

Martin Schongauer (c. 1445 – 1491)

Life and training

Martin Schongauer was born in Colmar in around 1445 to a family of goldsmiths originally from Schongau, in southern Bavaria. His father first moved to Augsburg, before establishing himself in Colmar in 1440. Three of his five sons, Caspar the Younger, Jörg and Paul, became goldsmiths like their father, whereas Ludwig and Martin became painters. Martin Schongauer's biography remains incomplete due to the scarcity of surviving archival documents.



Joseph Mœsl, after Hans Burgkmair the Elder, *Portrait of Martin Schongauer*, 1846, oil on cardboard applied to canvas

He probably trained as a goldsmith in his father's workshop in around 1460, before beginning his apprenticeship as a painter, possibly under the Colmar master Caspar Isenmann. He continued his training with a journey to northern Europe, spending a brief period in Nuremberg in the studio of Hans Pleydenwurff (active in Nuremberg from 1457 to 1472).

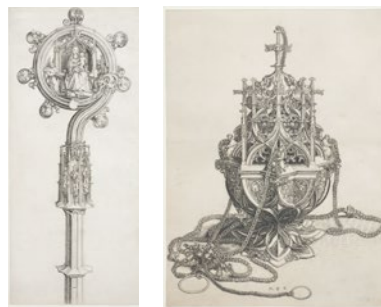
During that period he came into contact with models showing a strong influence from the masters of Flemish art: Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and Dirk Bouts. In October 1465, he enrolled in the University of Leipzig, which is the only proven fact in his biography. His return journey probably took him via Cologne and then on to Ghent, Bruges, Tournai and Brussels, where he was able to admire the work of the Early Flemish artists at first hand.

Martin Schongauer, the engraver

Martin Schongauer is known above all as a printmaker: he produced 116 different engravings, all of them signed. He was the first monogramist* whose identity was known: all of his engravings are marked with his monogram M+S.

His prints consist essentially of religious subjects drawn from the New Testament: the Childhood and Passion of Christ and the Life of the Virgin. The other religious compositions are figures of apostles, male or female saints, medallions containing the symbols of the Evangelists and a series illustrating the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

His twenty-nine secular subjects are scenes of everyday life (*Peasant Family Going to the Market, The Miller, Two Men Walking Together...*), a few animal motifs, some examples of the goldsmith's art (*a Bishop's Crozier and a Censer*), a series of ornamental foliate scrolls* and some heraldic* medallions.



Martin Schongauer, *Bishop's Crozier and The Censer*, 1480 – 1485, engravings

His engravings are the only works that can be attributed to Martin Schongauer with certainty, unlike his paintings, as they are not signed and are not contained in any archive contemporary to their execution.

Martin Schongauer, the painter

In parallel to this abundant production of prints, he produced just seven paintings in total, painted on wood panel as was the norm at the time: the *Orlier Altarpiece* and the *Altarpiece of the Dominicans* are held at the Musée Unterlinden; the *Madonna of the Rose Bower* can be seen in the nearby Dominican Church; the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, two paintings of the *Holy Family* and the *Virgin and Child* are held in public collections outside France.



Martin Schongauer, *Madonna of the Rose Bower*, 1473, oil on wood panel, parish of St Martin, exhibited in the Dominican Church

Finally, we must also mention the frescoes in St Stephen's church in Breisach am Rhein. In each of these works, the Colmar master's pictorial language strikes a balance between the naturalism of the Flemish masters and the idealised softness inherited from the painters of the Upper Rhine.

Foliate scroll: sculpted or painted decorative plant motif

Heraldic: relating to coats of arms

Monogramist: artist who signed his work with his initials