



Petrus Christus: His Place in Fifteenth-Century Flemish Painting

Joel Upton

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Long hidden in the shadows of Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden, Petrus Christus was one of the crucial painters active in the complex development of Flemish painting during a period of remarkable vitality and attainment. In Bruges, as elsewhere in the fifteenth century, the majestic spirit of high gothic Europe gave way to a humbler world of individual experience. Joel Upton defines Christus's own artistic contribution by showing it to be clearly distinct form that of either Jan or Roger. From the time of Jan van Eyck's death in 1441 to the arrival of Hans Memling in 1465, Christus was the only panel painter who lived in Bruges whose oeuvre is known. His art provides a singular record of the changing relationship of painter, painting, and patron at the very center of Flemish art. Upton contends that Christus's art marks an important stage in the evolution of values from the objective or moral collectivism of the thirteenth century to a more subjective, intensely personal, moral individualism of the latter part of the fifteenth century. While Upton acknowledges the acclaimed virtuosity of Jan and Roger in the portrayal of religious truths through compelling physical and emotional specificity, he argues that they preserve a conceptual distance between the image and the beholder that Christus deliberately closed. Christus's own paintings, therefore, stand out because of their unique accommodation to and transformation of the artistic world in which he lived. *Petrus Christus* is more than a study of a single painter. It reveals how, by visually shaping their experience, Flemish artists individually as well as collectively informed the infinite condition of our shared experience.

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