

Artistic activity in the 15th century (1420 – 1470)

The relative artistic uniformity of the International Gothic was followed by a more complex period in which regional stylistic currents emerged, often under the influence of a significant figure. The 1450s saw the emergence of artists with a characteristic style, whose output is known and for whom we have documentary sources. The painter Jost Haller, for example, is attested as having been in Strasbourg from 1438. He trained in the city but also worked in Metz and Saarbrücken. In around 1445 – 1450, he painted the *Tempelhof Altarpiece from Bergheim*, which combines the theme of the princess sacrificed to the dragon being saved by St George with an image of Christ presented by St John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, who sacrificed himself for mankind.



Upper Rhine, Strasbourg, *Stauffenberg Altarpiece*, 1454 – 1560, oil on wood panel

The anonymous master responsible for the *Stauffenberg Altarpiece* (1454 – 1460), who also came from Strasbourg, was commissioned to paint the work by Hans Erhard Bock von Stauffenberg, bailiff* of Rouffach, who had an image of himself and his coat of arms included at the foot of the Cross. The physical presence of the figures and the use of light to model the bodies and animate the drapery in the two works prove the influence of the art of the Southern Netherlands.

This influence is also tangible in the painted panels of the *Altarpiece of the Passion* commissioned by the canons* of

the collegiate church of St Martin in Colmar from the local painter Caspar Isenmann in 1462.



Caspar Isenmann, *Altarpiece of the Passion of Christ, Garden of Gethsemane and Arrest of the Christ*, 1465, oil of wood panel

This immense altarpiece, which is now incomplete, was finished in 1465, as is proved by the date inscribed on the reverse side. It demonstrates the way in which the artist drew upon different influences to forge his own style, in which the art of presentation and narrative does not conceal his interest in the individualisation of his figures.



Brabant (Brussels?), *The Virgin and Angel of Nativity*, c. 1460, polychrome wood

These links to the Southern Netherlands are so subtle that they probably explain why the two little figures from a *Nativity* (*the Virgin and an Angel*) were attributed to the Upper Rhine when they were bought in 1985. Their sweet, charming appearance and the rigid treatment of drapery with its broken folds could suggest such an interpretation, but the two sculptures actually come from the corpus of an altarpiece devoted to the Virgin Mary made in a Brabantine workshop in around the 1460s.

Two contemporary panels, which come from two different regions of the Holy Roman Empire but share the same subject, are much easier to differentiate, however.



Caspar Isenmann, *Altarpiece of the Passion of Christ: The Resurrection*, 1465, oil of wood panel



Southern Swabia, *The Resurrection*, 1450, oil of wood panel

The Resurrection painted by Caspar Isenmann clearly differs from the depiction of the theme painted by an artist from southern Swabia hanging in the same room. The panel with the elongated figure of Christ, the animated silhouettes of the holy women and the landscape in the background with the entrance to the city of Colmar can clearly not be by the same hand as the work produced in a region isolated from the major artistic centres, in which the gestures are stiffer, the faces more expressive, almost caricature-like, and the figures seem to be flat against the gold background.

Bailiff: official who dispensed justice in the name of a king or a lord

Canon: clergyman belonging to the chapter (assembly of clerics) of a church