THE DEPICTION OF SMELL
IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY NETHERLANDISH PAINTING
AS CULTURAL SENSE MEMORY
AND ODOR-CUED PRAYER CONTEXT

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by
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THE DEPICTION OF SMELL
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presented by Pachomius (Matthew J.) Meade,
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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The inspiration for this paper came from a chance meeting with a doctoral candidate at my university writing about the history of smell. After I stated that this kind of study would be impossible for an art historian, she replied that there are in fact many instances of smell one can observe in visual art: incense from thurible-swinging angels or mourners holding their noses while conveying a corpse on a bier. With new eyes, I then looked at my own area of concentration: fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting. Once smell/odor/odorants became a hermeneutic of viewing the devotional art of this time, it was apparent that smell was everywhere.1 This prevalence, along with scents and olfaction’s role in artworks intended for liturgical or devotional contexts, has not been addressed in art-historical literature. The frequency of odoriferous things, their recurring types, and the interplay of objects and odors led me to posit that their appearance in these paintings were more than just symbolic in a visual way. I hypothesized that implied smells played a role in these pictures, and I began looking for clues about how and where this argument had credibility.

The seminal art-historical scholarship of early Netherlandish painting focused on the iconography of symbolic objects. The major works of Erwin Panofsky and Max Friedländer focused on the meticulously rendered, densely packed household objects, architectural moldings, and foods that unpacked the

1 Cf. Appendix (Figure 3): Robert Campin, Mérode Altarpiece (c. 1425) oil on canvas (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art). Starting left to right along this triptych's panels, there is a rose bush, lilies, a snuffed candle smoldering, soot from a fireplace, and freshly cut wood and saw dust.
meaning of religious scenes to the trained eye. What these two well-read scholars believed were allusions to Scripture and theological trends available only to the most highly educated, more recent scholarship has shown was understood by many; popular primers, block prints, and sermon manuals made such allegorical images legible to a wide audience. However, much of the discourse on early Netherlandish painting has revolved around deciphering correct interpretations of symbols or explaining them away as not symbolic at all. In any case, iconography has dominated the field of scholarship.

Some important recent works on late medieval, Northern European art have widened the contextual, interactive understanding of the artworks. Caroline Walker Bynum’s book *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, although primarily dealing with German lands, extensively tackles the highly sensuous and lively piety of material culture. Bynum contends that the age is marked by a paradoxical move toward greater personalized, interiorized prayer as well as heightened fascination with material, miraculous objects. Likewise, Lynn F. Jacob’s *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* deals with the interactive potential of different views and

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“thresholds” of prayer created by paintings with doors throughout the fifteenth-century and ending with Rubens in the sixteenth. Bynum show the significant space for new forms of investigation in the art of the Low Countries in the early modern period. In the case of the Bynum, the tactile and performative aspects of sacred objects underscore the sensuous and dramatic parts of late medieval piety that worked in tandem with allegorical images in paintings. I see my study of depictions of smell in Flemish painting as a part of expanding the liturgical and devotional context in which these artworks functioned.

If the senses were important for affective piety, and were realistically represented in painting, and there were many conspicuously good scents associated with prayer, then new questions arise. What were considered good, bad, and neutral smells in fifteenth-century Flanders and Brabant? What was associated with particular smells? If we know that certain odorants were associated with specific places and behaviors, then was the introduction or suggestion of such smells able to trigger memory or cue behavior? At the same time, is it too speculative to claim that a flower, for example, is meant to imply a

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scent in addition to being merely a visual symbol for the Virgin Mary? The investigation of these questions leads me to posit that the depiction of smell in early Netherlandish painting manifested and reinforced cultural sense memory and odor-cued prayer contexts for believers.

The second chapter of this thesis situates my study within the state of the question of smell study. At the start I outline a historiography of smell. Also, I look at different ways in which contemporary authors approach smell in history. I suggest that the best practice is to understand that smells have meanings or associations, and that these are culturally conditioned. Thus, while we can know what something smells like today, we cannot necessarily know what that meant in fifteenth-century Bruges.

I also survey contemporary social and behavioral science studies of smell in relation to emotion, memory, attitudes, and behaviors. It is a common anecdotal experience to have a smell transport a person back in the imagination to a place and time correlated with it. Thus, while odors are still culturally-bound, the physiology of olfaction and how it affects humans is not. Therefore, this contemporary research gives insight into the power and influence of smell, and even imagined odors.

At the end of Chapter Two, I outline the possibilities of research in early Netherlandish paintings if one is open to smell playing a role in them. I touch briefly on the nascent discourse of art-historical smell studies in general and then move to a particular object to suggest different ways of using smell to interpret an image. There are great possibilities for discussions of class and gender issues, as well as distinguishing mainstream culture from the peripheral other. Then there
is the ability of odors of particular objects to bring to mind particular places and activities, as the psychological studies demonstrate. Certain odors also had a magical, medicinal quality, stemming particularly from consistent outbreaks of bubonic plague, and evocations of these scenes underscore textual evidence of pre-germ theory practices. Furthermore, long-standing Christian tradition associated pleasant smells with sanctity and foul ones with evil and disease (a religio-cultural question, but one that also overlaps with class or group identification).

Chapter Three takes up the questions posed in my research in regard to particular artworks in this period. I begin with an overview of my method, looking at a representative survey of Netherlandish panel paintings, listing smells shown in them, and categorizing them as good, bad, or neutral. I bring up the difficulty of establishing which category each properly is. Ultimately, while some smells are always pleasant or repulsive, quite a few are contextually bound. In the end, the thrust of such observation and categorization of types of odors and their associated meaning might best be termed smell iconography.

Next, I look to the sense spirituality of the late medieval period and how that relates to what devotional art depicts. These connections to the spirituality of the Song of Songs and the *hortus conclusus* (“the enclosed garden,” associated with the Blessed Virgin) and taste and smell in painting leans heavily upon Reindert Falkenburg, whose work comes closest to my own study. Falkenburg asserts that by the late medieval period the senses were a part of the spiritual experience, rather than being merely the first step of progressing into higher, non-sensuous spiritual experience – that an earlier, monastic tradition had
proposed. Instead, much like Bynum’s theory, the spiritual remained in the sense experience and the sense experience stimulated prayer.

The final section of Chapter Three delves into a case study of how smell in relation to those present in fifteenth-century panel paintings helped to collapse the experience of church and home. The artwork in question is Rogier van der Weyden’s *Columba Triptych* (Figure 7). I suggest important Eucharistic dimensions of this Adoration scene that echo historical, liturgical dramas in which clerics dressed like the Three Kings and presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh at the altar on the feast of the Epiphany. Additionally, I make the connection that incense and scented oil were familiar smells able to bring the faithful back into contact with liturgical experiences through their depiction. But most importantly, the latter smell – that of scented oil – in the form of chrism at baptism and confirmation, was a pleasant type odor that returned from the church on the heads of the newly anointed to fill homes with the fragrance of holy things. When a devotee recognized these smells through association with the Adoration of the Magi, it collapsed the space between the domestic and ecclesial sphere for him. In this way, the smells of these Epiphany scenes crystallize a shared communal experience.

In the fourth chapter, I argue that in particular instances smell was not merely a symbolic thread among others, but a deliberate and integral part of the painting’s experience. I begin with an example of the use of smell in connection with actual, affective piety and painting in a donor portrait connected to an image

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of the Madonna of the rose garden. This artwork shows evidence of use of scent receptacles with spiritual exercises. With insights gleaned from this painting and recalling the psychological experiments from Chapter Two, I begin to focus more closely on the association between the image and odor of lilies, irises, and columbines with the Virgin Mary in Flemish painting. In the case of Hans Memling’s *Greverade Triptych*, the grisaille images of Gabriel and Mary at the Annunciation look particularly statue-like when paired with a full-color vase of these Marian flowers (Figure 17). It appears that the viewer is meant to experience praying in front of statues and flowers even when the latter are not in season. Finally, I discuss the possibility that another Memling panel, the reverse of a donor portrait of a still life with the tripartite Marian floral arrangement, was the sole representation of the Virgin (Figure 20). What is more, I make the claim that this picture of a vase of flowers played on the suggestion of smell to transport a person to the remembered space of praying in front of a statue of the Virgin like in the *Greverade Triptych*, or even in front of Mary herself in the vision of the donor with Rosary and scent ball. Thus, these paintings helped re-present devotional practice as well as stabilize praxis through the fixed medium of painting. Cultural memory and sense memory thus become united in the devotional panels these artists painted.

The examples I discuss in this thesis I believe make a plausible argument for my hypothesis. In some cases smell is one of many players of the painting that speaks to the multivalence of prayer that could include the gaze, contemplating symbols, posture and movement, hearing and singing, as well as touch and taste. Moreover, there appear to be some idiosyncratic artworks that
only properly make sense once smell is seen to have a defining role in their composition and function. But even if these paintings in which odors are primary are rare, the existence of these smell-based works themselves are enough to reevaluate the place of odorants and olfaction in other Netherlandish painting of the fifteenth century.
Chapter 2: Smell Scholarship and Art History

Before delving into the role of smell in art-historical inquiry regarding fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting, it is necessary to outline some preliminary material. In this chapter I will address first the state of the question of smell in historical scholarship, its potential and limitations. Next, I will address contemporary social and behavioral science research on smell to show its importance in general human interpretation of the world, as well as to make a strong case for the visual-olfactory connection I will argue is at work in devotional paintings. Lastly, I will touch on the burgeoning field of the art history of smell. As a transition to the specific types of investigation I will utilize with regard to smell in Flemish painting, I will examine a devotional diptych as a case study for the possibilities of this hermeneutic.

Historiography of an Underprivileged Sense

Of the traditional Western list of the five senses, smell has received little honor or study in the humanities. The priority of sight in Western science, philosophy, and (art) history is apparent, with hearing perhaps being a distant second. From the time of the Plato and Aristotle through Aquinas and the medieval philosophers, into the Enlightenment and through to the nineteenth-century task of deodorizing urban space, smell was marginal. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, smell is ephemeral and elusive. A person may know that

he smells something, but to know with certainty from where the smell emanates, how to precisely describe the odor, and what that scent means appears much less easy to determine than what one sees.\(^8\) Secondly, smell was pejoratively deemed an “animal sense.”\(^9\) Sight and hearing in the human realm can be applied to the so-called higher occupations of reading, learning, and the appreciation of beauty, as Thomas Aquinas expounds, but not the senses of smell and taste:

> [T]hose senses chiefly regard the beautiful, which are the most cognitive, viz., sight and hearing, as ministering to reason; for we speak of beautiful sights and beautiful sounds. But in reference to the other objects of the other senses, we do not use the expression beautiful, for we do not speak of beautiful tastes, and beautiful odours.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) "Human sensory processes are well understood: hearing, seeing, perhaps even tasting and touch - but we do not understand smell - the elusive sense. That is, for others we know what stimuli causes what response, and why and how. These fundamental questions are not answered within the sphere of smell science; we do not know what it is about a molecule that ... smells," Jennifer C. Brookes, "Science Is Perception: What Can Our Sense of Smell Tell Us about Ourselves and the World around Us?" *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 368, no. 1924 (August 13, 2010), 3491.


\(^10\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 2ae.27.Lad 3, as quoted in Campbell, “Aquinas’ Reasons for the Aesthetic Irrelevance,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 1996) 168. It should be said that Aquinas’ view of immutatio – the process by which a thing is most spiritual and less changed by matter through the senses – ranks the senses with sight first, followed by hearing and then smell, and taste and touch being the very lowest (cf. Summa 1.78.3, Campbell, 170).
Smell – along with taste and touch for that matter – seems restricted to non- or at least pre-scientific experiences such as eating and the other base, bodily processes both sexual and otherwise excretory. “Because they are ephemeral, olfactory sensations can never provide a persistent stimulus of thought. Thus the development of the sense of smell seems to be inversely related to the development of intelligence.”

Despite the ocularcentric or sight-prized bias of Western thought and the laconic treatment of osmology, smell is undeniably a visceral and powerful sense. As Beata Hoffman states: “Due to human anatomy, olfactory signals reach the brain sooner than signals from the other senses. Many olfactory stimuli convey important information and this is why the human brain and the human organism respond very quickly, often pre-consciously.” And even Thomas Aquinas “argued that human ‘cognitive faculties’ are either sensory or mental. The higher faculties utilize the lower ones and therefore the mind must use the senses. Therefore, cognition must begin with the ‘sensory faculties.’” Furthermore, while the so-called Proust phenomenon of sense memory is culled from odor, smell does not remain merely in sensuous experience. Experienced perfumers can attest that cognition in the form of analysis and imagination are just as important to concocting of scents as raw smell. There is an ambivalence about this sense, for it is so inescapable even as we might try to obscure unpleasant

11 Corbin, Foul and Fragrant, 6.
manifestations of it. As a part of the human experience it must have a history and a place in the scholarly disciplines.

In recent years historians have begun to take smell seriously as a topic of cultural importance. This is due in part to its underprivileging in the Western tradition, hence the turn to smell and smellscapes broadens examining the past by means of a new lens. Sensory history, nevertheless, is not a momentary fad, but holds real promise to expand our understanding of complex artworks. “[S]ensory history holds the promise of radically historicizing the past, of reminding us how very contingent it is, of rescuing history from commodification,” which is to say it interprets the past and reveals the history of ideas that shaped culture.15

As an emerging field within history, sensory history has its share of difficulties and pitfalls. In the case of smell, for instance, because it was considered unimportant, documentation of odors and smell experience can be hard find. Conventional histories may not provide relevant information, so the investigation of smell forces researchers to seek new documentation: diaries and sermons, poetry and popular literature, as well as looking anew at natural philosophy and period cookbooks. Furthermore, the majority of smell history has spanned the late eighteenth century to the present, when osmology came under the empirical study of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution’s effect on smellscapes with an equally strong attempt to neutralize odors from

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civilized ambiance. While the documentation lends itself to these modern periods, it is perhaps also due to the seminal work in historical study of the sense of smell, Alain Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1982, English translation 1986), with its focus on French history in the time after the Revolution.

A major obstacle in smell scholarship is the classic dilemma that the ancients and medievals had with it: it is enigmatic and illusive. The good thing about odor is that we can know what something smells like, but we do not know what that meant. The point is context, for smells are socially constructed and meaning is imparted – we can know what something smells like just as we can hear eighteenth century music played on period instruments, but we do not know what that odor or music meant to people of a particular time and place, which might dangerously reduce both to mere curiosity. This is made abundantly clear in contemporary experience by means of the sense most related to smell, taste; one need only eat an authentic dish from a culinary tradition totally foreign to one’s own to understand that certain tastes, textures, odors, and indeed, foods and parts of food are subjectively enjoyed and culturally conditioned.

Furthermore, contemporary anthropology provides anecdotal information

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16 "...in the 18th century, Charles Linnaeus, the Swedish naturalist, introduced his hierarchical categorization and developed a scale of scents, from very pleasant ones to repulsive ones. Although Linnaeus concentrated on the therapeutic properties of aromas and ignored their sensory qualities, for years to come European researchers considered him to be the author of the first scientific classification of scents (Gilbert, 2010: 39)." Hoffmann, “Scent in Science and Culture,” 36-37.


18 Smith, “Producing Sense,” 841-842.
illustrating that different cultural and national groups notice – often in the negative – the differing body odor of the foreigner.

Some historians discount the social meaning of smells. The claim by those who do this is that a contemporary person can in fact experience what the persons of that time did by taking in the same smells. The goal of smell history in this context is to open up historical scholarship in a sensuously informed way. Thus, Peter Charles Hoffer claims that Civil War reenactments provide a historian – or ordinary participant and spectator – with a feeling of what nineteenth century warfare was like. However, as Mark M. Smith points out, even if one can recreate authentic, period smells, the variables and context cannot be reproduced in this case:

What was rank and fetid to, say, the southern slaveholder’s 1850 nose is not recoverable today not least because that world – the world that shaped what smells existed and how they were perceived and understood by multiple constituencies – has evaporated. Even the reproducibility of past sensations should not be taken for granted. One wonders how much the sight of jet planes overhead, the rhythmic throb of distant traffic, the accidental application of 1990s aftershave on a “Union” soldier, the soft hands of the “Confederate” accountant holding his reproduction sword, the lingering taste of a Shoney’s breakfast, and a host of other modern elements that existed in 1998 but not in 1863 hamper the actual

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19 Cf. Constance Classen, “Odor of the Other,’ Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories.” Ethos 20, no. 2 (June 1, 1992): 134: The anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter, was working among the Inuit of the arctic and an old woman asked if he thinks she smells bad, to which he responds in the affirmative. After pausing and returning to her sewing she tells him she asked because alternately, they think he smells bad and that it is offensive to them.

20 Smith, “Producing Sense,” 845.
“reproduction” of Gettysburg, not to mention those irreproducible, unique accidents of climate, time, and history – acoustic shadows.\textsuperscript{21}

Therefore, the attempt to replicate smells for historical purposes is moot. For this reason, historical scholarship must rather do its best to uncover how smells were perceived in historical milieus, and then, posit implications for interpretation.

\textit{Psychology of Smell}

While the meaning we give to smell is culturally bound, human physiology is more universal. As mentioned above, smell induces strong reactions in us. Recent social and behavioral science experimentation has investigated the link between the body and mind’s reaction to smell and memory, as well as the power to compel behavior. Neurologically, the receptors at the back of the nose that interpret smells are located near the amygdala and hippocampus, the two parts of the brain scientists believe are associated with memory.\textsuperscript{22} What is particularly interesting for the present study is that smell not only cues memory, emotions, or behavior, but that one of these many odor-cued responses can prompt a range of other cues. That is to say that sense memory appears to be susceptible to

\textsuperscript{21} Smith, “Producing Sense,” 846.

suggestion, working to create a context of experiences similar to what a conditioned association of scents means for a particular culture.

The impetus for much of the sociology of smell is the experience of nostalgia. The term comes from the Greek, meaning “a return home,” but originally implied overwhelming homesickness. The power of nostalgia is utilized by advertisers to play on consumers’ desire to revisit happy experiences, as the television series on marketing agents, Mad Men, dramatically expounded in a pitch for a Kodak slide projector – a device that resembles a child’s carousel that brings a person back to visual memories again and again. The anecdotal intuition of the power of smell to intimate memory is commonly called the Proust phenomenon. In his book Swann’s Way (1919), Marcel Proust recounts how the smell of madeleine pastries dipped in tea whisked him back to his grandmother’s kitchen as a child. Social scientists and psychologists have set about testing if there is any validity to this experience.

The findings of such studies show varying levels of efficacy of smell to affect behavior, emotion, and memory, but they all appear to prove at least some affect. Psychology and Sociology of the sense of smell is relatively new. Because visual and linguistic tests have a longer data history, they provide something like a control group or constant within the experiments. Often however, the interplay

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25 “The fundamental principle underlying the Proust phenomenon is that odors can become affective markers for places where meaningful social interaction took place because they fit into the overall experience,” Gerald C. Cupchik, GERALD C., Michelle C. Hilscher, and Dina Battu, “Recognizing Odors Associated with Meaningful Places,” The American Journal of Psychology 123, no. 3 (2010): 290.
of images and language are intrinsic to these smell studies, in what is termed cross modal priming effects.

In a study by Li, Moallem, Paller, and Gottfried, the researchers studied the affect of pleasant and unpleasant odors upon rating the likeability of faces.\textsuperscript{26} Basing their hypothesis on prior studies that “subliminal affective information in visual stimuli can modify social judgments,” they tested the ability of scents undetectable to conscious smelling to affect participants’ judgments.\textsuperscript{27} The choice of odorants were taken from a previous study, made up of three: citral (“lemon”), anisole (“ethereal”), and valeric acid (“sweat”) as good, neutral, and bad odors, respectively. Participants were asked to sniff a vial of an odorant and then briefly view and rate a picture of a face on a scale of unlikeability to likeability. After the test was complete, four of the thirty-one participants were able to identify four of the seven odorants.\textsuperscript{28} This consciousness of smells was taken into account when processing the data from the study. It showed that subliminal good and bad smells positively or negatively influenced likeability ratings of faces significantly, but when participants could detect a smell as pleasant or disagreeable during the experiment, they tended to give less heightened ratings.\textsuperscript{29} Whether participants were fighting sense prompts cannot

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\textsuperscript{27} Li, et al., “Subliminal Smells,” 1044. The undetectable odorants were as low as 7 ppt. The chemical measurement ppt stands for “part per trillion,” meaning a trace amount that can be read by technical instruments but is not consciously detected by humans, cf. “What does ppt and ppq levels mean?” Accessed January 26, 2016. http://www.measurement.gov.au

\textsuperscript{28} Li, et al., “Subliminal Smells,” 1045.

\textsuperscript{29} Li, et al., “Subliminal Smells,” 1048. Apparently, awareness of the experimental variables made the participants try to combat unconscious reactions.
\end{flushleft}
be determined by this study, but it does suggest that smells do shape our affective behavior and attitudes.30

Much sense scholarship has been conducted on the relationship between smell and memory. Spurred by previous research showing scents’ ability as environmental cues to stimulate recall, Stafford, Salehi, and Waller investigated pre-existing memory associations.31 Prior experiments had paired smells with stimuli and then reintroduced odors to see if subjects could recall the observed stimuli. In their study, Stafford, Salehi, and Waller showed subjects a list of odor-related words paired to a particular smell (e.g., peppermint, rosemary, or no odor), and then later asked them to complete a lexical decision task (LDT) while either sniffing the same odorants or no odorants.32 Of the two experiments conducted in three conditions, they all demonstrated that words associated with certain smells used in each group increased recall. However, the odorants had to be recognizable. In this case, of all pleasant smells rosemary performed best for participants. Therefore, the researchers drew two conclusions: one, that socially formed meanings attached to smells are capable of eliciting memory, and two, that some odors are more potent in this regard despite intensity, pleasantness, or length of exposure.33

An unintended outcome of Stafford, Salehi, and Waller’s experiment is equally interesting for the present paper. While the data shows that pairing

32 A lexical decision task provides subjects with a list of words to see if they will allot stimuli to sense words or non-words.
33 “Both experiments showed that the effect was stronger for certain odors which...may be due to the strength of the relationship between word and odor,” Stafford et al., “Odors Cue Memory,” 69.
odors with related words will increase a person’s memory and associations, the suggestion of odor appeared to be as strongly statically significant in this regard as inhaling odorants. That is, each of the two experiments had three groups: the first was exposed to smells during the learning and the recall testing, the second group was asked merely to imagine particular odors at the recall testing, and the control group was just given the LDT. Interestingly, counter the hypothesis of the researchers, those who merely imagined the scents performed as high as those who inhaled the scents again. This seems to imply that the sense memory attached to smells and their related meanings can be induced merely by the suggestion of them!

Li, Moallem, Paller, and Gottfried’s study demonstrates the process by which we can attach a kind of moral meaning or value to images and objects and even persons. Over time, various influences create an institutional or cultural conditioning of these associations, in line with Stafford, Salehi, and Waller’s findings that positive reinforcement (i.e., good odors) incur greater recall and that particular smells have greater power of association. Stafford, Salehi, and Waller posit the reason certain scents did well was due to semantic association based on function rather than even pleasantness.

One possibility is that since the words related to peppermint contained more functional words (e.g., toothpaste, gum) compared to a higher number of adjectives for bergamot (e.g., zesty, fresh), it may be that the effects of odors are strongest for odor plus functional words. This gains some support from experiment 1 where both odor-related words contained more functional words

34 Stafford, et al., “Odors Cue Memory,” 60.
compared to adjectives...which possibly also helps strengthen the categorical priming effect.35

It is interesting to note that function does not here mean simply manual work or hygienic practices (e.g., brushing teeth) but merely action (e.g., chewing gum). What this suggests is that not only utilitarian endeavors have a higher power of association, rather things done for delight alone have the same end.

Smell has the power to evoke strong associations, but when it is attached to social interaction and spaces it can affect expectations for mood. Cupchik, Hilscher, and Buttu tested the idea that people will attempt to recreate meaningful spaces in new environments that fit schemata. Thus, Social psychologists have argued that people look outward at situations as shaping their experiences (Jones & Nisbett, 1972), [whether] this ‘field of view’...[is] recent or remote (Nigro & Neisser, 1983). An evocative atmosphere in a situation that fosters meaningful interaction should make the episode, the setting, and the associated odor more memorable for participants.36

Furthermore, smells that become site-associated are long-lived and resist the introduction of new smells.37

In this regression analysis studying the relationship between associated narrative and particular odors, one male and one female pair were asked to view a living room space, inhale an ambient odor circulated in the room during viewing, and (depending on each group) asked to either imagine themselves or

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the owner of the home interacting in the room, respectively; then they responded to five factor sets of questions to determine likeability and environmental coherence. A previous study had shown that participants associated a “warmer” living environment with a living room that looked lived in and more antique, while a modern, spartan, and geometric living room as “cool.” Cupchik, Hilscher, and Buttu wanted to see if subjects’ descriptions were more expressive when paired with an associated odor (pleasant in “warm” spaces, unpleasant in “cool” ones) as well as incoherent odors and spaces in the opposite instance. Odorants were chosen from previous studies as pleasant freshness (fresh cut grass, clementine, rose) and incense (agarbatti) in contrast to unpleasant decay (rotting leaves, synthetic sweat, birch tar) and intense cleaning (Clean Fresh pine) odors. The results support the researchers’ hypothesis of odor-space coherence (e.g., pleasant smells match “warm” living spaces) and fit imagined, narrative associations. These results suggest that the formation of spaces around hedonic aromas trigger emotional responses consistent with conditioning.

Smell, memory, emotional evocation and paintings were all tested by Herz and Cupchik. The goal of the study was to see if odor-cued memory had a greater emotional content when paired with images than with verbal label cues. This is to say that the paintings acted more as texts than objects of relationship or contemplation. With that said, the findings of the study showed that recall of paintings after forty-eight hours was very poor on a whole. But in the case of the

verbal labels, the recall was slightly better. “Unlike visual or auditory stimuli where a cognitive representation (memory, name, image) can elicit the corresponding physical sensation in a more or less symmetrical way, true olfactory imagery may not be possible.” However, when hedonic odor and pleasant imagery are paired, the recall is generally almost equal to the verbal cues and better than in control conditions. The conclusion of the researchers can be explained thusly: “In other words, the quality of a memory which is evoked by the smell of a lover’s perfume will be more emotionally loaded than the memory of the same person elicited by the name of their perfume, even though the content of the memories may be the same.”

One of the most interesting studies on smell tested the effect of nonconscious odor-cued behavior conducted by the Dutch team of Holland, Hendriks, and Aarts. In the Li, Moallem, Paller, and Gottfried study, odorants were applied under the ability to consciously smell them, but in this other experiment, nonconscious – that is, smells so diluted participants were unaware of them – were tested to see if they cued behavior. All prior experiments demonstrated semantic associations attached to smells through cultural conditioning and memories or emotions can be cued or affected by odorants. However, Holland, Hendriks, and Aarts tested whether all of the above understanding of what smell does could in fact influence how a person behaves in a given setting.

In one of the tests conducted by the Dutch researchers, a control group of a room without an odor and one in a room with a diffused pine scent, were asked to fill out a series of questions. Citrus scent is shown to be associated in many Western countries with all-purpose cleaning products. Then each subject was taken into a room that had no diffused smell and asked to wait for results. In the time of waiting the participant was given a cookie that produced many crumbs when it was bitten. A camera recorded subjects and two observers, blind to the aims of the experiment, recorded the number of times each subject brushed away crumbs from a table. The result was that subjects who had been in the citrus-diffused room prior to eating a cookie cleaned the table surface an average of almost three times as often as the control group.

All of the above studies into the relationship between the sense of smell with memory, emotion, and behaviors, are significant for what smell, as present in representational painting, does to a viewer. The Holland, Hendriks, and Aarts experiment indicates, in line with studies that examined smell-associated words and settings, that odors can affect behavior without a person being conscious of it manipulating him. Stafford, Salehi, and Waller’s research shows that the mere suggestion of smell seems to be as powerful in evoking the same experiences as exposure to the actual odors. Likewise, Stafford, Salehi, and Waller suggest that function, attached to a particular odor and association, is a stronger indicator of memory and use of imagination. This function need not be utilitarian or labor

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46 “to demonstrate that the influence of scent on cognition and behavior can occur without a person's conscious awareness of this influence,” Holland, et al., “Smells like Clean Spirit,” 691.
intensive, and could be applied to art and religion. Herz and Cupchik’s findings differ from this, however, pointing out that olfaction seems to work at an emotional rather than a conceptual level, but in the end say that content – what psychologist Avery Gilbert calls the image that the brain produces for smells – is the same. Cupchik, Hilscher, and Buttu studied the strong associations of places with associated scents, noting that strong emotions are tied to hedonic experiences of smell and environment. When one considers the data gleaned from these contemporary studies, it seems that the mere depiction (suggestion) of smell in paintings – with their various cultural associations – may have the ability to recreate particular experiences associated with the smells that are depicted therein. Furthermore, the mere suggestion of smell in these painting might be able to trigger the sense memory and induce behavior in the spectator.

**Smell Study and Early Modern Flemish Painting**

Smell scholarship is new to general history but even more so to art history. In the case of the visual arts it seems that the Western bias for sight is justified! Nevertheless, art historians have explored the sense of sight and found that it, too, has a history and a cultural context. As noted above, smells are culturally subjective and bear meanings based on context. The same holds true for sight, as Peter Burke notes:

> [A]rt historians such as Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001) as well as psychologists such as Richard Gregory (1923-) have all emphasized, stereotypes or schemata are necessary to the process

47 See below, p. 25-26.
of structuring perception and so interpreting the world. The eye depends on the brain. However, most if not all of these schemata come from the repertoires of particular cultures. Eye, brain and culture work together.  

Following this logic, sight is not just sight, and this means that other factors that carry cultural meaning are overdue for art-historical study. The contemporary social psychology studies discussed in the second part of this chapter points to the importance of the feelings that smell – even at the non-conscious level – evokes. To exclude what smells are represented and what they meant to artists, patrons, and audiences is to devalue the multivalent effects of art, as well as making art history an overly cerebral, abstract enterprise as it elides the full spectrum of the sensuous impact of art. It also furthers smell’s place as an animal sense unworthy of serious scholarship – not to mention forgetting that all art objects were intended for functional contexts other than the atmospherically neutral venue of the modern art museum.

That being said, the treatment of smell in art history has not dealt much with what is depicted and what it meant. Instead, smell has been studied in regard to material culture and the affect smellscapes create in the acoustical space in which art is viewed as well as the less-sophisticated realm of popular and children’s museum spaces where smell is used like a McDonald’s ball pit.


49 Mark S. R. Jenner, “Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories,” The American Historical Review 116, no. 2 (April 1, 2011), 336: “the use of odors, whether in Disneyfied displays or, more discreetly, in boxes from which the visitor can inhale, has become common in historical museums. In recent years, the museumgoer has been able to experience the smells of a World War I trench, a Victorian slum, the spices traded in the eighteenth century, and a Tudor warship, to name but a few. Such odorized presentations of history are deemed appropriate primarily for non-academic audiences, and especially for children; they also have a tendency to adopt a humorous and at times flippant tone. (The Smelly Old Histories were full of jokes.) Smells, it seems, still fit uneasily into the world of serious scholarship.”
Likewise, modern artists have tried to include smell as a part of their Gesamtkunstwerk.\textsuperscript{50} This notwithstanding, representational art seems ripe for smell scholarship of the sort already being practiced in general history. For that matter, abstract art should not be left out, for the same reason that synesthesia – the experience of hearing colors or the condition by which music evokes visualization in the mind – was a potent inspiration for the non-objective painting of artists like Wassily Kandinsky.\textsuperscript{51} Psychologist Avery Gilbert, posits that “scents exist entirely in our heads. Many particles are floating in the air but not all of them are recognized as scents. Therefore, scents are images rather than objectively existing entities.”\textsuperscript{52}

In the study of specific periods of art history, smell is a mostly unused lens of inquiry for Flemish panel painting of the fifteenth century. The only scholar who seems to have even considered smell an actual part of these paintings’ composition is Reindert Falkenburg.\textsuperscript{53} This is likely not only because there has been little attention given to smell within art history in general, but also because these artworks are stridently visual – every detail of naturalistic clarity in texture, hue, and empirical likeness is packed into these paintings.\textsuperscript{54} The new verism of artists like van Eyck, van der Weyden, and Memling, was revolutionary and

\textsuperscript{52} Hoffmann, “Scents in Science and Culture,” 33.
\textsuperscript{53} Cf. p. 67.
\textsuperscript{54} Concerning the pride of place vision has over other senses is dealt with analogously: “This might be at least partly due to the fact that visual art survives, but music, like drama, is ephemeral, and survives only in its secondary textual (visually perceived) form. Within the objects traditionally investigated by art historians, and historians of religion we find many examples of visible music, depicted in various ways,” Beth William, “Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence,” Speculum 88, no. 1 (January 1, 2013), 14.
evidently the mere fact of accurately representing what was seen was serious business for them. At the same time, most art history has focused upon the symbolic, allegorical use of objects in these paintings. Ever since Erwin Panofsky’s *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953) made iconographic study of these paintings paramount, discussion of the true meaning of these symbolic objects (and if they are symbolic at all) has been a focus of the period.\(^{55}\) Johan Huizinga found the twin aspects of naturalism and allegory to be contradictory and opposed from a culturo-historical sense; the symbolic was moribund medieval residue in the emergent, humanistic shift to the Renaissance in European history.\(^{56}\)

However, what was contradiction for Huizinga is the very reason why smell should be studied in early Netherlandish painting. The fact that objects are both the thing-in-itself and symbolic gets to the heart of smell scholarship. What is depicted? What odors are associated with these things? And what meanings were associated with particular smells? Outside of seventeenth-century Dutch still lives, few period styles could boast so many odiferous items: from censers to barn animals, from foreigners to flowers.

An example of the wide range of smelly objects in paintings from the period can be seen in a small diptych by the anonymous Master of 1499 (Figure 1).\(^{57}\) The closed diptych front depicts Christ as the *Salvator Mundi* (Savior of the

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57 Cf. Appendix (Figure 1): Master of 1499, *Diptych of Abbot Christiaan de Hondt* (c. 1499) oil on panel, approximately 37.1 x 20.4 cm with frames (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten).
World), and the open leaves show a copy of Jan Van Eyck’s Madonna in the Church (c. 1438-1440) on the left (*dexter*) and a donor portrait of Cistercian Abbot Christiaan de Hondt to the right (*sinister*). The open diptych demonstrates the two most common settings of fifteenth century Flemish paintings: ecclesial (or heavenly) and domestic (contemporary time and space). The objects grouped around the Virgin Mary seem symbolic (columbine flowers represented the Holy Spirit, and lilies represent Mary’s purity as they denote the virginal conception of Jesus) and those in Abbot Christiaan’s plush abbatial cell speak to his (or his abbey’s) wealth (oranges, ewers, personal fireplace) as well as a rebus for his family name (the dog, *hondt* in Dutch).

Nonetheless, all of these things depicted in the *Diptych of Abbot Christiaan de Hondt* have distinct scents. Lilies are associated not just with Mary’s purity, but with Easter and thusly spring when they bloom. The presence of lilies in even a high-vaulted, stone church is quite noticeable (especially for those who suffer from seasonal allergies!). Likewise, the apartment of the abbot

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Hand, Metzger, and Spronk suggest that the so-called Master of 1499 could be the manuscript illuminator, Gerard Horenbout of Ghent. Their claim is based not only on stylistic similarities of the art, but on the small, snuffed candles that appear in several of his paintings (including twice in the Abbot de Hondt Diptych) which they posit may act like a signature, because *bouw* was a Flemish term for wick at the time. Cf. John Oliver Hand, Catherine Metzger, and Ron Spronk, *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (Washington: Antwerp: Cambridge: New Haven: National Gallery of Art; Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten; Harvard University Art Museums; Yale University Press, 2006) 316.

58 Cf. Hand, et al., *Prayers and Portraits*, 140, 145: Christiaan de Hondt was abbot of Ter Duinen (Our Lady of the Dunes Abbey) near Bruges from 1495 to 1509. The terms *dexter* and *sinister* relate to the heraldic and portraiture terminology. The place of honor is on the right or *dexter* in Latin, which is on the viewer’s left. Ordinarily the male figure is dexter, but because the Madonna and Christ Child are more important, they take the dexter side.

The Salvator Mundi on the diptych front is dated 1499 (hence the anonymous artist’s attribution). The back of the diptych depicts a later abbot of Ter Duinen, Robrecht de Clerq (reigned 1519-1557), obviously painted later to match the style of Abbot Christiaan, but when opened he faces the Salvator Mundi. The background above Abbot Robrecht shows that this rear part of the diptych was originally painted to be faux marble, and is strikingly plain compared to the luxurious interior of the abbatial a partment of his predecessor.

suggests wealth, not just visually but also aromatically. While smoke was a pervasive reality of medieval life because all heating and cooking needed fire, in the monastic setting it could be a sign of luxury in that, rather than residing in an open dormitory or an unheated cell, the abbot had his own hearth.\textsuperscript{60} Despite the unpleasant – or at best, neutral – odor of a wood fire, Abbot Christiaan has ewers that might hold scentless oil or water, but also might hold perfumed oils such as chrism that were used in sacramental rites.\textsuperscript{61} Next to the ewers are two oranges, and there is yet another one on a mantle above the fireplace. Oranges were seasonal, available in the winter in Europe, and an exotic delicacy.\textsuperscript{62} Still, along with being expensive commodities in the Low Countries, their fresh citrus scent could have combated the stale air of a stone bedroom. What is more, however, smoke that fumigates and acidic fruits were prized at this time as warding off plague – but in this case also may have been a sign of the wealth that was necessary to do such things.\textsuperscript{63} At the same time, the presence of a the toy spaniel at the abbot’s feet – if it was intended to be a more than a representation of de Hondt’s surname or symbol of fidelity – would have its own animal odor, as well as the capacity to create pungent smells if it were to indiscreetly defecate in abbot’s chambers.


\textsuperscript{61} Ward sees this as storing of medicinal balm in the Ghent Altarpiece Annunciation. In that case the “stoppered flask” is stowed because Christ has come to heal all wounds of sin and division. Cf. John L. Ward, “Hidden Symbolism,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 57, no. 2 (June 1, 1975) 218-219.

\textsuperscript{62} Panofsky says that fruit in connection with the Virgin and Child often “suggests by this very intactness the\textsuperscript{quaedia Paradisi} lost through the Fall of Man but regained, as it were, through Mary, the ‘new Eve,’” \textit{Early Netherlandish Painting}, 144.

The dilemma of fifteenth-century panel painting, however, is this: How does one know that the smell was intended to be a part of the composition by the artist – was it merely a visible sign – or that the spectator would have considered the smell of objects depicted in a painting as part of the artwork? A reasonable, speculative answer to these questions is: No, the suggestion of smell was not intended as part of these artworks. Certainly the aspect of smell has not occurred to art historians. Be that as it may, those art historians are all citizens of a deodorized, Western milieu. Just as nineteenth-century Protestant scholars’ assertion that the early Flemish masters placed hidden symbolism in their paintings, more recent art historians have pointed out that early modern Catholics were by in large aware of allegorical images for the cognoscenti and even among the many illiterate persons in the form of printed illustrations.64

Thus, to rule out smell as a part of the painting is to discount what we know of the power of olfaction that contemporary behavioral science studies has shown, while also neglecting to take into account cultural meanings attached to odors.

If we consider the possibility that artists and audiences were open to understanding that the depiction of smell could induce associations to that scent, other insights about an artwork unfold. The additional symbolic quality of odors to vision is mentioned above. There is another aspect of smell’s depiction that has to do with the lived experience and attitudes of late medieval and early modern Europeans. As will be discussed more in-depth below, long-standing Jewish and Christian tradition up to the Enlightenment attributed health or

sickness, as well as moral character of places and persons on good and bad smell(scape)s.\textsuperscript{65} As C.M. Woolgar writes:

Did groups of individuals therefore set out to be identified by smell, to be raised up by it, or condemned by it? By looking at how odours were created or controlled\textemdash who had access to them, and when, we can provide some answers. The odour of the individual is only one aspect of this: the wider environment might also be perfumed - in the first instance goods, such as bed linen, the contents of wardrobes and chests, then whole rooms and buildings. This last was least effective in certain conditions, for example where there was already a dominant odour of smoke in a building, and the investment was unlikely to be worthwhile until buildings and lifestyles had reached a certain pattern.\textsuperscript{66}

Once one considers the importance of smell, suddenly the interiors of the \textit{de Hondt Diptych} more strongly emphasize their points: nobility, wealth, and sanctity. As Woolgar states elsewhere, “Purchases of flowers for the royal household at the end of the Middle Ages are indicative of a small-scale trade; and flowers were among the many commodities considered appropriate gifts of a queen.”\textsuperscript{67} Not surprisingly, Mary – seen here wearing a crown – is enveloped with an odor that separates her from the unwashed rabble and transports her into the holiest of sites. Abbot Christiaan himself – although apparently not self-conscious about monastic poverty – displays not only class status by the smellscape he inhabits, but it also separates him from an environment associated

\textsuperscript{65} Harvey, \textit{Scenting Salvation}, 1.
\textsuperscript{66} C.M. Woolgar, \textit{The Senses}, 132.
\textsuperscript{67} C.M. Woolgar, \textit{The Senses}, 128.
with the impious rabble; such powerful associations between smells and the
experience of a location is consistent with contemporary sociological study.68

Smell, then, is yet another interpretative piece of art-historical method. It
reveals the ideas and attitudes of the culture that makes use of them in its
artwork. However, as sociological experiments have suggested, I will argue in the
last part of this paper that smells had the power to do more than simply reinforce
visual symbols and cultural attitudes; I will argue that smell had the power on the
fifteenth century viewer to evoke sense memory.

68 “Social psychologists have argued that people look outward at situations as shaping their experiences (Jones
& Nisbett, 1972), and this ‘field of view’ enables them to reconstruct original experiences, whether recent or remote
(Nigro & Neisser, 1983). An evocative atmosphere in a situation that fosters meaningful interaction should make the
episode, the setting, and the associated odor more memorable for participants,” Gerald C. Cupchik, Michelle C. Hilscher,
and Dina Buttu, “Recognizing Odors Associated with Meaningful Places,” The American Journal of Psychology 123, no. 3
(2010), 282.
Chapter 3: Smell-associated Meanings in Netherlandish Painting

Even before Moses existed, He [God] had within himself every fragrance of all that is pleasing.

− St. Irenaeus

Europe in the early modern period was an intrinsically foul place to live. The inhabitant of fifteenth-century Flanders would have traversed a smellscape in which there was no sewer system, infrequent bathing, and unmediated exposure to all forms of farm and pre-industrial manufacturing that was pervasive and ubiquitous. With that said, certain good smells would have been conspicuous and acute, (just as the sound of church bells would have been particularly loud in a relatively silent world). The depiction of good, neutral, and bad smells in the ever more naturalistic Flemish paintings of the fifteenth century gave viewers an ideal and symbolic experience similar to quotidian life, but also provided a way of lifting persons into contact with divine life.

In the second chapter, I asserted that odors are culturally bound and impart meaning within a realm of associations that smells evoke. In this chapter I will present case studies on medieval neutral, bad, and good smells as depicted in painting. My terminology here for odor types is on one level interchangeable with insipid, unpleasant, and pleasant smells, respectively, but on another level these odors have a moral attachment to neutral, bad, and good. Another way of


71 Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, 2; Smith, “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense,” 851.

saying this could be to term this classification an iconography of smell. As contemporary psychological study has shown, people tend to attribute likeability and virtue to what is considered a good smell. Some of this reaction is based in physiology because senses are not historically conditioned; odors can evoke survival instincts warning us of danger and disease. However in the case of the late medieval and early modern European milieu, odor became confirmation of holiness (or its opposite) in what was known as the odor of sanctity and the odor of corruption.

An example of the odor of sanctity is related in the transfer of some of St. Ursula’s eleven thousand virgins’ relics to a Cistercian monastery in the thirteenth century.

Laid out in the choir, the sacred bones began to give off an unbearable stench. Suspecting some Satanic hanky-panky, the abbot summoned the abominable spirit to show itself. “[All o]f a sudden the huge jawbone of a horse was glimpsed beneath the heap of relics; it was cast out forthwith, and the horrible stench that had filled the place gave way to the sweetest of

74 Taste being the constant companion of smell, it can help to explain this. The survival tastes are sugar (sweet), salty, and fatty; those things that have an alkaline flavor are often poisonous. However, things such as vegetables also have an alkaline flavor and are deceptive in that regard. Likewise, taste can be acquired to enjoy other alkaline tastes like beer, vinegar, etc. Cf. Alton Brown, “Undercover Veggies,” Good Eats, Food Network, June 8, 2009.
This may help to explain why not only unpleasant things become likeable, but how odors once considered good can be thought annoying to many now: incense, strong cologne, etc. Plague remedies in terms of fumigation smoke of pleasant plants, “antiseptics” like vinegar, and foods high in acid like citrus juice that put the humors in balance, cf. Aberth, The Black Death, 52-53.
smells: whereupon the monks praised God.” The corpse of a saint cannot emit an unpleasant smell unless the Devil himself interferes.\textsuperscript{75} The odor of sanctity was a sign of his holiness and a reminder of holy things. These smells are, of course, unexpected, and contrast with the fear and repulsion of death and decay. This was expressed in New Testament allegory and taken to a quite literal degree by medieval Christians:

Concerning the odor of a good reputation, the same Apostle says: \textit{We are the odor of Christ}, that is, the example and imitation of Christ, \textit{in all places}, and \textit{we are for others an odor of life that leads to life} \cite{durande:2007:p94}., while others are an odor of death that leads to death \cite{leguere:1994:121}, that is, the odor of envy and evil thoughts that lead to eternal death.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, the alternative to good smells would be the bad smells, in a delectable and moral sense.

Not all odors are so easily classified. For the present study, I surveyed a representative sample of fifty-four Flemish and early Netherlandish paintings between 1400-1500. I categorized the smells in this survey as good, neutral, and bad (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{77} Categorization was at times difficult because the smell of a depicted object may vary depending on context. One example is the candle. In itself a candle burning will have a slightly more pungent aroma if it was made of animal tallow as opposed to beeswax, yet, it can rightly be dubbed a neutral

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Annick Le Guérer, \textit{Scent: the mysterious and essential powers of smell} (New York: Kodansha International, 1994) 121.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Cf. Appendix (Figure 2): Smell Chart in Fifteenth-Century Flemish Painting
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
As oil lamps and candles were the main source of artificial light before the invention of electricity, it is not surprising to see their frequent cameos in paintings (sixteen of the fifty-four). However, sometimes candles are depicted as snuffed with smoldering wicks. The smell of snuffed candles is unpleasant and in the medieval period some believed that it could induce miscarriage in pregnant women. At the same time, snuffing a candle in the presence of a foul room smell is anecdotally thought to extinguish bad odor. How then, does one categorize it? This is compounded by the fact that frequently enough the snuffed candle with a smoldering wick is shown in the presence of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation (Figure 3).

_Late Medieval Sense Spirituality_

Despite the categorization of smell being a difficult task at times, there are clear indications of odor associations for the time period. Much of this can be taken from popular sermons, hymns, and early vernacular books of the late medieval period, themselves drawing on the reflection of Scripture commentators stretching back as far as the Patristic period. What is described in these prayer texts is exactly what is seen in the paintings. Therefore, when one sees a flower it has obvious symbolic meanings (e.g., the purity of the Virgin), but the scent itself was an integral and essential part of the experience. As Caroline Walker

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78 The neutral odor could also be a comment on the candle being so common.
80 Cf. Appendix (Figure 3): Robert Campin, _Mèrode Altarpiece_ (c. 1425) oil on canvas (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art). Cf. Panofsky, _Early Netherlandish Painting_, 143: “[T]he Marian symbolism of the candle itself seems to be superseded by another idea akin to St. Bridget’s notion of physical illumination ‘reduced to nothingness’ by the radiance of Light Divine: the candle on the table has gone out, emitting a wisp of smoke, at the approach of the angel.”
Bynum has said in regard to materiality in the late medieval Low Countries, religious experience was marked by paradox: “Miraculous matter was simultaneously – hence paradoxically – the changeable stuff of not-God and the locus of a God revealed.” For the believer at this time, smells – implied or actual – were the means to prayer but also not transcended and forgotten. On the contrary rather than a dichotomy, outer and “inner” senses were interlaced. This textual testimony, taken with what appears in the paintings themselves, helps to make fresh what odors were meant to be in fifteenth-century Flanders.

Most important for late medieval spirituality, was twelfth-century, monastic reflection on the sensuous imagery of the Song of Songs – the courtly, erotic poem of the Hebrew Scriptures – which linked smell and taste symbolism as *unio mystica* of Christ the Bridegroom with the soul of the believer. The mystical writings of big names like St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Richard of St. Victor, anonymous works by Carthusian monks, and the documented mystical experiences of cloistered nuns, were all distilled to the laity by the mendicant orders in the High Middle Ages. An important work was St. Bonaventure’s *Vitis Mystica* (“The Mystical Vine”), which took the longstanding *unio mystica*, love spirituality, and made explicit the beginning of spiritual experience in the natural world through all the senses:

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Let us now smell these flowers in our vineyard praying to sweet Jesus that He deign to endow our hearts with the scent of His sweetest smells so that we may feel His sweetness. “O soul, father only the petals of the flowers of the blossoming Jesus, the drops of red blood and enclose these in the bed chamber of your heart. This taste and smell be in your heart as a holy medicine to drive away your illnesses and protect from the future evils.”

Sight, smell, taste, and touch are all mentioned in this exhortation.

Bonaventure’s instruction grounds prayer in an experience everyone can have and then invites the devotee to utilize memory and imagination. In its various forms, Bonaventure’s work was popular and translated into vernacular languages, for example in Middle Dutch as *Een Boecxken van den hemelschen Wijngaert*.

A second and perhaps more important primer by Bonaventure is the *Lignum Vitae* (“Tree of Life”) which uses the schematic image of a tree, and moving from base to top, charts a progression from human senses to the spiritual pinnacle. However, it should be noted again that in Bonaventure’s time, and in the later medieval period especially, that senses did not pass away into a wordless, imageless, abstract experience of the holy. Henning Laugerud calls the engagement of senses of primary importance to creating so-called hooks of memory, and creating a process of internalization of the mysteries through which one is transformed – just as St. Francis of Assisi’s intense reflection on the crucified Christ produced the wounds of the Passion in his own body through

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87 Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 156.
stigmatization. 88 All the associations of smells, as well as ingesting or imagining the odors themselves, produce multiple effects: “this act of meditation comprises, therefore, not only the consumptive ‘internalizing’ and ‘incorporation’ by the soul of the Heavenly Bridegroom but also of (the virtuousness of) [the person contemplated] - and is an act of self-reflection by the soul as well.” 89 Many strata of Low Country society knew of this modern devotion in the fifteenth century. Therefore, I assert that the presence of smell was a deliberate motif used by artists in this time and played into the multi-sensory piety of the era.

The Stable and the Church

The theme that recurs with frequency in its sheer abundance of smells is The Adoration of the Magi. 90 This is the smellscape par excellence.

Netherlandish artists generally set the scene in a stable-grotto-ruin characteristic of the period’s paintings of Christ’s birth at Bethlehem, a perfect nexus for good,

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88 La ugerud, “Sensory Materiality,” 252, 266.
89 Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 156.
90 The gospel of Matthew 2:1-12 (and 2.16-18) describes the three foreign gift bearers to the newborn King of the Jews to be “magi from the East,” or “wise men,” (Douay-Rheims Bible). These were probably Persian Zoroastrian clerics (magi sharing a root with magician), cf. Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., The New Jerome Biblical Commentary (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990) 635. Over time in Western Europe they became known as either the Wise Men (a fairly accurate translation of the biblical term into a context ignorant of the original term’s meaning), but also dubbed the Three Kings. The latter is based on typological reflection on Psalm 72:10 [71:10], “Reges Tharsis et insulae munera offerent. Reges Arabum et Saba dona adducunt.” These respective Gentile peoples coming to worship the God of Israel, were from Spain (Tarshish), Ethiopia (Sheba), and Arabia (Seba) (note that St. Jerome attributed Sheba with Arabia). These prophecies help to explain the common custom of depicting the Three Kings as European, African, and Asian – coming from the three known continents to worship Jesus. The purported relics of the Three Kings – some attribute as loot brought back from the Fourth Crusade’s sack of Constantinople (1204) – are now in Cologne Cathedral. Names have been attributed to the Magi (Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior), although ethnic designation varies as to which is which, as does the gift borne by each, and just as often all three are regarded as all being from different East Asian nations. Although Northern Renaissance paintings typically depict these foreign visitors as royalty, modern designations of the paintings most often use the original biblical designation of Magi, which I will generally do in this paper.
bad, and neutral odors. The convergence of many kinds of smells stemming from several contexts makes these Nativity and Epiphany altarpieces particularly suitable for study. I will argue that smell associations in these scenes collapsed the space between ecclesial/heavenly/communal associations and more domestic/earthly/personal associations.

In the first place, it is important to understand what the interaction of these smells was at the time. “The environments of medieval churches were consciously manipulated in order to present the church as a sacred space.” The practice of traveling to church, receiving sacraments and their secondary phenomena, and then bringing it back to the home mark important moments of initiation into the Christian life. These collapsing associations involve olfaction and can be linked to images of the Epiphany. Frankincense and myrrh both come from balsam tree resin, and their aromatic qualities were burned in the former and crushed into olive oil for the latter, the fruit of trade with the east and the exotic. Myrrh was an expensive ointment used to anoint a body for burial, and generally a costly perfume. Spices and aromatic resin were used in oils for perfume throughout the ancient world. As sensual practices of the Mediterranean were applied to sacramental rites in order to bring out secondary

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91 Showing contrast or “antithesis” between Christianity and Judaism/paganism, “In the fifteenth century the symbolic ruin...and the above instances leave little doubt that it is symbolic – came to be introduced into representations of the Infancy of Christ, viz., the Nativity (quite literally the birth of a new era) and the Adoration of the Magi,” Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 135.


93 Le Guéret, Scent, 134-135.

94 This gives insight into the men, and in particular the women such as Mary of Magdala, who subsidized Jesus' public ministry and appeared at the tomb on Easter morning to anoint his body after the Passover (cf. Luke 23:56, 24:1, etc.).

95 Harvey, Scenting Salvation, 2.
meanings, not surprisingly perfumed oil became common. The early third-century theologian, Origen of Alexandria – in a trope that will be repeated in Christian preaching into the late medieval period –, uses the qualities of incense and myrrh as metaphors about striving for Christian perfection:

We must seek “frankincense” and not just any kind of frankincense but [that which is] clear. The high priest does not want to take something dark and sordid; he seeks something clear. But he also demands from you “galbanum” whose nature is to chase away harmful serpents by the strength of its odor. He also seeks “myrrh”; for he wants both our words and our deeds to be purified and cleansed.96

This sermon clearly links liturgical use of perfumed substances to spiritual work and apotropaic function (i.e., the odor of sanctity). In Roman Catholic sacraments, there are three oils: the Oil of Catechumens, Oil of the Infirmed, and Sacred Chrism. Of the three, only chrism is scented with spices and balsam.

The presence of incense and chrism is prominent in a multi-narrative painting of the *Scenes from the Life of St. Augustine* by an anonymous Flemish painter of the fifteenth century (Figure 4).97 It is a densely-populated, richly detailed work recounting different episodes from the life of the saint after his conversion and ordination, first to the priesthood and later as a bishop. This is the central panel of a triptych that displayed the early and later life of the saint.98

96 *Homily on Leviticus* 9.8.3 as quoted in Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 198-199. Galbanum is a kind of gum resin used for incense and myrrh.

97 Cf. Appendix (Figure 4): Master of St. Augustine, *Scenes from the Life of St. Augustine* (c. 1490) oil, gold, and silver on panel (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art).

There are five scenes, with three demarcated by architectural set pieces, and one set in a deep background landscape. Starting from the upper left corner and moving counter-clockwise around the vignettes are: Augustine’s ordination to the priesthood by Bishop Valerius; St. Augustine preaching from a raised pulpit with his mother, Monica, seen kneeling in blue and white and (anachronistically) praying a Rosary; the episcopal ordination of the saint to the See of Hippo Regius in Northern Africa; the bishop Augustine disputing with theologians in a corridor; and lastly a legendary encounter with a boy trying to fill in the Mediterranean Sea into a hole in the sand that served as a metaphor to Augustine’s futile desire to penetrate the mystery of the Trinity. The individualized portraits of the many figures throughout the piece could be various donors of a confraternity, and the distinctive, asymmetrical hoods over white surplices and lain behind the shoulders of St. Augustine and others (especially in the background scene) indicate the altarpiece’s original setting in a church of Augustinian canons.

Friedländer mentions that a right wing of the altarpiece also survives in both inner and a partial outer side panel, cf. “The Bruges Master of St. Augustine,” Josephine Walther, trans., *Art in America* 25: 1937, 47. The outside surviving panel depicts Sts. Augustine and Paul and is in the Suermontd-Ludwig-Museum. The inside right panel depicts three scenes, the main one in the lower two thirds of the composition showing Augustine on his deathbed attended by his monastic community, cf. Maryann Wynn Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1998) 129. Like the central scene with its many odorants pushed up into the viewer’s foreground, we see an elaborate ewer on the floor, a thurible, bread, wine, candle on a table (Eucharistic allusion) and a vial for extreme unction(?), a pail (for holy water?), and a lantern at the floor’s far right corner. Despite the sacramental symbolism here (compare to the Eucharistic symbolism in the Columba Triptych’s Adoration of the Magi), there seems also to be the notion of the odor of sanctity at the passing of this saint.

99 Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 82.
101 Friedländer identifies three historical persons from other portraits he attributes to this same artist based on this painting, and he also notes there was an Augustinian church in Bruges, cf. Friedländer, “Master of St. Augustine,” 53-
Friedländer describes the figures as somewhat squat with large heads, set into a grid-like geometric assemblage, with a uniform lighting and crisply-drawn details. The central scene sets off left and right scenes with the two columns on either side of the sanctuary that opens up into the space of the picture. In the background is a Gothic-vaulted apse showing five stained glass windows each with two saints, and in some cases coats of arms below these figures. In the middleground just before the main group of figures, is a gold tiered, polyptich retable with carved sculpture and paintings on top of the high altar. Four figures in various kinds of ecclesial and lay dress stand behind the three bishops, two of whom hold the crosiers of the two consecrating bishops for the ordination. The bishops performing the episcopal ordination wear full pontifical vestments, in this case wearing copes as opposed to the chasuble St. Augustine wears, as the principal outer garb. St. Augustine is seated in a rigidly frontal pose, with hands folded, and feet resting on a green, embroidered carpet. Three acolytes wearing albs attend to the liturgical action and stand on a geometrically patterned tile floor that project into the viewer’s space.

The central scene shows the saint immediately after his episcopal ordination being crowned with a mitre. At the ordination of priests, hands are anointed with chrism, but in the ordination of bishops the crown of the head is anointed with chrism, symbolized here by the two lavers held by the standing

54. Compare these clerical habits with those of four Augustinian canons in The Master of Spes Nostra, Four Canons Memorial Plaque (c. 1500) oil on panel, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
102 Friedländer, “Master of St. Augustine,” 53.
acolyte upon a gospel book by the right pillar of the sanctuary.103 Lined up on the floor directly in front of the new bishop is a pail of holy water with a sprig of hyssop used as an aspersillum to sprinkle upon the clergy and congregation, and an incense thurible and its boat of raw incense. It is also worth noting that these objects – chrism, hyssop, and incense – are all closest to the viewer in this composition and form a straight line into the ritual action that takes place within it.104 It is these things with conspicuous smells that invite the viewer liminally into the fictive space of the painting. Episcopal ordination would have been a rare experience for most people, but this painting brings to the foreground the sacred odors associated with solemn Catholic liturgy and sacraments.

A normative portrayal of sacramental experience is seen in Rogier van der Weyden’s fixed Triptych, The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece (Figure 5).105 This is the largest work Rogier ever produced (220 cm). It depicts a large Gothic church with six side chapels. In the foreground center is a crucifixion scene with gospel characters at the foot of the cross. The elevation of the host after its consecration at an altar is depicted just inside the rood screen of the church, representing the sacrament of the Eucharist as the most important of the seven. On the left and right panels are the other six sacraments in their respective chapels: baptism,
confirmation, confession, extreme unction (Last Rites), matrimony, and holy orders (here, priesthood).\textsuperscript{106}

Most germane for this study are the representations of baptism and confirmation. At this time the norm was infant baptism, if not on the same day as soon as possible after birth due to high infant mortality and the influence of Augustine’s soteriology.\textsuperscript{107} In the Latin church the three sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) were separated when infant baptism became the norm, with the bishop being the reserved minister for performing confirmation – he confirmed the baptism of the faithful to whose parish he visited.\textsuperscript{108} Rogier’s painting gives us insight into the sacramental practice of the day (Figure 6).\textsuperscript{109} The priest holds a metal box with two compartments for the two types of sacred oils. The baby has already been anointed on the breastbone and between the shoulders on the back with the unscented oil of catechumens prior to the water baptism in the font.\textsuperscript{110} The viewer presently witnesses the post-baptismal explanatory rite of anointing with the scented chrism. Apparently contemporary application of the oils was done with a stylus rather than with the cleric’s fingers, in this case, in the form of a cross on the crown of the skull.

Durandus, thirteenth-century bishop of Mende in France, gives us the praxis and theological reflection on the use of the oils:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} Panofsky, \textit{Early Netherlandish Painting}, 282.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Augustine, \textit{On Baptism}, Book IV §31-33, New Advent <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>.
\item \textsuperscript{108} “The sacrament of dignity and necessity is Confirmation; it is a sacrament of dignity since it can only be conferred by a bishop, and it is a sacrament of necessity, since he who renounces it out of contempt, will not be saved,” Guillaume Durande, \textit{The Rationale divinorum officiorum}, 100-101.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Cf. Appendix (Figure 6): Rogier van der Weyden, \textit{Seven Sacraments} (detail of sacraments of baptism and confirmation).
\item \textsuperscript{110} Durande, \textit{Rationale divinorum officiorum}, VIII §6, p. 91.
\end{itemize}
According to St. Augustine, the unction with oil shows us that we are fully prepared to hear the faith, and that we are called to the good odor of Christ, and that we are reminded to renounce the Devil. The second unction, on the breast and between the shoulders is done, according to Rhabanus, so that we will be fortified through the faith in all our members to perform good works, strengthened through the grace of God... This [last] unction is done on the crown, that is, at the top of the head, on the cerebrum, according to the same author, so that the one anointed may be joined to those who share in the kingdom of heaven, and because the soul of the one who is baptized is betrothed to its head, that is Christ; moreover, it is done with chrism made from oil and balsam so that we might know that the Holy Spirit, which works invisibly, is given to him. For oil warms weary members and provides light, as was noted above, balsam gives off a sweet scent. Seeing the soul’s members are weary...the Spirit gives him good works which provide a good odor for others, which is designated by the fragrant balsam. This anointing is also done on the crown of the head, where the seat of pride [superbia] is seen, which always seeks after higher things [superiora], so therefore, it is done in the form of the cross and in the name of humility.\textsuperscript{111}

Nearly the same practice is occurring at confirmation just above the baptism, with the bishop tracing a cross of chrism on the forehead of the \textit{confirmandus}. At this time an attendant priest tied a white cloth around the head to seal the anointing, in order to absorb the oil the bishop crossed on the

\textsuperscript{111} Du rande, \textit{Rationale divinorum officiorum}, VIII §8-9.
forehead. We see this process in Rogier’s painting, as well as three children scampering off after their crismation, bandaged all.\textsuperscript{112} These sacramental initiations are important for the bridging of sacred and profane because of the family or parish celebrations that occurred afterward. English families in the late medieval period were known to spend a great deal to provide a feast for family and neighbors after a child’s baptism.\textsuperscript{113} More to the point however, the aromatic chrism would remain on the head of a baby for at least the rest of that day. What is seen in \textit{The Seven Sacraments Triptych} is not the full story of the confirmation rite, as Bishop Durandus gives dramatic witness to the claims that I have been making in regard to collapsing the aroma of Christ from the liturgy into the domestic space.

The bishop announces to the confirmed or crismated that in honor of the Holy Trinity they should bear the chrism cloths on their foreheads for the space of three days; and on the third day the priest shall wash their foreheads, and the chrism cloths upon their foreheads he will burn; or candles should be made from the chrism cloths for the use of the altar.\textsuperscript{114} How amazing! Not only would the smell of perfume permeate the home, but it would linger for three days! What is more, those cloths that conferred the sacramental graces upon the children were brought back to the parish church, and in some cases, used in candles for the celebration of the Mass! Again, the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{112} Confirmation is a sacrament associated with the bestowal of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:1-2; Galatians 5:22-23).
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\textsuperscript{113} Katherine L. French, \textit{The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death}, Middle Ages Series, (Philadelphia: Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press; University Presses Marketing [distributor], 2007) 60.
\end{flushleft}

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\textsuperscript{114} Durandus as quoted in James Monti, \textit{A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) 133.
\end{flushleft}

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church with its pleasant smells was a sharp contrast to the urban, rural, and domestic smells of the fifteenth century, but the space between it and the home collapsed as the aroma of Christ returned to it from the town.

One of the earliest depictions of the Epiphany in Netherlandish panel painting of the fifteenth century is the *Columba Triptych* (Figure 7) by Rogier van der Weyden and his workshop. This late, monumental painting is also unique among this artist’s folding triptychs (as opposed to fixed-wing triptychs) in that it has three separate narratives from the infancy accounts of Christ. This is also one of the first Flemish triptychs to have the Epiphany occupy the central panel. The *Columba Triptych* has been associated with Cologne and the church from which it takes its name, however, patronage and original context in the building is a matter of speculation.

Following the narrative scenes from left to right the *Columba Triptych* displays the Annunciation, the Adoration of Magi, and the Presentation in the Temple (the Circumcision). Although the three scenes are distinct temporally, the center and right panels share an overlapping wall which merges space from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. The heavy use of the red creates a banner of continuous color horizontally throughout the entire composition, while the vertical figure of the Virgin in her lapis lazuli blue robes (the one figure to appear in all three narrative scenes) breaks up the space in a rhythmic way.

115 Cf. Appendix (Figure 7): Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop), *Columba Triptych* (c. 1450-1456) oil on panels (Munich: Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische).

116 Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 107: It is “one of the first examples, in surviving early Netherlandish triptych production, of a triptych in which each panel of the interior depicts a separate narrative event.”


118 Cf. Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 115-116. Radiography uncovered that the donor portrait just behind the wall to the left of St. Joseph was not in the underdrawing and his identity remains unknown.
The interplay between the three panels in their distinctness and juxtaposition tell us much about fifteenth-century spiritual experience. At the poles of the work we have a domestic and an ecclesial setting. The Annunciation on the left wing of the triptych places Mary in her bedchamber, kneeling at a prie-dieu to pray from her book of hours as the Angel Gabriel descends the stairs from a closed portal. Golden light rays draw diagonal lines toward her as a miniature Holy Spirit in the form of a dove symbolizes the virginal conception. The scene resembles many other Annunciations of the period, but perhaps most notably Jan van Eyck’s *Annunciation* in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. (Figure 8) which, due to its tall, narrow shape, is thought to have been originally part of a triptych.\(^{119}\) While the formal composition of the *Columba Triptych* Annunciation and the van Eyck in Washington are similar, their setting is not; the latter is set within a church.\(^{120}\) There could be a trace connection to this in the rose window in the room, although stained glass in domestic interiors is seen in other Annunciation paintings (Figure 8).\(^{121}\)

In contrast to the Annunciation setting, the Presentation in the Temple is very much a church interior. From inside and out it resembles a Romanesque church.\(^{122}\) The placement of the altar in which Mary and Simeon rise seems to be

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\(^{119}\) Cf. Appendix (Figure 8): Jan van Eyck, *Annunciation* (c. 1428) oil on panel transferred to canvas (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery).

\(^{120}\) Placing the Annunciation in a church was an innovation, cf. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 137.

\(^{121}\) Cf. Appendix (Figure 3): Robert Campin, *Méode Altarpiece*, although x-ray research shows these windows were painted with stained glass after the first complete painting of the scene, cf. Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 92.

\(^{122}\) Panofsky says that fifteenth-century Flemish painters thought of Gothic architecture as distinctly Christian, and the older Romanesque style as closer to Eastern styles. "It was quite justifiable to substitute 'Romanesque' for 'Oriental' buildings wherever the contrast between Christianity and Judaism was intended," *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 135.
the chancel of the church, denoted by the triumphal arch just behind the foreground scene. Another view could be to see this as a side chapel, much like the one for which the *Columba Triptych* was originally commissioned, in which case the viewer would be looking from the side of the nave to the opposite, or even in radiating chapels behind the chancel. One part of the temple structure overlaps panels into the scene abutting the stable in the center, a significant detail explained further below.

The distinctiveness of the altarpiece wings is important because Rogier’s *Columba Triptych* takes the polar settings of left and right panels and merges them in its central scene. Said a different way, the domestic and the ecclesial realms collapse in the Epiphany. The central scene is the site of the Adoration of the Magi. It is set into the characteristic, fifteenth-century ruin that, in the classic Panofskyan interpretation, represents the end of a Jewish or pagan world and the advent of the newborn church. At the same time, the vaulting above the thatched roof of the stable appears to be a Gothic arch, lining up directly with the Virgin and Child, and hinting at the newness to arise from Christ’s birth. The main figures of Mary and Jesus are left of center, and the figures are lively in their gestures, pressed up directly to the picture plane like a tableau. Joseph emerges from a spiral staircase leading up from a grotto. The solid colors of the Holy Family contrast with the multicolored, gold-fringed, and brocaded clothing

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123 “The Columba Triptych...develops thresholds both laterally, to structure relations between the scenes, and frontally, to structure relations between the viewer and the image,” Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 116 (cf. 116-118).


of the Three Kings. The Magi remove their hats, begin to bow, and kneel. All of them bear tall, gold, cylindrical vessels for their gifts, with the eldest king already having presented his gift and placed on a triangular table between the Virgin and St. Joseph. The tenderness that is often associated with Rogier’s painting is on full display as the same eldest magus gently cradles the Christ Child’s feet in one hand, and raises the newborn king’s hands to his lips for a reverent kiss.126

The main action of the Columba Triptych’s central panel is the above mentioned adoration, but there are more figures in this composition. Directly behind St. Joseph on the left and behind a wall is a donor praying a Rosary. A larger group of bearded men and one young man peer out from a Romanesque archway (a sign that they are a part of an old order). They wear yellow and pointed hats, which may denote the dress legislated for Jewish persons to wear at this time in this country.127 The humans are not the only figures, though, as there is a small, white greyhound in the front right corner and a donkey and ox behind the arches that surround the main scene. They stick their head through an archway above the left shoulder of the Virgin and connect to the scene by means of a stone manger. There is a deep background that recedes from this point with a contemporary cityscape placing the Adoration of the Magi outside the city walls of Bethlehem. Again, this densely populated scene is the place where many odorants come together, mixing worlds and theological realities.

126 Davies, Rogier van der Weyden, 22.
127 Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Paintings, 287; Jacobs, Opening Doors, 116.
It might be assumed that all domestic smells are bad and ecclesial ones are good, but again, it is not necessarily so. The domestic and ecclesial are two spheres of experience for all strata of churchgoer. The process by which these two spheres collapse, overlap, blend, and interact includes the sense of smell. There are the mundane smells of the barn: ox, ass, fresh hay and old fodder, with moldering thatch on the roof. Yet there are also very noticeable odors associated with liturgical spaces: incense and aromatically infused oil. Regarding the quotidian smells, there are good, bad, and neutral smells, and some remain ambiguous. Lenten sermons made an analogy between spring cleaning in which old straw shut up in homes throughout winter are replaced with fresh hay for floors.

\[\text{Just as men and women} \text{ clean the house, taking out the fire and straw and flowers, just so they should clean the house of their soul, doing away with the fire of lechery and of deadly wrath and of envy, and add straw there, sweat [sic.] herbs, and flowers.}\]

In that sense one could bring different interpretations to the work based on one’s own association. Does the donkey turn to the old, corrupt fodder and the ox turn toward the Christ Child – placed in the manger, but now seated on Mary’s lap –

\[\text{128 Dom estic and monastic are usually distinguished from one another, but perhaps the liturgical and the conventual life of the monastery are equivalent enough. Certainly the abbot’s quarters depicted in the Master of 1499’s Abbot Christiaan de Hondt (Figure 1) witnesses to creaturely living.}\]

\[\text{129 Technically speaking straw and hay are not interchangeable terms in modern, agricultural parlance. The former is the byproduct or remnant plant matter of seed crops (e.g., wheat), while the latter is grown as a seed crop in itself, harvested before the nutrients go to the flower. Both are used as animal fodder, though it more likely that straw was used for non-edible functions (e.g., floor covering and bed stuffing), it cannot always be certain which is depicted in paintings. Thus, I use the terms interchangeably for the sake of lexical variance.}\]

\[\text{130 Easter sermon by John Mirk, quoted in French, The Good Women, 22.}\]
as new food for the life of the world?\textsuperscript{131} The irreverent jackass continues to eat the stinky feed, even though a new covenant in Christ’s blood has come.\textsuperscript{132} Thus, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, “and that which is decayeth and groweth old, is near its end.”\textsuperscript{133} At the same time, popular sermons for the Epiphany often made plain that “the purpose of incense as on the offerings of three kings was to put away the stench of the stable, to employ a good smell to counter an offensive one.”\textsuperscript{134} This deodorizing and fumigating idea was employed in the subsequent outbreaks of bubonic plague after the Black Death (1348-1350), and to some degree seems to have worked.\textsuperscript{135}

Smell associations within the Epiphany panel appear to be more nuanced and rich in possibilities than simple good and bad labels allow. This collapsing of everyday smells with scents that connoted heaven is not merely symbolic, but rather reflects the lived experience of the pious for whom altar and hearth were interlaced at important moments during their lives. Some of these associated odors were linked to memories of liturgical seasons and others evoked more regular sacramental smells. The former instances are forms of paraliturgical rites and popular devotions that are proximate to public worship, while the latter mark particular initiation rites of the Church.

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\textsuperscript{131} Panofsky, \textit{Early Netherlandish Painting}, 187.
\textsuperscript{132} Jacobs, \textit{Opening Doors}, 116.
\textsuperscript{133} Hebrews 8:13.
\textsuperscript{134} Woolgar, \textit{The Senses}, 119.
\end{flushright}
The blur between terrestrial, domestic smells and transcendent, ecclesial ones is seen in the tradition of the crèche or nativity scene. The custom of making a tableau of the Bethlehem stable for Christmas originated with St. Francis of Assisi. Two weeks before the commemoration of Christ’s birth in 1223, the saint commissioned a layman acquaintance to construct a grotto with ox, ass, manger, and a statue of the Christ Child in the church at Greccio. Importantly, for the present discussion, the scene was filled with straw and situated in the choir screen, near the high altar. Just prior to Midnight Mass, townsfolk came to adore the display by torchlight. At the service where Francis assisted as deacon, he preached using the parts of the crèche as props. After the Mass, the faithful took pieces of straw from the crèche home as relics, with accounts of the sacramentalized straw curing sick livestock who ingested it, as well as easing difficult labors for pregnant women who clutched it.

Augustine Thompson in his recent, critical biography of St. Francis believes that the Greccio nativity seems to be a true story, although the immediate annual creation of the crèche is probably projected on the past from slightly later practice. Nevertheless, the importance of the Incarnation in Francis’ spirituality (and its influence on the medieval imagination) was illustrated in the crib: “The humiliation of the Son of God who became a child in the stable amid squalor and domestic animals, was for Francis a model of

138 Drawing on one of the later biographies written by St. Bonaventure, the first crèche was said to be a living nativity with human and animals occupying a cave. However, earlier eyewitness accounts speak already of statues and a church locus.
139 Thompson, Francis of Assisi, 260.
spiritual perfection.”140 The popularity of crèche sets in parish churches spread throughout Europe within the next several centuries, and they are still in contemporary use wherever Christians are. Most significant for smell study is the proximity of the Bethlehem stable to the altar by which the scents of the farm mix with the incense of the solemn high Mass. Likewise, the story of the Greccio original describes how the transfigured matter of Christ’s manger is taken from the church back to the home. Of course, straw itself would be connoted with coming from a domestic setting to the church in order to imbue the matter with spiritual power. By the fifteenth century, when paintings like our example may well have been based on set-piece presentation of crèches, – something as ordinary as hay was mystically potent. As Bynum argues, at the same time as the Devotio Moderna proposed greater personal, interior piety, there was a strong turn to materiality. Matter comments on its own materiality by not being God, yet it is created by God, and it is that through which he acts.141 The above references from popular sermons about fresh and rotten straw, the smell of the barnyard animals versus sweet incense, is proof enough of the strong visceral reactions due to suggestion of odors as apparently unexceptional as straw.142

The interaction between matter and divinity, the imminence and transcendence that are at work in the Incarnation has a longer tradition than St. Francis. In both Eastern and Western Christianity sermons and Scriptural commentaries make frequent connections between the Epiphany specifically with

140 Thompson, Francis of Assisi, 109.
141 Bynum, Christian Materiality, 35.
142 Woolgar, The Senses, 124.
the sacrament of the Eucharist. Such luminaries as Ambrose, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, along with a certain Theodatus of Ancyra – who preached at the Council of Ephesus which proclaimed Mary not simply mother of Christ’s human nature but *Theotokos* (“Godbearer”) – all make deliberate connections with the worship of the nations and bringing gifts to the God who becomes flesh and food. Medieval Magi plays arose first in France in the eleventh century and became popular throughout Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries until becoming even more elaborate in the following two centuries. “It is important to keep in mind that in the Latin Magi plays the Three Kings always offered their gifts at the altar, since, as we know from the written sources, it symbolized the manger.” Thus, these plays took place at the time of the offertory for the feast with clerics donning royal robes of the Three Kings and presenting the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The phenomena of paraliturgical reenactments of the Epiphany at the Eucharist had a direct impact on Netherlandish painting of the period. Taking the place of honor in the *Columba Triptych*, the Adoration of the Magi’s growing importance in devotional and liturgical prominence is evident. However, most notable is how Eucharistic allusions emerge into the narrative scene. This early Epiphany in Flemish art exhibits a small table which appears next to the manger;

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1.44 Nilgen and Franciscono, “Epiphany and the Eucharist”: Cf. Ambrose, *De Iacob et vita beata* 2.7 (PL, xlv, 657); John Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum Homilia* 7.5 (PG, LVII, 78), *De beato Philogonio Homilia* 6 (PG, LxvIII, 753) and *In Epistolam I ad Corinthios Homilia* 2.5 (PG, LXI, 204); Gregory the Great, *Homilia 8 In die Natalis Domini* (PL, LXXVI, 1104); Augustine, *Sermo 190 In Natali Domini* 3.3, and *Sermo 194 In Natali Domini* 2.2 (PL, xxxvili, 1008, 1016); Theodotus of Ancyra, *Homilia 1 In die Nativitatis Domini* 11 (PG, LxxviI, 1366).


by the beginning of the sixteenth century this will become a huge dining table in the paintings of this scene. The small, triangular table does not quite seem like an altar, but it does allude to altars since it holds a vessel similar to the ciborium that would house the consecrated hosts in a church. The table could just as easily be what is called a credence table, the auxiliary place of various vessels for the Mass that are not set on the altar for consecration of the Eucharist (a place one could put the collection plate and incense boat, as well as the cruets for water and wine, and the lavabo vessels for the priest to ritually wash his hands).147 This association is emphasized in its placement by the manger which resembles a Roman stone sarcophagus – a connection deliberately made in Ghirlandaio’s Adoration of the Shepherds (Figure 9) and by the gift of myrrh for burial – repurposed for livestock troughs, and which also takes the place of an altar.148 But more importantly table and tomb are beside the Madonna, who holds the Christ Child on her lap. Since the Body of Christ is the focus of the Eucharistic celebration, and in typology Mary is frequently connected to the Ark of the Covenant – upon which was God’s footstool and before which the show bread was placed – it seems that all three symbols work together.149 In fact, the merging of


148  Cf. Appendix (Figure 9): Domenico Ghirlandaio, Adoration of the Shepherds (c. 1483-1485) tempera and oil on panel, (Florence: Santa Trinità). The influence of Hugo van der Goes’ Portinari Altarpiece is widely acknowledged, but Ghirlandaio also incorporates a legend of a Roman Emperor Fulvius written in Latin on the sarcophagus-cum-manger: “The urn that conceals me will bring forth a God,” cf. “Adoration of the Shepherds by Ghirlandaio,” Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/ghirland/domenico/5sassett/shepherd/shepher.html>

the stable and the church is made explicit by the presence of a small crucifix above the archways of the ruin reminiscent of what accompanied altars. There are also subtle allusions to the Eucharist in individual wheat stocks on the thatched roof of the stable. Jacobs also posits that the overlap of the temple into the central panel with the Adoration suggests that the Epiphany is actually what she terms a rotated threshold in which (if we consider the Presentation taking place in a side chapel) the stable becomes the sanctuary of a church.

Smell comes into play specifically here by the suggestion of incense. Whether every rural parish could afford incense for every Sunday is hard to determine. Certainly in a well-endowed, urban parish or monastic chapel the use of incense would have been ubiquitous. Even with the subtle objects that represent Eucharistic themes, the presence of the Magi and their gifts in themselves would likely have evoked incense smells. Incense tends to linger in spaces even long after diffusing from sight of smoke clouds, but the sense memory of the liturgy should have made an immediate connection to the Mass. The limited participation of laity in the Eucharist liturgically, even in an auditory sense, would make the odor of incense filling the sacred space and representing the prayers of the faithful that much more powerful.

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151 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 117-118.
152 “Certain parts of the Mass celebration were emphasized with additional sensory experiences. Heavenly odors were not forgotten. Elevation of the Eucharist during mass, a ritual that began around 1200, was, according to By num, surrounded by its own rituals, including special prayers, bell ringing, incense, and physical prostration before it. By num has shown that the Eucharist ritual was often of central importance for saintly and visionary medieval women. For example, the hermit Dorothea of Montau was drawn towards the host by its smell, the living scent of God that the incense was meant to mimic,” Robinson, “The Heart’s Nose,” 57.
though the species of the sacramental Body is made prominent through food analogies, it is important to realize that most probably did not receive communion that frequently. Seeing the Eucharist was a pious act of spiritual communion – hence adoration –, but even how well one could view it from the nave is questionable.\textsuperscript{154} Conversely, the scent of incense reached even those who could not see beyond the screen, providing a direct experience associated with the Mass that may well have been further evoked by smell imagery in paintings of the Epiphany. And its juxtaposition to the barn odors could have been a deliberate way that the artist – similar to the admonitions of primers and popular sermons – took the devotion to the Eucharist back to the ordinary smells of the home, just as the people of Greccio took with them miraculous straw from the crèche.

In conclusion, comparing \textit{The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece} to the \textit{Columba Triptych}, I think there is a sacramental trigger aside from the Eucharist. The portrayal of Christ as a baby is a staple of affective piety in the medieval period, however it is emotional for the very reason that people identify with their love for infants. Yes, this is the Lord Jesus who grew up to die and Rise in order to save humanity from sin and death, but it is also a sweet mother and a
cute baby. The presence of a work of art showing a nude baby in church with all eyes on him had to have had a strong association to baptism. This, placed alongside the gifts of the Magi, which included perfumed oil, seems to drive the behavioral cue home. When one saw an Epiphany scene like the Columba Triptych, then, he was reminded of baptism by the suggestion of smells it depicted; he was reminded of feasting and happy coming of age rituals in the family and community. Further, if he were a pious and semi-literate person, he likely drew various connections to the odor imagery of popular devotionals. As the English writer, John Mirk, writes in a Nativity sermon: “And that same nyght of Cristes blessyd incarnacion herbis began to blosom and floure, the trees ripe frute, vines ripe grapes, and many oþir marvelles were shewd.”155 To see was to smell and to be reminded of smells was to lift one out of the earthly world into pleasanter times and spaces, and perhaps even to mystical experiences – the enclosed garden and delights of heaven.

Chapter 4: Smell Sense Memory and the Power of Visual Images

In the previous chapters I argued that the depiction of things that give off certain smells was a deliberate part of the painting. I gave an overview of a number of contemporary behavioral science experiments that suggest that the sense of smell has a tremendous power to stimulate memory, to affect attitude toward places and persons, and even to cue behavior through nonconscious or imagined odors. Viewing a subject like the Adoration of the Magi demonstrates the range of odor-associated images connected to the very devotional experiences in which these artworks were intended to play an important role. In this chapter I will argue that in certain cases the sense of smell was not simply an additional aspect among other symbolic, emotional, or theological triggers evoked in early Netherlandish paintings, but that these paintings can only be understood fully once one recognizes the role implied scents play in them. These paintings served the function of multivalent contextual enhancement and crystallized cultural sense memory by uniting individual devotion to a shared experience of a larger body of believers.

The Actual Use of Smell in Prayer

To hypothesize that smell had a role in prayer and liturgy seems both obvious and far-fetched: obvious because incense and chrism were common enough, and far-fetched as this seems hardly as tied to artistic representations as

156 Cf. p. 22.
157 Cf. p. 39, 47-60.
I am claiming.\textsuperscript{158} However, studies discussed below have established that late medieval religious experience, and its depictions in the arts was sensuously rich in ways that, to modern tastes, could come off as hokey or even sacrilegious.

The liturgical role-playing of the Three Kings placing gifts on the altar at Epiphany is but one example of medieval religious drama. Another popular aspect of this flair for the dramatic could be witnessed in articulated sculptures. These wooden statues, typically of Christ, could be taken down from a cross to be placed in the lap of a seated \textit{Mater Dolorosa} in a \textit{pietà}, laid in a tomb for Good Friday liturgies – even with a compartment in the chest to act as a ciborium -, and then even hoisted to the rafters by ropes on the feast of the Ascension.\textsuperscript{159}

These were common in Northern Europe, surviving examples from the time of the Burgundian court’s interaction with the Low Countries (Figure 11).\textsuperscript{160} Such sculptures are often placed under the blanket German term of \textit{Andachtsbilder}.\textsuperscript{161} Often these images show a great deal of wear on hands and feet, attributed to unintended damage by devotional kissing or touching.\textsuperscript{162} This is an example of the tactile quality of devotional life in this period. For the purposes of the present study, \textit{Andachtsbilder} remind us that objects we categorize primarily in terms of their aesthetic qualities were, in their original milieu, functional in a more participatory and multi-sensory environment.

\textsuperscript{158} Cf. pp. 44-47.
\textsuperscript{159} By num, \textit{Christian Materiality}, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{160} Cf. Appendix (Figure 11): \textit{Courajod Christ} (second quarter of the twelfth century) polychromed wood, 155 x 158 x 30 cm. (Paris: Louvre) inv. RF1082.
\textsuperscript{161} Cf. Alexandra Bennett Huff, “Vicious Virtues and Belligerent Brides: Female Personifications in Late Medieval German Crucifixion Images,” (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 1997), 12. The German term \textit{Andachtsbilder} means something like “devotional painting,” with \textit{Andacht} having the sense of personal prayer or reverent contemplation. Its form \textit{Andachtsbilder} is plural but is the common English usage. There are problems with its
Based on comparanda, some scholars have posited that the same drama and sense-stimulation could have been a part of monumental altarpieces. Lotte Brand Philip’s bold reinterpretation of the *Ghent Altarpiece* saw the polyptych’s original frame as being a colossal stone retable.¹⁶³ Not only was it a freestanding stone frame Philip contends, but it was sculpture in the round giving space behind as well as in front for the polyptych’s panels to move forward and backward. But Philip’s most audacious claim is that the *Ghent Altarpiece*’s movement of panels was mechanized and that it was, in effect, an automaton that could be turned on to rotate wings of the retable cyclically, similar to a glockenspiel.¹⁶⁴ This may seem like fanciful supposition, but Philip notes that there were many examples of major clocks and automatons in the fifteenth century.¹⁶⁵

Philip’s assertion of an automated *Ghent Altarpiece* builds on that of her mentor, Erwin Panofsky, who had speculated that the double authorship of Hubert and Jan van Eyck had been a salvage job of the former’s work by a

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¹⁶⁵ “We have only to recall the outspoken predilection which the Middle Ages had for the automaton. The vogue of the large astronomical clock, which can be traced back to the fourteenth century in such impressive structures as the work by Giovanni Dondi (1364) of the earliest clock in Strasbourg (1354), came to a first flowering in the fifteenth century with the immense automata in the churches of Prague, Danzig, and Lübeck. These early self-operating machines included not only moving figurines but the appealing feature of a chime-work. While the huge wheels of the clocks were usually entirely or at least partly hidden, their movement was revealed to the onlooker by the motion of figures which could be seen and by the melodies which could be heard. The clocks, in other words, brought forth music. And this is a point which seems to be of utmost importance for the Ghent Altarpiece,” Philip, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, 113-114.
combination and recontextualization by the latter artist.\textsuperscript{166} In regard to the two panels on either side of Mary and John the Baptist on the \textit{Deësis}, which depict angels singing and playing musical instruments (Figure 12), Panofsky theorizes they were originally shutters for a pipe organ.\textsuperscript{167} Philip differs in that she proposes Hubert to be the sculptor of the retable and inventor of the mechanized control of the polyptych. Nonetheless, she believes that this mechanism was meant to produce music in the form of chimes and wind instruments similar to pipe organs.\textsuperscript{168} She also suggests tower staircases on the reverse of the altar, and there may have even been the opportunity for choirboys to sing from towers or from open spaces behind the panels.\textsuperscript{169} This is suggested by a later altarpiece by Petrus Christus, \textit{The Fountain of Life} (Figure 13), which borrows copiously from the \textit{Ghent Altarpiece} (Figure 25).\textsuperscript{170} In this single-panel work, heavenly musicians are flanked to their left and right by Gothic masonry towers in which young men appear to be singing, based on their proximity to minstrels and the banderol that flow from one of their number’s gesturing hands.

Philips’ argument about the original, mechanized, musical structure of the \textit{Ghent Altarpiece} has elicited criticism for lacking “caution and circumspection” through conjecture “presented as though it were fact.”\textsuperscript{171} There is certainly no

\textsuperscript{166} Panofsky, \textit{Early Netherlandish Painting}, 208-209.
\textsuperscript{167} Cf. Appendix (Figure 12): The angel panels from the \textit{Ghent Altarpiece}. Hubert(?) and Jan van Eyck (1432) oil on panel (Ghent: St. Bavo’s Cathedral).
\textsuperscript{168} Philips, \textit{The Ghent Altarpiece}, 114-115.
\textsuperscript{169} Philips, \textit{The Ghent Altarpiece}, 27.
\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Appendix (Figure 13): Petrus Christus, \textit{The Fountain of Life} (c. 1445-1450) oil on panel (Madrid: Prado).
\textsuperscript{171} Alison Stones, “Review The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck,” by Lotte Brand Philip, \textit{The Art Bulletin} 56, no. 2 (1974): “Caution and circumspection are not attributes manifested in this book. Conjecture is presented as though it were fact. The body of material set forth here and so splendidly illustrated in the excellent plates will no doubt continue to stimulate discussion for some time to come.”
way to prove the scholar's hypothesis, but if this altarpiece or others like it did include music as part of its design, it points to another multi-sensorial experience of a religious art object. The paintings in their present frame still imply, at the very least, what should be obvious: that in the presence of this art music would be heard in the liturgy regardless of being mechanical, concealed, or otherwise. Music (hearing) and painting (vision) were united here because of the context.

If touch and hearing so frequently accompanied sight in fifteenth-century piety, then why not smell? We see direct evidence for this in a small work by Hans Memling, the Munich Diptych, or more literally, The Madonna in the Garden with a Donor and St. George (Figure 14). Its small size (approx. 43.3 x 62 cm) seems to imply private devotion. Like many paintings of the period, the setting is outdoors with castles and city walls receding to a mountainous background. It is a good example of the enclosed garden piety that pairs Marian virtues with flower symbolism. On the left, the Virgin is seated in front of a flowerbed of blue irises and red and white roses. Four angels – proportionately smaller either because of youthful appearance or by hierarchical scale – surround her playing a portative organ, lute, lyre, and viol. The Madonna is swathed in a red cloak, holds the nude Christ Child who, seated on her lap, reaches for an apple offered by the angel on the right closest to the picture plane. On the right panel, a wealthy patron in black brocade, fur-lined clothes kneels in prayer toward the Virgin and Child. His patron saint, George, is clad in a suit of armor (in the tradition of van Eyck, we see the reflection of the group in the armor), who

172 Cf. Appendix (Figure 14): Hans Memling, Munich Diptych (The Madonna in the Garden with a Donor and St. George) (c. 1480) oil on panel (Munich: Alte Pinakothek). Cf. Falkenburg, “Scent of Holiness,” 159-160.
with right hand coaxes the man to turn to Mary, and in his left hand holds a spear impaled through a gray, pathetic dragon at his feet. Immediately behind St. George is an outcrop of brown, jagged rocks that directly echo the mountain in the atmospheric perspective behind it.

The flowers and perhaps the fruit are obvious smell cues. However, the painting is an otherwise unexceptional example of stereotypical donor devotional panels of fifteenth-century Flanders. In fact, it is in poor condition and too little is known about the painting (e.g., the donor’s identity) and its appearance in relevant literature only mentions it as a donor portrait, private devotional diptych and nothing more. And yet it is remarkable for one particular detail: its depiction of the Rosary. At its base is a perforated metal ball. This is a pomander or scent ball. These were common enough among people who had the means to afford gold and silver perfume receptacles sometimes shaped like hearts or pomegranates.

Writing a meticulous history of the Rosary’s form and function, Eithne Wilkins gives an etiology for the scent ball:

There was of course a utilitarian as well as an aesthetic reason for carrying a pomander: in Europe ambergris (also valued as an aphrodisiac), myrrh, musk, cloves, attar of roses, and so on, were used as a prophylactic against the plague, and after the mediaeval institution of communal bathing was abandoned from fear of syphilis and there was a general decline in washing, people needed to scent themselves.173

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Although masking body odors and using fumigation to combat disease brought on by bad air with good scents was common in early modern Europe, this is a curiously limiting statement. Falkenburg does not rule out medicinal and apotropaic reasons for Rosary pomanders, as plague was associated with sinfulness or God’s wrath. Still, he presumes that the primary function of this potpourri is parallel to the Marian devotion of the sacramental to which it is attached.

To my mind its function of ‘perfuming’ prayer and meditation must have been equally prominent. The real smells of pomanders and rosery beads must have underscored - and maybe even facilitated - the experience in the believer of a spiritual scent during devotional exercise. Katelynn Robinson also mentions that medieval women mystics described the Madonna and Christ Child as emitting intense, floral smells themselves – implying that pleasant, terrestrial odors find their true origin in heaven. Again, the Rosary with pomander used in this devotional diptych tells us more simply its basic meaning. While this may be documentation of a treasured sacramental or even a sign of wealth, it is a record of the patron’s piety. It is, then, the smoking gun that shows a direct connection between Netherlandish panel painting and

175 Falkenburg, “The Scent of Holyness,” 160. The author gives a fuller list of scents, including musk, sweet and yellow flag, cinnamon, lemon skin, saffron, laudanum, lavender, aloe, nutmeg, incense, rose leaves, sandal-wood, spikenard, violets, tragacant, and benzoion. There was also a recipe for “pulverized sandelwood, mixed with black earth soaked in rose water, styrax and other resins and gums.” Robinson mentions the multisensory use of amber: “Amber beads, a common and desirable material for paternosters, provided other sensory experiences in addition to scent, with its tactile smoothness and natural warmth compared to precious stones and metals. Amber prayer beads could provide a nearly complete sensory experience in prayer: the beauty of the warm, smooth beads, the sound of a Latin or vernacular prayer, and perhaps the scent of a pomander filled with musk,” “The Heart’s Nose,” 61.
the sense of smell. The Virgin is surrounded by flowers that are of sensory as well as symbolic value, while the devotee on the opposite panel evokes her presence – not just through the tactile practice of praying the Rosary, but – through the scent of the pomander.

Smell paired with visual aids was part of religious experience. As touch and hearing were engaged in inventive and immediate ways with the art object, so too smell was able to heighten prayer. In the case of the *Munich Diptych*, the painting crystallizes the Proust phenomenon – or perhaps better said the Proust *meta*-phenomenon. For on the one hand, this painting reminds the donor (and others with similar associations) of the joys of prayer, and on the other hand, it is not memory but a kind of prospective reminiscence! The latter point is to say that both image and odor transport the viewer to an imagined (constructed?) memory of a state of being, a future, or over a miraculous threshold – to use Jacobs’ term – into the presence of the Virgin and Christ Child.177

*The Annunciation: Implied Smell and Memory*

The *Munich Diptych* demonstrates that smell had its place in prayer for the early modern believer. The pairing of prayer with pleasant odors still happens in Catholic piety today, as can be seen from contemporary placement of

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177 “Visions of Paradise were similarly populated by sweet smells and a multitude of flowers. In the closing years of the twelfth century, Roger, a Cistercian lay brother at Stratford Langthorne, recounted an extensive dialogue he had in a vision of his friend, Alexander, a monk who had died about a year earlier. Alexander told how he was in Paradise and that there they lived off smell, which at the start of the day descended from Heaven, satisfying and refreshing each according to his merits by a differential sweetness,” Woolgar, *The Senses*, 119.
flowers before a statue of the Blessed Virgin (Figure 15). So pervasive is the pairing of Marian images with flowers or botanical scents that it seems plausible to argue that even when the odorants are not present, the scent implied by their images, recreates the same effect. Painting has the advantage of making possible what cannot happen in nature. Thus, Livia’s garden frescos in her Roman villa (Figure 16) depict flowers that do not bloom at the same time and migratory birds not present in the same season within one mural. In season and out, the new art of fifteenth-century Flanders could make present flowers for the Virgin. As the psychological studies noted in Chapter Two make clear, olfaction is powerful for inducing emotional memories and behavior, and Flemish masters intuitively made implied smell part of their composition.

In Chapter Three, I argued that the smells depicted in the Epiphany of the Columba Triptych collapsed the space between domestic and ecclesial spheres, creating a feedback loop between the two experiences. Returning to that panel (Figure 7), I wish to draw attention to the Annunciation on the left wing of that altarpiece. Unlike the central and right panels of the triptych that share continuous space, the Annunciation is distinctly separate. Yet, while it may be

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178 Cf. Appendix (Figure 15): Photo by the author, Our Lady of Lourdes statue taken in Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Columbia, MO, 13 February 2016. Though the architecture is more contemporary, it shows the traditional things we see in many Flemish paintings: a niche and statue, a prie-dieu, flowers in vases. In the case of the flowers, both red and yellow roses as well as wilting orchids. This picture was taken in winter otherwise Easter lilies may have been present. Although roses are associated with Mary, the variety of flowers appears to be unimportant compared to the very fact of offering of flowers at the statue of the Virgin.

179 Cf. Appendix (Figure 16): Garden Murals from Villa of Livia (c. 50 B.C.) fresco, (Rome: National Roman Museum). “Not only is everything in blossom and ripey laden, but the quince and the pomegranate, which bear fruit in late autumn, are there with blue periwinkles that flower in early spring. Close by are the lavender poppies of early summer... Just as this is a year depicted without seasons, so it takes no count of migratory needs. All can happen at once. This is the pictorial enchantment of Livia’s dining room: a rendition of nature gathered into the imperial embrace; nature made subject to the beneficial regulations of Augustan control,” cf. Nigel Spivye, How Art Made the World: A Journey to the Origins of Human Creativity (New York: Basic Books, 2005) 54-56.
distinct in time and space from other scenes within the artwork, it directs the
viewer’s focus to this scene because of its three-dimensional illusions. Rogier has
painted a frame around the scene in Mary’s bedchamber that, in turn, allows the
artist to trick the eye. “This frame isolates the Annunciation and focuses viewer
attention on it,” writes Jacobs, “creating a zone of sacred space while connecting
this realm of the sacred with that of the world. Indeed, the wing of
Gabriel...crosses the frame, as does the vase of lilies, thereby projecting the scene
into the space of the viewer.” Van der Weyden used this framing technique in
several other works so that “the miraculous threshold occurs not between panels
but between the artwork and the viewer.”\textsuperscript{180}

The trompe l’oeil of the lilies is such that, teetering on the edge of the
frame, one wants to be ready to catch them if they should fall. But this
placement, perceived as spatially closest to the viewer, creates a liminal path into
the fictive space. We have to assume in a less image-saturated context, how
much more miraculous these cinematic paintings must have been. Thus the
desire to touch heightens the spectator’s senses and begins to allow for
participation between devotee and the saints. The lilies on the brink link the
narrative scene into the real time of the present. Speaking in regard to van Eyck’s
Annunciation in Washington D.C. (Figure 8), Carol Purtle relates the cushioned
stool and lilies in the bottom right foreground of that painting with the Mass of
contemporary experience.\textsuperscript{181} If the Annunciation panel were a mirror, it would

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{180}] Jacobs, Opening Doors, 106.
\item[\textsuperscript{181}] Ward sees the Annunciation lilies differently than its usual Marian connotations: “contrary to the general belief that lilies in the Annunciation scenes represent the purity of the Virgin, many fifteenth-century Flemish painters probably used the flower as a symbol of Christ. That this is the meaning here is apparent from the proximity of the lilies to
\end{itemize}
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be situated right on top of the altar (which would not be glimpsed in the reflection) and the stool and vase would be seen just to the side it opposite of the painting plane. Thus, the painting makes a direct theological parallel between Incarnation and transubstantiation of the Eucharist, between Christ-event and sacramental experience.\textsuperscript{182}

I think more can be said about the placement of these lilies in regard to the sense of smell. Again, these flowers are not just symbolic but were part of the experience of devotion and the sense of seasons, like that of Easter when those flowers bloom.\textsuperscript{183} If lilies were present in proximity to altars, altarpieces, and statues, then the scent of these flowers would be well-remembered. Likewise, because tactile desire is elicited by the trompe l’oeil vase in the \textit{Columba Triptych}, it is conceivable that the floral scent was intended to be brought close to the viewer.

A still more persuasive case for my argument can be seen in another, slightly later Annunciation scene by Hans Memling. The \textit{Greverade Triptych} (Figures 17) is the artist’s last major altarpiece, and a large (approx. 221.5 x 333 cm) and complex one at that.\textsuperscript{184} This multifarious polyptych depicts, in its core,

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\textsuperscript{182} Carol J. Purtle, "Van Eyck's Washington Annunciation," \textit{The Art Bulletin} 57, no. 2 (June 1, 1975) 122.

\textsuperscript{183} At the same time they employed these primarily symbolic depictions, artists were developing more purely visual strategies to draw the viewer into the scene. By placing the subject of his Annunciation from the \textit{Mérode Triptych} in a domestic setting instead of a portico or church interior, Campin provided the spectator with an accessible and familiar devotional experience... Thus, a vase of lilies, a sign of the Virgin’s purity, is prominently placed on the table at the center of Campin’s picture, even though these flowers do not bloom in March, the presumed time of the Annunciation,” Ainsworth and Christiansen, \textit{From Van Eyck to Bruegel}, 82.

\textsuperscript{184} Cf. Appendix (Figures 17): Hans Memling, \textit{Greverade Triptych or Passion Altarpiece} (1491) oil on panel (Lübeck: Sanhkt-Annen-Musæum). (exterior wings) \textit{The Annunciation}.
the final events of the Passion, and at its first opening presents four saints. My focus in this discussion is the grisaille depiction of the Annunciation on the exterior wings.

Grisaille, faux-sculptural paintings of the Annunciation are common on the exteriors of many fifteenth-century folding triptychs. Although the second half of the fifteenth century saw great experimentation with textures, colors, and dynamic poses unattainable in stone, these sculptural paintings hearken back to the staid grisaille of several generations before, such as that of Jan van Eyck.185 Despite the gravity-defying Holy Spirit dove and some fluttering pages in Mary’s prayer book, the two figures are quite still. The color and rigid poses give the impression of actual sculpture. Characteristically, the two statues are set into niches and stand upon elevated pedestals. Their conversation is bisected by the opening of the panel door, but the tile floor shows it is a continuous space.

Despite the derivative nature of the scene, there is a subversive, visual quality to this grisaille Annunciation. In what could be overlooked, there is a vase of flowers in full color tucked into the extreme, lower right hand corner of the Virgin Annunciate panel. A blue iris and a white lily rise up on leafy stalks knee-high to the Virgin, set into a narrow-throated, pear-shaped red earthenware jug complete with a handle and studded base. After seeing this color interloper into the monochrome space one notices that the trapezoidal bits of floor tiles may actually be full color as well.186 Granted, these are not bold-color marble mosaic,

185 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 156.
186 Dirk de Vos, et al., see the Greverade Triptych’s grisaille painting closely resembling a full color Annunciation (Appendix Figure 18: (c. 1480-1490) oil on panel (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art)). This other painting has a very similar jug in the lower right corner just at the Virgin’s feet and a similar tile floor, as well as the
but when opened to the first position with the panels depicting *Sts. Blaise, John the Baptist, Jerome, and Giles*, one can see the same pattern and color for the floor tiles, denoting the same church space.

This quiet subversion to otherwise conventional tropes creates a new and different level of reality within the work. Thus, Jacobs wonders:

Does the vase represent a “real” offering placed in front of a statue, in emulation of actual devotional practices carried out in the church? But how can the lily and vase be part of the reality of “this” world when it is an intrinsic part of the iconography of the Annunciation, an event occurring outside of the here and now and articulated within the realm of sculpted imagery?¹⁸⁷

To these questions I would reply: All of the above! Memling is deliberately playing with the tension between symbol, representation, spiritual reality, and devotional practice. The lilies and iris are part of Annunciation iconography,
representing the purity of virginity, queenship, and humility.\textsuperscript{188} Offering flowers to statues of the Virgin were also common practice. Both of these realities are invoked in this grisaille painting. Nonetheless, the experience of smelling these flowers is also a part of this work. The imagined fragrance of these realistically depicted plants immediately brings back memories of praying before statues and flowers in a church niche. Thus, the conscious or nonconscious odor-cued behavior recreates an experience for believers. The tiles, continuous with the church spaces the ‘living’ saints occupy, evoke the experience of seeing statues in the church, but unlike plants set before statues, the painting’s lilies and irises never wither. The associated memories and emotions of the actual sense experience merge with the symbolic meanings of the flowers and Mary, thereby bringing about the common experience and reinforcing it for the community of devotees. As Robert Hughes explains regarding this pre-modern period:

\begin{quote}
Where, in fifteenth-century Florence or seventeenth-century Flanders, did you get your information about the world and how to interpret it? [...] That left] the spoken words (which included everything from village-pump gossip to the high rhetoric of tribune and pulpit) and visual images - painting and sculpture...in determining not merely public taste but mass social and religious conviction as well... They made legends tangible and credible, inserting them unconditionally into the lives of their audience, compelling belief - and so altering behaviour.\textsuperscript{189}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{188} Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 149.
If the contemporary olfactory, behavioral studies discussed in Chapter Two demonstrate that the nonconscious smell of pine needles can induce persons to become more clean, and that inciting persons to imagine good smells helps to recall details of events, we can plausibly assume that such an obvious odor cue as a tromp l’oeil vase of flowers did similar things for pious Christians looking at Memling’s painting.¹⁹⁰

If visually simulated olfaction was part of the compositions of fifteenth-century devotional painting in the Low Countries, then this hypothesis can be taken even further. The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum has an interesting panel by Hans Memling that plays directly with these symbolic and sense cues (Figures 19 & 20).¹⁹¹ This small panel (29.2 x 22.5 cm) painted on front and back is believed to be a fragment of a larger work that has not survived. On one side is the Portrait of a Young Man and on the other is a Still Life with Flowers.

*The Portrait of a Young Man* (Figure 19) depicts a fashionably dressed gentleman with his hands folded in prayer. It is bust-length and shows off the donor’s wealth, with a white shirt criss-crossed with a lattice of gold ribbons tied down the middle of his chest. Over this is an overcoat of black fur. He is clean-shaven with a straight nose, bright brown eyes, and bushy eyebrows all under the cover of thick, curly brown hair that densely surrounds his face and trails back to the base of his neck. Scholars have speculated that the donor was one of the many Italian merchant-bankers working in Bruges at this time, based on the

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hairstyle and clothing.\footnote{Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying,” Museum catalog, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza <http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha_obra/282>}{192} He is set in a room with a neutral colored wall as his background and a window ledge to his upper left looking out onto a landscape with leafy trees.\footnote{Panofsky grants Memling as close to a serious compliment of originality in adding deep landscapes to the backgrounds of his portraits, cf. \textit{Early Netherlandish Painting}, 349.}{193} A round, purple porphyry column abuts the left edge of the window sill, while a brightly colored, oriental-inspired carpet drapes over both sides of the sill.

The reverse of this panel shows Memling displaying his gifts for rendering fine points in the crispest detail, in one of the earliest independent still lives in European painting (Figure 20).\footnote{Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying.” This still life was only discovered in 1933 when restorers removed a dark overpainting over which was written “del Maestra de Orbens.” This Orbens cannot be linked to the male don or convincingly, and that the language is in Spanish could be as much a question of provenance as patronage, due to clothing and hairstyle. The fact that the still life is a recent discovery may explain some of the lacuna of scholarly work on this piece, cf. Dirk de Vos, Hans Memling, D. Marechal, and Willy Le Loup, \textit{Hans Memling} (Ghent: Ludion, 1994), 122.}{194} Set deep into an ochre-colored, square wall niche, a vase of flowers takes up two thirds of the painting. Situated in the direct center of the panel, the flowers extend upward to the edge of the picture plane. There are two (perhaps three) violet columbines, three blooming, blue irises and a fourth yet to bloom, and above all these, three white lilies in flower with a fourth bud. The three distinct species exhibit different shapes of leaves that create variegated textures of green in the mid-tone and deep shadow of the niche.

The flowers grow out of a vase that appears to be an earthenware pitcher glazed in white with black or dark blue painted design. The Same pitcher, with pinched spout and handle, appears in other Netherlandish Annunciation scenes, such as Campin’s \textit{Mérode Altarpiece} (Figure 3). Such majolica lead-glazed jugs were imported from Italy, and were popular as a consumer good of merchant
classes and up. The vase’s primary feature is its monogram of Christ “IHS” within a sunburst. The decorative patterns of the blue-black on white surrounding the holy name are a toothed pair of circular borders, broken in their path around the spout through foreshortening. Outside the round borders are something suggesting palm fronds, a different take on the delicate vine patterns on the Mérode Altarpiece flower jug.

The composition of the flower pitcher is set atop another exotic, Oriental carpet that hangs over the shelf of the niche, and is very similar to the one on the window sill of the donor portrait on the panel’s front; such carpets are frequently depicted in Memling’s work. The carpet seems to show both the difference and connection between thresholds of open and closed doors – they all seem to belong to the same space, with the flowers occupying a space on the wall opposite the balcony, or on one of the walls opposite the figures but outside of a viewer’s gaze in the inner composition.

This still life, while a standalone image on its panel surface, is linked to more than fifty years of traditional Marian associations in Flemish panel paintings, and in sacred art before that. Panofsky writes that in “view of its many parallels, we are safe in assuming the pot of lilies has retained its significance as a symbol of chastity.” The irises refer to Mary both through the royal blue of the

195 Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying.” The carpets, while similar in color and patterns, are not the same, though are characteristic of Memling’s paintings; so frequent are these accoutrements in the painter's works that they came to be called Memling Rugs in the textile world.

196 Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 142. Ward says lilies rather refer to Christ (cf. footnote 138), and that showing some unopened buds shows that the Holy Spirit inseminates flowers on God the Father’s behalf, but not upon others. One would think this would be only one blooming flower, then, but in this case we see three and only one not opened – which perhaps has the same meaning but in reverse to what Ward conjectures. Cf. Ward, “Hidden Symbolism,” 197.
robes of the Queen of Heaven and the bluish-purple of the mater dolorosa’s suffering.\textsuperscript{197} The columbine are symbols of the Holy Spirit. The pitcher with the monogram of Jesus is obviously a reference, paired with the flower symbolism above, to the Incarnation. The play of raking light that casts great shadows to move to the right and out of the composition could be an oblique reference to the gospel of John’s Prologue, in which the light (Christ) shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.\textsuperscript{198}

Art historians assume that this panel was once a part of either a diptych or triptych for private devotional use.\textsuperscript{199} In order to talk about the smell in the composition of this Memling panel, it is necessary to distinguish possible reconstructions of it so that the proper role of odor can be observed. When positing reconstruction, many suggest that the Thyssen-Bornemisza panel was part of a triptych for several reasons. First, the features of the donor portrait are strikingly similar to those of the Triptych of Benedetto Portinari (Figure 21), another half-length folding painting completed perhaps some years after Portrait of a Young Man/Still Life with Flowers.\textsuperscript{200} Both portraits feature a similar setting, with a stone column at an open-air balcony into a deep landscape framing a finely dressed man folding his hands in prayer. Portinari (from a long line of Medici bankers in Bruges) also rests his elbow on the ledge of what appears to be another sill on the side closest to the viewer, upon which rests a

\textsuperscript{197} Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying.”

\textsuperscript{198} Cf. John 1:5. If this is the case, it fulfills the same symbolic function as the snuffed candle did in Annunciation scenes.

\textsuperscript{199} Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying.”

\textsuperscript{200} Cf. Appendix (Figure 21): Hans Memling, Triptych of Benedetto Portinari (1487) oil on panel (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Gemäldegalerie {central panel}; Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi {both side panels}).
prayer book on a diminutive stand as he turns toward the central (or other two) panel(s). The central panel shows the Madonna and Child, with Mary handing the nude baby Jesus an apple – a reference to being the New Adam and New Eve. Jesus rests on a red damask cushion on the sill that has another Oriental rug draped over it. On the opposite left panel is the donor’s patron, St. Benedict, who, unlike Portinari who is prayerfully looking toward the vision of Christ and the saints, has his eyes cast to a book (perhaps his *Rule* for monks). St. Benedict is dressed in the black habit of his order and holds an elaborately carved abbot’s crosier. He also leans his elbow on the sill, his window looks out into the same landscape, and it is worth noting the hand-colored print of the Crucifixion affixed to the wall perpendicular to the balcony opening.

Despite many of the formal similarities between the *Portrait of a Young Man* and the *Benedetto Portinari Triptych*, there is one obvious difference: the donors are facing opposing directions in their portraits. The reason for this has to do with heraldic or hieratic places of honor. Portinari is placed on the viewer’s right, but from his vantage he is on the *sinister* (left) side; right is the place of greater honor but, in the case of a triptych, the central position has the most important place.201 So in this context St. Benedict has greater place than Benedetto Portinari, but Jesus and Mary have the highest seating. This can be seen again in the half-length diptych of *The Virgin and Child with Maarten van Nieuwenhove* (Figure 22), also painted by Memling in the same year as the

201 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 71.
Benedetto Portinari Triptych.  

Here there are only two panels, and the donor takes the sinister side, turned in prayer to Christ and the Virgin.

Why, then, would this donor appear on the left (dexter) panel turning to what – deduced from the Marian flower symbols on the reverse – must be a Madonna and Child either in the central (triptych) or right panel (diptych)?

We can likely discount this panel being a part of a diptych, because if the opposite panel were a patron saint or Jesus and Mary, he or she would not be put on the less honorable side. However, if it were a triptych then – opposite to the Triptych of Benedetto Portinari – this patron’s wife could be on the right wing in the sinister position, with the Madonna and Child holding the greatest central placement. If the original multi-panel, hinged painting were a triptych, it would likely have been that opposite the flower symbols representing the Marian scene, and the family coats of arms of husband and wife would have occupied the other exterior panel (the reverse of the female donor) (cf. Figure 23).

This Portrait of a Young Man in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection could, however, be a diptych if it depicted a married pair of donors. Although not as common in Netherlandish devotional panels as placing donors opposite sacred figures, it

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202 Appendix (Figure 22): Hans Memling, Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych (1487) oil on panel (Bruges: Musée Brugge, Hospitaal museum Sint-Jans hospitaal). Cf. Hand, et al, Prayers and Portraits, 182.

203 In heraldry and traditional, Western portraiture, husbands occupied the viewer’s left and the wife on the right, except in the other relational examples I mention further in the body of the text.

204 De Vos, et al., Hans Memling, 122.

205 Cf. Appendix (Figure 23): Bernard de Rijckere, Coats of Arms of the van Santvoort and van Hertsbeeke Families in a Niche (exterior right wing of the Adriaan van Santvoort and Family Diptych) (1563) oil on panel (private collection). Cf. Borobia, Mar, “Portrait of a Young Man Praying.”
does occur (cf. Figure 24 & previous Figure 23).206 A strong reason against this reconstruction is what De Vos says in regard to symbols and spatial setting. Both the carpet – characteristic only of the Virgin’s presence – and the architectural space that would be tight for a loggia in a diptych, support the original was a triptych.207 Another strong argument against a diptych is that the male donor has his hands folded in prayer; he and his wife are surely not praying to each other! However, that gesture in itself may not disregard a married couple diptych.

There are two reasons for this that can be gleaned from comparanda, and these two types of representation will underscore my argument about the function of smell in religious art of the period.

The first reason why the Memling panel in the Thyssen- Bornemisza Museum could present a married couple at prayer is that it would be similar to many donor portraits on monumental altarpieces. An early example is the donor portraits of Joos Vijd and his wife Elisabeth Borluut on the exterior wings of the *Ghent Altarpiece* (Figure 25).208 The “Ghent Altarpiece donors, are...distinctly separated from the heavenly scenes of the interior, as they kneel in enclosed niches,” writes Jacobs.209 She also points out that the exterior zones make distinct and hieratic separations in the temporal and spatial zones in which they dwell. “The donors end up at the bottom of the hierarchic structure. Not only are they on the exterior..., but they are also on the lowest tier, on the base plane of the

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206 Cf. Appendix (Figure 24): Nicolas Froment, *Matheron Diptych or Rene I, Duke of Anjou and Jeanne de Laval* (c. 1476) oil on panel (Paris: Louvre). The reverse are two identical representations of the Jean Matheron device of lilies and bannerole surmounted by a crown on a field of blue with gold fleur-de-lis patterns.

207 De Vos, et al., *Hans Memling*, 122. However, Friedlander thought it came from a diptych.

208 Cf. Appendix (Figure 25): Hubert(?) and Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece* (exterior view) (1432) oil on panel (Ghent: St. Bavo’s Cathedral).

earthly existence, not in the transcendent realm of heaven.”210 Yet, as Jacobs also notes here, van Eyck has painted the donors’ eyes to look a little past the statues of the church patron saints that are directly in front of them – they are looking to a spiritual reality via prayer, imagining the saint not the statue.211 Additionally, as Jung states in her discussion on choir screens in the medieval period, architectural structures were not so much a barrier as a passage to be crossed; in fact the mere placement of a barriers in a sacred space made the hidden place all that much more intriguing, and in practice lay people seemed to go into the choir areas quite often.212 Jacobs makes a similar claim for triptychs in her book in regard to interior and exterior thresholds. Thus, Vijd and Borluut can actually have a relationship with many different panels on the exterior and interior.213

A slightly different way of showing this connection between donors and what happens in other places inside or away from the donors’ place, is provided by the exterior wings of Memling’s Last Judgment Altarpiece in Gdańsk (Figure 26).214 Here, the donors, identified by their coats of arms, occupy the lowest part of the composition, in each of their panels, and kneel on a tile floor beneath niches that contain grisaille representations of statues of their patron saints, the
Madonna and St. Michael. In one composition, Memling collapses what could have been separated into many different panels standing alone. This forces the artist into an awkward space, so to speak. As Jacobs outlines:

This structure separates the devotions of the donors from the images of the saints, so that their devotion has no clear object... Memling’s work thus has been cited as the first work in which the donors are “praying to a crack,” that is, the crack between the two panels of the exterior...

Jacobs, however, does not think that the artist is quite so clumsy, spiritually as well as artistically.

Memling’s donors are not really praying to the crack: their upward gazes show their thoughts are directed higher...to God, manifest in the sky in the opened triptych. Indeed, the donors of the Ghent and Beaune Altarpieces, though seemingly addressing the grisaille saints, are disconnected from them such that their prayers, like those of Tani and his wife, find their ultimate object in the theophany within.

If this is the case with the Last Judgment donors praying to a chasm that opens them to an experience on the opposite threshold, then, the original construction of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Memling panel could have been a married donor portrait diptych. Their gesture of praying is neither without precedent nor coherence within the context of front and back of an entire artwork.

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215 Cf. Jacobs, Opening Doors, 154. Jacobs misattributes the warrior saint as St. George, but his wings and the donor’s name, Angelo di Jacopo Tani, along with the presence of not dragons but demons, denote it as the archangel who the book of Revelation states banished Satan and the rebel angels to hell (Rev. 12:7). Likewise it is Michael who weighs souls in the central interior panel.

216 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 154.

217 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 154.
The second reason that the Memling fragment could have been one half of a married couple diptych is because of what appears on the reverse and how it relates to the interior images. A comparable image of this is found in a late work also by Memling, the *Sts. John and Veronica Diptych*. The interior panels show the male saint on the dexter side, the female on the sinister panel. On the exterior, there are two genre images of a vanitas and the symbol for another saint (Figures 27 & 28). The reverse of the St. John the Baptist panel is a skull set into a gray stone niche that utilizes two-point perspective and raking light cast from the left to contrast the image with deep shadows. The skull is anatomically correct to the point of being gruesome, showing not blackened eye sockets but the tear drop slits through which the eyes are connected to the brain and a number of its teeth are missing. The jaw of the skull projects into the viewer’s space, heightening the illusion of three-dimensionality. Below the niche is the Latin word MORIERIS (“you will die”), painted as a trompe-l’œil carved inscription. Thus, this is a *memento mori* or vanitas image. There are precedents for a vanitas image – specifically a skull – appearing on the reverse of the *Braque Triptych* by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1452) (Figures 29). The inner scene is a kind of Deësis with Jesus flanked by four saints on either side. The exterior incorporates the coat of arms of the male and female patrons on respective panels. Along with each armorial bearing, is also a vanitas image: a skull resting

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218 Cf. Appendix (Figure 27 & 28): Hans Memling, *Sts. John and Veronica Diptych* (exterior reverse of skull and chalice with snake in niches) (c. 1480-1483) oil on panel, (St. John/Skull panel:) Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, (St. Veronica/Chalice:) National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


on a brick for the male donor, a cross with an inscription from Sirach 41:1-2 for the female. Also, in the case of the family portrait diptych of Adriaan van Santvoort and Anna van Hertsbeeke’s family with its reverse niche displaying their coats of arms (Figure 23), this heraldic device includes an hourglass that is also memento mori iconography.

However, while this earlier memento mori on the Braque Triptych is unified between both outside panels, those of the Sts. John the Baptist and Veronica diptych are not (or at least the elements require a viewer’s studied reflection). The St. Veronica panel’s reverse is another stone niche, this time with a Romanesque arch opening set in the golden mean of proportion (more properly proportioned by Western standards of centering than the vanitas image opposite it). Within this niche, lit also from the left, is a gold chalice with a thin, black snake with red eyes draped over it. The hemispherical cup of the chalice is nearly as wide as its base, and its stem is with a bejeweled node. The base of the chalice terminates in flat planes sloping downward into a cinquefoil or sexfoil form. Like the skull, its base projects forward over the sill of the niche. The chalice with the snake is a well-known attribute of St. John the Evangelist, eluding to a legend that the saint drank poison and was unharmed.

221 “O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions! To a man that is at rest, and whose ways are prosperous in all things, and that is yet able to take meat!” cf. Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 41:1-2.

222 “The Van Santvoort and Van Hertsbeeke coats of arms on the reverse of the portrait of Anna van Hertsbeeke are accompanied by a clever rebus on the family name ‘Santvoort.’ The motto on the on the banderole, ‘Altyt v oort,’ may be translated ‘All time [or always] forward,’ but between the two words is depicted an hourglass - measuring time (‘tyt’ in Middle Dutch) as grains of sand flow from top to bottom - which changes the motto into, essentially, ‘Altyt-Sant-v oort.’ The hourglass may simultaneously function as a vanitas symbol,” Hand, et al, Prayers and Portraits, 218.

The *Sts. John and Veronica* diptych remains enigmatic in its meaning. “It is not known who commissioned the ensemble, but the combination of images is iconographically unique and must reflect the specific religious needs of its owner.”²²⁴ The inside depicting the figures of the two saints is almost identical to a set done on the exterior wings of the *Jan Floreins Triptych*. It has been suggested by several art historians that it was commissioned by the same Jan Floreins, “a friar in the monastery of the Hospital of Saint John in Bruges. Such a provenance would better explain the presence of the chalice of Saint John the Evangelist, since both John the Baptist and John the Evangelist were patron saints of the hospital and its monastery.”²²⁵ So this curious little diptych incorporates two figural portraits of saints, a symbolic portrait, and also throws in a vanitas image in a traditional place for it on the exterior side of a private diptych.

If all of these parts are not random but seem to have a logical, albeit anomalous, relationship to a person and place, it is fair to posit that the four images interact in meaning too. After all, the Baptist and Veronica share a continuous landscape (ergo, a continuous threshold) and interact. If the skull and St. John’s chalice were meant to interpret one another, it could be that the former is a statement of mortality, and the latter a statement of immortality, for the Eucharist has been called from the Patristic period “the medicine of immortality, and antidote to prevent us from dying” that is drunk from a

Furthermore, each saint portrait has a relationship to its outside reverse. St. John the Baptist was a martyr and forerunner for Christ’s sacrifice, and St. Veronica wields the image of the Holy Face of Jesus, not made by hands, that was a popular indulgenced image that remitted time spent in purgatory – the Baptist corresponds to death represented by the skull, and Veronica to salvation from the effects of death and sin symbolized in the miraculous chalice.

Based on these two arguments – the interaction of donors to other inside and outside images on a winged painting, and the symbolic representation of persons that also appear to interact across image thresholds – I return to Memling’s *Portrait of a Young Man/Still Life with Flowers*. Given the comparanda discussed above, it is most likely that the original setting for the portrait was a double portrait of a married couple. In this reconstruction, the *Portrait of a Young Man/Still life* displayed the Marian flower still life on just one exterior side or included another symbolic representation of a saint like its compliment (and like the St. John Chalice), or perhaps the family coats of arms.

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228 De Vos says that the flowers not only support a triptych with the Madonna and Child in the central panel, but that because this image appears on the reverse of the male donor, “it must also be viewed as a kind of emblem of the donor’s personal Christian vocation,” but does not explain what he means by this specific vocation. He also posits that in the closed position there was no painted symbol on the reverse of the female donor, because you would not have seen that in the closed position, and would have been a faux marble, like the reverse of the *Benedetto Portinari Triptych*, cf. De Vos, et al. *Hans Memling*, 122.
I want to make the case that the reconstructed form of the Thyssen-Bornemisza painting was a diptych and did not include a literal image of the Virgin and Child Jesus. Instead, just as the visual attribute of the serpent in the chalice stands in for St. John the Evangelist, so the niche with the lilies, irises, and columbine takes the place of a representational image of Mary, and specifically as Jacobs notes regarding the *Greverade Triptych*, reflects the iconography of the Annunciation. One may counter that part of the reason for painting (as I argued above) is to depict what cannot be seen in life: in this case, Mary and the baby Jesus present to the donors in their home would be ideal. At the same time, although Panofsky considered Memling a derivative copyist of his predecessors in fifteenth-century Flanders, as Jacobs and several recent scholars (I believe rightly) call him a great experimenter within the existing traditions.\(^{229}\)

The idiosyncratic pairings within the *Sts. John the Baptist and Veronica Diptych* indicate that Memling was capable of unique conglomerations from the tradition to meet the needs of patrons, and perhaps, to suit the taste of wealthy classes for novelty. Should it not be possible that this jug of flowers alone – singular and new in the tradition – should function in a transformed way in a private diptych format?

As the *Greverade Triptych* melds visual symbol through associated meanings and sense memory so does the *Still Life with Flowers*. Is it meant to be a tromp l’oeil stand-in for actual flowers placed before images of the Virgin? Yes. Is it a symbol for the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary in general? Yes. Is it

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supposed to look like a bouquet and luxurious textile in a merchant’s fine home and call to mind sweet aromas? Yes. Is the smell of lilies, irises, and columbine meant to collapse the space between church liturgical space and private devotion? Again, yes. The multivalence of the prayer experience feeds into the artwork, with smell playing a pivotal role. As some scholars now maintain, artists introduced certain details in an attempt to use naturalism to create visually accessible images, and that they intended to encourage the viewer to identify with them individually as real, three-dimensional objects and experience their deliberate placement as part of an illusionistic construction of pictorial space. These objectives would be in keeping with the sweeping spiritual movements of the day, such as the Modern Devotion, whose proponents encouraged the faithful to meditate on sacred scenes as if they were actually taking part in them.230

The patrons depicted in the interior panels pray to a crack, as Jacobs would say, but also pray beyond the inner threshold to the opposite side of the panel that takes them – in their domestic space – into contact with the Blessed Virgin.231 Memories of prayer evoked by sense imagery, particularly the sense of smell, create a space for the patrons to look past what is depicted and come into a faith reality. In fact, whether triggered by sight or sight mixed with actual smells – as we can see was a common practice from the Munich Diptych – the patrons passing even casually by the diptych, could have had it closed to the still life and be transported by the Proust phenomenon to a place of devotion. Based on the

230 Ainsworth and Christiansen, From Van Eyck to Bruegel, 82.
231 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 154.
examples of this chapter, I conclude that smell was an intentional and integral part of Netherlandish sacred painting, meant to evoke and crystallize devotional experience. In order to better understand these paintings, we must recognize the role of smell.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

When I began this study, I set out to discover what the good, bad, and neutral smells depicted in fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting were. To my knowledge, with the exception of Reindert Falkenburg, no one has made the connection between smell’s place in devotional life and its presence in art at the time. However, it became clear early on that the many odiferous plants, animals, foods, liturgical instruments, and even persons represented in these paintings were not merely symbolic in a visual sense nor simply a display of an artist’s virtuosity. Instead, as scholarship of early modern material culture has shown in recent years, attention to the role of the senses in the contexts in which they appear provide new insights for interpreting these artworks.

Regarding my contribution to the field, after starting from the premise that there is no contradiction between symbol and object-in-itself, I found that smells of individual things became bearers of meaning. Odors have culturally conditioned connotations that demarcate class and sanctity in both domestic and ecclesial settings. Popular spirituality of this period also encouraged imagining smells in connection with prayer, and what is seen in the art are the same odorants evoked in those treatises. Case studies of paintings of the Epiphany in conjunction with smell gave support to the idea that scents from church taken to the home helped collapse space between the two spheres of life for believers. What is more, as psychological research on olfaction as it affects memory, attitudes, and behavior suggests – and because senses themselves are not historically bound –, we can infer that depictions of smell were a deliberate part
of compositions by artists. Thus I argued that, in specific cases visual odor-cues in these paintings were meant to recreate experiences from the larger spiritual milieu, both enacting and reinforcing symbolic associations of these scents. The results of my research open up a new appreciation for the interaction between prayer and these paintings, remembering the importance of multivalent experience of both.

My research began in a very basic way: looking at paintings. I poured through catalogues of Netherlandish panels between 1400 and 1500, noting works that had anything that could give off a distinctive odor, and then listing specific odorants with the painting in which they appeared. Later I returned to this list of approximately fifty works and designated smells as good, bad, or neutral. There were two limitations with this method. First, although I had access to many of the great masters (e.g., van der Weyden, Memling) and lesser and some anonymous Netherlandish painters (e.g., the Master of 1499), there are so many hundreds of panels not available in print or online that could give a fuller picture of the period. Indeed, it seemed like every time I thought I finished the list, further research would uncover myriad new images and odorants in them! I had to be satisfied with a survey of representative works for this study. Second, it was clear that so many of these smells were contextually bound which made a discreet, tripartite designation of odors difficult at times. Flowers and incense were always pleasant smells, but what was smoke from fireplaces? This contextual component shaped how I structured my research and reminded me that if my hypothesis was that smell created a larger experience of prayer through and with the artworks, I could not abstract the odors from the scenes in which
they appear. Thus, I focused study on three main subjects: Adoration of the Magi, the Annunciation, and donor portraits in small devotional panels.

The lens of smell is a new way of investigating Flemish religious painting. The state of research in general history provided many avenues in which to pursue study – mostly in regard to class, gender, and “the other” –, but my primary interest in this project was to deal with the devotional, liturgical, and mystical experience of fifteenth-century devotees of these images. In order to discover what smells meant to the people of the time I utilized primary texts such as popular spiritual works, sermons, and chronicles. I would have liked to have included much more of these primary sources in this research. With that said, some of my most exciting discoveries were made when close inspection of smells led back to written sources, instead of the other way round. For example, the curious custom of wrapping children’s heads with a white cloth after the sacrament of confirmation – so different from early Church and post-Tridentine practice – caused me to search for its meaning in bishops’ rituals from the period to find in Durandus a role of smell beyond my expectations!232

The recent works of Lynn Jacobs and Caroline Walker Bynum also inspired me to explore what seemed like opposing methodologies. On the one hand, I had to take into account different kinds of primary documents to understand context and use. On the other hand, I had to allow the art objects in their accumulated voice to speak for themselves, as it were – for they still speak about the interests, motivations, and ideas of patrons, artists, and the faithful who prayed with them. Tempered by the first approach, I hoped I would not be

232 Cf. Chapter Three, p. 47, Monti, A Sense of the Sacred, 133.
projecting wildly speculative conclusions far from the worldview of the time; there is a fear that I have made just such grandiose claims for the artworks. Still, I think that once one understands that these paintings were not made for museum walls but to be interacted with and bear meaning, looking for the place of the sense of smell within them does not seem so outlandish. Unlike even the great forefathers of iconographical and iconological research, Max Friedländer and Erwin Panofsky, who were often hampered by inherited connoisseurial mindsets that prized the idea of genius artists and canonical works, my study influenced by material culture helped me appreciate any and all of the paintings that fit my scope of research. (To say that is not to discount the debt any scholar of early Netherlandish painting has to Panofsky and Friedländer.)

On the one hand, much of what I discovered in my research was not necessarily new, but it helps to broaden the discourse of piety and painting in the late medieval Low Countries. Several centuries of monastic mystical meditation found its way to vernacular block prints and primers for the laity in the early modern period, but with a strong materiality in which sense experience fed spiritual practice without needing to transcend the senses. Thus, the smells and tastes associated with sanctity and devotional contact in the literature is what is seen in the painting.

On the other hand, my research suggests new insights. Like Falkenburg, I assert that smells were used by the artists in the same way that spiritual authors encouraged the faithful to use their senses in prayer. Furthermore, I looked at specific odors in the Epiphany of Rogier van der Weyden’s *Columba Triptych* that shows the merging of sacramental, liturgical experiences with the life of the
home. This was brought out primarily by the smells of incense, chrism, and straw. In the final chapter of this paper, I made the claim that these smell associations were enough to induce behavior and emotional memories by an artist’s symbolic use of odorants. Conspicuous placement of flowers associated with the Virgin Annunciate, I argued, could be enough to recreate experiences in churches before actual statues and flowers. These claims all go back to the social and behavioral science studies outlined in the second chapter.

I believe that there are a great many ways in which my research and theories could be expanded upon in the future. While I dealt with behavioral studies of smell, I did not investigate how modern advertise visualizes aromas to sell products. Likewise, I did not get into the neurology of smell in connection to vision, and there are some intriguing new findings in this area of study for my research.\textsuperscript{233} I would also like to have the opportunity to study more of the primary texts in regard to the sense of smell, and even more time to delve into monographs on particular works and artists. It would be wonderful to have an opportunity to travel and observe more objects in person, especially obscure panels in Belgium. For that matter, I have to admit my own limitation in not knowing Dutch; a reading knowledge of the language could help me with any primary documentation pertaining to commissions.

In conclusion, I consider the contributions of my research for the study of early Netherlandish painting to be helpful by way of continuing to nudge it out of a bipolar preoccupation; most of the research since the work of twentieth-century

iconographical scholars has vacillated between high and low symbolic interpretation of objects in these religious panels. By considering other sense-based interaction with these altarpieces and devotional works, I hope the scholarship can better understand the worldview and practices of artists and the believers who prayed in front of their artworks. I believe my scholarship also suggests exciting new possibilities for interdisciplinary work; specifically with social and behavioral scientists, liturgical historians, and scholars of late medieval devotional literature. Smell is something that causes such a strong visceral reaction but can easily be overlooked when it comes to serious academic study. At the very least, I hope my research on the role of smell in fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting will make odors and olfaction a significant topic of study for this period and other times and places in art history.
Master of 1499, *Diptych of Abbot Christiaan de Hondt*  
(l-Madonna in the Church; r-Abbot de Hondt)  
(c. 1499) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of Wikimedia Commons  
Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smell Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good smells</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incense (frankincense)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrrh (Magi, Magdalene)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (meat, bread)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyssop</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosary pomander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral smells</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candles</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log fire</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straw*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil*</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bad smells</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals (farm, wild)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners*</td>
<td>8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Blood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/Shepherds</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snuffed Wick</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decomposing Bodies</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burning Bones</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burning Flesh**</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demons**</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers taken from a survey of 54 paintings. Multiple panels are sometimes counted as more than one work.

* Uncertainty of assigning the designation

** There may be other works that depict these images, but...
Figure 3

Campin, Robert, Mèrode Altarpiece
(c. 1425) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art
Master of St. Augustine, * Scenes from the Life of St. Augustine*  
(c. 1490) oil, gold, and silver on panel  
Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art
Rogier van der Weyden, *The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (c. 1440-1445) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art
Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten
Rogier van der Weyden, *The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*
  (baptism and confirmation detail)
  (c. 1440-1445) oil on panel
  Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art
  Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten
Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop), *Columbia Triptych* (c. 1450-1456) oil on panels
Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art
Munich: Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische
Figure 8

Jan van Eyck, *Annunciation*  
(c. 1428) oil on panel transferred to canvas  
Photo: courtesy of University of California, San Diego  
Washington, D.C.: National Gallery
Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1483-1485) tempera and oil on panel

Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art

Florence: Santa Trinità
Figure 10

Joos van Ghent, *Adoration of the Magi*
(c. 1465) distemper on canvas
Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 11

_Courajod Christ_, articulated statue (Inv. RF1082)
(second quarter of the twelfth century) polychromed wood, 155 x 158 x 30 cm
Photo: courtesy of L’Agence Photographique de la Réunion des Musées et du Grand Palais
Paris: Louvre
Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece* (musician angels detail) (1432) oil on panel

Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art

Ghent: St. Bavo’s Cathedral
Figure 13

Petrus Christus, *The Fountain of Life*
(c. 1445-1450) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of National Prado Museum
Madrid: Prado
Hans Memling, *Munich Diptych*

(The Madonna in the Garden with a Donor and St. George)

(c. 1480) oil on panel

Photo: courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Munich: Alte Pinakothek
Figure 15

Photo by the author, Our Lady of Lourdes statue
13 February 2016
Photo: courtesy of Rev. Pachomius Meade, OSB
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Columbia, MO
Figure 16

Garden Murals from Villa of Livia
(c. 50 B.C.) fresco
Photo: courtesy of National Roman Museum
Rome: National Roman Museum
Hans Memling, *Greverade Triptych or Passion Altarpiece*  
(pictured: exterior wings) *The Annunciation*  
(not pictured: first open position, Saints Blaise, John the Baptist, Jerome, and Giles;  
open position, *The Passion, death, and resurrection*)  
Photo: Museen für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt, Lübeck  
(1491) oil on panel  
Lübeck: Sanhkt-Annen-Museum.
Hans Memling, *The Annunciation*  
(c. 1480-1490) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art
Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man*  
(c. 1485-1490) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art  
Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza
Hans Memling, *Still Life with Flowers*  
(c. 1485-1490) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art  
Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza
Hans Memling, *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* (1487) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Gemaldegalerie {central panel}; Florence: Galleria delgi Uffizi {both side panels}
Hans Memling, *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* (1487) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of ArtStor.org
Bruges: Musea Brugge, Hospitaalmuseum Sint-Janshospitaal
Bernard de Rijckere, *Coats of Arms of the van Santvoort and van Hertsbeeke Families in a Niche* (exterior right wing of the *Adriaan van Santvoort and Family Diptych*) (1563) oil on panel

Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.)

private collection
Nicolas Froment, *Matheron Diptych or Rene I, Duke of Anjou and Jeanne de Laval* (interior)

*Matheron Family Devices* of lilies interlaced with S-curve banderole surmounted by crown

on a blue field with gold fleur-de-lis (exterior)

(c. 1476) oil on panel

Photo: courtesy of Musée de Louvre (Paris)

Paris: Louvre
Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece* (exterior view)  
(1432) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of Wikimedia Commons  
Ghent: St. Bavo's Cathedral
Hans Memling, *Last Judgment*  
(exterior panels with donor portraits and grisaille statues)  
(1467-1471) oil on panel  
Photo: courtesy of Wikimedia Commons  
Gdańsk: Muzeum Naradowe
Hans. Sts. John and Veronica Diptych
(front, St. John the Baptist; reverse, skull in niche “MORIERIS”)
(c. 1480-1483) oil on panel
Photos: courtesy of Web Art Gallery
Munich: Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen
Hans. *Sts. John and Veronica Diptych*  
(front, St. Veronica; reverse, St. John’s Chalice and Snake)  
(c. 1480-1483) oil on panel  
Photos: courtesy of Web Art Gallery  
Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art
Rogier van der Weyden, *Braque Triptych* (exterior panels) (1452) oil on panel
Photo: courtesy of Web Gallery of Art
Paris: Louvre
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