



*All that Glitters is not Gold: The Depiction of Gold-Brocaded Velvet in
Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Paintings*
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Summary

This dissertation – *All that glitters is not gold: The depiction of gold-brocaded velvets in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish paintings* – has been written within the project called: *The Impact of Oil; a history of oil painting in the Low Countries and its consequences for the visual arts, 1350-1550*. The aim of this project – which is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) – is to write ‘an integrated history of the introduction, dissemination and development of the use of oil media in panel painting from 1350 to 1550’. The project started in 2008 and will end in 2013. For additional information, see: www.impactofoil.org.

The dissertation *All that glitters is not gold* consists of a preface, an introduction, four chapters and a bibliography. The first three chapters discuss the painting techniques to imitate gold-brocaded velvets by three different artists: Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441), Geertgen tot Sint Jans (c. 1455/1465-c. 1485/1495) and Cornelisz Engebrechtsz (c. 1462-1527). These chapters were published – or will be published in the near future – as separate articles; the article on Engebrechtsz was co-written with colleague-conservator Jessica Roeders. The fourth and final chapter gives an overview of the methods and techniques applied to paint gold-brocaded velvets in the Netherlands during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, by comparing the artists from the first three chapters with other painters from this period. The conclusion of this chapter can therefore be regarded as the conclusion for the whole dissertation. An attached CD-ROM contains the appendices: an overview of the paintings that were studied, four tables with brocade patterns, the description of a historical reconstruction and two related articles on the painting technique of the Leiden School.

The *Preface* of this dissertation gives a short description of the aims of the *Impact of Oil* project and the position of the three different Ph. D. candidates in it. It explains how the author came by her research subject, which started general as ‘the painting techniques of golden objects’, but developed into ‘the painting techniques of gold-brocaded velvets’. The *Preface* is followed by the *Acknowledgements*.

The *Introduction* starts with a short description of the subject of this dissertation, the study of the painting technique of gold-brocaded velvets, and states what this study may contribute to

the field of (technical) art history. This is followed by five sections that discuss different aspects of the current study: terminology, real gold-brocaded velvet textiles, methodology, literature and sources. Because the terminology of the words ‘gold-brocaded velvet’ and ‘pomegranate motif’ can be confusing, these are explained in the first section. This is followed by a section on real gold-brocaded velvet fabrics during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, including a short explanation on their high cost and status. This section was copied from the article on Engebrechtsz (chapter 3); when a dissertation is composed out of separate articles, some overlap or repetition is unavoidable. The following section, on methodology, describes the different methods and techniques that were used to conduct this study: studying the paintings with magnification, infrared reflectograms (IRR), X-radiographies, paint samples and tracings of patterns. The next section of the *Introduction* gives a description of the current literature available for this study, which is followed by the last section on the contemporary sources that were consulted.

Chapter one – *Gold-brocaded velvets in paintings by Van Eyck: observations on painting technique* – discusses, probably not surprising, the techniques applied by Jan van Eyck to paint his gold-brocaded velvets. It starts with a brief introduction in which the studied paintings are introduced, followed by some remarks on real gold-brocaded velvets and existing literature on gold-brocaded textiles in the work of Jan van Eyck. The next section discusses the IRRs of the various paintings, focussing on the IRR of the cope of Saint Donatian in the painting *Madonna and Child with Canon van der Paele* (1436, Groeningemuseum Bruges), which shows an extensive underdrawing, not only of the contours of the cope and the modelling of the folds, but also of the brocade pattern. However, the cope is an isolated example in the work of Van Eyck; in the other infrared images only an underdrawing of the contours and folds of the drapery is visible, or no underdrawing at all. It raises the question if the cope of Saint Donatian was perhaps painted from life, a question that has been asked before, but has never been answered from an art-technical point of view. This study does not pretend to have a definite answer to this question, because there are simply too many contradicting variables, none of which are conclusive. But interesting conclusions can be drawn nonetheless. Similarly, the study of the (tracings of the) various patterns applied by Van Eyck is revealing. It appears that Van Eyck may generally have used flat model drawings of his patterns, which in one case, he reused on two different paintings, in two different sizes. However, elements of foreshortening were added to the pattern to heighten the verisimilitude of his fabrics. The techniques that Van Eyck applied to build up his paint layers vary

somewhat between the different examined paintings, although there are also clear overlapping elements that already point towards a certain degree of schematisation. His painting technique – especially in the two larger altarpieces, the *Van der Paele Madonna* and the *Ghent Altarpiece* – is often surprisingly loose and spontaneous.

Chapter two steps from the mid-fifteenth century Southern Netherlands to Haarlem in the North of the Netherlands during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. It is called: *Gold-brocaded velvets in paintings by Geertgen tot Sint Jans: a study of Geertgen's painting technique to imitate gold-brocaded velvets and a comparison with the Raising of Lazarus by Albert van Ouwater*. This chapter discusses the painting techniques employed by Geertgen to paint gold-brocaded velvets, starting with the lowest layer, the underdrawing, and then working its way upwards through the paint to the surface and final highlights. The paint layers in Geertgen's work turn out to be mostly impenetrable in these specific areas using IRR, obscuring any possible underdrawing. The only exception is found in the Vienna panels: in the sleeves worn by Mary Magdalene in the Vienna *Lamentation* (c. 1484, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) an underdrawing is found for the contour lines and few folds of the fabric and possibly also for the pattern on the sleeves. The latter is far less clear than the example of the cope from the previous chapter however, because the paint layer of the pattern clearly plays a role in the infrared image too. Regarding the build-up of the paint layers, Geertgen follows a system of layering which is consistent in all his paintings: a brown continuous underlayer, the modelling of the pattern, the application of the highlights. Based upon the painting techniques, the examined paintings can be divided into two groups: one group consists of the two Amsterdam paintings the *Holy Kinship* (c. 1495, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) and the *Tree of Jesse* (c. 1500, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), while the other group is formed by the remaining paintings. The two Amsterdam paintings are generally the most debated paintings within the oeuvre of Geertgen. Within this study, they deviate from the rest of the Geertgen group in two aspects: there is a clear colour variation in the brown underlayer between the two groups and a markedly different handwriting in the application of the highlights. Remarkably, with their specific painting technique, the *Holy Kinship* and the *Tree of Jesse* stand much closer to Albert van Ouwater's *Raising of Lazarus* (c. 1460-1475, Staatliche Museen (Gemäldegalerie), Berlin), than the rest of the Geertgen paintings, including the two Vienna panels that form the core of Geertgen's oeuvre, because they are mentioned by Karel van Mander (1548-1606) in his *Schilder-boeck* (1604). Albert van Ouwater (active c. 1460- 1480) is mentioned twice by Van Mander as being Geertgen's

teacher; the *Raising of Lazarus* is his only known painting. The defining aspects of the technique mentioned above – the specific colour of the brown underlayer and the handwriting of the yellow highlights – can be traced back even further, to Dirk Bouts (c. 1410-1475), who used these same aspects in his technique for his *Triptych of the Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* (c. 1460-1470, M-Museum/ Treasury of Saint Peter, Leuven). Regarding the patterns that Geertgen tot Sint Jans used for his brocades, there is very little overlap between the various patterns. It can be concluded that – rather than using and reusing model drawings of flat patterns again and again – the artist recombined elements from his patterns to form new ones for each painting that he made. This seems consistent with the working methods of Dirk Bouts and the Haarlem Master of the Tiburtine Sybil (active c. 1475-1495). With the latter master Geertgen shares a further connection; parts of one pattern were used by Geertgen on two of his *Adoration* panels (c. 1480-1485, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam and c. 1495, Collection Oskar Reinhart "Am Römerholz", Winterthur), but the pattern recurs with its full repeat on the *Raising of Lazarus* (c. 1480-1486, Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Mexico City) by the Master of the Tiburtine Sybil.

The chapter on the *Gold-Brocaded Velvets in Paintings by Cornelis Engebrechtsz* – co-written with Jessica Roeders – was actually the first article that was published within this dissertation. Cornelis Engebrechtsz has a relatively large oeuvre, depicting a wealth of different types of textile, including many gold-brocaded velvets. Even during, and after, the publication of the article new results kept coming up with the examination of additional paintings, especially during the exhibition *Lucas van Leyden and the Renaissance* in the Museum de Lakenhal in Leiden in first half of 2011. These have been added to the schedule in appendix 2.3. Compared to the artists discussed in chapter 1 and 2, Engebrechtsz probably had the most schematized manner of working, an efficiency that must have worked well in his relatively large workshop. Nearly all of his underdrawing is well visible in IRR, showing that he always drew the contours and folds of a drapery in the underdrawing phase, but not the pattern. The pattern was only applied *after* the application of the first brown paint layers which model the drapery. The next phase was the painting of the pattern, which was often red, although other colours can be found too. Lastly the yellow highlights were applied in a rather open and schematic manner with short, hatched strokes of paint. An interesting aspect in the technique used by Engebrechtsz, is the additional application of short, hatched lines of mordant with gilding on top. This use of gilded touches in gold-brocaded textiles, almost as if the mordant for the gold leaf was used as paint, can be found in the works of contemporaries

from the Northern Netherlands too: in paintings by Jacob Cornelisz (c. 1472-before 1533) and on at least one occasion by Jan Mostaert (c. 1474-1552). Engebrechtsz's use of patterns is very interesting. He had a collection of a dozen patterns, which he used and reused again and again on his paintings. He changed nothing in his patterns, apart from its size, which he adapted to fit the size of the figure clothed in gold-brocaded velvet. Nearly all of his patterns recur on different paintings; the most popular one was used up to five times. Later research only added to these figures, showing that he used the pattern mentioned above up in 11 separate fabrics.

The final chapter is titled *A broader perspective: painting techniques applied to imitate gold-brocaded velvets in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish paintings*. This chapter compares the previous chapters with the painting techniques applied by other artists, such as the Master of Flémalle/ Robert Campin (c. 1375/1380-1444), Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399-1464), Dirk Bouts (c. 1410-1475), Hans Memling (c. 1435-1494), Hugo van der Goes (1440- 1482) and Gerard David (c. 1455-1523), thereby creating an overview of the methods that were employed to imitate gold-brocaded velvets in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish paintings. This is the only unpublished chapter in the dissertation. It starts by discussing the area before Jan van Eyck, the so called Pre-Eyckian period, to create a context for the period under discussion and to show just how radically different the painting techniques applied by Jan van Eyck, his contemporaries and their successors, were. Before Van Eyck gold-brocaded silks were always imitated by a combination of paint and gold leaf. In the next section, the underdrawing for the gold-brocaded velvet areas is discussed and it is shown that, apart from a few discussed examples, in all other instances the paint layers in these locations are either impenetrable for infrared, or they show that the contours of the garment and the folds of the drapery have been underdrawn *without* the pattern. The pattern is nearly always applied in a later phase. The build-up of the subsequent paint layers can be described as a three-step-system: a brown modelling, the pattern itself and the application of the highlights. This chapter discusses the artists that apply this system and the ones that display a more experimental working method and in some paintings adapt it. Possible workshop traditions can be observed in the distinction of two groups of a brown underlayer: a warm orange brown colour on the one hand and a light pinkish grey-brown colour on the other hand. Also the handwriting of the highlight application shows two distinct groups that seems to fit in two different workshop traditions: one very schematic with short hatched lines, and the other much more painterly with a dense

network of paint. Remarkably, both examples were already observed in the chapter on Geertgen tot Sint Jans. They turn out to be applicable to the whole period under review. The next section discusses the use of drawings of flat textile patterns in a fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Netherlandish workshop. Even though no Northern-European example of such a drawing has survived, circumstantial evidence has shown that they must have existed – and were traded in – abundantly. Different examples are given of how artists employed such model drawings in a workshop. In the last section, a short overview is presented of the different methods of transfer of a pattern from a model drawing to a painting. This discussion is mostly theoretical however, because no evidence has been found in this study for any of the presented methods of transfer. The chapter finishes with an extensive conclusion, which – as has been mentioned before – can be regarded as a conclusion for the whole dissertation, because of the comparative nature of the last chapter.

The first appendix of this dissertation shows an overview of all the paintings that were examined for this study, including an entry of where and when this was done. The next four appendices contain schedules of the brocade patterns found on the examined paintings of respectively: Jan van Eyck, Geertgen tot Sint Jans, Cornelis Engebrechtsz and Jacob Cornelisz. The third appendix holds an extensive description and photographic account of a historical reconstruction of a detail from the Leiden *Lamentation* triptych by Cornelis Engebrechtsz. The last two appendices finally, contain two articles on the painting techniques of artists from the Leiden School, that were co-written by several authors, including the author of this dissertation.