

Definition: **Holbein (the Younger), Hans** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

German painter. His early work included religious paintings, such as *Dead Christ* (1521) and woodcuts such as *Dance of Death* (c.1523-25). Holbein's portraits of his friend Erasmus earned him the patronage (1526-28) of Sir Thomas More. In 1532, he settled permanently in London and became (1536) court painter to Henry VIII. Holbein's masterpieces include *The Ambassadors* (1533) and superb portraits of *Christina of Denmark*, *Duchess of Milan* (1538), and *Anne of Cleves* (1540).

Summary Article: **Holbein, Hans, the Younger**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

German painter and woodcut artist who spent much of his career as a portrait artist at the court of Henry VIII of England. One of the finest graphic artists of his age, he executed a woodcut series *Dance of Death* (c. 1525), and designed title pages for Luther's New Testament and Thomas More's *Utopia*.

He was born in Augsburg. In 1515 he went to Basel, where he became friendly with the scholar and humanist Erasmus and illustrated his *Praise of Folly*. He painted three portraits of Erasmus in 1523.

He travelled widely in Europe and while in England as painter to Henry VIII he created a remarkable evocation of the English court in a series of graphic, perceptive portraits. Among his sitters were Henry VIII and Thomas More. During his time at the English court, he also painted miniature portraits, inspiring Nicholas Hilliard. One of his pictures of this period is *The (French) Ambassadors* (1533; National Gallery, London). Pronounced Renaissance influence emerged in the *Meyer Madonna* (1526), a fine altarpiece in Darmstadt.

He was trained by his father, Hans Holbein the Elder, and by Hans Burgkmair, and worked in the family studio as a boy, together with his brother Ambrosius. In 1515 he went to Basel with Ambrosius (a painter of promise who died in 1519) and for some years found constant employment in the prosperous Swiss city, where he became a naturalized Swiss citizen in 1520. Working for the printer-publishers Amerbach and Froben, he showed himself a remarkable designer for books. His illustrations for Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* were as popular as the book itself. Later he designed a title page for More's *Utopia* as well as for Luther's German translation of the New Testament, and the *Dance of Death* series, in the woodcuts made from his designs by Hans Lutzberger, ranks with Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* as one of the masterpieces of European graphic art. He made numerous designs for goldsmiths' work and stained glass, was much occupied with mural decoration (a *Peasants' Dance* for a house in Basel and paintings for the town hall) and also executed some religious works – *Dead Christ* (1521; Basel) and *Madonna* (1522, Solothurn) – though his mastery of portraiture was already most in evidence. It appears in his portraits of Burgomaster Meyer and his wife in 1516 and Bonifazius Amerbach in 1519 (Basel), and the *Madonna of the Burgomaster Meyer* (Darmstadt) is in effect a magnificent portrait group.

Holbein had a passing contact with Italy in a journey to Milan in 1518, and visited Bourges in France in 1524, where he may have seen works by Jean Clouet (at this time he adopted a method of chalk drawing comparable with that of the French portraitist), but a cardinal event was his introduction to Thomas More in England in 1526, on the recommendation of Erasmus. He stayed until 1528, painting

the More family (an informal group of which copies and an original drawing exist); portraits of Warham, the archbishop of Canterbury, and bishop John Fisher; and making a superb series of portrait drawings (Royal Collection, Windsor). He then returned to Basel to finish his work at the town hall, painting also a portrait of his wife and children.

From 1532 London was his headquarters. He painted the German merchants of the steelyard, for example Jörg Gyze (Berlin), *The Ambassadors*, remarkable in technical skill and use of anamorphosis, and became court painter to Henry VIII in 1536. The dynastic group for the Privy Chamber at Whitehall, including Henry VII, Henry VIII, Jane Seymour, and Elizabeth of York, was destroyed by fire in 1698, but in other works Holbein has left an imperishable record of the Tudors. Of his numerous portrayals of Henry VIII, an authentic example is in the Thyssen Collection. He was compelled to paint elaborate details of court dress, but his later work is remarkable for an exquisite refinement of line and essential simplicity of design, as in the portrait he was sent to make at Brussels of the Duchess of Milan in 1537 (National Gallery, London), and that of Anne of Cleves in 1539 (Louvre, Paris). His other work in England included ornamental designs (for example, the drawing for the *Jane Seymour Cup*, Bodleian Library, Oxford) and miniatures, beautiful examples of which are in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Holbein, though he may have inspired the miniaturist Hilliard in some degree, stands alone in the history of the English School and may be called a great internationalist of portraiture.

images

Holbein, Hans, the Younger Henry VIII

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