

Netherlandish carved altarpieces: a historiographic overview with a focus on Sweden¹

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Since the late nineteenth century, and especially in the last three decades, a considerable body of literature has grown around the topic of Netherlandish carved altarpieces. Still, these artworks remain complex to study, mostly because they were disseminated across isolated and difficult-to-reach rural parish churches in several European countries. Moreover, their multimedia nature and their joint production only increase the difficulties for conducting research on these pieces. The objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive historiography of the existing body of research. Although this paper attempts to outline the main research trends over the last decades, it makes no claims to be exhaustive.

An extensive literature review of the corpus of research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces was written by Yao-Fen You (2005) in her doctoral dissertation 'Import / export: Brabantine altarpieces in the Rhineland, c. 1500-1530'.² Since then, however, Netherlandish carved altarpieces have attracted a large amount of new scholarly attention. Seventeen years later, the field is therefore in high need of a new comprehensive historiographic overview, especially because of the growing importance of technical studies and because digital disclosures have increased tremendously.³

The first section of this article, *(1) Moving away from an attributional methodology*, will first examine the pioneers in the study of Netherlandish carved altarpieces. These pioneers were mostly Belgian scholars who conducted iconographic and stylistic research on the artworks. Over the past few decades, however, numerous researchers started to point out the pitfalls of the purely

¹ I would like to thank Lynn Frances Jacobs (University of Arkansas), Carina Jacobsson (Uppsala University) and Jan Van der Stock (Illuminare – KU Leuven) for proofreading this manuscript. This article is part of my ongoing PhD research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in medieval Sweden, which is supervised by Jan Van der Stock (Illuminare – KU Leuven) and Carina Jacobsson (Uppsala University). The research for this paper was financially supported by the Chair for Medieval Sculpture in the Netherlands (Illuminare – KU Leuven); the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO); and the Petra och Karl Erik Hedborgs Stiftelse. This article is published with the support of the Belgian University Foundation.

² Yao-Fen You, *Import / Export: Brabantine Altarpieces in the Rhineland c. 1500-1530*, Michigan: University of Michigan, 2005, 15-24.

³ A historiographic overview of the literature on the Borman family, however, was written by Marjan Debaene in 2019. See Marjan Debaene, "Die Beste Meester Beeldesnydere..." On the Reception of the Borman Phenomenon over Time', in *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, ed. Marjan Debaene, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019, 8–21.

stylistic method. How this persistent stress on the identity of the producing artists had shifted attention away from other important questions is therefore also discussed in the first section.

The second part of the article then proceeds by analysing the first published primary sources related to these artworks, which laid the foundation for other researchers to provide critical interpretations. It is moreover concerned with the (2) *new wave of interest* that arose as a result of the 1993 exhibition on Antwerp altarpieces, organised in the Antwerp Cathedral and led by Hans Nieuwdorp. This exhibition remains one of the most important milestones in the research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces. At this time, the artworks were first addressed from a social, cultural and economic historical perspective, which is the focus of the third part, (3) *The rise of other perspectives*.

The study of Netherlandish carved altarpieces has greatly benefitted from several technical studies on shrine markings, marks, construction methods and polychrome techniques. The importance of such technical research in order to address previously unanswered questions is not to be underestimated, and its importance will only increase in the future, as will be discussed in the next section, (4) *Contributions of technical studies*. This also applies to the focus of the following part, (5) *Digital Disclosure*, which addresses the accessibility of these (technical) studies. Being able to look at high-definition pictures of the altarpieces, their marks, their bibliography etc. has been really convenient. The material available online allows researchers to see links that were much harder to discover before, such as the occurrence of the same motifs across altarpieces scattered all over the world.

Several of these other research questions, moreover, were answered thanks to a classification of the more than 350 surviving works according to the region where they are preserved. Research on their export across Europe has been performed on examples preserved in England and Scotland, Poland, the Iberian Peninsula, France, Germany (especially Rhineland and Westphalia) and the Nordic countries, a topic explored in the following section, (6) *Exported altarpieces*. Sweden, in particular, still houses no less than thirty-eight late medieval Netherlandish carved altarpieces, about ten retable fragments, and two wooden Malines statuettes, and although much has been written on these pieces before, an extensive description of this research field is currently lacking – a gap this paper aims to fill in its final section, (7) *Previous scholarship on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in medieval Sweden*.

Moving away from an attributional methodology

Between the late nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century pioneers in the field were mostly Belgian scholars, who focused on dividing the sculpted parts according to regional schools, such as the Antwerp or Brussels school of carving. The most notable pioneers were Joseph Destrée, Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, Herman De Smedt, Jaap Leeuwenberg, Jozef Van Herck, George van Doorslaer, Edward Van

Even, and Henry Rousseau.⁴ The specific focus of these pioneers on the carved components and their disregard of the painted counterparts is one of the main reasons Netherlandish retables have played a fundamental role in literature on Netherlandish sculpture, and held no central position in the historiography of Netherlandish painting. This is already testified by the fact that they were essentially classified as Netherlandish 'carved' retables, even though the pieces have both painted and carved counterparts.⁵

Over the past few decades, numerous art-historians have pointed out that the stylistic method of working with attributions, which has the ultimate goal of connecting artworks on the one hand, and artists on the other, has many pitfalls - especially when looking at carved altarpieces.⁶ By consistently trying to connect the

⁴ Edward Van Even, 'Maître Jean Borman, le grand sculpteur belge de la fin du XVe siècle: le retable de l'église de Güstrow, au Grand Duché de Mecklenbourg, exécuté par Jean Borman et orné de peintures attribuées à Bernard Van Orley', *Bulletin des Commissions Royales d'Art et d'Archéologie*, 23, 1884, 397-426; Edward Van Even, *Louvain dans le passé et dans le présent: formation de la ville, événements mémorables, territoire, topographie, institutions, monuments, oeuvres d'art*, Leuven: Fonteyn, 1895; Joseph Destrée, *Etude sur la sculpture brabançonne au moyen âge*, Brussels: Lyson-Claesen, 1894; Jean de Bosschère, *La sculpture anversoise aux XVe et XVIe siècles*, Brussels: Van Oest, 1909; Henry Rousseau, *Notes pour servir à l'histoire de la sculpture en Belgique: les retables*, Brussels: Baertsoen, 1896; Jozef Van Herck, 'De Vlaamse Gebeeldhouwde Altaartafelen Der Laatsgotiek (1)', *Bijdragen Tot de Geschiedenis*, 1930, 53-79; George van Doorslaer, 'Marques de Sculpteurs et Polychromeurs Malinois', *Revue Belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art*, 3, 1933, 159-176; Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, *Le retable bruxellois de Skånala en Uppland*, Brussels: A. Ballieu, 1936; Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, 'A propos de sculptures brabançonnnes conservées à l'étranger', *Bulletin de la Société royale d'archéologie de Bruxelles*, 1939, 95-98; Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, *De Brabantsche retabels 1450-1550*, Brussel: Kunstkringuitgaven, 1942; Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, *Les retables brabançons conservés en Suède*, Brussels: Imp. Lesigne, 1948; Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, *Notes pour servir à l'étude des retables Anversois*, Brussels: Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België, 1958; Jaap Leeuwenberg, 'De Laatste Retabels Uit de Scheldestad En Enig Aanverwant Beeldhouwwerk', *Revue Belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art*, 26, 1957, 75-114; Herman De Smedt, 'De verspreiding der Brabantse retabels in oostelijke richting', *Mededelingen van de geschied- en oudheidkundige kring voor Leuven en omgeving*, 5, 1965, 23-63; Herman De Smedt, 'De Antwerpse retabels en hun iconografie: een overzicht van onderwerpen en veranderingen', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 23-46.

⁵ You, *Import / Export*, 20.

⁶ These pitfalls have long been acknowledged by previous researchers such as Margareta Kempff, 'The Stenrat Workshop - The Cause of Renewed Efforts: Problems and Resources of the Art History Medievalist', in *Figur und Raum: mittelalterliche Holzbildwerke im historischen und kunstgeographischen Kontext*, ed. Uwe Albrecht and Jan von Bonsdorff, Berlin: Reimer, 1994, 178-183; Margareta Kempff, *Attribueringsarnas Mångfald: Johannes Stenrat Och Hans Hesse: 'Den Senmedeltida Verkstadens Produktion*, Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1994; Lynn Frances Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998, 20; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Spridningen Av Senmedeltida Träskulptur i Nordeuropa - Alternativa Forskningsstrategier', *Collegium Mediaevale: Tverrfaglig Tidsskrift for Middelalderforskning*, 13, 2000, 185-201; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Kyrkokonsten under Nordisk Medeltid: Europeisering, Spridning Och Reception i Ljuset Av Nyare Forskning', in *Norden Og Europa i Middelalderen*,

few artists that are known by name to the surviving artworks, attention has moved away from the fact that (i) multiple artists and their workshop-assistants collaborated in the production phase and (ii) that the cooperation between workshops (even across cities and countries) and the transfer of craftsmen resulted in the use of similar motifs. This practice of reusing models makes stylistic analysis particularly complicated.

This is not to say that several previous attempts to attribute the artworks to artists have not been relevant. For Netherlandish carved retables in Sweden, for instance, the majority of attributions made by Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren for the painted parts are still widely accepted today.⁷ Her research showed how

ed. Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindkvist, Århus: Jysk selskab for historie, 2001, 216–230; Ulrich Schäfer, 'Is It Possible to Describe the Personal Style of an Antwerp Carver?', in *Constructing Wooden Images. Proceedings of the Symposium on the Organisation of Labour and Working Practices of Late Gothic Carved Altarpieces in the Low Countries. Brussels 25-26 October 2002*, ed. Carl Van de Velde et al., Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press, 2005, 27–51; Jan Van der Stock, 'Flemish Illuminated Manuscripts: Assessing Archival Evidence', in *Flemish Manuscript Painting in Context: Recent Research*, ed. Elizabeth Morrison and Thomas Kren, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, 117–121; Marjan Debaene and Peter Carpreau, 'Kulturräume', in *Niederländische Skulpturen von 1130 bis 1600*, ed. Wibke Vera Birth et al., Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2017, 14–19; Emily Pegues, 'Borman and Bronze. Carving for Casting', in *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, ed. Marjan Debaene, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019, 176; Marjan Debaene, 'The Problem with Leuven Sculpture around 1500: The Creation of Anonymous Sculpture Workshops', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 2020.

⁷ Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, *Les volets peints des retables bruxellois conservés en Suède et le rayonnement de Colyn de Coter*, Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1984; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Un Dessin Inédit Du Maître de 1518 et Les Volets Peints Du Retable I de Västerås', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 53:2, 1984, 47–52; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, *Colyn de Coter et la technique picturale des peintres flamands du XVe siècle*, Brussels: Lefebvre et Gillet, 1985; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les retables brabançons aux XVe et XVIe siècles. Examen technologique et son interprétation en histoire de l'art', in *Journées sur la conservation restauration des biens culturels : traitement des supports travaux interdisciplinaires, Paris 2, 3, et 4 novembre 1989*, Paris: Association des restaurateurs d'art et d'archéologie de formation universitaire, 1989, 23–38; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Le marché d'exportation et l'organisation du travail dans les ateliers aux XVe et XVIe siècles', in *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Age*, ed. Xavier Barral i Altet, Paris: Picard, 1990, 629–645; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les volets peints des retables anversois: état de la question', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 60–89; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren and Nicole Gesché-Koning, *Brusselse gids van retabels uit de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (15de-16de eeuw): omgeving van Brussel*, Brussel: Tempora, 2000; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Rapport Entre Tapisseries et Retables Bruxellois', in *Tapisseries de La Couronne d'Espagne*, 2000, 113–129; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Rapport entre sculptures, polychromie et volets peint dans les retables bruxellois conservés en Suède', in *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles. Actes du colloque organisé par le musée du Louvre, 18-19 mai 2001*, ed. Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, Paris: Documentation française, 2002, 311–343; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les retables brabançons exportés en Suède (XVe-XVIe s.)', in *L'Europe des retables. Actes du colloque du Mans (13-16 octobre 2004)*, ed. Françoise Michaud-Fréjaville, vol. 1, Art sacré: cahiers de rencontre avec le patrimoine religieux 24, Rilhac-Rancon: Terre-Blue, 2007, 141–159. For an overview of the latest attributions made,

connoisseurship goes hand in hand with technical analysis, and since then it has become clear that the 'modern connoisseur' can simply not address nor answer questions of authorship without technical studies.⁸ As both Margareta Kempff and Marjan Debaene have stated, the method of stylistic analysis alone is no longer sufficient and should always be combined with a critical study of earlier documents and literature (as many attributions are the result of a series of false assumptions handed over from one researcher to the other), as well as material and technical examinations.⁹ The continued stress in the literature on the identity of the producing artists had shifted critical attention away from the examination of the artworks from a social, cultural and economic historical perspective.

A new wave of interest

Floris Prims - former city archivist from Antwerp - was among the first to approach the material by identifying and interpreting archival sources.¹⁰ Ever since, several scholars, such as Gustaaf Asaert, Hans Nieuwdorp, Jan Crab, Erik Vandamme and, more recently, Jan Van der Stock, have expanded this corpus of primary sources by delving into the archives, and by providing critical interpretations of these documents. Little by little documentary evidence gave insight into how the altarpieces were produced, marked, sold, transported and installed. To this day, researchers often rely upon the documentary evidence first published by these authors when studying these themes.¹¹

see Michel Lefftz and Marjan Debaene, 'Summary Catalogue of the Borman Dynasty and Workshop', in *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, ed. Marjan Debaene, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019, 178–293. This catalogue is most useful for being a clear overview with pictures, bibliography and so on. The division of works between each member of the Borman family, however, seems artificial, as distinguishing between several hands of artists and their workshop members is extremely difficult, taking into consideration how intensely they cooperated. For this matter, see Ethan Matt Kavalier, 'Jan Borman the Story-Teller', in *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, ed. Marjan Debaene, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019, 120 in the same book.

⁸ See for example Molly Faires, 'Reshaping the Field: The Contribution of Technical Studies', in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia 3, New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2001, 70–106 for the added value of technical research to the field.

⁹ Kempff, 'The Stenrat Workshop', 178–183; Kempff, *Attribueringarnas Mångfald*; Debaene, 'The Problem with Leuven Sculpture around 1500', 4-5. In addition, Marjan Debaene (ARDS, M Museum Leuven, and Illuminare – KU Leuven) is preparing a doctoral dissertation entitled *What's in a name? Leuven anonymous sculpture re-examined*, which focuses on the sculpture that was produced around 1500 and the first quarter of the sixteenth century in and around the city of Leuven.

¹⁰ Floris Prims, 'Altaarstudieën (1): Antwerpsche altaarkunst der XVde-XVIde eeuw', *Antwerpiensia*, 13, 1939, 278–285; Floris Prims, 'Antwerpse Altaartafels', *Antwerpiensia*, 19, 1948, 50–53; Floris Prims, 'Altaartafel als schoolgerief', *Antwerpiensia*, 19, 1948, 54–56; Floris Prims, 'Het Sint-Quirinusaltaar in St-Jakobskerk', *Antwerpiensia*, 19, 1948, 58–61.

¹¹ Gustaaf Asaert, 'Documenten voor de geschiedenis van de beeldhouwkunst te Antwerpen in de XVde eeuw', ed. A. Monballieu, *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten*



Figure 1 Installation of the 'Antwerp Altarpieces' exhibition in Antwerp in 1993. Image taken from a video made for the security guards of the exhibition © Illuminare – KU Leuven, The Archive of Hans Nieuwdorp

One of the most important milestones in the research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces was the 1993 exhibition on Antwerp altarpieces organised in the Antwerp Cathedral and led by Hans Nieuwdorp (fig. 1). The importance of this unique, unprecedented and influential exhibition and the accompanying catalogues cannot be overstated for several reasons.¹² First, whereas previous studies mainly focused on iconographic and stylistic analysis, the exhibition and the accompanying

Antwerpen, 1972, 43–86; Gustaaf Asaert, 'Antwerpse retabels – economische aspecten', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw. Essays*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols, Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 17–22; Gustaaf Asaert, *Vervaardigen, verhandelen, verschepen van Antwerpse retabels*, Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993; Hans Nieuwdorp, 'De oorspronkelijke betekenis en interpretatie van keurmerken op Brabantse retabels en beeldsnijwerk (15de en begin 16de eeuw)', in *Archivum artis Lovaniense: bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de kunst der Nederlanden: opgedragen aan prof. em. Dr. J.K. Steppe*, ed. Maurits Smeyers, Leuven: Peeters, 1981, 85–97; Jan Crab, *Het Brabants beeldsnijcentrum Leuven*, Leuven: Ceuterick, 1977; Erik Vandamme, *De polychromie van Gotische houtsculptuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden: materialen en technieken*, vol. 34, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Schone Kunsten, Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1982; Jan Van der Stock, 'Antwerps beeldhouwwerk: over de praktijk van het merkteken', in *Merken opmerken: merk- en meestertekens op kunstwerken in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik: typologie en methode*, ed. Christine Van Vlierden and Maurits Smeyers, Leuven: Peeters, 1990, 127–144; Jan Van der Stock, 'De organisatie van het beeldsnijders- en schildersatelier te Antwerpen. Documenten 1580-1530', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw. Essays*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols, Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 47–52; Jan Van der Stock, *Beeld in veelvoud te Antwerpen (15de eeuw-1585) productie-controle-consumptie: vijf perspectieven met speciale aandacht voor houtsnede en kopergravure*, Leuven: KU Leuven – Illuminare, 1995.

¹² Hans Nieuwdorp, ed., *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993.

catalogues were among the first to look at the artworks from a socio-economic perspective. Second, the project prompted new insights into the need (i) to preserve the artworks through conservation treatments, and (ii) to investigate the altarpieces at a technical level. Lastly, the year 1993 marked a new wave of interest in Netherlandish carved altarpieces among scholars studying early Netherlandish art worldwide.

In 2014 the curator of the 1993 exhibition, Hans Nieuwdorp, donated his complete collection of documentation on fifteenth and sixteenth century Netherlandish carved altarpieces to Illuminare – Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Art (KU Leuven). Illuminare and the RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History made the visual documentation of this collection available in the databases of *RKDImages* in the *Digital Corpus of Flemish Retables* project, together with the documentation collections of Herman De Smedt and Jaap Leeuwenberg.¹³ The documentation collection of Hans Nieuwdorp can be consulted in Illuminare and can be searched by theme (such as workshop practices, export, polychrome, iconography), by name of the altarpiece (ordered alphabetically) or by name of the artist(s), collector, merchant, etc. (also ordered alphabetically).¹⁴ The collection contains an instruction video that was made for the security guards of the exhibition. The video, which was digitized for the occasion of this article, offers an outstanding insight into the ins and outs of the exhibition.¹⁵

One year after the exhibition on Antwerp retables, the exhibition *Late Gothic Sculpture: the Burgundian Netherlands* was opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent in 1994. The exhibition came with an accompanying exhibition catalogue,¹⁶ which added considerable value with its catalogue entries at the end, which guide us through the highlights of late Gothic sculpture in the different production centres of the Burgundian Netherlands.

The rise of other perspectives

Focusing on the socio-economic perspective, the publications of Lynn Frances Jacobs form invaluable contributions to the field.¹⁷ In her famous book entitled *Early*

¹³ www.rkd.nl

¹⁴ For more information, see: www.illuminare.be/documentation

¹⁵ Video on the 'Antwerp Altarpieces' exhibition in Antwerp in 1993 © Illuminare - Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Art (KU Leuven), The Archive of Hans Nieuwdorp: <https://youtu.be/GOPJ8KCL1Kc>

¹⁶ John Steyaert, ed., *Laat-gotische beeldhouwkunst: in de Bourgondische Nederlanden*, Gent: Ludion, 1994.

¹⁷ Lynn Frances Jacobs, 'The Marketing and Standardization of South Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Limits on the Role of the Patron', *The Art Bulletin*, 71:2, 1989, 208–229; Lynn Frances Jacobs, 'The Inverted 'T'-Shape in Early Netherlandish Altarpieces: Studies in the Relation between Painting and Sculpture', *Zeitschrift Fur Kunstgeschichte*, 54:1, 1991, 33–65; Lynn Frances Jacobs, 'The Commissioning of Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Some Documentary Evidence', in *A Tribute to Robert A. Koch: Studies in the Northern Renaissance*, ed. Gregory T. Clark, Princeton: Princeton University, 1994, 83–113; Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*, 1998; Lynn Frances Jacobs, 'Fabrication et modes de production', in

Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing Jacobs discussed the medieval tastes apparent in the pieces by looking at their narrative component, their combination of painting and sculpture, and their architectural ornaments. In addition, she analysed these artworks by focusing on the dichotomy between altarpieces made for the open market and altarpieces made on commission, and everything in between. Jacobs' 1998 book contributed to the study of art markets, establishing a dialogue with the articles, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', and 'Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460-1560: Our Lady's Pand' by Lorne Campbell and Dan Ewing respectively.¹⁸

Although numerous publications devoted to the histories of art markets and the commercialization of art have appeared, most notable are those by Filip Vermeulen,¹⁹ who studied Netherlandish carved altarpieces not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a network of other luxurious exported items. He frequently referred to retables in his descriptions of the Antwerp art market, the export market of Netherlandish art, the points of sale such as the Our Lady's Pand –

Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 35–54.

¹⁸ Lorne Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', *The Burlington Magazine*, 118:877, 1976, 188–198; Dan Ewing, 'Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460–1560: Our Lady's Pand', *The Art Bulletin*, 72:4, 1990, 558–584.

¹⁹ See Robert Didier, 'Expansion Artistique et Relations Économique Des Pays-Bas Méridionaux Au Moyen Âge', *Bulletin de l'Institut Royal Patrimoine Artistique*, IV, 1961, 57–75; Filip Vermeulen, 'Exporting Art across the Globe. The Antwerp Art Market in the Sixteenth Century', in *Art for the Market, 1500-1700*, ed. Reindert Falkenburg et al., vol. 50, Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, Leiden: Brill, 1999, 19–30; Filip Vermeulen, 'Marketing Paintings in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp: Demand for Art and the Role of the Panden', in *International Trade in the Low Countries (14th-16th Centuries): Merchants, Organisation, Infrastructure*, ed. Peter Stabel, Bruno Blondé, and Anke Greve, Studies in Urban Social, Economic and Political History of the Medieval and Early Modern Low Countries 10, Leuven: Garant, 2000, 193–213; Filip Vermeulen, 'The Commercialization of Art: Painting and Sculpture in Sixteenth Century Antwerp', in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia 3, New Haven (Conn.): Yale university, 2001, 46–61; Filip Vermeulen, 'Further Comments on Methodology', in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia 3, New Haven (Conn.): Yale university, 2001; Filip Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age*, Studies in European Urban History (1100-1800), 2, Turnhout: Brepols, 2003; Filip Vermeulen, 'Antwerpen: het Onze-Lieve-Vrouwepand. Vernieuwingen in de kunsthandel', in *Plaatsen van herinnering: Nederland van prehistorie tot Beeldenstorm*, ed. Jan Bank et al., Amsterdam: Bakker, 2007, 460–469; Filip Vermeulen, 'De Antwerpse kunstmarkt tijdens de 16e en 17e eeuw', in *Beelddenken. Vijf eeuwen beeld in Antwerpen*, ed. Bart De Baere, Iris Kockelberg, and Nico Van Hout, Schoten: BAI, 2011, 216–217; Filip Vermeulen, 'Between Hope and Despair. The State of the Antwerp Art Market, 1566-1585', in *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm. Experiments in Decorum. 1566-1585*, ed. Koenraad Jonckheere, Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, 95–108; Karolien De Clippel and Filip Vermeulen, 'In Search of Netherlandish Art. Cultural Transmission and Artistic Exchanges in the Low Countries, an Introduction', *De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in de Nederlanden in Interdisciplinair Perspectief*, 31:1, 2015.

for example in his article 'Exporting Art across the Globe: The Antwerp Art Market in the Sixteenth Century' in the *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* published in 1999, which was entitled *Art for the Market, 1500-1700*.²⁰

As a result of this research on the artworks as exported products, researchers started to investigate how these works were transported, both over land and sea. Ulrich Schäfer previously explored this topic in his article 'Unhandlich, Schwer, Kompliziert und Empfindlich: Spätgotische Retabel aus den Niederlanden für Europa',²¹ while Gustaaf Asaert, Lynn Frances Jacobs, Roland Op de Beeck, and Claire Dumortier analysed the economic aspects of the production and transport of these artworks.²² Jan von Bonsdorff also presented several case studies on this topic when examining late medieval art transfer in the Baltic Sea Region, but kept a clear focus on the German art market.²³ Netherlandish carved altarpieces, however,

²⁰ Vermeulen, 'Exporting Art across the Globe. The Antwerp Art Market in the Sixteenth Century', 19–30.

²¹ Ulrich Schäfer, 'Unhandlich, Schwer, Kompliziert Und Empfindlich - Spätgotische Retabel Aus Den Niederlanden Für Europa', in *Niederländische Kunstexporte Nach Nord- Und Ostmitteleuropa Vom 14. Bis 16. Jahrhundert: Forschungen Zu Ihren Anfängen, Zur Rolle Höfischer Auftraggeber, Der Künstler Und Ihrer Werkstattbetriebe*, ed. Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia, Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014, 13–21.

²² Asaert, 'Antwerpse retabels – economische aspecten', 17–22; Jacobs, 'The Marketing and Standardization of South Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Limits on the Role of the Patron', 208–229; Jacobs, 'The Commissioning of Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces', 83–113; Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*; Roland Op de Beeck, 'Economische aspecten van de laatgotische retabelproductie', in *Vlaamse en Brabantse retabels in Belgische monumenten*, ed. Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo, Monumenten en landschappen 4, Brussel: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap Afdeling Monumenten en landschappen, 2000, 63–79; Claire Dumortier, 'Commercialisation et distribution', in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 63–75.

²³ Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Kunstverbreitung und Kunsthandel im Hanseraum aus quellenkritischer Sicht — am Beispiel der Bestellungsgeschichte des Birgitta-Altars in Vadstena 1455-1459', in *Niederdeutsch in Skandinavien IV: Akten des 4. nordischen Symposions ,Niederdeutsch in Skandinavien' in Lübeck-Travemünde 22.-25. August 1991*, Berlin, 1991, 9–27; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Art Transfer in the Baltic Sea Area' in *Künstlerischer Austausch — Artistic Exchange: Proceedings of the XXVIIIth International Congress of the History of the Arts, Berlin, July 15-21, 1992*, vol. 2, 3 vols., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993, 39–50; Jan von Bonsdorff, *Kunstproduktion und Kunstverbreitung im Ostseeraum des Spätmittelalters*, Helsinki, 1993; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Is Art a Barometer for Wealth? Medieval Art Exports to the Far North of Europe', in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. David Ormrod and Michael North, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, 29–43; Von Bonsdorff, 'Spridningen Av Senmedeltida Träskulptur i Nordeuropa — Alternativa Forskningsstrategier', 185–201; Von Bonsdorff, 'Kyrkokonsten under Nordisk Medeltid: Europeisering, Spridning Och Reception i Ljuset Av Nyare Forskning', 216–230; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Mobility and Ecclesiastical Art', in *Himlen Är Här*, Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkan, 2014, 47–55; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Lübecker Kunst – Handelsware im Ostseeraum', in *Lübeck 1500 - Kunstmetropole im Ostseeraum: Ausstellung, Museumsquartier St. Annen, Lübeck 20. September 2015 bis 10. Januar 2016*, ed. Jan Friedrich Richter, Petersberg: M. Imhof, 2015, 39–44; Jan von Bonsdorff, 'Changing Practices in the Commission of Later Middle Ages Church Art in the Baltic Sea Region', in *Hansische Identitäten*, ed. Kerstin

should not only be viewed as transported and exported products; as imported artworks, they also stood in relation to the environment in which they ended up, as emphasised by Yao-Fen You,²⁴ whose examination of both import and export forces resulted in new models for understanding the market, and the complex relation between consumer and producer.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, several general overviews of Netherlandish carved altarpieces appeared, which addressed the artworks from different points of view and considered topics such as technical research, with essays on the polychrome layers, marks or workshop production. These overviews were revised by Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo; Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren and Nicole Gesché-Koning; and Ria De Boodt and Ulrich Schäfer.²⁵ Whereas the 1993 exhibition catalogue focused on Antwerp examples, the Brussels retables also became the main focus of several scientific publications. In fact, the first catalogue of Brussels altarpieces was already presented in 1992 by Karen DiMartino Mensel.²⁶ Soon followed the volume *Miroirs du sacré. Les Retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles. Production, Formes et Usages*, edited by Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny (2005).²⁷ This

Petermann, Anja Rasche, and Gerhard Weilandt, Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2018, 75–81.

²⁴ Yao-Fen You, 'Krautheimer and the Marketplace: Vernacular Copies of Antwerp Compound Altarpieces in the Rhineland', *Visual Resources*, 20:2–3, 2004: 199–219; You, *Import / Export*; Yao-Fen You, 'The 'Infinite Variety' of Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces', in *Netherlandish Sculpture of the 16th Century*, ed. Ethan Matt Kavaler, Frits Scholten, and Joanna Woodall, Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 67, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017, 34–78.

²⁵ Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo, eds., *Vlaamse en Brabantse retables in Belgische monumenten*, Monumenten en landschappen, 4, Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap Afdeling Monumenten en landschappen, 2000; Périer-D'Ieteren and Gesché-Koning, *Brusselse gids*; Ria De Boodt, Ulrich Schäfer, and Johan Geleyns, *Vlaamse retables: een internationale reis langs laatmiddeleeuws beeldsnijwerk*, Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2007.

²⁶ Karen DiMartino Mensel, *The Late Gothic Carved Altarpiece from Brussels: A Catalogue, with an Historical and Interpretive Introduction*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992.

²⁷ Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, ed., *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, Brussels: CFC, 2005; Other relevant publications of D'Hainaut-Zveny include Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'La dynastie Borreman (XVe-XVIe S.). Crayon généalogique et analyse comparative des personnalités artistiques', *Annales d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie*, 5, 1983, 47–66; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Le retable de la Passion de Gustrow : problèmes d'attribution et essais d'analyse', *Belgisch tijdschrift voor oudheidkunde en kunstgeschiedenis*, 55, 1986; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Les messes de saint Grégoire dans les retables des Pays-Bas: mise en perspective historique d'une image polémique, dogmatique et utilitariste', *Bulletin Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 41–42, 1991-1993, 35–61; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Origine et spécificités des retables gothiques', in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 13–34; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Fonctions et usages religieux', in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 131–147; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Les retables sculptés aux Pays-Bas (fin XVe-début XVIe siècle). Instances d'une présence et d'une expérience du sacré', in *L'Europe des retables. Actes du colloque du Mans (13-16 octobre 2004)*, ed. Françoise Michaud-Fréjaville, vol. 1, Art sacré: cahiers de

publication served as a valuable scientific counterpart to the 1993 volume on Antwerp altarpieces by concentrating on similar themes, such as production, distribution, materials, iconography and style. It contained essays by Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Lynn Frances Jacobs, Myriam Serck-Dewaide, Claire Dumortier, Kim Woods, Jean-Pierre Delville and Paul Philippot, and was particularly useful because of its catalogue of Brussels altarpieces at the end written by Ria De Boodt.²⁸ Other interesting trends emerged in a comprehensive study by Niklas Gliessmann investigating 'small' altarpieces, which had remained unexplored until then.²⁹

At present, lots of research on Netherlandish carved retables is still being carried out. Some of the most important work on the cultural-historical aspects of carved altarpieces is being produced today by Ethan Matt Kavalier. He thoughtfully approaches the artworks by examining art-historical, political, commercial, religious, artistic and sensory aspects. Furthermore, he relies on metaphysical concepts, such as time and space. Especially relevant are his thoughts on the narrative, 'story telling' aspect and the tracery of Netherlandish carved altarpieces, which he repeatedly links to other artforms like architecture, music or literature. The detailed study of other sculptural media, in addition, might contribute to how we understand altarpieces. In 2017 Ethan Matt Kavalier, Frits Scholten and Joanna Woodall edited the *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art*, which was dedicated to sixteenth-century Netherlandish sculpture. This book discusses a variety of topics from altarpieces to sacrament houses, funerary sculpture, choir stalls, mantelpieces, and much more.³⁰ Currently, new questions are raised in the ongoing doctoral research of Emily Pegeus (The Courtauld Institute of Art), which mainly focuses on Jan Borman's career, but also attempts to situate this sculptor within the social networks in which he functioned, as well as the literary, political, and religious activities that were intertwined with the business of sculpting.³¹ Illuminare – Centre

rencontre avec le patrimoine religieux 24, Rilhac-Rancon: Terre-Blue, 2007, 41–88; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Le retable de Güstrow, un retable à double paire de volets. Considérations sur les usages et raisons d'être de ces vantaux', in *Le Retable de la Passion de l'Église Sainte-Marie de Güstrow: Étude historique et technologique, Der Passions-Altar der Pfarrkirche St. Marien zu Güstrow: Historische und technologische Studie*, ed. Ivo Mohrmann and Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, Brussels: ULB, 2014, 55–76; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, 'Meaning and Potency. On the Role of Figural Sculpture in Late-Medieval Cities', in *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, ed. Marjan Debaene, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019, 124–139.

²⁸ D'Hainaut-Zveny, ed., *Miroirs du sacré*; Ria De Boodt, 'Catalogue des retables bruxellois', in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 154–225.

²⁹ Niklas Gliessmann, *Geschitzte kleinformatige Retabel aus Antwerpener, Brüsseler und Mechelner Produktion des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts: Herstellung, Form und Funktion*, Petersberg: Imhof, 2011.

³⁰ Ethan Matt Kavalier, Frits Scholten, and Joanna Woodall, eds., *Netherlandish Sculpture of the 16th Century*, *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 67, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017.

³¹ <https://courtauld.ac.uk/people/emily-pegeus>

for Medieval and Renaissance Art (KU Leuven) will also publish a book on the sculpture from the Low Countries between 1400-1600 (forthcoming, 2022).³²

Contributions of technical studies³³

The study of Netherlandish carved altarpieces has greatly benefitted from several technical studies of shrine markings, marks, construction methods and polychrome techniques.³⁴ As the altarpieces were the result of an intense cooperation between multiple artists, it is no surprise that a mark system was invented. The altarpieces, which could be bought at various public outlets, were expensive: purchasing one created a financial risk for the buyers. Therefore, under the watchful eye of the guild, *keurders* (also called *waardeerders* or *brandmeesters*) labelled the artworks with a mark that guaranteed the quality of the polychrome layer, joinery or carvery as a warranty for both the clients and the subcontractors among themselves. As a result, several Netherlandish carved retables are included in the MARKS ON ART RKD database, which aims to collect a range of different marks that can be found on sculptures, furniture and the backs of panel paintings.³⁵

For a long period of time, scholarship on late medieval sculpture practically ignored the presence of the polychrome layers on the artworks. However, this changed in the last decade of the twentieth century, when technical studies, such as the ones by Peter Tångeberg, proved how studying the polychrome layer could help

³² Julie Beckers and Hannah De Moor, eds. *Taking Shape: Sculpture of the Low Countries 1400-1600*. Early modern cultural studies. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022 (forthcoming).

³³ For a general overview of how technical studies reshaped the field of research, see: Faires, 'Reshaping the Field: The Contribution of Technical Studies', 70–106.

³⁴ On marks found on Netherlandish carved altarpieces, see: Christine Van Vlierden, 'Het waarmerken van de beeldsnijproductie in de Zuidnederlandse centra', in *Het laatgotische beeldsnijcentrum Leuven*, Leuven: Stedelijk museum, 1979, 405–436; Nieuwdorp, 'De oorspronkelijke betekenis en interpretatie van keurmerken', 85-97; Vandamme, *De polychromie van Gotische houtsculptuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden: materialen en technieken*, 1982, 167-165; Van der Stock, 'Antwerps beeldhouwwerk: over de praktijk van het merkteken', 127–144; Herman De Smedt, 'Merkttekens op enkele Antwerpse retabels', in *Merken opmerken: merk- en meestertekens op kunstwerken in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik: typologie en methode*, ed. Christine Van Vlierden and Maurits Smeyers, Leuven: Peeters, 1990, 145–183; Annick Born, 'Réflexions sur divers aspects de la productions des retables anversoises', in *L'Europe des retables. Actes du colloque du Mans (13-16 octobre 2004)*, ed. Françoise Michaud-Fréjaville, vol. 1, Art sacré: cahiers de rencontre avec le patrimoine religieux, 24, Rilhac-Rancon: Terre-Blue, 2007, 23–40; Ria De Boodt, 'Einfach Einordnen Und Zuschreiben? Merkmale Der Südniederländischen Skulpturenzentren Der Spätgotik Und Ihre Anwendung', in *Niederländische Kunstexporte Nach Nord- Und Ostmitteleuropa Vom 14. Bis 16. Jahrhundert: Forschungen Zu Ihren Anfängen, Zur Rolle Höfischer Auftraggeber, Der Künstler Und Ihrer Werkstattbetriebe*, ed. Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia, Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014, 23–39; and the MARKS ON ART database (www.rkd.nl)

³⁵ www.rkd.nl

to address questions of dating or geographical attribution.³⁶ In addition, several international symposia studied the retables from a technical angle. Two important conferences were *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles*, which was organised by the Louvre, and *Carving Wooden Images: Organization of Labour and Working Process of Late Gothic Carved Altarpieces in the Low Countries*, organised by the VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel).³⁷ The most valuable publications in this field were by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA, Brussels), mostly in the *Scientia Artis* series, which occasionally also included conference proceedings. Their key publications include (i) the monograph focused on the altarpiece of Oplinter, with contributions by experts such as Myriam Serck-Dewaide³⁸ and Ria De Boodt; (ii) the issue *Imitation and Illusion*, which shed light on how polychromers tried to imitate the fabrics then in fashion by using a highly sophisticated form of relief decoration called applied brocade; (iii) the *Made in Malines* edition, which focused on the wooden Malines statuettes; and (iv) the proceedings of the 2015 conference on the

³⁶ Peter Tångeberg, 'Polychrome Sculpture in Sweden', *Studies in Conservation*, 15:4, 1970, 316–326; Peter Tångeberg, *Holzskulptur und Altarschrein: Studien zu Form, Material und Technik: mittelalterliche Plastik in Schweden*, München: Callwey, 1989.

³⁷ Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, ed., *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles. Actes du colloque organisé par le musée du Louvre, 18-19 mai 2001*, Paris: Documentation française, 2002; Carl Van de Velde et al., eds., *Constructing Wooden Images*, Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press, 2005.

³⁸ Other publications of Serck-Dewaide include Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Décors en relief: Approche technologique et historique', in *Le retable d'Issenheim et la sculpture au Nord des Alpes à la fin du moyen âge*, ed. Christian Heck, Bulletin de la Société Schongauer. Numéro special, Colmar: Musée d'Unterlinden, 1989, 91–97; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Les retables anversois sous le regard des restaurateurs', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw. Essays*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols, Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 114–128; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Examen et restauration de huit retables anversois', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 129–141; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Materialen, technieken en polychromie', in *Vlaamse en Brabantse retabels in Belgische monumenten*, ed. Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo, Monumenten en landschappen 4, Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap Afdeling Monumenten en landschappen, 2000, 87–105; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Onderzoek, conservering en restauratie', in *Vlaamse en Brabantse retabels in Belgische monumenten*, ed. Marjan Buyle and Christine Vanthillo, Monumenten en landschappen 4, Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap Afdeling Monumenten en landschappen, 2000, 105–116; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Retables non polychromés ou retables décapés?', in *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles. Actes du colloque organisé par le musée du Louvre, 18-19 mai 2001*, ed. Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, Paris: Documentation française, 2002, 37–80; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Matériaux et techniques', in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed. Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, Brussels: CFC, 2005, 55–62; Myriam Serck-Dewaide, 'Gepolychromeerde sculptuur: historisch overzicht van het onderzoek en de uitdagingen van de restauratie', in *Le retable du Couronnement de la Vierge. Eglise de l'Assomption d'Erreterria, Het retabel van de Koning van Maria. Kerk van Maria-Tenhemelopneming te Erreterria*, ed. Ion Berasain Salvarredi, Maite Barrio Olano, and Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, Brussels: Le livre Timperman, 2013, 119–139.

Saint-Denis altarpiece in Liège.³⁹ This last volume is especially important for providing new insights on the partial polychromy of the altarpiece: the extensive examination of the retable confirmed the usage of monochrome elements in Netherlandish carved altarpieces for the first time. The Saint George altarpiece from the Art & History Museum in Brussels is currently also being restored and will be the subject of a comprehensive publication as well.

The extensive publications on the altarpieces of Erreterria, Güstrow, Saint-Denis in Liège (and soon the Saint George altarpiece) proved that the field could benefit immensely from restoration projects involving detailed art-historical and technical studies of individual altarpieces.⁴⁰ These works are a testament to how restoration can not only ensure the conservation of the artwork, but also offer new insights into the making, meaning and marketing of the artform in general. Since then, further in-depth research on individual altarpieces has been presented and published. One example is the study day on the freshly restored Ringsaker altarpiece, which was organised by The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research and The Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History of the University of Oslo in 2020.⁴¹ The Ringsaker altarpiece was also subject of the *Wings & Links* project at the Centre for the Study of the Flemish Primitives of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage. This project was dedicated to the study of late medieval retables, with a specific focus on altarpieces that contained sculptures that were at some point attributed to Robert Moreau, like the Ringsaker altarpiece. Taking these works as a starting point, the project aimed to reflect on the work distribution among different professions involved in the production process of retables made in Antwerp.⁴²

³⁹ Ria De Boodt et al., *Le retable d'Oplinter /Het retabel van Oplinter*, Scientia Artis 1, Brussels: Institut royal du patrimoine artistique, 1999; Ingrid Geelen and Delphine Steyaert, *Imitation and Illusion: Applied Brocade in the Art of the Low Countries in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Scientia Artis 6, Brussels: Koninklijk instituut voor het kunstpatrimonium, 2011; Fanny Cayron, Delphine Steyaert, and Emmanuelle Mercier, *Made in Malines: les statuettes malinoises ou poupées de Malines de 1500-1540 : étude matérielle et typologique*, Scientia Artis 16, Turnhout: Brepols, 2019; Emmanuelle Mercier, Ria De Boodt, and Pierre-Yves Kairis, *Flesh, Gold and Wood. The Saint-Denis Altarpiece in Liège and the Question of Partial Paint Practices in the 16th Century. Proceedings of the Conference Held at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage in Brussels, 22-24 October 2015*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2021.

⁴⁰ Ion Berasain Salvarredi, Maite Barrio Olano, and Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, eds., *Le retable du Couronnement de la Vierge. Eglise de l'Assomption d'Erreterria, Het retabel van de Kroning van Maria. Kerk van Maria-Tenhemelopneming te Erreterria*, Brussels: Le livre Timperman, 2013; Ivo Mohrmann and Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, eds., *Le Retable de la Passion de l'Église Sainte-Marie de Güstrow: Étude historique et technologique, Der Passions-Altar der Pfarrkirche St. Marien zu Güstrow : Historische und technologische Studie*, Brussels: ULB, 2014; Mercier, De Boodt, and Kairis, *Flesh, Gold and Wood*.

⁴¹ www.niko.no

⁴² Elisabeth Van Eyck, 'Nouvelles Hypothèses Sur La Production de Retables Anversois Des Années 1530-1540 à Partir Du Groupe Dénommé Autrefois « Moreau »', *Bulletin de l'Institut Royal Du Patrimoine Artistique*, 35, 2016-2018; Elisabeth Van Eyck, *Wings and Links, Interdisciplinary Research on Sculpted Altarpieces and Painted Wings. Final Report*, Brussels: Belgian Science Policy Office, 2018.

By conducting technical research, Kristin Kausland was able to reattribute several altarpieces, which were formerly attributed to Northern-Germany, to the Northern Netherlands. She drew attention to the danger of attributing altarpieces solely based on stylistic arguments. Her research also demonstrated that the assembling of retables likely was even more collaborative than previously thought. Several of her case studies showed that local artists frequently added different parts to the imported artworks once they arrived at their destination, which means that a mixed origin was not at all exceptional. For example, the sculptures inside the altarpieces were sometimes imported artworks, whereas the cases were locally made – or vice versa. Her research serves as a warning against attributing an altarpiece in its entirety to a certain region, as it has now been made clear that these mixed-media assemblages could consist of parts from different origins.⁴³

Digital disclosure

Valuable resources for the research field are the databases which have fairly recently been launched. The *Digital Corpus of Flemish Retables*, for example, draws on the knowledge assembled by Leeuwenberg, De Smedt and Nieuwdorp and provides high-quality pictures, up-to-date bibliographies, and iconographic or stylistic analyses of more than 350 Netherlandish carved altarpieces.⁴⁴ The database is an initiative of the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, and Illuminare – Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Art (KU Leuven). While the *Digital Corpus of Flemish Retables* includes all known Netherlandish carved altarpieces, the following databases focus on one specific region: *Medeltidens bildvärld* (Sweden)⁴⁵, *Carved Flemish Altarpieces in Spain*⁴⁶, and *Medieval Altarpieces in Denmark*.⁴⁷ The database of BALAT-KIKIRPA, in addition, remains relevant because of the assessable and

⁴³ Kristin Kausland, 'A Fishy Business - a Late-Medieval North German Shrine Attributed to Wilm Dedeke in Norway', in *Painting Techniques. History, Materials and Studio Practice. 5th International Symposium. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 18-19-20 December 2013.*, ed. Arie Wallert, Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2013; Kristin Kausland, *Late Medieval Altarpieces in Norway – Domestic, Imported, or a Mixed Enterprise? An Art Technological Study of Northern German and Norwegian Altarpiece Production in the Period 1460-1530*, Oslo: University of Oslo, 2016; Kristin Kausland, 'Late Medieval Paintings in Norway – Materials, Techniques, Origins', *Zeitschrift Für Kunsttechnologie Und Konservierung*, 30:1, 2016, 47–66; Kristin Kausland, 'Nailing It! The Identification of Northern Netherlandish Altarpieces through Common Features in Their Methods of Construction', *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, 2017; Kristin Kausland, 'Part Production of 'Hanseatic' Altarpieces in Late Medieval Scandinavian Diaspora Communities', in *Migrants - Art, Artists, Materials and Ideas Crossing Borders*, ed. Lucy Wrapson, Victoria Sutcliffe, and Sally Woodcock, London: Archetype Publications, 2019, 1–15; Kristin Kausland, 'Setting the Stage, Framing the Picture; the Gilding and Polychromy of Late Medieval Altarpiece Structures in the North', *CLARA*, 5, 2020, 1–21.

⁴⁴ www.rkd.nl

⁴⁵ www.medeltidbild.historiska.se

⁴⁶ www.retablos-flamencos.albayalde.org

⁴⁷ www.altertavler.dk

downloadable high-quality pictures of several altarpieces.⁴⁸ Lastly, the *MARKS ON ART* RKD database aims to collect a range of different marks that can be found on sculptures, furniture and the backs of panel paintings, and thus includes several Netherlandish carved retables.⁴⁹

Since its launch in 2014, ARDS – the platform for medieval sculpture, an initiative from M-Museum Leuven – has shown great success in bringing people, projects and institutions working on medieval sculpture together.⁵⁰ By organising several exhibitions, expert meetings, lectures and symposia, they created a network of experts on medieval and renaissance sculpture from Western Europe. Communication through social media and the ARDS website, also expanded this network online. ARDS's most noteworthy accomplishment specifically for Netherlandish carved altarpieces was the exhibition *Borman and Sons – Half a Century of Brussels Sculpture from 1480-1530* (20.09.19-19.01.20), held in M-Museum Leuven, and the accompanying exhibition catalogue, conference, and soon to be published conference proceedings.⁵¹

Exported altarpieces

The field especially benefitted from scholars who concentrated on the presence of these artworks in their native countries, as well as from scholars who focused on the dispersion of altarpieces in one specific region. Kim Woods, for instance, focused on documented examples of Netherlandish carved altarpieces imported into both England and Scotland in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The altarpieces mentioned in these archival sources, however, no longer survive. Woods also examined works currently preserved in Britain, all of which were acquired in the nineteenth century.⁵² In 1986 Ryszard Szymycki extensively studied the Antwerp altarpieces preserved in Poland, which he analysed using a historical, iconographic and stylistic approach.⁵³ The essay-catalogue of the 1993 Antwerp Altarpieces exhibition contained an essay on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in the Iberian

⁴⁸ www.balat.kikirpa.be

⁴⁹ www.rkd.nl

⁵⁰ www.ards.be

⁵¹ Marjan Debaene, ed., *Borman. A Family of Northern Renaissance Sculptors*, London/Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019.

⁵² Kim Woods, *Netherlandish Carved Wooden Altarpieces of the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries in Britain*, London: Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1989; Kim Woods, 'Five Netherlandish Carved Altar-Pieces in England and the Brussels School of Carving c.1470-1520', *Burlington Magazine*, 138, 1996, 788–800; Kim Woods, 'Questions d'attribution stylistique: retables inédits en Angleterre', in *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles. Actes du colloque organisé par le musée du Louvre, 18-19 mai 2001*, ed. Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, Paris: Documentation française, 2002, 345–376; Kim Woods, *Imported Images: Netherlandish Late Gothic Sculpture in England, C.1400-c.1550*, Shaun Tyas, 2007.

⁵³ Ryszard Szymycki, *Retables anversoises en Pologne: contribution à l'étude des rapports artistiques entre les anciens Pays-Bas Méridionaux et la région de Gdansk au début du XVIe siècle*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Schone Kunsten 40, Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1986.

Peninsula, written by Claire Dumortier.⁵⁴ Earlier, Ignace Vandevivere (1970) had also published on this subject.⁵⁵ The book on the altarpiece of Errenteria (2013), edited by Ion Berasain Salvarredi, Maite Barrio Olano and Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren, holds a central position in the research into retables in this region, just like the essay 'Flemish Carved Altarpieces in Spain' (2018) by Ion Berasain Salvarredi, Maite Barrio Olano and Jesús Muñoz Petraland.⁵⁶ The website *Carved Flemish Altarpieces in Spain* should be noted in this context as well.⁵⁷ The examples in France appear to be less researched than those in other regions, although Richard Randall (1971) and Robert Didier (1989) did publish on this topic.⁵⁸ The archive of Hans Nieuwdorp preserved at Illuminare, in addition, contains an incredible amount of information on Netherlandish retables preserved in France, a topic on which Nieuwdorp was planning a publication.⁵⁹

The pieces preserved in Germany were brought into focus by Ernst Franz August Munzenberger and Stephan Beissel as early as 1895-1906, followed by Mina Voegelen (1923), Walter Paatz (1936), Herman De Smedt (1965), Hans Peter Hilger and Ernst Willemsen (1967), and Robert Didier (1989).⁶⁰ The cluster of Netherlandish

⁵⁴ Claire Dumortier, 'Retables sculptés anversois dans la péninsule Ibérique', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 111–113.

⁵⁵ Ignace Vandevivere, 'Le retable sculpté à volets peints de la chapelle des Rois Mages d'Estreito de Calheta, Madère: une production anversoise des années 1520', *Revue des archéologues et historiens d'art de Louvain*, 1970, 101–120.

⁵⁶ Berasain Salvarredi, Barrio Olano, and Périer-D'Ieteren, eds., *Le retable du Couronnement de la Vierge*; Ion Berasain Salvarredi, Maite Barrio Olano, and Jesús Muñoz Petraland, 'Flemish Carved Altarpieces in Spain: Reflections on Their Patronage and the Relationship between Flemish and Spanish Artistic Traditions', in *Netherlandish Art and Luxury Goods in Renaissance Spain*, ed. Daan van Heesch, Robrecht Janssen, and Jan Van der Stock, Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History, Turnhout: Brepols, 2018, 45–62.

⁵⁷ www.retablos-flamencos.albayalde.org

⁵⁸ Richard H. Randall, 'A Flemish Altar Made for France', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 33/34, 1971, 8–33; Robert Didier, 'Sculptures et retables des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux des années 1430-1460. Traditions et innovations pour le Haut-Rhin et l'Allemagne du Sud', in *Le retable d'Issenheim et la sculpture au Nord des Alpes à la fin du moyen âge*, ed. Christian Heck, Bulletin de la Société Schongauer. Numéro special, Colmar: Musée d'Unterlinden, 1989, 49–79.

⁵⁹ www.illuminare.be. Texts and documents for this unpublished publication are preserved in AN10, The Archive of Hans Nieuwdorp, Illuminare – KU Leuven.

⁶⁰ Ernst Franz August Münzenberger and Stephan Beissel, *Zur Kenntnis Und Würdigung Der Mittelalterlichen Altäre Deutschlands: Ein Beitrag Zur Geschichte Der Vaterländischen Kunst*, 2 vols., Frankfurt am Main, 1895; Mina Voegelen, 'Die Gruppenaltäre in Schwäbisch Hall und ihre Beziehungen zur niederländischen Kunst', *Müncher Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 13, 1923, 121–160; Walter Paatz, 'Eine Nordwestdeutsche Gruppe von Frühen Flandrischen Schnitzaltären Aus Der Zeit von 1360 - 1450', *Westfalen. Hefte Für Geschichte, Kunst Und Volkskunde*, 21, 1936, 49–68; De Smedt, 'De verspreiding der Brabantse retabels in oostelijke richting', 23–63; Ernst Willemsen and Hans Peter Hilger, *Farbige Bildwerke Des Mittelalters Im Rheinland*, Bonn: Rheinland Verlag, 1967; Didier, 'Sculptures et retables des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux des années 1430-1460. Traditions et innovations pour le Haut-Rhin et l'Allemagne du Sud', 1989, 49–79.

carved retables preserved in the Rhineland was extensively analysed by Godehard Hoffmann.⁶¹ Building on this research, the publications of Yao-Fen You (2004, 2005, 2017) also examined this cluster,⁶² which allowed her to address questions focused on the flexibility of patrons to determine the designs they wished for in these artworks, for instance, by making specific requests about the appearance of the polychrome layer. Additionally, she positioned the retables within the network of local altarpieces, and thus exposed the context in which the Netherlandish pieces enjoyed their popularity. You also studied the prestige of the Netherlandish retables through an analysis of its visual translation into contemporary media such as enamelwork, tapestry, and manuscript illumination.⁶³ The six preserved Antwerp retables in Zulpich, in addition, were the subject of Christoph Schaden's book.⁶⁴ In 2014, Leo Mock also published an article on this topic entitled *Brabanter Schnitzretabel im Östlichen Deutschland*.⁶⁵

Netherlandish carved altarpieces also found their way to the medieval Kingdom of Denmark, albeit in a smaller number compared with medieval Sweden.⁶⁶ It is important to note that any discussion on the dissemination of

⁶¹ Godehard Hoffmann, 'Der Annenaltar Des Adrian Van Overbeck in Kempen - Legende Und Ikonographie in Vorreformatorischer Zeit', *Annalen Des Historischen Vereins Für Den Niederrhein*, 198, 1995, 89–109; Wilfried Hansmann and Godehard Hoffmann, *Spätgotik am Niederrhein: rheinische und flämische Flügelaltäre im Licht neuer Forschung*, Beiträge zu den Bau- und Kunstdenkmälern im Rheinland, 35, Köln: Bachem, 1998; Godehard Hoffmann, 'Der Annenaltar des Adrian van Overbeck in der Propsteikirche zu Kempen - Werk und Werkstatt eines Antwerper Manieristen', in *Spätgotik am Niederrhein: rheinische und flämische Flügelaltäre im Licht neuer Forschung*, Beiträge zu den Bau- und Kunstdenkmälern im Rheinland, 35, Köln: Bachem, 1998, 117–295; Godehard Hoffmann, 'Antwerpener Retabel in den Niederrheinlanden: Zur Rolle der Auftraggeber bei der Gestaltung Importierter Flügelaltäre', in *Köln und die Niederrheinlande in ihren historischen Raumbeziehungen: (15.-20. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Dieter Geuenich, Pulheim: Rheinland, 2000, 271–306; Godehard Hoffmann, 'Compound Altarpieces in Context', *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten*, 2004–2004, 75–121; Godehard Hoffmann, 'The Workshop of Adrian Van Overbeck', in *Constructing Wooden Images. Proceedings of the Symposium on the Organisation of Labour and Working Practices of Late Gothic Carved Altarpieces in the Low Countries. Brussels 25-26 October 2002*, ed. Carl Van de Velde et al., Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press, 2005, 207–239; Godehard Hoffmann, 'Das Antwerpener Antoniusretabel in Kempen: Ein Flügelaltar Mit Gestalteter Rückseite (Rekonstruktion)', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, 68, 2007, 265–274.

⁶² For an extensive status questionis on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in the Rhineland, see: You, *Import / Export*, 8–10.

⁶³ Yao-Fen You, 'Krautheimer and the Marketplace', 199–219; You, *Import / Export*; You, 'The Infinite Variety', 34–78.

⁶⁴ Christoph Schaden, *Die Antwerpener Schnitzaltäre im ehemaligen Dekanat Zulpich*, Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2000.

⁶⁵ Markus Leo Mock, 'Brabanter Schnitzretabel Im Östlichen Deutschland', in *Niederländische Kunstexporte Nach Nord- Und Ostmitteleuropa Vom 14. Bis 16. Jahrhundert: Forschungen Zu Ihren Anfängen, Zur Rolle Höfischer Auftraggeber, Der Künstler Und Ihrer Werkstattbetriebe*, ed. Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia, Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014, 197–215.

⁶⁶ The preserved Netherlandish carved altarpieces in the Kingdom of Denmark are the following: Holstebro (fragments); National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (altarpiece

Netherlandish carved altarpieces in the medieval Kingdom of Denmark should also include the altarpiece in the church of Västra Ingelstad (Skåne, modern-day Sweden) and the retable in Ringsaker (Hedmark, modern-day Norway).⁶⁷ A comprehensive essay on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in Denmark, written by Sissel F. Plathe, appeared in the essay-catalogue that accompanied the Antwerp Altarpieces exhibition in 1993.⁶⁸ In 2010 she collaborated with Jens Bruun on a book entitled *Danmarks middelalderlige altertavler* (Denmark's medieval altarpieces), and the Netherlandish examples were included.⁶⁹ Each of the altarpieces included in the book also has an online record in the *Danmarks middelalderlige altartavler* database.⁷⁰ Ragnhild M. Bø, in addition, examined Netherlandish pieces preserved in Denmark-Norway. More specifically, she produced studies devoted to the Resurrected Christ Appearing to His Mother as displayed in these artworks, a detailed study of the Antwerp retable in Ringsaker, and engagements with Saints before and after the Reformation.⁷¹

Previous scholarship on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in medieval Sweden

The scientific interest in late medieval sculpture in Sweden, and more particularly research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in the country, was stimulated by an exhibition on ecclesiastical art in Strängnäs in 1910, and the start of the *Sveriges Kyrkor* series two years later.⁷² The exhibition on *Older Church Art* in Strängnäs (fig.

fragments and two retables, one from Aarhus and one from Borglum); Roskilde; Ringsaker; Saebø; Ulkebøl; Västra Ingelstad; Viborg. The term 'Kingdom of Denmark' is used here to refer to the 'royal territories' of the Oldeburgs, including both Denmark and Norway, but excluding the 'ducal territories' of Schleswig and Holstein.

⁶⁷ Sissel F. Plathe, 'Brabantine carved altarpieces in Denmark', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdoorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 94; On the altarpiece in Västra Ingelstad, see: Plathe, 'Brabantine carved altarpieces in Denmark', 94-110; Lena Liepe, *Den medeltida träskulpturen i Skåne: produktion och förvärv*, Lund: Lund University Press, 1995, 50, 56, 211, 217, 224-225; On the retable in Ringsaker, see: Ragnhild M. Bø, 'Making and Meaning-Making: The Antwerp Altarpiece in Ringsaker (c. 1530) across the Reformation', *Journal of Early Modern Christianity*, 7:1, 2020, 1-42.

⁶⁸ Plathe, 'Brabantine carved altarpieces in Denmark', 94-110.

⁶⁹ Sissel F. Plathe and Jens Bruun, *Danmarks middelalderlige altertavler. og anden billedbærende kirkeudsmykning af betydning for liturgien og den private andagt 1 1*, Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010.

⁷⁰ www.asp.altertavler.dk

⁷¹ Ragnhild M. Bø, 'Material and Immaterial Presence: Engagements with Saints before and after the Reformation in Denmark-Norway', *Mirator*, 19:1, 2018, 84-107; Bø, 'Making and Meaning-Making', 1-42; Ragnhild M. Bø, 'The Resurrected Christ Appearing to His Mother in Late Medieval Netherlandish Altarpieces', *Konsthistorisk Tidsskrift/Journal of Art History*, 2020.

⁷² Johnny Roosval, 'L'exposition d'art ancien religieux à Strängnäs', *Les arts anciens de Flandre*, 5, 1911, 123-130; On the exhibition and the *Sveriges Kyrkor* series, see Hugo Palmköld, 'De Tidiga Utställningarna Av Kyrklig Konst Och Sveriges Kyrkor', *Konsthistorisk Tidsskrift/Journal of Art History*, 70:1-2, 2001, 66-76; Birgitta Sandström, 'Till fromma för

2), which was organised between 20 June and 28 August 1910 and included Netherlandish carved retables such as Jäder and Ytterselö, was especially important for awakening a new interest in medieval sculpture.⁷³ This exhibition was among the first in a series of exhibitions devoted to medieval church art.⁷⁴ The curators of this influential exhibition were Johnny Roosval, Sigurd Curman and Carl R. af Ugglas.



Figure 2 Exhibition of 'Older Church Art' in Strängnäs in 1910 © Riksantikvarieämbetet

vetenskapen och för allmänhetens förståelse för dessa föremåls skönhet och historiska betydelse. Utsällingarna av äldre kyrklig konst i Strängnäs 1910 och Härnösand 1912', in *Tegn, symbol og tolkning: om forståelse og fortolkning av middelalderens bilder*, ed. Gunnar Danbolt, København: Museum Tusulanum Forl., 2003, 261–277; Pia Bengtsson Melin, *Medeltiden on display: uppställningar och utställningar av äldre kyrkokonst från omkring 1850 fram till i dag*, Stockholm: Runica et Mediævalia, Centrum för medeltidsstudier, 2014, 25-31; Lena Liepe, *A Case for the Middle Ages: The Public Display of Medieval Church Art in Sweden 1847-1943*, Kungl. Vitterhets-, Historie- Och Antikvitetsakademien Handlingar. Antikvariska Serien 55, Stockholm: Stockholm Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2018, 79-86.

⁷³ In 2018 Lena Liepe extensively analysed the 1910 Strängnäs exhibition and the other regional exhibitions that followed in *A case for the Middle Ages: the public display of medieval church art in Sweden 1847-1943*. See Bengtsson Melin, *Medeltiden on display*, 25-31 and Liepe, *A Case for the Middle Ages*, 79-86 for an extensive analysis of this exhibition.

⁷⁴ Liepe, *A Case for the Middle Ages*, 86. For previous exhibitions on this topic, see: Bengtsson Melin, *Medeltiden on display*, 13-24.

Two years later (1912) Roosval and Curman launched the *Sveriges Kyrkor* series, which dedicates each volume to a Swedish church.⁷⁵ Each of these volumes provides an in-depth analysis of the history of the church in question and thoroughly studies the possessions of the church, including some Netherlandish carved altarpieces. These volumes have proved essential to gain insight into the provenance, patronage, transport and the legacy/preservation of these artworks, mainly because of the source material they were able to collect and publish.

Johnny Roosval continued to pursue his interest in Netherlandish carved retables in his articles 'Retables d'origine néerlandaise dans les pays nordiques' (1933) and 'Les peintures des retables néerlandais en Suède' (1934), which formed a solid basis for continued research on Netherlandish retables in Sweden.⁷⁶ Other Swedish pioneers writing on this topic include Karl Asplund, Erik Bohrn, Sigurd Curman, Gunnar Ekström, Rune Norberg and Armin Tuulse. Given the focus of this paper, special attention should be given to Norberg's essay 'Senmedeltida skulpturer från Mechelen (Malines) i Sverige.'⁷⁷

In 1948 Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena published his *Les retables brabançons conservés en Suède*, which contained an overview of Netherlandish altarpieces in Sweden with a stylistic and iconographic focus.⁷⁸ Ten years later, Gunnar Lindqvist provided a comprehensive study of these artworks in his unpublished dissertation 'Senmedeltida altarskåp från Bryssel och Antwerpen i Sverige: målningarna.'⁷⁹ After a general introduction, an examination of the workshop organisation of the sculptors, and an analysis of the export of the altarpieces to Sweden, Lindqvist presented a stylistic examination of the painted wings of these artworks. The

⁷⁵ On their initiative to start the *Sveriges Kyrkor* series, see: Palmköld, 'De Tidiga Utställningarna Av Kyrklig Konst Och Sveriges Kyrkor', 66-76; Sandström, 'Till fromma för vetenskapen och för allmänhetens förståelse', 261-277; Bengtsson Melin, *Medeltiden on display*, 25-31.

⁷⁶ Johnny Roosval, 'Retables d'origine néerlandaise dans les pays nordiques', *Revue belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire et de l'Art*, 3, 1933, 136-158; Johnny Roosval, 'Les peintures des retables néerlandais en Suède', *Revue belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire et de l'Art*, 4, 1934, 311-320; Johnny Roosval, *Schnitzaltäre in Schwedischen Kirchen und Museen aus der Werkstatt des Brüsseler Bildschnitzers Jan Bormann*, Strassburg: Heitz & Mündel, 1903; Johnny Roosval, 'Om altarskåp i Svenska kyrkor och museer ur Mäster Jan Bormans verkstad i Bryssel', ed. Rolf Arpi, *Uppland Fornminnesförenings Tidskrift*, 23, 1903: 5-75; Johnny Roosval, 'The Reredos and the Theatre of the Fifteenth Century', *Mask: A Quarterly Journal of Art of the Theatre* 3, 1910, 1-5; Roosval, 'L'exposition d'art ancien religieux à Strängnäs', 123-130; Johnny Roosval, 'Nederländska Altarskåp, Uställingen Af Äldre Kyrklig Konst i Strängnäs 1910', *Studier*, 1913; Johnny Roosval, 'Vårdnäsaltarets Flyglar Och Cornells Engel-brechtsz Stil i Antwerpen', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 8, 1939: 5-12.

⁷⁷ Rune Norberg, 'Senmedeltida skulpturer från Mechelen (Malines) i Sverige', *Fornvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research*, 73, 1970, 290-300.

⁷⁸ De Borchgrave d'Altena, *Les retables brabançons conservés en Suède*.

⁷⁹ Gunnar Lindqvist, *Senmedeltida altarskåp från Bryssel och Antwerpen i Sverige: målningarna*, Stockholm: Licentiatavhandling framlagd Konsthistoriska Institut vid Stockholms Högskola vårterminen, 1958.

dissertation is most valuable because of its interesting theories about the patrons involved, and its exhaustive and highly detailed catalogue at the end.⁸⁰

Particularly noteworthy was the exhibition *Från drottning Blanka till drottning Astrid: en utställning om svensk-belgiska förbindelser*, organised in the Swedish History Museum in 1970.⁸¹ The essay on Netherlandish retables in the exhibition catalogue, written by Ghislaine Derveaux-Van Ussel, published a valuable list and map of Netherlandish carved altarpieces and retable fragments in Sweden. In 1969 and 1971 a KIK-IRPA research team (including Derveaux-Van Ussel) undertook an expedition to study and photograph the Netherlandish retables in Sweden: these photographs continue to be an important resource of study.⁸² Results of the fieldtrip were bundled in the publication *Le retable malinois de l'église d'Ödeby* in 1973.⁸³ In 1993, Derveaux-Van Ussel published another essay on Netherlandish carved retables in Sweden in the exhibition catalogue of *Antwerp Altarpieces*.⁸⁴

Between 1964 and 1980, five volumes on medieval wooden sculpture in Sweden were published, an initiative of the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm (now Swedish History Museum). Aron Andersson, Bengt Thordeman and Monica Rydbeck were the writers of these volumes, the first of which focused on the attitudes towards medieval wooden sculpture over time, the second on Romanesque and Gothic sculpture, and the third on late medieval sculpture.⁸⁵ This third volume, moreover, devoted a chapter to Netherlandish carved altarpieces in Sweden and highlighted the most prominent pieces. The fourth volume was a catalogue of the museum collection, while the fifth was filled with illustrations of the objects preserved in the museum collection.⁸⁶ In 1980, the conference *Safe Guarding of Medieval Altarpieces and Wood Carvings in Churches and Museums*, organised by the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, contributed to a better understanding of the poor conditions in Swedish churches where most

⁸⁰ Some of his findings were later published in Gunnar Lindqvist, 'Linköpings Stift Och Kunstutvecklingen i Europa 1490 - 1530', in *Kyrka i Bruk*, ed. Anne Olsson and Gunnel Mörkfors, Linköping: Östergötlands länsmuseum, 1996, 119–130.

⁸¹ Ghislaine Derveaux-van Ussel, 'De Brabantska Altarskäpen i Sverige', in *Från Drottning Blanka till Drottning Astrid: En Utställning Om Svensk-Belgiska Förbindelser*, ed. Aron Andersson, Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1970, 21–30.

⁸² Ghislaine Derveaux-Van Ussel, *Le retable malinois de l'église d'Ödeby*, Artes Belgicae, Brussels: Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, 1973, 8.

⁸³ Derveaux-Van Ussel, *Le retable malinois de l'église d'Ödeby*.

⁸⁴ Ghislaine Derveaux-Van Ussel, 'De Antwerpse retabels in Zweden', in *Antwerpse retabels: 15de-16de eeuw*, ed. Hans Nieuwdorp, 2 vols., Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst, 1993, 89–93.

⁸⁵ Bengt Thordeman and Aron Andersson, *Attitudes to the Heritage, Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden 1*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964; Aron Andersson, *Romanesque and Gothic Sculpture, Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden 2*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966; Aron Andersson, *Late Medieval Sculpture, Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden 3*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1980.

⁸⁶ Aron Andersson and Monica Rydbeck, *The Museum Collection Plates, Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden 5*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964; Aron Andersson and Monica Rydbeck, *The Museum Collection Catalogue, Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden 4*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975.

altarpieces were being preserved, and raised awareness for the urgent need for a general conservation policy.⁸⁷

The understanding that scholars largely ignored the presence of the polychrome layers on the artworks grew from the conference in 1980 on.⁸⁸ As Kristin Kausland (2020) indicated, the inclusion of research on the polychrome layer mainly started when Peter Tångeberg published his *Holzskulptur und Altarschrein: Studien zu Form, Material und Technik – mittelalterliche Plastik in Schweden* in 1989.⁸⁹ This publication demonstrated the usefulness of studying the polychrome layer in addressing questions of dating or localization. Tångeberg's other publications are vital for understanding the sculpture scene at the time and the context in which Netherlandish carved altarpieces were ordered.⁹⁰

The writings of Catheline Périer-D'Ieteren were also instrumental, mostly in understanding the painted components of Netherlandish carved altarpieces in Sweden.⁹¹ Her critical eye for stylistic analysis, strongly supported by technical evidence, resulted in numerous attributions or reattributions of the painted wings to several artists, especially Colijn de Coter and his workshop. The publication *Les volets peints des retables bruxellois conservés en Suède et le rayonnement de Colyn de Coter* in particular has played a key role in the field. Both her essays 'Rapport entre sculptures, polychromie et volets peint dans les retables bruxellois conservés en Suède' (2002) and 'Les retables brabançons exportés en Suède' (2007) highlighted the most relevant findings on the subject to date, and proposed avenues for further

⁸⁷ Aron Andersson and Peter Tångeberg, eds. *Safe Guarding of Medieval Altarpieces and Wood Carvings in Churches and Museums: A Conference in Stockholm, May 28-30, 1980*, Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1981.

⁸⁸ Andersson and Tångeberg, *Safe Guarding of Medieval Altarpieces and Wood Carvings in Churches and Museums*, 1981.

⁸⁹ Tångeberg previously wrote on the fact that the polychrome layers cannot be ignored in 'Polychrome Sculpture in Sweden'; Tångeberg, *Holzskulptur und Altarschrein*; Kausland, 'Setting the Stage, Framing the Picture', 1-21.

⁹⁰ On this matter, see especially Peter Tångeberg, 'Künstlerische Verbindungen Schwedens Im Mittelalter. Eine Übersicht', in *Niederländische Kunstexporte Nach Nord- Und Ostmitteleuropa Vom 14. Bis 16. Jahrhundert: Forschungen Zu Ihren Anfängen, Zur Rolle Höfischer Auftraggeber, Der Künstler Und Ihrer Werkstattbetriebe*, ed. Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, *Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia*, Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014, 61–85. Recently, Peter Tångeberg and Justin Kroesen explored the tabernacle shrine as a European phenomenon in medieval art (more than one-third of the total European stock is preserved in Sweden): Justin Kroesen and Peter Tångeberg, *Helgonskåp: Medieval Tabernacle Shrines in Sweden and Europe*, Michael Imhof Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2021.

⁹¹ Périer-D'Ieteren, *Les volets peints des retables bruxellois conservés en Suède*; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Un Dessin Inédit Du Maître de 1518', 47–52; Périer-D'Ieteren, *Colyn de Coter et la technique picturale des peintres flamands du XVe siècle*; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les retables brabançons aux XVe et XVIe siècles', 23–38; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Le marché d'exportation', 629–645; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les volets peints des retables anversois', 60–89; Périer-D'Ieteren and Gesché-Koning, *Brusselse gids*; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Rapport Entre Tapisseries et Retables Bruxellois', 113–29; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Rapport entre sculptures, polychromie et volets peint', 311–343; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les retables brabançons exportés en Suède (XVe-XVIe s.)', 141–159.

research.⁹² Likewise, Cecilia Engellau-Gullander contributed to this field by analysing painted wings attributed to Jan II van Conixloo.⁹³ In 1998 Eva Höglund also made a significant contribution with her catalogue *Nederländsk prakt i Mälardalskapens kyrkor*, which is especially useful thanks to the iconographic schemes provided for each altarpiece, both in the open and closed state.⁹⁴ Höglund later published further in-depth studies of the Antwerp retable of Jonsberg, and the Antwerp exemplar in Ljusdal (and its later domestic counterpart in Oviken).⁹⁵

More recently, Pia Bengtsson Melin, Herman Bengtsson, Carina Jacobsson, and Hannah De Moor devoted publications to the same topic.⁹⁶ The latter is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in medieval Sweden – with a focus on the provenance, patronage, transport methods and the legacy and continued impact of the pieces – at KU Leuven under the supervision of Jan Van der Stock (Illuminare – KU Leuven) and Carina Jacobsson (Uppsala University). Jessica Fröberg from Stockholm University is also working on Netherlandish carved altarpieces in Sweden, but her dissertation will focus on the narrativity of the artworks in relation to the sites they were produced for.⁹⁷ By restoring some of the Netherlandish altarpieces in Sweden conservator Maria Ihrén (*Pictor målerikonservering*) gained insight into the construction of these artworks. A great deal of further information on these pieces can be found in the *Medeltidens bildvärld* database, which focuses on medieval fonts, altarpieces, sculptures and murals in Swedish parish churches.⁹⁸ The latest bibliographies and pictures of the

⁹² Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Rapport entre sculptures, polychromie et volets peint', 311–343; Périer-D'Ieteren, 'Les retables brabançons exportés en Suède (XVe-XVIe s.)', 141–159.

⁹³ Cecilia Engellau-Gullander, 'Jan II van Conixloo. A Brussels Master of the First Half of the 16th Century', Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1992; Other contributions include: Cecilia Engellau-Gullander, 'Det Flamländska Altarskåpet i Jäders Kyrka: Ett Krigsbyte Eller Ej?', *Fornvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research*, 82, 1987, 93–109; Cecilia Engellau-Gullander, 'Le retable flamand de Skepptuna (Suède): l'attribution des peintures', *Les Annales d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie*, 11, 1989, 69–87.

⁹⁴ Eva Höglund, *Nederländsk Prakt i Mälardalskapens Kyrkor*, Stockholm: Carlsson, 1998.

⁹⁵ Eva Höglund, *Altarskåpet Från Jonsberg/The Altarpiece from Jonsberg*, Klenoder/Treasures 2, Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1995; Höglund, *Nederländsk Prakt*; Eva Höglund, Lennart Karlsson, and Maj Nodermann, *Ljusdal/Oviken: ett flandriskt altarskåp och dess svenska efterbild*, Klenoder/Treasures 3, Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1999.

⁹⁶ Carina Jacobsson, 'Den Afrikanske Kungen, Apan Och Sköldpadden. Flandrisk Altarskåp Som Spegel Av Världen', in *Förmodern Globalitet: Essäer Om Rörelse, Möten Och Fjärran Ting under 10 000 År*, ed. Anders Andrén, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011, 205–228; Pia Bengtsson Melin and Herman Bengtsson, 'Altarskåpet Från Skånåla', in *Uppsala Domkyrka, Sveriges Kyrkor 234*, Uppsala: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitetsakademien och Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2014; Bengtsson Melin, *Medeltiden on display*; Pia Bengtsson Melin, 'Västra Ed - kyrkan som sprängdes - Konst och förnyelse i Småland under det tidiga 1500-talet', *Fornvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research*, 112, 2017, 88–100; Hannah De Moor, 'Les retables brabançons en Suède: dispersion, adaptation et réception', *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art*, 1, 2019, 165–74; Hannah De Moor, 'Moving Altarpieces: Tracing the Provenance of Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces in Sweden', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 88:4, 2019: 185–204.

⁹⁷ <https://www.su.se/english/profiles/jefr9503-1.526527>

⁹⁸ www.medeltidbild.historiska.se

artworks can be found in the *BALAT-KIKIRPA* database, the *Medeltidbild* database, and in the RKD database *Digital Corpus of Flemish Retables*.⁹⁹

Case studies concerning the reception of Netherlandish carved altarpieces during and after the Swedish Reformation, as well as case studies regarding their restorations and relocations can be found in the publications by Inga Lena Ångström, including *Altartavlor i Sverige under renässans och barok*.¹⁰⁰ These publications have set the standard for the study of retables in Sweden after c. 1525-1530, when Netherlandish altarpieces had passed the height of their popularity.

Conclusion

At the end of the twentieth century, research on Netherlandish carved altarpieces saw a new wave of interest within the field of medieval art history, mainly thanks to the exhibition of Antwerp altarpieces in 1993 and the publication *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces* by Lynn Frances Jacobs in 1998. Consequently, there was a change in focus from a purely attributional methodology to an approach combining a social, cultural, economic-and historical point of view. In the last few decades, the added value of technical research for the field has become clear, and the importance of making this data available online through open access will only increase in the future. Even though the Netherlandish carved altarpiece is currently amongst the best studied topics in medieval art history, much remains to be done. Concerning the examples in Sweden, for instance, there is still much uncertainty about whether these artworks are currently stored in their original location or not. Moreover, the research on the commissioners is still understudied. Another aspect that is currently not fully understood is the mechanisms underpinning the transport of Netherlandish altarpieces to the Swedish hinterland. Recent research barely shed light on the early reception of these artworks, that is to say their evolution/impact after the production and installation phase. For example, there have been no controlled studies on the attitudes of the laity, the reformers, the Royal family or the antiquarians towards the altarpieces. It has been the aim of this paper to provide a clear overview of the available material and relevant literature that will prove useful for subsequent researchers in pursuing the above-mentioned questions in future research.

⁹⁹ www.balat.kikirpa.be and www.rkd.nl

¹⁰⁰ Inga Lena Ångström-Grandien, *Altartavlor i Sverige under renässans och barock: studier i deras ikonografi och stil 1527-1686*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis / Stockholm Studies in History of Art 36, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992; Inga Lena Ångström-Grandien, 'In The Name of God. Religious Works of Art Taken as War Booty by Swedish Troops in the Thirty Years' War', in *Po obu stronach Bałtyku: wzajemne relacje między Skandynawią a Europą Środkową = On the opposite sides of the Baltic Sea: relations between Scandinavian and Central European countries*, ed. Jan Harasimowicz, Piotr Oszczanowski, and Marcin Wislocki, Wrocław: Via Nova, 2006, 477-491; Inga Lena Ångström-Grandien, 'Swedish Church Art from the Introduction of the Reformation in 1527 until the Synod in Uppsala 1593', *Baltic Journal of Art History*, 9, 2015, 75-113.

Hannah De Moor Netherlandish carved altarpieces: a historiographic overview
with a focus on Sweden

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