

Jan van Eyck lived during the Middle Ages, hundreds of years ago. Jan van Eyck was a court painter who worked for an important nobleman. His boss was Duke Philip the Good. The duke trusted Jan van Eyck and gave him all kinds of assignments, sometimes even secret ones.

Here you can see the knife of Philip the Good. It has his motto and coat of arms with a lion on it. The lion is a symbol of bravery.



After Rogier van der Weyden, *Philip the Good*, c. 1451–1500. Groeningemuseum, Bruges.



Two knives of Philip the Good, mid-15th century. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.

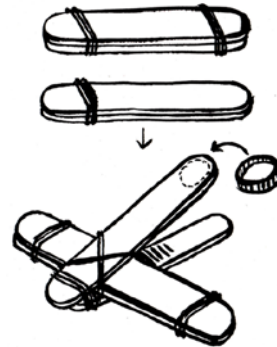
Idea for at home:

Come up with your own motto and make yourself a coat of arms out of cardboard.

Idea for at home:

The Middle Ages were turbulent times. Bands of knights fought each other to conquer plots of land. Make a catapult out of lolly sticks and elastic bands.

The diagram here will show you how. How far can you shoot it?



Jan van Eyck loved nature. He painted many different kinds of flowers and plants, very accurately and with lots of details. On the *Mystic Lamb* alone, we can identify 75 different kinds of plants, herbs and fruits. Because Jan van Eyck often travelled for Duke Philip the Good, he also got to know plants from distant countries. He painted them too.

Idea for at home: A forest on the page

Material

- leaves, branches, grass etc.
- thin paper
- charcoal

Instruction

- 1 Head out into nature with your pupils in search of all kinds of interesting shapes and structures. Take charcoal and large sheets of thin paper with you. If the pupils find an interesting piece of bark or a stone with an unusual structure, they can put their sheet of paper on it and rub over the paper with charcoal.
- 2 This will create a lifelike impression.
- 3 Be sure to collect enough prints!
- 4 When you return home, put the various sheets of paper together.
- 5 Can you recognise things?

Extension

Use the sheets as raw material for a landscape collage. Give the children the freedom to decide what to do, but emphasise that it must be a landscape. Later, they can also add figures or animals using charcoal.

Did you know that...

On the *Kouter* in Ghent, there are 18 works of art that refer to plants found in the *Mystic Lamb*? The American artist Jessica Diamond gave the leaves the name 'Mystic Leaves'. Between the veins of the leaves, you can read the names of the plants and flowers in Middle Dutch.



Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (detail)



Jessica Diamond, *Mystic Leaves*, 1998–2000, City of Ghent
© Michiel Devijver

Mother and child paintings are very popular in The Middle Ages. The mother is Mary and the baby is Jesus. Two angels are holding a beautifully decorated piece of fabric in this painting. Can you see the gold stitches that were used to embroider it?

The colour of Mary's dress is important. It's not blue by chance. The colour blue was made of lapis lazuli, a rare stone from Afghanistan. The stone was ground into a powder and Jan van Eyck and his workers then used it to make the paint. The colour blue symbolises heaven.

If you look closely, you can see the words 'ALC IXH XAN' on the painted frame. What Jan van Eyck means is: I've painted this painting 'as I can.' He really did his very best with it!

Idea for at home:

Take a nice photo of yourself with your mum (or dad). Dress yourself in sheets and blankets to look like Mary's robes. Perhaps you could even make a drawing of your photo afterwards, and do your best with it, 'as you can'!



Jan van Eyck, *The Madonna at the Fountain*, 1439. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

Duke Philip the Good was not the only person Jan van Eyck worked for. Other rich people also wanted him to paint their portrait as well. On the large panels, we can see Joos Vijd and Elisabeth Borluut. They commissioned Hubert van Eyck to paint the Mystic Lamb. That's why they were included in the painting.

Joos Vijd was a rich man. You can tell that from his fancy red robe, trimmed with fur. His wife Elisabeth is also wearing very nice clothes.

We don't know who the man is wearing the blue headgear called a chaperon. The man is also wearing a black jacket trimmed with fur. The chaperon is painted in precious lapis lazuli, which shows he was a wealthy man. He is holding a ring. This makes us think it's an 'engagement' portrait. The man was probably planning to give the ring to his future bride.

Idea for at home:

In Van Eyck's day, some people wore chaperons. These days, we wear things like hats, headbands and caps. Draw or paint yourself wearing your favourite headgear. Give your artwork a title and sign it with your name.

Then find a small box and hide your artwork in a secret place. That way, hundreds of years from now, people will be able to see what we wore on our heads in 2020.



Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (Joos Vijd and Elisabeth Borluut), The Ghent Altarpiece, 1432. Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent.



Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Man in a Blue Chaperon*, c. 1430. Muzeul National Brukenthal, Sibiu.

The Mystic Lamb is made up of several wooden panels. This masterpiece is 588 years old and can be found at St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent. Hubert and Jan van Eyck created this work of art in their studio. Every year, tens of thousands of people from all over the world come to admire it.

Over the centuries, the many layers of varnish got old, turned yellow and cracked. That is why specialists have been working in the museum to restore it since 2012. They use homemade cotton swabs to remove the dirty varnish. Very carefully, they also remove overpaintings – that means places that were painted over at a later date. This allows us to admire the true Mystic Lamb once again, looking just the way Hubert and Jan painted it.

Here you can see a picture of the lamb before the restoration. Below is the same lamb after the restoration. Can you see the differences?

Idea for at home:

Did you know that one panel of the Mystic Lamb was stolen? The theft took place in 1934. Even today, it is a mystery where the 'Just Judges' panel might be.

Get to work! Make a missing painting notice and hang it from your window or go out looking for the panel!



before the restoration



after the restoration

Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, 1432, Saint Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent

Adam and Eve lived in paradise. They were so free they didn't even have to wear clothes. God told Adam and Eve that they could eat the fruit of any tree, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One day, Eve met a snake. The snake told her about a tree that had delicious fruit growing on it. Eva wanted a piece of fruit and the snake took her to the tree. The tree was strong and the branches had nice juicy fruit hanging from them. The snake pointed out a very ripe fruit. Without a second thought, Eve reached for the fruit, pulled it off the branch and took a bite. Adam also took a bite of the delicious fruit. The snake grinned. This was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the fruits were the Forbidden Fruit that they weren't allowed to pick. As a punishment, Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise.

These panels form part of the Mystic Lamb. Look at Adam's feet! Do you see it, too? Adam seems to be stepping out of the frame of the painting. Jan van Eyck was such a good painter that it looks as though a real man is stepping out of the painting!

Idea for at home:

Make an apple snack!

Ingredients

- 2 sweet apples
- cinnamon
- baking paper

Recipe

- 1 Preheat the oven to 100°C.
- 2 Wash the apples and remove the core. Cut the apples into thin slices.
- 3 Place baking paper on a baking tray. Spread out the slices on the baking paper and sprinkle them with cinnamon.
- 4 Bake the slices in the oven for 2 hours. Keep a close eye on them! Let them cool down out of the oven so that they turn nice and crispy.



Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *Adam and Eve*, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, 1432. Saint Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent