and their collaborators do not seek to reduce the texts and images they examine to such simplistic binaries. Nor do they seek to speak with one voice. Like good exhibitions, their volume is addressed to various audiences and is written in a prose that should help open up the subject, rather than shut it down. The short 'in focus' articles, which examine such topics as language and memory or contemporary artists, should help to question dominant narratives of western art and history as much for the general reader as in the classroom. Occasionally, subtle arguments are flattened in the interests of making broad points, but this is not to be lamented when the result is an accessible volume that has the possibility of gaining a wide readership. One can only hope that the fascination of these images, combined with the ability of some European artists 'to see, and render, genuine human complexity in human beings across a variety of African phenotypes, features and forms' (p.xiii), will bring a new audience to them.

The Ghent Altarpiece. Research and Conservation of the Interior: The Lower Register

By Griet Steyaert, Marie Postec, Jana Sanyova and Hélène Dubois. 210 pp. incl. 420 col. ills. (Brepols, Turnhout, 2021), €54.72. ISBN 978-2-930054-41-4.

by **ABBIE VANDIVERE**

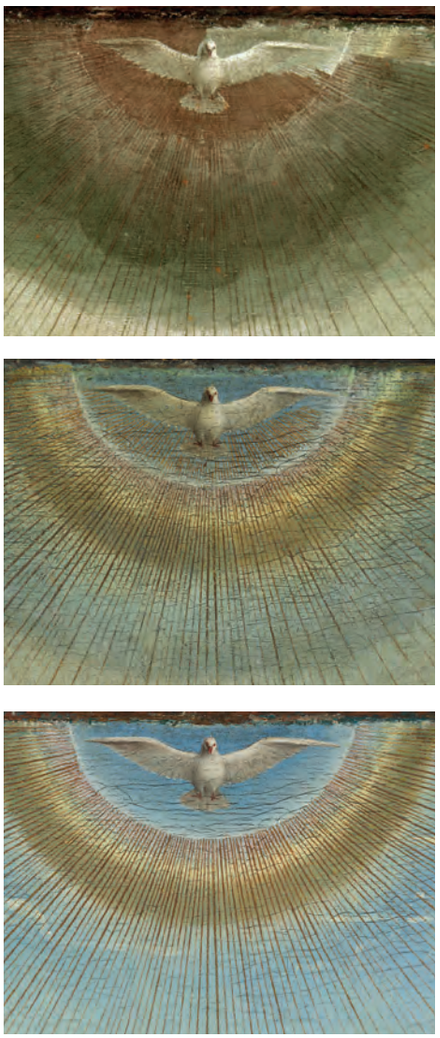
More than a decade ago an interdisciplinary team embarked on the conservation of the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan and Hubert van Eyck (1432; St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent).[1] Following Bart Fransen's and Cyriel Stroo's *The Ghent Altarpiece: Research and Conservation of the Exterior* (2020), this second volume is devoted to the lower register of the altarpiece in its open state and is also available in digital format.[2] The 2016–19 conservation of this section of the altarpiece revealed the original paint layers, which had been partially concealed beneath restorations for centuries. This has allowed a reinterpretation of the iconography, materials, technique and attribution. The book comprises four chapters. The first discusses the conservation-restoration treatment, the second the technical execution of the paintings and the third deals with paint layer stratigraphy and analyses of micro-samples. The fourth section addresses style and attribution. In the course of the study, theories about attribution and the stages in the making of the altarpiece that emerge in the earlier chapters are supported with sound scientific and material evidence. This approach highlights the way that interdisciplinary research and conservation can help answer long-standing art-historical questions and challenge assumptions.

The first chapter, which summarises the recent treatment, focuses on how the paintings have changed due to interventions by artists and restorers in the past. Diagrams help visualise the amount of overpaint applied to the painting in relation to the relatively small amount of damage to the original paint layers, especially in the central panel, the *Adoration of the Lamb*. A series of three images (Fig.3) shows how the central motif of the dove of the Holy Spirit changed from its state during the removal of overpaint in 1951 (a), to after the removal of varnish and before the removal of overpaint in 2017 (b) and to after the final removal of overpaint and restoration (c). The tower of Utrecht in the background of the *Adoration* was previously considered to be a sixteenth-century addition. The restoration has revealed that it is original to the painting, although its delicate architecture was overpainted in the sixteenth century. The authors conclude that the exterior and interior of the altarpiece were overpainted during the same treatment. The question of why such significant changes were made in the sixteenth century – not just covering damage, but also altering, and perhaps updating, significant elements – is, however, not much discussed.

The second chapter analyses the stages in the creation of the altarpiece and, in particular, changes made by the Van Eycks during the painting process. Revisiting the central motif of the Holy Spirit, the story becomes more complex; in its first stage the painting depicted no dove at all, only lines representing rays. Furthermore, complementary imaging and analyses of micro-samples have revealed that the water feature in the central panel began as a simple spring surrounded by a meadow; the stone fountain was added later and then reworked. Understanding these changes is crucial for establishing authorship. The first volume concluded that the exterior panels were almost certainly painted by single artist, presumably Jan van Eyck himself. In contrast, the initial phases of the *Lamb of God* panel were probably the work of another person, perhaps his brother Hubert.

The third chapter, on the stratigraphy of the layers, builds on the groundbreaking work by Paul Coremans and his team during the restoration in 1950–51. Since then, methods of examination and analysis – especially non-invasive imaging that makes no physical contact with the work of art – have been improved or supplanted by new ones. A useful addition to the imaging technologies used to examine the Ghent Altarpiece is macro X-ray powder diffraction (MA-XRPD), which detects crystalline pigments and degradation products at the paint surface. Although much can be learned from imaging methods, some information about layer build-up and materials can be obtained only from the examination of micro-samples. The layering of the *Ghent Altarpiece* is more complex than that of most other early Netherlandish paintings. This is probably due to the participation of (at least) two artists and developments that took place after the painting was begun. Starting from the ground and working upwards, each layer is clearly described in chapter 3. A list of the pigments that were detected is included, together with a useful explanation of how and where they were used. A comparison with analyses of the painting's exterior provides context, while the identification of certain pigments and additives (such as glass) has helped the scientists and conservators to distinguish between original pigments and overpaint.

Three stages of development were observed in the lower register of the interior. The final chapter, tantalisingly titled 'One painter or several? A stylistic study', attempts to resolve questions of attribution. Steyaert and Postec – who wrote a similar chapter in the volume on the exterior of the altarpiece – identify and differentiate different hands at work. Jan's characteristic touches are compared to other securely attributed paintings. These seem to belong to the second stage of execution, whereas the first stage is attributed to Hubert. The faces painted by these artists show distinct differences: whereas Jan observed the nuances of wrinkles and blood beneath the flesh, Hubert's faces are more schematic and lack depth and relief. The identity of the



3. Changes to the dove in the central panel of the Ghent Altarpiece in (a) 1951 during overpaint removal; (b) 2017 after varnish removal; and (c) after overpaint removal and restoration.

painter or painters of a third, 'non-Eyckian', stage and the purpose of their 'improvements' remain unclear. The authors consider it unlikely that this stage was executed by studio assistants; instead, it may have been carried out by artists who worked on the altarpiece after the Van Eycks, but prior to the overpainting in the mid-sixteenth century.

The book is beautifully printed and richly illustrated, including comparative images of each panel before and after treatment. Some observations in the written text are annotated with 'cve–' followed by a number, which refers to details on the 'Closer to van Eyck' website.[3] This invaluable site offers high-resolution images taken before, during and after the treatment, which allow viewers to zoom into the details of the painting. In the digital publication of the book, hyperlinks could have helped the reader navigate directly to these details, without having to look them up first in a labelled diagram.

Although the genesis of the interior of the Ghent Altarpiece has been proven to be more complex than was previously thought, this book explains the process in an engaging and accessible way. The text and detailed photographs guide those less familiar with technical concepts and language. As conservation treatment progresses on the upper register of the interior over the next few years, it is hoped that another high-quality publication will further contextualise the conclusions of the earlier volumes and reveal more secrets of this fascinating altarpiece.

1 See H. Dubois: 'The Art of Conservation XV: the conservation history of the Ghent Altarpiece', THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE 160 (2018), pp.754–65.
2 The Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels (KIK-IRPA), has made this publication (and the first in the series) available free of charge as an e-book at www.kikirpa.be/en/publications/the-ghent-altarpiece-2, accessed 27th July 2023.
3 'Closer to Van Eyck', available at closertovaneyck.kikirpa.be, accessed 27th July 2023.

Van Dyck and the Making of English Portraiture

By Adam Eaker. 256 pp. incl. 101 col. + b. & w. ills. (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, 2022), £35. ISBN 978–1–913107–34–5.

by **DESMOND SHAWE-TAYLOR**

This short discursive book argues that Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641) is the founder of English portraiture, that he was a master parvenu and that his work has been consistently undervalued. The first proposition is not controversial, but it is argued by devoting more attention to women portraitists during the Restoration and to Richard and Maria Cosway during the Regency era than to Peter Lely, Joshua Reynolds or John Singer Sargent, whose debt to Van Dyck may be taken as read. Although Adam Eaker asserts that 'no institution has been more associated with the collecting, display, and study of Van Dyck's portraits than the British Royal Collection' (p.129), he explores this through Johan Joseph Zoffany rather than through Thomas Gainsborough or Thomas Lawrence. In Zoffany's witty reductions, famous Van Dyck portraits hang on the wall while royal children unconsciously mimic their poses like a *tableau vivant*, as, for example, in his *George, Prince of Wales, and Frederick, later Duke of York, at Buckingham House* (1765; Royal Collection), in which the most prominent prop is Van Dyck's portrait of George and Francis Villiers, the sons of the Duke of Buckingham (1635; Royal Collection). It is interesting to note that the latter was one of the paintings Queen Caroline moved into the Great Drawing Room at Kensington Palace in 1736, as Lord Hervey recounted in his memoirs. It was there that it acquired the now lost Kent-style frame, depicted in the Zoffany painting.[1] It is not his swaggering cavaliers but these grave young orphans who best represent Van Dyck in the age of sensibility.

Van Dyck has been presented as an *artiste arriviste* ever since Giovanni Pietro Bellori commended him for turning up his nose at the Bentvueghels in Rome. Eaker sees self-promotion at the centre of the portrait business and demonstrates how the 'ritual of the sitting' (p.10) becomes ambiguously triangular when the work is commissioned by a husband or father. The artist must always behave as a fashionable host, the studio a drawing room; in this context a male artist physically recreating the beauty of a young woman can easily seem a species of presumptuous courtship. Perhaps not surprisingly, 'Van Dyck's portrait sittings inspired poets and playwrights almost from the moment of his arrival in London' (p.28). Eaker assembles an anthology of Baroque poets playing on this theme of artists' Pygmalion-like susceptibility to their own creations, while their jealous patrons tie themselves in clever lovesick knots. Readers wearied by these formulaic conceits will enjoy the blank sheet of paper in Van Dyck's portrait of Thomas Killigrew with a companion (Fig.4), surely intended to suggest that grief has robbed the poet of words.[2] Professional and social ambition go awkwardly hand in hand: ideally a portrait is not sold but given in exchange for an appropriately princely gift. The savviness that goes beyond professionalism connects Van Dyck to the 'accomplished' women painters of the next generation, who turned their fashionable amateurishness to advantage, in what the author calls a 'gift economy' (pp.82–83). A century later, Maria Cosway felt cruelly limited by the same expectations and the half-training imposed upon her by her husband.

It is not a criticism of the author's approach to point out that social ambiguity was not limited to Van Dyck or even to portrait painting. Until the twentieth century, creative people – and Eakins is right to point out that this meant 'dancing masters and hairdressers' (p.33) as well as painters – generally came from