

'distant' approach. The result is a meditative, beautifully illustrated addition to the literature on Rembrandt, but one that at times results in confusion around Rembrandt's use of themes because of its biographical structure.

Verdi follows 'certain of the central themes of Rembrandt's art', focusing on the commonly noted ties between Rembrandt's life and work. For example, Rembrandt's only image of the *Visitation* was painted at the moment his wife Saskia was pregnant. Also, images of the Holy Family abound when Rembrandt becomes a parent, and he produces the exquisite and heartbreaking *Bathsheba holding David's letter* in the Louvre when Hendrickje Stoffels was censured by her church's consistory for living with Rembrandt 'like a whore'. Verdi's may well be the first attempt to organise and present Rembrandt's *œuvre* in this somewhat romanticised way, recalling how Bredius used Rembrandt's imagery to illustrate an edition of the Bible. However, when claiming 'neither clients nor the subjects' marketability can entirely account for . . . the frequency of the subject of adultery in his art after the death of Saskia, he treats lightly the fact that the combination of admonition and eroticism in this and similar biblical subjects made them perennially popular in Christian art. Verdi also claims that 'the frequency with which he returns to [certain themes] suggests that they had some special significance for him [ . . . ] they reveal [ . . . ] Rembrandt's abiding humanity [ . . . ] in the seemingly inconsequential moments in the life of his subjects', but this does not explain why other themes with equal or greater significance to Rembrandt then lack this biographical connection.

Verdi begins chronologically, with Rembrandt in Leiden seeking to prove himself the equal of Lucas van Leyden, the city's great sixteenth-century artist. Verdi sees Rembrandt and Lucas blurring the distinction between genre and religious painting, each using the Bible more as 'a book of stories than an edifying work' (quoting Max J. Friedländer). It is more likely that Rembrandt appropriated the realism inherent in the genre tradition to intensify the immediacy of religious works and their capacity to edify. Verdi then partly illustrates his thesis with prints produced later in Rembrandt's career, such as *Christ presented to the people* and *The three crosses*.

Verdi elides the youthful rivalry with Lucas van Leyden with the themes of marriage and parenthood in Rembrandt's life and work, and then shifts to the childhood of Rembrandt's son Titus, where he follows images of Christ's childhood, early mission and scenes of preaching in Rembrandt's *œuvre*. To mark Rembrandt's years with Hendrickje Stoffels, Verdi traces penitential themes and figures, including Judas, Jerome, Hagar and Bathsheba. However touching these connections may be, they do not provide sufficient evidence that Rembrandt's life determines his choice of subject-matter.

There remain those moments in Rembrandt's *œuvre* that seem closely informed by his own struggles and challenges. Rembrandt's interest in the subject of Tobit's blindness appears intimately tied to his own father becoming blind in old age. Here, Julius Held's great excursus on Rembrandt and Tobit is Verdi's touchstone: 'Held's essay is among the most penetrating and persuasive attempts to link Rembrandt's choice of subjects with the circumstances of his own life'. What is less clear, however, is how meaningful the embracing figures at windows and doorways that Verdi then discusses are to Rembrandt's life at that moment.

In a postscript entitled 'Painting to Order', the subjects Rembrandt chose himself are contrasted to those he did not, such as *Claudius Civilis* and the *Night watch* and Verdi attempts to find patterns for these as well, but he ultimately arrives at the core of what makes Rembrandt's art radical: the startling humanity of his art.

Verdi's intriguing thesis is that Rembrandt portrays himself through various themes, no less than through his numerous self-portraits. While Rembrandt's *œuvre* may not yield to his thematic approach in its entirety, Verdi's solid grasp of the literature and his intense personal engagement with Rembrandt's art yield insights of sparkling intelligence. However, in asserting the primacy of the *The three crosses* and late *Ecce Homo* prints, Verdi shows he privileges the personal and the emotional over the ambitions Rembrandt expresses in the epic *Hundred guilder print*. In privileging themes of biographical importance, other stories that occur frequently in Rembrandt's *œuvre*, such as *The road to Emmaus* or the *Magdalene*, are almost completely ignored.

This is in the end a selective view that forces Rembrandt's career to fit a concern with themes. Nevertheless, by focusing on the emotional intensity and insight of Rembrandt's work, Verdi remains close to what makes it eternally vital and human.

### Rembrandt's Rivals: History Painting in Amsterdam (1630–1650). By E.J. Sluijter.

486 pp. incl. 329 col. + 297 b. & w. ills. (John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2015), €140. ISBN 978-90-272-4966-1.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER BROWN

THIS SUBSTANTIAL VOLUME is the first of two which will present the results of an ambitious research project undertaken at the University of Amsterdam from 2007 until today under the direction of Eric-Jan Sluijter. Such collaborative projects are, in the present writer's view, a very impressive and effective feature of research in the Humanities in Dutch universities. This particular one

has been especially successful. Its full title is 'Artistic and Economic Competition in the Amsterdam Art Market c.1630–90; History Painting in Rembrandt's Time'. Sluijter's team included a Ph.D. candidate (Erna Kok) and three post-doctoral assistants (Elmer Kolfin, Frauke Laarmann and Harm Nijboer), all of whom will produce valuable publications on aspects of this theme – and, in addition, there is the Ecartico database created by Nijboer and Marten Jan Bok. M.A. theses and seminar papers by several generations of students are gratefully acknowledged by Sluijter on p.1.

This volume takes the story to 1650 and volume 2 will reach 1690. This division is arbitrary and certainly the flow of Sluijter's first chapter on Rembrandt ends abruptly. He underlines the fact that Rembrandt was acknowledged to be the leading and best-paid history painter in Amsterdam between 1630 and 1650, notably being paid the astonishing sum of 1200 guilders each for his last two paintings in the *Passion* series for Frederick Hendrik in 1646. Sluijter then has monographic chapters on Rembrandt's leading contemporaries, Joachim von Sandrart, Jacob Backer and Bartholomeus Breenbergh, and, further down the food chain (he is entirely happy to make judgements about quality), a chapter on 'a network of moderately successful Amsterdam natives'. These are Claes Moyaert, Adriaen van Nieulandt (who, for this reader at least, emerges for the first time from the shadows), Isaac Isaacz and Salomon Koninck, who all collaborated on the decoration of the Great Hall at Kronborg for Christian IV of Denmark.

This chapter is followed by 'Of modest masters and cheap production: David Colijns, Rombout van Troyen, Daniël Thivart, Jan Micker and others'. Finally there are short chapters on artists who were specialists in other genres but occasionally painted history subjects (such as Thomas de Keyser, Nicolaes Pickenoy and Pieter Codde); two minor figures, Willem Bartsius and Gerrit Willemsz Horst, both profoundly influenced by Rembrandt; and the first decade of work by artists beginning their Amsterdam careers around 1640 (Ferdinand Bol, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Jan Victors, Jacob van Loo and Jan Lievens).

This descriptive account makes it clear that this is by far the most comprehensive study of Amsterdam history painting ever undertaken and that it is a very rich text, full of remarkable insights and intriguing propositions. It is difficult to do sufficient justice to it here: its 400 pages, thousands of footnotes, extensive indexes and hundreds of unfamiliar illustrations – how many even among readers of this Magazine know the Van den Eeckhout in the Gösta Serlachius-Museum in Mänttä – will be mined again and again by scholars of this subject.

In fact, there are few great surprises here, rather the revelation of a situation of extraordinary complexity. Lastman's central and hugely influential position up until his death

in 1633 (and beyond) becomes very clear. Rembrandt retains his dominant position (in the sense of reputation and rewards), although that is not to say that his was the dominant style in Amsterdam. Indeed, there is a curious lack of mutual influence between Rembrandt, Backer, Govert Flinck and Sandrart, all working at the same time in markedly different styles, almost as if in different cities. Sluijter is a discerning reader of contemporary authors, of Sandrart and Samuel van Hoogstraten in particular, although in the case of Rembrandt the extent of the artist's intellectual background, his 'deep understanding of humanist ideas about rhetoric and painting' may be overstated. Sluijter banishes Van den Eeckhout and Victors from Rembrandt's studio, claiming that they may have had drawing lessons with him but no more, judging by their early works. There is a thought-provoking discussion of Protestant preference for Old Testament scenes and Catholic preference for the New Testament but a confirmation that personal religious denomination very rarely affected an artist's choice of subject-matter. Sluijter discusses elaborate networks of patronage. What becomes clear is that the choice of a particular painter to carry out a particular commission was taken because of their suitability to treat certain subjects – Huygens did not consider Rembrandt suitable for the Oranjezaal, for example – but also their social acceptability, their reputation for being sensitive (or insensitive, in Rembrandt's case) to patrons' requirements and, of course, their cost. He also emphasises function, an argument that he will expand on in the second volume. There were real distinctions between artists who took on commissioned decorative schemes and those, like Rembrandt (for much of his career), who painted 'gallery pictures' which were marketed by dealers and agents. It is also evident that there were specialists for wall and ceiling paintings in the grand houses which were rising along the city's canals from the middle of the century onwards. Sluijter has sections on prices and the functioning of the art market but this is largely based on already published material and it is to be hoped that the second volume will present the results of new research in this area.

This is a quite remarkable book that leaves the reader impatient for the second volume, which will complete the story and fill a number of evident gaps. Together they will open up an entire, enormously important chapter in the history of art, almost for the first time, revealing a real sense of the human, economic, social and religious factors at play in the creation of some of the greatest works in the canon of Western European art, such as – to take one of many examples – Rembrandt's *Christ and the woman taken in adultery* of 1644 in the National Gallery, London, which was valued at the breath-taking figure of 1500 guilders in the inventory of the art dealer Johannes de Renialme in 1657.

**Franz Ludwig Catel. *Italienbilder der Romantik*.** Edited by Andreas Stolzenburg and Hubertus Gassner, with contributions by Markus Bertsch, Ljudmila Markina, Andreas Stolzenburg, Neela Struck and Gennaro Toscano. 493 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Hamburger Kunsthalle and Michael Imhof Verlag, Petersberg, 2015), €59.95. ISBN 978-3-7319-0257-7.

Reviewed by LORENZ VAN DER MEIJ

THE BOOK UNDER review is without a shadow of a doubt the most comprehensive and exhaustive tome to date on the nineteenth-century German artist Franz Ludwig Catel (Berlin 1778–1856 Rome). It accompanied the eponymous exhibition in the Hamburger Kunsthalle (closed 31st January). The Kunsthalle's Andreas Stolzenburg, who conceived of the idea for the exhibition and was responsible for its organisation, has written a large part of the book.

This impressive book follows the chronological treatment set out in the exhibition. A scholarly exposition of Catel's life and career is given in seven essays. They examine the artist's early life as a gifted illustrator, his contacts with influential clients as well as his first steps as a landscape artist in Italy. Added to this are essays on his development and style as a landscape painter as well as on his genre paintings and his position within the German community in Rome. This prepares the ground for the second part of the book, which consists of the catalogue. This section provides information on the 204 works that were on display in the exhibition. They are accompanied in the main by punchy entries, which describe the background and relevance of each of the works. A list at the back of the book sets out the provenance of each and provides references to the relevant literature. A succinct two-page



62. *Schinkel in Naples*, by Franz Ludwig Catel. 1824. Canvas, 62 by 49 cm. (Nationalgalerie, Berlin).

chronology gives the key biographical facts of Catel's life. The book is lavishly furnished throughout with illustrations of excellent quality; those of Catel's book illustrations are especially revealing and attractive.

Unlike many artists of his generation, Catel was almost entirely successful throughout his professional life. Privately wealthy, he was also a shrewd businessman who knew what his clients wanted and managed to earn a very good living out of providing it. He was sufficiently technically accomplished to be able to provide illustrations for books by Goethe at the tender age of twenty. This was enhanced by his tremendous knack of cultivating useful contacts. For example, he managed to get work from Elizabeth, widow of the 5th Duke of Devonshire, in Rome in 1815 to supply the illustrations for a new edition of Horace's *Satires*. By this stage, having settled into what became a permanent expatriate existence in Italy, he started to acquire other useful acquaintances, such as the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and important collectors such as Bavaria's Crown Prince Ludwig, Johann Gottlob von Quandt in Dresden and Maximilian Speck von Sternburg in Leipzig.

By the time he had reached mid-career, he had settled into producing a seemingly never-ending stream of pleasant, placid landscapes, normally adorned with happy Italian peasants – sometimes dancing and sometimes simply going about their daily business. He also dabbled in genre as a way of appealing to the prevailing Romantic taste of the time, resulting in paintings showing daring knights and mysterious monks against a moonlit backdrop. But unlike other German Romanticists, who also depicted such themes, his paintings seem to have been bereft of a deeper meaning. Yet his technical ability was never in doubt; *Resting peasants on Catel's estate near Rome* (Fondazione Catel, Rome; no.74 in the catalogue) and *Landscape with peasants near Tivoli* (Museum Folkwang, Essen; no.93), for example, show a clever use of colour and freshness through intelligently applied patches of pink on the canvas. His technical confidence in composition was surely the reason why he was able to give classes on perspective drawing in Rome to young artists, including Friedrich Overbeck and his Nazarene colleagues.

Yet having a good technique does not automatically make a great artist. One can wonder if Catel's art has stood the test of time. The authors have clearly thought about this question, although a direct answer does not seem to have been forthcoming. It is perhaps telling that the two paintings for which Catel is today best known are both untypical of his *œuvre*: a portrait of the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel in Naples (no.102; Fig.62) and the famous group-portrait of a number of artists enjoying a rather liquid luncheon in Rome with Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria (no.103.1). The authors do point out Catel's limitations, for example the way in which his use of genre motifs are generalised in comparison with other artists. The staffage consists