

pursue their research, or establish an academic tradition. Their endeavors were isolated phenomena.

The historical approach to art history is ideally suited to the study of the socioeconomic position of the artist. An historical reconstruction of that position should be founded primarily on manuscript sources, archival documents, and only secondarily on visual sources and literature. Prior to World War I, for lack of independent academic programs in their field, most art historians were trained in history, which gave them the requisite skills for conducting such research. These skills, paleography being the most obvious, are no longer taught at universities. Inevitably, therefore, the cause has been taken up by individuals on the periphery of the art-historical profession, for whom art history is more of an avocation – a “hobby,” if you will – than a profession: archivists, historians, and economists.

The last fifteen to twenty years have witnessed a rapid growth in the number of art-historical publications by members of the “historicizing” or “archivalizing” camp. Most of the authors – especially the historians – were trained at a time when the influence of Marxism on scholarship was pronounced. Yet their work could not be said to bear an ideological stamp, any more than that of the historians who studied social history around 1900. Marxism as a scholarly ideology, exemplified in art history by Hauser and Hadjinicolaou, has come and gone. The methodological progress since 1900, made partly under the influence of historical materialism, is now public property, however. Current research is highly pragmatic and often characterized by a certain aversion to more traditional art-historical methods, especially connoisseurship.⁵² That pragmatism is nourished by developments in the archival world. The ongoing revelation of Dutch archives enables increasingly detailed research. Under such conditions, the grand vision and the sweeping statement do not fare well. One feels a certain affinity with Leopold von Ranke: As long ago as 1824, he said the question historians should ask themselves first and foremost is “how things *really* were.”

New Approaches in Art History and the Changing Image of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art between 1960 and 1990

ERIC J. SLUIJTER

OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, SOME DISTINCT SHIFTS HAVE OCCURRED in the interest in certain categories of seventeenth-century Dutch art; that this is related to changing views of that art will, in light of the preceding chapters, come as no surprise. These shifts usually manifested themselves in scholarship first of all, but it was not long before they did so outside scholarly circles as well. Given that directors and curators of art museums are often art historians who are themselves engaged in scholarly research, new approaches to and revaluations of certain painters or groups of works reach a broader audience quickly; after all, these art historians are the ones who decide what is hung in their museums, what exhibitions are organized, and what is purchased. Most important, in recent decades, exhibition catalogues, with their lengthy essays and thoroughly researched entries, have played a vital role in disseminating fresh insights and information. They mark the recent changes in the image of seventeenth-century Dutch art and will therefore serve as a useful guidepost for us.

The present chapter will focus on shifts in the approach to history, genre, and landscape painting alone, before concluding with a few words about the altered vision of Rembrandt. In so far as possible, we will concentrate on research carried out by Dutch as opposed to foreign art historians. The question as to the identity of Dutch art, which has figured so prominently in preceding chapters, is also important in this period, even if it is not always equally apparent.

TWO PRELIMINARY POINTS

Modern art-historical research on seventeenth-century Dutch art is a highly international affair. The foreign contribution to this field is – in contrast to other aspects of the Netherlands' history and culture – considerably greater than that of the Dutch themselves. This is not difficult to understand. Dispersed around the world, seventeenth-century Dutch painting is literally international property, and its study is accordingly global.

The contribution of Germany and the United States has been particularly great. For Germany – the cradle of art history as a scholarly discipline, where more Dutch art is preserved than anywhere else – this has been true for over a century. Since World War II, however, the practice of art history in America has made tremendous strides, while at the same time, the number and quality of American collections comprising Dutch pictures has risen dramatically. This has led to a corresponding surge in scholarly interest in Dutch art in the United States, which has taken the lead held by Germany before the war, and made English the *lingua franca* of the profession.

Despite all the work that is being done abroad, the scholarly study of seventeenth-century Dutch art in Holland has managed to hold its own, not least of all because of the simple fact that the historical sources are both physically and linguistically most easily accessible to us. As a result, Dutch art historians have always been leaders in the study of written sources, be they archival, literary, or theoretical.

Now for the second preliminary point. In reviewing the changes in the extent, quality, and nature of contemporary research, one is inevitably struck by the role of technology. Photography, for instance, has made it possible to study and compare large numbers of paintings. Thanks to the photographic documentation of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, or RKD, in The Hague, one can peruse hundreds of pictures from around the world in the course of an afternoon. Over the past twenty years, nearly every painting that is in a museum, has appeared at a sale, or has otherwise come on the market (and is at all worthwhile) has been routinely photographed. Auction, gallery, museum, and exhibition catalogues, not to mention books and articles, appear in steadily growing numbers and are illustrated more and more lavishly. As a result, contemporary art historians have far more illustrations at their disposal than a few decades ago. A photograph can never replace a work of art, of course, but the technology has radically changed art history.

One can also collect material much more quickly and efficiently nowadays, thanks to the countless lexicons, repertories, and modern indexing systems. And, of course, the computer has made the search for bibliography in scholarly libraries and other institutions considerably easier and faster, to say nothing of how it helps process large quantities of data, such as the art in seventeenth-century estate inventories.

FROM UNITY TO FRAGMENTATION

To gain some idea of the changes that have occurred over the past few decades, it would be useful to consider the scholarly surveys that have appeared, which are excellent indicators of how interest in certain aspects of seventeenth-

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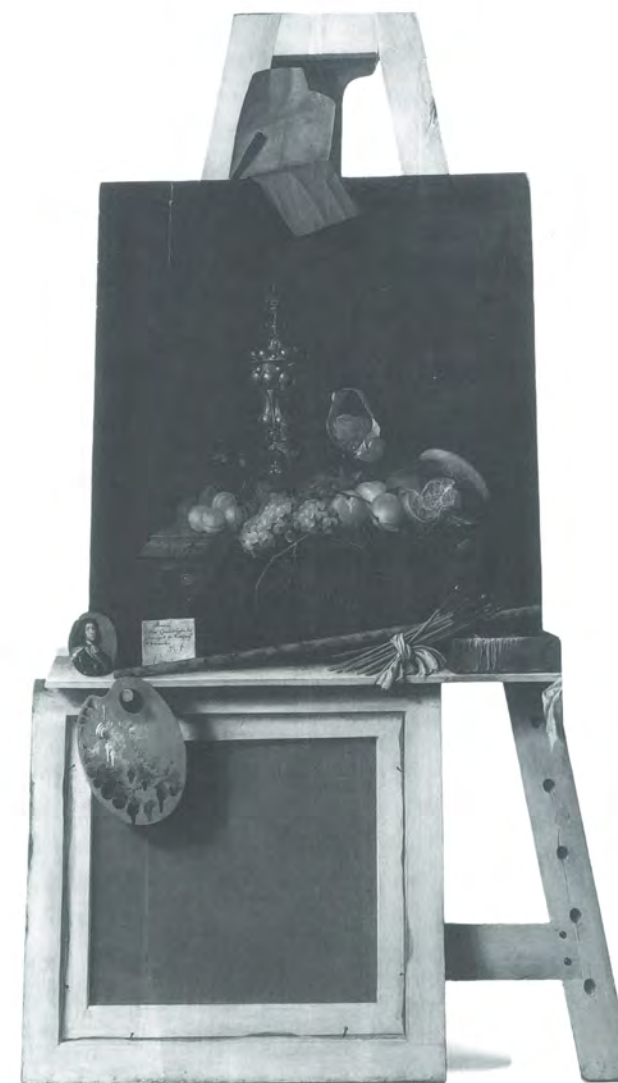


FIGURE 66. Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts (active ca. 1660–72), *Easel with Fruit Still Life and Painter's Paraphernalia*, ca. 1670, panel, 226 × 123 cm, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst.

century art has evolved. In particular, two monumental examples invite comparison: Wilhelm Martin's two-volume *Hollandsche schilderkunst in de 17de eeuw* (1935–6), and Bob Haak's *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters in the Seventeenth Century* (1984). In leafing through these works, one is struck by the difference between the material the authors discuss and the works they illustrate. Martin's illustrations form a rather complete, coherent image of seventeenth-century art, whereas Haak's are amazingly diverse. To judge from the material presented and the approach to it, the search for a unified historical image of art has been supplanted by diversity and complexity.

Characteristically, the two volumes in which Martin's massive work was published are entitled *Frans Hals en zijn tijd* (*Frans Hals and His Time*) and *Rembrandt en zijn tijd* (*Rembrandt and His Time*). They thus revolve around the two artists who were considered the great luminaries of Dutch art. Martin's introductory words serve to clarify his angle: For him Dutch painting personifies "the most consistent pictorial realism," "the beauty of psychologically and artistically profound reality," coupled with "pithyness and soundness." These were both aesthetic and moral values in his eyes, values that sprang from the national character, which he saw as the "healthy counterweight to Italianate mannerism and European baroque academism."

Although Martin provides an incredible wealth of information and observations about even the most obscure seventeenth-century painters, he approaches everything in light of Frans Hals, Rembrandt, Jan Steen, and Johannes Vermeer, the canon around which the others are grouped. Needless to say, there is little room for painters who fail to meet the author's standards. Rather than skipping over them – he was too conscientious for that – Martin lumps them together in relatively summary chapters and separates them from his general survey of Dutch art. The tone of these chapters is rather negative, since after all, he did not see these artists as part of the "healthy counterweight." By the same token, the concept of "rise, florescence, and decline" runs like a leitmotiv through the entire book, and is directly correlated to "Dutch-ness": Every outside influence and every international tendency that appeared in the course of the century is designated a premonition of decline. French fashion, French classicism, and French art theory were the culprits, and in Martin's view, they ruined Dutch art in the late seventeenth century.

Turning to Haak, the plan and focus are altogether different. If one compares his illustrations to Martin's, he almost seems to be dealing with another subject. Haak's book appeared in the wake of an astonishing variety of new approaches, at a time when scholarly interest in certain painters and groups of painters had expanded enormously. Although, of course, the old canon is hardly ignored, the book is no longer organized around them. On the contrary.

Haak divides the history of Dutch art into roughly three blocks: 1590–1625 / 1625–50 / 1650–80. The blocks revolve not around particular painters, but centers of artistic production (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, Utrecht, and so forth). This is indicative of the author's intention to structure his survey according to objective historical criteria rather than subjective associations. Thus, he fragmented the old, familiar image, as it were; artists and groups of artists who had previously been slighted were now assigned a place of their own within the context of a city's artistic output. The "great masters" were incorporated in this scheme, so that – for the first time in a comprehensive survey – they were seen in light of the broader artistic activity of a particular

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time and place. Other striking new aspects of Haak's book are the ample attention paid to the sixteenth-century roots of seventeenth-century art, as well as the extensive discussion of developments in the first decades of the seventeenth century, in which the Dutch mannerists, Caravaggists, and pre-Rembrandtists figure prominently. The early history of landscape, still-life, and genre painting now stands on its own two feet, and is not treated as merely a necessary prelude to the subsequent evolution of Dutch art.

Of course, the greatest difference between Haak and Martin concerns the artists who, given the "international" character of their art, were previously excluded or, if they came up at all, treated in isolation. These were history painters in particular, insofar as they did not belong to the school of Rembrandt, and landscapists primarily interested in foreign landscapes. Haak illustrated works by even more artists whom Martin had all but ignored, such as Caesar van Everdingen (Fig. 67) and Claes Berchem, than by the so familiar Adriaen van Ostade and Paulus Potter. Moreover, painters such as the Rembrandt pupils Ferdinand Bol and Govaert Flinck are no longer only represented by works that betray their master's influence: Now we also get a good look at their later development, which, as it happened, took a very different tack.

In one respect, the altered image of Dutch art had no effect on Haak: His book ends abruptly around 1680, so that the last generation, which was also active in the seventeenth century and has attracted growing interest, is still omitted. The author begrudged the painter Adriaen van der Werff only a few lines, and only one illustration.

A number of other aspects of Haak's book are equally indicative of changes in the postwar approach. In the first part, for instance, one chapter is devoted to the social position of the artists, and another to their patrons and clients; besides the patronage of burghers, that of the court and the municipal authorities is addressed. There is also a chapter on realism and symbolism, which expounds views on the iconography of Dutch art. Nor is seventeenth-century art theory neglected.

Characteristically, Haak neglects to integrate these various elements in a coherent vision of seventeenth-century painting, let alone contemporary Dutch culture. Not only does he divorce his treatment of historical developments and the sociohistorical context from his discussion of the paintings themselves, but also he discusses ideas on art (seventeenth-century art theory), content (iconography), and form (stylistic analysis) in separate sections. The image is thus splintered not only because the range of paintings is much broader, but also because the approach to art as an integral part of culture is far more complex. As a result, it is all but impossible to synthesize all the new insights. Nor did Haak attempt to do so: He attached more importance to historical complexity than to a coherent vision. It is striking, moreover, that

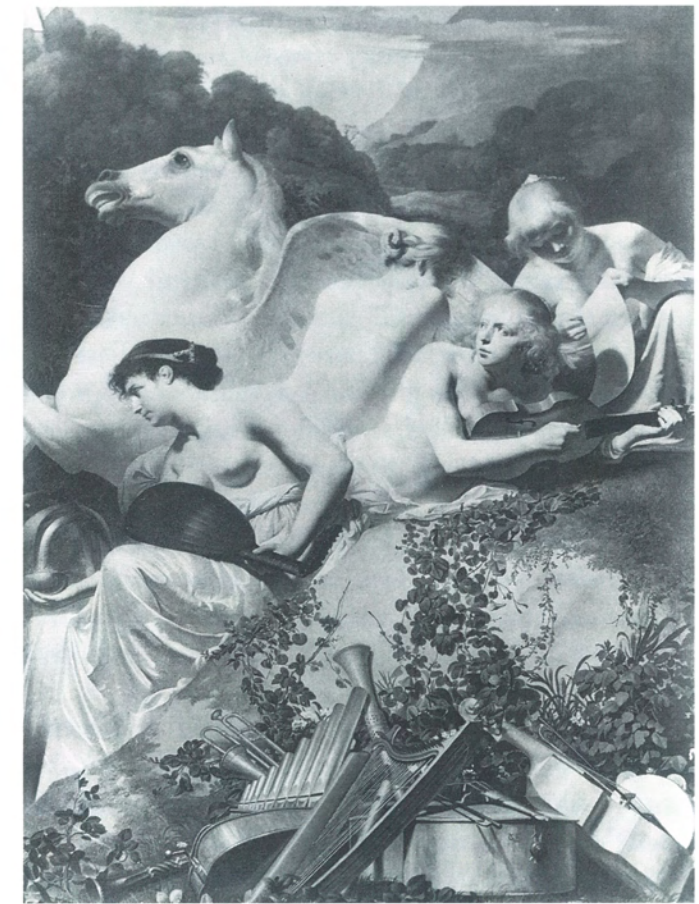


FIGURE 67. Caesar van Everdingen (ca. 1616/17–78), *The Four Muses and Pegasus*, canvas, The Hague, Huis ten Bosch.

the author never reveals his own taste or hazards a value judgment, any more than he indulges in poetic descriptions, or lets his feelings or ideals influence his narrative. He eschews anything unverifiable, as he does the vexed question of the nature, overriding principle, or essential core of Dutch art. The reader gradually realizes that what was once considered typically Dutch art is now incorporated in a much broader range of artistic activity, with ties to contemporary developments elsewhere. Quietly, the whole issue of the Dutch identity has been put into perspective.

Thus, the revaluation of Dutch art we have just traced concerns, roughly speaking, those aspects that did not fit the traditional image of what is typically Dutch, especially history painting and Italianate landscape painting. These are the very aspects that were denigrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the work of the so-called *fijnschilders*, for instance. The following sections will take a closer look at the most important of these revaluations.



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THE REVALUATION OF HISTORY PAINTING

The groundbreaking exhibition *Gods, Saints and Heroes*, held in Detroit, Washington, and Amsterdam in 1980–1, was for many a revelation.¹ It was the first attempt to shed some light on what is described for the sake of convenience as Dutch history painting, that is, paintings based directly on biblical, mythological, or classical literary texts. Only now did it dawn that seventeenth-century Holland had not only produced landscape, still-life, genre, and portrait painting of great significance, but also history painting of exceptional caliber.

Of course, the exhibition did not come as a complete surprise; a lot had happened beforehand. For instance, interest in Dutch mannerism of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had been stimulated by the rediscovery in the 1920s of Italian and French mannerism as specific stylistic phenomena. This triggered a discussion in the 1930s – primarily among non-Dutch art historians, and still entirely from the perspective of Italian and French art – about the northern variant of mannerism and how it was related in a stylistic sense.² The exhibition *Triomf van het maniërisme* (*Triumph of Mannerism*), held in the Rijksmuseum in 1955, persisted in presenting Dutch mannerism as an appendage of the international movement.³ Then, in the United States, the first, albeit small, exhibition was devoted to the Dutch mannerists in 1970 (*Dutch Mannerism. Apogee and Epilogue*).⁴ This was followed in 1993 by the monumental *Dawn of the Golden Age*, about Dutch painting around 1600. As a result, the Dutch mannerists gained a place in the contemporary canon of Dutch art. That artists such as Hendrick Goltzius (Fig. 68),⁵ Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (Fig. 69), Abraham Bloemaert, and Joachim Wtewael have come into their own is surely because they offer the art historian so much meat to chew in terms of style, theory, and iconology.⁶

The revival of Dutch Caravaggism began in a similar fashion. Caravaggio was largely forgotten in the second half of the seventeenth century but is now ranked among the greatest artists of his day. As interest grew in the profound impact of Caravaggio's work on Italian, Spanish, French, and Dutch painters, there was a growing realization that the works of Dutch Caravaggists in particular are of extraordinary quality and character. In 1933, Arthur von Schneider published his pioneering *Caravaggio und die Niederländer*. Then in 1952 the exhibition *Caravaggio en de Nederlanden* (*Caravaggio and the Low Countries*), was organized in Utrecht, the town where most of the painters worked.⁷ As the titles indicate, Caravaggio was the focus of each. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, monographs on Hendrick ter Brugghen, Gerard van Honthorst, and Dirck van Baburen carved out a unique identity for each of these artists.⁸ Finally, in 1986–7, a large exhibition in Utrecht and Braunschweig – *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw. Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten* (*New Light on the Golden Age. Hendrick ter Brugghen and His Contemporaries*)⁹ –

presented the Dutch *caravaggisti* in their own right, not as “followers”; Caravaggio’s name does not appear in the title, and Ter Brugghen is honored as one of the greatest Dutch painters of his time.

Needless to say, the repercussions of this reappraisal can be felt on the art market and in the museums. Few museums – and this certainly applies to Holland – possessed good pieces by these Caravaggists. The Rijksmuseum owned Ter Brugghen’s *Calling of St. Matthew* (now considered one of his most important works), but since little value was attached to the canvas, which was thought to be of only local interest, it was given to the Centraal Museum in Utrecht in 1925. Thirty years later, by which time the revaluation was underway, the decision must have been regretted. In 1956, thus shortly after the Utrecht exhibition, the Rijksmuseum purchased a good Ter Brugghen, and a second in 1970. In 1963, the Mauritshuis acquired a fine one, which was its first. Since then, many beautiful Ter Brugghens have entered foreign, espe-

FIGURE 68. Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1616/17), *Danae*, 1603, canvas, 173.3 × 200 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Ahmanson Foundation.



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cially American, museums, the prices of which are all but beyond the reach of their Dutch counterparts. The reception history of the Dutch mannerists is much the same. There are examples too numerous to mention of museums competing for pictures that were ignored until recently; for lack of funds, the Dutch usually come away emptyhanded.¹⁰

The recent fortunes of Dutch “academics” and so-called “pre-Rembrandtists” are similar. As the unfortunate label of the latter implies, they were considered worthwhile only because the early Rembrandt owed so much to his master Pieter Lastman, the most important of the artists in the group.¹¹

FIGURE 69. Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1562–1638), *The Slaughter of the Innocents*, 1591, canvas, 270 × 255 cm, Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum.





FIGURE 70. Govaert Flinck (1615–60), *Marcus Curius Dentatus Refuses the Samnites' Gifts*, 1656, canvas, 485 × 377 cm, Amsterdam, Koninklijk Paleis op de Dam.

Most of the painters classified as academic (or classicizing) are of Rembrandt's generation; but with their polished, taut execution and bright palette, they steered a course very different from his. The best known are Pieter de Grebber, Salomon de Bray, and Caesar van Everdingen, but the Rembrandt pupils Ferdinand Bol and Govaert Flinck, who "converted" in their later work, can be assigned to the same category.¹² Until recently, the fact that in the seventeenth century they were preferred for official commissions from the stadholder's court (for which De Grebber, De Bray and Van Everdingen [Fig. 67], among others, worked) or from municipalities (Bol and Flinck executed the most important works for the Amsterdam Town Hall; Fig. 70), did not



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speak in their favor. Now that international and academic tendencies in seventeenth-century Dutch art are no longer censured out of hand, these artists are being rehabilitated.

The same applies to the Dutch classicists of the late seventeenth century, Gerard de Lairesse (Fig. 71) being the chief representative. This group was judged perhaps most harshly. Above all, Lairesse was seen as the black sheep of Dutch painting: Because of his style, which bore the stamp of French classicism, and his classicist art theory, he had to bear much of the blame for the decline in the late seventeenth century. Moreover, the fact that he criticized Rembrandt in his *Groot Schilderboek* blinded earlier generations of art historians to his artistic merits. For many, the superb examples of his work in *Gods, Saints and Heroes* were therefore among the greatest revelations: They are now seen as a natural continuation of tendencies already manifest in an earlier generation of Dutch history painters – and thus no longer as an entirely new and alien element in Dutch art.¹³

The Search for Formal Sources

After all the emphasis that had been placed on its unique "national" character, there was a need to explore the links between Dutch art and foreign develop-

FIGURE 71. Gerard de Lairesse (1641–1711), *Fortitude Bridling the Fool*, canvas, 182.5 × 290 cm, Amsterdams Historisch Museum.



ments, aggravated in part by a growing discomfort with nationalism. History painting was perfectly suited to underscoring the European context; after all, it invites comparison to international traditions, and is created by painters who in many cases traveled to Italy, usually by way of France. What had once been cause for censure was now seen as an important asset. Dutch scholars in particular immersed themselves in this art (witness the preponderance of Dutch names among the organizers of *Gods, Saints and Heroes*). Through painstaking comparison, great strides have been made in recent decades in identifying formal sources and borrowings from works by artists such as Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Carracci, Caravaggio, and Rubens, among countless others. Their study of how Northern Netherlandish artists used or were inspired by Italian, French, and German prints has taught art historians a great deal about the relations of this art with international conventions and traditions. They have gained understanding of the dialogue many Dutch painters maintained with the international art world; in some cases, they did so by traveling, but above all they relied on prints either by or after foreign masters.

This search for formal sources often seems to be a goal in itself, and not to go beyond establishing "influences" – a rather passive and vague concept. One must take another step, however. Painstaking comparisons can help determine what choices artists made, what elements appealed to them – often linked, of course, to the subjects they chose – and how they handled their sources. Thus, one is again confronted with the specific nature of Dutch art, not at all as before; nebulous concepts such as "national character" are beside the point. Approaching this art in an international context puts it in perspective and highlights its particular qualities. Only then can one determine whether those qualities have anything to do with indigenous pictorial or iconographical traditions, or with the function of the art itself in other social environments.

Interpreting the Image

That history painting is based on texts made it a rewarding subject for iconographical and iconological research, which is concerned with literary sources, after all. Religious subjects, themes from classical mythology, Roman history, or postclassical literature, allegory (in town halls or other municipal settings, for instance) – these are all grist for the mill of the iconographer and the iconologist. The iconological method that had produced such good results in the study of – primarily Italian – art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (with an aura of textual erudition that appealed to academics) also lent itself to Dutch history painting.

Much valuable work has been done in this field in recent decades. Here, too, the scholar was confronted with the question of the Dutch character

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This search for formal sources often seems to be a goal in itself, and not to go beyond establishing "influences" – a rather passive and vague concept. One must take another step, however. Painstaking comparisons can help determine what choices artists made, what elements appealed to them – often linked, of course, to the subjects they chose – and how they handled their sources. Thus, one is again confronted with the specific nature of Dutch art, not at all as before; nebulous concepts such as "national character" are beside the point. Approaching this art in an international context puts it in perspective and highlights its particular qualities. Only then can one determine whether those qualities have anything to do with indigenous pictorial or iconographical traditions, or with the function of the art itself in other social environments.

Interpreting the Image

That history painting is based on texts made it a rewarding subject for iconographical and iconological research, which is concerned with literary sources, after all. Religious subjects, themes from classical mythology, Roman history, or postclassical literature, allegory (in town halls or other municipal settings, for instance) – these are all grist for the mill of the iconographer and the iconologist. The iconological method that had produced such good results in the study of – primarily Italian – art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (with an aura of textual erudition that appealed to academics) also lent itself to Dutch history painting.

Much valuable work has been done in this field in recent decades. Here, too, the scholar was confronted with the question of the Dutch character

of this art. In painting decorations of town halls and palaces, artists and their patrons undeniably looked to foreign models; but the political ideals the history painters were meant to visualize – those of the town councils or the stadholder's court – differed in many respects from those espoused by neighboring nations.¹⁴ In religious art, the particular religious situation in the Northern Netherlands played a role.¹⁵ Pastoral or mythological scenes proved to be based primarily on Dutch adaptations of the original literary sources.¹⁶ Furthermore, links to literary genres especially popular in Holland often came to light, such as books of songs and emblems of love. By the same token, northern book illustrations frequently turned out to be a pictorial source of greater importance than Italian compositions.

Many of these paintings, too, were intended for the free market and aimed at a broader, more differentiated audience. The question as to which segments of the population were involved and how characteristic aspects of Dutch history painting can be related to them deserves further research. That the biblical, mythological, or pastoral subjects that were popular in the Northern Netherlands often reflect specifically Dutch preferences is an interesting phenomenon that calls for study within a broader cultural context.

One problem that affects many iconological interpretations of history pieces based on texts is a tendency to read an artwork purely as a sort of text, and to ignore the form as a vehicle of meaning. Works of art communicate visually: The form determines how an artwork refers to the meaning of the text. The form can also convey meanings that lie outside the textual frame of reference. To give form its due as a vehicle of meaning, more attention should be paid to the pictorial traditions and iconographical conventions of certain subject types. By studying the assimilation and transformation of pictorial traditions within particular groups of subjects, form and content can be studied in closer conjunction.¹⁷ On that basis, one can determine how ideas and associations related to certain themes were articulated.

Art Theory and History Painting

Interest in Dutch history painting is correlated to that in seventeenth-century art theory. There used to be little interest in the latter, because once again it was thought that theorists such as Van Mander, Van Hoogstraeten, and Lairese only introduced contemptible foreign ideas.¹⁸ For modern Dutch art historians, on the other hand, the study of art theory, which was squarely based on Italian and French models, represented one more opportunity to place Dutch art in an international context. The art-theoretical treatises have a conceptual framework that can be traced to classical theories of rhetoric and poetics. Their goal was to boost the intellectual status of painting and graft it onto the honorable tradition of the liberal arts.

Jan Emmens's *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* (*Rembrandt and the Rules of Art*) from 1964 stimulated the study of art theory in the Netherlands.¹⁹ Emmens surveyed the development of the most relevant theoretical ideas – from Carel van Mander (*Schilder-Boeck*, 1604) to Gerard de Lairese (*Groot Schilderboek*, 1707) – and the derivation of such ideas from Italian and French art theory. His objective was to strip Rembrandt's image of views based on art theories that were developed after his death and then projected onto the artist. Emmens was largely responsible for triggering the discussion about how art theory relates to art, the practice of art, and thinking about art in seventeenth-century Holland. These relations are still a problem, which cannot be solved without a thorough knowledge of the treatises themselves. Hessel Miedema in particular has enormously enriched our knowledge of the subject with his monumental studies of Carel van Mander.²⁰

Like it or not, in studying Dutch art theory, one is again confronted with the problem of defining what is "uniquely Dutch." Although the initial tendency was to concentrate on what corresponded to similar writings in Italy (and France), more emphasis is now being placed on those aspects that deviate from Italian art theory. Some scholars believe that through their writings, theorists such as Van Mander and Van Hoogstraeten sought to legitimize a unique, northern tradition.²¹

There has been much discussion lately about Philips Angel's *Lof der schilder-konst* (*In Praise of Painting*), which is a special case.²² The treatise was originally presented in the form of a lecture to the Leyden painters' guild on the feast day of St. Luke in 1641. It is interesting to read what an average painter had to say in support of his profession to an audience that consisted largely of landscape, portrait, still-life, and genre painters. Emmens saw Angel's treatise as merely a concise version of Van Mander's theory of art; recently, however, the point was made that, although Angel undeniably meant to affirm the dignity of painting, the character of his treatise is very different from "genuine" art theory. Angel was well acquainted with Van Mander's work, and borrowed whatever he needed from it; but Angel's superficial, scarcely recognizable adaptation of his predecessor's ideas is indicative of his thoughts on his occupation. He says nothing about the didactic, high-minded goals of painting, for instance, any more than he makes a hierarchical distinction among histories, landscapes, marines, or interiors. In defiance of "official" theory, which is based on the liberal arts, he judges a painter primarily according to his financial success, and emphasizes his role as a producer of high-quality, painstakingly crafted merchandise. Delighting the eye is the painter's task. Achieving verisimilitude in representing the visible world through precise observation, a meticulous manner, and patient study of optical effects, light and shade, and texture – these are for Angel the cardinal criteria where the status of his art is concerned. They call to mind the painting of his contem-

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poraries in Leiden and other Dutch cities, who were noted for their finely executed, costly works.

Thus, there is again a tendency to relativize the importance of international art theory for seventeenth-century Dutch art – certainly for paintings produced around the middle of the century – and to rid all sorts of artworks of the theoretical baggage they have sometimes been encumbered with by art historians.²³ The notion that the meaning of (history) painting is primarily high-minded and intellectual has been tempered, as has the idea that history painting enjoyed the greatest prestige in the seventeenth century. It was not even necessarily the most expensive category. Finely rendered scenes of maid-servants, drinkers, and merry, fashionable companies, idyllic landscapes with nymphs, or large hunting and game pieces were sometimes just as costly, if not indeed much more so.

Modern art-historical scholarship may at times somewhat exaggerate the importance of history painting by comparison to other genres. Given its neglect by previous generations, however, the overemphasis is understandable. The large number of recent studies on the subject have heightened awareness of the many qualities of history painting.

REVALUATIONS IN GENRE PAINTING

Shifts have also occurred in the study of genre painting. An excellent survey of the field's expanded image was provided by the spectacular exhibition *Masters of 17th-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* that was held in Philadelphia, London, and Berlin (but not in Holland!) in 1984.²⁴ In his substantial introduction to the catalogue, Peter Sutton – like Haak – precedes his stylistic survey with a discussion of methods and problems of interpretation as well as aspects of art theory, and then follows it with a cultural-historical survey. Besides the traditional canon (Van Ostade, Ter Borch, Vermeer, Steen), considerable attention is also paid to genre painters of the early seventeenth century, to pieces by Caravaggists, to the so-called Leiden "fijnschilders" (literally, "fine-painters") and to late-seventeenth-century genre painters.

Most striking is the revaluation of the *fijnschilders*, Gerrit Dou and Frans van Mieris being the most famous. Their pictures fetched some of the highest prices in the seventeenth century, but in the mid-nineteenth, their reputation, entered a period of decline. To be sure, the work of Dou and Van Mieris has always been part of the image of seventeenth-century genre painting, but – unlike Ter Borch, Metsu, De Hooch, Steen, and Vermeer – they were downplayed somewhat and not particularly esteemed. Because they took painterly finesse and technical refinement to such extreme heights, their work found

little favor at a time when spontaneity and expressivity in the handling of paint were prized above all.

It is difficult to say to what extent the revival of interest in the *fijschilders* is related to neo-realist styles in modern painting, as Emmens believed, or to a new fascination with technical knowledge of painting that is long since lost. At least it is clear that the iconological approach to genre has drawn attention to Dou and Van Mieris, whose work is often featured in studies by Emmens and De Jongh.²⁵ Before long, the revaluation of their art led to a substantial monograph on Frans van Mieris.²⁶ Then, in 1988, an exhibition was organized in Leyden about Dou, Van Mieris, and twenty-one kindred Leiden painters.²⁷ The very next year witnessed a similar show in Amsterdam, devoted to a smaller selection of *fijschilders* who were not limited to Leyden: Godfried Schalcken and Adriaen van der Werff – Dordrecht painters of a younger generation – figured prominently, besides Caspar Netscher and Egdon van der Neer. As indicated by the catalogue, current interest in the ups and downs of reception history was one of the reasons for choosing these particular artists.²⁸ Meanwhile, monographs on Schalcken and Van der Werff have appeared, and dissertations about Dou and Caspar Netscher have been written (but not yet published).

Interest in Dou, Van Mieris, and Van der Werff on the part of museums and collectors has grown accordingly. In Dutch museums, their work is poorly represented, especially compared to German museums – princely collections for the most part, formed in the eighteenth century, when the reputation of these artists was at a peak. Their paintings now command high prices once again, and are difficult to come by – much more so than at the start of this century, when they were held in such low esteem that the Alte Pinakothek in Munich disposed of all but one of its sixteen Dous. Thanks to private Dutch collectors who acquired several pieces in the 1920s and 1930s, three of them are now in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam (Fig. 72). To the extent that important works by these masters have come onto the market in recent years, it was again American museums that, with their ample resources, often purchased them.



No aspect of Northern Netherlandish art has received so much attention from iconologists as genre painting – a nineteenth-century term denoting figure pieces that are based not on texts but more or less on contemporary life. Once again, it was a pioneering exhibition – *Tot lering en vermaak* (*For Instruction and Delight*), held in Amsterdam in 1976 – that pointed the way. E. de Jongh directed both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue. Some years earlier, in 1971, he had explained his approach in another exhibition catalogue.²⁹

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FIGURE 72. Gerrit Dou (1613–73), *The Quack*, 1652, panel, 112 × 83 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

One reason the iconological method has been so successful is because it enables one to talk about these paintings in clear terminology that can be historically verified. Here again, the “what” of the image is paramount, and the discussion is centered not so much on the image itself as on the deeper meaning it conceals. The broad appeal of this approach may have to do with the need of contemporary museum visitors – a need aroused by twentieth-century conceptual art – to have artists’ profounder intentions explained. And since genre painting seems so easily accessible, the explanation of “hidden” meanings is all the more surprising.

The iconological approach, which was originally developed by students of

Italian and French Renaissance and Baroque art, hauled genre painting out of its Dutch isolation, as it were. Once it, too, was shown to conceal ideas of a literary, humanist nature, it was "released from a unilateral position of uniqueness and reintegrated in the great continental context of significant foundations of seventeenth-century Western European art," as one art historian put it.³⁰ Theoretical concepts borrowed from Classical Antiquity by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humanists formed the framework within which hidden layers of meaning and literary allusions were deciphered.³¹ Realism as a key concept in the interpretation of Dutch genre painting was now supplanted by "pseudo-realism." In addition, however, a typically Dutch core reappeared, a characteristic mentality with an inherent, "overpowering tendency to moralize, which usually comes down to exhorting virtuousness and alluding to transitoriness and death," as well as a "great predilection for disguise, concealment, allegory and ambiguity, in short, enigma." This approach could lead to sweeping generalizations such as, "The joyful, often coarse domestic and tavern scenes have been convincingly characterized as instructive lessons, warning against sin, recalling death, challenging the viewer to lead a God-fearing life."³² Yet this is a far cry from the "national core" dear to previous generations of art historians: What was taken to be the essence no longer rested on vague concepts, but was verifiable through texts.

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Since the early 1980s in particular, the iconological interpretation of genre painting has had to withstand a good deal of criticism.³³ Yet few would deny the method has considerably enriched our understanding of seventeenth-century art. De Jongh himself has often warned against an all too rigorous application of emblematic and other texts, and against the extremes to which the quest for deeper meanings can go.³⁴ At the same time, he mitigated the emphasis on didactic moralism. Other critics went further, singling out the separation between form and content as a problem. For De Jongh, they noted, the content of the image lies only in a veiled, deeper meaning. If the concealment of meaning is seen as the most essential aspect, then the meaning is detached, as it were, from the image itself, and located outside it, in texts. Form and content thus remain separate, and little or no meaning is attached to the process or manner of representation.

Another problem that has received attention concerns the use of emblems in interpreting genre pieces. As part of a literary genre, the emblem functions in an entirely different context from the painting. To be sure, the texts in emblem books relate to the respective prints, but the prints do not convey the meaning of the texts independently of them; the text is essential if one is to understand the emblem. Identifying emblems with motifs in paintings presupposes the motifs are merely symbolic signs referring to what are often, in fact,

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rather complicated intellectual constructs that can only be interpreted with the aid of rather precise literary knowledge. As genre painting was primarily aimed at an anonymous audience that was broader and more differentiated than ever before, critics have argued against seeking unduly specific, complex meanings in such paintings. In particular, Jochen Becker recently asserted that ambiguity can even be seen as a distinguishing characteristic of Dutch genre. He demonstrated that depictions and motifs must have meant different things to different viewers, depending on their intellectual, religious, and social backgrounds and on the context in which they viewed the works. It thus seems more reasonable to look for an entire range of ideas and associations that emanate from what is actually shown, and that would have been rather obvious to the contemporary viewer. The occurrence of certain motifs in emblems (which have a very specific meaning in that context) can sometimes tell art historians where to look for certain associations in a more general sense.

A related question is whether it is justifiable, in interpreting genre paintings, to take the commonplaces regarding instruction and concealment from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetics as a point of departure. In discussions of poetry and introductions to emblem books, the noble didactic intentions of this literature are noted repeatedly: teaching by entertaining and by concealing wisdom beneath an attractive surface. Seventeenth-century discussions of painting – in treatises or other literary contexts – really say nothing about this. There is no reason to assume this particular function of art was considered (too) self-evident. In texts on poetry and emblematics, after all, it *was* thought necessary to hammer on the educational function and veiled principles, even though texts are less ambiguous than images. If edification and concealment had played an important role in painting, that would certainly have been spelled out in texts about the art of painting, especially since it is a silent art and one that, precisely because of its alluring, sensual appearance, was sharply criticized by orthodox religious writers.

As we have noted, Angel, a fellow townsman and contemporary of Dou for whom Dou was the *primus inter pares*, said nothing about the didactic or intellectual motives of art, but a great deal about art as a delight for the eye of the art lover. Other writers likewise emphasize the visual aspects of art, such as the ability of painting to represent everything convincingly, to show what one wishes to see, to deceive the eye and tempt with beauty, to capture the ephemeral and conquer nature. Partly on this basis, and out of dissatisfaction with – and perhaps aversion to – the iconological interpretation in which the *fijnschilders* figured so prominently, Peter Hecht in particular has come to regard the work of these artists mostly as a sort of "*l'art pour l'art*."³⁵ His view that these artists were guided in their choice of subjects by their pictorial possibilities and by artistic rivalry is valuable as far it goes.

For all the differences between Hecht's vision and De Jongh's, they evi-

dently subscribe to the same concept of meaning.³⁶ Hecht, too, limits himself to the question as to whether the depiction has a symbolic meaning, or goes no further than what meets the eye. The difference is that Hecht usually denies there is anything beyond the literal. Yet such a restricted concept of significance does not help us understand what these paintings are about. After all, we are dealing with a representation. The very process of depiction endowed the subject with meaning, which emanates from what the artist chose to depict and how he went about it. Having no basis in written texts, these pictures must have communicated through pictorial conventions, which often contained social stereotypes and common metaphors the artist's public would have recognized. It is especially worth asking – as iconologists seldom do – why certain subjects, represented in a particular fashion, were considered interesting and attractive. Studying the origin and development of popular visual conventions, and how the various painters applied, varied, transformed, or deviated from them, can tell us much more about the whys and wherefores of certain subjects.

Having discussed the iconological approach to genre painting, and pointed out a few problems and possible solutions, we must now touch on a far more absolute form of criticism, namely, that of Svetlana Alpers.³⁷ Alpers regards the iconological approach to Dutch painting, including genre, as misguided, since in her view it misapprehends the specific qualities of the art. She sees iconology as a method that only brings the depiction back to the order of a text, which to her way of thinking completely distorts the interpretation of Northern Netherlandish art. She draws a connection between what in the seventeenth century was recently acquired scientific knowledge (based on observation and empirical analysis) and art in the Netherlands, and attempts to reconstruct a Dutch "visual culture." To her way of thinking, very little Dutch art was intended to convey a meaning that can be explained by way of texts: In seventeenth-century Holland, the image was first of all a vehicle of visual knowledge of the world, which the mind absorbs through observation. According to Alpers, the significance of this art, which communicates on a purely visual level, lies in the visible; it is articulated on the surface itself by way of the visual "description." However, in her hands, the works of art seem robbed of their richly allusive content. Even in her discussion of images of women reading letters, she sees the meaning – despite her remark that in such images, social customs and artistic traditions coincide – in the visual attention itself, that is, the woman's focus on the surface of the letter, which repeats the viewer's focus on the picture. The meaning is thus located entirely in the image. Seeing/representation/knowledge is placed alongside or even opposite thinking/language/meaning. As far as Alpers is concerned, Dutch art, including genre painting, emphasizes the former, but how this is related to the latter remains unclear.

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We have noted that, on the whole, Alpers's book was poorly received in the Netherlands.³⁸ The distinction she made between the visual-descriptive mode of Dutch art and the text-oriented, narrative mode of southern art – thus stressing the Dutchness of Dutch art – was particularly hard to swallow. Yet, also in connection with genre painting, many of the questions Alpers raised regarding the place and function of the image in seventeenth-century Dutch culture should give Dutch art historians plenty of food for thought.³⁹

REVALUATIONS IN LANDSCAPE PAINTING

There is still a good deal of interest in the landscape painters who were so highly esteemed in the first half of this century, such as Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan van Goyen, Paulus Potter, and Meindert Hobbema. Hobbema and Potter are no longer seen as the only leaders, however; they must now share that position with a number of landscape painters who attracted little attention in the past. A group of all but forgotten artists – favored by collectors in the second half of the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries – is back again. They are the Italianate landscapists who, building on the achievements of the Netherlandish landscape painters, set about depicting the "alien" land, using Italian motifs above all. Like many history painters, they too had traveled to Italy. But instead of seeking training in the Italian tradition, they further developed their northern specialty in Italy and drew inspiration from the idyll of the Italian landscape, which they captured with a great sense of atmosphere and pictorial refinement.

In 1966, Wolfgang Stechow – who took up the cause of these painters already in the 1930s – published a standard work on Dutch landscape painting. It meticulously describes the formal development of various landscape types and, for the first time in a survey, devotes considerable attention to Italianate landscapists. A year before the book came out, the first major exhibition was dedicated to their art in Utrecht, with a catalogue by Albert Blankert – still the standard work on the Italianate painters.⁴⁰ Various monographs on these artists appeared as well – mostly dissertations, only one of which was written by a Dutch author. Thanks to these studies, the previously obscure Jan Asselijn, Jan Both, Claes Berchem, Bartholomeus Breenbergh, Carel Dujardin, Adam Pynacker, and Cornelis van Poelenburgh are now much better known.

The lack of interest in an earlier period is a consequence of both the aversion that originated in the mid-nineteenth century to finely painted pictures, and once again the "un-Dutchness" of the Italianate artists. Martin relegated them to the category of "the least national in our art," which justified virtually ignoring them. By now, however, the gulf that separates these painters from their French and Italian confrères is evident: Works by Dutch Italianate

- 2 Letter from Willem Vogelsang to Jan Kalf, no. 4, 16 April 1907, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Leyden, Ms. BPL 2761, I. I am grateful to Annemieke Hoogenboom for sending me an excerpt from this letter.
- 3 Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, 2.04.26.02, *Geheim en kabinetsarchief Binnenlandse Zaken 1814-1935*, inv. no. 484 (*verbaal* 1906), no. 137. Letter from the trustees of the University of Leyden, Leyden, 6 July 1907, no. 652 *kabinet*. The names of those who had recommended Martin are also included here. With thanks to Annemieke Hoogenboom.
- 4 Martin 1904, p. 21.
- 5 Ibid., p. 25.
- 6 Bredius 1915-22, vol. 1, p. viii.
- 7 Ibid., vol. 2, p. vii.
- 8 Tollebeek 1990, pp. 79-80.
- 9 Ibid., p. 87.
- 10 Martin 1901, pp. 1-2.
- 11 Idem 1905-7, p. 125.
- 12 Idem 1904, p. 24.
- 13 Floerke 1905.
- 14 Montias 1990c.
- 15 Evelyn 1935, p. 39.
- 16 Montias 1990a.
- 17 Floerke 1905.
- 18 Tollebeek 1990, p. 85.
- 19 Ibid., p. 104.
- 20 Justi 1888.
- 21 Martin 1904, pp. 26-7.
- 22 Dudok van Heel 1987/8.
- 23 Haverkamp-Begemann 1982.
- 24 Bredius 1909.
- 25 Gelder 1933.
- 26 Idem 1946, p. 4.
- 27 Quoted in Schwartz 1984, p. 8.
- 28 Strauss and Meulen 1979.
- 29 Sluijter 1987, p. 290.
- 30 Schwartz and Bok 1990, p. 10.
- 31 Muller 1880.
- 32 Quoted in Hoogewerff 1947, p. 7.
- 33 Eeghen 1969.
- 34 Miedema 1980, vol. 1, p. 9.
- 35 Aikema et al. 1975.
- 36 Miedema 1986/7, 1987a, 1987b.
- 37 Lemmens 1964.
- 38 Jager 1990.
- 39 Bok 1990.
- 40 Briels 1976.
- 41 Idem 1987.
- 42 Montias 1982.
- 43 Wetering 1986b and Bok 1990.
- 44 Fock 1990 and Montias 1991, respectively.
- 45 Montias 1987, p. 455.
- 46 Idem 1990b.
- 47 Idem 1988.
- 48 Chong 1987/8.

- 49 Woude 1990.
- 50 Wijsenbeek-Olthuis 1987.
- 51 Montias 1990c.
- 52 See, for instance, Schwartz 1985.

Chapter 13

- 1 Blankert et al. 1980/1.
- 2 Kauffmann 1923; Stechow 1927/8; Antal 1928/9; Baumgart 1944.
- 3 *Triomf van het maniërisme* 1955.
- 4 *Dutch Mannerism* 1970.
- 5 The double volume 42/3 of the *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* of 1991/2 was entirely devoted to Hendrick Goltzius.
- 6 See, for instance, Cavalli-Björkman 1985. Monographic works: Reznicek 1961; Lowenthal 1986; McGee 1991; Roethlisberger 1993. Monographs with oeuvre catalogues of the paintings of Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (P. J. J. van Thiel), Goltzius (L. Nichols), and of the drawings of Bloemaert (J. Bolten), are in preparation.
- 7 *Caravaggio en de Nederlanden* 1952.
- 8 Nicholson 1958; Judson 1959; Slatkes 1965. See also Nicholson 1979 and Spear 1975.
- 9 Blankert and Slatkes 1986/7.
- 10 For more on this, see Hecht and Luijten 1986.
- 11 On pre-Rembrandtists, see Tümpel and Tümpel 1974, and Tümpel and Schatborn 1991/2.
- 12 See, for instance, Blankert 1982.
- 13 On Lairesse, see, for example, Snoep 1970 and now Roy 1992.
- 14 See, for instance, Van de Waal 1952; Blankert 1975; Onians-de Bièvre 1988; Breninkmeijer-de Rooy 1980-1 and 1982; Peter-Raupp 1980.
- 15 See, among others, Tümpel 1980/1, 1983, 1984, and 1991/2.
- 16 Kettering 1983; Sluijter 1986.
- 17 Sluijter 1986.
- 18 Mander 1604; Hoogstraeten 1678; Lairesse 1740.
- 19 Emmens 1981a.
- 20 Among others, Miedema 1973a, 1981.
- 21 Melion 1992; Brusati 1995.
- 22 Miedema 1973b; Chapman 1986; Sluijter 1988; Miedema 1989b.
- 23 See, for instance, Raupp 1984.
- 24 Sutton 1984a.
- 25 See, for example, Emmens 1963; Jongh 1967; Jongh et al. 1976.
- 26 Naumann 1981.
- 27 Sluijter et al. 1988.
- 28 Hecht 1989.
- 29 Jongh 1971. The following had appeared earlier: Jongh 1967, and the same author's splendid, pioneering article, 1968/9.
- 30 Müller Hofstede 1984, pp. xi-xii.
- 31 See E. de Jongh's introduction in Jongh et al. 1976, and Raupp 1983.
- 32 Bruyn 1987-8.
- 33 Several publications with divergent critical commentaries, in alphabetical order: Becker 1992; Bedaux 1990, esp. pp. 9-17: "Introduction," and pp. 71-108: "Fruit and fertility. Fruit symbolism in Netherlandish portraiture of the sixteenth and seventeenth century"; Białostocki 1984; Hecht 1986; Sluijter 1988 and 1990; Stone-Ferrier 1983; Sutton 1984b; Vries 1977, vol. 3, Chapter 2.
- 34 See, for example, Jongh 1992b.
- 35 Hecht 1989.

- 36 Sluijter 1991.
- 37 Alpers 1983. See also the previous polemic: Alpers 1975/6; Miedema 1977; Alpers 1978.
- 38 For a summary of the principal criticisms, see Sluijter 1988, p. 17. Cf. Chapter 11, above, pp. 220-21.
- 39 See, for instance, Kemp 1985 and Freedberg 1992.
- 40 Stechow 1966 and Blankert 1978.
- 41 Sutton 1987/8.
- 42 Brown 1986. For more on the importance of the Flemish immigrants in general, see Briels 1987.
- 43 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1986; Vries 1986.
- 44 Bruyn 1987/8; studies by, among others, Falkenburg 1985; Raupp 1980; Wiegand 1971.
- 45 These statements derive from Bruyn 1981 and 1986a.
- 46 Schama 1987/8. See also Haverkamp-Begemann and Chong 1985.
- 47 See, for instance, Montias 1992, Fock 1990, and, regarding landscapes in particular, Chong 1987/8.
- 48 Fuchs 1973.
- 49 Freedberg 1980, pp. 9-20.
- 50 Alpers 1983, Chapter 4: "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art."
- 51 See also Falkenburg 1989.
- 52 Emmens 1981a. Scheller 1969, among others, was also important for this.
- 53 For a survey of the art-historical literature on this subject, see Broos 1977.
- 54 Among others: Bauch 1960; *Geschildert tot Leyden* 1976; Broos 1975/6; Defoer 1977.
- 55 Among others: Bialostocki 1981; Held 1969; Waal 1974; Tümpel 1959, 1968-71.
- 56 Schwartz 1984.
- 57 Sluijter 1987 and Schwartz 1988.
- 58 Alpers 1988.
- 59 Bruyn et al. 1982-9.
- 60 Bredius 1971.
- 61 Sumowski 1983-92.
- 62 Among others, Haverkamp-Begemann 1987; Liedtke 1989.
- 63 Among others, Wetering 1977 and 1991/2b.
- 64 Wetering 1986b and 1991/2a.
- 65 Hecht and Luijten 1986.
- 66 Broos et al. 1990/1.
- 67 Hecht 1990.

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- 36 Sluijter 1991.
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39 See, for instance, Kemp 1985 and Freedberg 1992.
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46 Schama 1987/8. See also Haverkamp-Begemann and Chong 1985.
47 See, for instance, Montias 1992, Fock 1990, and, regarding landscapes in particular, Chong 1987/8.
48 Fuchs 1973.
49 Freedberg 1980, pp. 9-20.
50 Alpers 1983, Chapter 4: "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art."
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54 Among others: Bauch 1960; *Geschildert tot Leyden* 1976; Broos 1975/6; Defoer 1977.
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64 Wetering 1986b and 1991/2a.
65 Hecht and Luijten 1986.
66 Broos et al. 1990/1.
67 Hecht 1990.