

ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN

Flemish school, ca.1399 - 1464

The origins and training of this artist have been a subject of controversy. Later fifteenth century Italian sources mention him as being from Bruges and a pupil of van Eyck ; but the view which generally prevails now is that he is to be identified as the Rogelet de la Pasture, a native of Tournai, who is recorded as having begun his apprenticeship with Robert Campin on March 5, 1427, and again under the name of Rogier, --of which Rogelet is to be taken as the diminutive --as having become a free master of the painters' guild of Tournai on August 1, 1432. Documents of October 1435 and March 1441 gave this artist's age as 35 and 43 respectively. On this assumption he had moved to Brussels by October 1435 : it being from that time on that Rogier van der Weyden is recorded as active in Brussels. Van der Weyden was official painter of that city by 1436, a post which he held until his death. He married as early as 1426, which is not incompatible with the date when Rogelet's apprenticeship began, insofar as the Tournai system seems to have involved a long training period before the apprenticeship proper; and his financial records show that he had in fact many contacts with the city of Tournai. His Italian contemporary Bartolommeo Faccio records that he went to Rome in 1450 for the celebration of the Jubilee Year ; and he is known to have also worked at that time for Lionello d'Este of Ferrara. He died in Brussels. There are no signed paintings of his, and most of the known documentation deals with minor decorative works ; but sixteenth century inventories and accounts of works by early writers provide a basis for attributing to him a body of religious paintings, centering around the Crucifixion from the Escorial (now in the Prado) and the Last Judgement in the Hospital at Beaune (painted for the Chancellor Rolin between 1443 and 1450), and also a number of portraits.

Portrait of a Man

oil on canvas, 14×10 ins.

Condition

Originally on an oak panel, slightly larger in its dimensions (14 $\frac{3}{4}$ ×11 ins or 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins.). Transferred to canvas, after 1938. Photographs of the work taken before its transfer (Frick Art Ref. Lib., photo taken by Bruckmann at 1902 exhbn. ; Witt Lib., photo from time of 1938 sale) show it to have changed considerably in character. In particular the modelling became softer throughout, and there are corresponding changes in the physiognomy and structure of the face, which appear to be the result of cleaning down.

Provenance

Charles Léon Cardon, Brussels (1902) ; Kleinberger, Paris (1911)¹⁾ ; Mortimer L. Schiff, New York (1929) ; sold Christie's, Jun. 24, 1938, no.85²⁾ ; Countess Vetter von der Lilie, Vienna³⁾ ; Silberman Galleries, New York. Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19 .

Literature

Hulin de Loo (ed.), Catalogue Critique, Exposition de Tableaux Flamands des XIV^e, XV^e et XVI^e Siecles, Bruges, 1902, p.7, no.27 ; H.Hymans, L'exposition des Primitifs Flamands à Bruges, Paris, 1902, p.30 ; F.Dülberg, "Die Ausstellung altniederländischer Meister in Brügge", Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst, NF 14, 1902-3, pp.53 (ill.), 55 ; W.Burger, Rogier van der Weyden, Leipzig, 1923, p.70 and pl.48a. ; M.J. Friedländer, Die Altniederländische Malerei, Berlin, 14 vols, 1927-37, II, 1924, pp.41 and 102, cat.no.33 ; J.Destrée, Rogier de la Pasture van der Weyden, 2 vols., Paris-Brussels, 1930, I, p.179, II, pl.134.

Exhibited

Bruges, Exposition des Primitifs Flamands et d'Art Ancien, Bruges 1902, tableaux, no.27 (cf. lit.) ; Flemish exhibition, Guildhall, London, 1906, no.11 ; Ind., 1959, no.56.

This portrait, when exhibited in 1902 as a van der Weyden, was catalogued by Hulin de Loo with a question-mark ; he affirmed that it recalled van der Weyden, but had suffered too much damage for any definite statement to be made. Hymans (1902) expressed similar doubts as to whether it could be by van der Weyden. Friedländer (1924) noted that it was much restored, and suggested a date of around 1450.

After transfer to canvas and restoration (see under condition), the work was sold with certificates of 1934 from G.Gluck and R.Einberger, attributing it to van der Weyden and dating it 1450-60. It was said then, without apparent basis, to be a portrait of William Rolin. In the opinion of the compiler, this portrait is reminiscent of van der Weyden in its general character⁽⁴⁾, and most probably fifteenth century.

Notes.

1. Information from the photo in the Frick Art Ref. Lib. The painting was not in the Cardon sale, Brussels, Jun.27-30, 1921, and was listed by Friedländer (1924) as whereabouts unknown.
2. Sold by order of John M.Schiff (son) ; bought by Ranson.
3. According to information provided at the time of acquisition.
4. Cf. in particular the Portrait of Laurent Froimont (Destree op.cit, pl.35)