Prolog: Samuel van Hoogstraten and the Golden Age of Dutch art, literature, and science: the present book and future research

Weststeijn, T.

Published in:
The universal art of Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678): painter, writer, and courtier

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
PROLOG

Samuel van Hoogstraten and the Golden Age of Dutch Art, Literature, and Science: The Present Book and Future Research

The one connecting factor in the different chapters in this book is obviously Van Hoogstraten himself: there was a single personality – although our knowledge of it may be shifting with each new historiographical focus – that linked art, literature, and scholarship during a foundational era of Dutch cultural history. Even though getting to know the ‘real’ Samuel van Hoogstraten may be beyond our ken as historians, it is a legitimate ambition to try to sketch the conceptual and ideological framework which implicitly connected his varied efforts. Four major themes surface throughout the present book’s chapters and determine the surplus value of the sum of the parts: 1) training in Rembrandt’s studio; 2) the theory and practice of art as deceit; 3) Van Hoogstraten as a courtier; and 4) his ambitions in the context of the history of knowledge. These themes illuminate the paintings as well as the writings, and may also indicate avenues for future research.

Rembrandt’s studio

Van Hoogstraten’s training in Amsterdam demands interest if only because Rembrandt, of all painters of the European Baroque, has probably received the most substantial amount of scholarly attention. From the 1960s onwards, attempts have been made to ‘normalize’ Rembrandt by putting the spotlight on the wide range of works and minor masters in his background. Yet in the twenty-first century, he exerts again the centripetal force in the historiography of Dutch art. According to Mariët Westermann, the relative decline of European hegemony has renewed attention to ‘the extensive but no longer assured history of painting as a unique resource of European culture’, engendering a ‘return to the major contributions of Dutch seventeenth-century art’ and Rembrandt in particular. The master-pupil relationship will therefore continue to dominate research about Van Hoogstraten, even though he is undoubtedly coming into his own as a canonical figure and historians will increasingly understand the master through his pupil.
Studying the Dordrecht painter seems, in fact, a promising approach in Dutch art history: his cosmopolitanism, intellectualism, and the ‘betrayal’ of his master’s manner – which made him such a suspect figure for earlier scholars – provide an alternative model for the traditional image of the Rembrandt circle as centered on a dark, unlettered, provincial, and lonely genius, while at the same time it is evident that Rembrandt remained a worthy example for Van Hoogstraten throughout his career.  

The present book confirms this latter insight in particular. Broos, for one, highlights how Rembrandt was literally looking over his students’ shoulders. The fact that a drawing documenting a teaching procedure survives and that Van Hoogstraten’s painted work returned to it in later years, illustrates not only Rembrandt’s pedagogy: the insight that the master made direct changes in the students’ work also deserves the attention of scholars who try to establish the amount of cooperation in the studio, and inspires a more nuanced position towards the ‘degrees of authenticity’ by which workshop products should be judged. 

It comes as no surprise that Van Hoogstraten relied on his master for one of his most ambitious self-portraits. Rembrandt’s large self-portrait production in different media, poses, costumes, and types was a historically exceptional phenomenon, as Van de Wetering has explained. Van Hoogstraten must have recognized this aspect of his master’s ambitions when in the self-portraits identified by Broos he presented himself as an artist, drawing attention to the process of making art and thereby heralding the self-referential aspects of his later trompe-l’oeil. What is more, the young man drawing from life looking out not at the viewers, but at the visible world, presents himself as that budding artist who would later feature in the *Inleyding,* devoted to ‘the riches of nature, and what is in it: the heaven, the earth, the sea … the flat fields, hills, springs and trees provide work in abundance; the cities, markets, churches, and a thousand riches of nature call out to us’.  

It is likely that Rembrandt did not just hold Van Hoogstraten’s pen for him when needed, but also spoke words of advice. The pupil probably cherished the sketches while noting down remarks just like students were wont to do in the Dutch Republic’s Latin schools. A collection of these quotations seems to have been the basis for his volume on painting published towards the end of his career. Such a procedure would explain the treatise’s many sideroads which indicate that it was not intended to be read from cover to cover in a linear fashion. Taylor’s analysis singles out one such element that may have been among the master’s advice: the term *zwier* was essential to describe and instruct in the art of figure composition. Complete understanding of this word’s meaning arises only out of scrutiny of the visual material, whereas the term is also an important addition to the vocabulary in which to discuss our looking at seventeenth-century art. Word and image, theory and practice, the master’s teaching and the student’s reflections were complementary. 

Taylor’s analysis of vocabulary through images is suggestive of a manner of reading. Indeed, Van Hoogstraten’s ambiguous stance towards liefhebbers (art lovers) without practical knowledge, to whom he addresses the book but who are also the butt of frequent criticism in the treatise, makes clear that his treatise was not intended to be fully understood just by reading.
His focus on the artist as the best judge of art was itself a literary commonplace. Yet the present book’s chapters by Blanc, Brusati, and Taylor point out that doing justice to the treatise involves reading complemented with action – making art. This may seem like an obvious remark, but it explains why the *Inleyding*, in many cases, does not prescribe an unambiguous, clear-cut theory: the kind of ‘thinking’ that it propagates automatically involves the ‘doing’.5

This performative element is, in fact, relevant on various levels besides technique. *Zwier* was related to the physical movement of figures on a stage. Van Hoogstraten’s ideal of painting as evoking a virtual reality should in many cases be interpreted literally rather than figuratively; ideally, scenes from history were to be used in a performative context: curtains in front of paintings were pulled aside to reveal a scene in a longer narrative, relevant texts were read aloud, and perhaps music accompanied the looking at art.6 Moreover, terms such as *zwier* suggest how intricately painterly style was supposedly linked to the artist’s corporeality: being *zwierich* of brush reflected an artist’s physical elegance (which, according to early modern physiology, was closely related to his temperament that was in turn a product of his country of upbringing’s climatic circumstances).

*The art of deceit*

One of Rembrandt’s experiments in ‘thinking outside the box’ concerned frames – the most striking is the 1641 *Portrait of Agatha Bas* (Royal Collection, London) in which not only the sitter’s fan is depicted sticking out of the picture plane, partly overlapping the frame, but she is actually holding the frame with her left hand; likewise in the printed *Portrait of Jan Sylvius* (1646), the sitter’s face and fingers throw cast shadows outside the oval frame [Fig. 2]. When Van Hoogstraten emulated such playful conceits – which Brusati identifies as the artist’s abilities to at the same time simulate (i.e., suggest the presence of three-dimensional spaces and living figures) and dissimulate (i.e., call attention to the painting as a framed canvas or paper) – it becomes clear to what extent visual illusionism had been a chief concern. Painters from Rembrandt’s generation had accomplished much; one way to emulate perfect illusionism – one’s own or the work of others – was to consciously puncture the illusion.

Brusati points out how for Van Hoogstraten, the device of the painting-within-the-painting was a means of articulating his theoretical concerns. Here we find a first parallel with his novelistic writings. These contain many frame narratives, which, as Chapter 8 argues, typify Van Hoogstraten as a novelist. His convoluted texts are made up of stories told by the books’ main characters, stories which, in turn, often involve passages in reported speech, enabling the narrative to move quickly to remote locations. This element, together with the hybrid combination of prose, poetry, and fictional letters quoted in full, is precisely what made Van Hoogstraten such an original writer in Dutch. Roscam Abbing’s chapter highlights how this novelistic procedure is replicated in some of the paintings that depict letters and Van Hoogstraten’s own writings (the books, not their content). The pictures-within-pictures, stories-within-stories, and stories-within-pictures bring to the fore not just Van Hoogstraten’s ‘conscious devising’ of artifice, in
Fig. 2 Rembrandt van Rijn, Portrait of Jan Cornelisz Sylvius, 1646, etching, 28 x 19 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
Brusati’s words. They rather point out the master’s emphasis on the power of art and literature to transport the viewer into other realities. In the case of a painting’s ‘speaking’ likeness, art was even supposed to evoke a complete virtual reality – more literally than literature did.

If we assume that Van Hoogstraten’s ambitions were shaped during the period when Rembrandt took hold of his drawing pen when needed, the essays by Brusati, Roscam Abbing, and Yalcin suggest that what the master imparted on his pupil was not the ‘Rembrandt style’, the specific brushwork and clair-obscur that was his most explicit trademark. More essential was the ambition to give pride of place to ‘deceiving the eye’ (to use Van Hoogstraten’s own, famous formula), a central issue in rivalry between artists and demonstrations of painterly virtuosity. Van Hoogstraten came to identify his social success with the art of painting’s deceptive powers. As Colenbrander argues in the present book, the Perspective Box in London must be linked even more closely to the master’s personality and intimate life than was previously thought.

One way to try to connect Van Hoogstraten’s focus on illusionism to his ambitions as a writer is the theory of rhetoric. The ancient rhetoricians had taken pride in describing their art as deceitful – they even allowed not telling the truth if this would make an argument more persuasive; they also indulged in some measure in the comparison between oratory and sophistry. These remarks underly the praise of deceit in the early modern theory of painting, and are also the literary foundation for Van Hoogstraten’s comparison of the painting to the mirror – that most vain and superficial of human attributes, associated, moreover, with feminine fickleness. The London perspective box itself seems to be a tribute to the deceitful possibilities of the medium of oil paint, which suggests that the seductive Venus/Danaë depicted on the lid was closely related to the ‘love of art’ that was defined as the painter’s greatest reward: form and content were closely related (the female figure shares some essential qualities with Pictura herself whose qualities were deemed alluring and dangerous, as Eric Jan Sluijter has demonstrated).

Dame Pictura was obviously a woman desired by artists and liefhebbers alike, who were especially attracted to the fraudulent sheen of oil and varnish: had Van Hoogstraten not identified the invention of oil paint as the result of alchemy, echoing Giorgio Vasari who called Jan van Eyck a ‘sophist’?

Van Hoogstraten as a cosmopolitan courtier

Another aspect of Van Hoogstraten’s art that can probably be only addressed in full by taking account of his origins in Rembrandt’s studio is his European career. At first sight, the master and the pupil harbored opposing ideas in this respect: Van Hoogstraten’s cosmopolitan ambitions contrasted with Rembrandt’s reputation, based in part on the fact that he never left his home country. Constantijn Huygens’s (1596-1687) biographical note on Rembrandt highlighted how this painter, allegedly from a needy and uneducated background, derived his talents purely from the native soil. The account suggested that not going to Italy was Rembrandt’s conscious choice to underscore his Batavian roots (Huygens heaped implicit praise on the master when he called not going abroad his single defect). Yet in reality, Rembrandt’s workshop was internationally oriented, attracting students from the German states and Scandinavia; more importantly, it was
positioned in an emulative relation towards Rubens and Titian. The studio was a springboard for Willem Drost and Monsù Berardo (Bernhard Keil, 1624-1687) to seek successful careers in Italy. In the present book, Yalcin’s analysis of Van Hoogstraten’s experiences in Britain begs the question whether it is sensible to talk of the ‘Dutch School’ in connection to these pupils. Perhaps Van Hoogstraten should be seen as exemplary of a category of travelling Europeans for whose works the notion of Kunstgeographie – ‘artistic geography’ which interprets works in relation to origin – is irrelevant. Yalcin and Roscam Abbing remind us that throughout his artistic career, Van Hoogstraten obeyed the courtier’s main rule. Decorum – or buygsaemheid (flexibility) in his own original and instructive translation – signified adapting his works to his public’s desires, incorporating subtle iconographical details that could be understood only in a local context. (Obviously, exchanging the Rembrandtesque manner for a smoother brush and brighter palette testified to the same flexibility in a stylistic sense.) The chapters by Yalcin, Roscam Abbing, and Weststeijn make clear how his international orientation and willingness to change his approach for specific publics resulted in Van Hoogstraten being a founding figure in new genres: the ‘letter rack’ painting, the trompe-l’oeil with Palladian architecture, and, perhaps more epochal, two of the first Dutch novels.

Yet buygsaemheid in manifesting one’s own artistic identity could only go some way. In the novels, Van Hoogstraten presents himself not only as a learned artist but also as someone who took pride in his native language. His efforts to ‘transpose Holland in Latium’ included a few references to the Batavians, the ancient Dutchmen praised by Tacitus himself. When Van Hoogstraten adapted the genre of the novel – that had originated in Italy, France, and England – to the Dutch context, it seems that his international outlook was motivated by the desire to ultimately single out the United Provinces’ unique cultural qualities. It is significant in this respect that even when the master arrived in the center of European civilization, Rome, he was given the nickname ‘The Batavian’ upon joining the local artists’ confraternity. In the novels, he paired his energetic use of the Dutch language with a choice of topics that was far removed from ancient Rome: the far North and the Eastern fringes of Europe. It is hard to establish to what extent he also tried to ‘embrace the vernacular’ in his art and whether his works, be they portraits of Dutch sitters or demonstration pieces for foreign buyers, expressed a purportedly ‘Dutch’ self-image. Brusati, Yalcin, and Colenbrander remind us that some of Van Hoogstraten’s most accomplished works, such as the perspective box and a number of architecture paintings, depict domestic interiors with the signature Delftware tiles that may have been associated with purportedly ‘Dutch’ virtues.

One complication when studying ‘Batavian’ factors in Van Hoogstraten’s painted and written work is that the novels feature such an idiosyncratic subject matter. They involve horror, magic, and violence which are wholly absent in Van Hoogstraten’s ambitions as a painter or even a draftsman. Perhaps the term schilderachtig (painterly or ‘picturesque’), which in the treatise on painting relates to the concept of ‘beautiful ugliness’, may be stretched to explain some of the exoticism in the books. For some examples the author refers to Johan van Heemskerk’s (1597-1636) novelistic description of a boorish theme and Adriaen Brouwer’s (1605-1638) paintings of similarly rustic topics. This begs the question, to what extent were picturesque topics in art related to a specific ‘vernacular’ painting style?
The present book also gives rise to another question: whether there might be ‘Baroque’ concepts with which to thematize Van Hoogstraten’s idiosyncrasies – both the exoticism of the novels and the artworks’ trompe-l’oeil effects. Terms come to mind that are often used in relation to the interests of seventeenth-century scholars such as ‘the curious’ and ‘admiration’, words that expressed the viewer’s confrontation with the unexpected or unknown. The Spanish Jesuit Balthasar Gracián (1601–1658), for instance, spoke in this regard of ingenium as the artist’s ability to express relationships in an innovative manner – putting old things in a new light. As Horn’s chapter reveals, Gracián’s ideology was used by Houbraken to situate Van Hoogstraten’s artistic ambitions in an ideological context. A vernacular term (in Italian) to denote this ideology was argutezza, sharpness of mind, which was apparently the basis for conceits such as metaphor: only a sharp wit would be able to discover the third term through which two, highly dissimilar objects were related. Van Hoogstraten’s paintings that explicitly expose the conceit of simulation – by calling attention to an image’s real identity as a framed canvas – may have been intended to evoke admiration, highlighting the artist’s ability to establish similitude between a layer of paint and a three-dimensional object or even a human being. In the Dordrecht master’s novels, the weaving together of divergent frame narratives which allowed for the introduction of exotic and ‘unheard-of things’ in the civilized domain of Holland youngsters, may have been a somewhat less intellectually challenging attempt at demonstrating ingenuity.

Moreover, curiosity and admiration (verwondering in Van Hoogstraten’s Dutch) were terms often used to describe objects in scientific collections. The works by the painter’s own hand that demonstrate knowledge of optics suggest that he was interested in other objects evoking admiratio. Brusati points out that in Vienna, he saw a camera obscura with the Jesuits; Yalcin highlights his contacts with London’s Royal Society and the Vauxhall Association in which other scientific experiments were discussed. It is probable that Van Hoogstraten, imitating Rembrandt, had his own small library and collection of man-made curiosities and exotic natural objects. His treatise mentions not only Saxon antiquities, Japanese lacquerware, and Amerindian feather images but also shells, gems, suggestively shaped rocks, bezoar stones, and mandrakes. These were typical items in scientific cabinets: the visitor’s ingenium was essential to identify the unusual objects’ meaning in the framework of the Creator’s design. Furthermore, Van Hoogstraten’s collection may have included material things similar to those featuring in his novels: hyperborean magical accoutrements, Ottoman scimitars, ‘Scythian’ arrows, and others revealing the existence of elephants and Egyptian cults. In this context, we should perhaps pay more attention to the global dimension of Van Hoogstraten’s statement that artists should comprehend ‘the entire visible world’. He praised Rembrandt’s The Preaching of Saint John, for instance, for the multiplicity of men ‘from different states’ depicted in the audience; in fact, the painting contains more than seventy figures including two wearing Japanese armor and Amerindian garb [Fig. 3].

If ingenuity (geest in Dutch) was indeed an overarching concept to explain Van Hoogstraten’s artistic and literary ambitions, it is important to analyze how it was rooted in ideals that he encountered at the courts of Vienna, The Hague, and London, explored in more detail in the present book by Roscam Abbing and Yalcin. These environments provided the stage for civilized
demonstrations of ingenuity that were needed to attract attention in a rigidly hierarchical social context. Not only did Van Hoogstraten understand how a court artist’s *geest* should be essentially flexible, correctly judging each new social situation and constantly adapting one’s behavior in a seemingly effortless manner; he even appears to have made the courtier’s ideal of simulation – the indispensable play-acting involved in this social flexibility – so much his own that he came to comment on it in his writing and painting. Roscam Abbing’s and Brusati’s essays in tandem suggest that works which thematized both *simulatio* and *dissimulatio*, like the framed letter-racks, were intended as objects for civilized conversation, which increased their value as commodities and sophisticated gifts. The emphasis on the function of artworks as conversation starters in a courtly context draws attention to the limits of economic history as an interpretive framework in the study of Dutch art. Van Hoogstraten’s financial success in the Netherlands – he became a rich man towards the end of his career – demonstrates that he knew how to operate in the world’s most markedly capitalistic art market at the time. Yet it may have been social as well as economic insights that helped him come so far. Making paintings as gifts did not yield him money – he knew that ultimately human capital was his best investment. In this sense the Dutch Republic,
in spite of the unprecedented blossoming of a free market for art, had not broken with its Bur- 
gundian tradition and with the 'honor economy of the court', in Brusati's words. Roscam Abbing 
draws attention to the fact that the same continuity held true for Van Hoogstraten's writings. 

We should also, perhaps, not forget that many of the paintings, besides serious matters of 
emulation and self-reflection, express an element of humor. The procedure of masking and con-
sciously demasking involved a moment of irony that was probably not lost on Van Hoogstraten's 
courtly contemporaries; irony may also have played a role in an iconographical sense in genre 
paintings such as The Doctor's Visit (discussed by Brusati in the present book). What is more, 
trompe-l'oeil could be intrinsically humoristic; didn't Houbraken describe how Rembrandt's pu-
pils poked fun of their master's avarice by painting coins on the floor, observing how he reached 
out for them in vain? Van Hoogstraten's Inleyding contains precious little explanation on the 
topic of humor. Did anyone laugh when the ancient master Zeuxis deceived Parrhasios: when the 
latter tried to draw aside the curtain only to discover that it was painted? We have to look at the 
Italian and Spanish tradition of art theory to find how terms such as capriccio, grillo, and scherzo 
(joke) were associated with the illusionistic depiction of everyday household objects, foodstuff, 
animals, and people from the lower classes. Gianpalo Lomazzo (1538-1592), Federico Zuccari 
(1539-1709), and Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644) explicitly associate the Netherlandish masters' 
focus on everyday life with the intent to provoke laughter: the realistic mode of representation is 
apparently a requisite for the public to recognize humorous situations (and in effect, any modern 
cartoonist will agree that few things are as fleeting as humor). For the Italians, the obvious im-
plication is that the Northern artists themselves are similar to the simpletons they depict so con-
vincingly. Finally, in the context of Van Hoogstraten's ambitions, it is even harder to establish to 
what extent his novels were intended to be funny. Was the swordfight between two women that 
concludes Haegaenveld intended as a carnivalesque reversal of values? The present book argues 
that a certain conception of the picturesque (schilderachtig) infuses Van Hoogstraten's books. 
Bringing these varied painterly and literary elements in relation to the Bakhtinian notions of 
laughter and the grotesque might be a fruitful line of future research.

An even more speculative element in regard to how Van Hoogstraten's art related to 
'low' culture should be taken account of especially in the light of Eric Jan Sluijter's studies of the 
painted female nude in Rembrandt's circle. Optical illusionism was combined with eroticism in 
Van Hoogstraten's perspective box with its depiction of a nude Venus or Danaë. The mythologi-
cal and scientific connotations cannot fully obscure the fact that there is a voyeuristic element 
involved in this peculiar kind of peepshow, in which the woman's frontal nudity appears only 
after the spectator has bent over the box in a peculiar physical pose. Herman Colenbrander called 
attention to this aspect during the 2009 conference on Van Hoogstraten, pointing out that in the 
eighteenth century in particular, pornographic subject matter was often rendered in anamorphic 
form: the optical distortion reduced the image's literalness while at the same time it heightened 
the pleasure of the viewing process.

The universal art_Samuel Hogst.indd   29
04-06-13   16:01
Finally, the present book brings to the surface aspects of Van Hoogstraten’s work that are relevant to the history of science. Perhaps it is better to speak in this context of the history of knowledge, as this term captures more adequately how Van Hoogstraten’s different ambitions were interconnected. The English word ‘science’ does not adequately translate *wetenschap*, the term Van Hoogstraten uses to qualify his ambitions as an artist; when he calls the art of painting an *algemeene wetenschap*, he means a universal discipline encompassing different branches of knowledge. Obviously, it would not be correct to call Van Hoogstraten a scientist; yet his writings and paintings give reason to assume that among Dutch painters, he was extraordinarily concerned with establishing how the insights acquired by artists’ daily attention to the visible world were related to knowledge as it was understood by the scholars and practitioners of natural science of his day. In this context, it is important to note that Van Hoogstraten’s treatise on painting is silent about mathematical perspective, while it devotes an extraordinary amount of attention to coloring with its different optical, psychological, and material connotations (an emphasis the author shares with his predecessor Karel van Mander but which is otherwise rare in the tradition of art theory). The kind of knowledge that Van Hoogstraten’s art could pre-eminently transmit was apparently related to physical phenomena such as color and light, which no other medium than oil paint could record so accurately. In the context of the history of science, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box did not just demonstrate the geometry involved in the making of an anamorphosis: it catalogued effects of direct and indirect natural light, how it was filtered or reflected by various materials in an interior.

The present book highlights that Van Hoogstraten’s treatise, with its emphasis on optical deceit, was likewise a repository of knowledge. Yet we should realize that the precise meaning of *wetenschap* in Van Hoogstraten’s book remains, for now, elusive: it had many different aspects. Antiquarian knowledge, for instance, was central to the author’s ambitions; references to ancient dress, armor, and the habits of the ancients, even when they do not relate to the visual arts, take up much space in the treatise. Obviously, transmitting pedagogical knowledge was essential too, which could be complemented with artworks such as the drawing presently identified by Broos: this may have come down to us precisely because it documented not only the correct manner of rendering anatomy but also a teaching method. Furthermore, as Taylor highlights in the present book, a specific term such as *zwier* expressed the painter’s efforts to manipulate his figures as if moving on a stage. Art theory apparently crossed between media: in this case, the dancer or playwright’s knowledge was applied to that of the artist.

Seeing Van Hoogstraten’s art and writing in the context of the history of knowledge seems to bring us full circle to what first gave rise to scholarly interest in the master’s ideas on pictorial representation as distinct from the Italianate tradition: Svetlana Alpers’s take on Dutch art as aimed at inventorying (or ‘mapping’) visible reality. This idea seems to have lost less of its original appeal than the original iconological approach; in fact it stands in need of being revived after filtering out the noise engendered by the anachronistic application of twentieth-century literary theory. The ideological framework that gave Dutch art its intellectual significance may
have had more to do with the history of knowledge – in relation to perception in particular, color theory, and the rendition of optical properties and surface textures that may be subsumed under Van Mander’s term reflexy-const – than with the history of literature.21

In any event, Van Hoogstraten’s art confronted his viewers in most cases with a twofold intellectual challenge involving both optical and literary connotations. Perhaps only an approach based on the history of knowledge does full justice to his art’s formal qualities, but this does not mean that the traditional iconological scrutiny should be relinquished. Yalcin demonstrates how some of the master’s architectural scenes deploy mathematical perspective and the atmospheric qualities of the oil medium for a trompe-l’oeil effect while at the same time referring to a specific and complex iconographical issue. Colenbrander points out that even in the perspective box, his consummate demonstration of mastery of linear perspective and painterly optics, Van Hoogstraten introduced interpretive clues in a straightforward fashion: individual signs to be ‘read’ as elements that together constituted a single and unambiguous message. As Brusati argues in the present book, the Inleyding’s plea to furnish paintings with verklarend bywerk – explanatory visual details – should be interpreted in this broad sense: comprising both emblematic meaning and commentary on the perceptual insights that the art of painting provides.

In conclusion, the chapters collected in this book offer various arguments for overcoming the binary thinking that has determined the study of Dutch art when it pitted practice against theory, form against meaning, or a ‘modern’ Dutch conception of visual description versus an old-fashioned emblematical approach. Obviously, Van Hoogstraten’s cosmopolitan outlook was the living evidence against the Schlosserian dichotomy featuring silent Dutch craftsmen versus garrulous Mediterranean painter-intellectuals. Furthermore, in regard to the issue of the ‘modern’ we should note that even though the Van Hoogstraten brothers were involved in the most modern ideological debate of their age, namely that related to Spinoza and his circle,22 Frans van Hoogstraten’s edition of the Dutch mystic Thomas à Kempis (c.1380–1471) expressed another side of his interests (and in fact, mysticism inspired many of the seventeenth century’s efforts to establish the ‘light of reason’). Hendrik J. Horn’s chapter brings to the fore how Arnold Houbraken’s ideas on Samuel van Hoogstraten’s art and life straddled modern and traditional conceptions in a similar manner. Although Houbraken’s ideas were certainly influenced by the secularizing trends sparked by Spinoza, ancient Stoicism pervaded his theory of painting even more markedly. The Stoic notion that the artist could ‘see God in Nature’, which Horn associates with a Deistic trend in Houbraken’s thought, must have been a predominant theme for Van Hoogstraten too. The conception of nature as a ‘second Bible’, that inspired so many investigations in natural science in the Dutch Republic,23 should remind us that analyzing Van Hoogstraten from the perspective of the history of knowledge does not necessarily involve an interpretation of his art as a ‘modern’ or secular one. After all, the Dordrecht master famously quoted Calvin that even though there was a ‘more direct and certain way’ to obtain virtue – namely reading the Bible –, the art of painting ‘in the continued mirroring of God’s wondrous works, brings its sincere practitioner, through his sublime contemplation, closer to the Creator of all things.”24
Notes


3 Westermann 2011-2012, 733.

4 ‘Leer vooreerst de rijke natuur volgen, en wat’er in is, naebootsen. De Hemel, d’aerde, de zee …. De vlakke velden, heuvelen, beeken geboomten, verschaffen werx genoeg. De steeden, de marten, de Kerken, en duizent rijkdommen in de Natuer, roepen ons, en zeggen: kom leergierige, beschouw ons, en volg ons nae’, Inleyding 18.

5 In fact, Van Hoogstraten highlights this aspect of his book when he stresses that his readers should become more adapt at expressing visually rather than verbally (‘vaerdiger tot uitbeelden, als tot uitspreken’); they should become ‘meesters in de kunst’ rather than ‘meesters in de mont’, Inleyding 46, 18.


7 Weststeijn 2008, Chap. VI.


10 C. Huygens, Mijn jeugd, C.L. Heesakkers (transl.), Amsterdam 1994.


12 Inleyding 232, 344-344.

13 Van Hoogstraten’s remark on the ‘toehoorderen van allerleye staeten’, Inleyding 183, may also refer to the listeners’ emotions (mental rather than geographical states).


THE UNIVERSAL ART OF SAMUEL VAN HOOGSTRATEN | PROLOG

El arte de la pintura (ed. B. Bassegoda y Huegas), Madrid 1990, ‘de la pintura de animales y aves, pescaderías y bodegones y de la ingeniosa invención de los retratos del natural’, 517.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, Bloomington 1984; for this book’s importance for the study of Dutch art cf. various publications by David R. Smith, most recently the edited volume Parody and Festivity in Early Modern Art: Essays on Comedy as Social Vision, London 2012. Van Hoogstraten uses the term grotesque (he speaks of ‘grotissen’) only in the context of decorative detail, especially flowers and fruit: ‘zwierige festons … veerewige ruikers in potten en vazen; en Wijntrossen en schoone Pers en Abrikoos, of Meloen en Citroen, en een helderen Wijnroomeer op een zwangeren Dis’, Inleyding 75; he defines ‘groteseren’ as ‘schilderen van kruiden en biezen, vogelen en dieren’, Inleyding 334. Yet a variety of terms such as ‘kodderyen’, ‘hedendaagse speeltjes’, ‘rareitien’, ‘snorrepippen’ and ‘snuysteren’ denote paintings of the category that merely aims at the public’s delight, rather than their edification or emotional engagement, Inleyding 77. ‘Grol’ is a similar term that reminds of the grotesque and of Lomazzo’s term ‘grillo’, Inleyding 334; G.P. Lomazzo, Trattato dell’arte de la pittura, Milan 1584, lib. IV, cap. 1, 280; lib. VI, cap. 48, 422.

For two eighteenth-century examples see F. Leeman, Anamorfosen: een spel met waarneming, schijn en werkelijkheid, Amsterdam & Cologne 1975, 142-143. Modern scholars have failed to discuss pornography in Dutch visual culture, probably due to the dearth of extant material. For the written documents cf. I. Leemans, Het woord is aan de onderkant: radicale ideeën in Nederlandse pornografische romans 1670-1700, Nijmegen 2002.

In contrast to the differentiation in modern Dutch between verf (the material) and kleur (the optical or psychological phenomenon), Van Hoogstraten’s term verf could refer to all the different aspects.

Obviously, the exchange could also be the other way around: the play-actor Johannes Jelgerhuis stated that ‘de Lairesse and Van Mander enabled me to be what I am’. Quoted in Ann-Sophie Lehmann and Herman Roodeburg (eds.), Body and Embodiment in Netherlandish Art. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek/Netherlands Yearbook for the History of Art 58 (2007-2008), 8.


Inleyding 346.