

[The Virgin and Chancellor Rolin](#) by [Jan Van Eyck](#)

Original Lithographic Bookplate - Main Subject: Religion & Belief



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**Dimensions (As Shown)**  
8W x 8.5H Inches  
20.32W x 21.59H cm

**Medium**  
Original Lithographic Bookplate

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**About Jan Van Eyck**

Jan van Eyck (1385 - 1441) was a 15th century Flemish painter and one of the first to popularize oil paint. Jan belonged to the Van Eyck family of painters and was a younger brother of Hubert van Eyck.

The date of his birth is not more accurately known than that of his elder brother, but he was born much later than Hubert van Eyck, who took charge of him and made him his "disciple". Under this tuition Jan learnt to draw and paint, and mastered the properties of colours from Pliny. Later on, Hubert admitted him into partnership, and both were made court painters to Philip of Charolais.

After the breaking up of the prince's household in 1421, Jan became his own master, left the workshop of Hubert, and took an engagement as painter to John of Bavaria, at that time resident at The Hague as Count of Holland. From the Hague he returned in 1424 to take service with Philip, now duke of Burgundy, at a salary of 100 livres per annum, and from that time till his death Jan van Eyck remained the faithful servant of his prince, who never treated him otherwise than graciously.

He was frequently employed in missions of trust; and following the fortunes of a chief who was always in the saddle, he appears for a time to have been in ceaseless motion, receiving extra pay for secret services at Leiden, drawing his salary at Bruges, yet settled in a fixed abode at Lille.

In 1428 he joined the embassy sent by Philip the Good to Lisbon to beg the hand of Isabella of Portugal. His portrait of the bride fixed the duke's choice. After his return he settled finally at Bruges, where he married, and his wife bore him a daughter, known in after years as a nun in the convent of Maeseyck. At the christening of this child the duke was sponsor, and this was but one of many distinctions by which Philip the Good rewarded his painter's merits.

Numerous altarpieces and portraits now give proof of Van Eyck's extensive practice. As finished works of art and models of conscientious labour they are all worthy of the name they bear, though not of equal excellence, none being better than those which were completed about 1432.

Of an earlier period, a Consecration of Thomas a Becket has been preserved, and may now be seen at Chatsworth, bearing the date of 1421; no doubt this picture would give a fair representation of Van Eyck's talents at the moment when he started as an independent master, but that time and accidents of omission and commission have altered its state to such an extent that no conclusive opinion can be formed respecting it.

The panels of the Worship of the Lamb were completed nine years later. They show that Jan van Eyck was quite able to work in the spirit of his brother. He had not only the lines of Hubert's compositions to guide him, he had also those parts to look at and to study which Hubert had finished.

He continued the work with almost as much vigour as his master. His own experience had been increased by travel, and he had seen the finest varieties of landscape in Portugal and the Spanish provinces. This enabled him to transfer to his pictures the charming scenery of lands more sunny than those of Flanders, and this he did with accuracy and not without poetic feeling.

We may ascribe much of the success which attended his efforts to complete the altarpiece of Ghent to the cleverness with which he reproduced the varied aspect of changing scenery, reminiscent here of the orange groves of Cintra, there of the bluffs and crags of his native valley. In all these backgrounds, though we miss the scientific rules of perspective with which the Van Eycks were not familiar, we find such delicate perceptions of gradations in tone, such atmosphere, yet such minuteness and perfection of finish, that our admiration never flags. Nor is the color less brilliant or the touch less firm than in Hubert's panels. Jan only differs from his brother in being less masculine and less sternly religious.

He excels in two splendid likenesses of Jodocus Vijdts and his wife Catherine Burluuts. The same vigorous style and coloured key of harmony characterizes the small Virgin and Child of 1432 at Ince, and the "Madonna", probably of the same date, at the Louvre, executed for Rollin, chancellor of Burgundy. Contemporary with these, the male portraits in the National Gallery, and the "Man with the Pinks", in the Berlin Museum (1432-1434), show no relaxation of power; but later creations display no further progress, unless we accept as progress a more searching delicacy of finish, counterbalanced by an excessive softness of rounding in flesh contours.

An unflinching minuteness of hand and great tenderness of treatment may be found, combined with angularity of drapery and some awkwardness of attitude in the full length portrait couple (John Arnolfini and his wife) at the National Gallery (1434), in which a rare insight into the detail of animal nature is revealed in a study of a terrier dog. A "Madonna with Saints", at Dresden, equally soft and minute, charms us by the mastery with which an architectural background is put in.

The bold and energetic striving of earlier days, the strong bright tone, are not equalled by the soft blending and tender tints of the later ones. Sometimes a crude ruddiness in flesh strikes us as a growing defect, an instance of which is the picture in the museum of Bruges, in which Canon van der Paelen is represented kneeling before the Virgin under the protection of St George (1434).

From first to last Van Eyck retains his ability in portraiture. Fine specimens are the two male likenesses in the gallery of Vienna (1436), and a female, the master's wife, in the gallery of Bruges (1439).

He died in Bruges and was buried there on July 9, 1441. Like many great artists he formed but few pupils. Hubert's disciple, Jodocus of Ghent, hardly does honour to his master's teaching, and only acquires importance after he has thrown off some of the peculiarities of Flemish teaching. Petrus Christus, who was taught by Jan, remains immeasurably behind him in everything that relates to art. But if the personal influence of the Van Eycks was small, that of their works was immense, and it is not too much to say that their example, taken in conjunction with that of Rogier van der Weyden, determined the current and practice of painting throughout the whole of Europe north of the Alps for nearly a century.

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