

DERMATOLOGICAL ICONODIAGNOSIS in Vienna: a unique museal opportunity for dermatologists at EADV 2026



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INTRODUCTION

EADV 2026 is held in Vienna, a city renowned for its exceptional artistic and cultural heritage. Its museums offer a unique opportunity to explore the representation of skin and visible dermatological conditions in works of art.

Dermatological iconodiagnosis is the identification and analysis of visible skin abnormalities depicted in artworks. By examining these representations, this approach can contribute to the development of **visual diagnostic skills**, enhance observation of clinical signs, and provide an original educational perspective for dermatologists.

The **Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna**, with its rich and diverse permanent collection, provides a particularly valuable setting for such an exploration.

This study aimed to identify, document, and analyze visible dermatological features represented in selected artworks from the permanent collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, highlighting their potential relevance to dermatological education and visual literacy.

MATERIAL & METHODS



Paintings and sculptures from the permanent collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, were examined **in situ** by members of the International Society of Iconodiagnosis (ISI), following the standardized protocols, guidelines, and recommendations for dermatological iconodiagnosis published by Charlier et al. (*Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, 2023;31:100951).

High-resolution photographs were subsequently reviewed by the **ISI Dermatology Board** for cross-validation of the observations.

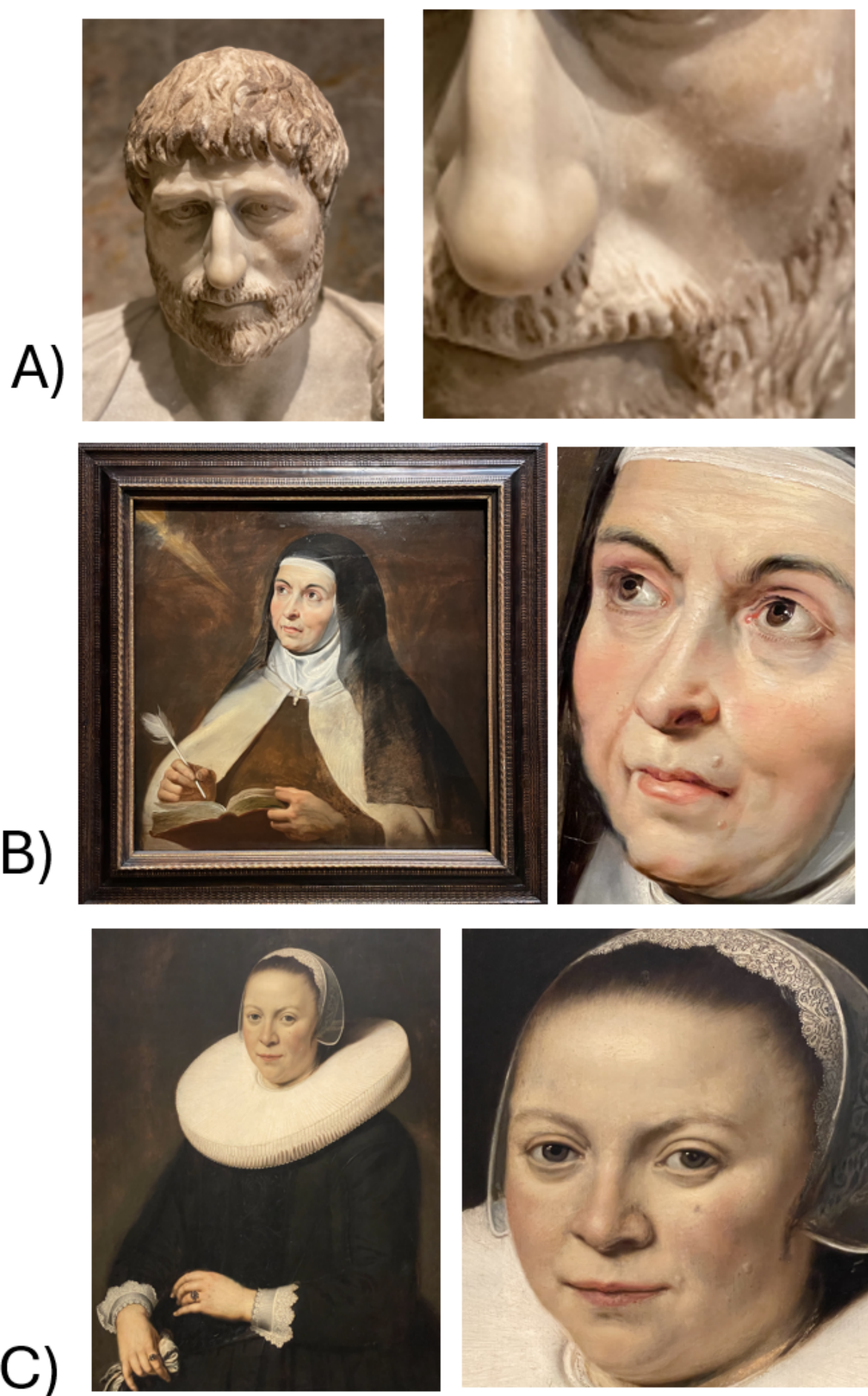
The analysis focused on **visible dermatological features**, including nevi, moles, and other potentially identifiable skin lesions. Particular attention was paid to distinguishing genuine dermatological features from **artistic conventions, stylistic effects, or technical artifacts**, in order to minimize the risk of pseudodiagnosis.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

RESULTS ABOUT DERMATOLOGY

Among approximately **800 paintings and sculptures** examined from the permanent collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, **three dermatological iconodiagnoses** were identified, corresponding to approximately **0.5% of the artworks examined**. The observed dermatological features included **nevi and moles, all identified in sculptures**.

Potential **pseudodiagnoses related to artistic style, representation, or technical effects** were carefully excluded from the analysis.

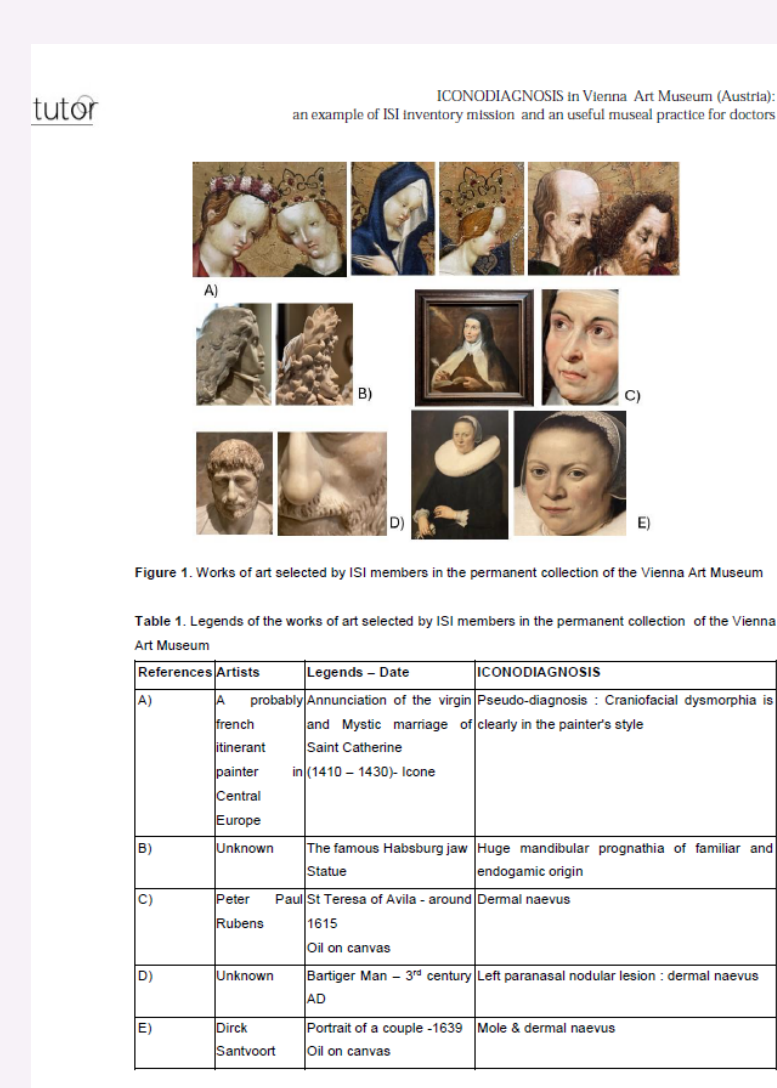
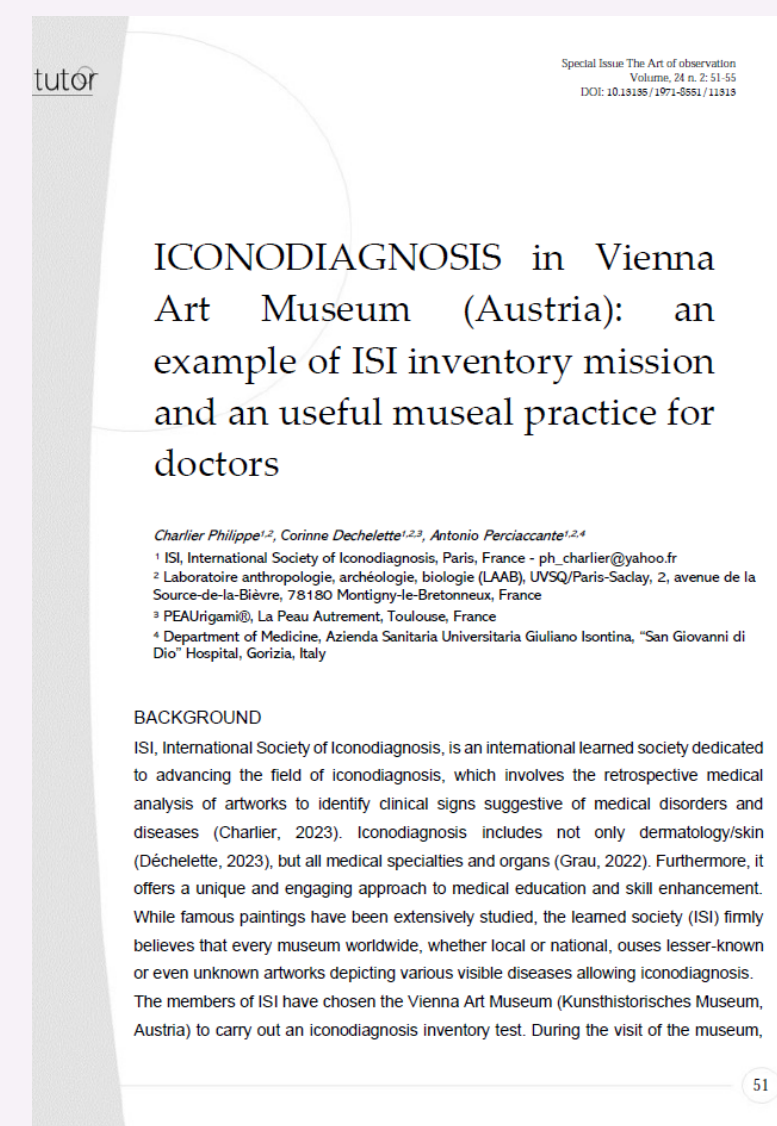


Ref.	Artists	Legends – Date	ICONODIAGNOSIS	Level of proofs
A)	Unknown	Bartiger Man – 3 rd century AD Marble Sculpture	Left paranasal nodular lesion : dermal naevus	II
B)	Peter Paul Rubens	St Teresa of Avila - around 1615 Oil on canvas	Dermal naevus	II
C)	Dirck Santvoort	Portrait of a couple - 1639 Oil on canvas	Mole & dermal naevus	II

BEYOND DERMATOLOGY

Iconodiagnosis is not limited to dermatology. It can be applied to any disease or pathological condition whose clinical manifestations are visibly represented in an artwork. In this broader perspective, the ISI has identified **five illustrative cases involving non-dermatological conditions**, demonstrating the potential of artworks as historical sources of clinical observation.

These cases were brought together in a **dedicated article providing a global overview of iconodiagnosis beyond dermatological manifestations**, highlighting the contribution of art to the visual documentation of disease across medical disciplines.

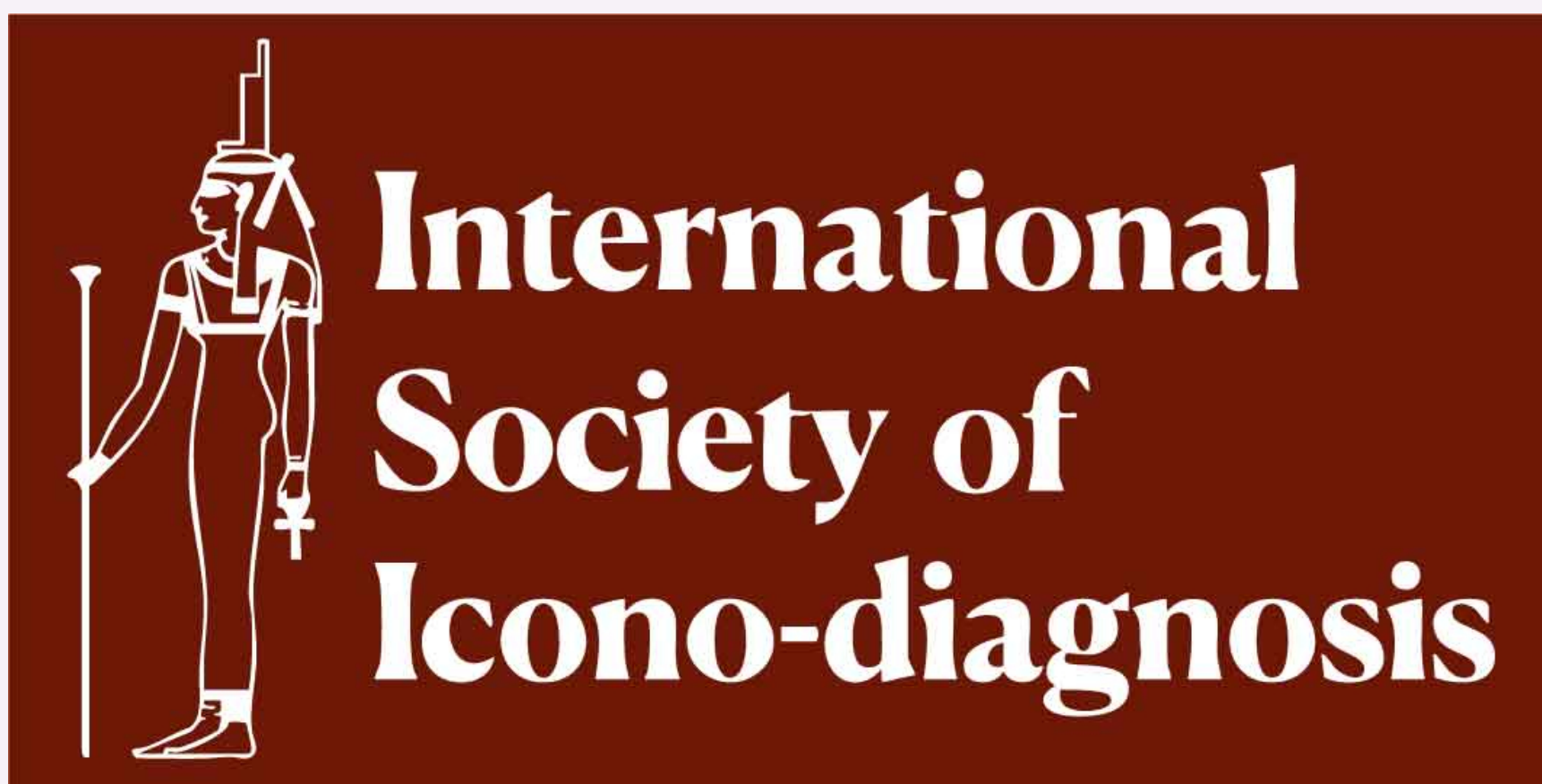


CONCLUSION

Systematic dermatological iconodiagnosis in museum collections is **feasible, educational, and potentially valuable for dermatological visual literacy**. Although visible dermatological features were identified in only a small proportion of the artworks examined, museum collections represent a largely underexplored resource for dermatology.

Access to **museum reserves**, together with collaboration with curators and art historians, could facilitate the systematic documentation and validation of dermatological features in artworks, strengthening the comprehensiveness and reliability of ISI iconodiagnostic databases.

Major art-rich cities hosting EADV congresses provide a unique opportunity to combine **dermatological observation, visual learning, and cultural enrichment**, while contributing to the growing documentation of skin representations in art.



<https://www.isi-iconodiagnosis.org/>

Iconodiagnosis of dermatoses, study of skin through the arts and contribution to dermatology



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INTRODUCTION

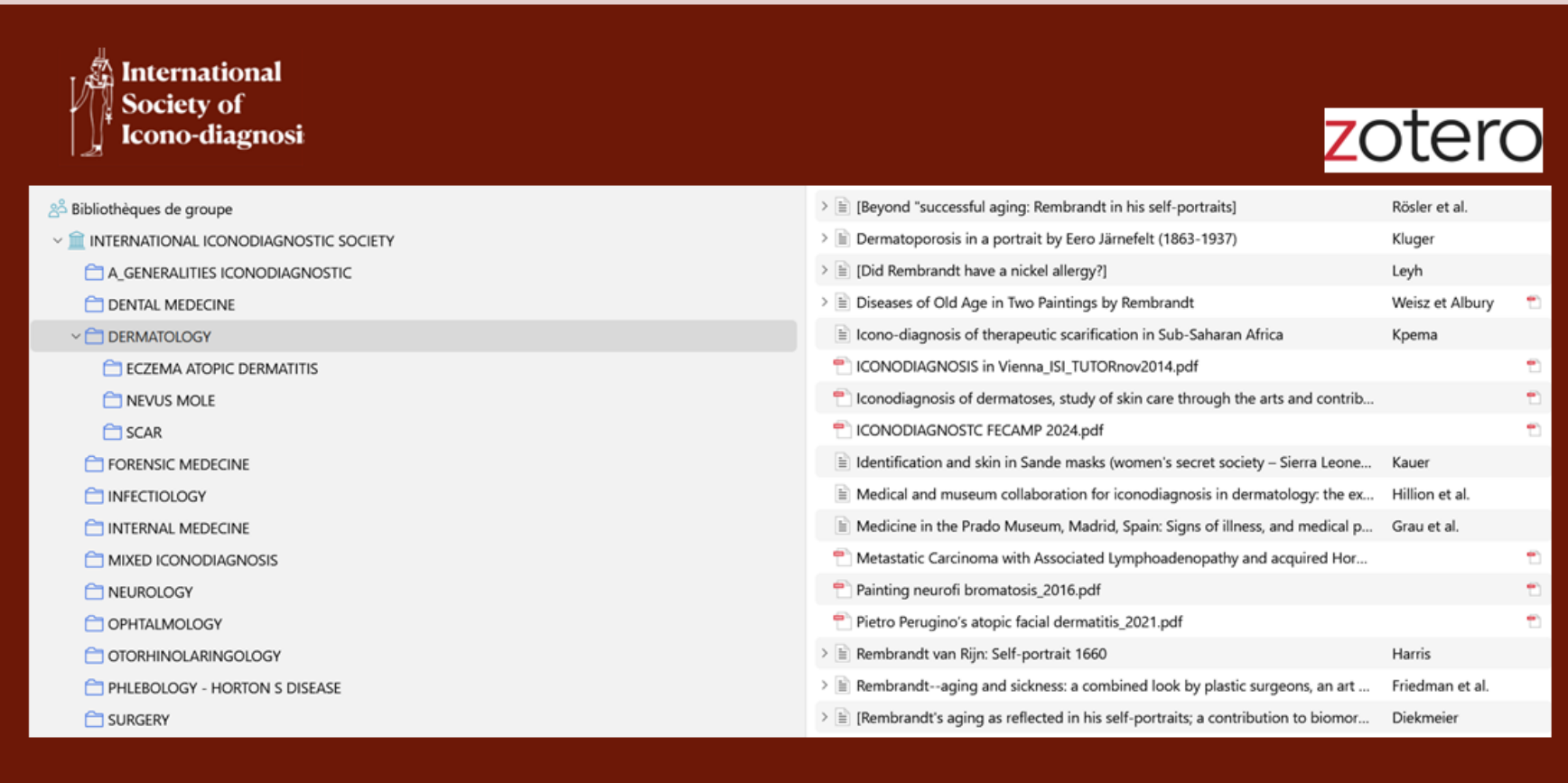
Iconodiagnosis is an interdisciplinary approach that combines art history and medicine to identify diseases through their representation in works of art, primarily paintings but also, secondarily, sculptures. Within this framework, the **International Society of Iconodiagnosis (ISI)** has developed a unique database that catalogs historical artworks depicting dermatological, neurological, phlebological, internal, and anatomical diseases, reflecting the involvement of several medical disciplines in iconodiagnosis.

The present study focuses on **dermatology and iconodiagnosis**. Of the 252 artworks currently referenced in the ISI database, 131 (49%) allow for a dermatological iconodiagnosis. Painters from the 14th to the 18th century have portrayed a wide range of conditions, encompassing 30 distinct dermatoses.

MATERIAL & METHODS

The **first step** was a literature search conducted using the PubMed database to identify articles addressing the representation of diseases in artworks. The search strategy included the keywords of each dermatosis combined with the terms “art,” “iconodiagnosis,” and “painting.” The selection and analysis of the articles were performed in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. This research was complemented by contributions from ISI members who were aware of relevant articles not indexed in PubMed. All collected references were centralized in the ISI Library using the Zotero reference management software.

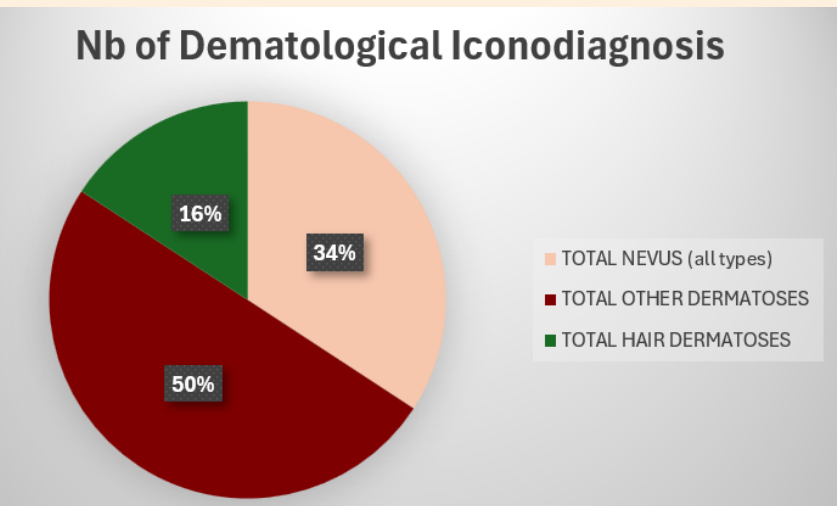
The **second step** was the implementation of the database using LibreOffice and the development of the visual interface.



International Society of Iconodiagnosis Bibliographical Database using Zotero software centralizing more 150 scientific publications

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The **131 artworks** with dermatological iconodiagnoses documented in the ISI database span **30 distinct dermatoses**. The most frequently identified are **nevi** of various types (39 out of 131, representing **30%**). Hair-related disorders constitute the second most common category, accounting for 18 cases (**14%** of the total).



Dermatological Iconodiagnosis	Number	Percentage	Dermatological Iconodiagnosis	Number	Percentage
DERMAL NEVUS	13	9,9	SMALLPOX	2	1,5
WART DERMAL NEVUS	9	6,9	ACTINIC KERATOSIS	1	0,8
NEVUS	8	6,1	SCAB	1	0,8
PSEUDO FRONTAL ALOPECIA	8	6,1	SCAR	1	0,8
ROSACEA	6	4,6	TRICOPHYTIC SYCOSIS	1	0,8
RHINOPHYMA	5	3,8	PIEBALSDISM	1	0,8
ATOPIC DERMATITIS	5	3,8	POIKILODERMA	1	0,8
SEBORRHEIC KERATOSIS	5	3,8	MELANOMA DUBREUILH	1	0,8
MELANOCYTIC NEVUS	4	3	PAPULAR LESION	1	0,8
LENTIGO	4	3	KERATOSIS	1	0,8
FRONTAL ALOPECIA	4	3	CYST	1	0,8
CARCINOMA	4	3	DERMATOMYOSITIS	1	0,8
TINEA CAPITIS	3	2,3	EPIYHELIOMA	1	0,8
HALO NEVUS	3	2,3	ERYTHROSIS	1	0,8
SEBORRHEIC DERMATITIS	3	2,3	ERYSIPELE	1	0,8
HIRSUTISM	3	2,3	HEMOCHROMASIS	1	0,8
SYPHILIS	2	1,5	KERATOSIS PILARIS RUBRA	1	0,8
DERMATOPOROSIS	2	1,5	SPITZ NEVUS	1	0,8
SUN TAN	2	1,5	LIPOMA	1	0,8
PLAGUE	2	1,5	MALAR RASH	1	0,8
DEPIGMENTATION	2	1,5	ANDROGENIC ALOPECIA	1	0,8
CONGENITAL SYPHILIS	2	1,5	MILIAN'S CITRIN SKIN	1	0,8
SCLERODERMA	2	1,5	MOLE PIGMENTED NEVUS	1	0,8
LIPODISTROPHY	2	1,5	NEUROFIBROMATOSIS	1	0,8
LEPROSY	2	1,5	WOUND	1	0,8
TOTAL	131	100%			



International Society of Icono-diagnosis

ARTIST (surname, NAME)
Domenico GHIRLANDAIO

ARTIST NATION
ITALIAN

DATE OF CRE.
1490

TYPE (painting, statue)
PAINTING

TECHNICAL ASPECTS
Tempera on poplar panel

MUSEUM LOCATION
MUSEE du LOUVRE

CITY LOCATION
PARIS

COUNTRY LOCATION
FRANCE

PERMANENT COLLECTION or RESERVE
PERMANENT

ICONODIAGNOSTIC MEDICAL SPECIALITY
DERMATOLOGY

ICONODIAGNOSIS
RHINOPHYMA

DIFFERENTIAL ICONODIAGNOSIS

ICONODIAGNOSIS LEVEL OF PROOFS (1 to 4)
2

PUBLICATION 1 REFERENCE
Déchelette C, Charlier P. Iconodiagnosis of dermatoses, study of skin care through the arts and contribution to the education of semiology. Ethics. Medicine and Public Health. 2023; 28.

PUBLICATION 2 REFERENCE
Faure M. In: Histoire de la dermatologie en peinture. La der-matologie en France. Editions Privat; France; 2002.

PUBLICATION 3 REFERENCE

PUBLICATION 4 REFERENCE

Editor of the monograph
C.Déchelette

Monograph writing date
27/03/25

WORK OF ART TITLE
THE OLD MAN AND THE CHILD

ID
12



International Society of Iconodiagnosis Visual Database using Database Libre Office Software

This ISI database comprises **20 search fields**, allowing for detailed analysis based on both medical criteria and artistic factors, while also integrating links to scientific publications that describe and analyze these cases of iconodiagnosis. Its purpose is to ensure scientific rigor in the analyses and to foster in-depth interdisciplinary research.

Currently, the database includes only works of art that have already been studied and published in the medical literature. However, many ISI members have identified **artworks with cutaneous anomalies in museums that remain unpublished**. The database therefore also aims to document these artworks, pending potential publication. The ultimate goal is to build the most representative resource possible, covering diverse countries and historical periods.

CONCLUSION

With this resource, **semi-quantitative analyses** can be conducted, enabling researchers to assess the frequency and distribution of dermatological manifestations in art and sculpture across different periods and artistic styles.

These studies provide a new perspective on the evolution of skin disease representation and its socio-cultural perception throughout history. This work highlights the relevance of iconodiagnosis in enriching our historical understanding of dermatological conditions while offering researchers a structured framework for analyzing medical imagery in art and sculpture.



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Skin and Dermatoses in German Paintings: An Iconodiagnosis Study based on the International Society of Iconodiagnosis (ISI) Database

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INTRODUCTION

Iconodiagnosis is an interdisciplinary approach that combines art history and medicine to identify diseases through their representation in works of art, primarily paintings but also, secondarily, sculptures. Within this framework, the **International Society of Iconodiagnosis (ISI)** has developed a unique database that catalogs historical artworks depicting dermatological, neurological, phlebological, internal, and anatomical diseases, reflecting the involvement of several medical disciplines in iconodiagnosis.

Dermatological iconodiagnosis, defined as the systematic study of skin representations in works of art, is an emerging discipline that provides a complementary approach to the historical understanding, epidemiology, and teaching of dermatological semiology. It enables the systematic identification and analysis of cutaneous signs depicted in artworks, enhances the visual literacy of dermatologists, and facilitates international comparisons of dermatological representations across artistic traditions.

At the **ESDR 2026 Congress in Heidelberg**, special attention was given to German paintings exhibiting dermatological iconodiagnosis features.

Using the **International Society of Iconodiagnosis (ISI) database**, which compiles artworks with dermatologically relevant features reported in the scientific literature, we present a selection of German paintings dating from the 15th to the 19th century that demonstrate significant iconodiagnostic potential.

MATERIAL & METHODS



ICONODIAGNOSIS
DERMATOLOGICAL DATABASE

Dermatological iconodiagnosis	Number	Percentage	Dermatological iconodiagnosis	Number	Percentage
DERMAL NEVUS	13	9.9	SMALLPOX	2	1.5
WART DERMAL NEVUS	9	6.9	ACTINIC KERATOSIS	1	0.8
NEVUS	8	6.1	SCAR	1	0.8
PSEUDOFRONTAL ALOPECIA	8	6.1	SCAR	1	0.8
ROSCARIA	6	4.6	TRICHOMYCTIC SYCOSIS	1	0.8
BIROPHOMA	5	3.8	PERIALLOIDEM	1	0.8
ATOPIC DERMATITIS	5	3.8	POKALODERMA	1	0.8
SEBORRHEIC KERATOSIS	5	3.8	MELANOMA DUBREUILH	1	0.8
MELANOCYTIC NEVUS	4	3	PAPULAR LESION	1	0.8
LENTIGO	4	3	KERATOSIS	1	0.8
FRONTAL ALOPECIA	4	3	CYST	1	0.8
CARCINOMA	4	3	DERMATOMYOSITIS	1	0.8
TIMEA CAPITIS	3	2.3	EPITHELIOMA	1	0.8
HALO NEVUS	3	2.3	EPITHELIOMA	1	0.8
SEBORRHEIC DERMATITIS	3	2.3	ERYSIPELA	1	0.8
HIRSUTISM	3	2.3	HEROCHROMOSIS	1	0.8
SYPIUS	2	1.5	KERATOSIS PLASIE RUBRA	1	0.8
DERMATOPOROSIS	2	1.5	SPITZ NEVUS	1	0.8
SUN TAN	2	1.5	LUPOMA	1	0.8
PLAQUE	2	1.5	MALAR RASH	1	0.8
DEPIGMENTATION	2	1.5	ANDROGENIC ALOPECIA	1	0.8
CONGENITAL SYPIUS	2	1.5	MELANOCYTIC SKIN	1	0.8
SCLERODERMA	2	1.5	MOLE PIGMENTED NEVUS	1	0.8
LIPOSTROPHY	2	1.5	NEUROFIBROMATOSIS	1	0.8
LEPROSY	2	1.5	WOUND	1	0.8
TOTAL	131	100%			

The ISI database currently includes **131 artworks** with dermatological iconodiagnoses reported in the scientific literature, encompassing **30 distinct dermatoses**.

Nevi are the most frequently identified lesions, with **39 cases (30%)** representing various clinical types. Hair disorders constitute the second most common category, accounting for **18 cases (14%)**. This diversity highlights the broad spectrum of dermatological conditions represented in works of art and underscores the value of iconodiagnosis as a resource for dermatological education and historical research.

These artworks originate from a wide range of countries and artistic traditions. For the present study, we identified and selected those created by **German painters**.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

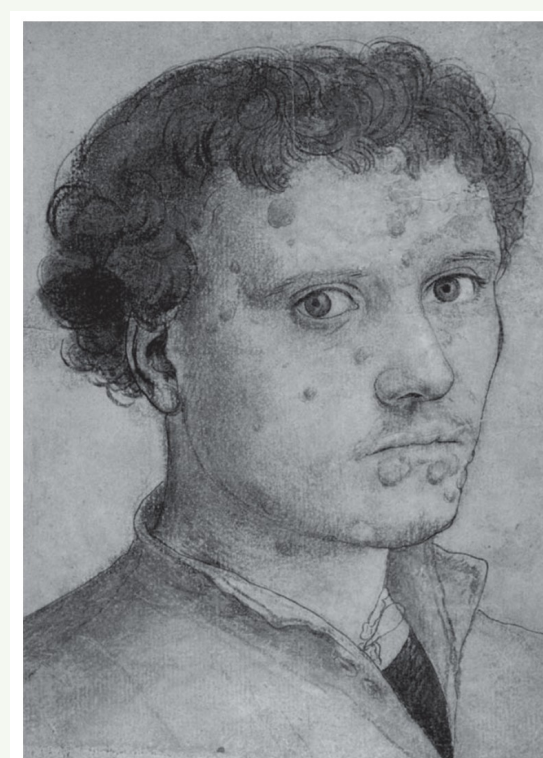
Among the **131 artworks** included in the ISI dermatological database, 3 artworks (**2.9%**) were created by **German painters**. These comprise *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* by **Matthias Grünewald**, illustrating ergotism; the *St. Elizabeth Diptych* by **Hans Holbein the Younger**, showing features consistent with scabies and sycosis barbae of probable dermatophytic origin; and *Head of a Young Man*, also by **Hans Holbein the Younger**, exhibiting clinical features suggestive of leprosy.

Although not representing a true case of dermatological iconodiagnosis, *Adam and Eve* by **Lucas Cranach the Elder** and **Lucas Cranach the Younger** (after 1537, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels) provides an exceptionally accurate depiction of **sexual dimorphism in human skin**.

Adam is portrayed with thicker skin, pronounced musculature, and a more robust integument, whereas Eve's skin appears smooth, fair, delicate, and translucent, with superficial veins clearly visible beneath the epidermis. This remarkable attention to cutaneous morphology offers a genuine artistic illustration of fundamental concepts in skin biology.



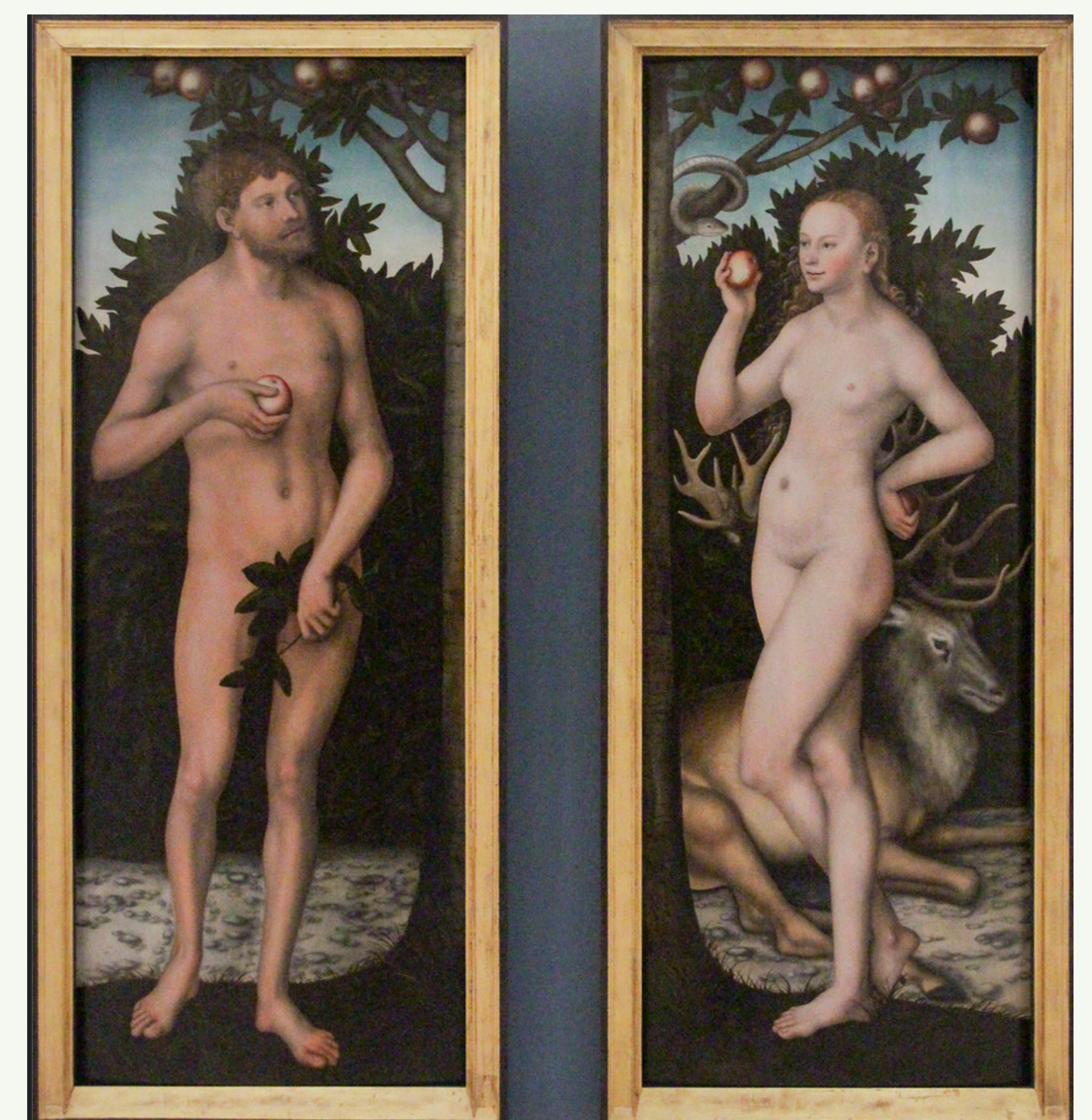
The Temptation of Saint Anthony
Matthias Grünewald, 1516
[Ergotism]



Head of a Young Man
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1593
[Leprosy]



St. Elizabeth Diptych
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1516
[Scabies & Sycosis]



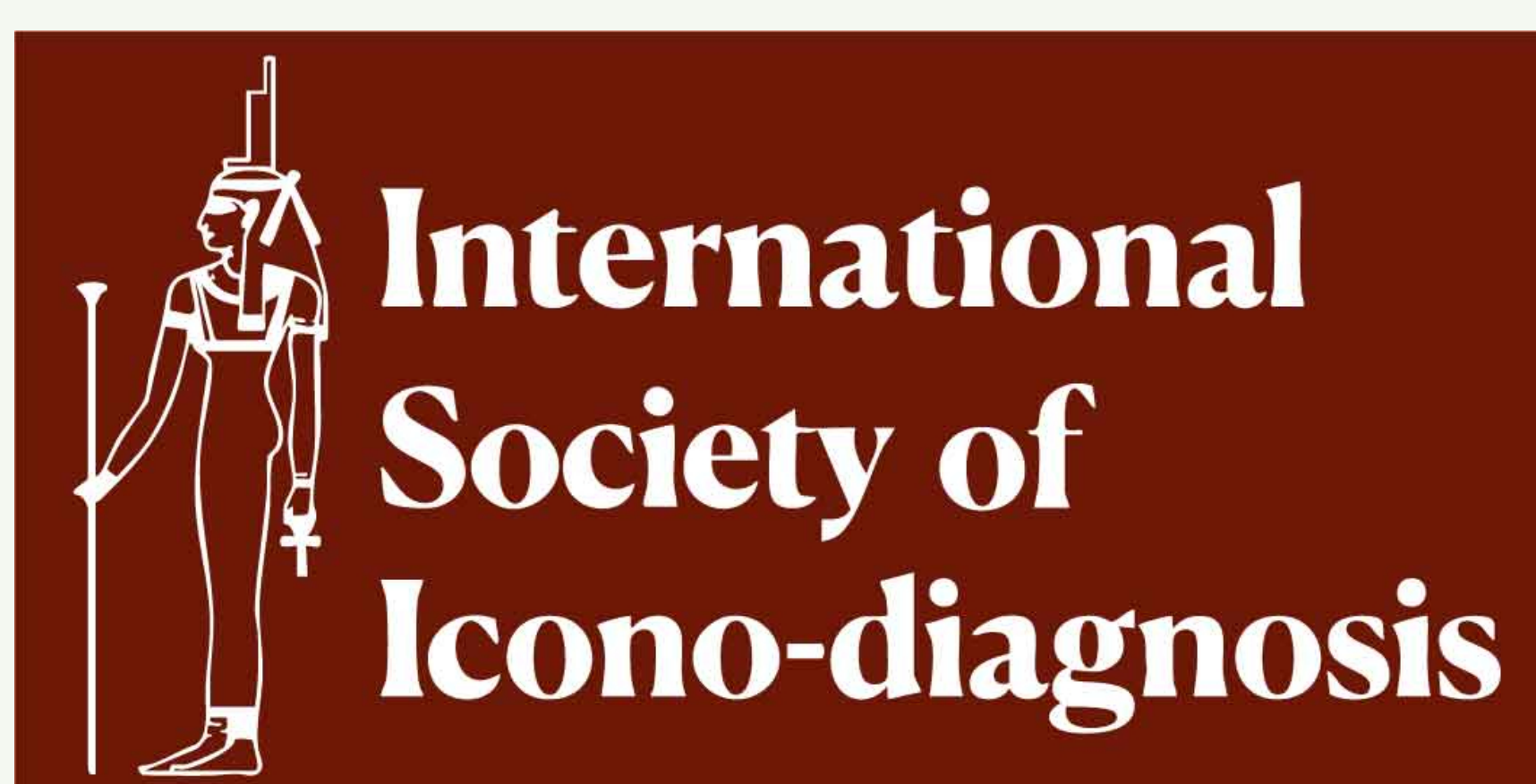
Adam and Eve
Lucas Cranach the Elder and Lucas Cranach the Younger, 1537
[Male and female skin]

CONCLUSION

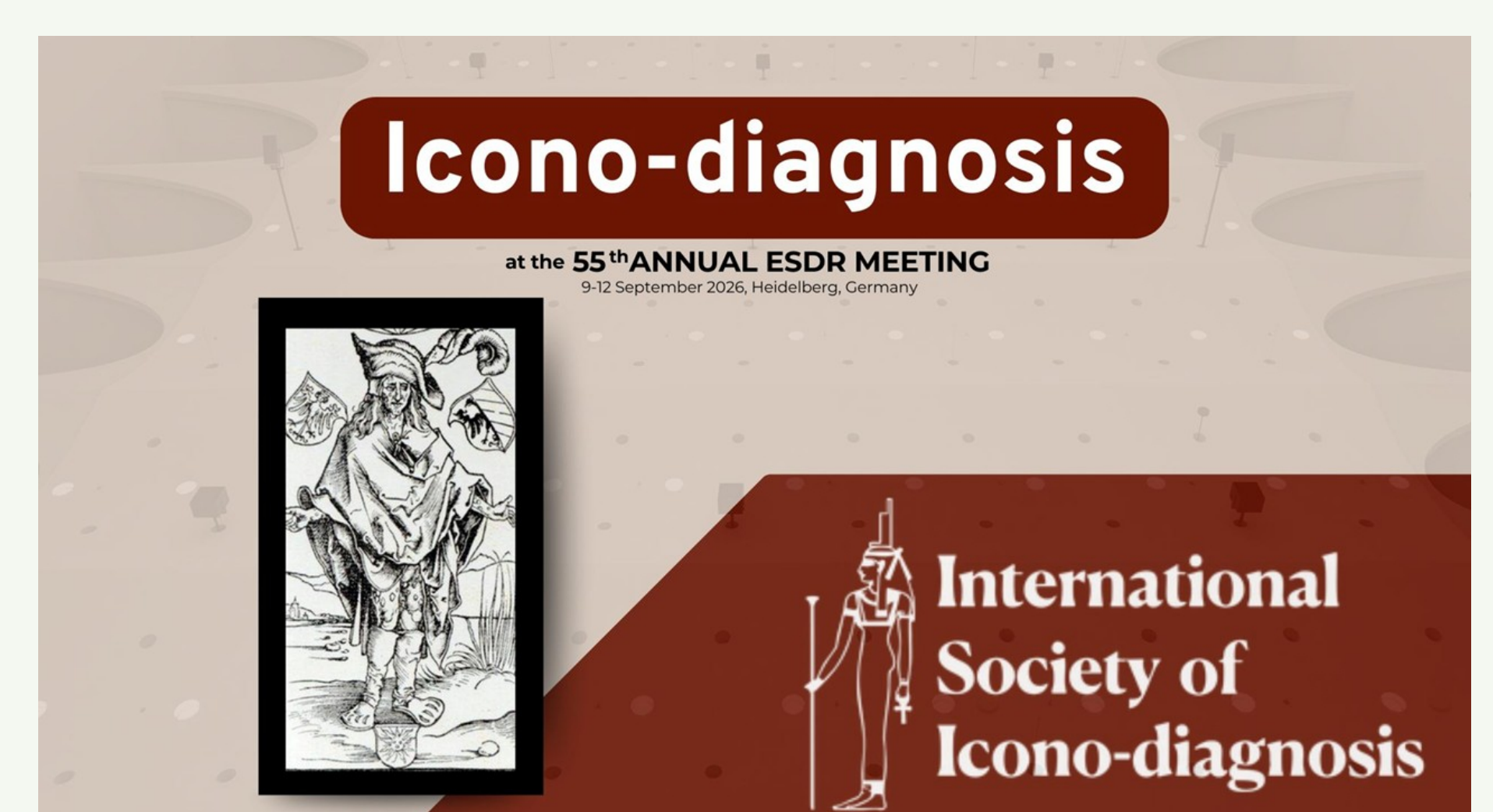
In conclusion, these paintings will also be presented at the **ESDR 2026 interactive exhibition in Heidelberg**.

This presentation will raise participants' awareness of the field of dermatological iconodiagnosis and collect knowledge about other artworks exhibiting iconodiagnosis relevance.

JOIN ISI ! Become a member !



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Iconodiagnosis of dermatoses, study of skin through the arts and contribution to dermatology



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INTRODUCTION

The skin has been covering us since the beginning of humanity. There is no other organ in the human body that has as many functions as the skin: biological, cultural and social. The skin is a sensory organ, of contact and expression. Thus, the skin is the first thing we notice and from which we draw conclusions about a person. It gives information about health, age and cultural background.

Human skin is ubiqui-tous in painting with the exception of landscapes, still life and animal art. There is no possible representation of the human being without a representation of skin. The study of this artistic skin or pictorial skin dating from antiquity to the Renaissance represents a valuable source of information on the lifestyle, skin care and dermatoses of the contemporaries of the time of the paintings studied. It is enough to observe the pictorial skin as one observes the skin of a patient.

Our objective was to establish an overview of the importance of the skin in art as a contribution to semiology and dermatology and to emphasize the relationships between skin and art.

MATERIAL & METHODS

We have studied the relationship between dermaology and pictorial art from several aspects. To answer the following questions, we have carried out a bibliographical approach using the following key words : iconodiagnosis, art & skin, visual literacy and we have exemplified each item by a selection of paintings from the main international Fine Arts museums that we have visited :

- What information about the skin does pictorial art provide from antiquity to the present day?
- How can art be used to help dermatology?

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

List of dermatoses identified by iconodiagnosis.

	Dermatological Iconodiagnosis	Description of the dermatoses	Painting
1	THE WEIGHT	Plague is an anthroppoosonosis, i.e. a disease common to humans and animals, caused by the bacillus <i>Yersinia pestis</i> . Human plague can take three forms, including bubonic plague, which can be recognized by the presence of plague buboes corresponding to satellite adenopathy in the drainage territory of the ectoparasite bite. <i>Saint Roch, Francesco Ribalta (1625) Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia, Spain.</i>	
2	FURUNCLE	A furuncle is a bacterial infection of a pilosebaceous follicle of the skin. It manifests itself as a hard and painful red pimple centered by a hair and rapidly transforming into a pustule. <i>Barthélémy l'Anglais, Livre de Propriétés des Choses, illumination end XV^e.</i>	
3	RHINOPHYMA	Rhinophyma is a progressive, more or less inflammatory acquired hypertrophy of the integument of the nose, most often a complication of rosacea. <i>The Old Man and the Child, painting by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1490), Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.</i>	
4	NEVUS	Nevi are macules, papules or nodules, most often brown or flesh-colored, made up of clusters of melanocytes or nevus cells. <i>Portrait of Frederick of Montefeltro in a painting by Piero della Francesca (1470-1473), Uffizi Museum, Florence, Italy.</i>	
5	SPITZ NEVUS	A Spitz nevus is a relatively rare type of non-cancerous skin tumor. They tend to grow rapidly at first, forming pink or brown bumps on the surface of the skin. <i>Portrait of a Young Man with a Lamp, Lorenzo Lotto (ca. 1506-08) Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.</i>	
6	ATOPIC DERMATITIS	Atopic dermatitis is a condition that causes dry, itchy and inflamed skin. <i>Self portrait of Pietro Perugino (1496-1500), Pietro Perugino, Collegio del Cambio, Perugia, Italy</i>	

VITILIGO	Vitiligo is a depigmenting dermatological disease due to the loss of melanocytes (attacked or destroyed) characterized by the appearance of white patches on the skin. <i>La Mascarade Nuptiale (1788) - José Conrado Roca ; Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle, France.</i>	
SYCOSSIS (on the left) & SCAB (on the right)	Trichophytic syccosis (beard scurf) is a dermatophytic infection of the chin most often caused by <i>Trichophyton mentagrophytes</i> or <i>T. verrucosum</i> . The scabs are small superficial lesions of the skin, a few centimeters long, rounded, pink, scaly and accompanied by itching. In a second time, they become clearer than the surrounding skin. <i>Detail of St. Elizabeth Diptych, Hans Holbein (1516), Pinacothek, Munich, Germany.</i>	
DUBREUILH'S MELANOMA	Dubreuilh's melanoma occurs almost exclusively in the elderly, and its clinical appearance is that of a spot that progressively spreads over several years, most often on the face, cheeks, temples or forehead. <i>Family of Charles, Francisco de Goya (1800) Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain.</i>	
MELANOCYTIC NEVUS (white arrow) & SYPHILIS (red arrow)	Melanocytic nevi are pigmented tumors of the skin that reflect a benign local or diffuse melanocytic proliferation. They can be present at birth: they are called congenital melanocytic nevi. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infectious disease transmitted by a bacterium of the spirochete family; <i>Treponema pallidum</i> . It manifests itself by an initial chancre (ulceration) often located on the lips. <i>Fashionable Wedding, William Hogarth (1943-1945), National Gallery, London, UK.</i>	

I

We have presented some **well-known** works of art, but there must be many other **lesser-known** paintings where painters have faithfully reproduced the appearance of the skin and its defects.

We are now going to initiate a **systematic search** for those paintings that allow a dermatological iconodiagnosis, by contacting art museums in several countries in collaboration with dermatologists.

Art through **iconodiagnosis** allows to diagnose dermatoses a posteriori, art can today allow dermatologists to optimize the diagnosis of dermatoses a priori through **visual literacy** applied to dermatology.

Visual arts courses for residents in dermatology and dermatologists could help to improve their visual diagnostic skills. The emphasis on close observation of visual art and medical images and the co-teaching of these courses by medical faculty members and arts educators appear to be particularly important elements in the successful implementation of this arts-education approach. In addition to developing visual acuity, participants practice ekphrasis, accurate an detailed description from the ancient Greek , which means “to explain to the end”; this skill being useful in describing skin symptoms

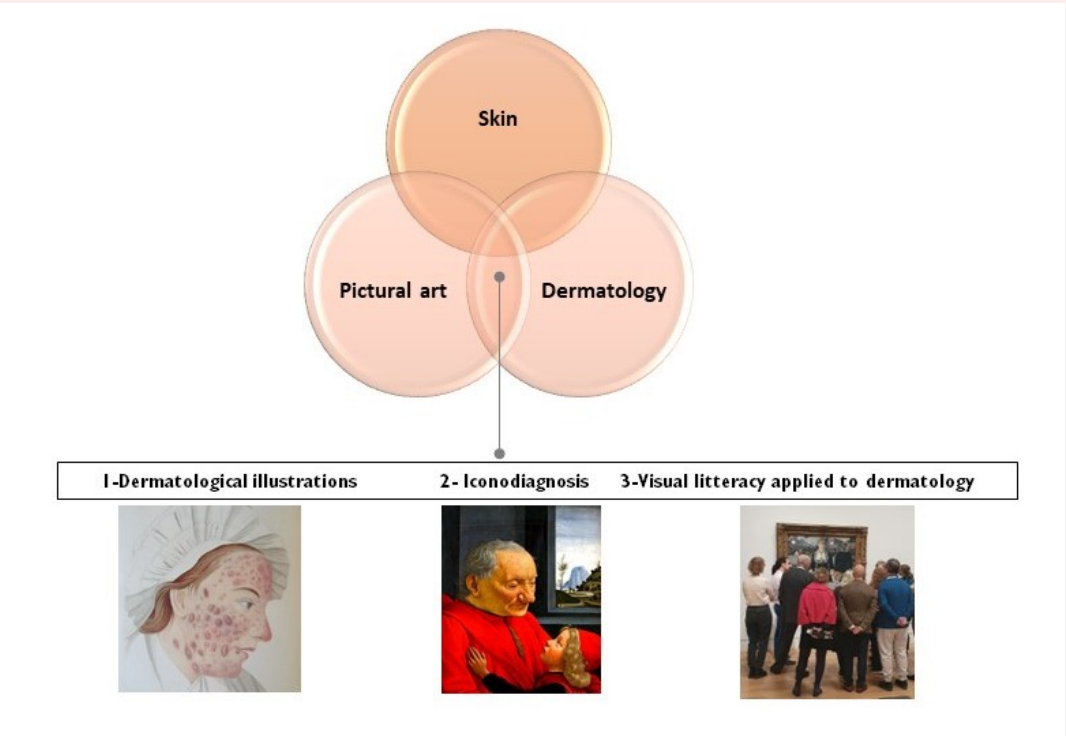
Today, visual literacy courses for dermatologists are organized by EADV, European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology.

CONCLUSION

All this information allows us to apprehend the skin under the prism of **anthropology**.

today, **visual literacy**, a discipline based on the idea that a work of art can be “read” is taught to dermatologists and has demonstrated its interest in optimizing the visual acuity and ekphrasis of dermatologists in the service of their dermatological diagnosis. As the physician William Osler (1849–1919) wrote: “There is no art more difficult to acquire than the art of observation” .

Art, skin and dermatology are thus interrelated and these three elements are encompassed more generally in the **medical humanities**.



ISIS is an international society dedicated to advancing the field of iconodiagnosis, which involves the retrospective medical analysis of artworks to identify clinical signs suggestive of medical disorders and diseases. Iconodiagnosis is concerned with diseases and the symptoms of visible diseases; this includes not only dermatology, but also ophthalmology and internal medicine. ISIS brings together doctors and scientists with a passion for art.

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<http://laboratoire-laab.fr/isis/>

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(2) ISIS - International Society of Iconodiagnosis, France.

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(4) PEAUrigami®, LA PEAU AUTREMENT, Toulouse, France.