

Public Abstract

First Name:Pachomius (Matthew)

Middle Name:

Last Name:Meade

Adviser's First Name:Anne

Adviser's Last Name:Stanton

Co-Adviser's First Name:Michael

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Yonan

Graduation Term:SP 2016

Department:Art History & Archeology

Degree:MA

Title:The Depiction of Smell in Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Painting as Cultural Sense Memory and Odor-cued Prayer Context

In the region now known as Belgium, fifteenth-century painters began to exploit the new medium of oil paint to achieve greater realism. This was to remove the barrier between painting and viewer. Odors such as flowers, incense, and perfumed oil depicted in these paintings played their own role in bringing these images to life. Just as smells can transport a person in memory to past events, so implied smells in paintings of this period recreated major life events and ideal spaces for religious devotion. In this thesis, I argue that smell was a deliberate part of the painting compositions and played a dynamic role in the prayer life of people in the late Middle Ages. At this time to see was to smell and to smell was to pray. Contemporary psychological studies of smell's ability to stimulate memory and behavior, close examination of the recurring smells in these paintings, and connection of odor found in both religious literature of the time and the art are discussed. The work of such artists as Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling are investigated to draw insights about associated meanings from the period. The findings of this work could influence art history, religious studies, historical and contemporary liturgical studies, material culture, and even social and behavioral sciences.