Dutch Art of the Golden Age Abroad

"The Envy of some, the Fear of others, and the Wonder of all their Neighbours": Seventeenth-Century Foreign Insights on Dutch Art.
Société des Arts and the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, 17 & 18 March 2022. Program: https://www.unige.ch/lettres/armus/files/5716/4672/4623/Programme_colloque_17-18_mars_22.pdf

The conference was the final of three held as part of the research project *Un siècle d'Or? Repenser la peinture hollandaise du XVII^e siècle*, which aimed to reassess the very notion of the Dutch 'Golden Age'. The project's two previous conferences – *The Dutch Golden Age: A new aurea aetas? The revival of a myth in the seventeenth-century Republic* (2018) and *The Contribution of Artistic Genres to the Construction of the Dutch Golden Age* (2019) – concentrated on the construction of the notion of 'Golden Age' and the perception of Dutch art in its local context. This final conference provided a shifted focus from this and invited a multitude of case studies about how cultural agents from around the globe reacted to and interacted with Dutch art. The focus on the external perception of the Dutch art world as the basis of the conference aimed to highlight the complexity and diversity of the outsider's gaze, and how these perspectives, in turn, were incorporated into Dutch visual culture and the self-representation of Dutch collective identity. The organising committee of the conference consisted of Jan Blanc, who also led the overarching project, Angela Jager, Susanne Bartels, Lucie Rochard, and Marije Osnabrugge.

The conference's opening session, entitled *Local Reaction to Dutch Immigrant Artists Communities*, zoomed in on the artistic influence of Dutch artists who worked abroad. Forough Sajadi (Leiden University) presented a paper about seventeenth-century Iran. Sajadi discussed how the country increasingly opened up to trade delegations from the Netherlands throughout the Safavid period (1501–1736) and how this led to more and more artistic exchanges between both countries – including the development of the local *Farangi Sâzi* style that was partly inspired by a handful of Dutch and Flemish artists working in Iran – from 1600 onwards. The next speaker, Sander Karst (University of Amsterdam), talked about artists who stayed closer to home. Drawing on the data-driven research from his recently defended PhD thesis, Karst explained how the British managed to establish a thriving art sector in their country by opening their borders to hundreds of Dutch artists and the skills and knowledge they brought with them.

By taking a closer look at the *Market and International Demand*, the second session shifted the focus from the international travels of artists from the Netherlands to the export of their works. Hans J. Van Miegroet first presented the research he conducted with a cross-disciplinary team at Duke University into the emerging art market in eighteenth-century Paris. Using the sales data of thousands of paintings, Van Miegroet showed that works from the Netherlands were not only in the majority at the Paris art market but that they also fetched the highest prices in relative terms. According to Angela Jager (University of Geneva/RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History), Netherlandish art enjoyed a similar popularity in Denmark and Sweden. By presenting new in-depth archival research, Jager stated that the extensive trade between the Dutch Republic and its northern neighbours was accompanied by the systematic export of luxury products, including paintings.

At the session on *Taste and Collecting* Lucie Rochard (University of Geneva/Université de Lille) opened the debates by skilfully dissecting how a taste for art from the Netherlands, a *goût flamand*, developed in France. Rochard demonstrated that

the low opinion that the French initially had of Dutch art – and the Dutch in general – gradually changed for the better as more and more paintings from the Netherlands entered the French market throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That a nation's taste in art could change depending on its display was also stressed in Ewelina Bednarz's (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń) talk on Dutch paintings in the collection of Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland (1674–1696). Bednarz showed that after Sobieski had built and decorated the Wilanów Palace according to Netherlandish taste – which eventually earned the palace the nickname "The Holland House" –, many local aristocrats followed suit and not only began to buy Dutch art *en masse* but also to invite numerous Dutch artists to work in Poland.

Session four took a closer look at the creation of new inventions and techniques fostered by the introduction of Dutch art into Russia, England, and Spain. First, Roman Grigoryev (Heritage Museum/ European University of St. Petersburg) explored the reception of Dutch iconography in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Russia. Grigoryev described how popular print compositions by Dutch artists reverberated in frescoes in churches across Russia, as well as contributed to the rapid adoption of etching techniques in the country. Secondly, Anne-Valérie Dulac (Paris Sorbonne Université) discussed the linguistic borrowings from Dutch that Edward Norgate used in his *Miniatura or the Art of Limning*. Having to deal with new artistic genres that had first blossomed in the Netherlands, such as genre and landscape painting, Dulac argued, Norgate and his peers had to adapt foreign words into the English language, resulting in polyglot descriptions of art works. Finally, Eduardo Lamas (KIK-IRPA, Brussels) brought the aspect of cultural transfer through immigration into discussion by focussing on the work of the Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682). Lamas hypothesised that Murillo drew inspiration from the work of the Dutch artists who worked in his hometown of Seville in an effort to meet the demand for Dutch art.

The final session focused on *Dutch Objects in a Global World*. In his opening paper, Benjamin Schmidt (University of Washington) explored the collection and desecration of Dutch art in early modern Japan after the arrival of Jesuit missionaries. Schmidt discussed the practice of *e fumi*, an exercise directed by the Japanese emperor in which icons were physically stamped upon as a form of censorship, positing that these paintings were either from or modelled on imagery from the Low Countries. In the following paper, Anna Grasskamp (University of St Andrews) also investigated the role of Jesuits in introducing Western art and optics to Asia, to the Jiangsu region of China. She commented that the appropriation and re-creation of Dutch prints into Sino-European hybrids led to the consumption of images with visual plays. These were transferred to ceramics as well as on paper and canvas, which led to an inspiring discussion around the collection and display of Dutch works in a courtly context, providing parallels with European courts through mutual politically motivated appropriation.

Taken together, the diverse sessions and talks presented a nuanced picture of the reception of Dutch art outside the Netherlands. They showed that the ways in which Dutch artists and artworks were received, used, and appropriated depended strongly on the context in which they ended up. Within Europe, for instance, countries without strong painting traditions such as Denmark, England, and Poland welcomed Dutch artists and their works with open arms, utilising the skills these foreigners brought with them to establish thriving art sectors of their own. Other European countries with more developed artistic climates, such as France, in contrast, were initially less willing to import Dutch art but had to sit and watch as demand for the easily recognizable Dutch objects continued to grow within their borders as time processed. Also, far beyond Europe – where contact with Dutch art was mainly limited to prints – different meanings were assigned to artistic objects

from the Netherlands. For example, the Japanese ceremoniously trampled the Dutch art they received, while artists from China and Iran skilfully incorporated the motifs and figures they found on these objects into their own work.

However, the insights into the foreign reception of Dutch art would have been even richer if the conference had also included talks about countries outside Europe and Asia. In particular, research into the artistic exchanges between the Netherlands and Latin America would have added a stimulating and fruitful element to the discussion. In recent years, this theme has enjoyed increasing academic interest in the work of Aaron M. Hyman, Stephanie Porras and Sandra van Ginhoven, among others (Porras, Going viral? Maerten de Vos's St Michael the Archangel, in: *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 66, 2016, 54–78; van Ginhoven, *Connecting Art Markets. Guilliam Forchondt's dealership in Antwerp (c. 1632–78) and the overseas painting trade*, Leiden 2017; Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat: The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America,* Los Angeles 2021). The fact that the call for papers focused exclusively on the Northern Netherlands has undoubtedly contributed to this lacuna. A missed opportunity, especially since various speakers pointed out that regarding art, the Northern and Southern Netherlands were interchangeable for many early modern people both within and outside of these regions – an observation that was clearly reflected in several talks that repeatedly used the adjectives Dutch and Flemish as synonyms. (For a more in-depth reflection on the historiographic division between art from the Northern and Southern Netherlands, see: Hans Vlieghe, Flemish Art, Does It Really Exist?, in: *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 26/3, 1998, 187–200. For a recent examination of the artistic exchanges between the Dutch Republic and the Southern Netherlands, see the 2015 special volume of *De Zeventiende Eeuw* and in particular: Karolien de Clippel and Filip Vermeylen, In search of Netherlandish art: Cultural transmission and artistic exchanges in the Low Countries, an introduction, in: *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 31/1, 2015, 2–17.)

Be that as it may, the conference succeeded in its aim to shed a new, more global light on seventeenth-century Dutch art. The fruitful discussions that followed the various sessions will no doubt be reflected in the upcoming conference proceedings and the pioneering database *Visiting the Golden Age* – which was presented at the end of the conference – will surely provide a welcome refuge for anyone wanting to learn more about how foreign visitors experienced the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Visiting the Golden Age*-database is incorporated within the extensive database structure of the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History (https://rkd.nl/nl/projecten-en-publicaties/projecten/848-visiting-the-golden-age). It collects and summarizes published travel descriptions from foreign visitors. For now, this two-day meeting provided an exciting conclusion to the project *Un siècle d'Or?*

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