

Holbein

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Masters of Art

Hans Holbein the Younger

(c. 1497-1543)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

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Masters of Art Series

Hans Holbein the Younger



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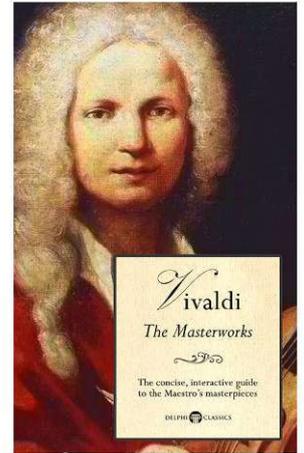
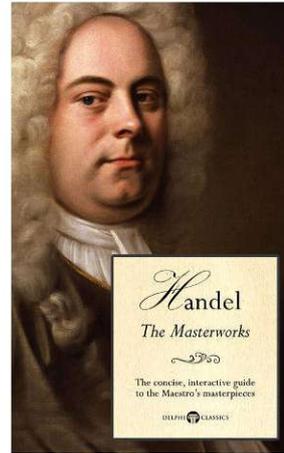
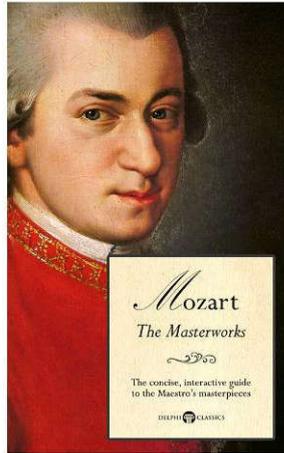
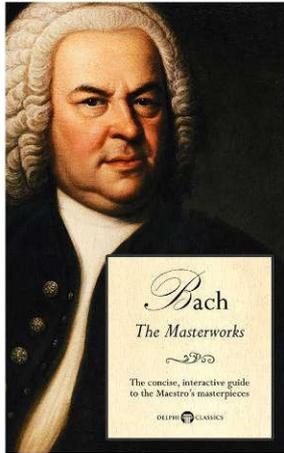
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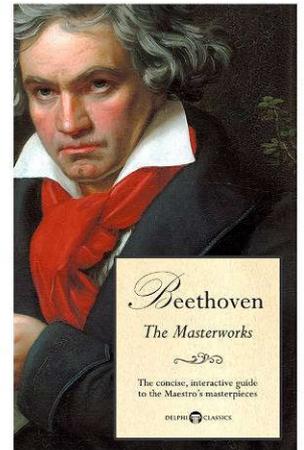
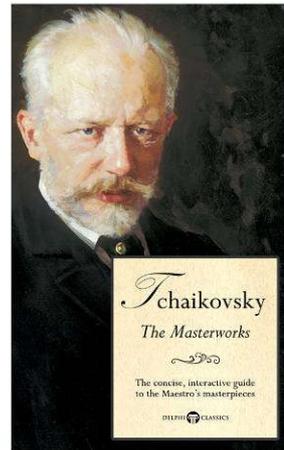
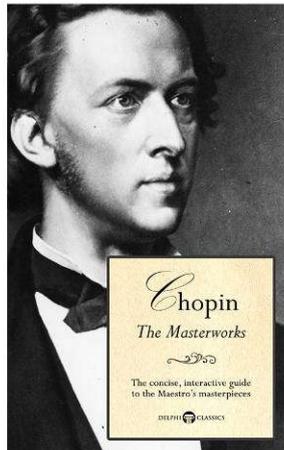
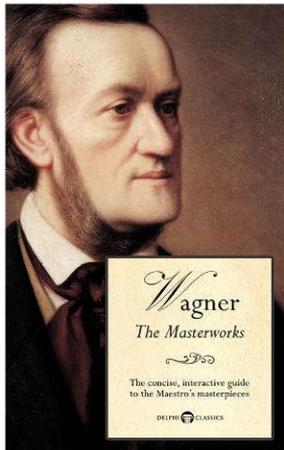
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The Highlights



Panorama of Augsburg, Bavaria, 1493 — Hans Holbein the Younger was born in the free imperial city of Augsburg during the winter of 1497.



The birthplace was completely destroyed in World War II. A replica was erected at the site in 1965 and is now used by the Kunstverein, an art association founded in 1833, which promotes fine arts from Germany.



Holbein was the son of Hans Holbein the Elder (1465–1524), a pioneer in the transformation of German art from the Gothic to the Renaissance style.



Hans (right) and his elder brother Ambrosius Holbein by Hans Holbein the Elder, 1511. Silverpoint on white-coated paper, Berlin State Museums

The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Holbein's most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

Portrait of Jakob Meyer (1516)



Hans Holbein the Younger, a Northern Renaissance master generally regarded as one of the greatest portraitists of art history, came from a family of prominent artists. His father, Hans Holbein the Elder, and his uncle Sigmund were celebrated in Germany for their late Gothic artwork, and Holbein's brother Ambrosius also went on to become a painter, though he died before attaining maturity. Holbein was born in the free imperial city of Augsburg during the winter of 1497–98. His father operated a large and bustling workshop, sometimes assisted by Uncle Sigmund. Holbein and his brother would have first studied with their father and are recorded as having commenced independent work by 1515 in Basel, Switzerland. It was an especially gifted and vibrant period of art in Northern Europe, when such masters as Albrecht Dürer, Matthias Grünewald and Lucas Cranach were producing innovative masterpieces, directly challenging the influence of the Italian Renaissance.

At the time, the city of Basel was regarded as an important centre of learning, especially for the printing trade; and so the lure of the city was all too tempting for the two brothers, eager to escape the eclipsing shade of their famous father and uncle. In a new city they could set about establishing their own reputation. Reports indicate that they were apprenticed to Hans Herbst (1470-1552), Basel's leading painter. Herbst's entire religious work perished in the Basel iconoclasm (when Catholic art and decoration were destroyed in unofficial or mob actions), after he opposed the Reformation. He was forced to convert to the new faith in 1530 and after that he received only insignificant orders. Therefore, it is difficult to assess how much influence Herbst had on the development of Holbein as an artist.

The brothers also found work as designers of woodcuts and metalcuts for various printers. In 1515, we know that the preacher and theologian Oswald Myconius invited them to add pen drawings to the margin of a copy of *The Praise of Folly* by the humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus. These sketches provide early evidence of Holbein's curious blend of humour and humanistic leaning. The next year Holbein secured the patronage of the wealthy merchant classes and was commissioned to paint the burgomaster Jakob Meyer and his wife Dorothea Kannengiesser, in spite of the artist's young age and almost unknown reputation. Meyer would later become the head of the Catholic party in opposition to the reformers and would commission Holbein to paint his greatest religious work, *The Meyer Madonna*.

The Meyer portraits were influenced by a chiaroscuro woodcut by Hans Burgkmair, depicting Hans Baumgartner. Dorothea was the burgomaster's second wife and the occasion for the double portrait could have been his election as the mayor the same year. Holbein presents the husband and wife against a continuous architectural background, noted for its elaborate detail, with striking contrasts of gold and red. It is the first portrait in which Holbein explores the use of perspective to create depth, wherein the architecture appears to project into the sitter's space. The elaborate display of gold embroidery and jewellery accentuates the grandeur of the architecture, while the cool blue of the sky offers a calming contrast.

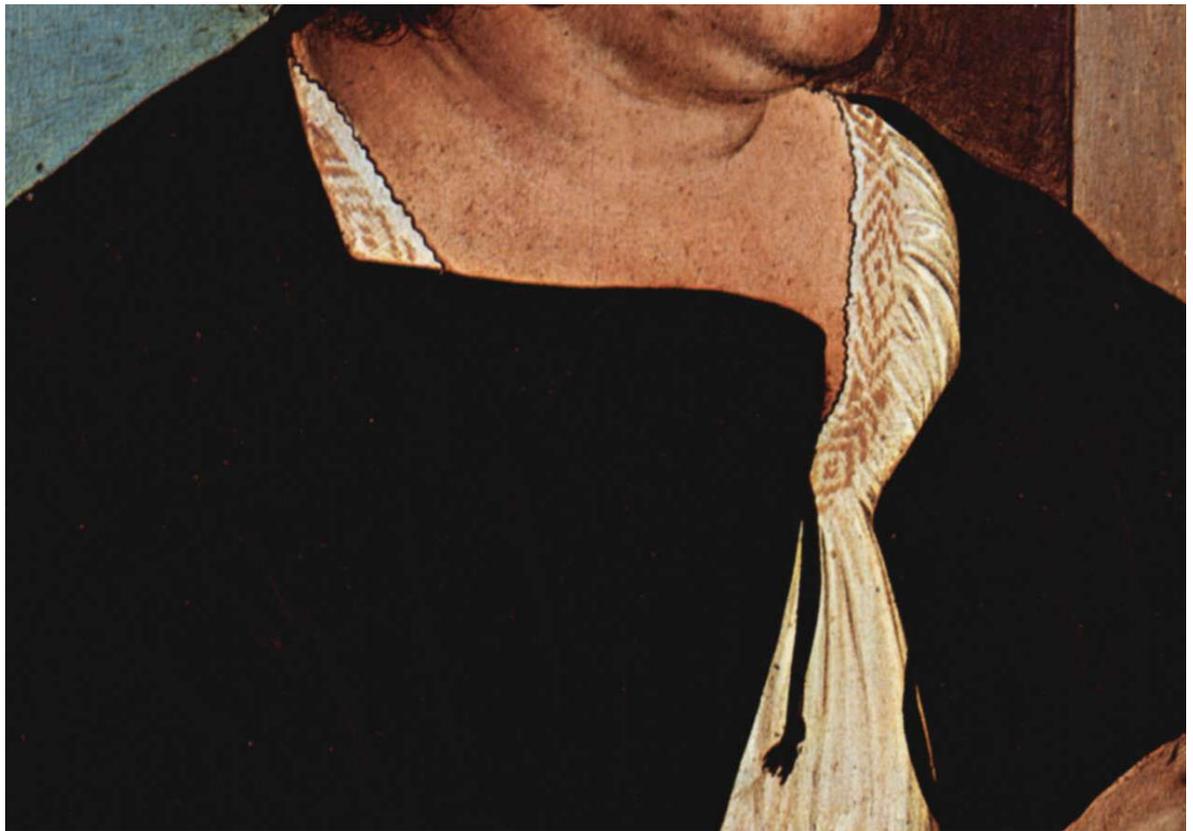
The husband and wife are portrayed in a classical setting that was fashionable at the time, while their facial features are precisely observed and stubbornly unidealised — note the burgomaster's prominent double chin and his wife's severe and cold

expression. Both sitters are portrayed as close in mutual feeling, with similar postures, aloof from the young artist and his medium. Unlike Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) before him, whose work often embraced the emotionalism of his world, Holbein makes a calm appraisal of his sitters' condition, capturing their likeness with an accuracy that belies his tender age of eighteen.





Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



The companion portrait of the burgomaster's wife, Dorothea Kannengießer



Portrait of Hans Herbster by Ambrosius Holbein, Kunstmuseum Basel, 1516 — Basel's leading painter was reportedly Holbein's master when he first lived in the city.



'Christ on the Mount of Olives' by Hans Herbst, c. 1510



Hans Burgkmair's woodcut of Hans Baumgartner, which influenced the Meyer portraits, c. 1512

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End of Sample