

JULIEN CHAPUIS

Stefan Lochner. Image Making in Fifteenth Century Cologne

Turnhout, Brepols 2004. 331 pp., incl. documents relating to the artist (ed. Truus van Bueren) and dendrochronological analyses of relevant works (by Peter Klein). 224 b. & w. ill. and 69 col. pls. ISBN 2-503-50567-8

The eagerly awaited volume has finally been produced, eight years after it was first announced by his publishers. It was generally assumed that the author delayed publication repeatedly because, in the light of recent scholarship, he needed time to reconsider the text of his expanded dissertation *Underdrawing in Paintings of the Stefan Lochner Group*. It is the more disappointing that the handsome, generously illustrated volume that has finally been published shows no evidence of a new investigation as »art historical disputes are kept to a minimum and confined to footnotes« (p. 39). Chapuis contents himself with a largely visual approach, an enthusiastic celebration of the paintings ascribed to Stefan Lochner. Tellingly, the introductory survey 'Perception of the Artist and his Work' is padded with material of dubious relevance and does not really look beyond the 1950s.

Curiously, the book is presented as the initial volume of a Metropolitan Museum series on »well-known artists« whose paintings »are deemed autograph due to inscriptions, to reliable documentary evidence, or to self-portraiture within the work or works«. It is hard to see how a monograph on Stefan Lochner could fit these criteria. After all, »none of the works ascribed to Lochner is signed or documented as being by him« (p. 28) or contains self-portraiture. The name of the painter is linked to an œuvre only by a dubious assessment in the 19th century of Dürer's preferences among those Cologne works that had then survived the vagaries of time. Yet the »beautiful« *Dombild* said to have attracted Dürer's attention in 1520 had been painted eight decades before his visit, was antiquated in style and was already

known to him. Can such idiosyncratic attribution be equated with »reliable documentary evidence«?

Chapuis' optimistic assessment of available documents promises, however, that »circumstantial evidence in support of the traditional identification is considerable« (p. 28). To this purpose he claims exceptional wealth and social status for the artist on the grounds that Lochner purchased two houses (albeit heavily mortgaged) and was twice elected to represent his guild on the city council. Yet, surviving property and wealth tax records demonstrate that Lochner's achievements were by no means exceptional among the painters of Cologne. Admittedly, few prospered like Hermann Wynrich van Wesel who recorded interest in some twenty properties and represented his profession four times. Equally suspect is the author's notion of Lochner's unrivalled artistic status. In evidence he cites the council commission of 1442 to paint the city coat of arms on shields for a wine barrel and for the headgear of ten oxen, as well as a trumpet banner and four staves, all for use during festivities arranged to entertain emperor Friedrich III in Cologne. We are told that these modest pieces, Lochner's only recorded work, were »the most important decorations« (p. 26) commissioned for the event. Yet it was customary to display large paintings in the form of triumphal arches, simulated tapestries or fictive architecture to enhance the magnificent processions, banquets and tournaments arranged for princely visitors. The councillors of Cologne would have entrusted the most complex among these decorations to the most eminent painter of the city; in 1442 that clearly was not Lochner.

The flaw in the author's circumstantial evidence also undermines his assertion that the council commission of 1442 establishes Lochner as the painter of the great altarpiece in the council chapel (now in the Cathedral). Nor is it sufficient to simply brush aside the many arguments against this attribution (discussed, for instance, in *Kunstchronik* Nov. 1994, pp. 696-711). A more scholarly approach could not ignore the fact that, when Dürer offered a drink to the journeyman of the painter he named Stefan, Stefan Lochner had been buried for some seventy years. Nor that Dürer paid for the unknown altarpiece to be opened at a time when the *Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne* (or *Dombild*) would have been displayed open in the council chapel by the councillors who were entertaining the newly crowned emperor Charles V and their archbishop in their city.

More persuasive is the author's descriptive approach to some of the paintings ascribed to Stefan Lochner. Chapuis encourages the reader to look more closely at the painted forms and his enthusiasm is infectious. We linger to admire the sweet competence of music-making angels in the *Last Judgement* of around 1435-40 and the horrific beauty of a cruel devil, the realism of the contorted nude bodies of the condemned and the translucence of the saved souls; we celebrate the judicious juxtaposition of glowing colours and are impressed by the vigour and originality of the underdrawing style. Here, the author creates a tempting vision of an isolated creative genius working in late medieval Cologne: »In the minds of local artists and patrons, Lochner's was the only conceivable formulation of the subject« (p. 88).

Sadly, this seductive notion is hardly plausible and the pursuit of it leads to curious inconsistencies and omissions. This is the more lamentable as the title of the book suggests a less blinkered approach. Had the author considered the local tradition in the manner the title implies, he could not, for instance,

have repeatedly dwelled on the musician angels to demonstrate the painter's creativity, for these angels follow designs from the Frankfurt *Madonna of Humility* of around 1420 by the Master of St Lawrence. Nor should he vouch for the originality of the cross-hatched method of drawing, for it can already be found in pattern sheets in Brunswick of around 1395. Nor should he extol the novelty of the punchwork, for it reflects the work of Conrad von Soest and his followers in Cologne. Even the subtle reflection of windows in jewels and armour turn out not to be location specific but just excellent workshop practice. In short, we are hardly looking at images »wrought by an individual endowed with a superior intellect, great perceptual sensitivity, and a sublime sense of beauty« (p. 231), although of the painter's exquisite craftsmanship there can be no doubt.

A perceptive look at the production methods, albeit without technical analysis of the production process or the materials, leads the author to suggest that the painter Stefan Lochner learned his art in the workshop of a goldsmith. This he substantiates by comparing Lochner's luminous colouring, the pallid flesh tones, the intricate punchwork and the use of cross-hatching with enamel techniques in French metalwork, such as the *Golden Rüssel* in Altötting and the *Reliquary of the Holy Thorn* in London. In itself this is certainly an attractive and plausible suggestion and, despite the author's denial (p. 226), enamel decoration can still be found in Cologne works such as the *St. Catherine* of c. 1380 in the Schnütgen-Museum. It is certainly tenable that the documented Stefan Lochner from the Constance region could have been apprenticed to a Cologne goldsmith. But even a journeyman goldsmith surely needed further training to become a master painter. It should therefore not have been overlooked that the cited techniques feature not only in metalwork but also prominently in the Westphalian/Cologne

tradition of painting. The *Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne* from the council chapel shows all the hallmarks of that painting tradition.

However, Chapuis seeks to establish a distance between the art attributed to Stefan Lochner and paintings from earlier Cologne workshops by discussing their underdrawings without reference to their surface appearance. An examination of sample panels from the workshops of the masters of St Veronica and St Lawrence yielded one detailed underdrawing but otherwise only limited contour markings for the figures. It is generally accepted that such contour markings denote the use of detailed workshop models, but Chapuis courageously deduces from his scant evidence that the painters of Cologne did not apply detailed underdrawings and that the one detailed example found amongst the few investigated, the *Madonna of Humility* in Cologne by the Master of St Lawrence, must be wrongly ascribed. He concludes that Lochner therefore could not have learned his vigorous and detailed drawing method in the workshop of a Cologne painter.

But then Chapuis goes on to demonstrate that the extent of underdrawing varies considerably in paintings ascribed to Stefan Lochner and ranges from very detailed drawing to limited contour markings only. In Lochner's case, we are told that a skilled master may vary his production methods and that the »absence of a typical underdrawing alone is insufficient to strike a picture from an artist's œuvre« (p. 148). Minimal contour and foldline markings only were apparently found in the underdrawing (not illustrated) of a small painting that is considered one of Lochner's earliest works, the *Virgin in the Rose Bower* in Cologne. Peter Klein's dendrochronological examination of the supporting wood easily supports a very early production date (p. 310). Moreover, the style and content of the painting fits comfortably into the Cologne tradition of around 1435. Yet the author claims that it

must be placed at the very end of Lochner's career when long experience allowed him to create this image »purely out of colour« (p. 149). Here, a closer study of the actual painting materials and technique might have prevented such a notion.

Elsewhere the clear description of the underdrawing style and the skill in detecting small revisions and rare colour coding again demonstrate the author's perceptive talent; it is in the analysis of his findings that a lack of scholarly rigour tends to disappoint. The reader is not helped by a lack of photographic evidence in crucial cases. Nor does it seem reasonable to draw conclusions from a juxtaposition of excellent and numerous enhanced infrared reflectograms of the *Last Judgement* and the *Martyrdom* wings with a few pallid infrared photographs from part of the central panel of the *Dombild* without taking note at least of the difference in transparency of the two methods of investigation. Even the one reflectogram of *Dombild* drapery that is shown is difficult to read and should have been computer enhanced. The author frequently fails to differentiate between underdrawing and surface lines, ignores evidence available from the painted surface, and comes to some dubious conclusions about the division of hands in the workshop. This allows him, for instance, to attribute the Annunciation figures of the *Dombild* to an unknown draughtsman (p. 130)! Equally surprising is his attempt to allocate the Raleigh *St Jerome* to the Master of the Heisterbach Altarpiece.

In the last part of the book some useful technical observations are interspersed with contradictory essays seeking to differentiate between 'influence', 'borrowing' and 'emulation'. Having denied any significant »influences« on the art of Stefan Lochner, the author goes on to assert that Lochner »borrowed« from works by Jan van Eyck by making »detailed drawings« (p. 199) of certain male heads from the *Ghent Altarpiece*. No drawings have survived to confirm this

contention and the photographic evidence presented is not entirely compelling. Still, it has long been noted that the figures in the wings of the *Altarpiece of the Patron Saints* and its novel angular drapery patterns refer to the Ghent Altarpiece, whilst content and technique follow Cologne precedent. Although the author appears more familiar with Netherlandish art, he does acknowledge a little local „borrowing“ from the Master of St Veronica and from Conrad von Soest in a couple of sentences. He is more forthcoming on the painter's imitators and followers.

In view of the subtitle of the book, it is difficult to understand the author's failure to discuss the technical, stylistic and iconographic hallmarks of painting in Cologne in the early 15th century. Moreover, he consistently cites Netherlandish material when an ample number of relevant panels are available in Cologne and elsewhere, as well as docu-

ments relating to local guilds, donors and markets, both published and unpublished. Indeed, transcriptions and translations of two sets of Cologne guild regulations were readily available; they are also appended to this volume but hardly explored in the text. This failure to recognise and discuss the context in which the artist produced his works further undermines this book. In a monograph, the art historian expects to find a comprehensive and scholarly debate, with the conclusions backed by corroborative evidence.

However, the popular approach and entertaining chapter titles such as ‚Beyond the Christmas Card‘ may indicate that Chapuis intended the volume for the general reader, who would certainly enjoy the enthusiastic descriptions of the painter's art and ability. Whether such a reader could follow the complex and often contradictory later chapters remains a mute point.

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The Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp

Corpus of Fifteenth-Century Painting in the Southern Netherlands and the Principality of Liège, 20. Brüssel, Studiecentrum voor de Vijftiende-Eeuwse Schilderkunst in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik 2003. Vertrieb: Turnhout, Brepols. 450 S., 325 Abb., 95 €. ISBN 2-87033-011-1

Das am Original gewonnene stilkritische Urteil ist eine Grundlage kunsthistorischer Argumentation. Dieses aufwendig erworbene Wissen der Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen, hat sich das Centre de Recherche ‚Primitifs Flamands‘ in Brüssel mit dem Corpusprojekt zur niederländischen Malerei des 15. Jh.s verschrieben und nun den 20. Band über den Bestand des Museums Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerpen herausgebracht (bisher erschienen: Beaune/Hôtel-Dieu; Brügge/Groeningemuseum I; Dijon/Musée des Beaux-Arts; Granada/Capilla Real; Institut de France; Lissa-

bon/Museen; Löwen/St. Peter; London/National Gallery I-III; Melbourne/National Gallery New England Museums; Palencia und Cervera de Pisuerga; Paris/Louvre I-III; Polnische Museen; St. Petersburg/Ermitage; Turin/Galleria Sabauda; Urbino/Palazzo Ducale).

Es ist über 50 Jahre her, daß die Gründer im ersten Band die Intention, die sie mit dem Langzeitprojekt verbanden, formulierten: »de réunir et de mettre à la disposition des chercheurs une documentation précise et critique, objectivement présentée« (Antwerpen 1952). Am Beginn stand das Anliegen, nationales