

Master of the Monogram TK

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Master of the Monogram TK
Active around 1518
[\[+ info\]](#)

Portrait of a Man (Georg Thurzo?),
1518
Oil on panel, 45.5 × 33.5 cm
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid, 213 (1930.44)
[\[+ info\]](#)

Portrait of a Woman (Anna Fugger?),
1518
Oil on panel, 45.5 × 33.2 cm
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid, 214 (1930.45)
[\[+ info\]](#)

fig. 1

Hans Baldung Grien***Portrait of the Margrave of Baden-Baden, Christopher I***

Oil on panel, 46.9 × 36 cm

Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen,

Alte Pinakothek, Munich, 1407



These two exquisite German Renaissance panels are companion pieces that follow the usual scheme of portraits of this kind. They were probably painted in Nuremberg or Augsburg. The couple, the man on the left and the woman on the right, gaze at each other, interacting. The figures are likewise set against the same green background. This backdrop colour was very common in the German Renaissance and was used by prominent artists like Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach the Elder and Hans Baldung Grien, and subsequently by other German painters up to Otto Dix in the 20th century. The sitters are depicted half-bust length with their heads in three-quarter profile. The man takes up more of the picture space. He is attired in black clothing with a white shirt whose collar sticks out slightly, a cape with a large fur collar and a large hat with applied gold decoration worn at an angle. Peeping out from beneath it is a sort of cap, also gold, similar to the one depicted in other works such as the *Portrait of the Margrave of Baden-Baden, Christopher I* by Hans Baldung Grien in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich [fig. 1]. His right hand appears to be resting on the picture frame. His gloves, in the fashionable style of the period, are similar to those found in works by other artists including Lucas Cranach. The white of his shirt contrasts with the flesh tones, which are pale in both faces. The underdrawing is visible to the naked



fig. 2
Infrared reflectogram
of *Portrait of a Man*
(Georg Thurzo?)



fig. 4.
Infrared reflectogram of
Portrait of a Woman (Anna Fugger?)

1
Kurt Löcher, 'Ein Bildnis der Anna
Dürer in der Sammlung Thyssen-
Bornemisza', *Wallraf-Richartz-
Jahrbuch* 39, 1977, 83–91.

fig. 3
Barthel Beham
Portrait of Magdalena Neudörffer, 1527
Oil on panel, 50.5 × 38.5 cm
Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel,
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister,
Kassel, GK 10



eye in both the husband's countenance – in his nose, mouth and ear – and that of his wife, but above all in her hand. The infrared reflectogram of the painting of the man reveals a change in the size of his ear, which was initially smaller but was finally enlarged by the artist [fig. 2]. The woman is portrayed with her arms in the characteristic pose of the period,¹ both resting on her lap, one on top of the other, though, somewhat unsettlingly, her left hand is not visible. A very similar position is found in the *Portrait of Magdalena Neudörffer* by Barthel Beham in the Kassel Gemäldegalerie [fig. 3], a later work than the one in the Museo Thyssen. The woman in the Thyssen portrait is attired in a black damask dress with dark red details and fur cuffs, and over it a black cape that appears to be made of velvet. On her head she wears a gold and white headdress covered with a fine veil, behind which there is a noticeable *pentimento* in the green background. The reflectogram of this painting [fig. 4]

fig. 5.

Albrecht Dürer

Portrait of Elsbeth Tucher, 1499

Oil on panel, 29.1 × 23.3 cm

**Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel,
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister,
Kassel, GK 6**



fig. 6

Wolf Traut

Portrait of a Woman, 1510

Oil on panel, 37.5 × 28.5 cm

**Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid, 408 (1928.23)**

2

Christian Salm, 'Hans von Kulmbach. The Rosary Triptych, portrait of a man and portrait of a woman', in Rudolf J. Heinemann, ed., *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*, vol. I, Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, 1969, 182–83, nos. 158 and 159.

3

See Isolde Lübbecke, ed., *Early German Painting, 1350–1550: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*, London, Sotheby's Publications, 1991, 328–29, nos. 76 and 77.

4

For more information on this subject see the study of the pigments and their materials carried out in connection with this article at the restoration workshop of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Archivo del Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

shows that the head covering was originally more voluminous and ended in an almost circular shape that fully coincides with the *pentimento*. This leads us to think, as Christian Salm noted² – unlike Isolde Lübbecke,³ who considered it to be a halo – that the initial headwear was designed to be larger and more rounded, a very common style during that period. Headpieces of this kind are found in other paintings, notably Albrecht Dürer's *Portrait of Elsbeth Tucher* in the collection of the Kassel Gemäldegalerie [fig. 5] and Wolf Traut's *Portrait of a Woman* in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza [fig. 6]. The analyses carried out on the green pigments in the background and in the area around the headdress show that different materials were used for each. It may therefore be assumed that it was not the artist who made the change but another painter using a different composition to achieve a shade of green similar to that of the background and at some point after the panels were created.⁴

This interesting pair of portraits was initially attributed to Hans von Kulmbach, chiefly on account of the initials beside the date, which seemed to read 'HK'. This hypothesis, maintained by Jacob Rosenberg,⁵ and subsequently by others such as Friedrich Winkler,⁶ was not, however, unanimously accepted by specialists.⁷ The technical studies carried out on the works proved that the two letters were, in fact, overpainted and therefore not original. Among the main test methods used, X-radiography and infrared reflectography, the latter clearly revealed – in addition to the aforementioned underdrawing – an original monogram with the letters 'TK' and above it a date, 1518. Based on these findings, Lübbecke⁸ proposed that their maker was an anonymous master with these initials, known as the Master of the Monogram TK, whom it has not yet been possible to equate with any known artist. In both paintings the monogram is roughly at the height of the sitter's left shoulder. In the female portrait only traces of the monogram are visible today together with the date.

As stated earlier, the style of the two panels is consonant with that of the German Renaissance, and the as yet unknown Master of the Monogram TK may possibly have been based in the Augsburg and Nuremberg area, though this is more difficult to determine. The overall scheme of the works is compatible with the stereotype of the period, though the softness of the modelling of the faces is very different from the harsher manner of the circle of the German master Albrecht Dürer.

The two subjects are elegantly dressed and adorned with jewellery. The woman sports two necklaces and several rings, while the man wears a necklace similar to one of hers, of which only a small part is visible, and several rings that can be made out through the slits in his gloves. His hat, with applied gold decoration, and cap, as well as part of the woman's headdress in the same shade denote a certain luxury and ostentation. This indicates that they both enjoyed a high social status and came from influential families in the Holy Roman Empire of Germany. The identification of the sitters as Anna Fugger and Georg Thurzo was suggested by Eisler⁹ based on comparison with two prints of them made by Holbein the Elder and preserved in the

⁵ *Sammlung Kommerzienrat Otto Held*, auction catalogue of Cassirer-Helbing, Berlin, 1929, nos. 26 and 27, pls XVI and XVII.

⁶ See Friedrich K. Winkler, *Hans von Kulmbach*, Bayreuth, Kulmbach Freunde der Plassenburg, 1959, 87.

⁷ See Ernst Buchner, 'Hans von Kulmbach als Bildnismaler', *Pantheon* 1, 1928, 135–42, 140 note 2.

⁸ See Lübbecke 1991, op. cit. note 3, 328–29.

⁹ János Eisler, 'Zwei Kulmbach Bildnisse', *Acta Historiae Artium* 20, 1974, fasc. 1–2, 81–86, here 81–82, figs 4 and 5.



fig. 7
Hans Holbein the Elder
Georg Thurzo, about 1511
 Engraving, 15.1 × 9.3 cm
 Kupferstichkabinett,
 Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin,
 KdZ 2514



fig. 8
Hans Holbein the Elder
Countess Thurzo, Wife of Count
Georg Thurzo, about 1511
 Engraving, 13.5 × 9.2 cm
 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatlichen
 Museen zu Berlin, KdZ 2516

Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen in Berlin [figs. 7, 8]. The similarity between the painting and the engraving of Georg Thurzo can be seen in the wide forehead, small mouth, long, round-tipped nose and powerful chin. Georg Thurzo hailed from a family of prominent mine merchants with properties in northern Hungary (now Slovakia). Their headquarters were in Krakow, from where they moved to Augsburg. Anna Fugger was the daughter of Ulrich Fugger and belonged to one of the most influential families of the period who were based in Augsburg and owned businesses all over the empire. The two families entered into a partnership, founding a joint company, and these ties were further strengthened by the marriage of their children. The couple wedded in 1497 in that city, where they both died. The courts of most of Europe and the whole empire were among their clients. Nevertheless, the resemblance between the print of Anna Fugger and the woman in the Thyssen portrait is less evident.

These panels may possibly have come from the collection of Countess Hertzberg in Düsseldorf. They later passed to Sir Charles Turner in London, where they remained until 1908. Critics had been familiar with the works since the start of the 19th century, as they were published by Woltmann and Woermann in 1888. They were sold at auction at Rudolph Lepke, in Berlin, in 1908, and were subsequently located in Otto Held's collection in Berlin. In 1915 they featured in an exhibition at Paul Cassirer's gallery in that city,¹⁰ and in 1929 they were again put up for auction at Cassirer-Helbing in the German capital. The following owner was the Goudstikker gallery in Amsterdam, where Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza acquired them for what was then known as the Sammlung Schloss Rohoncz, later the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, from which they passed to the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid in 1993. ●

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 Exhibition *Ausstellung von Werken*
alter Kunst aus Berliner Privatbesitz,
 Berlin, 1915.