, a lot of works have been lost so there might have been more, but anyway it might indicate that these painters did not sign often, especially in comparison to the examples given above. Herri met de Bles (c. 1510-c.1555/60) is a famous case. Of him van Mander recounts that in all his works he put a little owl, which lead to the absurd situation in which numerous paintings containing owls were attributed to the master.[313] Apart from the fake inscription '*Henricus Blesius f.*' on the Munich *Adoration of the Magi* (Alte Pinakothek) that gave way to the creation of the anonymous master Pseudo-Bles, not a single work is known to be signed with his name. As a result, the group of works attributed to Herri met de Bles is a rather heterogeneous group that still needs to be strongly revised.[314] On the other hand, not every work that can be attributed to this master contains an owl. In sum, the owl does not have the value of a signature at all.[315] It is therefore more likely that the owl was considered more as a searching game, just like the defecating figure in Patinir. This, in turn, might indicate that the audience – and clientele – was only a restricted circle of acquaintances.[316] Regrettably, nearly no biographical facts are known about the master, but it is not impossible that he indeed only painted for pleasure or for a very narrow audience, which did not prompt him to develop a marketing sign. In any case he seems to have had a sort of cult status quite soon, since he is included in the 1572 *Pictorum*, in which his portrait is accompanied by an owl (fig. 72), and in van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck*. Unfortunately, this is pure speculation, and it is impossible to tell why all these other masters did not sign or only rarely. There are various monogramming artists of whom only one monogrammed painting is known. This diminishes the value of the monogram, since it is not instantaneously recognizable anymore. One of the most famous examples is doubtlessly the Brunswick Monogrammist, whose name comes from a unique monogram on the *Parable of the great supper* (Brunswick, HAUM), consisting of intertwined letters J, V, A, M, S and L. These letters caused the painter to be identified with various masters, such as the enigmatical Jan van Amstel, the young Jan Sanders van Hemessen or even Mayken Verhulst, the second wife of Pieter Coecke van Aelst. Even nowadays his identity is still a subject of great controversy.[317] Another, randomly chosen, example is the so-called Master LC, who was hilariously dubbed Pseudo-Gassel since the C in his monogram was once read as a G, which subsequently led to the temporary identification with Lucas Gassel.[318] A final interesting example of a painter of whom only one fully signed work is known is the recently rediscovered Henrick Creeft. He was completely unknown, until recently a signature '*.C. REEFT FECIT*' was found on a *Triptych with the coronation of the Virgin* (Nîmes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, figs. 73a-b).[319] Although it is pure speculation, it seems reasonable to assume that these monograms and signatures are still in the same line as the early ones from the first decades, i.e. that they were purely marks guaranteeing the origins of the work to the buyer abroad. Anyway it is interesting to note that a lot of these masters do not seem to have been the most talented painters of their times, so maybe they just acknowledged their less

[313] Van Mander 1604, fol. 219v: "Dit was den Meester van den Wl, stellende in al zijn wercken een Wlken, dat somtijts soo verborghen sit, dat de luyden malcander langhe gheven te soecken, en wedden met te connen vinden, en alsoo hun tijt-verdrijf nemen met dit Wl soecken." Various examples of owls in works that are probably of Herri met de Bles' hand are depicted in van Schoute, Verougstraete and Bodiaux 2000, passim.
[314] Borchert, Ferino-Pagden and Sellink 2011, pp. 195-196.
[315] Allart 2000, p. 25.
[316] Burg 2007, p. 425.
[317] On the different identifications, see Schubert 1970, pp. 44-60.
[318] On this painter, see Ainsworth 1998b.
[319] Born 2011, p. 281.

competitive position and assumed an anonymous role. In that case the sad truth would be that their oeuvre being known might just depend on the preservation of one single painting.

IV. EPILOGUE

Yet, not every lesser talented painter assumed an anonymous role. The notorious pirate Marcellus Coffermans (active 1549-1575), for example, signed several works, constituting a modest part of his oeuvre.[320] But he seems to have led a sort of double life. Apart from the fact that he unconcernedly used the inventions of numerous of his illustrious predecessors – such as van der Weyden, Bosch or Metsys – which he repeated on a smaller scale over and over again, he also even copied Bosch' signature on his small-scale pastiches of the Brabantine master.[321] Coffermans' *Last Judgment* (Private collection, fig. 74), for example, is a compilation of compositional elements taken both from Bosch' hell-wing of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Madrid, Prado) and the center panel of his *Last Judgment* in Vienna (Akademie der bildenden Künste). Interestingly, while neither of both masterpieces carries Bosch' signature, Coffermans' pastiche does. In a weak imitation of the typical late gothic script, Coffermans put the inscription in relatively large letters on the lower side of the left panel, very much like Bosch used to sign his works. Thus, Coffermans might very well be an example of the Bosch-falsifiers mentioned by Felipe de Guevara around 1560, i.e. during Coffermans' lifetime.[322] Indeed, already by the middle of the second half of the sixteenth century the tragic fate of the easy-to-copy signatures had become apparent. The increasing demand for paintings that was already briefly touched upon above, went hand in hand with the emergence of a collecting mentality in Antwerp. This can be deduced from the inventories of the time, but also from the growing number of art dealers in this period. And unsurprisingly, the emergence of art collectors went hand in hand with the emergence of forgers.[323] Various forgeries were signed and sold as works by the most celebrated painters of previous decades, leading many a collector to be deceived. Quite soon this situation caused the Antwerp Guild of St Luke to complain to the town council, that subsequently promulgated a law on 3 October 1575.[324] In an attempt to tighten up control, it was decreed that from now on art dealers had to be members of the guild.[325]

Although these examples indeed illustrate the weakness of signatures, at the same time they indicate that signatures were never really universally taken as tokens of authenticity. As appears from de Guevara's commentary, the difference between an original and a forgery is clearly noticeable. According to him, the originals excel in quality and intellect, something which the copies clearly do not have.[326] In this view, Creighton Gilbert might have been quite right when he said that "the signature caters to a less sophisticated viewer and buyer."[327] It is interesting to note that connoisseurship was at an early stage already considerably refined, and in fact early literature on connoisseurship never really talks about signatures as a means to attribute a painting.[328] For the real connoisseur the value of the painting lies not in the name, but in the virtuoso brushwork.[329] This

[320] De Vrij 2003 collected 57 works of which 10 are signed (17,5%). On top of that, he also collected 73 variations, which as a rule are not signed.
[321] See for examples de Vrij 2003, cat. Nos. 47 and 48. Both are signed 'Jeronimus Bosch', while Bosch himself used to spell his Christian name as 'Jheronimus'.
[322] Cf. supra note 72.
[323] Filipczak 1987, pp. 44-45.
[324] '…dat oick de goede luyden, heeren en(de) borgers deur sulckdanige vercoopingen commen bedrogen te worden, als coopende schilderyen voor wercken van vermaerde en befaemde meesters, daer de selve maer en syn naer eenige principale geconterfeyt..' Quoted from van der Straelen 1855, p. 64.
[325] See, among others, van den Branden 1883, pp. 230-231, and Floerke 1905, pp. 154-156.
[326] Cf. supra note 72. See also Muller 1989, p. 142.
[327] Gilbert 2000, p. 80.
[328] The – to my knowledge – only exception is Filippo Baldinucci (1681). See therefore Burg 2007, p. 11.
[329] Muller 1989.

explains why some copies were even held in higher esteem than the original. A famous example is Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi Rossi* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti), which was famously copied by Andrea del Sarto (Naples, Museo e Gallerie Nazionale di Capodimonte). According to Vasari, this copy was valued higher than Raphael's original because of the splendid execution.[330]

The differentiation of copies in different qualities was confirmed and rationalized by the early literature on connoisseurship.[331] In fact, this idea and the connected thought that the value of a picture lies not in the name of the maker but in its pictorial qualities seems to have been quite universal, since it is still present in eighteenth-century literature, as well as in the writings of the great connoisseurs of the early twentieth century. In this view it should be less surprising that none of the early connoisseurs talk about signatures as a means to attribute a painting. Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745) is a case in point. In his *Two discourses* (1718) he defines the core group of works by a certain master as follows:

> "So here there are certain Pictures, and Drawings of several of the Masters, chiefly of the most Considerable ones, that a Beginner in the business of a Connoisseur will find at his first setting out, and always meet with in his Way that will serve him as Safe, and Sufficient Guides in This Affair. Such are Those whose Genuiness is abundantly established by History, Tradition, and Universal Consent…"[332]

Signed works are not even mentioned as a point of departure for the attribution, and for Richardson the 'Goodness of a Picture' is not established by a name, but by rationally considering all the different elements and subsequently marking them (fig. 75).[333] Although not as radically rational, the same idea recurs in the catalogues compiled by the French art dealer Edme-François Gersaint (1694-1750). For example, in the auction catalogue he wrote in 1747 for the sale of the estate of Monsieur Angran, Vicomte de Fonspertuis, he stated:

> "A real amateur, or rather a true connoisseur, attaches fewer importance to the name of an artist or to the rarity of his works, than to all the beautiful things he might have made."[334]

Although neither Richardson nor Gersaint mentions signatures, their silence about them seems to indicate that they do not consider them at all as a means for the attribution of a painting. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century connoisseurs start writing about the signature as a possible point of departure for the attribution, but then again they strongly emphasize the problems involved. Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), for example, stated that "signatures… require even more careful criticism than other documents, because they have been more attractive to the forger."[335] And also Max Friedländer (1897-1958) expressed his doubts. Whereas for him signed works constitute one of three categories of paintings that form the core oeuvre of an artist, he is clear about the potentially

[330] The story is recounted by Vasari 1998, pp. 41-43. For del Sarto's copy, see Freedberg 1963, vol. 2, pp. 131-133, and Shearman 1965, vol. 2, pp. 265-267.
[331] Muller 1989, esp. pp. 144-145
[332] Richardson 1718, p. 143.
[333] See also Gibson-Wood 1984, pp. 44-45.
[334] "Un veritable Amateur, ou pour mieux dire, un vrai Connoisseur s'attache moins au nom du Peintre & à la rareté des ses Ouvrages, qu'à ce qu'il peut avoir fait de beau." Gersaint 1747, pp. 159-160. See also Schatborn 2007, esp. p. 62.
[335] Berenson 1962, p. 115.

misleading evidence. Even if the inscription is not forged, Friedländer says, it might be copied from an older painting, or workshop-assistants might have signed with their master's typical signature.[336] In sum, it seems to be a recurring conviction in connoisseurship that the authentic signature might very well indicate the origins – workshop – of a painting, but that the value or the degree of authenticity must always be determined by the connoisseur.

[336] Friedländer 1946, p. 164.

V. CONCLUSION

As was already indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, it is very difficult to generalize or to draw firm conclusions. There are practically no contemporary textual sources that can confirm any hypothesis on signature practice, and apart from that there is the ever-present bias that we have regarding the original painted production. Lots of paintings have been destroyed, several signatures on still existing paintings doubtlessly disappeared by now – either being cut away or painted over – and malicious forgers inserted new inscriptions on old surfaces.

These problems notwithstanding, in the above overview we have attempted to sketch the evolution of the practice of signing paintings in the Netherlands from the early fifteenth century until around 1575. Although Jan van Eyck is invariably given as the prime example of a 'signing habit', he undoubtedly was a big exception. Indeed, for the fifteenth century, it is impossible to talk about a general habit among painters: except for Petrus Christus and Jheronimus Bosch not a single Netherlandish painter is known to have signed his works on a more or less regular basis.

Even in the early years of the sixteenth century, when the city of Antwerp took over Bruges' role as economic capital of the Netherlands, it did not immediately seem to have developed into a habit. Although there are certain signed works in several artists' oeuvres, the percentage of them is still very small and if there is more than one signature, they usually come in different forms, containing varying formulations. Yet, there might be some pattern noticed in what was signed and what not. It seems that especially – only? – works destined for abroad were signed or marked with some reference to the principal contractor. The appearance of this possible pattern might have got something to do with the increasing mobility of both artists and clients. Indeed, more than in the previous decades, clients commissioned artworks from artists in other cities than the one they lived in.

A notable change occurred around 1540-50. It seems that from now on it is possible to talk about a – modest – signing habit among painters, especially in the larger and more prolific workshops. There are more signing artists, who at the same time sign higher portions of their painted production. Moreover, these artists strived for a certain standardization of their signatures, more so than their predecessors did. On top of that, the signatures appear to have been consciously made much more visible: they are more often put on the lower side of the painting and are also bigger than the previous ones. Finally, there are also parallels between what these artists chose to sign and what not. As a rule, portraits are almost never signed. This development seems to have originated in Antwerp, but quite soon it spread to other Netherlandish cities as well, such as Haarlem and Bruges.

We pointed to two developments occurring around the same time that might help to understand, explain and contextualize the phenomenon. On the one hand, it was linked to a general growing art historical awareness among both artists and the public. Gradually, a canon was being shaped, consisting of artists' names – names that the artists active in this period increasingly inscribed on their works. On the other hand, however, important changes in all the different aspects of the functioning of the art market were emphasized. The demand for artworks increased, and – partly as a result of that – the working methods of the growing workshops changed. On top of that, also the distribution of artworks was slightly altered. With the opening of the *Pand* in the New Bourse in Antwerp, the very first centralized permanent art market was called into being. However, the artistic production sold there was in all probability anonymous, which makes it likely that by signing their paintings, artists pursued a certain 'branding' as a sort of mercantile stratagem in order to stand out

against the anonymous production sold at the *Pand*, which was probably also of lower quality. As a consequence, their names – their brands – came to stand for a certain style and quality of painting. The term 'branding' might sound slightly disrespectful when talking about art, but it might illustrate what was at stake. After all, artists were also just men trying to make a living.

On top of providing a chronological overview of the developments, this dissertation at the same time also tried to nuance some persistently recurring art historical clichés. Most importantly, the idea of the emergence of the artist's signature as an expression of the growing self-consciousness of the artist was firmly questioned and presented as a too Italocentric view on Netherlandish painting. The changes described above and the proposed explanations were much more prosaic, since in many cases there seems to have been a mercantile rationale involved. In the early years it seems that especially works for abroad were signed, the signature possibly acting as a sort of guaranteeing trade mark. The second cliché that was nuanced is related to this. Indeed, it appeared that the signature cannot always be seen as an indication of a painting being autograph, since in various artists' oeuvres also works that were partly or even completely made by the workshop carry signatures. Rather it seems to have functioned as a sign of responsibility, initially from the principal contractor in collaborations between different workshops, and later from the master at the head of the workshop, guaranteeing that the painting was indeed made in his studio. Finally, also the idea that the practice of signing painting was simply taken over from Italian by Netherlandish artists was questioned. Although there are indeed interesting parallels to be drawn between Italian and Netherlandish practice, that does not necessarily point to a single, one-way influence. The specific forms of the signatures vary and in some cases they are typically Netherlandish, such as Colijn de Coter's '*pingit me*' or Quinten Metsys' '*screef dit*'. Furthermore, also interesting parallels with German painting were drawn, so perhaps it is more appropriate to talk about certain general and recurring principles, rather than just a one-way influence coming from the Italian peninsula.

To conclude, it is important to again recall Rubin's statement on the matter: "precisely because [signatures] are attached to products of ingenuity and invention, the rules that might be suggested about signing have many exceptions."[337] Indeed, the hypotheses presented in this dissertation do not pretend to be general rules, and several exceptions have been highlighted in the text. On top of that, it is impossible to say why one painting does carry a signature why another does not. Because of the lack of primary sources it is very difficult to understand the how and why, and maybe in the processes put forward as possible explanations emphasis must be laid on others than the ones presented here. But perhaps the most important contribution of this paper is the historical overview that was presented, which at least allowed to finally review and nuance some stuck art historical clichés.

[337] Rubin 2006, p. 566.

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