



**Solving the Cranach Mystery...well, almost**

**A Case Study**

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**Fellow: American Institute for Conservation**

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**Web Version**

**<http://baumanconservation.com/SolvingTheCranachMystery.html>**

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# *Introduction*

The conservation of paintings can sometimes be a subject of drama and mystery. Each artwork that needs restoring carries within it, like a Chinese box, layer upon layer of meaning, sometimes obscured or distorted, and often puzzling. It is the conservator's job to understand what the master painter set down or intended.

Occasionally, discoveries are made during the treatment processes: that a painting is a fake rather than an original or, just the opposite, discovering something is authentic rather than a copy. Whole sections of paintings may be overpainted, hiding long-forgotten original intent. Only bits and pieces of information may remain after centuries of former restoration work and damage.

The latter situation occurred during the treatment of two 1537 portraits owned by the Muskegon Museum of Art in Michigan. The paintings, attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, depict Martin Luther and his wife, Katharina von Bora.

This Case Study will focus on the treatment work that led to the recovery of missing information and how, after a long pursuit, the artist's original intent was rediscovered...well, almost.

# Examination

March 12, 2013 to March 20, 2013

## *Description*

The half-length portraits of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora portray each sitter staring at a 45° angle. Martin looks to his left while Katharina stares to her right. The bearded Luther is dressed in black as Junker Jörg with his right hand on the pommel of a sword. Along the bottom of the painting, his cropped left hand is positioned just below the sword's cross-guard. The portrait is placed against a green background. It is signed and dated "1537."



*Lucas Cranach the Elder "Martin Luther"  
The Muskegon Museum of Art  
Muskegon, Michigan*



*Lucas Cranach the Elder "Katharina von Bora"  
The Muskegon Museum of Art  
Muskegon, Michigan*

Katharina is imaged against a similar green background with arms folded at her waist. Both hands are visible. She is wearing a fur-collared, floral-patterned black dress with a black-edged white blouse. Her brownish hair is drawn back under a hairnet. The undated painting is signed in the lower-right corner.



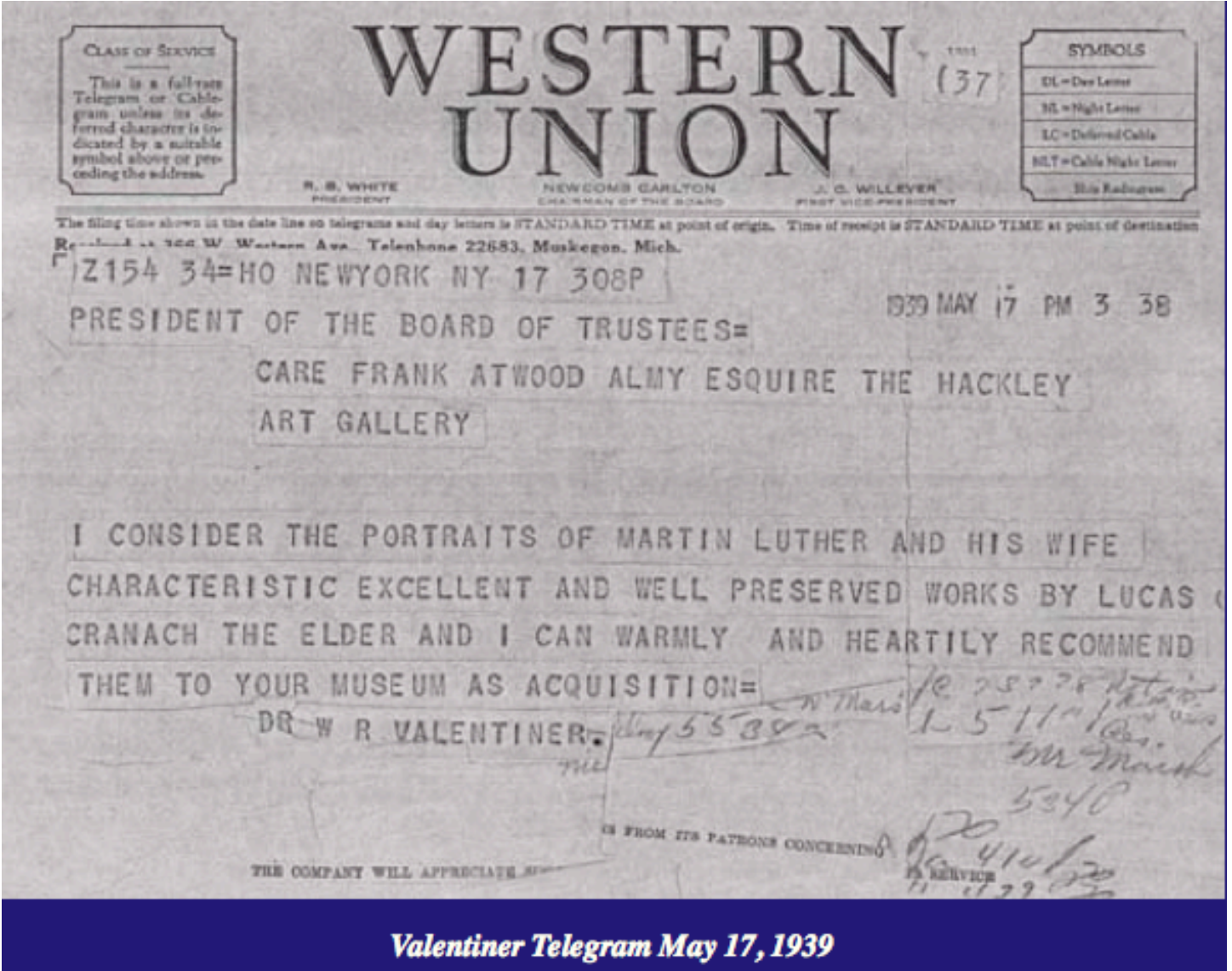
*Luther Signature and Date*



*Katharina Signature*

### *Provenance*

The Hackley Art Gallery, currently the Muskegon Museum of Art in Muskegon, Michigan, acquired the portraits in July of 1939 from the E. and A. Silberman Galleries, New York, New York. Dr. W. R. Valentiner, director of the Detroit Institute of Art, and former curator with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, authenticated the paintings in a telegram dated May 17, 1939. (1) (2)



On May 19, 1939, Frank Almy, the Hackley Art Gallery’s director, offered David Silberman \$10,000.00 plus the museum’s “Nocturne in Bruges” by Henri Le Sidaner, for the two Cranachs and a portrait of Dr. Samuel Johnson by Gilbert Stuart. This offer was accepted.

Mr. David Silberman

May 19, 1939

E. and A. Silberman, 32 East 32nd Street  
New York, New York

WILL YOU ACCEPT TEN THOUSAND AND LESIDNER FOR CRANACHS AND  
STUART STOP REGRET BOARD POSITIVELY REFUSES TO GO FURTHER  
STOP PURCHASE DESIRED AS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL UNTIL JULY  
EIGHTEENTH STOP WILL YOU CONSIDER THIRTY DAYS CASH

Frank Atwood Almy

*Almy Offer May 19, 1939*

**CLASS OF SERVICE**  
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

# WESTERN UNION

1201

**SYMBOLS**  
DL = Day Letter  
NL = Night Letter  
LC = Deferred Cable  
NLT = Cable Night Letter  
Skip Radiogram

R. B. WHITE  
PRESIDENT

NEWCOMB CARLTON  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

J. C. WILSON  
FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

(08)

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

Received at 366 W. Western Ave., Telephone 22683, Muskegon, Mich.

Z48 4=HO NEWYORK NY 20 1024A

1939 MAY 20 AM 11 08

FRANK ATWOOD ALMY=

DIRECTOR HACKLEY ART GALLERY

WE ACCEPT YOUR OFFER=

SILBERMAN.

*Silberman Acceptance May 20, 1939*

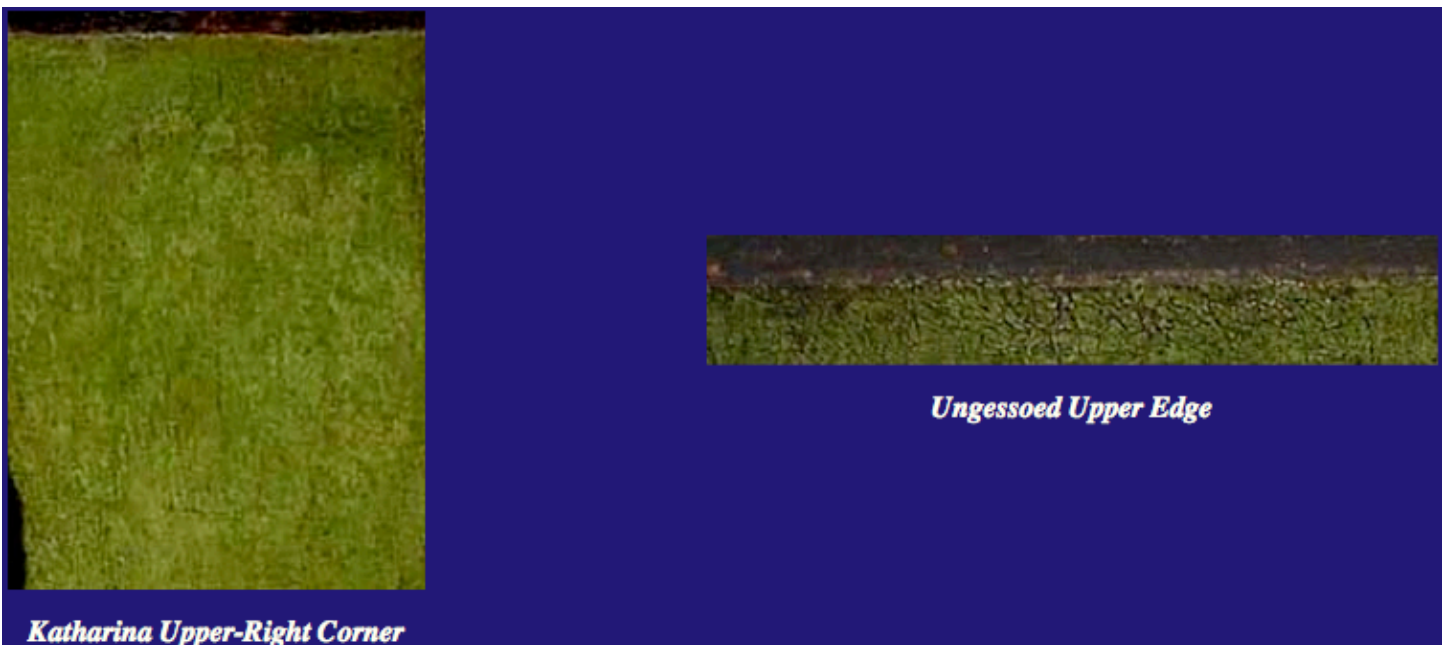
The museum cites previous owners of the portraits chronologically as Count Franz Vetter van der Lilie, Vienna; the E. and A. Silberman Galleries, New York; the Drey Collection, Munich; the Steinmeyer Collection, Berlin; and, again, the E. and A. Silberman Galleries, New York. There is no documentation to support these references. (3)

### *Supports*

The portraits have been painted on wooden panels measuring H. 51 cm x W. 36 cm x T. .48 cm. The supports are stable and do not exhibit planar distortions or cracking. The wood has been cut tangentially with the grain running vertically. Each panel has been cradled with five vertical battens and five movable horizontal members. The backs show no inscriptions or markings except for the museum's accession numbers: 39.5 for the male portrait and 39.6 for the female. Dendrochronological examination verified beechwood (*Fagus sp.*) as the support material. (4)

### *Gesso*

The ground has been thinly and evenly applied on both panels probably white when first applied but now slightly discolored from oil staining. The gesso appears to be calcium carbonate and is well intact. There are no areas where the ground has been used as a transitional tone, although a lighter-toned outline of thinned paint is present in the upper right corner of Katharina's portrait. The gesso extends to the right and left edges on both panels: .63 cm at the top and bottom are ungressoed.



## *Paint*

The thin paint layer has been smoothly applied with no areas of impasto. It is generally secure, although minor weak areas and losses are present along the edges of both portraits from former frame damage. In scattered areas the ground tone is visible where the paint layer has been thinned. The paint is pellicular in nature. (5) The backgrounds have been painted using minute smooth strokes offering seamless transitions. In general, the flesh and cloth tones are slightly thicker suggesting a careful modeling of diaphanous layers. There are no areas of visible pentimenti.

## *Restoration Paint*

An ultraviolet light examination offers clues to a painting's condition history. Organic varnishes glow a yellow-green color under such lighting. If restoration paint has been applied on top of the varnish, the area cannot glow and appears jet-black. This is referred to as "primary fluorescence." If a painting has been varnished more than once and the restoration work is sandwiched between the varnish layers, the ultraviolet light shows these areas as dark shadows. This is referred to as "secondary fluorescence." If the restoration paint is under the varnish, the surface will glow uniformly and the examination technique may offer a false positive conclusion.

The ultraviolet examination revealed secondary fluorescence within all areas of both paintings. It was most pronounced in the backgrounds and in the lower left corner of the Luther portrait. Only minor additions were evident in the flesh tones, which is not unusual since the hard lead-white pigment that predominates in these areas is less susceptible to environmental and physical damage. Museum records do not include any prior treatment documentation.

## *Surface Films*

The paint surfaces were coated with three distinct films. A dirt and grime film was resting on top of two organic varnish layers. Organic varnishes yellow and darken with age, thereby falsifying a painting's intended tonal relationships. Organic varnishes also serve to flatten the three-dimensional illusion of space. The portraits' overall visual qualities were severely compromised by these overlaying films.



# Treatment

March 25, 2013 to December 28, 2013

## *Consolidation*

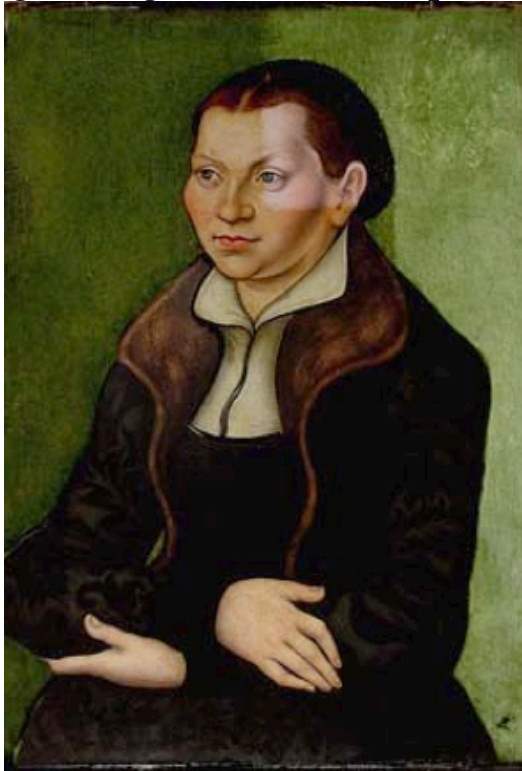
Scattered areas of weak paint were individually stabilized using a 1:10 gelatin adhesive. The liquid adhesive was applied warm using a small sable brush. This initial step allowed treatment work to continue without risk of further loss.

## *Cleaning*

*Katharina von Bora*

The cleaning of an oil painting involves the removal of discolored surface films and all areas of non-original paint. An understanding of paint chemistry is required to remove these films without injury to the surface. This work is carried out under binocular magnification using cotton swabs and appropriate solvents. The upper dirt film was removed using a mild pH-neutral detergent while the varnish layers were removed using organic solvents. (6)

Varnish removal began along the right side of the painting. Oil paint becomes milky as it ages. As a result, darker tones will appear blanchered or bloomed after cleaning. Later revarnishing reinstates a color's original richness. The below left image documents the color change that resulted from removing the overlaying films. The right image offers a corresponding detail.



*Full View During Cleaning*



*Detail During Cleaning*

The removal of earlier restoration work revealed former losses and heightened the upper-right corner's visual inconsistencies.



*Full View After Cleaning*



*Upper-Right Corner After Cleaning*

### *Cleaning Martin Luther*

The cleaning materials for the Luther panel were identical to those used for Katharina's. The dirt film was removed using a pH-neutral detergent and the varnish layers were soluble in organic solvents. Washes of overpaint were encountered throughout the dark tones to mute small abrasions along the wood grain. During cleaning, an area of hardened white overpaint was revealed in the upper-right quadrant. This area required scalpel assistance for removal.



### *Discovery*

As stated in the introduction, “whole sections of paintings may be overpainted, hiding long-forgotten original intent. Only bits and pieces of information may remain after centuries of former restoration work and damage.” This occurred during the removal of the Luther portrait’s varnish and restoration work. The silhouette of a scraped-out coat of arms or seal, and two lines of a missing inscription were discovered in the lower areas.



Fully cleaning the upper sections of both paintings brought out an additional discovery of faint lettering. Only a few letters on the first line of a possible five- or six-line inscription on the Luther portrait were legible—the letters D O C T O R A R T V S L V—but all of remaining letters, and all of the letters on Katharina’s portrait, were illegible. One could reasonably infer that the Latin text on the Luther panel originally read DOCTOR MARTINVS LVTHER.



*Detail Luther Upper Inscription After Cleaning*



*Detail Luther Upper Inscription With Known Letters Above Readable Letters*

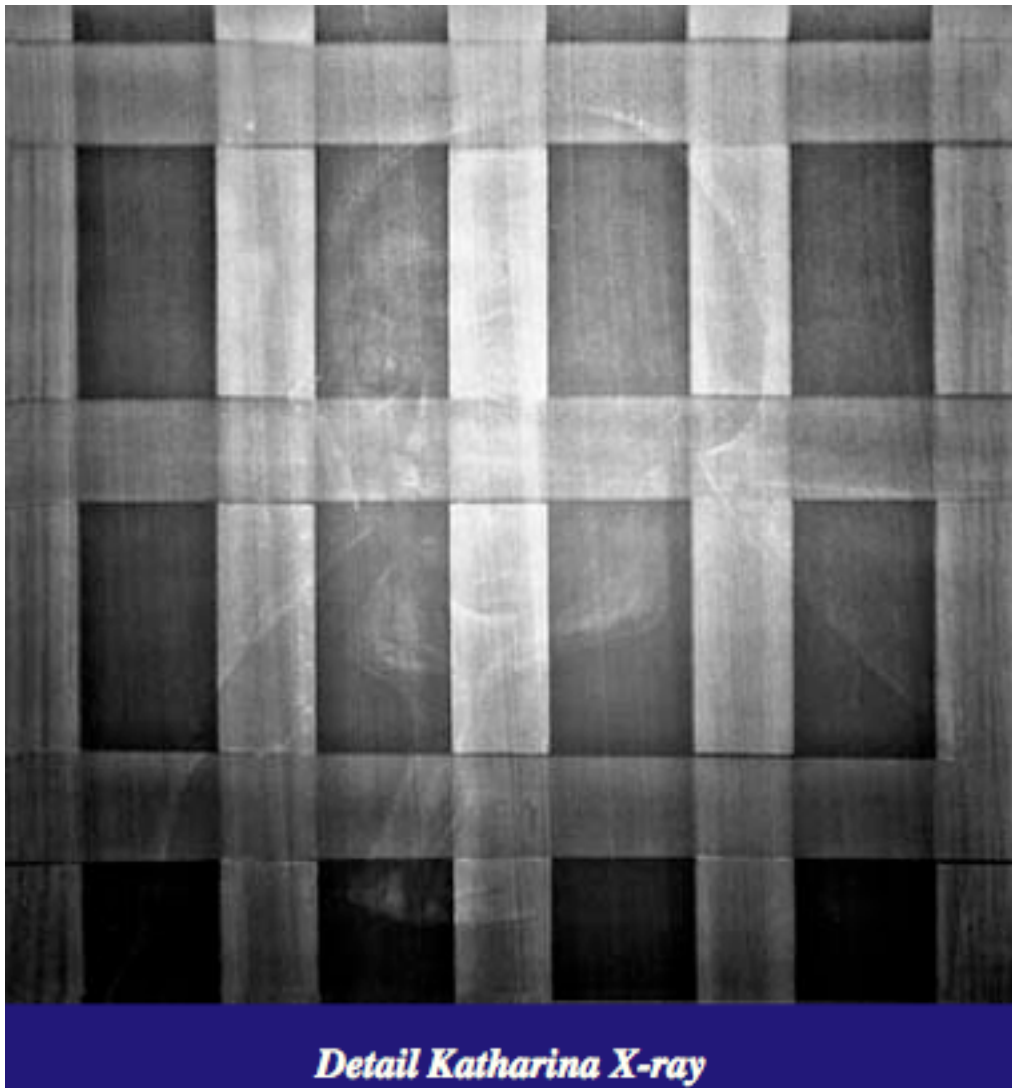


*Detail Katharina Upper Inscription After Cleaning*

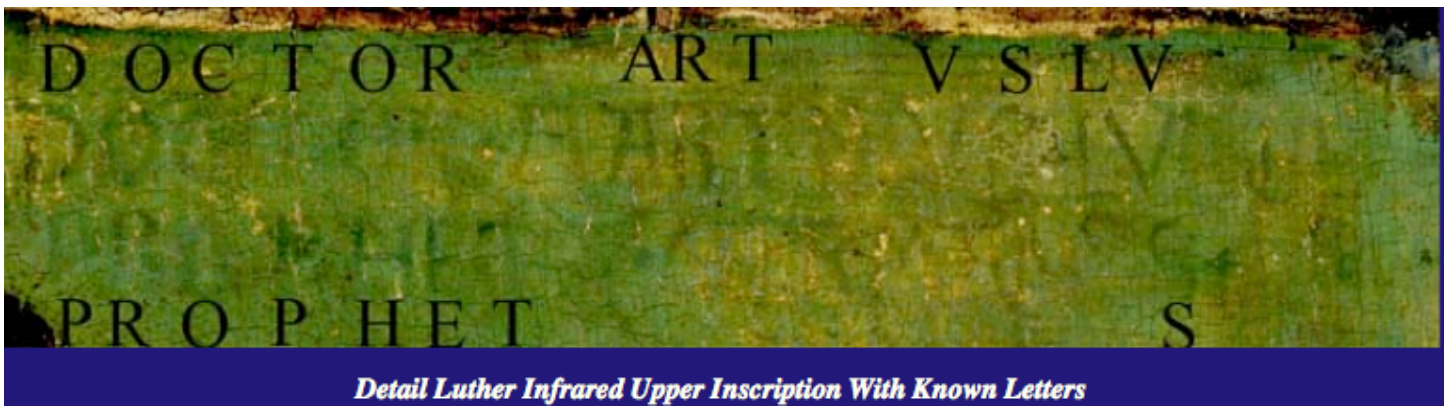
### *X-Rays/Infrared Photography*

In order to determine a possible solution to the missing inscriptions, two further investigative procedures were undertaken: X-rays and infrared photography. X-rays allow conservators to understand certain aspects of a painting's condition history. They can detect holes, tears, under-drawings, and areas of former restoration work. X-rays will pass through most objects but are blocked by pigments that contain heavy metals such as lead white; these areas appear white on x-ray film.

Unfortunately, the X-rays produced no clarifying information relative to the former inscriptions and only the Katharina panel presented a reasonable image, although the backing cradle severely compromised its resolution. (7)



Infrared photography can be used to “see” into the layers of a painting providing information that is not visible to the human eye such as under-drawings, variations in composition, and hard-to-read inscriptions. The technique can detect carbon-based materials such as graphite and certain black pigments. The infrared images sharpened the known letters on the first line of the Luther inscription and revealed additional information on the second line. It was now possible to read the letters P R O P H E T—probably PROPHEETA originally, the Latin word for prophet, and an additional S. The infrared examination of the scraped-out seal, the scraped-out lower two lines, and Katharina’s upper inscription offered no clarifying information. (8)



### *Filling*

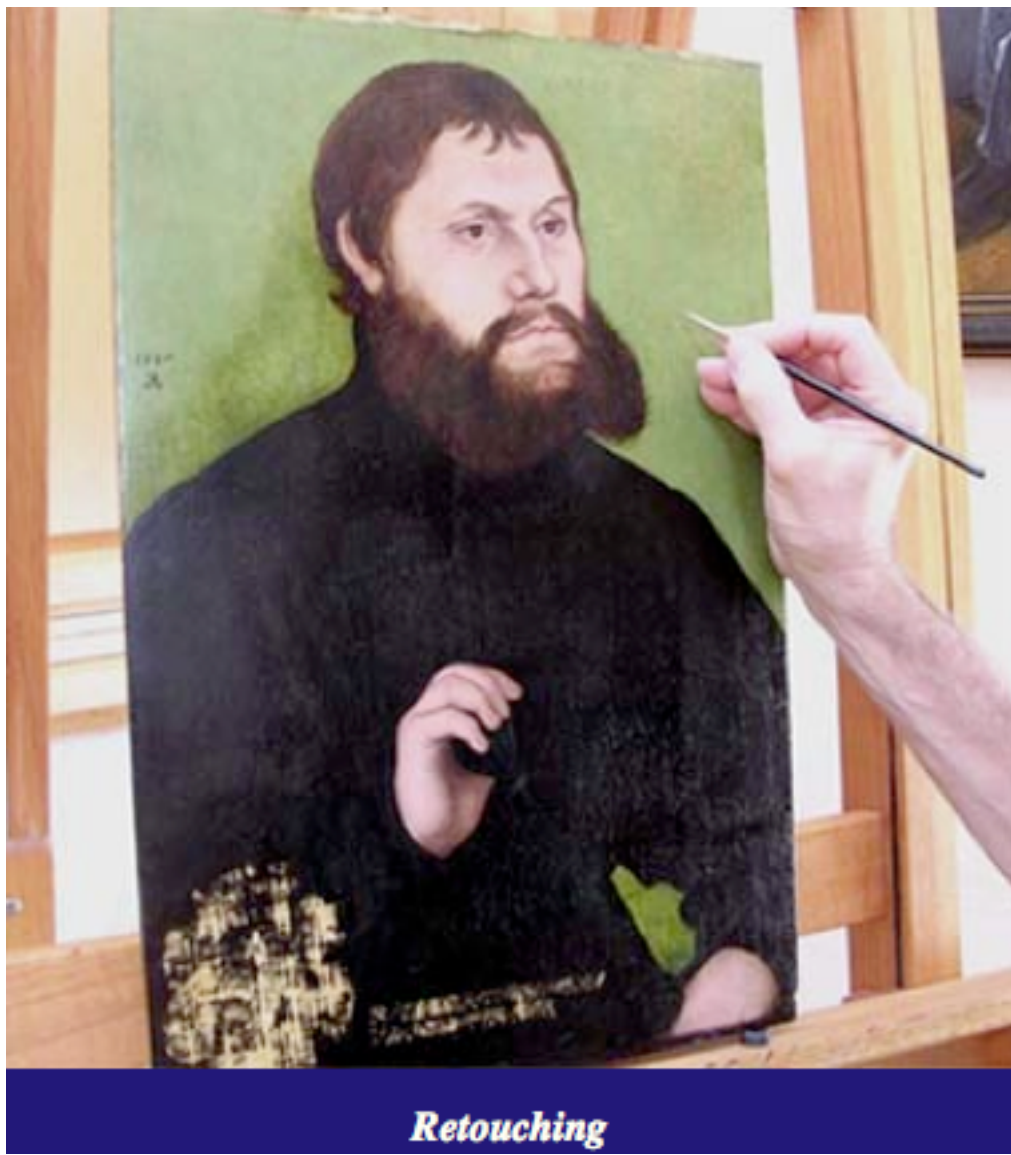
Filling has two purposes. It prevents further damage by sealing the edges of holes, tears, and cracks. It is also used to reproduce a sympathetic surface with respect to plane and texture. Minor areas of loss on both panels were filled with gesso, a mixture of marble dust and a 1:7 gelatin adhesive.

### *Varnishing*

A brush coat of Winsor & Newton non-yellowing varnish was applied to the paint surfaces. Varnish is applied for several reasons. First, it reinstates the richness of the paint by allowing the darks to have their proper tone. Second, it keeps dirt and air pollution off the picture surface. Third, the surface coating protects the paint layer from damage caused by abrasion, moisture, and accidental accretions. The varnish also creates an ethical buffer between the original paint layer and the retouching or inpainting. Conservators do not paint directly on the original paint surface. The work is done on top of an isolating varnish and can be removed by simply removing the underlying varnish.

### *Retouching*

Retouching is carried out to correct visual inconsistencies caused by inherent structural problems or surface damage. Its purpose is to reduce or eliminate these inconsistencies. It is applied only to areas of loss and should never extend over the original paint. The retouching was completed using Maimeri conservation pigments. These pigments are both color- and light-fast offering confidence that the restoration areas will remain consistent over time. Also, the pigments are soluble in mineral spirits. This relatively weak solvent permits safe and easy removal without risk of injury to the paint surface. (9)



Ms. Jane Connell, director of collections and exhibitions, and senior curator, for the Muskegon Museum of Art, guided the retouching to include: leaving the abraded upper inscriptions in place for they did not detract from the paintings' overall aesthetic balance; softening the visual inconsistencies in the upper-right corner of the female portrait; and fully retouching the lower scraped-out losses on the Luther portrait for these areas were visually dominant and visually disruptive. (10)

*Completion*  
December 28, 2013

After retouching, the application of a final, non-yellowing spray varnish completed the nine-month treatment.



*Before Treatment*



*After Treatment*



*Before Treatment*



*After Treatment*



While the conservation work on the paintings was at an end, the hunt for the lost inscriptions and unidentified seal was just beginning. Would it be possible to determine the original Latin text? Whose coat of arms was in the lower corner? The following pages record the chronological efforts and strategies used to pursue the unknown information.

# The Hunt

*First Strategy*  
April 15, 2013 to July 26, 2013

Hoping to recover the lost inscriptions, Internet research was undertaken to determine whether Cranach, or his workshop, painted other versions of the Junker Jörg image. The Cranach Digital Archive records numerous portraits of Martin Luther, including two as Junker Jörg. Similar to the Muskegon portrait, the paintings are half-length, the sitter is shown in 3/4 profile, and one hand rests on the pommel of a sword. Also, Luther is dressed in black against a green background. The panels were painted without inscriptions and offered no clues to the missing text. The portraits are imaged below.



*Lucas Cranach the Elder "Martin Luther" (1521)*  
*Museum der Bildenden Kunste*  
*Leipzig, Germany*



*Lucas Cranach the Elder "Martin Luther" (1521)*  
*Klassik Stiftung*  
*Weimar, Germany*

Internet research also was carried out on the visible letters from the Luther portrait in the hope of discovering a similar pattern elsewhere. None of these attempts was successful.

*First Breakthrough*  
July 27, 2013

An exchange of e-mails between myself, the Muskegon Museum of Art, and European specialists provided the first breakthrough. Dr. Gunnar Heydenreich, project director for the Cranach Digital Archive and professor of conservation at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany, sent the author an e-mail on July 27, 2013. (14) The e-mail included a portrait of Martin Luther as Junker Jörg similar to Muskegon's. The painting, imaged below left, was owned by a small church in Penig, Germany, approximately 50 miles west of Dresden. The portrait was identical to Muskegon's, imaged below right, in almost every detail, including the composition, signature, location of the upper and lower inscriptions, and its 1537 date. The only detail that was missing was the coat of arms. There was no corresponding Katharina image.



*Lucas Cranach the Elder "Martin Luther" (1537)*  
*Stadtkirche*  
*Penig, Germany*

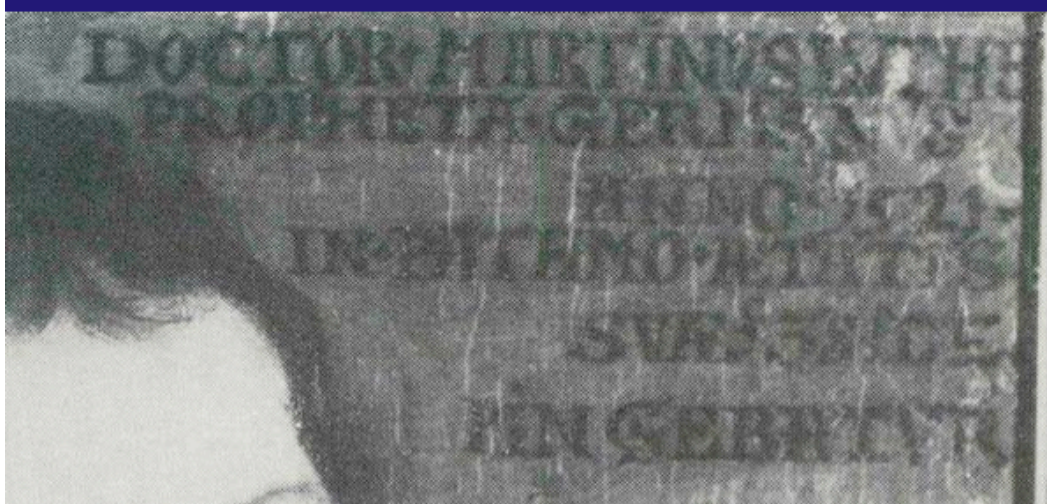


*Luther After Treatment*  
*Muskegon Version*

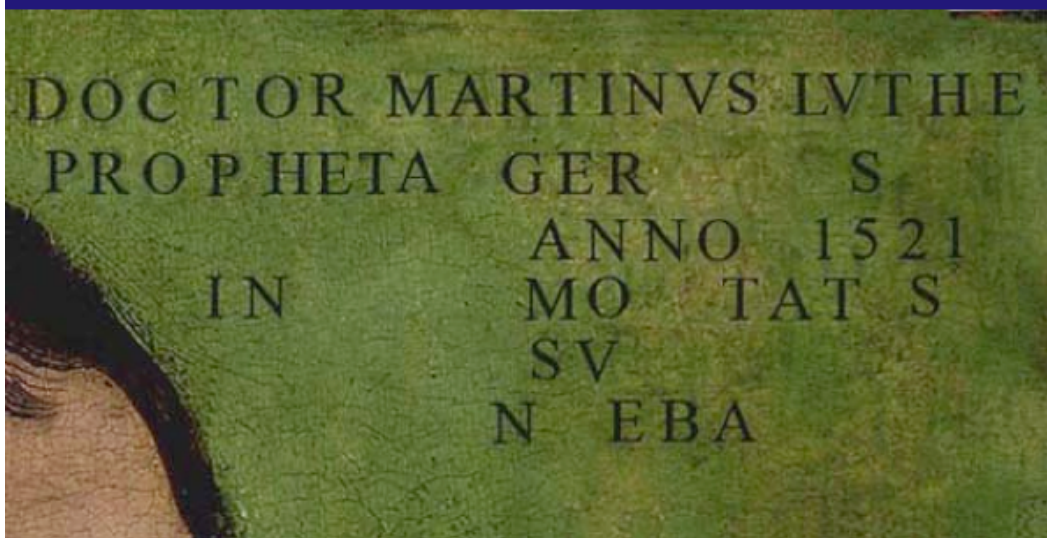
While the e-mailed image's resolution was poor, and there was evidence of previous damage, additional letters in the upper inscription were now visible. Using digital techniques, these letters were superimposed onto the treated panel. (11)



*Luther Upper Inscription Area*



*Luther Upper Inscription Penig Version*



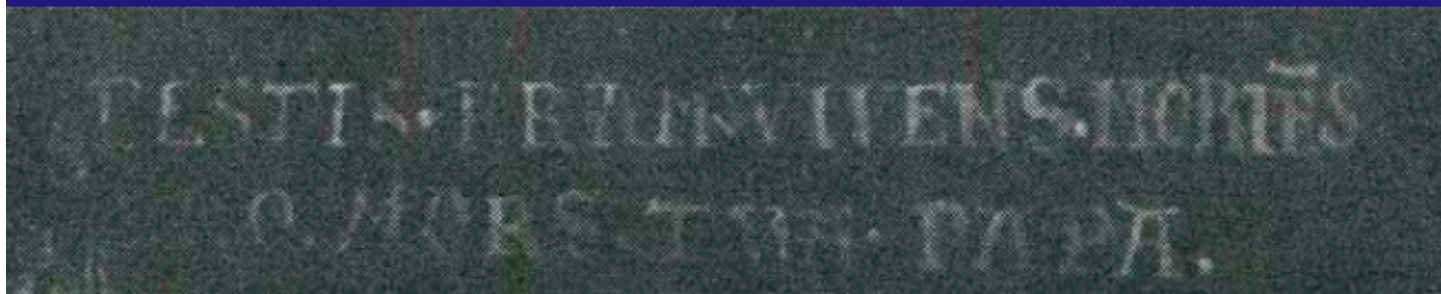
*Luther Upper Inscription With Known Letters*

The Latin ANNO 1521 refers to the year Frederick the Wise of Saxony sheltered Luther as Junker Jörg. While the additional letters were a breakthrough, they did not offer a complete transcription of the original text.

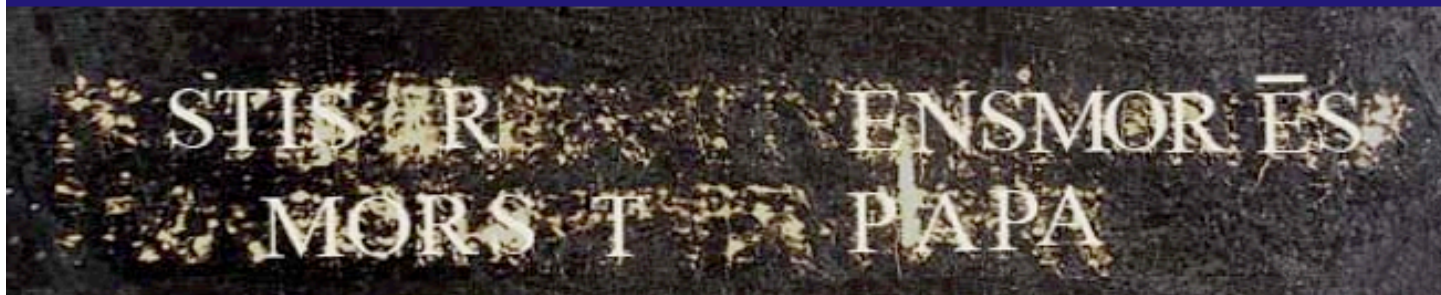
The lower inscription had been completely removed from Muskegon's painting—or was it? Using similar digital techniques, the readable letters from the Penig version—including an E with a line over it—were placed onto the panel. The line is a contraction mark that can replace a following N or M. Some of the added letters easily harmonized with the outline of the loss areas, suggesting that the inscriptions were the same. Once again, the additional letters produced only a partial understanding of the missing text.



*Luther Lower Inscription Area*



*Lower Inscription Penig Version*



*Luther Lower Inscription With Known Letters*

*Second Strategy*  
August 5, 2013 to February 21, 2014

By contacting the Penig Church (Stadtkirche), it was assumed that someone would be able to forward a high-resolution image of their painting and possibly solve the inscription mystery. A Dutch, German-speaking colleague, made several calls to the church on my behalf and was always told the minister was away. (12)

In a serendipitous find, he came across a 2013 article from a local Penig newspaper confirming the church owned not only a Martin Luther portrait but also a portrait of Katharina von Bora. (13) The story went on to note that the paintings were in storage in Dresden. The article's author, Mr. Michael Stellner, was contacted and his associate Mr. Alexander Christoph forwarded the minister's e-mail address. (14) Two inquiries to the minister went unanswered.

Several departments at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden were contacted to inquire if anyone there knew anything about the paintings. The Alte Nationalgalerie's director, Dr. Bernhard Maaz, copied Dr. Heydenreich on one of the exchanges. (15) This led to the second breakthrough.

*Second Breakthrough*  
February 21, 2014 to May 20, 2014

On February 21, 2014, Dr. Heydenreich suggested that possibly Dr. Ingo Sandner, a founding partner of the Cranach Digital Archive, could help in the search. After my eight months of searching, it took Dr. Sandner two days to find the paintings. (16) Ironically, the portraits were undergoing conservation under the care of Ms. Christine Kelm, chief of conservation for the Saxony State Monuments Conservation Office in Dresden.

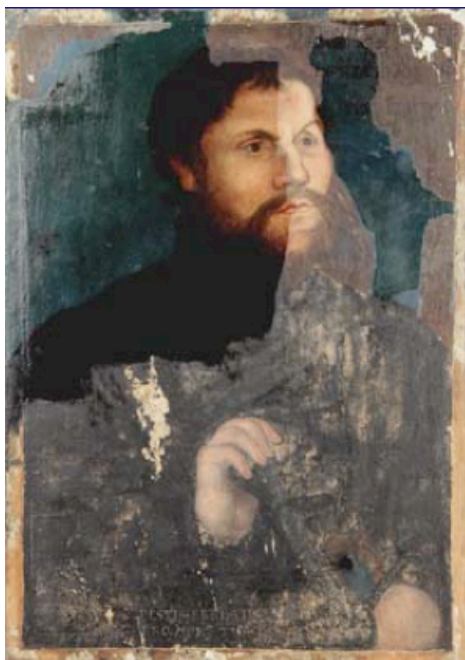
On April 10, 2014, Dr. Sandner viewed the portraits with Ms. Kelm, but he was not able to fully decipher the inscriptions due to the discolored varnish and former overpaint. While Dr. Sandner also offered his best interpretations of the text, a reply e-mail to himself and Ms. Kelm led to the third breakthrough. (17) This information is reviewed on the following page.

# The Inscriptions

*Third Breakthrough*

May 20, 2014

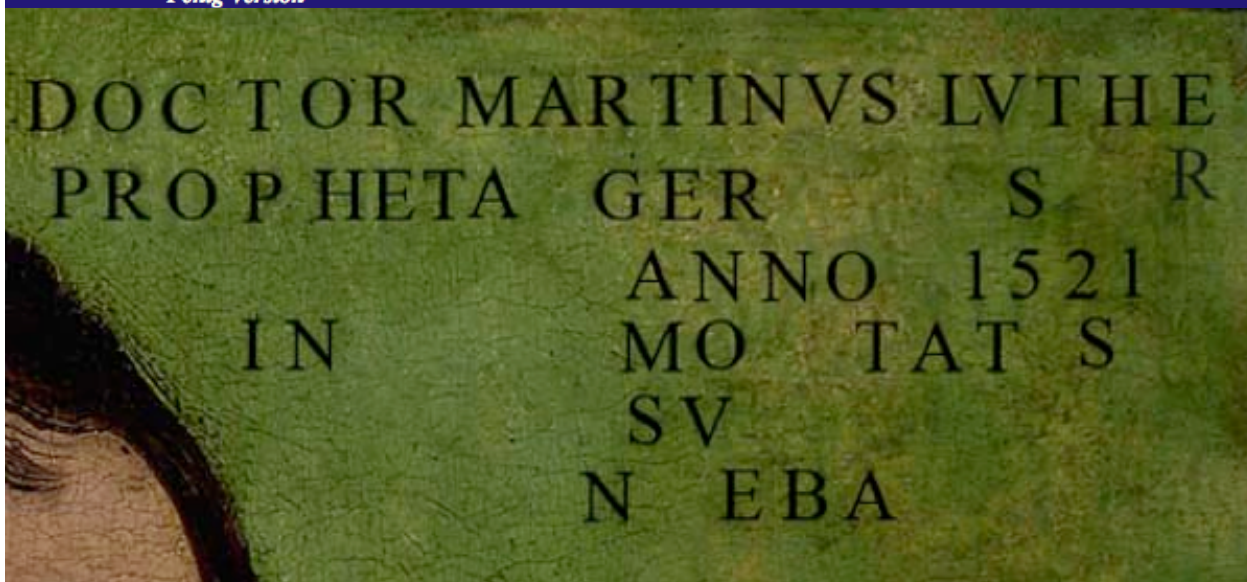
In an e-mail dated May 20, 2014, Ms. Kelm included during-cleaning images of the Penig portraits. The Luther panel was in poor condition and the background had been repainted a blue-green. Due to the painting's condition, only one additional letter could be added to the upper inscription: an R placed curiously just below the LVTHE. This letter completed the sitter's name and was added onto the template.



*Luther During Cleaning  
Penig Version*



*Luther Upper Inscription During Cleaning  
Penig Version*



*Luther Upper Inscription With Known Letters*

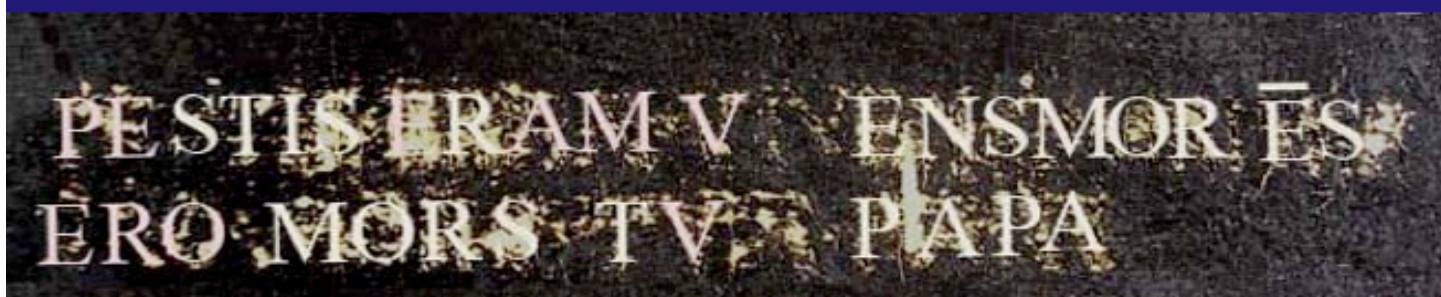
The lower inscription was also severely abraded but previously unknown letters were now legible. These letters were positioned into place, in red, on the Muskegon portrait. Several letters easily harmonized with the silhouette of the loss area, thereby verifying the inscriptions were the same.



*Luther Lower Inscription During Treatment  
Penig Version*



*Luther Lower Inscription With Previously Known Letters*



*Luther Lower Inscription With Added Known Letters*

Several words from the inscription on Katharina's portrait were now evident. While the darkened varnish obscured most of the letters, the visible words from the Penig version were digitally placed onto the background.

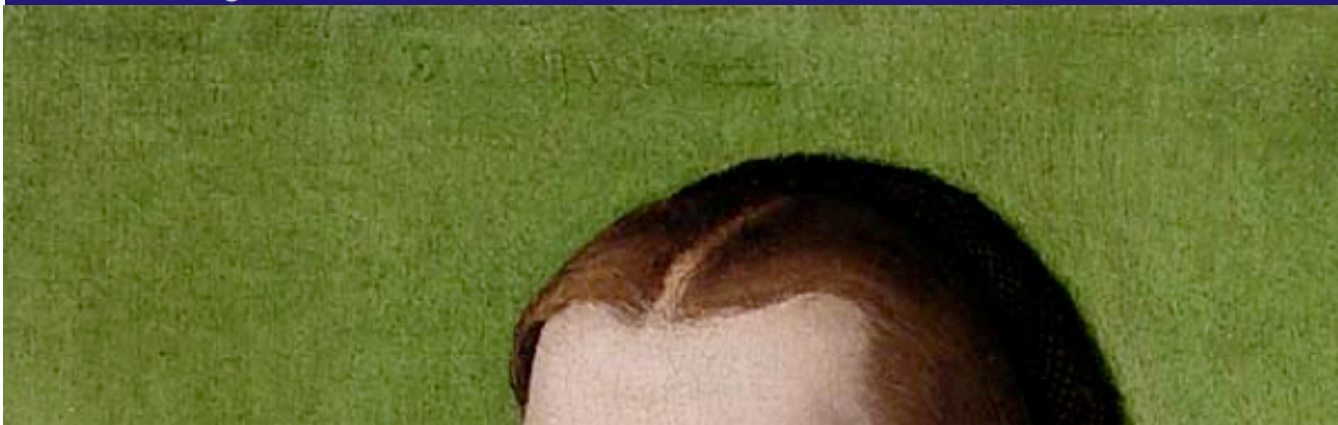




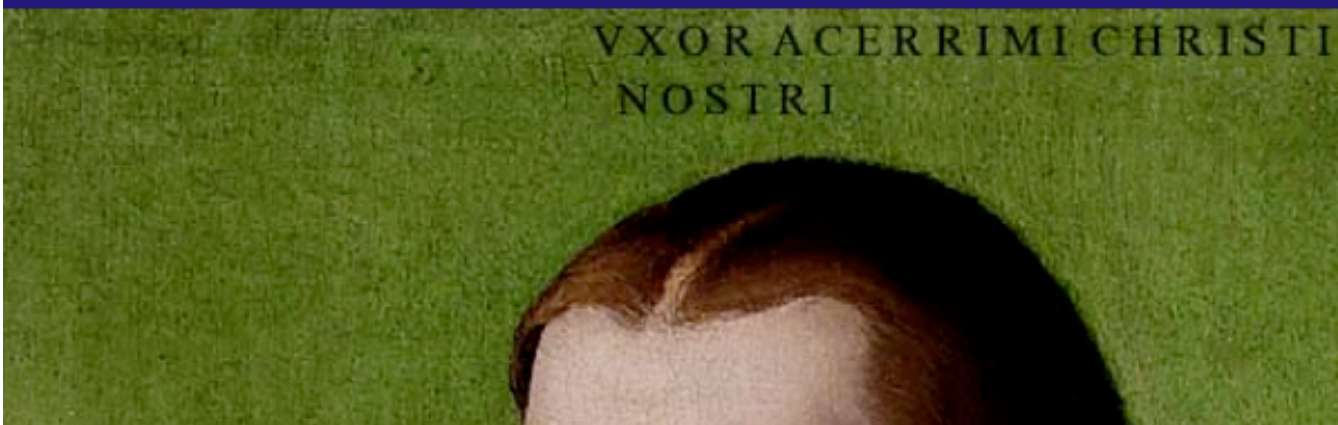
*Katharina During Cleaning  
Penig Version*



*Katharina Upper Inscription During Cleaning  
Penig Version*



*Katharina Upper Inscription Area*



*Katharina Upper Inscription With Known Letters*

*Final Breakthrough*  
June 8 and July 8, 2014

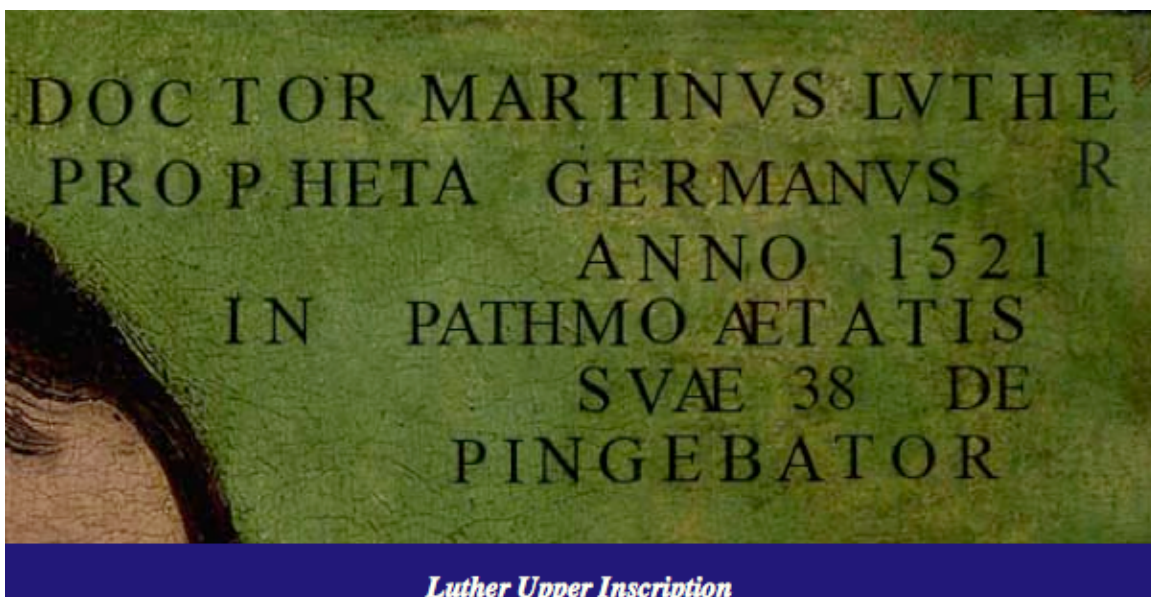
*Luther Inscriptions*

On June 8, 2014, Ms. Kelm sent information that included two nineteenth-century inventories that documented the inscriptions. Curiously, the inscriptions were recorded with puzzling differences. The inventories, with translations, are linked at the end of this Case Study in Appendixes A and B.

The first entry was written in Volume III of Christian Schuchardt's 1871 *Lucas Cranach des Älteren Leben und Werke (Lucas Cranach the Elder: Life and Work)*. Entry Number 41 documented a portrait of Martin Luther as Junker Jörg from the collection of a Mr. von Schreiberhofen. The listing noted the following upper inscription: DOCTOR MARTINUS LUTHER, PROPHETA GERMANUS ANNO 1521 IN PATHMO AETATIS SUAE 38. DEPINGEBATUR; and a lower inscription: PESTIS. ERAM. VIVENS. MORIENS. PRO MORS. TUA. PAPA. (18)

The second inventory was written in 1890 and titled *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Königreichs Sachsen (Architectural and Art Monuments of the Kingdom of Saxony)*. The Penig portraits were included and the following inscriptions were noted for the Luther portrait: DOCTOR MARTINVS LVTHER . PROPHETA . GERMANVS . ANNO . 1521 . IN . PATHMO . AETATIS SUAE . 38 . DEPINGEBATUR; and PESTIS . ERAM . VIVENS . MORTVS . ERO . MORS . TVA . PAPA. (19)

The upper inscriptions were identical in the two inventories except for the Latin V replacing the letter U in the later version. The previously unknown letters in the upper inscription were inserted onto the template. The spacing of the letters was based on the Penig during-cleaning image and it's interesting to note that in two instances letters in the same word were on different lines.

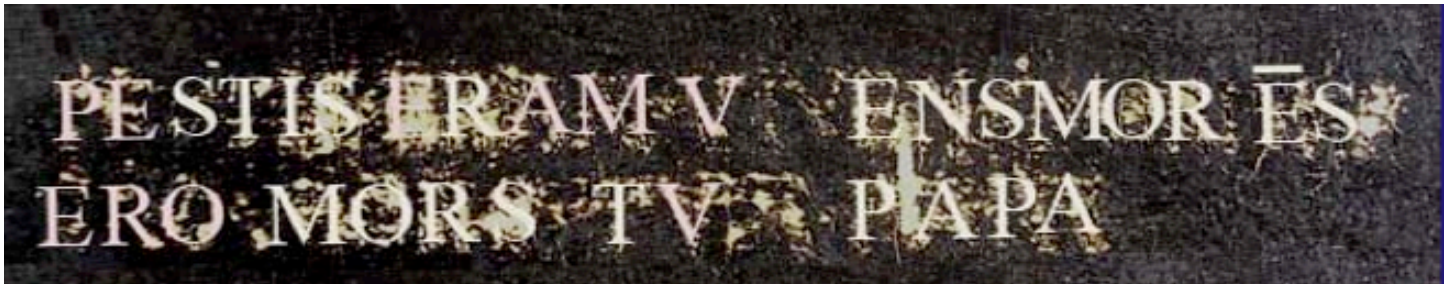


The lower inscriptions were not identical.

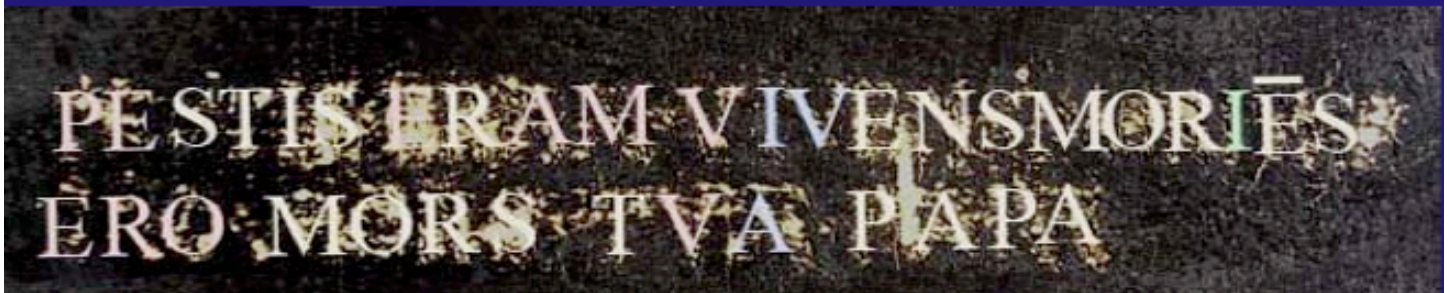
PESTIS. ERAM. VIVENS. MORIENS. PRO MORS. TUA. PAPA. (1871)

PESTIS. ERAM. VIVENS. MORTVS. ERO. MORS. TVA. PAPA. (1890)

One could reasonably infer that the texts were originally the same, but due to overpaint and darkened varnish the readers recorded slight differences. The identical additional letters, which did not conflict with the known letters, were added onto the template in blue. Internet research on the inscription's first three words identified the one missing letter as an I. This was inserted in green.

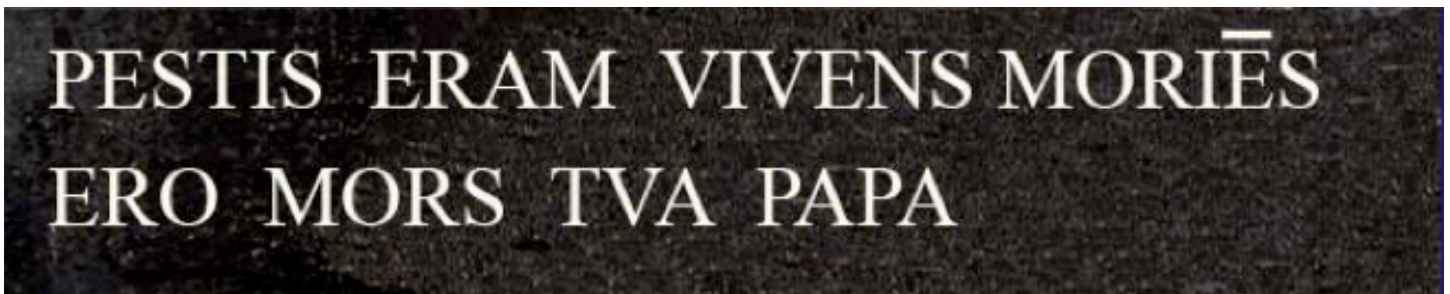


*Luther Lower Inscription With Previously Known Letters*



*Luther Lower Inscription With Added Known Letters*

The only major discrepancy in the above inscription is the word MORIENS (1871), changed to MORIES, with a line over the E. As noted earlier, an upper line in Latin can replace a following N or M.



*Luther Lower Inscription*

### *Katharina Inscription*

The 1871 and 1890 inventories also included Katharina's inscription. The 1871 von Schreiberhofen collection entry recorded: KATHARINA A BOR, UXOR ACERRIMI, CHRISTI JESU SALVATORIS NOSTRI, PER GERMANIUM APOSTOLI, DONI DOCTORIS MARTINI LUTHERI. The later 1890 Penig inventory documented: KATHARINA . A. BOR . VXOR . ACERRIMI . CHRISTI . JESV . SALVATORIS . NOSTRI . PER GERMANIAM . APOSTOLI . DNI . DOCTORIS . MARTINI LVTHERI. For comparative purposes, the two entries are referenced below.

KATHARINA A BOR UXOR ACERRIMI CHRISTI JESU SALVATORIS NOSTRI  
PER GERMANIUM (1871)

KATHARINA A BOR VXOR ACERRIMI CHRISTI JESV SALVATORIS NOSTRI  
PER GERMANIAM (1890)

APOSTOLI DONI DOCTORIS MARTINI LUTHERI (1871)

APOSTOLI DNI DOCTORIS MARTINI LVTHERI (1890)

Once again, the letter U was replaced with a V in the later inventory. There were two additional discrepancies: GERMANIUM versus GERMANIAM and DONI versus DNI. Ms. Kelm verified the former as GERMANIA, with a line over the A signifying a following M. Dr. Sandner confirmed the latter as DNI, with a line over the N, the Latin contraction for DOMINI. With the overpaint removed, Ms. Kelm also indicated the word JESV was spelled IHESV. The full text could now be inserted onto the template. The spacing of the letters was again based on the Penig during-cleaning image and Ms. Kelm's July 8, 2014, clarifying e-mail. Similar to the Luther panel, letters in the same word were on different lines.



*Katharina Inscription*



*Luther Panel With Inscriptions*



*Katharina Panel With Inscription*

After a fourteen-month search, the original inscriptions were brought to light. One could speculate that the texts were later additions and not original to the panels. This is unlikely, for the chance that three sets of portraits in three different collections (Penig's, von Schreiberhofen's, and Muskegon's) were inscribed at some unknown later date with the exact same inscriptions is virtually impossible. It is more plausible that they were inscribed at the same time in the studio of Lucas Cranach.

### *The Translations*

While the Latin texts were now known, what did they mean? For assistance with this question, Dr. Peter White, professor in the Department of Classics, at the University of Chicago, translated the upper Luther text as:

*Doctor Martin Luther, German prophet, depicted in 1521 in Pathmos at the age of 38.*

Luther referred to his 1521 year-in-hiding as living in Pathmos, a reference to the Apostle John's island of exile.

Dr. White translated Katharina's inscription:

*Katharina A Bora, wife of the most ardent apostle of Germany  
of the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ, Doctor Martin Luther. (20)*

An Internet search on the lower Luther inscription offered numerous translations including:

*I was a pestilence for you while living; when I die, I will be your death, Pope.*

The verse was supposedly composed by Luther in 1530 and used more than once in later years. In 1537, the date of the Luther portraits, he referred to the text as his Epitapheum, or epitaph. He is said to have written it on his wall just before his death in 1546. (21)

With these translations, one final question area remained: the scraped-out coat of arms. This issue is addressed on the following page.

# The Rose

## *Luther's Rose*

When the search began for the inscriptions, a parallel search was undertaken to discover the missing coat of arms. Websites devoted to heraldry were consulted and experts were contacted in the hope that someone could shed some light on the way outline. All pursuits were unsuccessful.

As seen in the below images, it was not unusual for Cranach to include a coat of arms within a portrait composition.

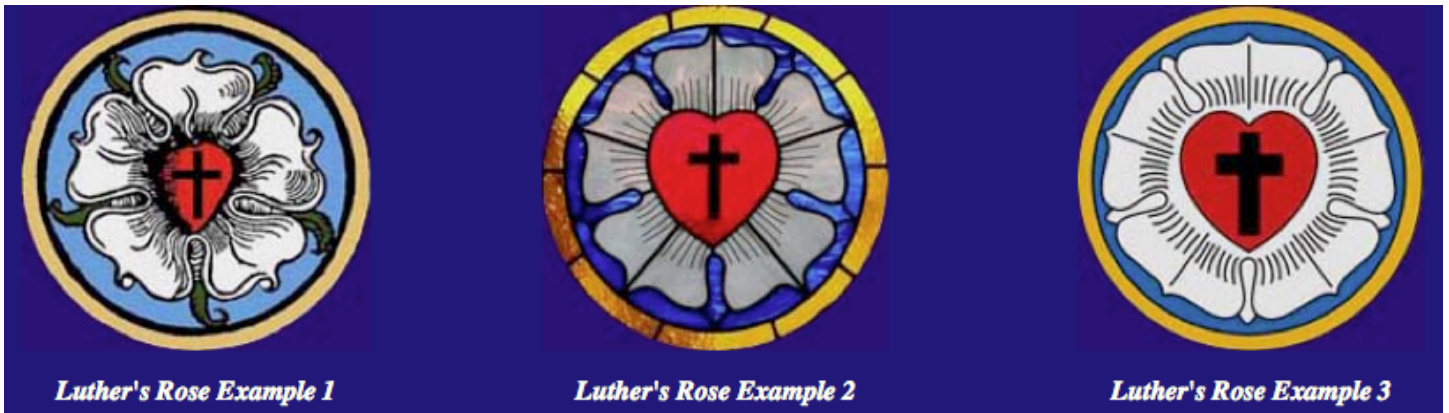


*Lucas Cranach the Elder*  
*"Nicholas de Backer" (ca. 1509)*  
*The Royal Collection Trust*  
*London, England*



*Lucas Cranach the Elder*  
*"Portrait of a Bride" (ca. 1505)*  
*Germanisches Nationalmuseum*  
*Nuremberg, Germany*

It is possible that Martin Luther had his own seal and it was this symbol that was originally in the lower-left corner. As a signing device for his publications, Luther designed a seal that included a central black cross within a red heart enveloped by a white rose against a blue background ringed in gold. In 1530, while Luther was sequestered at Wartburg Castle, Frederick the Wise of Saxony presented him with a signet ring carrying this composition. The seal is known today as Luther's Rose.



While the contours are similar to those in Luther's Rose, the loss area appears to have four or eight sections as opposed to the five or ten in the Rose. Also, the missing coat of arms has a vertical format, whereas Luther's Rose is circular.



In his description of Schreiberhofen's Luther, Schuchardt recorded: *in the lower left-hand corner a coat of arms, probably from earlier owners, emblazoned also with Luther's Rose.* Two points are important in this description: first, Schuchardt did not recognize the coat of arms thus severing a potential provenancial thread; and second, he did not document the composition of how the coat of arms and Luther's Rose were configured.



For Katharina's entry, Schuchardt noted: *It has the same coat-of-arms painted in the upper right.* For this entry, he does not mention the Rose, only the coat of arms, but one could easily infer that the two representations were the same.

One can only speculate as to why the coat of arms was removed from the Muskegon panel. Possibly, a later owner's hubris did not permit "his" Cranach referencing a previous collection. Or perhaps it was removed to conceal evidence of proper ownership. No documentation exists to support either possibility. (22)

# Final Thoughts

## *Three Sets of Portraits—or Two?*

The previous material discusses three sets of portraits: the Penig versions acquired by the Stadtkirche in 1848; the pair owned by Herr von Schreiberhofen and recorded in Schuchardt's 1871 inventory; and the treated panels from the collection of the Muskegon Museum of Art. But were there actually three sets of portraits, or just two? A re-examination of Schuchardt's 1871 entries offers promising evidence for the latter.

His Luther entry records: *signed and dated 1537, three-quarters profile turned to the right with short hair and dark beard, in black garment, with both hands holding a swordgrip, green background, in the lower left corner a coat of arms probably from earlier owners.* The inscriptions are also noted. For his Katharina entry, Schuchardt documents the inscription and: *half-length portrait with crossed arms, lower-right signature.* These details all parallel Muskegon's portraits.



*After Treatment*



*After Treatment*

Initially, the entries seemed to include two discrepancies. First, Schuchardt documented the Luther panel as: *2 feet 7 inches high, 2 feet 1 inch wide* (or H. 31" x W. 25"). The Muskegon panel, however, is H. 20" x W. 14," exactly 11 inches smaller on both the height and width. How could these be the same paintings? The disparity is easily reconciled if Schuchardt included the frame in his measurements, not an unknown practice, resulting in the same difference for both the height and width.

Second, in the Katharina entry Schuchardt noted: *It has the same coat-of-arms painted in the upper right.* This "discrepancy" could explain the wavy outline of thin paint in the upper-right corner of Muskegon's Katharina: the area used to contain the matching coat-of-arms. (23) With these considerations, Schuchardt's entries read as mirror images of the Muskegon portraits.



*Luther Coat of Arms*



*Katharina Upper Right Corner*

### *Provenancial Review*

Other circumstantial evidence lends support for two sets of portraits. First, a background check on *Herr von Schreiberhofen*—Mr. von Schreiberhofen—is in order. Schuchardt records von Schreiberhofen's name in the Dresden section of his book without forename or identifying information, as if he were a known figure, but all research on the name *Schreiberhofen* only linked back to Schuchardt's book. Something seemed to be wrong.

Herr von Schreiberhofen.

*1871 Schuchardt Entry*

The later 1890 inventory referenced Schuchardt's entries but listed the owner as *Herrn von Schreibershofen*—Mr. von Schreibershofen—with an “s” before the final “h.” The word *Herr* or *Herrn* can be spelled either way, but the *Schreibershofen* was initially discounted as a misspelling of Schuchardt's text. This was wrong.

Herrn von Schreibershofen

*1890 Inventory Entry*

Maximilian von Schreibershofen was a well-known general in the Saxon army. He was born in 1785 and died in Dresden in 1881, making him eighty-seven at the time of Schuchardt's publication and possibly living in Dresden, the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony. Schreibershofen had a long military career and was a recipient of the Knight's Cross and the Legion of Honor. The fiftieth anniversary of his promotion to the rank of general was even recorded in American newspapers. (24)

A 1918 article by Julius Vogel also documents “Schreibershofen in Dresden” as the owner of a Cranach “Junkers Georg,” but at the time of his publication the portrait's location was “*nicht mehr nachweisbar*,” or unknown. (25) No later references to Schreibershofen's paintings were found and, for almost 100 years, the portraits' whereabouts have been *nicht mehr nachweisbar*.

Ein ehemals im Besitze eines Herrn von Schreibershofen in Dresden befindliches Bildnis des Junkers Georg aus dem Jahre 1537 (vgl. Schuchardt a. a. O. III. S. 150) ist, falls es nicht mit einem der oben genannten Gemälde identisch ist, zur Zeit nicht mehr nachweisbar.

*1918 Vogel Entry*

The Muskegon Museum of Art cites previous owners of the two portraits as Count Franz Vetter van der Lilie, Vienna; the E. and A. Silberman Galleries, New York; the Drey Collection, Munich; the Steinmeyer Collection, Berlin; and, again, the E. and A. Silberman Galleries, New York, but the museum does not possess records to support any of these “owners.” Also, there are no references linking these collections to a Luther or Katharina portrait. It is more than curious that Schreibershofen's paintings “disappear” by 1918 and the Muskegon portraits emerge in 1939 without any known documentation.

### *In Conclusion*

While Cranach and his studio painted multiple versions of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora, it's hard to believe that the Schreibershofen pair and the Muskegon portraits are not one and the same. The paintings are likely 1537 studio pieces from the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder. With the lost coat of arms, the provenance in question, and the missing inscriptions rediscovered, the Cranach mystery has been solved...well, almost.



*Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder  
"Martin Luther" (1537)  
The Muskegon Museum of Art  
Muskegon, Michigan*

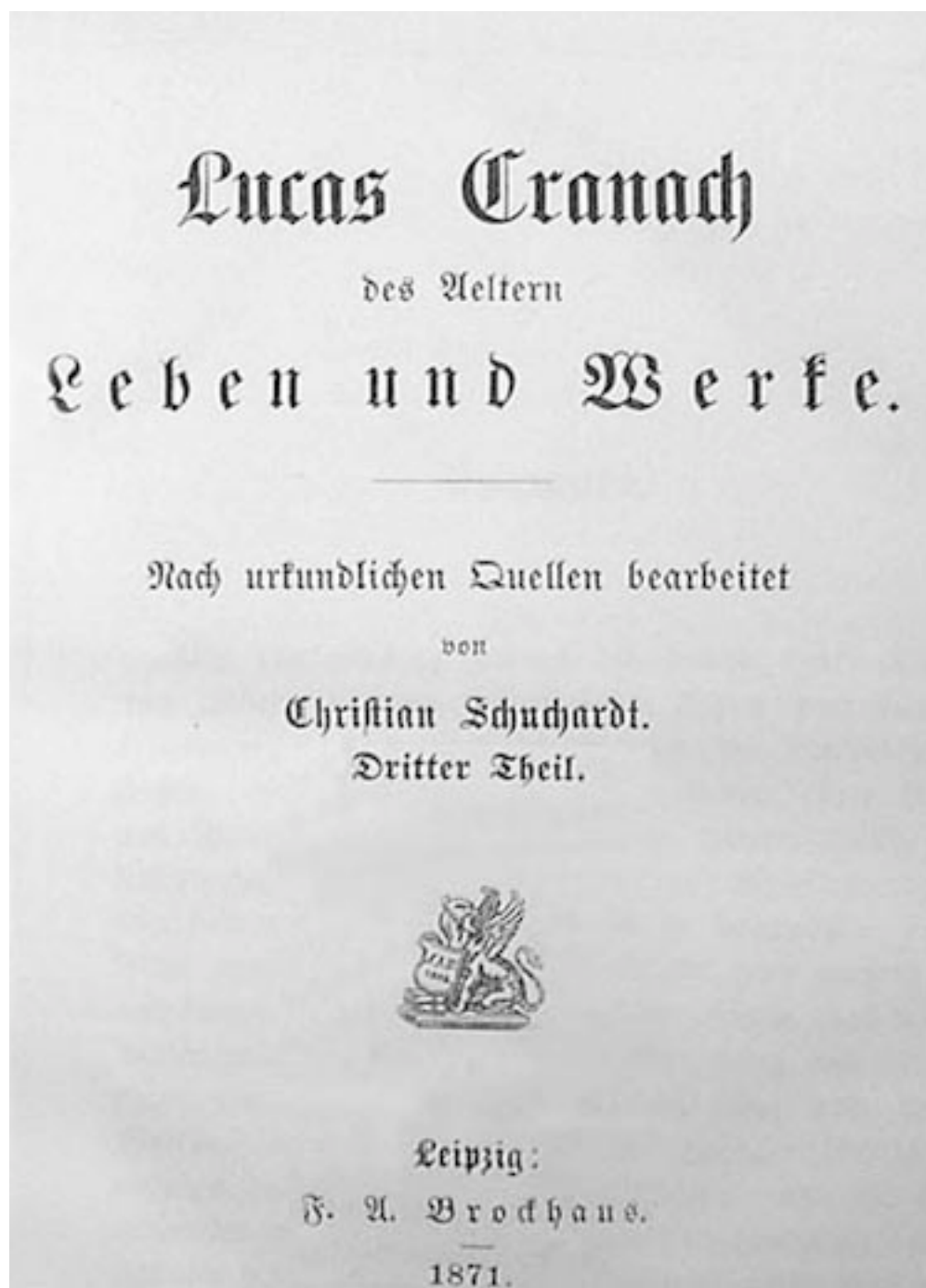


*Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder  
"Katharina von Bora" (1537)  
The Muskegon Museum of Art  
Muskegon, Michigan*

# Endnotes

## Appendix A

### 1871 Schuchardt Entries and Translations



Lucas Cranach  
the Elder  
Life and Works

Edited from Documentary Sources  
by  
Christian Schuchardt

Leipzig  
J. A. Brockhaus  
1871

c) Herr von Schreiberhofen.

41) Luther als Junker Jörg.

Hüftbild mit dem Zeichen und der Jahrzahl 1537. 2 Fuß 7 Zoll hoch, 2 Fuß 1 Zoll breit.

Drei Viertel nach rechts gewendet in kurzem Haar und dunkelm Bart, mit schwarzem Kleid, mit beiden Händen den Degengriff haltend. Der Grund grün. Oben links steht von späterer Hand: Doctor Martinus Luther, propheta germanus Anno 1521 in pathmo Aetatis suae 38. depingebatur; in der entgegengesetzten Ecke links unten ein Wappen, wahrscheinlich der frühern Besitzer, auf dem Wappenschild auch die Luther'sche Rose. Daneben steht: Pestis. eram. vivens. moriens. pro mors. tua. Papa.

Sehr schönes gutes Bild, in Farbe, Zeichnung und Malerei, das, wenn man es nicht für eine eigenhändige Arbeit Cranach's halten wollte, doch demselben ganz unmittelbar nahe steht. Das Zeichen hat zwar die Form des Sohnes und der Schule, es ist aber gleichzeitig. Es sind mir schon einige Bilder mit dem eigenthümlich saftgrünen Grunde vorgekommen, wie unter anderm ein gleiches Porträt auf der großherzoglichen Bibliothek zu Weimar, die zu den sehr guten Cranach'schen Werken gehören und die, wenn man sie nicht zu den eigenhändigen rechnen will, zu den schönsten Atelierbildern rechnen muß. Es wäre sehr interessant, wenn sich ein besonderer Schüler Cranach's darin nachweisen ließe.



c) Herr von Schreiberhofen

41) Luther as Junker Jörg

Half-length portrait signed and dated 1537. 2 feet 7 inches high, 2 feet 1 inch wide.

Three-quarters profile turned to the right with short hair and dark beard, in a black garment, with both hands holding the swordgrip. Green background. To the left written above by a later hand: Doctor Martinus Luther, propheta germanus Anno 1521 in pathmo Aetatis suae 38. depingebatur; in the opposite lower left-hand corner a coat of arms, probably from earlier owners, emblazoned also with Luther's Rose. Written next to it: Pestis. eram. vivens. moriens. pro mors. tua. Papa.

A very fine and beautiful painting, in color, in drawing and painting, so that, if one would not want to consider it a firsthand work of Cranach, it stands up, however, extremely close to it. The signature certainly has the shape of the son's and the school's, it is from the period. I have seen several pictures with this peculiar green background, for example a similar portrait in the library of the grand-duke in Weimar, which belong to the very good works of Cranach and which, if one does not want to consider them as authentic, one must count them among the most beautiful studio paintings. It would be very interesting if a particular student of Cranach's could be identified in it.

42) Katharina von Bora, Luther's Frau.

Halbfigur mit übereinandergelegten Armen.

Dieses als Seitenstück zu dem vorhergehenden, nach einem Cranach'schen Porträt gemalte Bild hat sehr viel Gutes, macht in allem den Eindruck eines guten Cranach'schen Bildes, ohne im einzelnen ihm zugeschrieben werden zu können. Es ist dasselbe Wappen rechts oben draufgemalt und die Inschrift dazugefügt: Katharina a Bor, Uxor acerrimi, Christi Jesu Salvatoris nostri, per Germaniam Apostoli, Dōni Doctoris Martini Lutheri etc.

Das Zeichen rechts unten ist in ähnlicher Weise wie das des ältern Cranach nachgemacht.

42) Katharina von Bora, Luther's wife.  
Half-length portrait with crossed arms.

This portrait, painted as a pendant of the previous one, is painted like one of Cranach's portraits. It has many good features. In general, it gives the impression of a good Cranach painting, without being attributable to him. It has the same coat-of-arms painted in the upper right and the inscription added: Katharina a Bor, Uxor acerrimi, Christi Jesu Salvatoris nostri, per Germaniam Apostoli, Doni Doctoris Martini Lutheri etc.

The lower-right signature is imitated in a similar way to the elder Cranach.

*Appendix B**1890 Inventory Entries and Translations*

Beschreibende Darstellung  
der älteren  
**Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler**  
des  
**Königreichs Sachsen.**

Auf Kosten der K. Staatsregierung  
herausgegeben  
vom K. Sächsischen Alterthumsverein.

---

Vierzehntes Heft:

**Amthauptmannschaft Rochlitz.**

bearbeitet  
von  
**Dr. R. Steche.**

—\*—

DRESDEN.

In Commission bei C. C. Meißner & Sohn.

1890.

Descriptive Representation  
of the older  
**Architectural and Art Monuments**  
Of the Kingdom of Saxony  
Funded by the Kingdom State Government  
published  
by the Royal Antiquarian Society  
Volume Fourteen  
Rochlitz Government Administration  
edited  
by  
Dr. R. Steche  
Dresden  
Publisher C. C. Meinhold & Sons  
1890

In der Sakristei bewahrt: Bildniss Luther's, als Junker George dargestellt, und Frau, Oelgemälde auf Eichenholz, je 36 cm breit, 51 cm hoch. Gestiftet von C. Friedrich Aug. Roch 1848 mit dem Wunsche für den Geistlichen, sich durch die Anschauung des Bildes Luther's ermuthigt und gestärkt zu fühlen, das Wort Gottes, wie es von diesem Glaubenshelden geschehen, in seinem Sinne lauter und rein vorzutragen. Die aus dem Nachlasse des Domherrn Dr. Burscher in Leipzig, Oheims des Stifters, stammenden Gemälde sind von verschiedenartigem Werthe. — Luther's Hüftbildniss trägt das Zeichen Cranach d. Ae. und darüber die Jahreszahl 1537, es zeigt alle Vorzüge und Eigenart des Meisters mit sorgfältigster Durchführung und erscheint mindestens als ausgezeichnetes Schulbild, wenn nicht als Cranach's eigne Arbeit, mit der nachträglich erfolgten Ueberschrift: DOCTOR MARTINVS LVTHER. PROPHETA GERMANVS. ANNO. 1521. IN. PATHMO. AETATIS SUAE. 38. DEPINGEBATUR. Darunter: PESTIS. ERAM. VIVENS. MORTVS. ERO. MORS. TVA. PAPA.\*) — Das Brustbildniss der Katharina Luther trägt Cranach's Zeichen aussergewöhnlich gebildet, ohne Jahreszahl, ist auch weniger künstlerisch und sorgfältig ausgeführt, es erscheint als ein später gemaltes Gegenstück. Seine Unterschrift lautet: KATHARINA. A. BOR. VXOR. ACERRIMI. CHRISTI. JESV. SALVATORIS. NOSTRI. PER. GERMANIAM. APOSTOLI. DNI. DOCTORIS. MARTINI LUTHERI. 70.\*\*)

Kept in the Sacristy: Portrait of Luther as Junker George and his wife, oil paintings on oak, each 36 cm wide, 51 cm high. Donated by C. Friedrich Aug. Roch 1848 hoping that the priest will be encouraged and strengthened by the contemplation of Luther's portrait and then to present the word of God clearer and purer with the same mindset as this hero of the faith. The paintings, which came from the estate of the canon Dr. Burscher in Leipzig, uncle of the donor, have different qualities--Luther's half-length portrait bears the signature of the older Cranach and above it the date 1537, displays all the merits and characteristics of the Master with a most careful execution and appears at least as an outstanding workshop piece, if not Cranach's own work, with the following inscription: DOCTOR MARTINVS LVTHER . PROPHETA . GERMANVS . ANNO . 1521 . IN . PATHMO . AETATIS SVAE . 38 . DEPINGEBATUR .

Below: PESTIS . ERAM . VIVENS . MORTVS . ERO . MORS . TVA . PAPA\*)--The half-length portrait of Katharina bears Cranach's extraordinary abilities, not dated, though it is less artistically and carefully executed, it appears to be a later-painted pendant. It's inscription reads: KATHARINA . A. BOR . VXOR . ACERRIMI . CHRISTI . JESV . SALVATORIS . NOSTRI . PER GERMANIAM . APOSTOLI . DNI . DOCTORIS . MARTINI LUTHERI. 70.\*\*)

## Reliefbrustbildniss

Luther's aus Papierteig gepresst, mit gleichem Spruch wie das oben beschriebene Bildniss Luther's, gleich den in anderen Kirchen, z. B. zu Döbeln, befindlichen. Solche Relieffe wurden im 16. Jahrh. meistens nach einer von Albrecht von Soest geschaffenen Form sowohl aus Papierteig wie Metall (Dom zu Meldorf in Dithmarschen mit Albrecht's Zeichen) hergestellt. Die *Bücherei* der Sakristei enthält theilweise werthvolle geschriebene und gedruckte Werke, ferner eine Agenda v. J. 1661, deren Silberbeschlag die Wappen der Herren von Schönburg und Reuss zieren.

\*) Die K. K. Hofbibliothek zu Wien besitzt ein mit der Feder gezeichnetes Bildniss Luther's, unter welches er selbst geschrieben:

Mein Leben pestis gewesen ist  
 Du Pabst wohl inne worden bist  
 Nu aber mein thu schlaff in gott  
 Sol sein dein schad und bitter Tod.

\*\*\*) Beide Gemälde entsprechen künstlerisch durchaus, in den Zuthaten aber nicht völlig den in Chr. Schuchardt's Lucas Cranach d. Ae. Leben und Werke III, S. 150, Nr. 41 und 42 als im Besitze eines Herrn von Schreibershofen aufgeführten Bildnissen.

**Relief half-length portraits of Luther, made from paper-paste, with the same inscription as Luther's portrait above, are similar to ones found in other churches, for example, in Döbeln. Such reliefs were made in the 16th century, mostly created according to a procedure of Albrecht von Soest from paper-paste as well as metal (Cathedral at Meldorf in Dithmarschen with Albrecht's signature). The sacristy archives contains some valuable written and printed works, also an agenda of 1661, silvermounting is decorated with the coat of arms of the Lords of Schönburg and Reuss.**

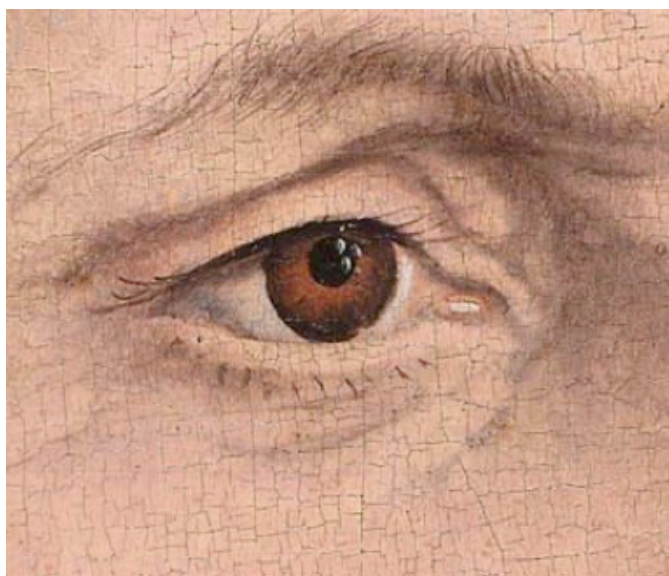
**\*) The K. K. Court Library in Vienna possesses an image of Luther, sketched with a pen, with a text he wrote himself:**

**My life was a living pestilence  
 You Pope have learned it since  
 I found in God all my peace  
 To your shame and bitter death.**

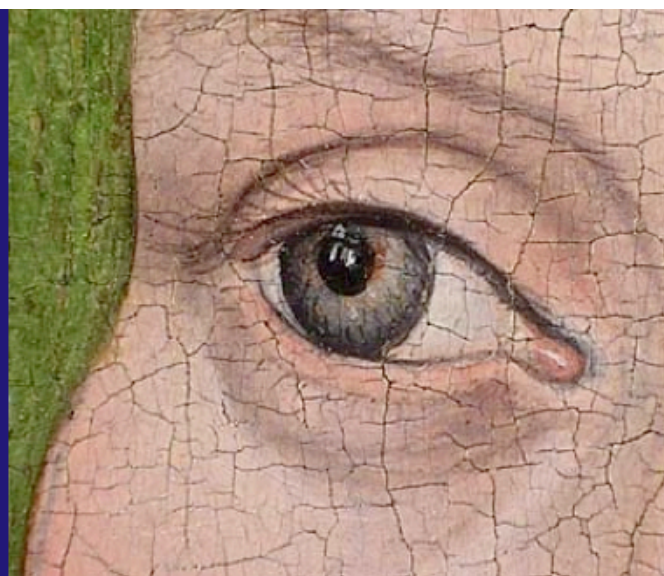
**\*\*\*) Both paintings entirely match artistically, but not exactly in their additions to Chr. Schuchardt's Lucas Cranach the Elder Life and Works III, Page 150, Nr. 41 & 42 referenced in Mr. von Schreibershofen's collection.**

## *Details*

Conservators have the ability to view works of art under binocular magnification. This vantage point discloses a hidden world of brushstrokes and color. From this perspective, artistic abilities are also magnified. The following after-treatment images offer a detailed glimpse into the artist's extraordinary skill.



*Detail Luther Eye*



*Detail Katharina Eye*



*Detail Luther Mouth*



*Detail Katharina Mouth*





*Detail Luther Fingers*



*Detail Katharina Fingers*

### Footnotes

1. Valentiner biographical information from-  
<http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/valentinerw.htm> accessed 5/15/14.
2. A telegram, dated May 18, 1939, from Dr. Paul Grumann, director of the Joslyn Memorial Building, Omaha, Nebraska, to Frank Almy claims "authentication by Friedlander." The authentication was also referenced in an unsigned internal Muskegon Museum of Art memo dated May 16, 1939. There is no documentation to support the authentication and there is no reference to the paintings in Friedlander's 1932 *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*. Heinz Norden translation of *Die Gemälde von Lucas Cranach*. Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press. 1978. p.99.
3. Howarth, Shirley Reiff. *European Painting: Muskegon Museum of Art*. S.D. Warren Company. Muskegon, Michigan. 1981. p.14.
4. Dendrochronology performed by Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin. Results received in a letter dated March 11, 2014.
5. Stout, George. "Classes of Simple Paint Structure." *Technical Studies*, vol. VI. 1938. p.231.
6. References for consolidation, cleaning, varnishing, and retouching from the author's 2005 Case Study, "A 1938 Portrait of Adolf Hitler."

7. The portraits were x-rayed at 56 kilovolts and 3.3 milliamps for 6 milliseconds on August 18, 2013, by Ms. Tracy O'Brien and Mr. Thomas Daus from the Radiology Department at Shriners Hospital for Children in Chicago, Illinois.
8. Infra-red examination carried out with the assistance of Mr. Joe Barabe on March 29, 2013.
9. Filling, varnishing, and retouching purposes from Bradley, Morton C. *The Treatment of Pictures*. Cosmos Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1950.
10. E-mail instructions dated November 20, 2013.
11. Dr. Heydenreich is also the author of the acclaimed *Lucas Cranach the Elder: Painting Materials, Techniques and Workshop Practice*. Amsterdam University Press. 2007.
12. Digital font chosen for its similarity to the original.
13. The colleague is a gallery owner in Holland.
14. E-mail dated 8/6/13. The article *Zwei wertvolle Gemälde der Kirchengemeinde sollen Lutherweg aufwerten (Two Valuable Paintings of the Parish to Enhance Lutherweg)*. Freie Presse, 2/25/13, referenced on <http://www.penig.de/presseportal>.
15. E-mail dated 10/7/13.
16. E-mail dated 2/21/14. On 5/20/14, Dr. Sandner said it took two phone calls to find the paintings, one to the church and one to the Monuments Office.
17. E-mail dated 3/12/14.
18. Schuchardt, Christian. *Lucas Cranach des Älteren Leben und Werke*. Vol. III, 1871. Leipzig. pp.150-151, Entries 41 and 42.
19. Steche, Dr. R. *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Königreichs Sachsen*. 1890. Dresden. pp.46-47.
20. Dr. White also offered a possible alternative translation: *Katharina A Bora, wife of the most ardent apostle of Germany of our Savior Jesus Christ, Lord Doctor Martin Luther*.
21. Translation and Epitaph reference from Springer, Carl. "Death and Life After Death in Luther's Latin Elegies." *Proceedings of the XIV Annual Congress for Neo-Latin Studies*. August, 2009. p.1056. Accessed 6/14/14 at [books.google.com/books?isbn=9004227431](http://books.google.com/books?isbn=9004227431), 6/14/14.

22. The museum has listed their paintings with the Nazi-Era Provenance Internet Portal Project. To date, no one has claimed ownership. Also, the portraits were acquired in early 1939, somewhat prior to the period of systemic Nazi looting.

23. There also seemed to be a third discrepancy. In the Luther entry, Schuchardt noted the location of the upper inscription as: *To the left written above*. The inscription though is in the upper right; however Schuchardt also states that the coat of arms is *in the opposite lower left-hand corner*. This latter statement would place the inscription in the upper-right corner, not the left. This contradiction could be a printing error or an error in Schuchardt's records. Compositionally, an upper-right text balances Katharina's upper-left inscription as the sitters turn toward each other.

24. Biographical information from <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/22nd-november-1879/23/general-news> accessed 7/6/14; [https://archive.org/stream/geschichtedesmi00potegoog/geschichtedesmi00potegoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/geschichtedesmi00potegoog/geschichtedesmi00potegoog_djvu.txt) accessed 7/11/14; and <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz79166.html> accessed 7/11/14.

25. Vogel, Julius. "Luther as Junker Georg." [http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/2659/1/Vogel\\_Luther\\_als\\_Junker\\_Georg\\_1918.pdf](http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/2659/1/Vogel_Luther_als_Junker_Georg_1918.pdf) accessed 7/2/14, originally published in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, Neue Folge 29, Bd. 53. 1918. S.57-65 (*Journal of Visual Arts*, New Series 29, Vol. 53. 1918. pp.57-65).

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**Mr. Alexander Christoph. Freie Presse, Chemnitz, Germany.**

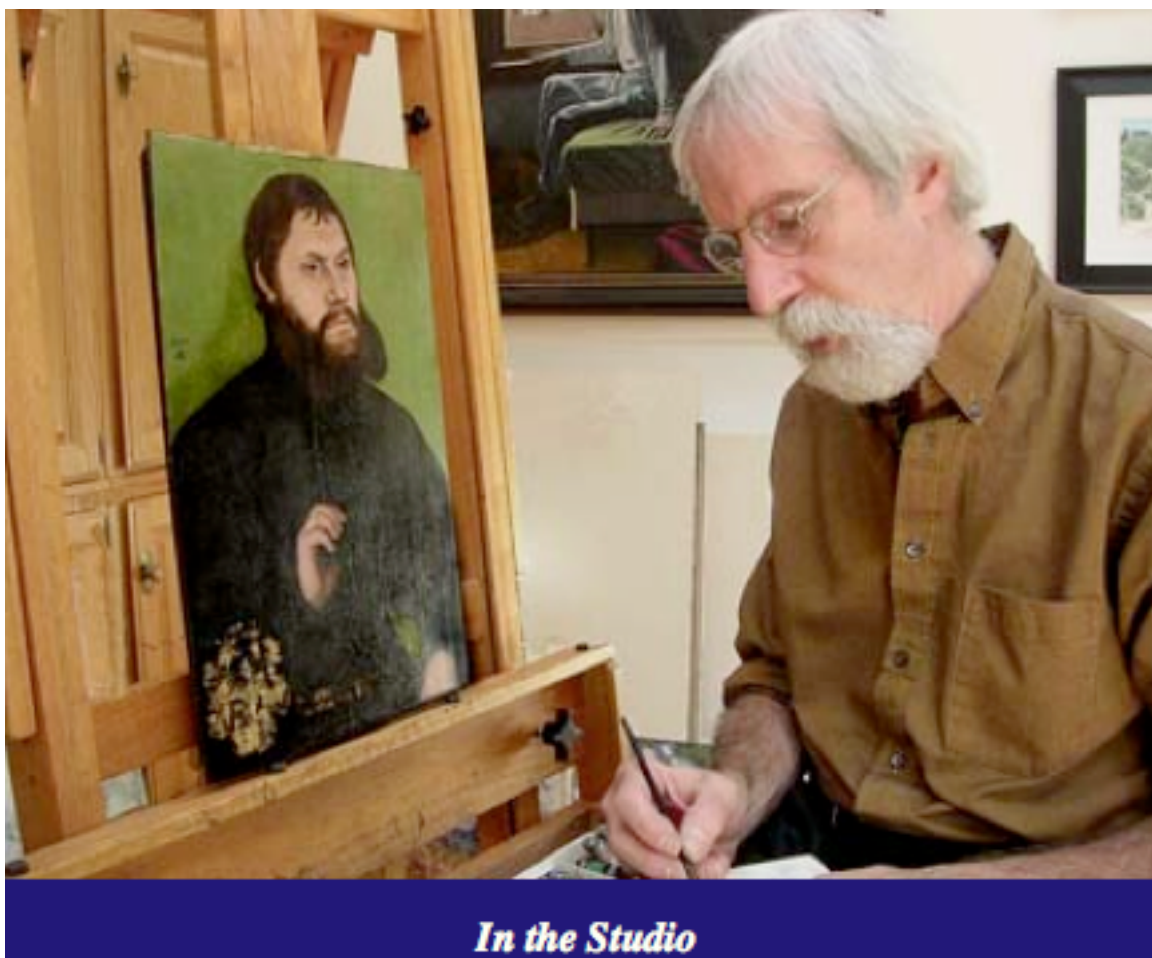
**Mr. Michael Stellner. Freie Presse, Chemnitz, Germany.**

**Cranach Digital Archive, <http://www.lucascranach.org>.**

**Forest Products Laboratory. Madison, Wisconsin.**

**Ryerson Library, The Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, Illinois.**

**The River Forest Public Library. River Forest, Illinois.**



### To the Reader

The author wishes to thank the reader for reviewing this material. Comments, corrections, and suggestions can be sent to [barrybbc7@yahoo.com](mailto:barrybbc7@yahoo.com).