



Holbein the Younger: His Palette

Arron Adams

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Hans Holbein the Younger was German painter, draftsman, and designer renowned for the precise rendering of his drawings and the compelling realism of his portraits. Holbein was one of the greatest portraitists and most exquisite draftsmen of all time. Holbein was associated early on with the Basle publishers and their humanist circle of acquaintances. In Basle, Holbein was also active in designing woodcuts for title pages and book illustrations. He increased his reputation as a book illustrator by a series of woodcuts for the German translation of the Bible by Martin Luther. The artist's most famous work in this area is a series of 41 scenes illustrating the medieval allegorical concept of the Dance of Death. Its scenes display an immaculate sense of order, packing much information about the lifestyles and habits of Death's victims into a very small format. He completed also a series of pen-and-ink sketches for The Praise of Folie by the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus. Holbein acted not only as a portraitist but also as a fashion designer for the court. The artist made designs for all the state robes of the king; he left, in addition, more than 250 delicate drawings for everything from buttons and buckles to pageant weapons, horse out-fittings, and book-bindings for the royal household. This choice of work indicates Holbein's Mannerist concentration on surface texture and detail of design, a concern that in some ways precluded the incorporation of great psychological depth in his portraits.



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