

# **THE AMBASSADORS PART 2.**

**HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER  
(c.1497-1543)**



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- **Lesson 4**
- **The Ambassadors**  
**by Hans Holbein**

Holbein the Younger, H. (1533). *Ambassadors* [Painting]. National Gallery, London, UK. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ambassadors\\_\(Holbein\)#/media/File:Hans\\_Holbein\\_the\\_Younger\\_-\\_The\\_Ambassadors\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ambassadors_(Holbein)#/media/File:Hans_Holbein_the_Younger_-_The_Ambassadors_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)



## GROUP WORK – LESSON 4 - DISCUSSION TASK



- **Discuss in your group:**

1. What do you think is the object on the floor between the two men? Why is it there?
2. If you identified the object - Why do you think it is there?
3. Are you familiar with the expression: 'Memento mori'? If not, use the Internet to search the meaning and discuss it in your group.
4. Do you know any philosophies which have the meaning of the expression 'Memento mori' at the centre of their thinking?
5. What is the connection of the object in the painting to the meaning of 'Memento mori'?
6. What message the painter wanted to send to a viewer by including the object you discussed in the painting?
7. **Choose a spokesperson** (or some of you/ all of you can contribute) **for your group who will report the main points from your discussion to the whole class.**

# SYMBOLS



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# SYMBOLS

- **The most unusual element:**
- is **the strange distorted disk... ????**
- set at an angle in the foreground between the two men;



# SYMBOLS



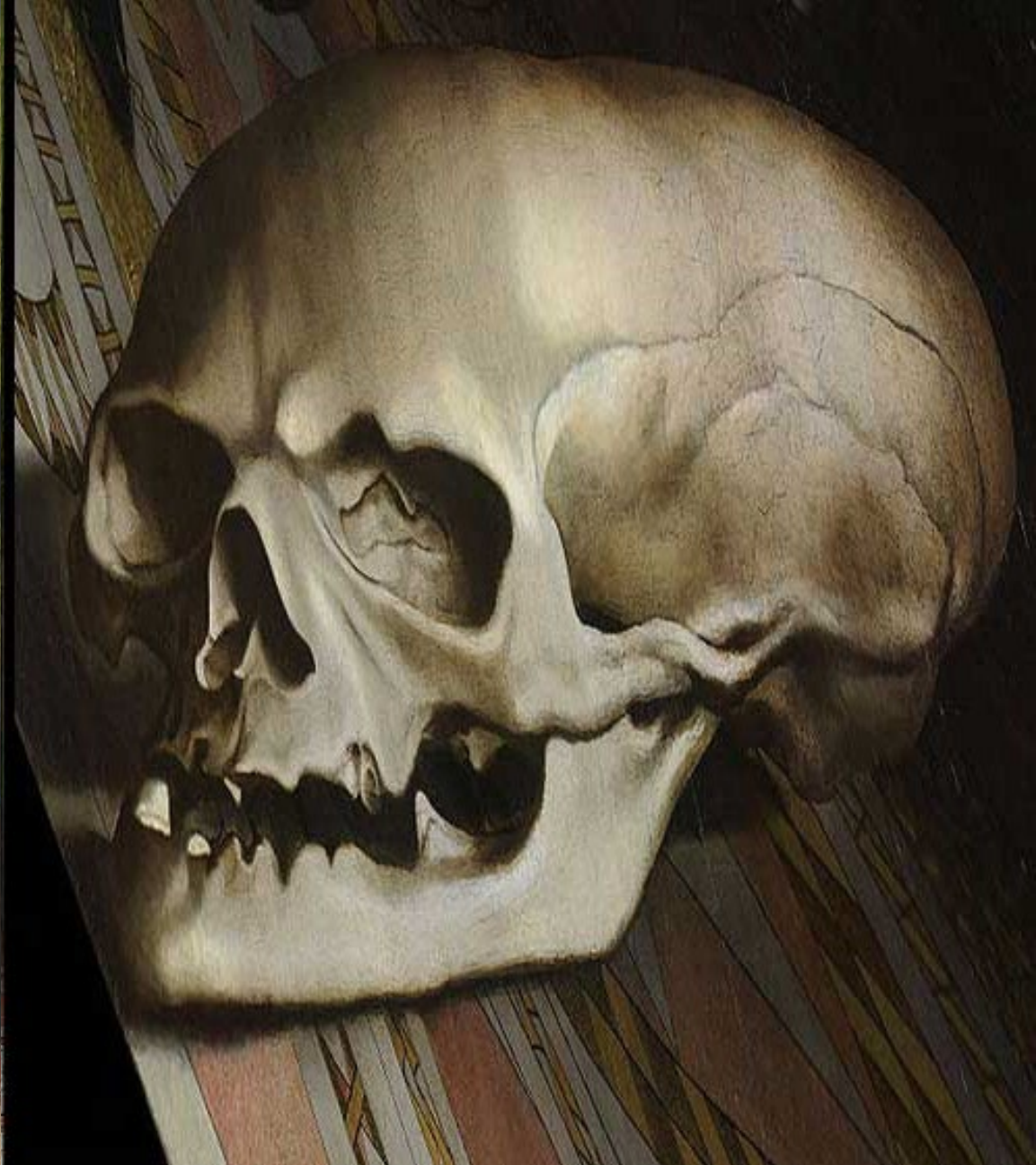
- a stretched-out skull;
- recognizable when the painting is viewed from the right.



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# SYMBOLS

- Why is it there?
- the painter may have been displaying his technical abilities by incorporating this perspective device to emphasize the transitory nature of life;
- the youth of the sitters, their wealth and status, along with the precious objects in the painting must be seen in the context to human mortality;
- more complex than it first appears;
- many, sophisticated symbols;
- it serves as a memorial to the two young ambassadors.









***“A chilling reminder that  
amidst all this wealth, power, and learning, death  
comes to us all.”***

Jeremy Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar*, 2003





# ON TECHNIQUE



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# ON TECHNIQUE

- *The Ambassadors* may have been designed to hang in a stairwell or beside a doorway so that it would be approached from the right-hand side - only from this viewpoint is the skull seen in the correct perspective;
- technique of distorting objects is known as anamorphosis;
- artists usually employed it in works of a light-hearted nature as a piece of visual trickery, intended to amuse.







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# **VISUAL TOUR - ANALYSIS**



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## VISUAL TOUR I

- **I. Jean de Dinteville**
- the French nobleman;
- wears a heavy black coat with a lynx-fur lining;
- the texture of the fur - painted in exquisite detail;
- a beautiful sheen on the pink silk beneath;



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## VISUAL TOUR I



- on de Dinteville's hat is **a skull**;
- his **personal insignia**;
- his **gold chain** bears the pendant of a high chivalric order.



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## VISUAL TOUR 2



- **2.The friend**
- Georges de Selve;
- a classical scholar and Bishop of Lavaur;
- sent to many European countries as an ambassador;
- was in London in 1533;
- the painting commemorates his stay.



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## VISUAL TOUR 3

- **3. Dagger**
- - Jean de Dinteville has his hand on **a dagger in a gold sheath;**
- - is an ornamental, ceremonial knife, rather than one designed for combat;
- - on it are embossed **the characters AET. SUAE 29;**
- - in Latin - in abbreviated form;
- - refer to de Dinteville's age;
- – **29 years.**







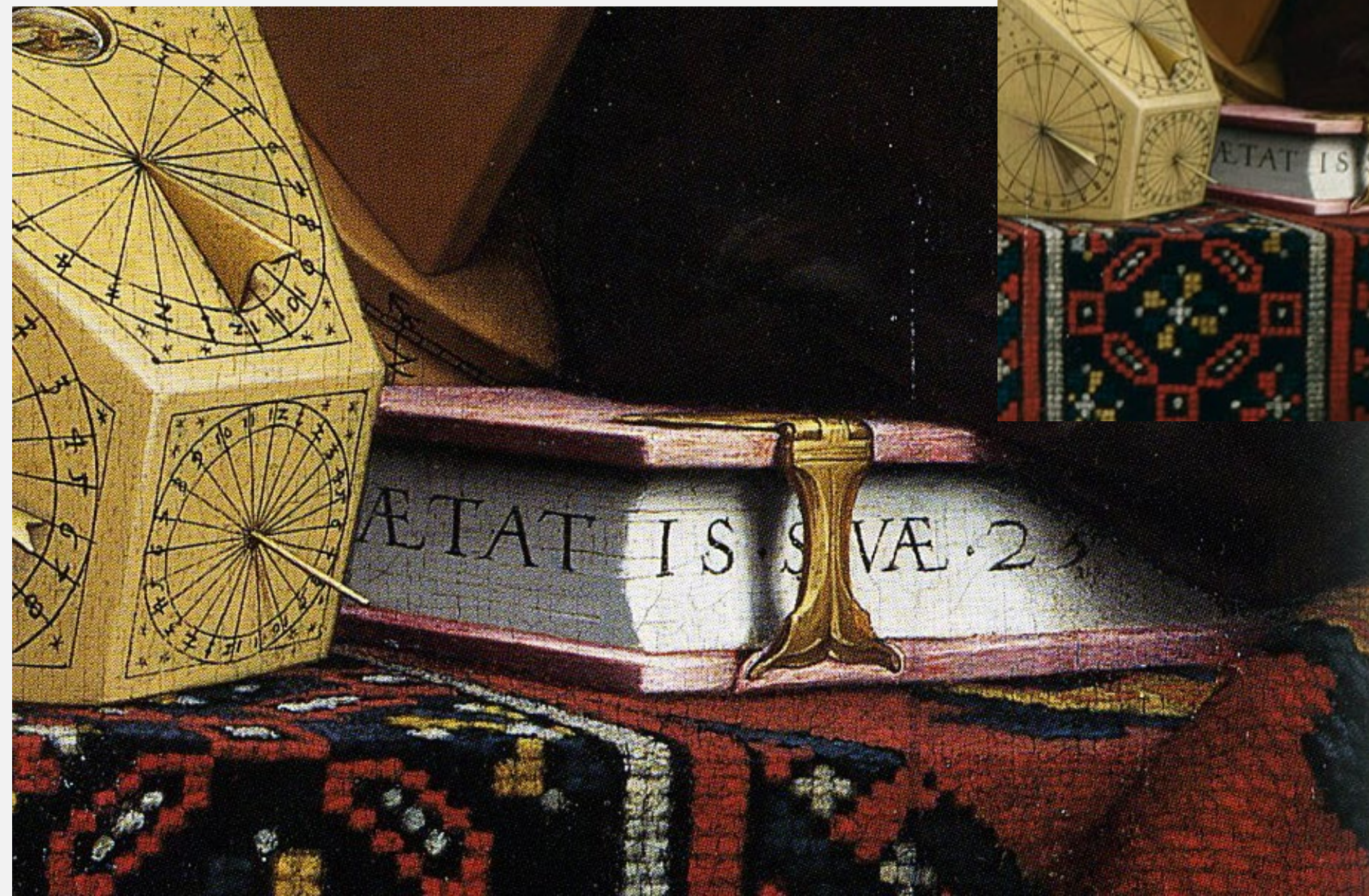


# VISUAL TOUR 4



- **4. Book**
- the Latin text written on the edges of the pages of the book under George de Selve's right arm;
- reads *AETATIS SUAE 25*;
- it tells us the sitter's age – 25;
- the book *could be a bible* - with a decorative clasp.







## VISUAL TOUR 5

- **The objects on the upper shelf:**
- are **scientific** instruments.
- **The lower shelf:**
- indicate other **intellectual and artistic** pursuits, such as music.





## VISUAL TOUR 5

- **5. Measuring instruments**
- On the top shelf - a range of instruments:
- **a sundial** for measuring the time of day and **a navigational instrument** for finding the position of stars;
- both men lived in **an age of great discovery**, when advances in the development of scientific instruments made the circumnavigation of the globe possible.
- the instruments **clearly place the painting in its historical context.**





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# VISUAL TOUR 6

- **6. Terrestrial globe**
- turned on its side - positioned to show places important to de Dinteville, under whose right hand it is positioned;
- Polisy - the name of Jean de Dinteville's chateau, is one of the few places marked on the globe;
- the painting first hung in his chateau.







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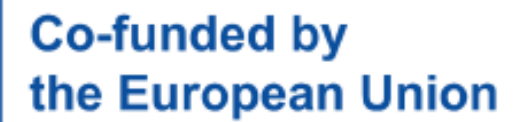


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# VISUAL TOUR 7

- **7. Celestial globe**
- **used by astronomers** to find and map the positions of stars, the moon, and the planets;
- **the stars are highlighted in gold;**
- **the patterns of the constellations** are depicted with background illustrations.







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## VISUAL TOUR 8

- **8. Maths book and T-square**
- a German **mathematics book**, published in 1527;
- on the lower shelf, complete with **T-square**;
- it signifies that **both figures are men of great intellect and broad education.**







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## VISUAL TOUR 9

- **9. Lute**
- the collection of **musically themed objects** on the lower shelf of the table;
- a lute, a Lutheran hymn book, and a set of cases for flutes;
- barely visible - **one of the lute's strings is broken** – a possible reference to the increasing discord between Catholics and Protestants;
  - the hymn book has been seen as a plea for religious harmony.













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**The  
Ambassadors  
1533**  
oil on panel;  
207 x 209,5cm;  
**National Gallery,  
London, UK;**  
**Hans Holbein  
The Younger**

**The end of analysis**



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# VIDEOS

- Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors (updated!) 6:28 + eng. subtitles
- Smarthistory. (2020, October 29). *Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors (updated!)* [Video]. YouTube. [https://youtu.be/qOvxK\\_3HEco?si=90staxm1DZz7SoJe](https://youtu.be/qOvxK_3HEco?si=90staxm1DZz7SoJe)
- Symbolism in Holbein's 'Ambassadors' | Paintings | The National Gallery, London 1:31 + eng subtitles
- The National Gallery. (2010, July 13). *Symbolism in Holbein's 'Ambassadors' / Paintings / The National Gallery London* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/ReF2O8rzpb4?si=drRt4NbP7OGXpC70>



# **FUN/ INSPIRATION**



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*My mom and sister recreate The Ambassadors by Hans Holbein the Younger [Photograph], by Ipyeh, 2019, Getty Museum Challenge, Reddit*

[https://www.reddit.com/r/GettyMuseumChallenge/comments/gapapu/my\\_mom\\_and\\_sister\\_recreate\\_the\\_ambassadors\\_by/?rdt=39543](https://www.reddit.com/r/GettyMuseumChallenge/comments/gapapu/my_mom_and_sister_recreate_the_ambassadors_by/?rdt=39543)





Holbein's Ambassadors Recomend Social Distancing [Photograph], by Walford, J., 2020, Flickr  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/walford/50145234947>



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*The Ambassadors (after  
Holbein) (Twin Portrait of  
Katie Taylor and Alanna  
Audley) Painting*

Paul MacCormaic

Ireland

Painting, Oil on Canvas

Size: 96.5 W x 104.1 H x 0.1 D cm

Maccormaic, P. (no date). *The Ambassadors (after Holbein) (Twin Portrait of Katie Taylor and Alanna Audley)* [Painting].

Ireland. <https://www.saatchiart.com/en-sk/art/Painting-The-Ambassadors-after-Holbein-Twin-Portrait-of-Katie-Taylor-and-Alanna-Audley/27024/861048/view>



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# **HOLBEIN – OTHER PAINTINGS**



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## Erasmus of Rotterdam (1533) by Hans Holbein

Holbein the Younger, H.  
(1523). *Erasmus of Rotterdam*  
[Painting]. National Gallery,  
London, UK.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Holbein\\_the\\_Younger#/media/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Holbein_the_Younger#/media/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg)





## Henry VIII – at 49 (1540) by Hans Holbein

Holbein the Younger, H.  
(1540). *Henry VIII* [Painting].  
Gallerie Nazionali d'Arte  
Antica, Palazzo Barberini,  
Rome, Italy.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/  
Hans\\_Holbein\\_the\\_Younger#/  
media/File:Enrique\\_VIII\\_de\\_I  
nglaterra,\\_por\\_Hans\\_Holbein  
\\_el\\_Joven.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Holbein_the_Younger#/media/File:Enrique_VIII_de Inglaterra,_por_Hans_Holbein_el_Joven.jpg)





# Portrait of Anne of Cleves (1539) by Hans Holbein

Holbein the Younger, H. (1539). *Anne de Clevés* [Painting]. Louvre, Paris, France.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne\\_of\\_Cleves#/media/File:Anne\\_de\\_Cl%C3%A8ves\\_-\\_Hans\\_Holbein\\_le\\_Jeune\\_-\\_Mus%C3%A9e\\_du\\_Louvre\\_Peintures\\_INV\\_1348\\_-\\_MR\\_756\\_-\\_version\\_2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_of_Cleves#/media/File:Anne_de_Cl%C3%A8ves_-_Hans_Holbein_le_Jeune_-_Mus%C3%A9e_du_Louvre_Peintures_INV_1348_-_MR_756_-_version_2.jpg)



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# Venus and Amor (1526-1528)

by Hans Holbein

Holbein the Younger, H. (1526-28). *Venus and Amor* [Painting]. Offentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel, Switzerland.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus\\_and\\_Amor#/media/File:Venus\\_with\\_Amor-Venusmaler,\\_1525.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_and_Amor#/media/File:Venus_with_Amor-Venusmaler,_1525.jpg)



**THE END**  
**Thank you for your  
attention**



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<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/northern/holbein/a/the-carpet-and-the-globe-holbeins-the-ambassadors-reframed>

Kurbalija, J. (2023, August 23; updated 2024, March 19). The Ambassadors reimaged: How Holbein's painting can inspire global AI negotiations? *Diplo*. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/the-ambassadors-reimagined-how-holbeins-painting-can-inspire-global-ai-negotiations/>

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Holbein the Younger, H. (1542-43). *Selfportrait* [Painting]. Uffizzi Gallery, Florence, Italy. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Self-Portrait\\_by\\_Hans\\_Holbein\\_d.\\_J.\\_-\\_Uffizi\\_Gallery.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Self-Portrait_by_Hans_Holbein_d._J._-_Uffizi_Gallery.jpg)

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*My mom and sister recreate The Ambassadors by Hans Holbein the Younger* [Photograph], by Ipyeh, 2019, Getty Museum Challenge, Reddit [https://www.reddit.com/r/GettyMuseumChallenge/comments/gapapu/my\\_mom\\_and\\_sister\\_recreate\\_the\\_ambassadors\\_by/?rdt=39543](https://www.reddit.com/r/GettyMuseumChallenge/comments/gapapu/my_mom_and_sister_recreate_the_ambassadors_by/?rdt=39543)



## SOURCES:

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Holbein's Ambassadors Recommend Social Distancing [Photograph], by Walford, J., 2020, Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/walford/50145234947>

Holbein the Younger, H. (1523). *Erasmus of Rotterdam* [Painting]. National Gallery, London, UK. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Holbein\\_the\\_Younger#/media/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Holbein_the_Younger#/media/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg)

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