

PRINT QUARTERLY

SEPTEMBER 2025



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A Portrait of Israhel and Ida van Meckenem

Carolyn Yerkes

Israhel van Meckenem's double portrait with his wife, Ida, is the first known instance of a signed, engraved self-portrait in the history of art (fig. 201). Although that truth is universally acknowledged, so too is a contradictory one: this late fifteenth-century artist was no great innovator. In *Print Quarterly* over twenty years ago, Fritz Koreny described the famous print as an idea that Israhel (c. 1445–1503) never could have

had himself, voicing a sublimated chagrin that runs throughout the literature on the engraver.¹ The double portrait is unique within early western printmaking and distinct from the rest of Israhel's giant corpus of prints, most of which are copies after or reworkings of prints by other artists. Art history has ensnared this appealing work in a conundrum: the artist best known as a rote technician somehow produced the most

This article is dedicated to Bridget Alsdorf, whose work on double portraits of married couples inspired it. I thank Marisa Bass, Susan Dackerman, Yaacob Dweck, Armin Kunz and Peter Parshall for reading drafts, and Martin Sonnabend and

James Wehn for insightful conversations.

1. F. Koreny, 'Review: Israhel van Meckenem', *Print Quarterly*, XVIII, 2001, p. 469.



201. Israhel van Meckenem, *Portrait of Israhel and Ida van Meckenem*, c. 1490–1500, engraving, sheet 132 x 178 mm (London, British Museum).

astonishingly personal print of the era.

First and foremost, Israhel and Ida's double portrait is a statement of identity unprecedented in European printmaking. With this work, the couple leaps out from the anonymity that still shrouds most fifteenth-century printmakers, who are usually referred to by invented monikers, or *Notnamen* such as Master of the Playing Cards or, toward the end of the fifteenth century, by their monograms. In tying names to faces, the print identifies its subjects and also humanizes them, presenting them as a pair of people who have a relationship. Israhel's portrait with Ida is unprecedented in other ways too: it is the first engraved and the first signed, engraved portrait of an artist's wife.² All of its firsts are related to the others, a concatenation that allows us to understand the print within the context of Israhel's other work. Israhel van Meckenem was the savviest print entrepreneur of his time. The portrait of his marriage demonstrates his keen sense of audience and the traditions of workshop practice across several media, including painting and manuscript illumination in addition to bookmaking and printing. Revisiting the print with these traditions in mind allows a new interpretation of it to emerge. The engraving constitutes an experiment in the expression of personal, artistic, legal and above all commercial identity.

Unlike most printmakers of his generation, Israhel van Meckenem never signed his prints in a set way. He occasionally used inscriptions to tell his audience about himself, and his varying forms of monogram and signature sometimes provide snippets of biographical information. His large engraving of a bearded man wearing a turban includes the words 'Israhel Van Meckenem Goltsmit' at the bottom, the letters of the name trailing off into calligraphic flourishes that echo the beard's curling tendrils (fig. 202). The man appears to be not a specific person but rather a type – the artist's version of a foreigner from the east, similar to the drawings and prints of

turbaned men made by his contemporary Martin Schongauer (c. 1450–91). Scholarship divides over the question of whether the print is a self-portrait or a depiction of an Ottoman. One does not preclude the other. Israhel may have experimented here with another new type of monumental image: the portrait of the artist as a foreigner. Israhel was from Bocholt in the lower Rhine, near the modern border between the Netherlands and Germany, and he engraved that city's name on many of his copperplates. A drawing of his tomb marker indicates that he died in 1503; stylistically, the double portrait is thought to date to late in his career.³

Israhel described himself as a goldsmith and documents confirm that he worked as one, receiving commissions for a monstrance and repairs to church furnishings. These projects do not seem to have constituted a large part of his business, however, while as a printmaker and publisher his productivity was unmatched. During the second half of the sixteenth century, Israhel produced over six hundred engravings, only about a quarter of which are thought to be his original designs.⁴ The rest he copied from his predecessors and contemporaries, including Martin Schongauer, the Monogrammist PW (active c. 1490/1510), and Master ES (active c. 1450–67); Israhel may have trained with the last. His practice of copying other artists' prints – and, in the case of Master ES, pulling new impressions from their copperplates after replacing their monograms with his own – is one of the primary reasons that his double portrait comes as a surprise. Clearly, an assertive claim to being a printmaker in his own right must have felt like a necessary step to take.

Historians have done their best to extinguish the portrait's distinctive warmth with recourse to precedents. Israhel could find the formal template for such a double portrait in paintings, because the genre was evidently well-established.⁵ Even if we accept that Israhel saw painted marriage portraits, the singular

2. A. Shestack, *Fifteenth Century Engravings of Northern Europe*, Washington, DC, 1967, unpaginated, under no. 244; D. G. Scillia, 'Israhel van Meckenem's Marriage à la Mode: The Alltagsleben', in *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays toward a Cultural Anthropology*, edited by E. E. DuBruck, Lewiston, NY, 1989, p. 208.

3. British Museum, E.1.159. J. R. Wehn, 'Inventing the Market: Authenticity, Replication, and the Prints of Israhel van Meckenem', PhD thesis, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, 2019, pp. 126–30 and *Art of Enterprise: Israhel van Meckenem's 15th-Century Print Workshop*, Madison, WI, 2023, p. 9. M. Sonnabend, *Vor Dürer: Kupferstich wird Kunst, deutsche und niederländische Kupferstiche des 15. Jahrhunderts aus der Graphischen Sammlung des Städel Museums*, Dresden and Frankfurt am Main,

2022, pp. 26–27; *Israhel van Meckenem (um 1440/45–1503)*, edited by C. Metzger and L. Behling, Munich, 2006, pp. 28–31, with earlier literature.

4. M. Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog der deutschen, niederländischen und französischen Kupferstiche im XV. Jahrhundert*, ix, *Israhel von Meckenem*, Vienna, 1908–34; F. Koreny and J. C. Hutchinson, *The Illustrated Bartsch: Early German Artists*, ix [vi/ii], *Israhel van Meckenem*, edited by W. Strauss, New York, 1981; F. Koreny, *German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts 1400–1700: Israhel van Meckenem*, xxiv–xxiva, edited by T. Falk, Blaricum, 1986.

5. For a review of the genre, M. Bournet-Bacot, *Le portrait de couple en Allemagne à la Renaissance: d'un genre au genre*, Rennes, 2014.



202. Israhel van Meckenem, *Head of an Elderly Man with a Long Beard and Turban*, c. 1475–1500, engraving, 195 x 124 mm (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

fact of his achievement remains undiminished and, to this day, largely unexamined. What is unique about the double portrait of Israhel and Ida is the fact that it was printed. A painted portrait and a printed one belong to two separate categories; the dividing line between them is the assumption of a public. The

painted double portrait is a storied genre with roots in antiquity and an intimate audience, centred around a family. The printed double portrait is not a genre at all: in fact, there are no other prints like that of Israhel and Ida until the seventeenth century. The most important question to ask about the engraving,

then, may not be why the couple printed it, but rather why no other printmakers after them, including Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), followed their lead.⁶

The impetus for Israhel's decision to print the double portrait can be understood as a dimension of the only form of genius ever conceded to him: his business acumen. Peter Parshall effectively rehabilitated the artist by enumerating his commercial inventions, demonstrating that Israhel's signal contribution to the history of the medium was his ability to imagine new types of prints that people wanted to own.⁷ Israhel considered how to choose appealing subjects and package them in identifiable ways for maximum saleability. One measure of his success is reputation. In 1505, Jacob van Wimpeling cited Israhel alongside Schongauer and Dürer as an artist whose prints were highly sought after, a note that emphasizes others' desire for possession.⁸

Bulk production is another measure. Israhel was responsible for around fifteen percent of all engravings that survive from before 1500. That his double portrait might be understood as a commercial invention has been suggested before.⁹ What remains to be seen, however, is *why* a printed self-portrait would have advanced his business, especially if that business was not based on individuality, but on replication. It is not obvious that anyone would have cared what a printmaker and his wife looked like, yet the print implies that Israhel and Ida thought that someone might. The portrait engraving identifies the pair with images, names and a symbol. Israhel's and Ida's names are written below the line that circumscribes the picture of them: *Figuracio Facierum Israhelis et Idae uxoris* (description of the faces of Israhel and his wife Ida). The words provide a written answer to the question: who are these people in the picture? In a circular way, the image answers the question posed by the text: who are Israhel and Ida? Today we might ask a different question altogether: who wanted to know?

The third part of this equation, which provides a possible solution, is the symbol that comes after the words, the three-letter monogram IVM. The monogram is another iteration of Israhel's

signature, a stamp of authorship borrowed from the metalworking trades, in which guilds controlled artisanal production with registration marks. The earliest engravers of prints adopted this stamping practice as their own, as many of them already were goldsmiths. Israhel sometimes marked his prints with only IM or IVM; other times he used versions of his name, as in the long form he used for the head of the bearded man, or a shorter form, *Israhel*, or *Israhel V M*. Most intriguingly, he made his name the subject of an entire print, the *Ornamental Panel with the Engraver's Name*, weaving the letters of *Israhel V M* into a tapestry of leaves and branches (fig. 203).¹⁰ The print of Israhel's name, semi-disguised in a virtuosic design, would have made an effective advertisement for the goldsmith, especially because precious metalwork often incorporated embedded inscriptions. Israhel varied his signature throughout his career, denying a teleology that begins in anonymity, moves through the purgatory of the monogram and finally has the artist emerge into the full-fledged light of selfhood, expressed in his name.

In this context, the double portrait of Israhel and Ida is another trial in a series of experiments, a new entry in the indeterminate category of how to identify oneself as an artist in public. It is easy to think of the picture of husband and wife as the subject of the portrait print, with the names and monogram that follow as metadata attached to them. In that hierarchy, the image comes first, then text, then finally the symbol, each step a reduction or consolidation of the previous one. Given the sense of creative and commercial possibility that Israhel found in his own signature, however, this hierarchy does not make sense. Each form of identification is equal and differentiated by its specific function. The likeness is the image, the inscription identifies the image and the monogram identifies the image's maker.

A crucial dimension of Israhel and Ida's identity as established in the print is the fact of their marriage. The double portrait refers to that legal status in explicit language (*eius uxoris*, 'his wife') and visually emphasizes their coupledness. This lovely picture may

6. See similar point made by N. Orenstein in her review of Wehn, 2023, op. cit., in *Renaissance Studies*, xxxviii, no. 5, 2024, pp. 752–53.

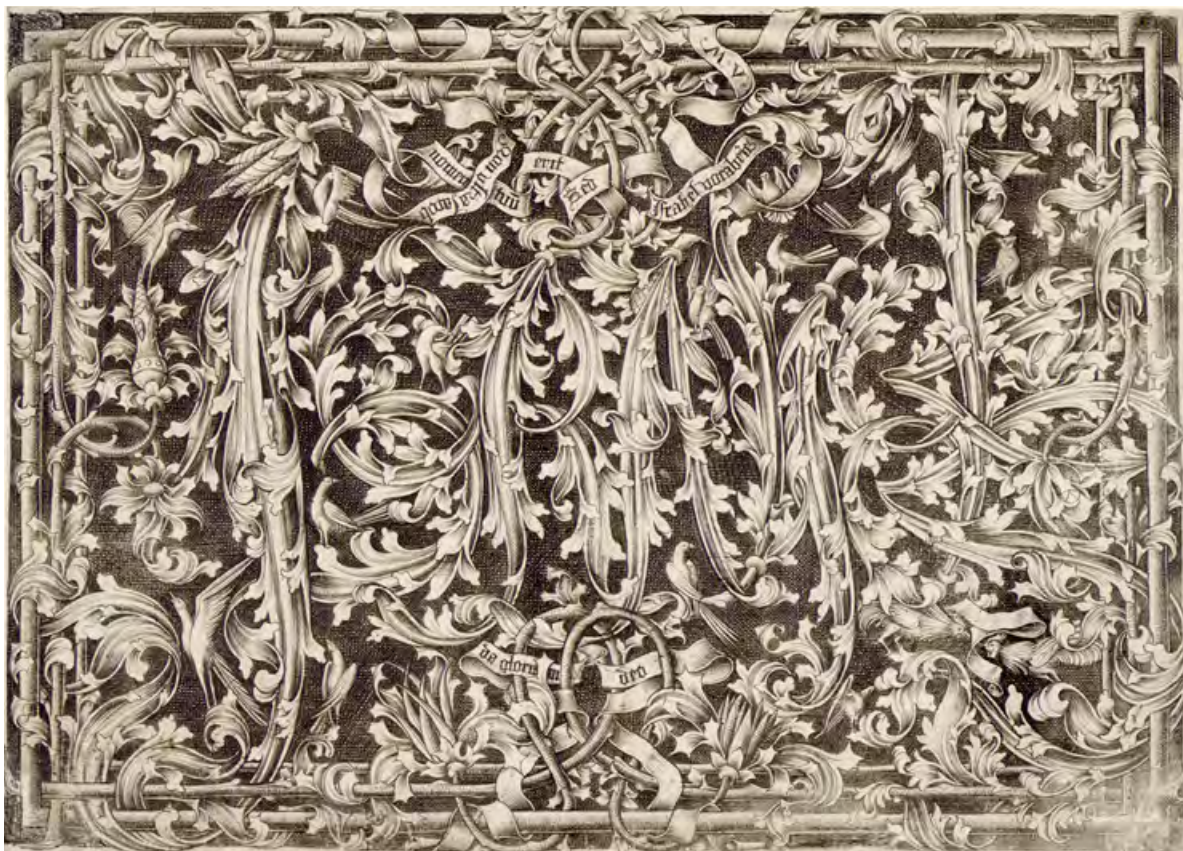
7. P. Parshall, 'Israhel van Meckenem: Entrepreneurial Printmaker and Pirate', in D. Landau and P. Parshall, *The Renaissance Print: 1470–1550*, New Haven and London, 1994, pp. 56–63.

8. Jacob Wimpeling, *Epitoma rerum Germanicarum*, cap. 68, *De Pictura et Plastica*, 1501: 'Icones Israelis Alemanni per

universam Europam desiderantur, habenturque a pictoribus in summo precio'; extracted in P. Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries*, Princeton, NJ, 1960, p. 857.

9. S. Foister, *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, London, 2008, p. 184.

10. Wehn, 2023, op. cit., pp. 26–27; P. Pieper, 'Das Namensornament über ein Ornamentblatt Israhel van Meckenem', *Unser Bocholt*, xiv, 1963, pp. 2–4.



203. Israhel van Meckenem, *Ornamental Panel with the Engraver's Name*, c. 1475–1500, engraving, sheet 190 x 268 mm (Vienna, Albertina Museum).

thus have a more practical function: Israhel and Ida may have intended the print to accentuate her place in the family business. In almost all guilds, apprentices and journeymen were expected to be unmarried, and masters were expected to be married. These requirements usually were taken for granted, although sometimes codified in formal regulations.¹¹ Israhel's enormous output has prompted some historians to ponder whether and how Ida may have helped him in his work.¹² Although no documents help pin down her

specific contribution, enough is known about women in artisanal industries that we can assume she made one.

Ida's participation in the printmaking trade would have been circumscribed in specific ways, but could have been substantial nonetheless. Goldsmith guilds, to which Israhel may have belonged, never admitted women to their ranks.¹³ As long as her husband was alive, Ida could not have worked independently in the trade, nor would she have run or owned a metalworking business under her own name. She could have directed

11. C. Schleif, 'The Many Wives of Adam Kraft: Early Modern Workshop Wives in Legal Documents, Art-Historical Scholarship, and Historical Fiction', in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by J. L. Carroll and A. G. Stewart, Burlington, VT, 2003, p. 203; S. Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis*, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2019, pp. 107–08.

12. D. Scillia, 'Dressing the Part: Costume in Israhel van Meckenem's Secular Imagery', in *Sacred and Secular: Israhel*

van Meckenem & Early German Engraving, edited by A. Nakada, T. Iizuka and M. Jingaoka, Tokyo, 2016, p. 256; A. von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon*, III, Vienna and Leipzig, 1911, pp. 115–24.

13. M. C. Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*, Chicago, 1986, p. 137; see also A. Schmidt, 'Women and Guilds: Corporations and Female Labour Market Participation in Early Modern Holland', *Gender & History*, XXI, 2009, pp. 170–89.

the shop, managed the accounts, sold the prints, or even helped make them. Israhel and Ida had no sons, and thus as Israhel's widow, Ida could have retained the right to inherit her husband's property, which in this case would have included his tools, equipment, and, most importantly, his copperplates.

Israhel, who took ownership of Master ES's copperplates and reprinted them under his own sign, would have understood that the transfer of this property was the single greatest factor in the survival and continuity of a successful printmaking business. The high number of state changes that we find across Israhel's own copperplates, along with evidence that many of them were re-engraved to strengthen lines weakened from use, suggests that the copperplates were long in circulation, perhaps well beyond his own lifetime. We do not know when Ida died, which leaves open the possibility that she and her husband planned for a future in which she would steer the ship on her own, as Dürer's wife Agnes would run the workshop after his death.

In a commercial landscape where marriage was an expected part of a printmaker's identity, the engraved double portrait would have enhanced their reputation as qualified printmakers. Prints were not legal documents, and the presentation of Ida as Israhel's wife in one of them was probably not sufficient to convince a guild to break a trade rule and let her stand as his substitute. Although the conventional sinister-dexter arrangement has been retained in the portrait, the engraved image of Israhel and Ida does depict them in one form of equilibrium. They sit in front of an ornamented background panel that evokes a cloth of honour, its dense cross-hatching providing a strong contrast for their sparsely modelled faces.¹⁴ One senses that they correspond to each other, and in a way, reflect each other. That doubleness is the print's subject, not specificities of facial features.

In the same way that Israhel and Ida's printed faces established their marriage as an essential aspect of their identity, so too do the print's inscriptions concern their audience as much as their author. The extraordinarily various forms of his signature often correlate to the differing traditions and guild

regulations of the media he adapted to his own relatively new art form. Categorizing Israhel's names and monograms as integrated, independent or expendable upends certain expectations about what he meant to convey when he applied them to a copperplate. Signature placement does not necessarily correspond to a sense of authorship, because Israhel was as likely to plant his name or monogram prominently on a copy after Dürer or Schongauer as he was to sign his own inventions. In this sense the signature is an appropriation as well as an identification. The large signature on the *Bearded Man* might be read as a prideful gesture, but the converse does not hold: a small monogram outside a frame line does not indicate a reluctance to claim credit for his work. The smaller the monogram or signature, and the farther it sits from the principal image, the easier it is to trim off completely. This ease of elimination is intentional, because Israhel's smaller engravings were designed to be cut out and pasted into printed books or manuscripts as illustrations and decorations.¹⁵ His sheets of roundels depicting biblical subjects could be used precisely this way, as was one impression of his engraving of St Barbara that was trimmed from its original sheet of six roundels and pasted into a Flemish book of hours (fig. 204).¹⁶

Although Israhel identified himself as a goldsmith, with these smaller engravings he effectively worked in the manner of a manuscript illuminator, although printed rather than painted images were his saleable product. The case of the Bruges guilds, discussed by James Douglas Farquhar, suggests the bearing that this profession had on Israhel's printed work and on how he presented his own identity.¹⁷ For illuminators, the format and medium of the work for sale determined the legal regulations governing how the work could be sold. Signatures and registration marks like monograms established compliance.

In fifteenth-century Bruges – Farquhar, whose study is paraphrased here, focused on documents from the period 1426 to 1500 – manuscript illuminators were essentially 'painters whose living came from the book trade', and that legally nebulous situation required them to be members in both the painters'

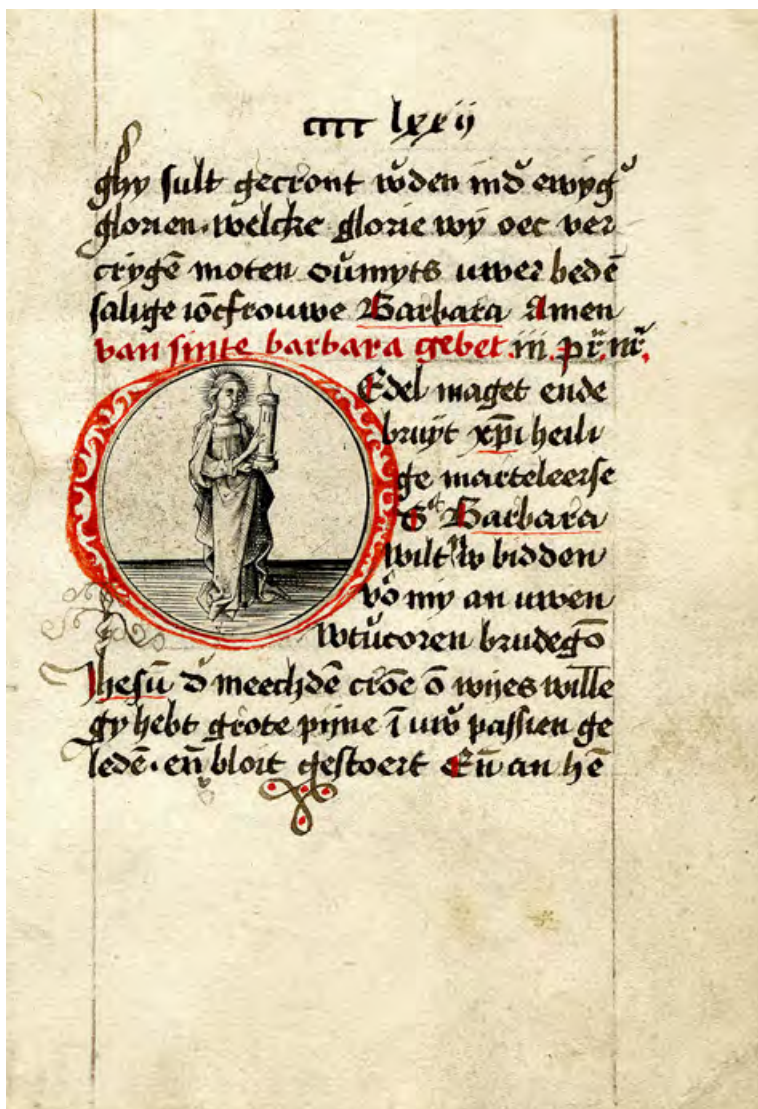
14. S. Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, New York, 2008, p. 280.

15. On this practice see P. Schmidt, *Gedruckte Bilder in handgeschriebenen Büchern: zum Gebrauch von Druckgraphik im 15. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, 2003. Also K. Rudy, 'L'interface entre l'imprimé et le manuscrit', in *Les origines de l'estampe en Europe du Nord 1400–1470*, edited by S. Lepape and K. Rudy, Paris, 2013–14, pp. 133–36, and *Image, Knife, and Gluepot: Early Assemblage in Manuscript and Print*, Cambridge, UK, 2019, pp. 39–47; for

reviews see R. Schoch, *Print Quarterly*, xxxii, 2015, pp. 233–35, and D. Areford, *Print Quarterly*, xxxviii, 2021, pp. 455–59.

16. Rudy, 2019, op. cit., pp. 16, 39–47, 293–300.

17. J. D. Farquhar, 'Identity in an Anonymous Age: Bruges Manuscript Illuminators and their Signs', *Viator*, xi, 1980, pp. 371–84. Farquhar built on the discoveries of W. J. Weale, 'Documents inédits sur les enlumineurs de Bruges', *Le Beffroi*, ii, 1864–65, pp. 298–319.



204. Israhel van Meckenem, *St Barbara*, c. 1480–90, engraving, pasted into a detached page from a Flemish book of hours, ink on paper, sheet 144 x 104 mm (London, British Museum).

Guild of St Luke and the bookmakers' Guild of St John the Evangelist.¹⁸ A compromise that protected the interests of both guilds required the manuscript painters to sign their works, register those signs with the Guild of St Luke and pay that guild a fee. A problem arose when the bookmakers began to purchase single-sheet manuscript leaves produced in other cities and to sell them in Bruges, both singly and within books. Bruges manuscript illuminators, who

had paid for the protection of their trade, smarted from the loss of business. Tight regulations were put in place on painted single leaves, requiring anyone producing them to sign their work and to bring that sign to the Guild of St Luke for registration.¹⁹ The painters guild collected fines for infractions, leading to suits, and in 1457 the regulations were further tightened to ban the sale of single-leaf illuminations – as distinguished from illuminated books – made

18. Farquhar, op. cit., p. 372.

19. Ibid., p. 373.



205. Derick Baegert, *St Luke Painting the Virgin*, c. 1485–90, oil on panel, 1,130 x 820 mm (Münster, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur).

outside the city.²⁰ Their guild register from 1501 includes the page on which illuminators based outside Bruges signed their names together with their registration marks, allowing them to sell single-leaf illuminations within the city.²¹

Although Israhel has no direct connection to Bruges, the well-documented circumstances there provide necessary context to interpret his use of monograms and signatures as well as an instructive example to help reason by analogy.²² Manuscript illumination offers the closest professional analogue to Israhel's own production of small engravings destined for books. Supplementary illustration of books is one of the earliest known functions of prints, and some of Israhel's larger print series can be found bound into books. Twelve of his engravings of the Passion were the basis for a fifteenth-century manuscript prayerbook, for example.²³

Bruges is the best-documented example of a phenomenon that occurred in other urban contexts as well: single-leaf miniatures were likely to be subject to legal rulings, rulings that were often resolved by mandatory signatures.²⁴ The medium itself was particularly susceptible to litigation not because of its content, but because its manufacture straddled two pre-existing categories of production that historically had been protected by guilds: painting and book-making. Registration marks and other forms of signature were not so much statements of authorship and originality as they were legally mandated forms of conflict resolution between two professional turfs. Israhel's prints, which could be used as supplementary illustrations for books, therefore also straddled those professions. He sold them in markets well outside his own immediate surrounds of Bocholt and he would have known that the legal circumstances of production and sale of single-sheet illustrations shifted according to territory. It is no surprise then that the monograms on his smaller engravings intended for books adhere to the traditions of their illuminated siblings.

Israhel's experiments with his signature speak to how he gauged his professional identity relative to other types of painters as well. The printmaker's



206. Israhel van Meckenem, *St Luke Painting the Virgin*, c. 1485–1500, engraving, 205 x 140 mm (Vienna, Albertina Museum).

relationship to Hans Holbein the Elder (c. 1460–1524) has been closely scrutinized, but other painters from his own Westphalian region informed his visual world, too, influencing how he identified himself. His engraving of *St Luke Painting the Virgin*, for example, was likely made with Derick Baegert's panel of the same subject as a general model (figs. 205 and 206). Baegert painted his initials *BAEG* onto the blue and white vase sitting on the windowsill, a gesture Israhel took up as a mode in other engravings, as when

20. Ibid., p. 374.

21. For synopsis with bibliography see C. de Hamel, *The Manuscripts Club: The People Behind a Thousand Years of Medieval Manuscripts*, New York, 2023, pp. 140–49.

22. Wurzbach hypothesized, without firm evidence, that Israhel's wife was Ida van der Ameye, a miniaturist active in Bruges in the third quarter of the fifteenth century; op. cit., pp. 115–24.

23. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.476. W. Melion, 'Medi-

tating the Unbearable in a Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Manuscript Prayerbook with Printed Images', in *Vernacular Books and their Readers in the Early Age of Print (c. 1450–1600)*, edited by A. Dlabáčová, A. van Leerdam and J. Thompson, Leiden and Boston, 2023, pp. 328–93.

24. J. van der Stock, *Printing Images in Antwerp: The Introduction of Printmaking in a City, Fifteenth Century to 1585*, translated by B. Jackson, Rotterdam, 1998, pp. 40–41.



207. Israhel van Meckenem, *The Beheading of John the Baptist*, c. 1475–1500, hand-coloured engraving pasted on wood, 228 x 179 mm (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

he inscribed his name into altar tables and pulpit ledges. Only by fully incorporating his signature could he avoid having it obliterated, although that

did not always work. In a hand-coloured impression of *The Beheading of John the Baptist*, pasted to a piece of wood, perhaps to simulate a panel painting, the



208. Israhel van Meckenem, *Enthroned Madonna Suckling the Child*, c. 1475–1500, engraving, sheet 112 x 82 mm (Vienna, Albertina Museum).

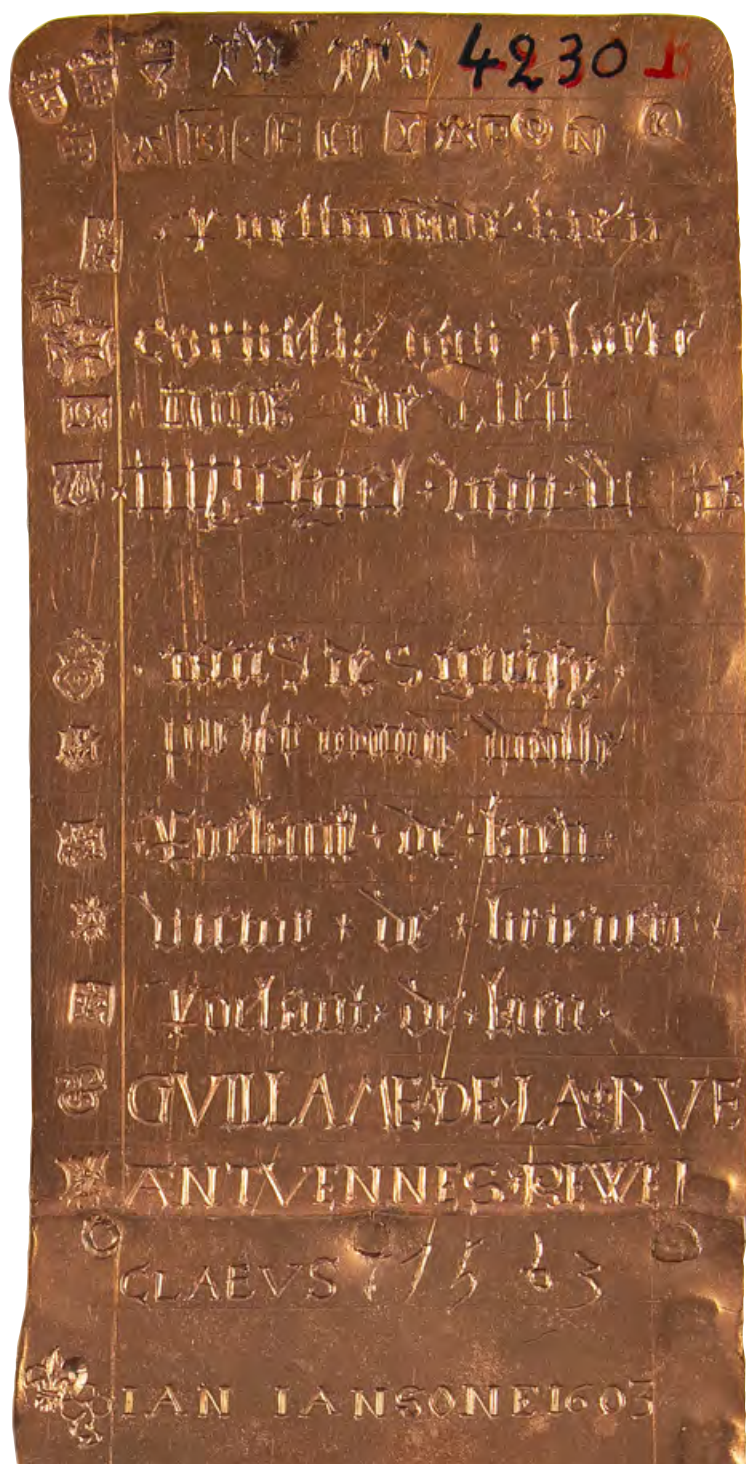
IM monogram has been completely painted over (fig. 207).²⁵ The painter presumably considered the result to be his product, not Israhel's.

Israhel used other forms of signature for prints not intended for manuscripts. He explored various ways to keep his monogram visible and integral to the image, even in smaller engravings. In the

Madonna Suckling the Child, the *I* and the *M* sit above the framing line, easily trimmable were it not for the pinnacle of the Madonna's throne rising behind the frame (fig. 208). Solutions like this one let Israhel have his monogram and keep it, too, and relate more closely to fifteenth-century panel painting than to manuscript illumination.

25. See also the impression of Israhel's *Virgin and Child Standing in a Room* in the British Museum, 1861,1109.633, discussed by

Rudy, 2019, op. cit., pp. 92–93.



209. A Registry Plate of the Silversmiths Guild of Ypres, c. 1525, copperplate, 257 x 73 mm (Brussels, Royal Museums of Art and History).

A final aspect of the Bruges case relevant to Israhel and his work is the page of the Guild of St Luke register book from 1501. This page is the physical record of single-leaf illuminators who appeared in person to write their names and add their identifying signs, with the intention of selling their wares within a city where they were not citizens. Logs like these also exist for smiths, who registered their stamps with their guilds, as in the example of the copper registry plate of the silversmiths guild of Ypres (fig. 209).²⁶ Here again we have a relationship of three parts: the person, the name and the sign. Each part is an answer to the same question, posed by the guild: who are these artists who seek to sell their wares? Israhel and Ida's printed double portrait could have been their way of answering that question, substituting for them in cities where they could not appear to register themselves. At the very least, the practice of registration might have inspired them to make it.

Israhel developed new forms of prints that subsumed the functions of older media. His illustrated indulgences substituted for manuscripts, his smaller engravings replaced illuminated miniatures, his packets of print sets worked like sets of illuminations to decorate books, and hand-coloured versions of his larger prints simulated panel paintings. In each case, he adapted his signature according to the conventions of the form, establishing his identity through the standards of the preceding medium. The double portrait may have had a similar function, in which the engraving identifies Israhel and Ida, their names and their mark, in lieu of their presence.

One lingering question remains, which is why no printmakers after Israhel followed his lead and made a printed double portrait as a statement of their own identity. If his print was meant to serve so many functions, helping to establish Ida's role in the business, underscoring her right to inherit property, enhancing

their reputations and possibly providing a registration for them in distant markets, then it seems strange that no one else made anything similar. Plenty of wives, from Agnes Dürer (1475–1539) to Volcxk-Diericx (c. 1525–1600), took over their husband's print workshops, and they apparently saw no need for anything like this to do it. Israhel and Ida were the first to make a printed double portrait and they were the last.

If the printed double portrait had been only a statement of love and pride, it might have taken hold and become a well-established genre as the painted marriage portrait already had. There was every possibility that it might do so, at a time when the close-up biblical narrative format was coming into its own. Yet the print was something else entirely, an innovation on the brink of its own obsolescence. In the double portrait, Israhel merged the older practice of signing one's work for purposes of quality control with a new ambition: to stake out his own originality and with that, his artistic identity. The latter imperative was much of its historical moment, in which artists made new claims to selfhood across painting, sculpture and architecture. After Israhel, other printmakers would continue to use the signature as an assertion of individual reputation, while the idea of the signature as a registration mark gradually fell away, like many other medieval traditions inherited from the guilds. For Dürer, who transformed the print into a modern medium, a signature had a single and definite function. Although he was obsessed with his self-image, save for possible exceptions of crypto-portraiture, he never etched or engraved it.²⁷ As the author and publisher of his work, operating without a guild, Dürer did not have to answer to anyone. Israhel and Ida printed their names and faces to identify themselves in public. Theirs was another experiment in establishing identity that – in this sense and in this sense only – failed.

26. See the plate of the St Eligius' Guild of Goldsmiths at the Bijloke Museum, Ghent, 'engraved with the names and housemarks of the sixty-five goldsmiths active in Ghent between 1454 and 1481', per U. Weekes, *Early Engravers and their Public: The Master*

of the Berlin Passion and Manuscripts from Convents in the Rhine-Maas Region, ca. 1450–1500, London, 2004, p. 29.

27. M. B. Cohn, 'Albrecht Dürer as St George: A Proposal', *Print Quarterly*, XL, 2023, pp. 170–74.



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