

# Schäufelein as Painter and Graphic Artist in *The Visitation*

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HANS SCHÄUFELEIN, who was probably born in Nuremberg sometime between 1480 and 1485, first earned distinction as an artist in Dürer's workshop, where he was employed from about 1503 until about 1506 or 1507. Dürer thought enough of his abilities to entrust him with the execution of the Ober Sankt Veit Altarpiece in 1505 (Vienna, Diözesan Museum), a commission for which Dürer had already made the designs. By 1515 Schäufelein had relocated to Nördlingen, where he established his own workshop, there serving the counts of Oettingen, among others, until his death between 1537 and 1540.

Schäufelein's paintings are uneven in quality and today they are less well known and perhaps less prized than his prints. He was a prolific printmaker and produced prints for books (the *Beschlossen Gart*, the *Speculum Passionis* of Ulrich Pinder, contributions to Maximilian's *Theuerdank*, *Weisskunig*, and *Triumphzug*) as well as numerous single-leaf woodcuts. A gifted storyteller, Schäufelein seems to have found a natural outlet for his particular talents in the graphic medium. Clearly, in this regard he owed a debt to Dürer.

Those artists who studied with Albrecht Dürer in the first decade of the sixteenth century assimilated not only their master's technical vocabulary, but also his versatility in various media. They left a legacy of paintings, prints, and drawings and designs for projects in stained glass, metalwork, and architectural decoration. The artistic range of this group of artists—which, in addition to Schäufelein, included Hans Baldung Grien and Hans Süss von Kulmbach among others—has often been admired and discussed. What has received much less attention in the literature is the question of the interrelationship be-

tween these different media, particularly as evidenced by the working methods of given artists. Such evidence is revealed in the underdrawings of paintings, affording an opportunity to study more closely the inception of the work of art and to relate the preliminary stages of a painting to the creative process observable in other works by the same artist.

At the time of the exhibition "Liechtenstein: The Princely Collections," it was possible to study the *Visitation* by Hans Schäufelein (Figure 1),<sup>1</sup> and, in particular, to investigate the artist's working procedure through the painting's underdrawing, now made visible by means of infrared reflectography.<sup>2</sup> Schäufelein's paintings have not been studied previously in this way, and, as there are very few works by him in

1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Liechtenstein: The Princely Collections*, exh. cat. (New York, 1985) pp. 235–237, no. 150, col. ill.

2. Infrared reflectography is a video system responsive to the range of infrared light between 900 and 2,000 nanometers. It can penetrate most pigments to reveal underdrawings in carbon black in the subsurface layers of the painting. The infrared reflectogram assembly, the visual document of the underdrawing, is recorded photographically from a monitor screen or, through more recent developments, by computer from the digitized infrared signal. The literature on this subject is vast. For a more detailed discussion of the technique and its interpretive value for art-historical research and for the basic bibliography see Maryan Wynn Ainsworth and Molly Faries, "Northern Renaissance Paintings: The Discovery of Invention," *Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* n.s. 18:1 (1986). This method of investigation is being used in the Paintings Conservation Department of the Metropolitan Museum for an ongoing study of early Netherlandish, German, and French paintings. Two interns for this project, Katherine Crawford and Ronda Kasl, assisted in the study of the Schäufelein painting. The research is made possible by the generous support of the Rowland Foundation.



American collections, the opportunity to examine the Liechtenstein painting was a welcome one. The recovery of the preliminary sketch on the panel for the *Visitation* provides new visual evidence for the discussion of several issues, including the function of the underdrawing vis-à-vis the subsequent painted lay-

ers, its relationship to the artist's drawings and prints, and the clarification of the dating of the painting.<sup>3</sup>

The underdrawing of the *Visitation* (Figures 2–6) is remarkable for its state of completion and for its complexity. Though no drawing could be detected in the landscape (perhaps because it is obscured by the

3. The Hohlheim Altarpiece, of which the *Visitation* is part, is variously dated from 1518–19 by Modern to 1525–32 by Buchner. In the *Liechtenstein* catalogue entry for this picture, Guy Bauman suggests a date of about 1520. See H. Modern, "Der Mömpelgartner Flügelaltar des Hans Leonhard Schäußelein

und der Meister von Messkirch," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlung des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 17 (1896) pp. 307–397; E. Buchner, "Schäußelein," in U. Thieme and F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig, 1935) XXIX, pp. 557–561; and Bauman, in *Liechtenstein*, p. 237.

1. Hans Schäufelein (ca. 1480–ca. 1540), *The Visitation*, ca. 1520. Oil on wood,  $30\frac{3}{4} \times 25\frac{5}{8}$  in. (78 × 65 cm.). Vaduz, Collections of the Reigning Prince of Liechtenstein, inv. no. 934 (photo: Walter Wachter)

2. Infrared reflectogram assembly of *The Visitation*, detail of Mary, Elizabeth, and two donors



dark pigments used there), all of the figures are fully worked up in a brush underdrawing, the directness and facility of which are immediately apparent. The drawing shows very free and expressive lines for the contours and interior folds of drapery. Further modeling with parallel hatching and crosshatching creates the desired gradations of light and dark (Figures 3–5).

In some areas, such as in the head of the Virgin (Figure 3), the intention was to suggest the volume of forms, and the hatching conforms to the rounded contours of the face. In other areas, such as in the

hands of Elizabeth and Mary or in the face of the donor at Elizabeth's feet (Figures 5, 6), the purpose of the underdrawing was to establish a system of shading through even, straight, parallel hatching, which by its very nature entirely flattens the forms. There is here a kind of play, even competition, between linear patterning and tonal effects. The underdrawing reveals the variety of purposes served by Schäufelein's technical vocabulary, ranging from expressions of plasticity to seemingly more decorative concerns.

The very finished quality of the preliminary design is further revealed in areas such as Elizabeth's left



3. Infrared reflectogram assembly of *The Visitation*, detail of the Virgin

5. Infrared reflectogram assembly of *The Visitation*, detail of the hands of Mary and Elizabeth



4. Infrared reflectogram assembly of *The Visitation*, detail of Elizabeth

6. Infrared reflectogram assembly of *The Visitation*, detail of the donor at Elizabeth's feet



7. Schäußelein, *The Sealing of the One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand* (Rev. 7:1–4). Woodcut illustration from Martin Luther, *Jesus: Das Neues Testament Teütsch . . .*, Augsburg, 1523 (1524 ed.). The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division (photo: New York Public Library)

cheek or the cloak folded back at her right arm (Figures 2, 4), where it is clear that Schäußelein added dark-toned washes to the underdrawing. These areas do not correspond exactly to the applications of paint on top of them, but appear to have been employed simply in order to describe the forms more fully in the underdrawing itself. An underdrawing of such complexity and finish could have served as a presentation drawing or *vidimus* for the approval of the patron, and perhaps did.<sup>4</sup>

The relatively minor adjustments from the underdrawing to the painted layers, in contours of forms as well as the configuration of drapery folds, indicate a well-established working drawing, which may have been based on a compositional sketch on paper. The underdrawing should not be confused with the additional brush drawing in the uppermost layer of the painting with which Schäußelein reinforced his final decisions about the edges of forms and further characterized the shading of the arms and legs of the donors. In Figures 3 and 6 this surface drawing appears as the darkest lines. Sandwiched between the under- and overdrawing are broad, flat areas of color and their modifying glazes. The addition of color and of surface drawing produces a less volumetric and three-dimensional effect than is evident in the underdrawing. The planar, rather decorative appearance of the finished painting is due in large part to these additions. Whereas the underdrawing displays a high degree of spontaneity, the overdrawing is more labored as it refines and straightens contours, and the



8. Schäußelein, *St. Sebastian*, 1522. Drawing. London, British Museum (photo: British Museum)

4. This is an issue for further study. Very fully worked-up underdrawings, including the addition of thin gray washes, have been noted in the paintings of other early 16th-century artists, such as Bernaert van Orley, Lucas van Leyden, and Erhard Altendorfer, in research carried out by Jan Piet Filedt Kok, Molly Faries, and Maryan Ainsworth (see Ainsworth and Faries, "Northern Renaissance Paintings," p. 37, n. 37, for references). How these very finished underdrawings relate to questions of workshop participation in the execution of a painting cannot be answered until further examples are studied.



and the rendering becomes more mechanical as the artist copies himself.

This technique of reintroducing the drawing in the uppermost layer is not unusual in early sixteenth-century German painting. Hans Baldung Grien, among others, used the same method in works such as *St. John on Patmos* in the Metropolitan Museum's collection.<sup>5</sup> The visual effect here is similar to contemporary chiaroscuro woodcuts, where independent line and color blocks were superimposed.<sup>6</sup> Aside from its form-defining function, this overdrawing is a deliberate reference to a graphic convention borrowed from printmaking. Its use in paintings may reflect a desire by the artist to appeal to the prevailing aesthetic.

From the preliminary stages of the *Visitation* to the finishing touches, it is clear that Schäußelein thought in terms of printmaking, in which he excelled and earned his reputation. His predilection for the graphic mode is at once apparent in the style of the underdrawing, in the precise and even quality of the hatching and crosshatching in areas of shadow, and in the broadly defined areas of drapery. The closest comparisons with other works of art, in fact, are with Schäußelein's woodcuts and drawings for woodcuts.

Among these comparisons are Schäußelein's woodcut illustrations for the 1523 New Testament (Figure

7)<sup>7</sup> and his drawings of the Life of St. Peter, which were probably made in preparation for a print series.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a group of independent sketches of saints and apostles also shows the same drawing conventions and stylistic traits that are evident in the underdrawing of the *Visitation*. These are a *St. Sebastian* (dated 1522, Figure 8) and a *St. Peter* (British Museum, London), *St. John on Patmos* (formerly Paris, A. Drey Collection), and an *Apostle Philip* (Erlangen), all dating from the 1520s. These examples help to secure a dating for the *Visitation* in the early 1520s.<sup>9</sup>

From the comparisons above it is clear that Schäußelein was quintessentially a printmaker. The quality of his line, the way he structured groupings of lines, the form and function of these lines—all were conceived in terms of graphic conventions. The fact that his talents were primarily those of a printmaker rather than a painter is nowhere more emphatically apparent than in the underdrawing of the *Visitation*. This preliminary and heretofore invisible stage of the painting can now be seen to constitute the most expressive one, articulated in terms of the language in which Schäußelein communicated best. Future research on other paintings by Schäußelein will surely address some of the issues outlined here and will help to clarify the accomplishment of Schäußelein as a graphic artist as well as a painter.

5. Acc. no. 1983.451.

6. Lucas Cranach can be credited with the first use of this technique in Germany, around 1506–08. Baldung subsequently popularized the chiaroscuro woodcut in his works after 1510. For a brief history of the technique and illustrations of early examples see Walter L. Strauss, *Chiaroscuro: The Clair-Obscur Woodcuts by German and Netherlandish Masters of the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries* (Greenwich, Conn., 1973).

7. See M. Consuelo Oldenbourg, *Die Buchholzschnitte des Hans Schäußelein: Ein bibliographisches Verzeichnis ihrer Verwendungen, Studien zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* 340 (Baden-Baden, 1964) pp. 83–85, 118–123; and Michèle Hébert, *Inventaire des gravures des Ecoles du Nord I* (Paris, 1982) pp. 251ff.

8. Friedrich Winkler, *Die Zeichnungen Hans Süss von Kulmbachs und Leonhard Schäußeleins* (Berlin, 1942) pp. 130, 152, and

ills. 46–48. Winkler summarizes the various opinions about the dating of these drawings (p. 152), which range from 1510 to 1530. Comparison with securely dated prints and drawings of the early 1520s argues in favor of a date ca. 1520.

9. For a discussion of these examples and illustrations of them see Edmund Schilling, "Zeichnungen des Hans Leonhard Schäußelein," *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* 9 (1955) pp. 151–180; and Franz Winzinger, "Unbekannte Werke des Hans Süss von Kulmbach und des Hans Schäußelein," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 24 (1970) pp. 61–70. The chronology of Schäußelein's late works is problematic because of the paucity of securely dated examples. Now the additional evidence of the underdrawing allows for a reexamination of this issue based on comparisons of the underdrawing with dated prints and drawings.