

Jan van Eyck

Jan van Eyck was born before 1395, however the date is uncertain. He was a Netherlandish painter who had perfected the newly developed technique of oil painting. His paintings were mostly portraits, like the one of himself, or of religious subjects like most other artists from the Northern Renaissance. Most of his paintings, whether they had a religious subject or not, had some sort of religious symbol. In the portrait of himself he is wearing a headdress, which may be a religious symbol for example. The work that he is most well known for is the altarpiece in the cathedral at Ghent, The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (also called the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432).

He accomplished a lot in his life and his skills and achievements have lived longer after him. He was the honorary equerry and painter of John of Bavaria, count of Holland. He worked there until the count's death and lived briefly in Bruges but he went to Lille to serve Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, who was the most powerful ruler and foremost patron of the arts in Flanders. Jan van Eyck was loyal and he even went undercover numerous times on secret missions for the duke. Of course, he stayed with this duke until his death as well.

Jan van Eyck moved back to Bruges and later married and had two children. He continued to paint until the end. Unfortunately, the paintings from the last decade of his career were the only ones that managed to survive. However, scholars can conclude that the naturalism and elegant composition of Jan's paintings drew inspiration from the early 15th-century illuminators such as the anonymous Boucicaut Master and the Limbourg brothers, who worked for the Burgundian dukes. Jan signed his paintings which was an unusual practice for the time period and we know that he signed 9 and dated 10. However, not every piece is clear about whether he did all of the work or did some with his alleged brother, Hubert van Eyck.

The technique to mirror the textures, light, and spatial effects of nature were perfected by Jan van Eyck, so much that artists after him had trouble imitating the work and could mostly just admire. This is most probably because he felt this responsibility to due justice to nature and God's creations. He filled his paintings with religious symbols disguised as everyday objects because he believed that God was everywhere. Even the light that so naturally illuminates Jan van Eyck's landscapes and interiors is a metaphor of the Divine. And thus Jan van Eyck remains as one of the most significant artists from the Northern Renaissance.