



Allison Stielau The Case of the Case for Early Modern Objects and Images

What sort of thing is the etui? A case in which one stores anything that should be held snugly, for protection or concealment: spectacles, cutlery, watches, for example. «What didn't the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for!», wrote Walter Benjamin, who compared the era's dwellings to «the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet».² The eighteenth century had its own passion for cases, whether they held microscopes, surgical tools, weights and scales, or sets of toilet articles. Earlier still, etuis carried small items on the person, writing instruments, prayer books, a knife or spoon. From the fourteenth century survive the etuis for a few supremely important objects: imperial crowns, reliquaries, miters, and monstrances.³ Lightweight but extremely durable, leather was often the most suitable material for the etui. Boiling and molding leather in a process known as *cuir bouilli* produced hard shells in any desired shape. Etuis were also constructed of wooden frames covered in soft leather, with incised and embossed decorations. They were lined with suede, silk, or other textiles.

As an object meant to embrace another object, the etui sits in an undefined interstice between received categories. It is not comfortably a work of art. Nor, when ornamented and carefully crafted, can it be placed in the vast category of functional objects known as «material culture». However, designating the etui a decorative art object does not adequately account for its service to other such objects, for the fact that, as a bespoke case designed to fit the specific contours of an already-made thing, it is always secondary to the object it contains. The etui would not take the form it does, would not even exist, if not for the object it holds inside. It is this relationship between container and contained that resists traditional categorizations and renders the etui worthy of special notice. Exploring that relationship in several early modern examples, I hope to show how the etui defines its own peculiar object-type, with implications for the two-dimensional image.

In addition to the standard etuis that share recognizable forms, like penners and violin cases, a rarer group best emblemizes the concept of containing at issue here. The largest surviving collections of etuis are those made to fit the singular objects of princely Kunstkammern. The treasury of the Saxon electors in Dresden holds more than three hundred cases from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, made for the most part by court bookbinders to protect the baroque *pretiosa* collected by Augustus the Strong (1670–1733).⁴ During his lifetime, Augustus became King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. To assert his power in those distant regions, he dazzled his new subjects with possessions brought from his Dresden wonder cabinet: elaborate parade bowls, ivory bibelots, rock crystal vessels, and precious metal statuettes. The travel cases for these fragile pieces are unique,

each one made with the individual object to hand for precise measurements. Their wooden bases are covered in Morocco leather, sometimes stamped blind, sometimes with gold leaf, while their interiors are upholstered in silk or suede. A few cases arrived with works of Italian craftsmanship, but most were made in Dresden, sometimes for objects that had been in the Electors' treasury already for centuries.

The other major extant collection of etuis fits the carved stone vessels that once belonged to Louis, Grande Dauphin of France (1661–1712). Outfitted in snug velvet and leather stamped with the Dauphin's insignia in gold, the collection was carefully preserved and transported, eventually brought by Louis's son Philip V to Madrid, where it now resides in the Prado Museum.⁵ These two sets of etuis reflect developments in the conception and organization of the princely collection. They move to standardize storage containers, they suggest the possibility that the objects might travel and be displayed in different locations, and they appear to aid the management of a collection large enough to remain in storage and to require identifying exteriors for its convenient curation.⁶

An earlier cousin of these princely examples serves as case study of the singular etui (Fig. 1). Constructed of wood and covered with incised leather, this hulking black mass contains an elaborate silver-gilt nef, which was made by an unknown goldsmith for a patrician family in Nuremberg sometime around 1503, the year inscribed on the etui's base.⁷ The Schlüsselfelder Schiff represents a contemporary carrack, its decks and riggings populated with seventy-four cast figures in various



1 Unknown maker(s), *Schlüsselfelder Schiff* and its etui, before 1503, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

states of work and play. Every jutting angle and irregular hump of the thirty-two-inch-tall leather case corresponds to a detail of the miniature ship, from the height of the mast to the thrust of the dragon-headed bow and the fluttering of the animated pennants. This physical correspondence of etui to nef makes the case as careful a masterpiece as the ship it holds, though its maker remains likewise unknown.

Inside the etui, the nef cleverly masks its own function, the ability to hold two liters of wine in a compartment hidden beneath the conceit of the narrativized carrack. If not for the wine hold, we might consider this object a small-scale sculpture, comparable to contemporary precious metal statuettes of silver and bronze.⁸ But its function, whether or not ever consummated, renders the nef an object of decorative, or applied, art. The etui, which might easily be assigned a merely functional role, was also endowed with design features beyond those necessary for protecting the nef inside, like the incised vegetal and geometric patterns on its surface, and the red leather and velvet lining its interior. A piece of cabinetry almost as technologically stunning as a carrack itself, the etui could also be appreciated as an aesthetic object in its own right, the dark cloak worn by the glittering nef when not in use at table.

Despite both having been designed with aesthetic choices in mind, the etui and the nef seem to be of entirely different orders. They fit as close as hand in glove, but remain as different as hand and glove. While the etui would not exist without the nef, the nef's survival has depended to a certain extent on the etui, which has protected each individual figure and detail from loss and damage over five hundred years. But this relationship is not entirely reciprocal because of the formal dependence of one object on the other. Separated from its case, the Schlüsselfelder Schiff makes no reference to its protective vessel. The empty etui, on the other hand, remains to a great extent an index of its content, a husk recording the precise volume of a lost interior.

A sixteenth-century watercolor of the nef could easily be classed, as a two-dimensional image, with prints and paintings as a work of art (Fig. 2). But its function seems to have been to record a singular thing in all of its detail, from the sailors climbing the nef's riggings to the split-tailed mermaid at its base. Once in the collection of the Hamburg goldsmith Jakob Mores (1540–c. 1612), the watercolor might have served as a two-dimensional reproduction of a distant three-dimensional masterpiece, inspiration and perhaps even model for an appreciative later smith. Its label mentions the ship's possible function as a wine vessel, recording the volume of liquid it could contain as well as the ship's weight.⁹ Conceptually, then, the function of this watercolor might lie closer to that of the etui than that of a work of art. The image is a venture aimed at preservation, marking off in word and representation the heft and size of a now-missing thing.

If the watercolor functions as an etui, it is, unlike the Schlüsselfelder example, a transparent one. The optic and haptic relationships between the nef and its leather case are complicated by the etui's opacity, evading precise description. The Schlüsselfelder case has been called «an abstract form that also presents the negative imprint of the ship» inside, a statement that alludes to the way the etui can abstract most of the nef's world-referencing detail while maintaining its general shape.¹⁰ But the etui does not produce an *exact* «negative imprint», which would capture every detail of the nef's surface, as a mould produces a surface in metal-casting. If an imprint is not the exact metaphor, then neither is a silhouette. While the etui presents the nef's general outline, it does not convey the intricate and spindly forms



2 Unknown artist, *Schlüsselfelder Schiff*, late 16th century, watercolor, Berlin, Kunstbibliothek/Staatliche Museen.

of its masts and riggings; rather than flattening the object into the two-dimensional black of a true silhouette, it maintains, even adds to, its three-dimensional volume. The case is not the ship's shadow, then, but the dark positive of its presence, muffling its gilt energy like a falcon's rufus into a blind, and thus silent, stillness.

The received classifications into which the Schlüsselfelder etui, nef, and watercolor might be fitted (material culture/decorative art/Art) inadequately address their relationship to each other and the larger field of surviving sixteenth-century objects. But distinguishing between container and contained, as between object and image, is not merely a modern, or modernist, endeavor that reinforces classificatory systems refined more recently. Artists of the nef's own era also explored relationships between different object-types, as well as their movement into and out of representation. Those brought up by or apprenticed to goldsmiths and other craftsmen, artists like Albrecht Dürer and Benvenuto Cellini,



3 Martin Schongauer, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 15th century, engraving.

were perhaps prompted especially to reflect on these issues.¹¹ Their experiences in both the workshop and the rarified culture of Art in which they later operated undoubtedly informed their portrayal of objects.

Martin Schongauer, a goldsmith's son, diagrammed the correspondences between object, case, and image similar to those of the Schlüsselfelder set in an engraving of around 1475 (Fig. 3). His *Adoration* adds an intensely interesting anecdotal embellishment to a scene whose subject had been a site of elaborating detail in Italian panel painting from at least the fourteenth century. Here, Schongauer stacks the entourage of attendants and animals into the depth of the landscape, placing emphasis on the few figures in the foreground. The Magi proffer the Child three highly detailed vessels, which are based on contemporary goldwork, fragments of the Real that make their way into this imagined scene. The direction of the narrative's action and the viewer's attention moves with these

vessels toward the infant at left, but a detail at right, partly obscured behind legs and garments, catches the eye.

With fingers splayed, a young man handles a round object, an orb that doubles his own bent head as well as the lidded cup being offered to Jesus by the magus at left. The orb splits in half and bears a carrying strap around its sides. It is the etui for the king's bulbous repoussé vessel, its taut leather covering contrasting texturally with the flexible leather sack into which the page pushes it. We can reconstruct from this constellation of objects the way they were once telescoped inside each other, carefully packed for the long journey from the East, precious substance inside gold vessel inside leather case inside leather sack, all hoisted across a horse's back, or stowed in the hold of a ship. This prior narrative of preparation and travel, only rarely depicted in art of this time, was increasingly alluded to as the Adoration scene grew larger and more detailed. The gifts of the Magi, where they came from, and how they got there—in other words, the movement of goods and people through space—became an increasingly visible marginal subject of the Adoration's narrative.

The etui implies an even more specific series of events after the arrival at Bethlehem, when the precious gifts must be unpacked. Schongauer portrays the intermediate moment after which the sack has opened to the etui, and the etui to the metal orb, but just before the orb opens to its own interior in front of Mary and the Child. The fragmentation of the carefully packed parcel into its component parts serves to differentiate them. For while each is a type of transport vessel, they are all essentially distinct. The leather sack is a generic container, able to hold multiple objects and a variety of materials inside its limited and variable volume, here deflated and laid out loosely on the ground. The etui's volume, by contrast, cannot fluctuate, but instead must accommodate the particular object it was designed to contain. Its main purpose is protective and so it bears almost nothing in the way of ornament.

The orb depicted in Schongauer's engraving also serves to carry an object, but not one that determines its shape. Based on iconographical convention, we can assume the vessel is gold, its design and careful craftsmanship signaling its precious material value. While the goods inside the proffered vessels are of primary concern with respect to the Biblical narrative, the lidded cups are portrayed more simply as the Magi's treasure given over to their newborn king. As the vessels' interiors are rarely revealed in Adoration scenes, their exterior details serve to differentiate the famous gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh, as well as the Magi themselves. The vessels are thus attributes, identifying objects we can hardly picture the Eastern kings without. But in this case the appearance of the etui on the right radically grounds those objects, making them not symbolic, iconographical identifiers, but crafted vessels requiring material protection and care.

Here the repoussé orb and its leather case exist as if balanced on a fulcrum, the etui brought low as the orb rises up to meet the baby Jesus. In this compositional choice, the artist charts the non-reciprocal relationship between an etui and its contents already observed in the case of the Schlüsselfelder objects. The sack and the etui, if not exactly discarded, are no longer necessary at the moment of presentation, however much that moment depends on the safe passage made possible by those containers. As the son of a goldsmith, Schongauer privileged his father's craft by placing metal vessels at the image's center. His intimate knowledge of superlative metalwork is evident in this Adoration scene, as it is perhaps even more not-

ably in his engraving of a censer. The artist proved further sensitive to the vessel's craftsmanship here by also portraying the means of its preservation and conveyance. His inclusion of the etui in the Adoration scene reflects not only his beginnings in the goldsmith's shop, but also the concerns of his own rapidly ascendant metalcraft, which took transport as both theme and goal. In his own lifetime Schongauer's engravings moved throughout Europe. Could he have imagined them being as carefully carried, as carefully presented, as the vessels he himself portrayed?

As representation, the Adoration engraving has the ability to describe a spectrum of objects together and to deploy those objects as agents in human narratives, an ability non-representational objects do not possess. The Schlüsselfelder watercolor showed how images can also act as containers for objects when they serve as archiving devices that testify to the existence of another thing, whether real or only imagined. Schongauer's engraving represents a sacred scene, but one that also archives contemporary craft production and transportation practice. As Robert Suckale has noted, Schongauer did not entirely invent the anecdote of packing. The leather sack appeared in Hans Pleydenwurff's *Adoration* of 1460, where a servant presents one of the three kings with a gold vessel supposedly pulled from the laced bag at his feet.¹²

By adding the further embellishment of an etui to the scene, Schongauer expanded the Adoration's inventory of objects. In both Northern and Southern Europe the Adoration seems to have been a particularly rich site for the stocking and re-stocking of such an inventory. Albrecht Dürer's 1504 *Adoration* (Uffizi Gallery) updates the packing theme by replacing the loose sack of Pleydenwurff's era with a large leather purse in whose hinged metal mouth a servant fumbles. Dürer also set an apple-shaped cup in the hand of one of the Magi. The painted vessel relates both to an extant drawing by Dürer and to a description of an object in the possession of the Pirckheimer family, though it is not entirely clear which of these three cups archives the others.¹³

The handing down of attendant objects by means of the image has a long tradition in Northern European, particularly Flemish, Art. In fact, it would be possible to narrate the history of Northern Art by tracing the appearance of single objects through the work of the great painters and engravers, noting in each instance how the artist preserved, embellished, or modified, for example, the elaborately draped bed, the convex mirror, the chandelier or candlestick, the gold cup, the book, the mullioned window, or the prie-dieu. Erwin Panofsky observed that the identical ewer and basin appear in precisely the same position in the painting of St. Barbara supposedly by Robert Campin at the Prado and in Rogier van der Weyden's Louvre *Annunciation*, evidence of those painters' connection to each other and grounds on which to propose attributions.¹⁴ A century later, singular objects can be tracked through Hans Holbein's portraits, such as the tools that appear first in the 1528 likeness of Nicolaus Kratzer (Louvre) and later in the 1533 painting known as *The Ambassadors* (National Gallery, London) (Fig. 5).

These examples demonstrate how images acquired and transported objects in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This acquisitiveness is not reducible merely to a new bourgeois materialism. Instead, images inventoried the material world in order to reflect complexly on both representation and objecthood, considering, as I have here, the classificatory distinctions between object-types. A particular obsession in paintings of the period was the portrayal of containing objects: vessels,



4 Israel van Meckenem, *Lute Player and Harpist*, from *Scenes of Daily Life*, engraving.

boxes, purses, and satchels that thematize movement through time and space. Like the etui, containing objects are most often also *concealing* objects. They extend the possibility, in their physical form, of secrecy. The engraving and the painted panel, conversely, appear to be all surface, all revelation. They can have no secrets. But when imported into the two-dimensional surface of the image, containing objects hold open a three-dimensional space whose interior and possible contents remain invisible to the beholder. They populate the image with pockets of opacity and, thus, epistemological uncertainty. It is by way of these representations that the image finds material metaphors for other strategies of concealing meaning, whether via encryption, allegory, or symbolism. By representing objects capable of being packed, the image suggests its potential to be interpreted, or *unpacked*.

The etui is a special type of containing object, revealing more about its contents than a cabinet, chest, or purse. For early modern beholders, etuis designed for common quotidian objects had a recognizable form. The contents of penners and inkpots that usually hung from the belt, ubiquitous in representations of the evangelists, are obvious. Etuis shaped like a leaf and coming to a narrow point, designed to hold pairs of collapsible spectacles, were similarly common; one can be seen hanging from an apostle's belt in Schongauer's *Death of the Virgin*, the spectacles themselves pressed into service on the page of a prayer book. Cases for musical instruments perhaps most easily express their contents to the twenty-first-century viewer. They remain one of the few etui-types from the early modern period still in use today.

In Israel van Meckenem's *The Lute Player and the Harpist* (1500), we would recognize the lute's etui in the lower right even if the young man were not holding the instrument in his lap (Fig. 4). At the feet of the female harpist in the lower left, a small chest with metal hinges remains closed, facing its back to the picture plane. Its interior, concealed and possibly locked, pairs compositionally with the



5 Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533, oil on canvas, London, National Gallery.

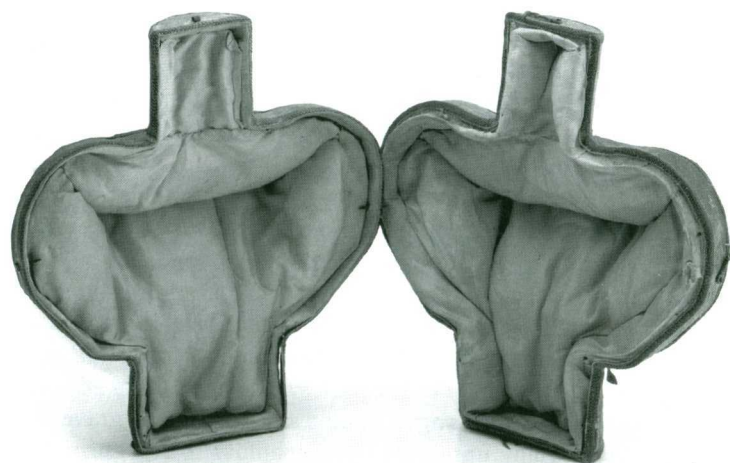
woman herself, suggesting that her interior, both physical and psychological, might likewise remain inaccessible, an armored strongbox. The lute case, the male musician's object-counterpart, has however slid open to reveal a dark sliver of its interior. As the empty double of the plucked lute, the etui has an unsettling quality, but it opens the possibility that knowledge—of the self and perhaps another—might be gleaned from both inside and out, whereas the box remains an undifferentiated, inexpressive block.

As the singular case of a singular object, the Schlüsselfelder etui does not articulate its contents so easily. It is much closer in this way to the etuis made centuries later for the collections of Augustus the Strong and Louis of France. Those cases disclose little of their contents' material or figural decorations, offering an allegory that is less epistemologically optimistic than the lute case in van Meckenem's engraving. In their obdurate opacity, singular etuis of singular objects reify the historian's relationship to the past, whose once sharp edges and bright detail will never be more than vague humps and angles, the grave volume of it known and felt, but finally unrevealed. The inability to recognize such an etui and to imagine its contents not only dramatizes the sad obsolescence of the past's material relics, it also predicts our own.

Aside from the examples given here, etuis are fairly uncommon in representation in the sixteenth century, but Hans Holbein's *Ambassadors* contains two (Fig. 5).¹⁵ On the lower shelf between Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, the lid of a long black case hangs open to reveal a set of five wooden recorders, each slid into its own snug tube. On the floor underneath the shelves, almost hidden in the shadows behind Dinteville's legs, lies an overturned lute case, the dark twin of the instrument above, with the same faceted belly and jut of the pegbox from the neck, facing down, like a discarded body. Why should the lute case appear in this portrait and why, if necessary, should it be so obscured? It is a reminder, like the barely revealed crucifix at upper left, of the painting's potential to conceal, a potential well-evidenced by the number of scholarly studies attempting to unmask the symbolism of the scientific instruments and texts, the carpet and curtain, even the broken lute string.¹⁶

The essential meaning of *The Ambassadors*, as everyone knows, is hidden in plain sight: the anamorphic skull that, as soon as the beholder orients himself to recognize it, undoes all the glamour of worldly luxury and knowledge on display in the painting's central field. The skull and the etui are related compositionally in Holbein's painting, set at an angle beginning just an inch apart on the floor below the shelves, as if they are body and shadow, or body and ghost, of each other. A tiny brown line along the etui's side indicates the almost imperceptible crack separating its two halves. The anamorphic skull that swings out from the etui's side is so flat it could almost have escaped from that crack, making the secret concealed in the etui nothing more complicated than mortality, the sudden and surprising reminder that Death is in the room.

All etuis are haunted by their absent contents, just as the deflated glove is haunted by its absent hand.¹⁷ In the catalogue of the Dauphin's treasure, which reproduces every extant case along with the object it was made for, the only interiors shown are those of cases whose contents have disappeared (Fig. 6). The catalogue's photographs are provided to suggest more precisely the shape of the missing vessels. Indeed, alongside earlier inventories, the etuis helped researchers at the

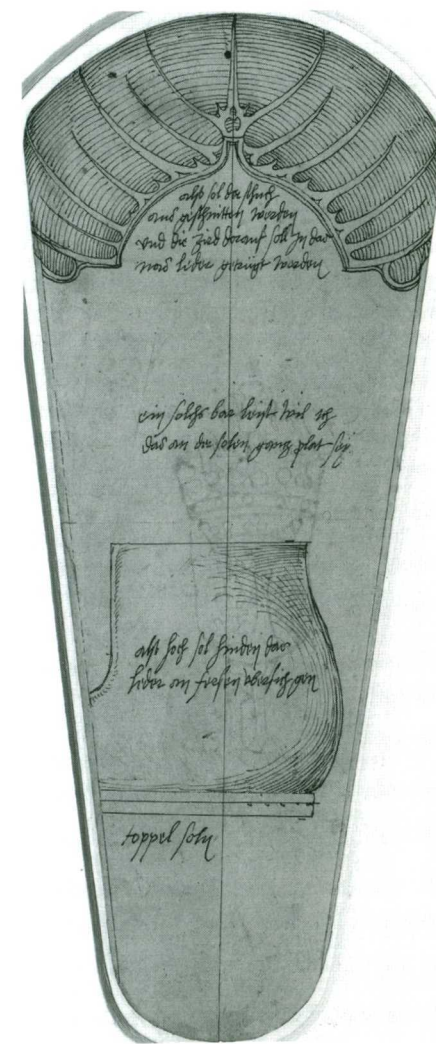


6 Unknown maker, *Case for an octagonal urn with snake handles*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Prado reconstruct the complete collection after it had become damaged and disorganized over the years. But the interior photographs also function as insistent proof of absent content, because without seeing the inside we cannot know that nothing is there.¹⁸ Like seashell and chrysalis, the etui records the existence of a vanished body, holding the precise volume of a lost interior presence open against the vastness that could so easily obliterate any memory or trace of it.

If the bespoke etui cannot fit into the ready-made object categories delineated at the outset of this essay, perhaps it should be placed in a class of its own. Such a class would include objects that possess, like the etui, the qualities of being haunted and of maintaining the volume of a separable interior even when that interior has been lost. This category need make no distinction between two-dimensional and three-dimensional, between «functional» and «non-functional», between prototype and record. One candidate for this proposed class of objects is a drawing in the British Museum from around 1526 (Fig. 7). At 271 by 111 millimeters, it takes the shape of an extremely elongated trapezoid, with curved top and bottom edges. An ornamental design in black ink covers the top, a vessel-like profile the mid-section. The notes across the surface read: «thus the shoe is to be cut out, and the ornament on it to be pressed into the wet leather / I want a pair of lasts completely flat at the heels / so high the leather at the heel is to extend / double soles». And on the verso: «These shoes are to have straps and rings / The last of this shoe is to be completely straight and flat on the bottom».¹⁹

This design has been attributed to Albrecht Dürer, on the basis of handwriting, ink, and watermark analysis. Its instructions direct a shoemaker to produce a high-back heeled form known as a Hornschuh.²⁰ The assumption has been that Dürer designed the shoe for himself and that the drawing and its accompanying ink-washed sole record the length and width of his own foot. In 1974 Friedhelm Trost, an orthopedic shoemaker, produced a pair of shoes using this design for the Deutsches Ledermuseum in Offenbach.²¹ This movement of two-dimensional design to three-dimensional ob-



7 Albrecht Dürer, *Design for a Shoe*, seen from above, with the back of the shoe, seen from the side, 1522–28, pen and black ink on paper, London, British Museum.

ject recalls Dürer's own notes and sketches on the proportions of the foot, which demonstrate how to conjure human anatomy out of a flat surface.²² The shoes, with their incised toes and buckled straps, are reverse-engineered etuis. By reconstituting the volume of two lost feet, perhaps Dürer's own, they shape a haunted foothold in the world.

But how should this foothold be characterized? As functional or decorative? Historical or modern? A tool for scholarly inquiry or the manufactured relic of a beloved artist? Together with the British Museum drawing that helped produce them, the shoes fit the understudied category of the empty etui, which would appear at first glance to be the most perversely peripheral, least important object-type imaginable. Why attend to the guitar case if it holds no guitar, the sheathe if it holds no sword? An empty case ordinarily furnishes less information than its former contents, making it a subtler prompt for historical narration and interpretation. Its value lies, however, in the peculiar ability to simultaneously record presence and absence, an existence and the loss of it.²³ The empty etui thus materializes the problem of mortal and historical preservation. As failed storage device, it conveys the ultimate impossibility of really holding, of holding on to, anything.

Anmerkungen

1 The author wishes to thank Robert Felfe, Christopher Wood, Christine Schorfheide, and Peggy Große.

2 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, transl. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge 2002, p. 220.

3 Günter Gall, *Leder im Europäischen Kunsthandwerk*, Braunschweig 1965, p. 48–63.

4 Jutta Kappel und Ulrike Weinhold, *The New Grünes Gewölbe: Guide to the Permanent Exhibition*, Dresden 2007, p. 270.

5 Letizia Arbeteta Mira, *El Tesoro del Delfín: Alhajas de Felipe V Recibidas por Herencia de su Padre Luis, Gran Delfín de Francia*, Madrid 2001, p. 85–89.

6 I am grateful to Virginie Spenlé of the Kunstkammer Georg Laue, Munich, for her insights on princely etuis in a June 2010 interview.

7 For dimensions and more detailed description, see *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg, 1300–1550* (ex. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), New York 1986, p. 224–227.

8 For example, see Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *The Art of the Goldsmith in Late Fifteenth-Century Germany*, Fort Worth 2006.

9 Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Nürnberger Goldschmiedekunst des Mittelalters und der Dürerzeit, 1240 bis 1540*, Berlin 1968, p. 276.

10 *Gothic and Renaissance Art* 1986 (as note 7), p. 227.

11 On the importance of the goldsmith's workshop to Italian artistic production, see Michael Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*, New York 2002.

12 Robert Suckale, *Die Erneuerung der Malerei vor Dürer*, Petersberg 2009, p. 221–222.

13 Kohlhaussen 1968 (as note 9), p. 352–353.

14 See Plate 98 in Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, Vol. 2, New York 1971.

15 A high-resolution, zoomable image, can be found at the Google Art Project, <http://www.googleartproject.com/museums/nationalgallery/the-ambassadors>, accessed on 20. May 2011.

16 See, for example, John North, *The Ambassadors' Secret: Holbein and the World of the Renaissance*, London 2002.

17 On the haunted quality of unpaired gloves in Renaissance portraiture, see Peter Stallybrass and Anne Rosalind Jones, «Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe», in: *Things*, edited by Bill Brown, Chicago 2004, p. 174–192.

18 See Mira 2001 (as note 5), the illustrations on pages 150, 221, 240.

19 Translation in Walter L. Strauss, *The Complete Drawings of Albrecht Dürer*, New York 1974, Vol. 4, p. 2342.

20 John Rowlands, *Drawings by German Artists and Artists from German-Speaking Regions of Europe in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, London 1993, p. 110–111.

21 Günter Gall, «Albrecht Dürer: 'also sol der schuch ausgischnitten werden' Anmerkungen zu einer Zeichnung», in: *Festschrift für Peter Wilhelm Meister*, edited by Annaliese Ohm and Horst Reber, Hamburg 1975, p. 173–186.

22 Strauss 1974 (as note 19), Vol. 5, p. 2502–06.

23 In this we might consider them to be object-equivalents of Barthes' photographic punctum. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, New York 1981.

Philipp Zitzlsperger

Zur Wirklichkeit der Dinge im Bild.

Frühneuzeitliche Differenzen zwischen Alltag und Darstellung¹

Mit Nachdruck und Tiefenschärfe haben Kunsthistoriker versucht, der «Sprache der Dinge» in gegenständlichen Bilddarstellungen auf den Grund zu gehen und zu bestimmen. Leitende Frage war, inwieweit dargestellte Dinge einer Alltagsrealität gerecht werden, diese repräsentieren oder symbolisch deuten. Und immer wieder musste konstatiert werden, dass die Realitätsnähe von Darstellungen einer materiellen Kultur kaum zu greifen ist, dass die «Sprache der Dinge» zwischen Realismus und Scheinrealismus oszilliert, die Sprachmetapher mitnichten greift. Panofsky sah hinter den Dingen veristischer Darstellungen der Frühen Niederländer einen «disguised symbolism». Gegen die daraus erwachsene, hypostasierende Rätselbild-Ikonologie wandte sich bereits Johan Huizinga ebenso wie mit Svetlana Alpers *Art of Describing* (1983) die Dingwelt der bildenden Kunst wieder auf ein Wahrheitsniveau zurückgeführt wurde, das für die nordalpin-holländische Kunst den beschreibenden über den erzählenden Sinn bildlicher Darstellungen stellte.² Im Folgenden ist keine Dichotomie von Erzählung und Beschreibung aufzumachen. Vielmehr soll die Kritik an einer logozentristischen Ikonologie aufgegriffen und ein hermeneutischer Zugang zu Dingdarstellungen erprobt werden, um zu zeigen, dass sich die Bedeutung von Dingen in Bildern nicht allein über textliche und programmatische Fixierung erschließt. Auch wenn in der Frühneuzeit bestimmte Dinge nicht Gegenstand humanistisch gelehrter oder theologischer Diskurse waren, können sie dennoch symbolische Sinnstiftung beanspruchen. Gleichgültig ob südlich oder nördlich der Alpen – die symbolische Bedeutung der Dinge kann sich in ihrer Bildwelt selbst erschließen und Wirklichkeiten generieren, die einer textlichen Reflexion zeitlich voraus sind.³

Die folgenden Beispiele fokussieren methodisch die Kleiderwelt in Bildern als Teilmenge der Dingwelt. Exemplarisch werden zwei Bildgattungen herangezogen: das autonome Porträt der deutschen Renaissance und das zeitgleiche Historienbild. Ziel ist es zu zeigen, dass einerseits zeitgenössische Quellen (Traktate, Gesetze, Emblematis etc.) die Kleidung als Zeichen verstehen, über ihre Symbolik jedoch nicht aufklären.⁴ Andererseits aber liefert gerade das autonome Porträt wegen seiner reduzierten, handlungslosen Menschendarstellung ein erstes Deutungsmuster, das in einem zweiten Schritt den spezifischen Einsatz der Kleidung als Insignie im Historienbild offenbart, der – wie zu zeigen ist – eine eklatante Differenz von Bild- und Alltagsrealität offenbart, die eine Bedeutungsmetamorphose bedingt. Aus der Differenz zwischen Alltag und Bild den Wandel der symbolischen Bedeutung zu filtern, ist in einem dritten Schritt der exemplarische Weg zu einer «Ding-Ikonologie». Sie ist auf den quantitativen Vergleich der Bilder angewiesen.

Dürers Bildnis des Hieronymus Holzschuher (1526) zeigt den 57-jährigen im beengten Büstenausschnitt, mit schütterem, weißem Haupthaar und Vollbart im