32

The Conjurer

BRIEF RESEARCH REPORT 87–88[1]

Follower of Hieronymus Bosch
c. 1530–40

Oil (not analysed) on oak (analysed) panel, 53.6 × 65.3 cm. The black-painted wooden frame (80.0 × 68.3 × 8.4 cm) is modern.
Musée Municipal, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 872/1/78

BRCP, *Catalogue Raisonné*, cat. 32; www.boschproject.org no. 32.

Inscriptions and labels
Reverse, top left: an exhibition label: *Les Primitifs Flamands*; below it on a small, round label: 1; to the right, an illegible black text; and to the right of that an illegible, faded, dark text. Centre: some markings in chalk; below these, a large number 560 …[?] in chalk. Bottom right: a handwritten inventory label; below it, 872.1.87 in black.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the technical examinations confirm that the Conjurer *was painted by a follower of Bosch. The composition must have been copied after an existing model, since the underdrawing consists only of contours and was carefully followed in the paint layers. The style and material of the underdrawing and painting technique are also highly atypical for the Bosch group. (A somewhat comparable method of underdrawing was used in the* Cure of Folly, *cat. 33.) The panel was apparently not painted within an engaged frame. A small section of a barb in paint only and a correlating partial edge that remained unpainted do survive at the top right corner, but the ground continues to the edge of the panel there. We may therefore assume that the grounded panel was placed in a temporary work frame during the painting process, after which it was transferred to a rabbeted frame. Dendrochronology indicates that the panel could have been painted from 1496 onwards, although a date after 1498 is statistically more probable. The framing method indicates a production date after about 1525. As is further explained in* BRCP, Catalogue Raisonné, *cat. 32, we date this work to around 1530–40.*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The painting was studied in storage at the Musée du Louvre in Paris 25–26 March 2013).[2]

Dendrochronology determined that the youngest heartwood ring dates from 1485, which, with the added minimum of nine sapwood rings for Baltic oak, implies an earliest possible felling date of 1494 for the tree that supplied the wood.[3] An earliest felling date of 1496 is statistically more probable, since that would cover 93 per cent of the range of possibly missing sapwood rings. Assuming at least two more years for drying and transportation, the panel could have been produced from 1496 onwards, but a production date from 1498 onwards is statistically more probable.

OBSERVATIONS

Support

The panel's thickness is about 1 cm.It consists of two horizontal planks, with an off-radial cut (false quarter-sawn) and a horizontal grain direction. The planks were butt-joined, apparently without the use of dowels, and the edges were bevelled. The format appears to be

32.1 IRR





RR 87



RR 88



32.2–3 VIS and IRR



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32.4 VIS

largely original.[4] In the upper right edge of the painted surface a barb remains, but the ground continues up to the panel edge (fig. 32.4). This indicates that a temporary work frame was applied there, on top of the ground, but before the panel was painted. A barb at the top left edge indicates the former presence of a frame member there as well. Both elements were applied at a slight angle. The remaining edge with ground at the upper right was roughly covered up with paint afterwards, but appears to have been abraded.

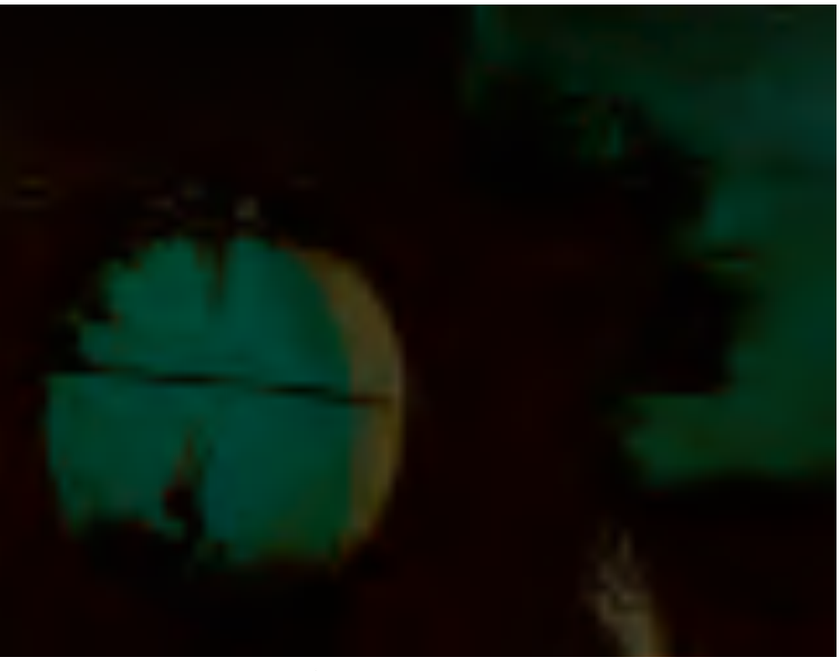
Preparatory layers

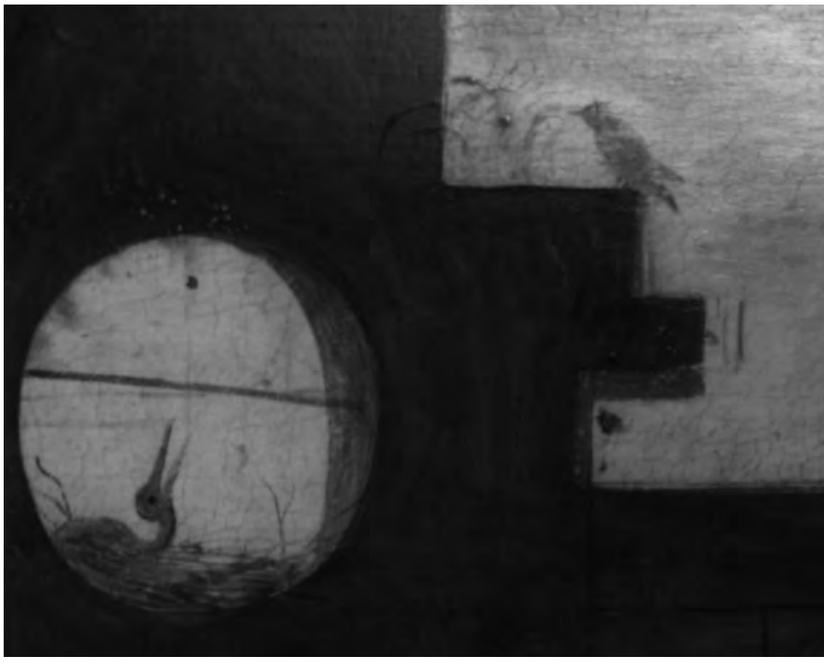
An off-white ground (not analysed) seems to be present. It is completely covered by the paint layers and is visible only at the panel edges, especially at top right. The underdrawing appears executed in a dry but fatty material and only indicates contours in relatively broad lines lines (figs. 32.1 and 32.3). A somewhat comparable underdrawing material was revealed in the *Cure of Folly* (cat. 33, RR 85).

Paint layers

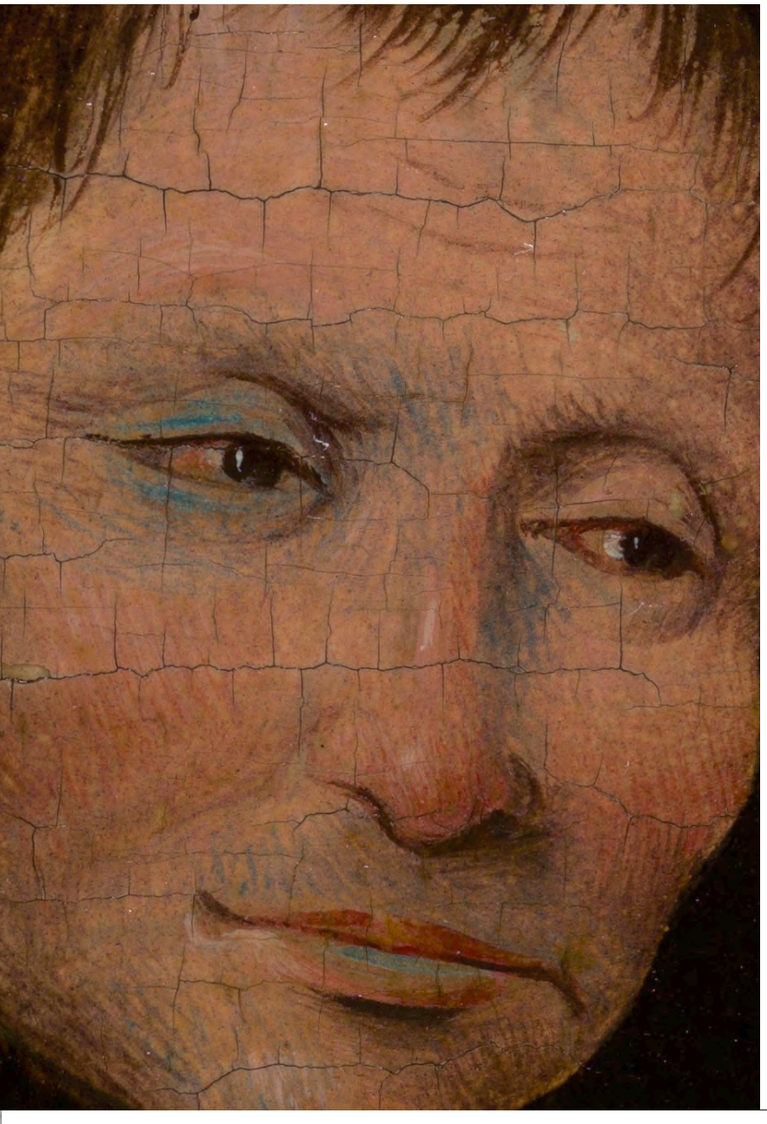
The paint application closely follows the underdrawing, although some contours, as well as the dog and a few elements on the table, were shifted. The oil paint (not analysed) was applied with a brush in several stages, from background to foreground, leaving areas in reserve. Some small overlaps were observed among several figures' clothing, which generally appears painted before the flesh tones.

At the upper right edge, the paint barb is most pronounced at the boundary of the azurite blue sky. The foliage and the lines indicating brickwork partly continue onto the edge with the visible ground. Paint was laid on thinly, in fine brushstrokes with minimal use of texture. These strokes remain visible, especially in the faces, where blue paint was also sometimes used. In the face of the hatless man in the centre of the group, for example, hatched strokes in varying colours – pink, red, purplish and dark blue – partly overlap each other





32.5–6 VIS and IRR



32.7 VIS

(fig. 32.7). Light blue was used for the lower lip and the proper right eyelid, as well as black and white highlights.

The conjurer's robe and the child's garb both appear to have a vermilion base and a coat of red lake. The red robe of the person whose purse is cut has a lead-white base layer with some blue pigments, followed by red lake (see fig. 32.8). In some areas the red lake paint has a finely speckled appearance, which may reflect the use of cloth for dabbed paint application.

Green glazes were applied onto a light green base that contains lead white, but were abraded or have discoloured brown (see, e.g., at the undergarment of the victim (fig. 32.9). Lead-tin yellow was not detected.

CONDITION

The wooden support is severely warped (convexly) but otherwise in excellent condition; it has a nearly invisible join.

The adhesion of ground and paint layers is very good, and no recent losses were observed. There are, however, small damages around the edges along with several restored losses and abraded areas, especially in the lower left and in the centre of the panel, in and around the green-robed man. The barely visible second bird on the wall was executed in brown paint atop the blue sky, but is quite abraded (87MICGBM009). It is much more easily detected in IRR/IRP (figs. 32.5–6).

Ageing cracks are relatively obvious in white areas, and broader drying cracks are visible in the sky (87MICGBM002). The varnish appears even and saturates the paint well, although the retouchings have a slightly uneven gloss and some fingerprints are visible to the left. There are residues of old varnish, but overall, the legibility of the original paint surface is excellent.

[1] For a variety of practical reasons, some of our research reports were produced in an abbreviated format, which resulted in a slightly different lay out. This concerns seven reports: cat. 3 (RR 155–156); cat. 23 (RR 63–68); cat. 26A–B and 26C (RR 59–62 and RR 109–110); cat. 32 (RR 87–88), cat. 52 (RR 111–112); and cat. 53 (RR 113–114).

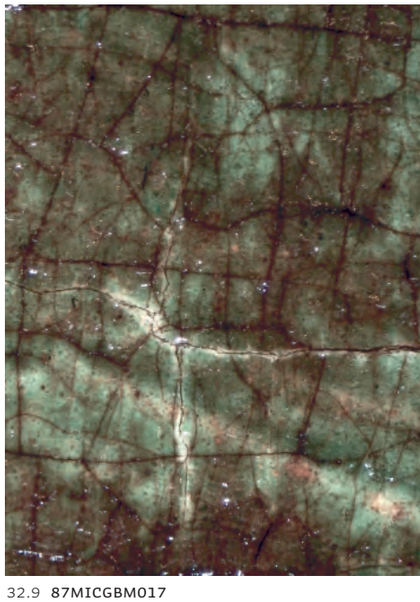
[2] Gwendoline Fife of the Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL), Maastricht, replaced Luuk Hoogstede on this occasion.

[3] Both planks came from the same tree. The youngest or last-preserved rings on each of the two planks of the panel date from 1485 (I) and 1482 (II), respectively. Klein 2001, 126.

[4] The originality of the panel's dimensions have been doubted (see Elsig et al. 2006, 120 and 121 fig. 1).



32.8 87MICGBM014



32.9 87MICGBM017