

L3-2day2

Northern Renaissance 15th Century

Art Discussed:

Van Eyck, *Giovanni and His Bride*, 1434

Van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece*, 1432

VOCAB:

Grisaille

Polyptych

HW:

Use your text, look at the chapter for N. European Art in the 15th century, discuss how the artist humanized a religious painting of your choice.

Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini and His Bride*

- Wedding symbolism in painting
- Dog as symbol of fidelity
- Slippers cast off symbolizing standing on holy ground; slippers also served as traditional wedding gifts
- One candle in the chandelier symbolizes one act of intercourse
- Candle burns all night on first night of wedding
- Bed curtains are open, revealing marriage bed
- Bride pulls up dress as an allusion to a wife's role as child bearer
- Saint Margaret: patron saint of childbirth on the bed headboard
- Painting signed and dated: "Jan van Eyck was here 1434"
- Tiny medallions surrounding mirror depict Passion of Christ
- Priest not necessary for a wedding, only two witnesses who appear in the mirror
- Figures are extremely pale, very richly robed
- Attention to detail, light, texture and luster

Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece*

- Outside wings: theme of salvation
- Figures sit in small niches, claustrophobic
- Saint John the Evangelist and Saint John the Baptist done in grisaille; both patron saints of Ghent
- Extreme realism of figures, cf. donors
- Many detailed surfaces from stubble on beard to leaves on trees
- Inscriptions denote Christ's coming
- Donors kneel in Gothic frames
- Flemish landscape is revealed in background

Inside:

- No attempt to idealize figures, as in Adam and Eve
- Hierarchy of scale of figures
- God the Father enthroned wearing the Pope's tiara flanked by Mary and John the Baptist, then the angels, then Adam and Eve
- Sacrifice of Christ symbolized by the Lamb bleeding on the altar in the lower central panel
- The case that housed the altarpiece is now lost