

Before the Renaissance, art did not have the same purpose and meaning it has today. In those days, art was not considered an individual expression but a means to represent religious symbols and stories. Until the end of the Middle Ages, artists such as sculptors, painters and woodcarvers were regarded as a special elite among artisans. Their works of art, such as sculptures or ceiling paintings, were usually commissioned by the church authorities or wealthy families. Contrary to today, signing a work of art to confirm the individual authorship was unusual in those days.

However, Jan van Eyck personifies the transition of the painter from an anonymous and modest craftsman to a self-confident, learned and famous individual. Jan van Eyck's dated signature can be seen in nine works, either on the frame or hidden in the painting. Some frames also feature his motto 'Als ich can', which means 'as I can'. These elements reveal Jan van Eyck's proud and self-confident attitude, which would characterise future Renaissance artists.

The quatrain on the frame of the Ghent Altarpiece

Jan Van Eyck provided us with countless details, not just in the panels but also on the frames. When the frames of the outer panels were cleaned in 1823, a quatrain or inscription of four lines was discovered. And Jan Van Eyck would not be Jan Van Eyck if he did not give it a special twist. Several letters have been marked in the last line.



The quatrain roughly translates as:

Hubert van Eyck, the greatest painter ever, started work on the painting. His brother Jan, second best in the art, completed this difficult task at the request

of Joos Vijd. By means of this verse, he invites you to behold the work on 6 May [1432].

How to write a quatrain

A **quatrain** is a stanza or poem of four lines with two rhymes. The word comes from French 'quatre' (four). The rhyme scheme is usually A-A-B-B, but A-B-A-B and other schemes are possible as well.

Example:

My cat is nice.
My cat likes mice.
My cat is fat.
I like my cat.

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Write a quatrain about a wish of yours, for instance.
Other subjects are of course possible too: you can write a quatrain about an animal, trade, something you are interested in ...