
The Description of the Arnolfini Portrait by Jan Van Eyck

"The Arnolfini Portrait" by Jan van Eyck is a 1434 oil painting on oak panel. It is a full length dual portrait, of the Italian merchant Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini and his wife, in their home in the Flemish city of Bruges. It is one of the most original and intricate paintings in Western art, because of its beauty, and allowance of the picture space with the use of a mirror. His wife is not pregnant but holding up her skirted dress in the present-day fashion.

"The Arnolfini Portrait" provides a clear record of the social status of the subjects. The woman's robe is ordained with fur and entails an extreme amount of fabric. The man is dressed in a cap and a coat, lined with fur. These garments place the couple among the wealthy citizens of Bruges. The small size of the space, the wooden clogs on the floor worn to protect against street dirt, and the absence of ostentatious gold jewelry, all indicate middle-class rather than noble status. However, the chandelier, decorative mirror and oriental carpet, as well as the expensive oranges on the side dresser, are visible indicators of significant wealth.

Van Eyck used the method of applying layer after layer of thin glowing glazes to create a painting with a concentration of both quality and color. The glowing colors also help to highlight the realness, and to show the substantial wealth and luxury of Arnolfini's world. The medium of oil paint also permitted van Eyck to capture surface presence and distinguish textures accurately. He also focused the effects of both direct and diffuse light by showing the light from the window on the left mirrored by many surfaces. It has been suggested that he used a magnifying glass to paint the minute details such as the specific highlights on each of the amber beads hanging beside the mirror.

The view in the mirror shows two figures inside the door that the couple is facing. In line with the mirror, in the center of the picture, the man holds the hand of his wife in the palm of his own. The stiffness of the posture is also showed by the man's raised hand signifying he is taking an oath. Maybe that's why there are two people are in the doorway. They might be observers to the marriage of Arnolfini and his wife. The appearance of the painting was remarkable for its time, in part for the implementation of detail, but for the use of light in the space, for its completely important portrayal of a room, as well of the people who live in it. The meaning is given to the portrait and its details, and there has been much debate on this, according to Craig Harbison the painting "is the only fifteenth-century Northern panel to survive in which the artist's contemporaries are shown engaged in some sort of action in a contemporary interior.

The mode of analysis I used is Combined Analysis. I used this because there were so many details to understand this artwork. was so much more to look at and analyze on this painting.

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There were so much different elements to this painting. The symbolism of this painting is limitless, and very complex. After researching this painting, I do think that Van Eyck created this artwork with a religious meaning, even though it is in a seemingly secular situation.

Works cited

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