

Lasse Hodne

Omnivoyance and Omnipresence

Word and Vision According to Nicholas of Cusa and Jan van Eyck

In his *De visione Dei*, Nicholas of Cusa addresses two aspects of divine vision: my desire to see God and God's capacity to see me. The latter aspect is distinguished by absolute power: God's gaze is all-seeing. To explain this peculiar power Cusa introduces what he calls the figure of an 'omnivoyant'. This is a portrait with its eyes turned towards the spectator so that the gaze of the depicted person appears to follow the spectator. This paper shows how this optical effect determined the choice of the full-face view as the characteristic way to represent the divine in Renaissance painting, and how inscriptions on the frames of a series of portraits of Christ attributed to Jan van Eyck reveal that the use of this effect was deliberate and in accordance with theological doctrine.