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## Introduction

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## Introduction

Jasper Hillegers, Elmer Kolfin, Marrigje Rikken, Eric Jan Sluijter

*In 2017-2018, the first exhibition ever devoted to the oeuvre of Gerard de Lairese – in his own time one of the most celebrated Netherlandish artists – was held in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe. It was appropriately called: Eindelijk! De Lairese (Finally! De Lairese). At the close of the exhibition, a two-day symposium took place at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede and the RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague, in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam. The symposium formed the starting point for this special issue of JHNA. The issue presents new insights into Gerard de Lairese's artistic development, subject matter, workshop practice, and technique.*

*This special issue has been guest edited by Jasper Hillegers, Research Curator, Salomon Lilian Gallery, Amsterdam; Elmer Kolfin, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Amsterdam; Marrigje Rikken, Head of Collections, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Eric Jan Sluijter, Emeritus Professor of Art History, University of Amsterdam.*

- 1 Gerard de Lairese has been highly praised as well as intensely reviled. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, he has been slowly regaining his place within the canon of Dutch art. In his own time he was a highly celebrated master.<sup>1</sup> After his arrival in Amsterdam in 1665, Lairese had quickly become the most admired history painter of the Northern Netherlands, working for the open market as well as receiving many prestigious commissions from the highest circles in both Amsterdam and The Hague. In the Latin version of the *Teutsche Academie* (1683), Joachim von Sandrart (1606–1688) recorded that “he was highly esteemed by all because of the exceptional excellence of his art and the honesty of his moral.”<sup>2</sup> Arnold Houbraken praised him in his *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* of 1714–1718 as “a flower of art so beautiful the likes of which will not easily be seen for another century.”<sup>3</sup> In 1760 Jean Baptiste Descamps writes that he was given the honorary title of the “Dutch Poussin,” and

Jean-Baptiste Pierre Lebrun even described him in 1792 as “without doubt the greatest genius in the art of painting ever.”<sup>4</sup> However, his popularity waned rapidly in the nineteenth century. Gerard de Lairesse came to symbolize, and was even held personally responsible for, the decline of Dutch art at the end of the seventeenth century. With the characterization in 1919 by Frederik Schmidt Degener, successively director of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Rijksmuseum, Lairesse’s reputation hit an all-time low; Schmidt Degener called him a foreigner “having the petty style of the international decorator, and with the aplomb and the loquaciousness of the dogmatic.”<sup>5</sup> Driven by pure hatred, Schmidt Degener even saw in Rembrandt’s—in our eyes moving—portrait of Lairesse “the most revolting, most hideous mug that was ever painted. Pathetic, certainly, but with his greedy mouth, his perfidious thoughts, he is hateful at the same time. His apelike shape houses the soul of a miscreant.”<sup>6</sup> In the most exhaustive survey of Dutch art in the Golden Age written in the twentieth century, Wilhelm Martin’s two monumental volumes from 1935, Lairesse was still accused of causing the decline in Dutch art by introducing French taste into the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup>

- 2 The first serious study of Lairesse’s artistic work was published in 1947 by Jan J. M. Timmers, who had the intention to regain interest in and recognition of the artist’s achievements.<sup>8</sup> Apart from a biography and still-valuable introduction to his art theory, Timmers focused on Lairesse’s prints, of which he also added a catalogue. It took more than twenty years before this pioneering study was followed by Derk Snoep’s important essay on Lairesse’s decorative paintings (1970).<sup>9</sup> In 1992 (with a supplement in 2004) Alain Roy published his timely monograph on Lairesse’s paintings, drawings, and prints, of which the catalogue raisonné is of crucial importance for any research on Lairesse’s work.<sup>10</sup> Between 1989 and 2000, Janno van Tatenhoven published a series of small but insightful articles on Lairesse’s drawings.<sup>11</sup> Arguably the most encompassing study is Melinda Vander Ploeg Fallon’s little-known, unpublished dissertation (2000), in which she discusses Lairesse’s responses to his artistic environment, his career, and the buying public.<sup>12</sup> This renewed interest in Lairesse had been much stimulated by the first groundbreaking exhibition on Dutch history painting, *God, Saints and Heroes* (1980, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Detroit Institute of Art; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).<sup>13</sup> Lairesse’s paintings also featured prominently in the exhibition *Dutch Classicism* (1999, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Städelches Kunstinstitut) and he was even given the lead role in the exhibition *De Kroon op het werk. Hollandse Schilderkunst 1670–1750*, held at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, the Dordrechts Museum and the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel in 2006–7, that called attention to late seventeenth-century painting.<sup>14</sup> Over the same period, a number of excellent studies appeared that focused on Lairesse’s art-theoretical writings (*Het Groot Schilderboek* of 1707, and to a lesser degree his *Grondlegginge ter teekenkunst* of 1701), such as the searching article by Arno Dolders of 1985, followed by the study of Claus Kemmer in 1998, and the highly valuable publication of Tijana Zakula (2015), based on her dissertation.<sup>15</sup> Lyckle de Vries took Lairesse’s ideas about art and art making as a starting point for examining his works in two books (published in 1998 and 2011) that contributed greatly to our insights in Lairesse’s theory and art; he approached the *Groot Schilderboek* as a practical manual on art making, closely examining the interrelation with his paintings.<sup>16</sup>
- 3 Calling public attention to Lairesse’s artistic oeuvre as a whole for the first time, the exhibition *Eindelijk! De Lairesse* (2017–2018; Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede) successfully countered the generally negative reception that had befallen Lairesse for such a long time. The exhibition was

conceived by the late Bob van den Boogert, who was convinced of the necessity to confront the Dutch museum-going public with a reappraisal of the classicistic idealism exemplified by Lairese's art. After van den Boogert's sudden death, the exhibition was curated by Jasper Hillegers and Eddy Schavemaker in collaboration with Paul Knolle and the staff of the museum; it demonstrated the varied and consistently high quality of Lairese's oeuvre with fifty paintings (ranging from small, jewellike works to the five-and-a-half-meters-high organ shutters), twenty-eight drawings, and ten prints, thus fully justifying the high praise of his contemporaries. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication featuring short but informative essays by seventeen experts on a variety of topics pertaining to Lairese's life, ideas, art, and reception history.<sup>17</sup> With the aim of reassessing Lairese's artistic oeuvre, a two-day symposium was held at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede and the RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague, in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, at the closing of the exhibition. This inspiring conference was the starting point of this thematic issue of the *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*.

- 4 Presenting new insights into Gerard Lairese's artistic development, subject matter, workshop practice, and technique, this issue consists of four thematic essays and three case studies, each focusing on Lairese's work rather than on his art theory or his reception history, although these topics are brought into play where necessary. Eric Jan Sluijter argues that Lairese's artistic development was informed by the Romanist classicist tradition in Liège, his hometown, and by Italian artistic sources from Raphael to Poussin, while contemporary art and theory in France appear to be of no significance. After settling in Amsterdam, Lairese also assimilated elements from the styles prevalent in that city. Paul Taylor discusses Gerard de Lairese's response to works by artists in the "grand manner" such as Raphael, Poussin, Annibale Carracci, and Domenichino, painters Lairese presents in his *Groot Schilderboek* as examples to follow. Taylor examines in particular Lairese's numerous mentions of Raphael and Poussin—whose paintings Lairese had never seen in reality and only knew through reproductive prints—especially with respect to his theory and practice of color. Weixuan Li analyzes trends and patterns in Lairese's painting production. By dividing his paintings into three categories and taking the relative dates into account, she correlates his output with the quantity and quality of the pupils in his workshop, thereby revealing the pupils' participation and the consequences for his workflow. Starting from a critical review of the literature on Lairese's drawings, and signaling the field's considerable lacunae, Jasper Hillegers presents a much-needed, expansive reassessment of the artist's production of drawings, considering their function in light of what little we know about Lairese's studio practice.
- 5 Of the three case studies, two focus on groups of paintings and one on an individual work. Exploring the early series *The Infancy of Jesus*, Robert Schillemans discusses the iconography and function of this cycle of religious paintings, which must have been a Roman Catholic commission, although Lairese himself had converted to Calvinism. He demonstrates how Lairese ingeniously made use of older print sources for these traditional subjects, adopting and transforming them into his own style. Vera Blok studies Lairese's painting technique in four paintings for the large decorative cycle in Soestdijk Palace, concluding that the artist appears to practice what he later would preach in his *Groot Schilderboek*. Finally, Robert Wenley traces the provenance and identifies the sitters in an enigmatic, allegorical group portrait of children. He gives a new interpretation to this complex painting, demonstrating that the artist's invention goes beyond the traditional iconography of the Five Senses, simultaneously showing Lairese's great capacities

as an inventor and a portraitist.

*NB: When writing the master's full name, we use Gerard de Lairese, following the conventions of the RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History. When using only the artist's surname, we spell it as Lairese, without "de," as was done during his own lifetime (by Arnold Houbraken, for example).*

Jasper Hillegers (born 1976) studied art history of the early modern period at the University of Amsterdam (cum laude, Duparc Prize). Since 2010, he has been working at the Salomon Lilian gallery in Amsterdam. Additionally, Hillegers has been assistant curator at the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; has (co)curated several exhibitions (including *Eindelijk! De Lairese* in Enschede); and has contributed to numerous catalogues (for, among others, Salomon Lilian, Frans Hals Museum, Rembrandthuis, Joods Historisch Museum, Paleis op de Dam, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Städel Museum/National Gallery of Canada, Fondation Custodia) and scholarly publications.

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Elmer Kolfin teaches Dutch art of the early modern period at the University of Amsterdam and is supervisor of the research master Art of the Netherlands. Kolfin has published on a variety of subjects, including early seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings; painted and printed images of blacks in Dutch art; the Oranjezaal in Huis ten Bosch; print publishing in Amsterdam; and the paintings of Jan van Huysum. Since 2008 he has guest-curated exhibitions on images of blacks; representations of slavery; Dutch printmaking; and humour in seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting. His next exhibition, *Black in Rembrandt's Time*, opens in March 2020 in The Rembrandt House Museum. Currently, Kolfin participates in the NWO funded research project on the spread of coloured grounds to the Netherlands, *Down to the Ground*. He is editor-in-chief of *Oud Holland. Journal for Art of the Low Countries*, and serves on the editorial board of the interdisciplinary book series *Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam University Press).

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Marrigje Rikken studied art history at the University of Amsterdam and was awarded a PhD at Leiden University in 2016. From 2006 to 2008 she was assistant curator Dutch 17th-century Paintings at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. From 2009 to 2015 she worked as lecturer in art history at the University of Amsterdam and from 2015 to 2017 as curator of history paintings at the RKD – the Netherlands Institute for Art History at The Hague. In 2014 she was appointed associate curator at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, where she became head of collections in 2017.

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Eric Jan Sluijter is Professor Emeritus of the History of Renaissance and Early Modern Art at the University of Amsterdam (2002-2019). He worked at the RKD (1972-1976), taught at Leiden University (1976-2001) and as visiting professor at Yale University (1991), and The Institute of Fine Arts/NYU (2002-2007); in 2019 he served as visiting professor (Erasmus Lecturship) at Harvard University. For his publications, see [www.ericjansluijter.nl](http://www.ericjansluijter.nl)

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<sup>1</sup> For Lairese's critical fortune, see Alain Roy, *Gerard de Lairese (1640–1711)* (Paris: Arthena, 1992), 167–185; Melinda K. Vander Ploeg-Fallon, *Gerard de Lairese (1640-1711) and the Au-*



<sup>1</sup> For Lairese's critical fortune, see Alain Roy, *Gerard de Lairese (1640–1711)* (Paris: Arthena, 1992), 167–185; Melinda K. Vander Ploeg-Fallon, *Gerard de Lairese (1640-1711) and the Audience for the Antyk* (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2001), 22–67; and Jasper Hillegers, “De konstbloem, het grootste genie ooit en de nijdsige Waal. De waarderingsgeschiedenis van Gerard de Lairese in vogelvlucht,” in Josien Beltman, Paul Knolle and Quirine Van der Meer Mohr, eds., *Eindelijk! De Lairese. Klassieke schoonheid in de Gouden Eeuw* (Enschede and Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2016), 118–128.

<sup>2</sup> Joachim von Sandrart, *Academia nobilissimae artis pictoriae* (Nuremberg, 1683), 388–389: “. . . multoque ab omnibus ob insignem Artis suae praestantium morumque honestatem, colitur honore.”

<sup>3</sup> Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (The Hague, 1754), 3:106: “een konstbloem zoo schoon als licht in geen eeuw weer staat gezien te worden.”

<sup>4</sup> “On a donna Lairese le titre flatteur du Poussin Hollandais”: J.-B. Descamps, *La vie des peintres flamands, allemand et hollandois*, 4 vols. (Paris: Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1753–1764; rev. ed. 1842), 2:256; “. . . sans contredit le plus beau genie qu'il y ait eu dans la peinture”: J. B. P. Lebrun, *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands*, 3 vols. (Paris and Amsterdam: Brun et Poignant/Pierre Fouquet, 1792–1796), 2:41.

<sup>5</sup> Frederik Schmidt-Degener, “Rembrandt en Vondel,” *De Gids* 83 (1919): 237: “Die vreemdeling [. . . beschikkend over] een internationaal decorateurs-stijltje en over het aplomp en het spraakwater van den doctrinair.”

<sup>6</sup> Frederik Schmidt-Degener, “Rembrandt's portret van Gerard de Lairese,” *Onze Kunst* 23 (1913): 105: “Het weerzinwekkendste, het meest hideuze bakkes, dat ooit geschilderd werd. . . . Deerniswekkend, zeker. Maar met zijn gretigen mond, zijn perfide overleggingen, is hij hatelijk tevens. In de aapachtige gestalte huist de ziel van een aterling.”

<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm Martin, *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff Uitgever, 1935–1936), 2:475.

<sup>8</sup> Jan J. M. Timmers, *Gérard Lairese* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1942).

<sup>9</sup> Derk P. Snoep, “Gerard Lairese als plafond-en kamerschilder,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 18 (1970): 159–220.

<sup>10</sup> Roy, *Gérard de Lairese*, and Alain Roy, “Quelques nouvelles oeuvres attribuées à Gérard de Lairese,” *Les cahiers d'histoire de l'art* 2 (2004): 117–142.

<sup>11</sup> Paula Wunderbar (=Janno van Tatenhove), “Gerard Lairese (1641–1711),” *Delinaevit et sculpsit* 2 (1989): 35; Janno van Tatenhove, “Gerard Lairese (1641–1711),” *Delinaevit et sculpsit* 11 (1993): 27–31; Janno van Tatenhove et al., “Lairessiana I,” *Delinaevit et sculpsit* 16 (1996): 16–27; Janno van Tatenhove et al., “Lairessiana II,” *Delinaevit et sculpsit* 21 (1997): 228–47; Janno van Tatenhove et al., “Lairessiana III,” *Delinaevit et sculpsit* 21 (2000): 23–37.

<sup>12</sup> Vander Ploeg Fallon, *Gérard de Lairese*.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Blankert et al., *Gods, Saints & Heroes. Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> Albert Blankert et al., *Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Painting* (Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 1999); Sander Paarlberg et al., *De kroon op het werk: Hollandse schilderkunst 1670-1750* (Cologne: Locher, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Arno Dolders, “Some remarks on Lairese's *Groot Schilderboek*,” *Simiolus* 15 (1985): 197–220 [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.2307/3780693](https://doi.org/10.2307/3780693); Claus Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form: Gerard

de Lairese's *Groot Schilderboek* and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," *Simiolus* 26 (1998): 87–115 [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.2307/3780872](https://doi.org/10.2307/3780872); Tijana Zakula, "Reforming Dutch Art: Gerard de Lairese on Beauty, Morals and Class," special edition of *Simiolus* 37 (2013–2014): 3–142, published in 2015 by the Foundation for Dutch Art-Historical Publications, Amsterdam.

<sup>16</sup> Lyckle de Vries, *Gerard de Lairese: An Artist Between Stage and Studio* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998); Lyckle de Vries, *How to Create Beauty: De Lairese on the Theory and Practice of Making Art* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Josien Beltman, Paul Knolle and Quirine Van der Meer Mohr, eds., *Eindelijk! De Lairese. Klassieke schoonheid in de Gouden Eeuw* (Enschede and Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2016).

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