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Sumptuous Memories, Studies in seventeenth-century Dutch tomb sculpture

Scholten, F.

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Preface

This study began in 1982 with a meeting on the staircase of an old museum repository on Kleine Kromme Elleboog in Groningen. It was there, several times a week, that I passed Rombout Verhulst's putto from the Midwolde tomb (fig. 166). That chubby little white marble cherub, orphaned and seemingly forgotten, utterly intrigued me. I became fascinated by the softness of the hard marble, by the provenance and original significance of the sculpture – a fascination that led to the publication of a small book about Verhulst's tombs in 1983. Funerary sculpture has enthralled me ever since, although it was not until 1994 that I really picked up the thread again with the study that has resulted in this book.

The central problem that I was constantly aware of was a paradox. How did it come about that a sizable number of tombs of a very high quality were erected in a country with a chilly climate for sculpture that was thrown into confusion by the Iconoclasm and the Reformation? The underlying questions were: who commissioned these monuments, which were very costly and often lavish, and what were their intentions? What meanings and associations were vested in these tombs? How were they made? In what sense do they differ from funerary sculpture in neighbouring Roman Catholic and Lutheran countries? And how were they viewed by contemporaries?

The search for answers to these and other questions required a broad, contextual treatment of the material, which is why the angles of approach in this book often alter from one chapter to the next, and even within a chapter. In addition to socio-religious and political issues, the introductory chapter deals with questions of decorum, typology, materials and technique. The sixth and final one is concerned primarily with the public response to sepulchral monuments as

reflected in travellers' journals and the scholarly inquiries of antiquaries. The intervening chapters present four case studies, one per chapter, ordered more or less chronologically. Here the leading roles are played by the patrons and the artists they employed. The second chapter, for example, examines the significance of Hendrik de Keyser and his son Pieter in connection with the most important and most politically charged tomb erected in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century: the monument for William the Silent in Delft. Here I made grateful use of the excellent study by Els Jimkes-Verkade on the significance of this tomb. Her findings are elaborated upon and contrasted with the demolished tomb of Willem Lodewijk, Stadholder of Friesland. The third chapter focuses on the rise of Classicism in funerary art, with the almost inevitable role of Constantijn Huygens manifested in his capacity as tastemaker at court and as intermediary in the execution of two tombs by François Dieussart. The States-General and the various boards of admiralty were responsible for commissioning numerous tombs for national heroes. This official patronage was designed to enhance the image of the young Republic at home and abroad. Although the earliest example of that patronage dates from the beginning of the century, as Cynthia Lawrence has so clearly demonstrated, the zenith came during the First Stadholderless Period, half a century later. The country's presentational policy is seen most markedly in the case of the unfortunate Admiral Van Wassenaer Obdam and his 'princely' tomb by Bartholomeus Eggers, which is the subject of Chapter 4. The fifth chapter examines the patronage of the nobility – a group that commissioned lavish and fashionable tombs, many from the workshop of Rombout Verhulst, which proclaim a dynastic pride and awareness of status.

Several studies were valuable guides when writing this book. First and foremost there is Elisabeth Neurdenburg's *De zeventiende eeuwse beeldhouwkunst in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, after 50 years still a shining light for anyone involved with Dutch sculpture. Michael Baxandall's *The limewood sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, Jennifer Montagu's *Roman Baroque sculpture, the industry of art* and Malcolm Baker's *Figured in marble, the making and viewing of eighteenth-century sculpture* were inspiring for their original approach to the material. Nigel Llewellyn's imposing *Funeral monuments in post-Reformation England* was published just as I was finishing my manuscript, and it confirmed many of my own ideas and provided valuable extra arguments for my study.

This book could not have been written without the help of many

people, chief among them my dissertation supervisors, Henk van Os and Jeroen Stumpel. Henk's enthusiastic lectures were a great source of inspiration from the time I took my very first steps in art history. He has encouraged my research from the moment when, on an early train from Groningen to Amsterdam, I told him of my plans for this dissertation. His critical comments throughout the writing process saved me from numerous errors. That applies in equal measure to Jeroen, whose great perspicacity and meticulous reading enabled him time and again to put his finger on weak points in my argument, forcing me to reformulate and underpin my ideas. The great interest and superb supervision of both of them were vital for the realisation of this book. Secondly, throughout all the chapters there are traces of the valuable suggestions and critical comments of two good friends, Charles van den Heuvel and Reindert Falkenburg. I am grateful to my father and his wife Tonny for all their interest and confidence, and to Paula for her support over many years and for various archival discoveries which she shared with me. Michael Hoyle, the most expert and stern taskmaster an author could wish for, is responsible for the excellent translation and editing of the manuscript.

Many others have contributed to the book in one way or another. I would like to single out Marten Jan Bok, Aafke Brunt, Dorothea Diemer, Jan Piet Filedt Kok, Peter Fuhring, Eymert-Jan Goossens, Frans Grijzenhout, Peter Hecht, Mr M.D. Haga, Elly de Jong, Eddy de Jongh, Christiaan Jörg, Bram Kempers, Eloy Koldewey, Ruud Koopman, Serge Landuyt, Michael Latcham, Reino Liefkes, Hans Locher, Leon Lock, John Lord, Ger Luijten, Peter Mookhoek, Bianca du Mortier, Henk van Nierop, Herman Roodenburg, Jacqueline Rodenburg, Eric-Jan Sluijter, Maud Soethout, Hans Soop, Harry Tummers, Pieter Vlaardingebroek, Lyckle de Vries, Jan van der Waals, Gerard van Wezel, Adam White, and finally the many sextons and church authorities who gave me the opportunity to see and feel the tombs discussed in this book.

Amsterdam, February 2003

