

Here I am, in the middle of the still empty room under the groin vault. My eyes are drawn to the arched ribs. The keystone is adorned with the coat of arms of the Vijd family and that of my wife Elisabeth Borluut's family. The light entering through the stained-glass windows casts vivid colours onto the floor. As I'm standing in the light, I realise my shadow alters the colour pattern. I wish I could leave my shadow here as a trace of my existence for the centuries to come. I have commissioned this chapel, it was built thanks to my efforts and will, my grief and powerlessness. The Vijd chapel belongs to Elisabeth and me.

A few streets down, the shutters of the painter's studio are open. While a breeze is blowing up the dust and pigments, Jan Van Eyck is probably standing straddle-legged in front of one of the altarpiece's panels. The altarpiece is intended for Elisabeth and me. With his squirrel hair brush, he carefully applies strokes to the underlying layer of paint so as to paint the most minute details and the most delicate reflections of light. The altarpiece is intended to prove that I have made good use of the time God has given me. It should demonstrate that Elisabeth and I have always lived with the afterlife in mind.

I will soon leave the church of St John through the nave and enter the hustle and bustle of the city. Via the Belfry, I will walk to the harbour where my father showed me the way in the maze of bureaucrats, merchants and bargees. I have become fused with Ghent. I am an alderman of this city. I know I will leave something meaningful behind for my city ... Jan van Eyck and I have one thing in common: we do not want to be forgotten after our death.

I, Joos Vijd