

Education Support Pack For
SECONDARY TEACHERS



THE BOWES
— MUSEUM —

'St Luke Drawing The Virgin and Child'

15th Century

By the workshop of Dieric Bouts The Elder

about 1440 – 1475

Oil on Canvas (109.2 cm x 86.4 cm)



The Bowes Museum's exhibition: 'Image and Substance' focuses on the iconographic and visual relevance of the painting 'St. Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child', offering an insight into the Netherlands' artistic, historical, and devotional context.

The 15th Century painting is of major importance due to its connection with the artist Dieric Bouts the Elder, deemed one of the leading and most Influential Netherlandish painters of his time.

Bouts' works are rare in general and especially in the UK. There are no other paintings of this date and origin depicting this important subject in British public collections by Bouts or any other northern European artist of this period.

The Painting

The painting, attributed to Dieric Bouts The Elder, depicts St. Luke the Evangelist drawing the Virgin Mary and Child. This extraordinary 15th century oil painting was transferred from wooden panel onto canvas by a British conservator in 1899. This is a preventive practice for paintings on panel that are likely to be affected by damage caused by the environmental changes in temperature and relative humidity.

Transfers from panels in oak wood are very rare indeed, however, it is not a popular practice in the UK because it is a very delicate and highly skilled procedure which could damage the original work, but it is more popular in Italy, France and Russia in particular.

For more information please contact:
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The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County
Durham, **DL12 8NP**

Content

- In the foreground, the three figures (The Virgin, Christ Child and St. Luke) are presented in an interior with a tiled floor before a Colonnade (1) that opens onto a landscape – the viewer's eye is guided through the composition by the patterned tiles, and a green cushion set on a bench draped in the same green fabric, leading your eye through two marble columns to the landscape scene outside.
- The Virgin is seated on the left of the image, against a damask (2) cloth of honour and is holding a piece of fruit (maybe an apple or a fig), perhaps offering the fruit to the naked Christ Child whom she is holding.
- St Luke is crouching to the right of the frame, sketching a preliminary drawing for a painting using silverpoint (3) of the Virgin and Christ Child before him. This composition is a classic donor portrait for an altar piece. The posture of the saint suggests he is devoted to the Virgin. It was quite typical at the time for a member of the confraternity (4) who commissioned this picture to have the artist depict the saint or devotee as himself; heightening the portrayal of personal faith when the painting was used in worship.
- Through an open door on the right-hand side of the picture, it is possible to glimpse the framed panel that St. Luke will use to paint the final composition, placed on a three-legged easel. This section of the painting is really very interesting and important because it shows the artists practice at that time: artists usually temporarily framed the wooden panel and then used a primer of chalk to draw the preliminary outline of the figures and the details. Despite the term 'Underdrawing', this 'drawing' was made with black paint and with a brush. What you see in the Bouts painting is exactly this stage, but also the artist starting to use the vermillion pigment to create the red of the Virgin's drapery.
- It shows also the artist's painting palette and the colours he was using to create that specific painting. Roughly until the beginning of the 20th Century, artists made their own paints or they were prepared by an assistant (not shop bought). They produced the colours by smashing and grinding natural dry minerals into small dusty particles and mixing them with oils to create the pigments (wet paint). You can see the different pigments in the shells that were used to contain the colours before the artists put them on the palette. It also shows the brushes used for the painting stage.

The significance

- It illustrates a remarkable devotional and art historical subject that can be seen as a commentary on the wider fifteenth-century Netherlandish religious context, workshop practice and the changing status of the artist.
- Devotional artwork is intended as a visual representation of religious image or story that can be worshipped. Bouts tried to convey a more powerful religious experience removing the distance between the viewer and the fictive scene in his paintings.
- Based on the legend of Saint Luke depicting the Virgin with Christ the Child, this was a popular devotional subject during the C15th Renaissance (5) especially in the Netherlands (According to the Golden Legend St. Luke's Gospel was revealed to him by the Virgin Mary. The Saint became the Virgin's confidant, and this role resulted in the special privilege of painting her with the Christ Child.)
- This painting is of outstanding interest and national and international importance because it is closely linked with Dieric Bouts The Elder, an artist whose works are rare in general and especially in the United Kingdom. (There are no other paintings of this date and origin depicting this important subject in British public collections by Bouts or any other northern European artist of this period.)

- The size of the painting is also quite exceptional (109.2 cm x 86.4 cm). Typically we more often see much smaller (think A4 paper size or less) wooden panel pieces for personal devotion and worship because they were easier to travel with and transport as well as expensive to commission and make. The size of this artwork is closer to that of a three panel altar piece. So it is possible that the painting could have been commissioned by a private patron for his personal chapel in his mansion.
- The pigments used (e.g. azurite) were quite expensive at that time which also demonstrates that it was an important commission.
- The earliest works to have been attributed to Bouts are the three panels of the Triptych of the Virgin, in the Prado in Madrid, and various versions of the Virgin and Child. These paintings are very close in style to Rogier Van der Weyden, sometimes so close as to be virtually indistinguishable.
- It is with the Descent from the Cross, in the cathedral at Granada, that a truly personal style begins to emerge. In the National Gallery Entombment, Bouts took Van der Weyden's model and totally transformed its meaning.
- Bouts was the first among his contemporaries to make use of single-point perspective (6) (though in the example of St Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child, not yet highly accurate) Painting using oil was already in use in the 12th century, but this work shows examples of expensive pigments used at the time and is also important for the attention in the depiction of the landscape in the background.

The Artist

- Dieric Bouts the Elder (born c. 1415 – 1475) was one of the leading and most influential Netherlandish painters of his time.
- Bouts was born in Haarlem (northern Netherlands), but worked mostly in Leuven, where he became a city painter in 1468.
- He established a large workshop in Leuven that employed his two sons, Dirk the Younger and Aelbrecht.
- Bouts was married twice and had four children. His two daughters went to convents, and his two sons (Dieric the Younger and Aelbrecht) became painters who carried the Bouts workshop into the mid-16th century. (Hence he was referred to as Bouts The Elder).
- Bouts painted religious subjects, from altarpieces to small devotional paintings that people kept in their homes. He painted a range of subjects in a style characterised by elongated, calm, reflective figures, rich, controlled colours, and dignified, understated emotion. He is also recognised for painting especially good landscape backgrounds.

Glossary:

Colonnade (1): a row of evenly spaced columns supporting a roof, an entablature, or arches.

Confraternity (4): a society devoted especially to a religious or charitable cause.

Damask (2): a rich, heavy silk or linen fabric with a pattern woven into it, used for table linen and upholstery.

Renaissance (5): marks the period of European history at the close of the Middle Ages and the rise of the Modern world. It represents a cultural rebirth from the 14th through the middle of the 17th centuries.

Silverpoint (3): Silverpoint is one of several types of metal point used by scribes, craftsmen and artists since ancient times. It pre-dates the lead pencil as a tool used for drawing and is valued for achieving a hard clearly defined line.

Single Point Perspective (6): perspective drawings make objects appear more realistic, as they appear to recede as they get further away. If the receding lines are extended they will meet at points that are called vanishing points.

USING THE PAINTING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Aims to :

1. Evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design.
2. Know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms.

Starting points :

With the pupils' eyes closed, introduce some key vocabulary from the painting and describe the painting to help the students to build the scene in their imagination. 'In the foreground, three figures (the Virgin, Christ Child and St. Luke) are presented in an interior with a tiled floor...'

Working in pairs, give one student an image of the painting and ask them to describe it to their partner who will make a drawing based on the description given. The partner must keep the image hidden. They could be seated back to back or one pupil could keep the image hidden on their lap under the desk)

TIP: You could pass around objects from the painting in a canvas bag so that children can feel and describe them, such as rich heavy fabric, a pencil, a piece of fruit, metal point or scribe etc. This is particularly helpful to the more kinaesthetic or tactile learner in addition to a verbal description.

More information and guidance on analysing artwork and questions to initiate enquiry can be found at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/art/practicalities/analysingartistwork1.shtml>

Use the information provided on 'The painting', its 'Significance' and 'The Artist' to evaluate and analyse the painting 'St. Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child', by Dieric Bouts The Elder.

For KS3 students

Create an information finding treasure hunt—cut the information up into chunks of text and divide the class into smaller groups of 3-5. Give the groups the title 'Fact', 'Opinion', 'Description' and ask them to use the information found around the classroom to help them build up a bigger picture (wider context) of the artist and this painting.

Create a list of open ended and closed questions to support their enquiry, such as Who was the artist? What did he use to make the painting?, How big is the work? Who was the work made for?

After a period of time (perhaps between 15-30 mins depending on age and ability), ask the groups to share with the rest of the class what information they have found so that as a class they can build up a bigger picture of the work and how it was made and why.

Discuss its significance at the time and why it is still considered an important piece of work even today.

For KS4 +

You may want to include some opportunity for computer/internet based research and/or provide relevant books to vary the research methods used for finding information.

For GCSE Art & Design students use the format of Subject/Content, Form/Elements, Media/Process, Context/ Intention and Mood to frame their enquiry.

EXTENDED PROJECTS/CREATING YOUR SOW for KS3 & 4

(Art and Design National Curriculum)

Projects that enrich learning will emerge as you explore the different contexts and possibilities that the painting creates for you and your pupils, using themes in the painting as starting points to make meaningful connections and broader learning experiences.

You can do this independently in your classrooms or as part of a visit to The Bowes Museum to see the work first hand.

LINES OF ENQUIRY

Portraiture: Why did people have their portraits painted? How has this changed over time? St. Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child demonstrates a classical donor portrait for a devotional altar piece. Consider other ways in which people are portrayed e.g. Composition; Head and Shoulders, Posed, Candid, Abstract, Expressive and research other artists from a range of periods and styles such as Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon, Andy Warhol, Chuck Close, Marlene Dumas, and Robert Mapplethorpe.

(The Tate website has some useful information to support extended learning in Portraiture: <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/onlineresources/glossary/p/portrait#focus>).

Religion: Who is depicted in the painting? Why is this important? Where do you think a painting like this might have been displayed? Look at other paintings of the Virgin and Christ Child, what similarities and differences can you see?

You could use this painting and a discussion about how we represent Christ in Western Society to look at other cultures and religions. Who do they worship? How do other cultures and religions use images, icons and symbols? What do they mean? How has religious art been celebrated and attacked historically? (e.g. Ganesha the Hindu God, Mexican Day of the dead).

Or look at changing perspectives :

How do your students relate to religious art today? How is it represented in contemporary society and culture? Ron English – ‘The secret History of Kiss’ (painting), Damien Hirst – New Religion, including ‘The Kingdom of The father’ and ‘The Eucharist’ (painting, photography, sculpture, installation), The Zionist series by Mario Macilau (photography) David Mach ‘Die Harder’ (sculpture)

Patterns : Look at the intricate patterns in the painting, in particular the Damask panel and the tiled flooring.

Explore textures and patterns found through frottage (textured rubbings), and mono-printing using fabric and textured wall paper samples. This could be used to build up a design for a collage or collograph print or create a pattern design for tiles in a room by either drawing, using clay, or lino cut.

Students could create a collograph print tile or use collage to represent a smaller section of the painting to re-create the entire painting as a group project.

Single Point Perspective: The painting uses a single point perspective to guide the viewer’s eye through the painting. Can you find any other paintings which do this? (The use of the single point perspective is actually not very accurate in Bouts’ example; please see the tiles and, in particular, the bottoms and the tops of the columns differ from each other - maybe you want to point out those elements, even many skilled artists and painters struggled to refine foreshortening.)

Interiors and Exteriors : Try drawing a room using single point perspective and introduce vanishing points to develop their drawing and painting skills. Similarly you could follow this up by looking at other artists who represent interiors such as Vincent Van Gogh and Patrick Caulfield.

This could lead into an extended exteriors or architecture project providing the opportunity to introduce two and three point perspective.


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Workshop of Dieric Bouts The Elder (c.1415-1475)

St Luke Drawing The Virgin and Child

C.1440-1475