



# Three crucifixes in the Amerbach Cabinet and the incomplete small-scale sculptures around the year 1500\*

Agnieszka Dziki

Uniwersytet Warszawski

The late 16th-century inventory of the collection of Basilius Amerbach – a lawyer and professor from Basel – lists:

six locked cabinets designed for goldsmiths' works, all but one the same size. [...] In another cabinet there are six drawers. At the top there are two initiated [unfinished] crucifixes, one initiated child, all together with a few products made of wood. In the first drawer two finished crucifixes[:] Adam and Eve. One Lucretia and thirteen fairly small sculptures<sup>1</sup>.

Those two unfinished crucifixes and one of the finished are now stored in the collection of Historisches Museum in Basel, together with a large part of the original Amerbach collection [Fig. 1]. This selection of medieval and early modern artworks from local, southern German and Italian workshops contained many examples of artisans' virtuosity: small-scale sculptures, models, medals, coins, reliefs etc. The above-mentioned objects are not recorded in the so-called "A" Inventory of 1578, they appear for the first time in the will drafted four years later<sup>2</sup>; the source from which they were obtained is unknown. The approximate dimensions of the sculptures (heights: 18.1, 18.2, 20 cm) and their formal similarity indicate that they originate from one workshop, most likely from the hand of the same craftsman.

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\* An early version of this paper was presented at the Annual Medieval Postgraduate Colloquium Working Materials and Materials at Work organised by Charlotte Wytema, Harry Prance and Nicholas Flory at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London in February 2020. I am grateful to Prof. Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, Prof. Antoni Ziemia and to the anonymous reviewers of the "Quart" journal for their helpful comments.

<sup>1</sup> See E. Landolt, *Das Amerbach-Kabinett. Beiträge zu Basilius Amerbach*, Basel 1991, p. 146: "Item sind in gedachtem gemach sechs goldschmid beschlossen laden [Schubladenmöbel] (onet eine) vast einer große. [...] In der andern sind sechs schubladen. Vnd Zu oberst zwei angefengte Crucifixlin, ein angefengt kindlin, sambt anderm wenig von holzwerck. In der ersten schubladen Zwei vsgemacht Crucifixlin[.] Ein Adam vnd Eva. Ein Lucretia vnd dryZehen gar kleine bildlin".

<sup>2</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 62.

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1. Basel (?) or Upper Rhine area, three crucifixes (two unfinished), ca. 1500, limewood, heights: 18.1, 18.2 and 20 cm; Basel, Historisches Museum. Photo: P. Portner, © Historisches Museum Basel, 1870-1185; 1870-947; 1870-948



2. Basel (?) or Upper Rhine area, two unfinished crucifixes, ca. 1500, limewood, h. 18.1 and 18.2; Basel, Historisches Museum. Photo: P. Portner, © Historisches Museum Basel, 1870–947; 1870–948

Due to the different shapes and bodily positions it is impossible to combine these figures into a logical sequence of the sculpting process, in which the prototype of the final crucifix would be the figure of Christ with “sketchy” head and an unfinished body wrapped in a loincloth. In turn, the form of rough-hewn piece with softly modelled head (of a slightly different arrangement) and fairly extensive *perizoma* could possibly be reflected in the lost crucifix. Various states of finishedness indicate that the sculptor wanted to demonstrate contrasting qualities among the figures – one of them presents both barely chiselled, “cubistic” body and flamboyant, almost complete loincloth [Fig. 2]. The second unfinished piece consists of two diverse parts: right side of the torso of Christ and the leg are far more carefully worked out than the left side of the body<sup>3</sup>. It seems that this clear disparity was created in order to show the sculpting process – otherwise the craftsman would equally refine the whole figure. Furthermore, the absence of the crown of thorns<sup>4</sup> also indicates intentional incompleteness of this artwork; it could not serve a purely devotional purpose.

The whole set is carved in limewood – the structure of the preserved pair indicates carving from the same wooden block<sup>5</sup>. This feature also distinguishes both finished and unfinished crucifixes from the vast amount of connoisseur small-scale sculptures, which were mostly made of boxwood or fruitwood. This quality could be understood as a sample of sculpting work in the most common material in the workshops of southern Germany. The style of all figures indicates a local, probably Basel-based artists, active within the circle of Nikolaus Gerhaert and his Strasbourg workshop; the famous crucifixes from Baden-Baden and Nördlingen from the 1460s<sup>6</sup> are the reference for those items.

In the literature, this group is seen in many, slightly different ways – as a part of a serial production<sup>7</sup>, unfinished remains in a dissolved workshop<sup>8</sup>, models for the large-scale pieces<sup>9</sup>, incomplete cabinet sculptures<sup>10</sup>, rejects or fixed patterns for journeymen in order to speed up the process of making copies<sup>11</sup>, eventually as private devotional objects, which function has changed with their inclusion into a collection of the early modern connoisseur<sup>12</sup>. The seemingly unfinished crucifixes along with a bunch of other

<sup>3</sup> See A. von Ulmann, *Bildhauertechnik des Spätmittelalters und der Frührenaissance*, Darmstadt 1994, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> It seems extremely doubtful that this tiny element would have been carved separately. I am very grateful to the reviewer for this comment.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Söll-Tauchert, *Die grosse Kunstkammer: bürgerliche Sammler und Sammlungen in Basel*, Basel 2011, p. 243. The materiality of this set was variously described in the literature – the crucifix with a short loincloth as made of boxwood: *Spätmittelalter am Oberrhein. Alltag, Handwerk und Handel: 1350–1525* [exh. cat.] (v. 2,2), Ed. S. Lorenz [et al.], 29 September 2001 – 3 March 2002, Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Ostfildern 2001, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> See Niclaus Gerhaert: *Der Bildhauer des Späten Mittelalters* [exh. cat.], Ed. S. Roller [et al.], 27 October 2011 – 4 March 2012, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt am Main; 30 March – 8 July 2012, Musée de l’Oeuvre Notre-Dame, Strassburg-Petersberg 2011, pp. 216–219, 227–230.

<sup>7</sup> See *Spätgotik am Oberrhein. Meisterwerke der Plastik und des Kunsthandwerks 1450–1530* [exh. cat.], Ed. E. Petrasch, E. Zimmermann, J. M. Fritz, 4 July – 5 October 1970, Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe 1970, p. 129; S. Söll-Tauchert, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>8</sup> See S. Söll-Tauchert, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven – London 1985, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> See *Spätmittelalter am Oberrhein. Meisterwerke...*, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Historical Museum Basle: Guide to the Collections*, Ed. K. Sutton [et al.], Basel 1994, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> See *Bildersturm: Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille?* [exh. cat.], Ed. C. Dupeux [et al.], 2 November 2000 – 16 April 2001, Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern 2000, p. 129.

fascinating products of late medieval workshop have so far been incorporated into other classes, which were validating their existence: they were seen only as an unsuccessful experiment, workshop's model or reject etc. It was only the early modern collector who was supposed to acquire these objects from various sources and incorporate them into the *Kunstkammer*.

The scope of the impact of "incompleteness" is very wide, because it covers the liveliness of the unfinished or damaged surface, the desire to fulfil the blank space, the contrasts between the finished and the unfinished within a single object and the recipient's focus on what has been recognized as incomplete<sup>13</sup>. This article challenges the view that crucifixes from the Amerbach collection and many other incomplete objects were only an unsuccessful experiment and eventually to recognize the intentional blurring of the boundary between finished and unfinished as an artistic category around the year 1500.

In the late Middle Ages both secular *Kleinplastik* and small-scale objects of private devotion were in high demand – crucifixes had to be privileged among this group. The preserved finished example from the Amerbach collection is a piece of high-quality micro-carving with only partially painted surface<sup>14</sup>, which distinguishes it among a number of standard and relatively cheap artefacts designed for a wide audience. This allows us to conclude that this object – purchased together with unfinished figures as a joint group – was created and intended not only as a typical subject of devotion. In fact, many wealthy citizens (including Hans Heidegger in Zürich<sup>15</sup>) kept holy images at home despite the Great Iconoclasm and catastrophic *Bildersturm* of 1525, but the exact way in which the whole group was acquired by Amerbach is unclear. Due to the high quality of the "final" product, this is certainly not a reject or accidental remain in a late medieval workshop, however, the items themselves – through their materiality and incompleteness – could indicate this interpretation.

The contrast within the figures – the opposition of the barely sculpted body and detailed *perizoma* along with inverse relation in the second object – seems to emphasize attention given to particular elements rather than being instructive about the artistic method. Therefore, this is not a kind of workshop "aid" for journeymen, because in fact those things do not explain anything: the doubts of a young adept, for instance, how to attach arms or the *perizoma* to sticks cannot be satisfied. For the same reason, they were rather not models for some larger projects: a master would pass the knowledge through the practice in the workshop and the use of fixed patterns on a smaller scale. Naturally, sculptures of various purposes – for instance, items intended to be sold off the peg – remained in the workshop after the master's death; in the case of Veit Stoss "*ain geschnitzt Adam und Eva, aich ein alt weib, ain kindleins tanz* [one sculpted Adam and Eve, an old woman and children's dance]" were noted; all of them probably in smaller scale, since in the same document "*ain groß Crucifix*" is mentioned<sup>16</sup>.

Three crucifixes are apparently semi-finished products, designed as a kind of toys for laymen, which give some sort of idea of how the process of producing those kinds of items looked like – the collector had in his possession two completed and two unfinished figures. Amerbach decided to separate these pairs: he put on the cabinet or exhibited in other way the non-completed crucifixes along with the figurine of a child. In the first drawer he placed the finished ones together with the Adam and Eve group (Hans Wydyz, ca. 1505, boxwood, h. 21.8 cm, Basel, Historisches Museum), the figure of Lucretia and 13 "fairly

<sup>13</sup> See *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* [exh. cat.], Ed. K. Baum [et al.], 18 March – 4 September 2016, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2016, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Those kinds of objects appear in many depictions and portraits, i.e.: L. Cranach, *Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz as St. Jerome in his study*, 1525, Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum; A. Dürer, *Saint Jerome in his Study*, 1521, Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga.

<sup>15</sup> See *Bildersturm...*, p. 129: Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Z II 301a: "*habe ich deren etliche in meinem Haus, und in Sonderheit in den Büchern das gemalte Leiden Christi, behalten und nicht weggetan*".

<sup>16</sup> J. Rasmussen, *Zum kleinplastischen Werk des Veit Stoß*, "Pantheon" Vol. 34 (1976), p. 108.



3-4. Master H. L. [?], *St. George and the Dragon*, ca. 1530, boxwood, h. 27.8 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum.  
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small sculptures”. This collection included drawings of Hans Holbein, Urs Graf and others as well, and a unique selection of goldsmith models made of lead. It defines Amerbach not entirely as a typical collector of craftsmen’s tools in terms of Samuel Quiccheberg’s treatise<sup>17</sup>, but rather a seeker of unfinished objects, for whom the artistic process might be a matter of curiosity.

On the occasion of the “Small Wonders” exhibition in 2017 Frits Scholten spotted the contrast between the masterly carved figure of St. George (attributed to Master H. L., ca. 1530, h. 27.8 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum) [Fig. 3–4] and its totally unfinished rear with still visible bark on the small

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<sup>17</sup> See M. Meadow, B. Robertson, *The First Treatise on Museums: Samuel Quiccheberg’s Inscriptions 1565*, Los Angeles 2013, p. 68: “Instruments of workshops and laboratories: things used in both these two by the more skilled of the artisans: sculptors, turners, goldsmiths, casters, workers in wood, or instruments ultimately of all or any artisans whom this earth on which we live nourishes in our century”. It is a fragment of the entire section of this treatise devoted to the problem of composing the perfect collection. Object related to the creative process in the sculptors’ and goldsmiths’ workshops coexisted with musical, mathematical, anatomical instruments among one class, along with games, weapons etc.



5. D. Mauch, *Lucretia*, ca. 1530, boxwood, h. 12.5 cm; Basel, Historisches Museum. Photo: P. Porter, © Historisches Museum Basel, 1870–1036

boxwood blocks and has seen this trait as deliberate effect<sup>18</sup>. The *scorza vecchia* (“old bark”) makes the viewer aware of the materiality of the statue and the sculptor’s virtuosity in transforming the raw wood into detailed, lifelike image<sup>19</sup>.

The Renaissance suit of armour is the reason why Scholten linked the object with the circle of Jan Gossaert, whose trip to Rome would authorize him to adapt this Italian *non finito* practice at the court in Mechelen. This object is at the same time attributed to Master H. L., a sculptor and printmaker working in the Upper Rhine area<sup>20</sup>, however, his activity after finishing the altar in Breisach (Stephanmünster, ca. 1526) is hypothetically located in the southern Netherlands. Art of this region and its influence would explain the style and the quality of the cabinet sculpture *Adam and Eve in Paradise* (ca. 1520–1530, boxwood, h. 34.5 cm, Freiburg im Breisgau, Augustinermuseum), which is ascribed to the artist as well. Significantly, the structure of the whole group also allows an insight into the raw materiality of the wood<sup>21</sup>, however – like in the case of the statue of St. George – it is worth to consider the relief as only a part of a bigger whole<sup>22</sup>. Movable, tiny figures and reliefs could have been taken out of the larger frame or casket and be held in the palm of a hand in order to “reveal” the sculpting process through their incompleteness.

The border between finished and unfinished seems to be quite fluid: aforementioned figurine of *Lucretia*<sup>23</sup> (attributed to Daniel Mauch, ca. 1530, boxwood, h. 12.5 cm, Basel, Historisches Museum) [Fig. 5] was placed by Amerbach in one drawer together with two finished crucifixes, Adam and Eve group (Hans Wydyz, ca. 1505–1510, boxwood, limewood, h. 21.8 cm, Basel, Historisches Museum) and “thirteen fairly small sculptures”. The collector decided to put the figurine inside the cabinet along with other pieces of *Kleinplastik*, on the contrary, barely started and only initiated sculptures were put on the top of the furniture. Separation from other unfinished objects might be quite surprising, because of the quality of this statue which is quite rough all over: its surface lacks a smooth finish, the head is ragged. Among the *œuvre* of Mauch it is probably the rawest piece which offers an intriguing effect of quitting the artistic process a bit too early. Quality of this object has been variously defined in the literature as well: *Lucretia* was seen as a workshop model<sup>24</sup>, unfinished piece<sup>25</sup> and – similarly to Amerbach’s classification – as an example of *Kunstkammerstück* because of its fine detail<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> F. Scholten, *Statuettes “Taillee en bois bien fecté”*, [in:] *Small Wonders: Late-Gothic Boxwood Micro-carvings from the Low Countries* [exh. cat.], Ed. *idem* [et al.], 29 October 2016 – 22 January 2017, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 22 February – 21 May 2017, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 15 June – 17 September 2017, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Amsterdam 2017, p. 462. Vasari while comparing the style of Donatello’s and Luca della Robbia’s works praised “rough and unfinished” quality of the first one – see A. Bayer, *Renaissance Views of the Unfinished*, [in:] *Unfinished...*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> B. Decker (commentary in: *Dürers Verwandlung in der Skulptur zwischen Renaissance und Barock* [exh. cat.], Ed. H. Beck, B. Decker, 1 November 1981 – 17 January 1982, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt am Main 1981, p. 284) suggested to interpret this relief as a symbolic sign of the changed relationship between the sculptor and the object.

<sup>20</sup> This attribution – despite many doubts – is still upheld in the online catalogue of the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>21</sup> See D. Zinke, *Augustinermuseum Freiburg: Bildwerke des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, 1100–1530. Auswahlkatalog*, München 1995, p. 134. The whole structure of this relief is striking: the sculptor has used at least six pieces of boxwood in order to create the relief – see I. Alexander-Skipnes, *Translating the northern model: “Adam and Eve in Paradise” attributed to Master H. L.*, [in:] *The Sides of the North: An Anthology in Honor of Professor Yona Pinson*, Ed. T. Cholman, A. Pinkus, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, p. 153. The woodworking joints are visible, the incomplete back of the figure of Eve as well. The raw quality of the latter one was considered as a symbol of her “formed and unformed matter” – see *Dürers Verwandlung in der Skulptur...*, p. 282.

<sup>22</sup> It was suggested that the sculpture was probably kept in a casket – see H. Gombert, *Von den Schätzen des Augustinermuseums*, “Badische Heimat” 1959, No. 39, p. 158; or was a part of a larger structure – see G. von der Osten, *Über den Monogrammist H.L.*, “Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg” Vol. 3 (1966), p. 71.

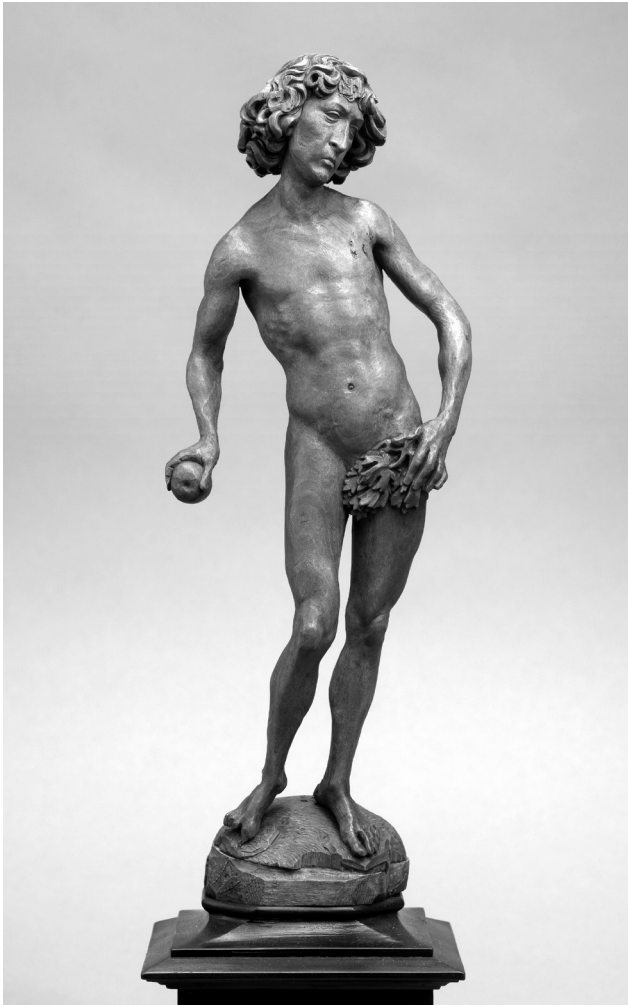
<sup>23</sup> Sculpture was attributed to the circle of C. Meit for a long time – see E. Landolt-Wegener, F. Ackermann, *Die Objekte im Historischen Museum Basel*, Basel 1991, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> See S. Wagini, *Der Ulmer Bildschnitzer Daniel Mauch (1477–1540). Leben und Werk*, Stuttgart 1995, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> See J. Rasmussen, *Eine Gruppe kleinplastischer Bildwerke aus dem Stilkreis des Conrat Meit*, “Städte Jahrbuch” Vol. 4 (1973), p. 138: “Der Basler ‘Lukrezia’ fehlt an Rumpf und Kopf die letzte Ausarbeitung”; see also E. Bange, *Die Kleinplastik der deutschen Renaissance in Holz und Stein*, Firenze 1928, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation was suggested by S. Söll-Tauchert (*Die grosse Kunstkammer...*, p. 339); see also Daniel Mauch, *Bildhauer im Zeitalter der Reformation* [exh. cat.], Ed. B. Reinhardt, E. Leistenschneider [et al.], 13 September – 29 November 2009, Ulmer Museum, Ulm 2009, p. 308.





6. T. Riemenschneider, *Adam*, 1495–1505, pearwood, h. 36 cm; Vienna, Kunsthistorischesmuseum, KHM-Museumverband

An uncertain quality defines also the statue of *Adam* by Tilman Riemenschneider (1495–1505<sup>27</sup>, pearwood, h. 36 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorischesmuseum) [Fig. 6]. It is characterised by an elegant shape of the figure and a rather unsteady pose, which forces the viewer to move around it; the dimensions, material and fragility of the structure indicate that the object was intended to be kept in a *Kunstkammer*. A closer look is prompted by “nuanced” surface<sup>28</sup>.

The manner of carving is different than the typical method of shaping various textures in the case of monochromatic sculpture, but it is – arguably<sup>29</sup> – intentionally incomplete. It seems that the chest, hands and feet are unfinished, the quality of the whole figure is slightly rough, far from the smooth surfaces of Riemenschneider’s achievements in limewood and alabaster. The striking figure of *Adam*, conceived as a fully autonomous piece of *Kleinplastik*, shows traces of its creator’s chisel, and the structural flaw exposed on the chest during the process of carving reveals the true nature of the material. One could theorise that the artist left the work unfinished after finding the flaw, however, this was probably not the case, as the figure was preserved and eventually came into the collection of Ambras Castle in the 19th century. The sculptor consciously stopped the process of carving at the right time, because he had already achieved the goal, which was to gain the beholder’s interest in a subtle, yet raw product. The method of forming is somewhat reminiscent of wax models for bronze castings<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> This artwork was seen as an early, unfinished work of Riemenschneider in order to prepare large-scale stone figures of Adam and Eve for the Marienkapelle in Würzburg (1491–1493). However, Alfred Schädler placed the figure in the years 1495–1500 – see *Tilman Riemenschneider. Frühe Werke* [exh. cat.], Ed. B. Buczynski, 5 September – 1 November 1981, Mainfränkisches Museum, Würzburg 1981, p. 233. S. Gross (*Hans Wydyz. Sein Oeuvre und die oberrheinische Bildschnitzerkunst*, Hildesheim 1997, p. 180) dated it to ca. 1510 after A. Scheiding and her dissertation *Studien zu den deutschen Statuetten 1470–1500* (LMU Munich), which was not published. T. Husband’s dating for the years 1495 to 1505 is upheld – see *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of Late Middle Ages* [exh. cat.], Ed. J. Chapius [et al.], 3 October 1999 – 9 January 2000, National Gallery of Art, Washington 1999; 7 February – 14 May 2000, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New Haven 1999, p. 242.

<sup>28</sup> K. Schlegel, S. Haag, *Die Kunstkammer Wien*, Wien 2013, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Schädler described *Adam* as an unfinished piece – see *Tilman Riemenschneider. Frühe Werke...*, s. 233. On the contrary, T. Husband has seen this object as “for all of Riemenschneider’s intents and purposes, finished” because of its fine structure and he concluded that “any additional smoothing of the surface would have erased many of these delicate details” (*Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor...*, p. 244).

<sup>30</sup> See Conrat Meit. *Bildhauer der Renaissance* [exh. cat.], Ed. R. Eikelmann, J. L. Burk, 1 December 2006 – 18 March 2007, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, München 2006, p. 168; see also *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor...*, p. 245: “Without the attributes this figure could be readily mistaken for a Northern interpretation of a Renaissance bronze – or a model for one, as the surface is remarkably similar to that of a wax worked up with a tooling knife – and thus may be evidence of Riemenschneider in a rare expression of Renaissance interest”.

Hans Leinberger was a well-known sculptor of those kind of models, since he was hired by Maximilian I to work on the bronze figures that flank the imperial tomb in Innsbruck. In June 1514 the plan was to cast free-standing life-size figures – the sculptor was responsible for preparing a model for the statue of Albrecht IV Habsburg<sup>31</sup>, moreover, he was supposed to execute the final version<sup>32</sup>. Eventually, he did not – the figure was cast in Tirol instead of Landshut, most likely due to technical difficulties of handling this relatively new material<sup>33</sup>; it resulted in the transfer of metal and the whole order to external workshops in 1518 (finally Stephan Godl made this statue)<sup>34</sup>. However, two other bronze figures are attributed to Leinberger and both of them show his experimental approach to the unrecognized physical properties of bronze; those artistic attempts – *St. John* (ca. 1515, h. 15.6 cm, Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe) and *Madonna* (ca. 1515, h. 45.5 cm, Berlin, Bode-Museum) [Fig. 7] – were made shortly after the contract for the imperial monument. Both statuettes are characterised by unfinished, rough surface, without traces of chasing or polishing; Erich Bange saw the first one as a “technical oddity, nothing more”, the second one as a “slightly more advanced stage of the experiment”<sup>35</sup>.

Holes in the structure of the statue of the *Madonna* – which are the effect of way too thin wall metal cast – were suggested to be the reason for leaving the sculpture in “unfinished” state<sup>36</sup>. The expression of this piece, its outstanding appearance, the spaciousness of the robes – which offers diverse viewpoints – and the great decorativeness of its texture makes this seemingly unsuccessful / unfinished try a truly splendid artwork. Leinberger’s role in larger casting projects was clearly limited to the preparation of the model, but in the end his artistic at-



7. *Madonna*, attributed to H. Leinberger, ca. 1515, bronze, h. 45.5 cm; Berlin, Bode-Museum. Photo: A. Voigt, © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 381

<sup>31</sup> See M. Weiniger, *Altdorfer und Leinberger*, [in:] *Fantastische Welten. Albrecht Altdorfer und das Expressive in der Kunst um 1500* [exh. cat.], Ed. S. Roller, D. Bohde [et al.], 5 November 2014 – 8 February 2015, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, 17 March 2015 – 14 VI 2015, Kunsthistorischesmuseum, Wien, München 2014, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> See E. F. Bange, *Die deutschen Bronzestatuetten des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1949, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> See *Fantastische Welten...*, p. 226.

<sup>34</sup> See E. Scheicher, *Das Grabmal Kaiser Maximilians I. in der Innsbrucker Hofkirche*, [in:] *Österreichische Kunsttopographie, XLVII: Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Innsbruck. Die Hofbauten*, Ed. J. Felmayer [et al.], Wien 1986, p. 355–426.

<sup>35</sup> E. F. Bange, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Renaissance and Reformation: German Art in the age of Dürer and Cranach* [exh. cat.], Ed. J. Chipps Smith [et al.], 20 November 2016 – 26 March 2017, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 2016, p. 74.

tempts are preserved and were exposed. The intimate depiction of *Madonna* and its dimensions suggest that the sculpture could be made for private devotion<sup>37</sup>. However, its form, materiality and the quality of incompleteness allow to recognize this object as a praised artwork as well<sup>38</sup>.

Horst Bredekamp understands this piece as a model which never played its role, therefore it was given a status of an autonomous and “uncertain” work of art<sup>39</sup>. This category also applies to the second preserved bronze sculpture of Leinberger – *St. John* – whose extremely raw shape with barbs, appendages, “bubblelike” surface and visible sprue hole provokes the questions of the meaning of this work<sup>40</sup> and the context of its function through the centuries.

Small-scale sculptures seem to belong to a larger phenomenon of intentional incompleteness; non-completed and incomplete artworks represent a wide variety of genres, materials and techniques. Taking advantage of technical shortcomings and turning them into an aesthetic value is a distinguishing feature of, for instance, the Loštice pottery [Fig. 8].

This earthenware has been produced in the Olomouc Region in the years 1430 to 1530 and mass-exported from Moravia to Eastern and Western Europe<sup>41</sup>; its main feature are nodules on the whole surface and rough texture. This phenomenon is regarded as potters’ reaction against the manufacture of high-quality tin vessels and glass – it was an alternative production in order to stay on the market<sup>42</sup>. Physical properties of clay: the lack of lightness, lustre and durability were replaced with intriguing effect of *quasi*-damaged object. It is a clear antagonism to the constant development of various types of earthenware. Base, body and rim of Loštice pottery was often edged with silver – it was a way of ennobling a faulty product; one of the preserved pots contains an inscription: “*Ist der Wein gut, so schmeckt er mur dester pas* [Good wine (drank from this vessel) tastes even better]”<sup>43</sup>.

Unfinished works of admired artists were seen as a sign of the fear of damaging them by less skilful hands: as an example of this anxiety of losing masterly creativity and intellectual effort Nico van Hout recognizes the unfinished drawing *Saint Barbara* by Jan van Eyck (1437, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten)<sup>44</sup>. This panel could be originally conceived as an incomplete work, which remains under construction just like the depicted building site – the status of the image and its creator’s achievement are the exact subject<sup>45</sup>. The situation is different in the case of *Ambraser Hofjagdspiel* (ca. 1440/1445,

<sup>37</sup> The object is believed to come from the city hall of Moosburg; according to the first monographist of Leinberger this sculpture could be taken there from a canonry (*Kanonikerhof*) or one of local churches – see G. Lill, *Hans Leiberger. Der Bildschnitzer von Landshut. Welt und Umwelt des Künstlers*, München 1924, pp. 131-132.

<sup>38</sup> C. Behle (*Leben und Eigenart des Künstlers. Stilistische Entwicklung. Rekonstruktion der Gruppen und Altäre*, München 1984, pp. 181-182) assumed that *Madonna* could be a gift from the sculptor for the municipal council of Moosburg after receiving or finishing the commission for the main altarpiece of St. John’s church in this city.

<sup>39</sup> H. Bredekamp, *Die Prägnanz der Form. Hans Leinbergers Berliner Muttergottes als Philosophem*, [in:] *Ikonische Formprozesse. Zur Philosophie des Unbestimmten in Bildern*, Ed. M. Lauschke, J. Schiffler, F. Engel, Berlin 2018, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> J. Rasmussen, *Deutsche Kleinplastik der Renaissance und des Barock*, Hamburg 1975, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> See M. Mackiewicz, *Walka o miejsce na stole – późnośredniowieczna ceramika luksusowa*, [in:] *Kultura materialna średniowiecza w Polsce*, Ed. S. Wadył, P. Kucypera, Toruń 2008, p. 161. The author noticed the Loštice goblets on the right panel of the triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by J. Bosch (ca. 1500, Madrid, Prado) and on the painting *Annunciation* by A. Altdorfer (1517, Regensburg, Municipal Museum).

<sup>42</sup> M. Mackiewicz (*ibidem*, p. 156) describes Loštice pottery as “luxurious” items, however, the presence of these objects for instance in the Upper Silesia region excludes its function only in patrician circles.

<sup>43</sup> A. Lange, *Loštické poháry (přehled dosavadních výzkumů)*, Severní Morava, Vol. 6, Šumperk 1961, p. 54-63; as cit. in: M. Mackiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> N. van Hout, *The Unfinished and the Eye of the Beholder*, [in:] *Unfinished...*, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> See A. Ziemia, *Sztuka Burgundii i Niderlandów 1380-1500*, t. 3: *Wspólnota rzeczy. Sztuka niderlandzka i północnoeuropejska 1380-1520*, Warszawa 2015, p. 262.



8. Loštice goblet, 15th century, h. 19.8 cm; Racibórz, Municipal Museum. Photo: M. Rezner

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) – a pack of 54 cards attributed to the workshop of Konrad Witz. Particular elements – especially the faces, hands and animal figures – remain unfinished for unknown reasons: the preciousness of the set indicates its collecting purposes, but on the other hand, those items remain incomplete not because of the need to personalize their appearance. Good state of preservation indicates that they have never been used for playing games and most likely have not left the workshop for a long time, where they evidently became a sort of help for the pupils, even a ground for exercises<sup>46</sup>. It is not known in which context the set functioned before it came to the collection of Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria (1529–1595)<sup>47</sup>. However, they had to find their place in private hands earlier, similarly to the three crucifixes from Basel.

Chiefly, the material itself lost its importance, while the recipient's interest in the artistic process increased. The beholders were seeking not only famous artisans (the status of van Eyck as the courtly painter under the patronage of Philip the Good was naturally quite exceptional), but rather intriguing and active objects, which were able to gain the interest because of their iconography or formal appeal, and to “betray” the secrets of the workshops. It was argued that medieval and early modern craftsmen did not think highly of incomplete works due to the potential misunderstanding of the iconography that could occur during the interaction with the viewers; they were also seen as a clear sign of lack of funds, therefore journeymen and pupils were to finish them<sup>48</sup>. This statement seems to be

mostly correct in relation to object in the public realm, but not necessarily in the case of *Kleinplastik* or other items that were kept in the cabinets of curiosities.

Pamela O. Long distinguished the “trading zones” in which an artisan communicates with the university-trained one in a relation much deeper than the one between the craftsman and the donor<sup>49</sup>. This union could take the form of direct (e.g. print shops) or indirect communication, such as written treatises (available at princely courts). The description of this phenomenon – which developed around 1500<sup>50</sup> – should include monarchs' fascination with specialised tools. Maximilian I had a lathe in his collection,

<sup>46</sup> On the reverse of the card with falcons and kings there is a sketch of realistic folds of the material on the hand or leg – see **B. Brinkmann**, *Das Ambraser Hofjagdspiel*, [in:] *Konrad Witz* [exh. cat.], Ed. **idem** [et al.], 6 March – 3 July 2011, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel 2011, p. 197; *The World in Play: Luxury Cards 1430–1540* [exh. cat.], Ed. **T. Husband**, 20 January – 17 April 2016, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2016, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> This set was described in the inventory as “*ein kartenspiel von hunden, lueder, kranich, habich und mannen*” (**V. Sandbichler**, *Vogeljagd und Vogelfang*, [in:] *Herrlich Wild. Höfische Jagd in Tirol*, Ed. **W. Seipel**, Innsbruck 2004, p. 138).

<sup>48</sup> See **N. van Hout**, *op. cit.*, p. 57. The author gives as examples i.a. the completion of H. van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece by J. van Eyck and the activity of D. Bout's workshop after his death.

<sup>49</sup> **P. Long**, *Artisan/Practitioners and the Rise of the New Sciences. 1400–1600*, Corvallis 2011, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 131.

which was a sign of specific interests, even if it was not used by him. The Emperor also collected workshop models and other miniature objects, such as a fortified tower<sup>51</sup>. Certainly this passion was part of a bigger trend: the famous Housebook of Wolfegg Castle illustrating about 1480 works by an anonymous master apart from the series of drawings *The Sun and His Children* and *The Noble Life*, consists of advices, recipes, a section on mining, metallurgy and a description of weapons; the latter one contains a technical drawing of a lathe (fol. 53v).

The three crucifixes from the Amerbach collection – and other abovementioned unfinished objects – establish a new class of artworks in the space of a *Kunstammer*, where not only precious and costly materials were kept. They probably entered the early modern collection immediately after the iconoclastic riots, what proves that also the members of the so-called middle class participated in the “trading zones”. This perspective is essential to expand the knowledge of the late medieval and early modern collecting history: it gives an insight into the interests of the court and urban elites, enriches the knowledge of craftsman–donor relationship and enables to understand the changed perception of what was seen as art itself.

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**Słowa kluczowe**

drobna rzeźba, Kunstammer, niekompletność, *non finito*, Amerbach, sztuka późnośredniowieczna

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**Keywords**

small-scale sculpture, Kunstammer, incompleteness, unfinishedness, Amerbach, late medieval art

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**MA Agnieszka Dziki, dzikiagnieszka@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-9961-7833**

Graduate of Bachelor's and Master's studies at the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw within the College of Interdisciplinary Individual Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences. Since 2019 she has been a student at the Doctoral School in Humanities. Under the supervision of Prof. Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, she is preparing her doctoral dissertation on the reception of unfinished and damaged objects to the North of the Alps between 1430 and 1530. Her interests include the material culture of the late Middle Ages, the art of the Netherlands and Germany and the history of collecting.

### Summary

**AGNIESZKA DZIKI (University of Warsaw) / Three Crucifixes in the Amerbach Cabinet and the incomplete small-scale sculptures around the year 1500**

The aim of this article is to present the case study of the three crucifixes in the Amerbach Cabinet in Basel in the context of a wider scope of intentional incompleteness around the year 1500. I would like to challenge the view that this particular group and a wide variety of other small scale sculptures were only an unsuccessful experiment and eventually to recognize the intentional blurring of the boundary between finished and unfinished as an artistic category in specific time and space. Those seemingly unfinished products have so far been incorporated into other classes, which were validating their existence. The perspective of “incompleteness” is essential to expand the knowledge of the late medieval / early modern collecting history: it gives an insight into the interests of the court and urban elites, enriches the knowledge of craftsman–donor relationship and enables to understand the changed perception of what was seen as art itself.