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## A Trapped Body or a Living Stone? The Case of Grisaille and Demi-grisaille Paintings by Hans Memling

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What is the meaning of the monochrome images painted on the outer parts of the wings of late medieval retables that seem to imitate sculptures? What is their status, what do they actually represent? What is their meaning in relation to the multicoloured depictions in the open retables? Does the monochrome have a similar meaning in all cases? What are its relations with monochromy in other artistic genres: sculpture and graphics?

The above questions are asked by scholars in view of the numerous paintings with monochrome elements from French called *en grisaille*. This text will not answer them, but will draw attention to certain aspects of this convention in paintings by Hans Memling, who introduced several innovations to it; moreover, his works have been preserved in exceptional numbers, which allows for a broader overview of these motifs than in other artists of the time and the identification of several regularities. Specifically: we will address the nature of figures painted *en grisaille*, their relation to the open version of retables and the/their meaning.

Painting with a limited colour scale was known in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> It is mentioned several times by Pliny the Elder who refers to it as “*monochromata*.”<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Previously, I posted the following short overview of realisations *en grisaille* and their interpretations in Andrzej Woziński, “Monochromatyczne obrazy na retabulum ołtarza głównego w kościele Mariackim w Gdańsku. Geneza i znaczenie” in *Procesy przemian w sztuce średniowiecznej. Przełom – regres – innowacja – tradycja. Studia z historii sztuki*, eds. Rafał Eysymontt, Romuald Kaczmarek (Warszawa: Argraf, 2014), 253–267.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, <https://tiny.pl/dl1pf>, 88–89, 282–283, 308–309, accessed on 27 June 2023.

convention is encountered in the Middle Ages in panel painting, wall painting, book painting, stained glass and textiles. Little is known about how it was called at the time.<sup>3</sup> In the archives we come across descriptive terms: the inventory of the Duc de Jean de Berry from 1401–1403 mentions an image of Mary and Child made in black and white (“un ymage de Nostre Dame tenant un enfant, et sont faiz de blanc et noir”).<sup>4</sup> In 1508 Albrecht Dürer, in notes accompanying his work on the Heller altarpiece, used the term “stainfarb” to refer to the stone-like colouring of the pairs of saints painted on the outside of the wings.<sup>5</sup> Commonly used in art-historical writing, the term “grisaille” was coined in the early seventeenth century. Its equivalent is “peinture en camaieu,” except that it means monochromatically painted figural parts against a coloured background.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest monochrome works are thirteenth-century stained-glass windows in Cistercian monasteries. Their repertoire, such as that at Heiligenkreuz, is limited almost exclusively to geometric and floral motifs.<sup>7</sup> Monochromatic figural depictions appeared in the fourteenth century in wall and book paintings.<sup>8</sup> Between 1303 and 1305, in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, below a cycle dedicated to Jesus and Mary, Giotto placed personifications of the virtues and vices. The entire lot is painted in the “trompe l’oeil” convention. The stone-coloured figures stand or float on these panels lined with speckled marble, while the walls where the panels are located are clad with slabs of veined marble.<sup>9</sup> The monumental monochrome painting initiated by Giotto also found continuators in northern Italy in the following century. Two decades after the creation of the frescoes in Padua, en grisaille painting was used for the first time across the Alps in illumination. Between 1325 and 1328, Jean Pucelle used this convention in the Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cloisters), painting in gray the figural parts placed on a background that is colourful, or abstract or decorated with geometric motifs.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Elsbeth Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung” in Hans Holbein d. Ä. *Die Graue Passion in ihrer Zeit, Katalog zur Ausstellung Staatsgalerie Stuttgart 2010/2011*, hg. v. eadem, Hatje Cantz (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 123–124.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Michaela Krieger, *Die Grisaille als Metapher. Zur Entstehen der Peinture en Camaieu im frühen 14. Jahrhundert*, Wiener kunstgeschichtliche Forschungen, Bd. 6 (Wien: Verlag Holzhausen, 1995), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Hayward, “Glazed Cloisters and Their Development in the Houses of the Cistercian Order,” *Gesta* 12, 1/2 (1973): 97–98, figs. 5–7; Michael Burger, “Grisaille in der Glasmalerei. Ein mehrdeutiger Begriff” in *Die Farbe Grau*, eds. Magdalena Bushart, Gregor Wedekind (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), 1–14.

<sup>8</sup> Michaela Krieger, “Grünwald und die Kunst der Grisaille” in *Grünwald und seine Zeit, Große Landesausstellung Baden-Württemberg. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, 8 Dezember 2007 – 2. März 2008*, hg. v. Jessica Mack-Andrick, Astrid Reuter (München-Karlsruhe: Deutscher Kunstverlag, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 2007), 58ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Eadem*, *Die Grisaille als Metapher*, 54ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 17ff.

The monochromatic formula is found in fifteenth-century illuminations, e.g. by Jacquemart de Hesdin in *Les Très Belles Heures of Prince Jean de Berry* from around 1400 (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique)<sup>11</sup> or in the manuscript *Composition de la Sainte Écriture* made in 1462 for Philip the Good (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique).<sup>12</sup> It is striking that many manuscripts with en grisaille motifs came from court circles. In the first half of the fifteenth century, monochrome appeared in Netherlandish panel painting. Its earliest manifestations were imitations of stone sculptures. In triptychs by Rogier van der Weyden, Dirk Bouts or Petrus Christus, monochromatic portals filled with sculptures can be found. They provide a frame for the multicoloured single figures or scenes painted inside them. The painted imitations of the sculptures are related in content to the main motifs deepening their meaning or providing a commentary to them.<sup>13</sup> Monochromatic paintings maintained in various shades of grey appear on the reverses of the wings of Netherlandish triptychs or polyptychs. They imitate single stone figures of saints standing on pedestals in niches or the carved scene of the Annunciation.<sup>14</sup> A diptych by Jan van Eyck from around 1436 (Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza) is peculiar in this respect, in which the Annunciation, painted en grisaille, appears not on the reverses but in the main opening; moreover, the backs of the figures of Mary and the Archangel are reflected in the dark, as if polished background plates.<sup>15</sup> A new character was given to monochrome by Hugo van der Goes in the scene of the Annunciation on the reverses of the wings of the Portinari triptych of 1475–1479 (Florence, Uffizi).<sup>16</sup> The stone colour, the illusionistically painted niches, or the bar attaching the Holy Spirit's dove to the back wall give the images the characteristics of sculptures; however, the movement of the figures, especially the archangel Gabriel, who seems to be coming with his message, is quite unsculptural. A similar ambivalence, though achieved in a slightly different way, is found in the works of Hans Memling, as we will discuss a little

<sup>11</sup> Hans Belting, Christiane Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes. Das Erste Jahrhundert der niederländischen Malerei* (München: Hirmer, 1994), 133–134, Taf. 2–3, Abb. 68–69.

<sup>12</sup> Charles the Bold (1433–1477). *Splendour of Burgundy, Historisches Museum Berne 25 April – 24 August 2008, Bruggemuseum and Groeningemuseum Bruges 27 March – 21 July 2009, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna 15 September 2009 – 10 January 2010*, eds. Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert, Gabriele Keck (Brussel: Cornell University Press, 2009), 184–185, cat. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung,” 125, Abb. 104. See also Belting, Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*, 197–198, 205–208, Taf. 126, 136–141, Abb. 98, 100–102.

<sup>14</sup> Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung,” 126–131, Abb. 106–131. See also Belting, Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*, 144ff., 163ff., 188ff., 243ff., Taf. 18–33, 75, 112–115, 202–205, Abb. 74–75, 93–94.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Preimesberger, “Zu Jan van Eycks Diptychon der Sammlung Thyssen-Bornemisza,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1991): 459–489; *Jan van Eyck. Grisallas*, ed. Till-Holger Borchert, Contextos de la colección permanente, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Vol. 23 (Madrid: Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2009); Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung,” 127–128, Kat. 33–34.

<sup>16</sup> Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung,” 131, Kat. 35; cf. Belting, Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*, 230–234, Taf. 172–173.

further on. Hieronymus Bosch, Joos van Cleve, Bernaert van Orley or the Master of Frankfurt on the reverses of the wings of their retables showed not single figures but multi-person scenes, sometimes set in a vast landscape, in which associations with sculpture are already evoked only by the colour scheme.<sup>17</sup>

In German-speaking territories, monochromatic images on the reverses of altar wings did not appear until the early sixteenth century in the realisations of the Master of the Altar of St. Bartholomew and Albrecht Dürer and Matthias Grünewald.<sup>18</sup> However, before this there were several works here, whose authors – Gabriel Angler (so called Lettnerkreuzigung, around 1440, from Tegernsee monastery, Alte Pinakothek in Munich; Tabula Magna, around 1445, from Tegernsee monastery; Bayerischen Nationalmuseum in Munich, Germanischen Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the church in Bad Feilnbach)<sup>19</sup> and Hans Holbein the Elder (so called Die Graue Passion, 1495–1500; Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie)<sup>20</sup> used this convention in a very individual, innovative way. In addition, it should be noted that Stefan Lochner in Annunciation on the reverses on the Adoration of the Magi Triptych (so called Dombild) in the cathedral in Cologne, 1442–1445, was the first in the area to use a reduced colouration in a manner reminiscent of the analogous scene on the Ghent altarpiece of the brothers van Eyck.<sup>21</sup>

In Italy, monochrome painting took various forms in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; it was used to show not only religious subjects. Between 1432 and 1436 Paolo Uccello applied this formula by painting with shades of green against a reddish background scenes from the Old Testament in the cloisters of the Santa Maria Novella church in Florence. The same artist painted a fresco in Florence Cathedral in 1436 pretending to be a carved horse statue commemorating John Hawkwood.<sup>22</sup> Monochromatic painted motifs appeared in several works

<sup>17</sup> Wiemann, “Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung,” 131–132, 136–138, Abb. 105, 115.

<sup>18</sup> Krieger, “Grünewald und die Kunst der Grisaille,” 58ff., Abb. 1, 7. On the subject of colour on the reverses of German late-gothic triptychs, see most recently: Lynn F. Jacobs, *The Painted Triptychs of Fifteenth-Century Germany. Case Studies of Blurred Boundaries* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), chapter 2: *Transparent Boundaries: Colour on the Exterior of German Fifteenth-Century Triptychs*, 93–164.

<sup>19</sup> Jacobs, *The Painted Triptychs*, 101–113.

<sup>20</sup> Dietmar Lüdke, “Hans Holbein d. Ä., Die Kreuztragung Christi” in *Grünewald und seine Zeit*, 157, Kat. 16; Elsbeth Wiemann, “Die Graue Passion von Hans Holbein d. Ä. – Ein Resümee” in *Hans Holbein d. Ä. Die Graue Passion*, 51–73; Jacobs, *The Painted Triptychs*, 123–126.

<sup>21</sup> Stephan Kemperdick, “Era of Innovations. Painting in the Generation of Konrad Witz and Stefan Lochner” in *Late Gothic. The Birth of Modernity, the Catalogue of the Exhibition, Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, May 1–September 5, 2021*, ed. Michael Eissenhauer, with contributions by Julien Chapuis, Svea Janzen, Stephan Kemperdick, Lothar Lambacher, Jan Friedrich Richter, Michael Roth (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2021), 46; Jacobs, *The Painted Triptychs*, 129–130.

<sup>22</sup> Annarita Paolieri, *Paolo Uccello, Domenico Veneziano, Andrea del Castagno* (Firenze: Scala, 1991), 13, 22; Almut Schäffner-Knoblach, “Studien in Terra verde. Bedeutungsebenen grünmonochromer Malerei der italienischen Renaissance” in *Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip. Kunst und*

by Sandro Botticelli, among others in Calumny of Apelles from about 1494–1495.<sup>23</sup> Andrea Mantegna, at the end of his career, painted en grisaille paintings of secular and religious subjects on colourful backgrounds imitating speckled marble, e.g. Introduction of the Kybele cult in Rome from 1505–1506 (London, National Gallery) or Samson and Dalila from around 1500 (London, National Gallery).<sup>24</sup>

It should be added that monochrome also appeared in other areas of late medieval Europe, not only in panel painting; for example, an exquisite series of en grisaille frescoes devoted to the Miracles of the Virgin was created in Eton College chapel near Windsor in the late fifteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

How against the background of late-gothic en grisaille painting are Hans Memling's works maintained in a similar convention?

The earliest known work by Memling in which he used en grisaille motifs is the triptych of the Last Judgment from 1465–1473 from Gdańsk.<sup>26</sup> The closed wings (fig. 1) show a pair of kneeling founders in the foreground: Angelo Tani and Catharina Tanagli. Behind them, coat-of-arms shields hang on the projection of the wall. These parts are painted in a multicolour convention. Above the founders, in niches, stand Mary and the Child and the Archangel Michael fighting demons. Both are painted in greys with warm tones. The colour and the shadows on the walls give them the appearance of sculptures, although the association is not free from doubt. The archangel in a dynamic stride looks as if he is stepping out of a niche – the tip of his shoe protrudes beyond the parapet, and the devils are also partially stepping out of the niche – their equilibristic poses, the agitated infant and the saints' gazes directed downward toward the founders seem to be unsculptural.

An ambivalent expression, but achieved in a different way than in the work from Gdańsk, was given by Memling to the figures in the Annunciation on the closed wings (fig. 2) of a triptych of Jan Crabbe from about the same time (Bruges, Groeninge Museum; Vicenza, Musei Civici; New York, The Pierpont Morgan

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*Theorie des Helldunkels 1300–1550*, hg. v. Claudia Lehmann, Norberto Gramaccini, Johannes Rößler, Thomas Dittelbach (Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018), 333–349.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Zöllner, “«Sandro Botticelli als Apelles und als Grisaillemaler. Petronius» «Monocromos»” als Inspiration für die Selbstreferentialität der Malerei” in *Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip*, 91–104.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Christiansen, “Dipinti a grisaille” in *Andrea Mantegna, Katalog der Ausstellung*, hg. v. Jane Martineau (London–New York: Olivetti/Electra, 1992), 393–415; Sabine Blumenröder, *Andrea Mantegna – die Grisailen. Malerei, Geschichte und antike Kunst im Paragone des Quattrocento* (Berlin: Berlin Mann [Gebr.], 2008); see also Jennifer Bleek, “Das Helldunkel, das Verhältnis von Natur und Kunst und die Frage der materia bei Leon Battista Alberti” in *Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip*, 105–124, especially 121–124.

<sup>25</sup> Emily Howe, Henrietta Mc Burney, David Park, Stephen Rickerby, Lisa Shekede, *Wall Paintings of Eton* (London: Scala Publishers Ltd., 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Dirk de Vos, *Hans Memling. The Complete Works* (Ghent: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 82–89, cat. 4.



Fig. 1. Hans Memling, Triptych of the Last Judgment (closed wings), 1465–1473, Gdańsk, National Museum, photo: from the collection



Fig. 2. Hans Memling, Triptych of Jana Crabbe (closed wings), 1467–1470, Bruges, Groeninge Museum, photo: from the author's collection

Library).<sup>27</sup> The archangel and Mary stand on pale stone pedestals. Their robes are painted monochrome – they have a light blue hue; the archangel's wings are of a similar colour. The faces, hands, and angel's foot have a natural pale flesh colour, the lips are slightly reddened, the eyes – brown, and the hair – reddish. In natural colours the painter painted the accessories accompanying the figures: a sceptre wrapped in a banner with an inscription, a book, a jug with a lily. The niches in which the figures stand are the colour of stone, but much darker than the pedestals. The matter subjected to light, according to the laws of physics, casts a shadow, but it is a peculiarly ethereal matter. The figures give the impression of being extremely light – in addition to the colour, this impression is intensified by the motifs directed upwards: a spiralling banner, a sceptre, a lily jug floating in the air and the hands. It looks as if there is a transformation of stone into flesh taking place in the scene.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 90–93, cat. 5.

Perhaps part of the same scene with a similar colour scheme is that of Mary from around 1470–1475 from the Museum of Art in Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup>

The monochrome parts in Jan Floreins' triptych of 1479 (Bruges, Sint Janshospitaal)<sup>29</sup> have an unambiguous sense and expression. The wing reverses (fig. 3) show St. John the Baptist and St. Veronica, painted in full colour, seated against a vast landscape. They are framed by decorative arcades with figures forming scenes of Original Sin and the Exile from Paradise. They are painted in monochrome in the tromp l'oeil convention. There is no doubt that this is a painted imitation of an architectural structure with carved elements.



Fig. 3. Hans Memling, Jan Floreins' triptych (closed wings), 1479, Bruges, Sint Janshospitaal, photo: from the author's collection

In a monochrome colour tone – shades of brown – Memling painted St. Christopher and St. Anthony on the closed wings (fig. 4) of a triptych of John Donn from around 1480 (London, National Gallery).<sup>30</sup> The colour of the figural parts harmonises with the dark brown marbling of the frames. The two saints stand in niches on round bases resembling rocky ground. The one on which St. Christopher stands extends beyond the edge of the niche. Also extending beyond

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 122–123, cat. 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 158–161, cat. 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 180–183, cat. 39.



Fig. 4. Hans Memling, Triptych of John Donn (closed wings), ca. 1480, London, National Gallery, photo: from the author's collection

the niche is the flower-tipped point of the poles and a fragment of the hanging robe; the other end of the robe falls freely. The saint stands in a casual yet studied pose, looking to the side. Sitting on his shoulders, little Jesus twists his body and makes a gesture of blessing toward St. Anthony. The colour of the two figures, their shadows on the walls of the niches, allow us to see them as painterly representations of the sculptures. While St. Anthony, with its compact silhouette, fully housed in a niche resembles a stone statue, St. Christopher, due to the aforementioned features, evokes less of a sculpture. Attention is also drawn to the eyes of the figures who are looking on – they are not the motionless eyes of sculptures; moreover, the faces of the figures have a strong psychological expression.

Saints John the Baptist and George, painted on the reverses of the wings (fig. 5) of Moreel's triptych of 1484 (Bruges, Groeningemuseum)<sup>31</sup>, look and act like the figures depicted in the ceremonial opening of this triptych. What makes them different is their colour – they were painted in shades of brown. Moreover,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 238–244, cat. 63.





Fig. 5. Hans Memling, Moreel's triptych (closed wings), 1484, Bruges, Groeningemuseum, photo: from the author's collection

they were placed not against a landscape background but in architectural niches with sloping floors. The colour and the niches are associated with sculpture, but the hanging robes and the flag, the moved pose of St. George and also the foot of St. John and the tail of the dragon slightly extended beyond the edge of the niche make the images ambiguous in status and meaning.

Adam and Eve depicted on the reverses of the wings (fig. 6) of a triptych from Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) from around 1485<sup>32</sup> look like living monuments to original sin. They are painted in multiple colours, although the colour gamut here is quite limited, obviously, because they are naked. Their poses are slightly agitated. They have all the characteristics of corporeal, living beings, but they are located in narrow stone niches, which is where the sculptures are placed.

The wings in Almazan in the Castile-Leon region were attributed to Memling recently. They are considered to be his late work of 1485–1490.<sup>33</sup> On their reverses (fig. 7), the artist shows St. Francis and St. Bernardine of Siena standing on pedestals

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 212–216, cat. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Til-Holger Borchert (note in), *Memling. Rinascimento fiammingo*, Roma, Scuderie del Quirinale, 11 ottobre 2014 – 18 gennaio 2015, a cura di *idem* (Milano: Skira, 2014), 170–173, cat. 30;



Fig. 6. Hans Memling, Triptych (closed wings), ca. 1485, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, photo: from the author's collection



Fig. 7. Hans Memling, Wings of the triptych (reverses), 1485–1490, Almazán, Palace Hurtado de Mendoza, photo: Municipality of Almazán

in stone niches. The saints look like living statues: their poses are quite casual, they display their attributes, their raised hands extend beyond the niches, their faces are thoughtful, their eyes wide open. The colour scheme of these images, however, is extremely limited: the grey stone, complexions and the brown of the habits harmonising with the colour of the frames. The reduction in colour is even more striking when one looks at the multicoloured depictions on the obverses of these wings: St. Peter and St. Elizabeth of Hungary standing on a patterned floor in an interior open to the landscape. So who do the reverses of the wings show: are the pedestals an additional universal attribute of sanctity, do they suggest the indestructibility of the body of the saints and the ideas represented by them, or is it that they are sculptures after all?

As in the triptych of Jan Crabbe, the scene of the Annunciation appears on the closed wings (fig. 8) of the 1480–1485 Passion triptych from Budapest

Aleksandra Stanek, "Tryptyk z Almazán. Uwagi na temat nowo odkrytego dzieła Hansa Memlinga," *Argumenta Historica* 6 (2019): 25–40.



Fig. 8. Hans Memling, Passion triptych, 1480–1485, Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, photo: from the author's collection

(Szépművészeti Múzeum).<sup>34</sup> Also in this work the figures are placed in niches; however, they do not stand on pedestals but directly on the floor; moreover, their colour is completely uniform – light grey. They have the characteristics of sculptures – the colour of stone, they are fully housed in niches, which seem to restrain their movements, casting shadows – but on the other hand the softness and fluffiness of the hair and the gazes of the figures seem to contradict this.

In a diptych from around 1480–1490 from the Art Institute of Chicago,<sup>35</sup> a monochrome image – St. Anthony of Padua – appears on the back of a portrait of an unknown man. The composition of the figure of the saint, the colour, and the positioning are reminiscent of St. John the Baptist in Moreel's triptych.

The Annunciation (fig. 9) appeared once more with Memling in a 1491 retable from the Greverade family chapel in the Marienkirche in Lübeck (Lübeck, St. Annen Museum).<sup>36</sup> In it, the painter, with a few modifications, returned to the scheme he had used in triptychs of Jan Crabbe and from Budapest. He placed the monochrome, grey-painted figures of the Archangel and Mary on pedestal-like projections of niches. Hovering above Mary's head is the dove of the Holy Spirit. This

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 120–122, cat. 11.

<sup>35</sup> D. de Vos, *Hans Memling*, 220–221, cat. 55.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, 320–329, cat. 90.



Fig. 9. Hans Memling, Greverade retable, 1491, Lübeck, St. Annen Museum, photo: from the author's collection

motif makes one doubt whether this is definitely a painted imitation of the sculptures. By the niche with Mary, a jug with flowers stands on the patterned floor. It has been painted in multiple colours, which reinforces the impression that the rest belongs to a different representational order and reproduces the stone sculpture.

The above chronological review of works shows that Memling used various variants of monochrome and among them no developmental line can be distinguished. In the latest example mentioned above, Memling used an archaic solution with precedents in painting of the first half of the fifteenth century, while the innovative idea of demi-grisaille used in an early work – a triptych of Jan Crabbe – and perhaps in another work, from which the Philadelphia fragment is taken, did not return later (at least nothing is known about it). In addition, in some triptychs the artist did not use monochrome at all, such as in the triptych with Rest during the flight to Egypt from about 1479–1480 (Paris, Louvre; Cincinnati, Art Museum).<sup>37</sup> It seems that the use of one or another solution may have depended on various factors: the preferences of the commissioner, the destination of

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 186–189, cat. 41.

the commissioned work or its function. In all of the works presented except the triptych of Jan Floreins, Memling gave the figures painted en grisaille an ambiguous character. Most of them show saints, but we also have depictions of Adam and Eve in a triptych from Vienna. They combine in different proportions the features of living, corporeal beings and at the same time stone sculpture. At the same time, they differ in a material sense from the accompanying lay persons and various accessories painted in multicolour. The reverses are fundamentally different from the open versions of the retables, where the scale and intensity of colour is incomparably richer; moreover, they are shallower in the spatial sense and more modest in terms of their staging.

The question of the significance of monochrome in late Gothic Netherlandish painting has not yet found a convincing explanation.<sup>38</sup> The essence of the en grisaille painting on the reverses of the wings has been attempted to be explained by liturgical considerations, indicating that their source may have been fabrics (vela) of limited colour scale, with which the images adorning the altars were covered during Lent.<sup>39</sup> However, such fabrics, as examples from German-speaking areas show, were not always monochromatic and their subject matter was not always as limited as in the case of the wing reverses of the Netherlandish retables. The sources of Netherlandish en grisaille paintings have been sought as a reflection of reformist ideas. Constanze Itzel<sup>40</sup> maintains that this kind of painting on Netherlandish retables were an expression of the church's stance on the late medieval controversy over images. According to the author, en grisaille paintings emphasise artifice and serve as a warning not to identify them with the beings they depict. Hence, in the Ghent retable by the brothers van Eyck or in the one by Rogier

<sup>38</sup> The most important positions interpreting the phenomenon of painting en grisaille have recently been presented in depth by Antoni Ziemia, *Sztuka Burgundii i Niderlandów 1380–1500*, t. 1: *Sztuka dworu burgundzkiego oraz miast niderlandzkich* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), 375–390; and recently by Stephan Kemperdick, “Abstraktion und Mimesis: Spielarten der Graumalerei in Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit” in *Die Farbe Grau*, hg. v. Magdalena Bushart, Gregor Wedekind (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), 15–39; *idem*, “Helldunkel statt Farbe. Sind niederländische Grisaillemalereien eine Schwierigkeit oder eine Leichtigkeit” in *Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip*, 49–72.

<sup>39</sup> Molly Teasdale Smith, “The Use of Grisaille as Lenten Observance,” *Marsyas IX* (1959): 43–45.

<sup>40</sup> Constanze Itzel, *Der Stein trägt. Die Imitation von Skulpturen in der niederländischen Tafelmalerie i Kontext bildtheoretischer Auseinandersetzungen des frühen 15. Jahrhunderts* (Diss.) (Heidelberg 2005); Constanze Itzel, “Peinture et Hétérodoxie. La peinture flamande à la lumière du débat sur les images” in *Campin in Context Peinture et société dans la vallée de l’Escaut à l’époque de Robert Campin 1375–1445, Actes du Colloque international organisé par l’Université de Valenciennes et du Hainaut-Cambrésis, l’Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique / Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium et l’Association des Guides de Tournai, Tournai, Maison de la Culture 30 mars – 1er avril 2006*, dir. de Ludovic Nys, Dominique Vanwijtsberghe, avec la collaboration de Xavier Fontaine, Jacques Debergh (Tournai–Valenciennes–Bruxelles: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique, Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium Association des Guides de Tournai, 2007), 135–154.

van der Weyden in Beaune, the founders pray in front of the images, but do not look at them. The scholar points out that the first painted imitations of stone sculptures appeared in Tournai and Ghent between 1420 and 1430 – in an area where at the time discussions about heresy were taking place and clerical concerns about the spread of Hussite ideas were intensifying. The consequence, according to the scholar, was the reform of sacred images to prevent suspicion of idolatry. However, doubts arise as to whether the author overestimates the importance of the aforementioned debate for art itself.

Netherlandish en grisaille painting was also sought to reflect the idea of “living stones” – a foundation on which the future community of believers – the Heavenly Jerusalem – is supported. According to Marion Grams-Thieme, the monochromatic sculptures were meant to be a prelude to full cognition, made visible in the multicoloured vision shown in the open retable.<sup>41</sup>

Some opinions have also been formulated that en grisaille painting accentuates the presence of an artistic element in an object serving a cult purpose – the virtuosity of the artist,<sup>42</sup> that it is a manifestation of the rivalry between painting and sculpture (paragone),<sup>43</sup> or that it is a means of giving the work the allure of luxury and exclusivity.<sup>44</sup>

Of the recent works on Netherlandish monochrome painting, two are worth mentioning. Krystyna Greub-Frażcz<sup>45</sup> examines the monochromatic images in their formal and content relationship with the multicoloured representations of the founders and the spatial and functional architectural context. She considers the issue of the origin of Netherlandish en grisaille paintings from many angles. She takes into account both religious considerations – devotio moderna, the Eucharistic cult, liturgical and paraliturgical performances and the religious sense of foundation – and artistic and aesthetic tendencies, in particular the Netherlandish realism of ars nova. The creation of the Ghent altarpiece of the van Eyck brothers, in her opinion, took into account the spatial and functional context: the chapel of the founders and the mass for their souls, founded in 1435, which was also to be held after their deaths for the intention of their salvation. This mass was attended by the founders themselves, painted on the exterior of the retable. She stresses that for the laity, a rood screen was the place where religious life was concentrated,

<sup>41</sup> Marion Grams-Thieme, *Lebendige Steine. Studien zur niederländischen Grisailmalerei des 15. und frühen 16. Jh.* (Köln–Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> Belting, Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*, 60–61.

<sup>43</sup> Preimesberger, “Zu Jan van Eycks Diptychon”: 459–489.

<sup>44</sup> Krieger, *Die Grisaille als Metapher; eadem*, “Die niederländische Grisailmalerei des 15. Jahrhunderts. Bemerkungen zu neuerer Literatur”, *Kunstchronik* 49 (1996): 575–588; *eadem*, “Grünwald und die Kunst der Grisaille,” 58–67.

<sup>45</sup> Krystyna Greub-Frażcz, *Die Grisailen des Genter Altars. Altniederländische Skulpturenimitation im Kontext des Lettners, Studien zur internationalen Architektur- und Kunstgeschichte*, Bd. 115 (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2014).

a place of epiphany, opening onto the main altar, at which they observed the visible shape of the invisible being in the form of the host during the elevation. In the case of the Ghent altarpiece, the monochrome paintings harmonised in colour with the rood screen. Multicoloured scenes shown inside the retable, on the other hand, had reference in what played out behind the rood screen – the sacramental mystery celebrated in the mass. The author draws attention to the structure of the rood screens – a row of arcades, carved statues, niches, and traceries, which have counterparts in the monochromatic parts of the retable. She describes this sphere as earthy. The colourful vision depicted inside the retable, on the other hand, corresponds to the heavenly sphere of the choir space. From this “bifocal” concept, according to the author, a pure style en grisaille was emancipated. In the course of transformations, monochrome paintings oscillated between animation and fossilisation, between real mimeticism and optical illusion. They were used as an autonomous carrier of meaning or symbolic-metaphorical reference.

A recent comment on Netherlandish monochrome paintings was made by Stephan Kemperdick,<sup>46</sup> referring to some of the previous interpretive ideas about this artistic phenomenon. The scholar notes that the sculptures painted in the Netherlandish paintings do not reflect the real sculptures, but are the invention of the painters themselves. What differentiates the depictions painted en grisaille from the multicoloured ones is not the spatiality or plasticity, but the texture of the individual motifs. In painted sculptures, it is everywhere an imitation of the surface of stone, while in multicoloured depictions it is painterly imitations of various matter: skin, hair, fabric. He also points out that in Dutch and German texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is in vain to find reflections on the specifics of the media – nowhere do they speak of imitations of sculptures, but of images painted in black and white. He also questions the view, which appears in the research, that Netherlandish en grisaille paintings contained a painted theory of art, or that they are a manifestation of paragone – this is not supported by any written sources. Moreover, in order to speak of rivalry between painting and sculpture they would have to be autonomous, self-conscious artistic genres – such a situation in the Northern Europe of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was not the case. In the appearance of en grisaille paintings on the reverses of the wings of the Netherlandish retables, he emphasises the importance of tradition, noting that from the first half of the fourteenth century these parts of the retables always had more modest decoration than the main opening. The colour reduction of the reverses reflected the hierarchy of the openings. Moreover, the decoration of the reverses evoked associations with monumental stone architecture (e.g., the retables in Oberwesel or St. Clair in Cologne). According to the scholar, new possibilities were breathed into the traditional colour restriction of closed retabula wings by Jan van Eyck, who introduced mimetic means

<sup>46</sup> Kemperdick, “Abstraktion und Mimesis,” 15–39; *idem*, “Helldunkel statt Farbe,” 49–72.

of expression. Kemperdick believes that the painterly imitations of the sculptures were not created *ex nihilo*, but based on similar motifs found in the paintings of Melchior Broederlam or the Limburg Brothers, among others. By modifying and placing them in a new context, Van Eyck wanted to demonstrate his mastery and show off his ability to create a perfect illusion – an imitation of stone figures – in which it was not a matter of competing with sculpture. In support of his hypothesis, Kemperdick cites a description from 1463 of a painted retable done by Simon Marmion for the chapel of St. Luke in the parish church of Valenciennes. Its author is full of admiration for, among other things, the illusionistically painted parts that look as if they were made of white stone.<sup>47</sup>

The various contexts in which en grisaille painting appeared, as well as its counterparts in other techniques – sculpture, stained glass, drawing treated as an autonomous form of expression<sup>48</sup> – speak in favour of the fact that it was an important cross-genre artistic current, oriented not only to reproduction and repetition, but also containing a creative, individual element, peculiar only to art.<sup>49</sup> Appropriate to this trend was the use of illusion. Thanks to it, the artist could, as it were, transform one matter into another; he could valorise it, and refine it. This can be seen in some wooden monochrome sculptures imitating bronze or alabaster products – for example, in some works from the second and third decades of the sixteenth century by the Gdańsk sculptor Master Paul (Pawel);<sup>50</sup> it can also be seen in some monochrome paintings such as Holbein's aforementioned *The Grey Passion*, or his retable from Hohenburg dated around 1509 (Prague, National Gallery). In the former, as recent conservation studies have shown, the artist added glass and quartz crumbs to the paints to enhance the luminosity of the colour and raise its material value,<sup>51</sup> while in the latter, on the reverses, he created painterly imitations of precious materials: lapis lazuli, rubies and aquamarines, but at the same time unrealised the figures themselves, giving them the appearance of ethereal phantoms.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in these works there is a kind of game with matter and the viewer himself. The matter undergoes metamorphoses and the viewer is deluded by them,

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*, "Helldunkel statt Farbe," 71.

<sup>48</sup> See numerous examples in Dietmar Lüdke, "Grünwalds Grisailen und die Erscheinungsformen monochromer Kunst in seiner Zeit," in *Grünwald und seine Zeit: Grosse Landesausstellung Baden-Württemberg*, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 140ff., Kat. 8–46.

<sup>49</sup> Fritz Koreny, "Riemenschneider and the Graphic Arts" in *Tilman Riemenschneider, c. 1460–1531, Symposium Papers XLII, National Gallery of Art, Washington*, ed. Julien Chapis (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2004), 108–110.

<sup>50</sup> Andrzej Woźniński, "Późnogotycka rzeźba monochromatyczna w Prusach," *Porta Aurea. Rocznik Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego* 11 (2012): 83–101.

<sup>51</sup> Wiemann, "Die Graue Passion," 70–71.

<sup>52</sup> Bruno Bushart, *Hans Holbein der Ältere* (Augsburg: Verlag Hofmann-Druck, 1987), 106–109; Wiemann, "Zur monochromen Bildgestaltung," 143, Abb. 120; *Hans Holbein starší: Hohenburgský oltář / Hans Holbein the Elder: Hohenburg Altarpiece*, ed. Olga Kotková (Praha: Národní galerie, 2020).



as a result of which he gets the impression of communing with something unusual and extremely noble, which of course also has sacra connotations.

Memling's monochromatic paintings have recently been the subject of analysis by Lynn F. Jacobs.<sup>53</sup> The scholar discussed the different types of en grisaille imagery used by the Bruges painter: the "pure" form of this convention, its combination with polychrome and demi-grisaille. She claims that Memling's en grisaille paintings were an expression of his reflections on painting. The artist showed different types of reality in his works – the relationship between "sculpted images" and "real objects." According to Jacobs, in his last work – the Greverade retable – Memling created a synthesis of the stylistic development of en grisaille painting in the fifteenth century. He depicted Mary in a manner reminiscent of the works of Robert Campin and Jan van Eyck, giving her the hallmarks of sculpture. In contrast, the angel in the moved pose appears less sculptural; it evokes the manner of Hugo van der Goes. She claims that the vase and lily painted in multicolour are symptomatic of the increasing importance of polychromy on the reverses of retables in the second half of the fifteenth century, to which Memling himself contributed. She sees in this depiction an almost art-historical approach of its author. According to her opinion, Memling's paintings expressed theory and a new awareness of the importance of painting and its possibilities as a medium. Its ambiguity manifested in several variations made it self-referential, directing attention to its artificiality. Memling's monochromatic paintings were consequently meant to make the viewer aware of their status as imagery.

Jacobs' observations are very revealing on many points, but one may have some doubts as to whether Memling's monochrome paintings actually contain a theory of painting, since, as Kemperdick noted, no traces of it have survived in Netherlandish written sources of the time.<sup>54</sup> The quoted reading of the Annunciation on the Lübeck retable as a review of the forms used in monochrome painting in the fifteenth century is also somewhat questionable. Mary is much more delicate than the heavy figures of Campin and van Eyck. Her hair is shaped differently, in a painterly fashion, falling softly to her shoulders, as the scholar herself notes in a footnote. In addition, it should be noted that Maria has painted eyes that see and look down. This element is absent from the quasi-sculptures painted by the aforementioned painters of the first half of the fifteenth century. Completely unsculptural is the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering above her. Surely Jacobs is right that Memling's en grisaille paintings are a demonstration of the possibilities offered by painting. It can not only perfectly imitate elements of the temporal world, but

<sup>53</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, "Memling's grisailles and artistic self-consciousness" in *New studies on old masters. Essays in Renaissance art in honour of Colin Eisler*, eds. John Garton, Diane Wolfthal (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 271–287; see also: *eadem*, *Opening Doors. The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 151–186.

<sup>54</sup> Kemperdick, "Helldunkel statt Farbe," 63.

also create a new reality in which different rules apply than in the empirical world. An excellent example of this is, as first noted by Jacobs, the unusual motif of a vase with a lily floating above the floor in the Annunciation in the Jan Crabbe triptych.<sup>55</sup>

Let's add to these observations some others that also highlight the presence of an artistic element in Hans Memling's en grisaille or demi-grisaille paintings, but tying it to their function and the mobility of the wings.

In the context of the question in the title of the paper, it is worth pausing to compare en grisaille paintings to "living stones." The term comes from the letter of St. Peter: "As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2, 4–5). A comparison of Christ to the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets to the foundation of the Christian community is found in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 2, 20–22). Revelation by St John the Evangelist speaks of the twelve layers of the foundation of the New Jerusalem and the names of the apostles written on them (Rev. 21, 14). The ambivalence of the en grisaille images also evokes what William Durandus<sup>56</sup> wrote in his "Rationale de divinis officiis" about "the church." He understood the concept doubly as a material building and at the same time a community of the faithful, and thus one that is alive. At the same time, he claimed that it is timeless, composed not only of the faithful living on earth, but also of the saved in heaven, souls in purgatory, saints, apostles and prophets. The sculptures made of durable material – stone – and the signs of life of the figures painted en grisaille – the stirring, the sighing, the hanging robes – can certainly be considered an apt visual equivalent of the above literary metaphors; the timelessness of the Church, Durandus said, could be symbolised by the pedestals and niches used to display sculptures embodying lasting values. It is also worth noting that the retable, through its several-part structure and its particular form with a clearly accentuated central part, could be seen as a substitute for the church.<sup>57</sup> If one were to accept such an interpretation, doubts arise as to why the themes depicted on the reverses of the wings do not always express ecclesiological content. Why would this very place – subordinate in the hierarchy of retable openings – be used to present issues of such high importance. If the reverses were to express permanence, what then would the feast-day side of a retable express. One must also ask why these "living stones" have the characteristics of a painterly imitation, although in many cases it is

<sup>55</sup> Jacobs, "Memling's grisailles," 280–281.

<sup>56</sup> *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments. A Translation of the First Book of the Rationale Divinorum Officiorum written by William Durandus sometime a bishop of Mende*, eds. John Mason Neale, Benjamin Webb (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 12; Grams-Thieme, *Lebendige Steine*, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Lynn F. Jacobs, "The Inverted 'T' – Shape in Early Netherlandish Altarpieces: Studies in the Relation between Painting and Sculpture," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54 (1991): 33–65.

questionable whether they certainly do. The en grisaille images seen on the wings of the retables from the first half of the fifteenth century do indeed look like naturalistically reproduced stone sculptures by painterly means. The correctness of such an identification is indicated by the stone colour, the massive, low-movement silhouettes with compact outlines, casting shadows on the walls of the niches, and the pedestals with “engraved” inscriptions; moreover, the details: relatively thick, unnaturally stiff strands of hair, and eyes with pupils and irises marked in a sculptural manner, or without them at all as empty knobs. In Memling, as we have noted, some of the above features are absent, while others are preserved. First of all, in his monochrome paintings, most of the figures are shown in a movement unusual for sculpture and, above all, they all have eyes painted in such detail that they look active. Thus, in the works of this artist, the boundaries between the image-imitation of sculpture and the image directly showing reality, between stone and living being, are blurred.

In the context of the en grisaille paintings on the retables, attention was drawn to the words of St. John the Evangelist: “The Word became flesh” (John 1, 14)<sup>58</sup>. They referred to scenes of the Annunciation with limited chromaticism seen on the closed wings of several retables. If this association is considered correct, then this transformation was shown by artists not only by descriptive means, but also as something that takes place in the very matter of art: the monochrome depiction of the beginnings of the earthly mission of Christ and His Mother is transformed in a feast-day side into a multicoloured vision of their later glory. In works from the first half of the fifteenth century, the transformation took place only in the process of opening the wings. The boundary between what could correspond to the word and what would be the body was clear here – it ran between the unveilings of the retable. In Memling’s works, the transformation has several stages, beginning already at the closed wings, where the stone is transformed into a figure and the sculpture into painting, followed by a further, more radical stage after the opening of the wings: a sacred reality appears in full material and colour dimension close to, though not identical with, the empirical world. This transformation towards perfection, towards the noblest matter, could also be considered a paraphrase of the words of the Redeemer in Isaiah’s prophecy: “Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones” (Isa 60, 17). Of course, it is difficult to say with certainty

<sup>58</sup> Reinhard Liess, *Zum Logos der Kunst Rogier van der Weydens. Die “Beweinungen Christi” in den Königlichen Museen in Brüssel und in der Nationalgalerie in London* (Münster: LIT, 2000), 165; James H. Marrow, “Illusionism and paradox in the art of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden. Case studies in the shape of meaning” in *Von Kunst und Temperament. Festschrift für Eberhard König*, hg. v. Caroline Zöhl, Mara Hofmann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 157ff. See also Belting, Kruse, *Die Erfindung des Gemäldes*, 60–61; and Christiane Kruse, “Fleisch werden – Fleisch malen: Malerei als «incarnazione» Mediale Verfahren des Bildwerdens im Libro dell’ Arte von Cennino Cennini,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 63, 3 (2000): 305–325.

whether Memling's monochrome paintings were inspired by the quoted passages from the Bible. It cannot be ruled out that the attempt to explain an artistic phenomenon as monochrome painting with these passages from the Holy text is a historically unjustified procedure. Nor can the transformations of form, colour, and conventions that occur in Memling's retables be explained by liturgical considerations; such may have come into play in the large retables from Gdańsk and Lübeck intended to furnish chapels, while the small triptychs served private devotions and very possibly functioned in secular spaces.

What is certain is that Memling's monochromatic images have an indeterminate status both in terms of material – they are neither stone nor living figure – and genre – they are neither an imitation of sculpture nor painting, or in other words: they are at the same time a stone and a living being, an imitation of a sculpture and a direct image. This precarious state of the permanent intermingling of matter and means of expression encourages all the more to open the wings in order to there – in the open retable – solve the riddle posed by the images on the outside.

#### SUMMARY

The *en grisaille* convention appeared in painting at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Italy, although it was already known in Antiquity – for instance, it is mentioned by Pliny the Elder, who calls it “monochromata.” It was quickly adopted by the French painters, especially illuminators. In the early fifteenth century, Dutch artists began to use it as well to decorate the closed wings of altarpieces with images imitating stone carvings. Monochrome was also used by Hans Memling, who introduced several innovations to this technique. There are several variants of monochrome in his works; though it should also be noted that he did not always use it. In almost all of his works, Memling gave the figures painted *en grisaille* an ambiguous character. They combine in varying proportions the qualities of living, corporeal beings and at the same time the qualities of a stone sculpture. They are also materially different from the accompanying lay persons and various accessories painted in multicolour. The reverses are fundamentally different from the open versions of the retables, where the scale and intensity of colour is incomparably richer; moreover, they are shallower in space and more modestly arranged. One of the most salient features of retables with movable wings is the transformation that takes place in the process of opening them. In Memling's work, it has several stages: it begins with the closed wings, where, by means of illusion, the stone is transformed into a figure and the sculpture into a painting; it is then followed by a further, more radical stage after the opening of the wings: sacred reality appears in its full material and colour dimension, close to, but not identical to, the empirical world. The transformations of form, colour, and conventions that occur in Memling's retables cannot be explained by purely liturgical considerations; such may have come into play in the large retables from Gdańsk and Lübeck intended to furnish chapels, while the small triptychs served private devotions and very possibly functioned in secular spaces. What is certain is that Memling's monochrome images have

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an indeterminate status both in terms of their materiality – they are neither stone nor living being – and in terms of their genre – they are neither an imitation of a sculpture nor a painting, or in other words: they are at once stone and living beings, imitation sculpture and direct painting. This precarious state of the permanent intermingling of matter and means of expression made it all the more inviting to open the wings in order to find there – in the open retable – the solution to the riddle posed by the images outside.