Technical art history: painters' supports and studio practices of Rembrandt, Dou and Vermeer

Wadum, J.

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Dou doesn't paint,

Oh no, he juggles

with his brush

Gerrit Dou

A Rembrandtesque 'fijnschilder'

Jørgen Wadum

Introduction

To evaluate Rembrandt's technical impact on artists in his immediate circle as well as on his followers, a thorough study of their methods and materials is needed. Gerrit Dou, one of Rembrandt's first apprentices and founder of the Leiden Fijnschilders movement, is one of these artists that merit attention. The available technical knowledge of Rembrandt's early painting technique is of great importance for a description of Dou's methods when considering his oeuvre from his start in Rembrandt's studio, until he, in 1675, as a prominent elderly painter laid down his brushes. Sluijter published an important study of Dou's position, training and technique in 1993.¹ The 2000 Dou-exhibition catalogue is the most recent reference point for the study of Dou's oeuvre.² Yet, apart from Boersma's thorough comparison of technical aspects of two of Dou's later paintings (1658-1667) in this catalogue, and an interesting essay by Christoph Scholzel about the painting technique of the Leiden Fijnschilders in Dresden,³ no other technical survey of Dou's works has been undertaken.

¹ Sluijter, Gerrit Dou, a Rembrandtesque 'fijnschilder'.
² Boersma, 'De fijnschilder Gerrit Dou'.
³ Scholzel, 'The painting technique of the Leiden Fijnschilders in Dresden'.
The current article is not an attempt to present a complete study of Dou's technique, but focuses on some of its characteristics. Dou's trademark refined technique with its meticulous rendering of materials, consistent throughout his career, has always intrigued the spectator. It seems to contrast strongly with Rembrandt's free manner of paint handling, and presumably required a very accurate layout of the design and a very systematic build-up of paint layers. Although at first sight Dou's technique seems utterly different, Rembrandt's influence is undoubtedly present. This will be illustrated by new information about Dou's practice, gathered during examination of a large number of his paintings with IXR and with the naked eye. Through this survey we hope to demonstrate how Dou started the painting process in a manner comparable to that of his master. This, together with Dou's exceptional brushwork, gives his paintings - so appropriately described by Houbraken as 'konstjuweel' - a full-bodied, saturated and extremely smooth character. Based on our findings we will also review the current dating and attribution of some of Dou's early works. We hope that additional scientific investigation of Dou's use of hiding media and pigment constellations will be possible in the near future.

Gerrit Dou

Gerrit Dou (fig. 1) was born in Leiden on the 7th of April 1613, as son of Marytje Janadr. Van Rosenburg and Douwe Jantsz., a wealthy glassmaker and glass engraver and master of a workshop employing several assistants. Dou thus grew up in an environment where his father's profession was performed on a high socio-economic level of craftsmanship. The influence of this milieu seems present throughout Dou's career in, for example, his carefully counting of the hours he worked on a painting in order to estimate its costs. In a society regulated by artisans' organisations and guilds it is therefore not surprising that Dou was instrumental in establishing the painters guild of St. Luke in Leiden in 1641. In 1622, only 9 years old, Dou showed a clear interest in drawing and painting and was sent to learn the principles of draftsmanship with the engraver Bartholomeus Doloedo. After eighteen months he became an apprentice of his father's colleague, Pieter Couwenhorn, who had the largest church glass workshop in Leiden. From 1625 he was a member of the glass makers' guild until, in February 1628, two months before becoming fifteen years old, he was accepted as an apprentice in the studio of the twenty-two year old Rembrandt. Obviously Dou was a younger with exceptional skills, comparable to Rembrandt who, also at the age of fourteen, chose for painting rather than for a theoretical education, and to Jan Lievens who started his training as a painter at the age of only eight. Dou stayed with Rembrandt for three years before starting his own studio in Leiden, where he would remain for the rest of his working life. If we compare the contemporary and later descriptions of Dou's art, it becomes apparent that more attention is devoted to his technique and the physical appearance of his pictures than to his choice of subjects. Probably, this must be seen as a continued fascination with Dou's ability to depict objects as exactly and convincingly as possible. In 1641 J.J. Olters appropriately referred to Dou's paintings as painted by a 'brilliant master, [skilful] primarily in small, subtle, and curious paintings, that be persons after life, animals, insects..."
Introduction
Joachim Von Sandrart (1606-1688) gave an often-cited description of Dou at work: 'He ground his paint only on glass and made his brushes himself. Due to the troublesome dust he kept his pallet, brushes and paint carefully covered, and when he sat down to paint he waited a long time until the dust had completely settled, only then he quietly took his pallet out of the small box next to him, prepared paint and brush, and started to work. After work he again carefully covered all his utilities...'

Sandrart's captivating account strongly influences our current notion of Dou's technique. However, the artist's actual practice is more complex than can be read in Sandrart's description. How did he select and prepare his painting support? Did he make preliminary drawings or did he sketch his composition directly on the support? Did he use various binding media for his pigments in order to achieve certain effects? These questions at first sight appear banal compared to the perfect enamel-like finish of Dou's works; however, during our examination of Dou's paintings they have proven to be essential for an understanding of his technique.

Underdrawing
Presumably influenced by his Leiden master, Dou preferred oak panels as support for his paintings throughout his career. No preparatory drawings by Dou are known and it seems therefore likely that Dou's detailed compositions were laid down directly on the panel in a drawn or brushed underdrawing. His drawing of Marijtje Jansdr. Van Rozenburg, the artist's mother, signed and dated 'GDOV. 1638' is a splendid example of how detailed, yet freely Dou operated his drawing tools. However, a straight comparison between the style of this drawing and that of his underdrawings cannot be made since an underdrawing serves a different function: it identifies rather than formulates form and thus uses a different technical language.

The fragmented underdrawing detected with IRX in 1998 in Old Woman Reading a Lessionary (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) became the impetus to examine more works by Dou. This has led to the discovery of comparable underdrawings in many other works, such as the two early oval portraits, Portrait of an old woman in a fur trimmed coat and Portrait of an old man in a plumed beret and gorget (c.1630-1631) in Cassel (figs. 3-4). We also discovered subtle drawn lines in Old Woman reading a book (Dresden) and in the globe of Still life with Globe, Lute, and Books (Hormaeke coll.). Surprisingly straight and firm construction lines were detected in the face and collar in the Cheltenham Self-portrait. These lines are comparable to those detected in the face of the Portrait of a Young Woman, where a horizontal line divides the oval painting in two halves. From this line two diagonally placed lines merge at the upper right edge creating a triangle area for the face. The woman's fingers are also indicated with what seem to be drawn lines. The tiny Self-portrait (Spain, private coll.) includes an underdrawing that outlines the chin of the head as well as the easel in the background. The 1646 Girl chopping onions also revealed drawn lines in the face of the girl that follow the diagonally positioned curtain on the back wall (figs. 5-6). In the tin pot, left, in the table, and in the folds of her dress, drawn or painted lines, sometimes different from the final paint layers, are observed.
The IR-reflectography of *The Young Mother* shows clearly visible drawn lines in black, which are especially evident in the skirt of the woman (figs. 7-8). Less apparent lines can be detected in the sketch of a wooden platform, originally planned below the chair in the left foreground. These lines are quite straight and were probably drawn using a ruler.

In the somewhat later *Young Lady at her Toilet* no underdrawing could be identified by IR. If the artist had used a white or coloured chalk, this would easily have been absorbed or gone transparent during the paint application and thus would be impossible to trace.

The *Astronomer by candlelight* (c. 1660) is a late painting with a distinct underdrawing. Minutely drawn lines can be seen in the dog-ear of the book on the table (figs. 9-10). The drawing indicates a lower position and thus the whole book slightly shifted position in the final execution. In the other corner of the book, the form was indicated in sketchy lines resembling what was observed in the early Old Woman reading a letter, and the *Portrait of an old Woman* (Cassel). In the *Astronomer* the hourglass was also carefully drawn before the paint was applied. The celestial globe was reserved in the background, its finely carved stand drawn, which further confirms a careful preparation of the composition. Under magnification the reflection from the graphite used for drawing can be detected. A rather straight-diagonal line runs through the face of the astronomer, probably used as a compositional aid, comparable to what was detected in the early Self-portrait and the Portrait of a young woman.

In the *Maiden servant* scoriing a brass pan at a window (London), 1665, Dou probably used a compass to position the arch of the window. The semicircular line can be seen under infrared examination, but was not used in the final execution. In the *Young woman* holding a lamp vertical construction lines made with a ruler were observed in the architecture. Schöbel documented underdrawings in both dry and wet media, indicating the position of the eyes, nose and the jaw in the *Fiddler* (1665).

Based on our findings we can say that Dou commenced his creative process on the light or buff coloured ground by drawing some overall compositional lines to indicate the form of an object or the basic orientation of the scene. This corresponds with what was recently discovered in *Rembrandt's Andromeda* from c.1630, a painting of which Dou could have observed its making. Dou's next step would be to draw various details (in graphite of black chalk), some quite sketchy in execution, others more detailed. In paintings where no underdrawing was found Dou most likely used a similar technique but used a drawing material that cannot be detected with IR. Interestingly, one of Dou's pupils, Jacob van Toorenvliet, in the left background of his small *Allegory of Painting*, gives us a glimpse of a painting prepared with a dark brown ground upon which the underdrawing is made in black.
Vigorous undermodelling

After the underdrawing stage Dou would start giving volume and body to his figures by applying a rough undermodelling, often called 'dead colouring'. Just like Rembrandt, Dou would delineate the composition in bluntly applied brush strokes of varying thickness before spreading the undermodelling in monochrome hues, ranging from dark reddish brown to light ochre; the energetically sketchiness expressing a certain automatism. Rembrandt’s Music Allegory from 1626 (figs. 11-12), Andromeda (c.1630) (figs. 13-14), and Susanna and the Elders (c.1636) all reveal in IRR a blunt and vigorous, yet searching undermodelling. However, as Dou basically followed the preparatory underdrawing, his undermodelling is more restrained as compared to Rembrandt’s manner. In Dou’s paintings certain areas would be heavily toned with black pigments; others would be semi-transparent, allowing the light ground to shine through. A monochrome development of the scene in light and shadow would be the result. The two early portraits of old people in Cassel show, using IRR, broad dark brushstrokes in deep shadow areas. Also in the Young Violinist relatively broad brushstrokes were encountered, one brushstroke basically covering the whole area of what became the lower part of the thigh of the seated figure.

In the Portrait of a young woman (Manchester) the undermodelling has been left partly open in the sleeve of her right arm, but is evident below the white veil around her neck. This economic manner of paint application was also found in another Portrait of a young woman (Cleveland). In these paintings a thin brownish wash is applied on the chalk ground, which gives a warm tonality in the areas where the paint is thin or transparent. The paint in the latter smaller painting was brushed on with a variety of brush types, from a coarse bristle to finer, more flexible sable-brushes. In IRR very little contrast is recorded in the face, however, some broad strokes are noticeable on the chest of the sitter and in the background. The butt end of the brush was used to create special articulation in the white blouse and hair of the girl.

The undermodelling plays an important part in describing the folds of the brownish curtains behind the Painter with Pipe and Book (c.1645). Part of the man’s right arm was only executed in the undermodelling stage, with some black and some more opaque brown hues to create the crease at the elbow. Apart from the brown dead-colouring Dou may have used thin or diluted paints with some carbon black.

Undermodelling in later works

From the earlier paintings, where a technique of undermodelling in brown or red-brown hues was used, Dou shifted over the years towards a cooler brown-grey, still using comparable short, broad brushstrokes for the indication of form and shadow. Boersma describes a greyish undermodelling in Lady at her Toilet. In The Young Mother
The engraver docs with his chisel in the copper plate. The volume of the hand is created by this technique, a way that, beyond doubt, reflects Dou’s training as a draftsman.

An excellent example of this technique can be found in a hand drawn by Ter Borch in equivalent minute lines, here in ink over a preliminary drawing in black chalk. One of the early examples of hatching in the flesh areas is noted in the old Woman from similarly the Portrait of a Woman, c.1644, mentioned above, shows hatching in the face, the neck and hands; splendid examples of how Dou enlivens the flesh areas that would otherwise become too dull if completely smoothened.

The hands and faces in the oval pendants, Portrait of a man and Portrait of a woman (Aurora Art Fund) from the early or mid 1640's, are painted using a similar hatching technique. This technique is also found in the two late Self-portraits from respectively 1663 (Kansas City) and c.1665 (Boston), and in the head and hands of Old Schoolmaster sharpening his quill, 1671 (Dresden).

It is therefore puzzling that Dou did not utilise this refined definition of skin, so convincingly executed in the above paintings, in his Self-portraits (Spain, priv. coll.) that Baer dates c.1645; a portrait relating to Rembrandt’s etched and drawn Self-portrait from 1631 (London, British Museum). If the current date is correct, it would confirm Dou’s continued reliance on Rembrandt’s models well into the mid-1640’s. It is obvious, however, comparing the small self-portrait with the larger Cheltenham Self-portrait, dated by Baer c.1635-1638, that the man in the small portrait must be younger. A logical consequence of this observation would be to date this small painting closer in time to its source, namely Rembrandt’s 1641 etching. Keeping the current date would technically speaking make the painting an outsider among the other paintings from the 1640’s. We feel that Dou in the Cheltenham Self-portrait appears to be around thirty-seven instead of...
Two details from the wings of an Antwerp polyptych, c. 1525. Inv.no. WRM 439/440. Courtesy K. Schauer, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Köln.

G. Dou. Old Woman with Jug at a Window (detail) Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Only twenty-two to twenty-five as implied in Baer's catalogue entry. Thus it should be dated around 1650, as was earlier the case.30

Cloth stamps
In his use of special effects Dou also looked back to his ancestors' achievements and borrowed from them a special technique to create textures, which goes back to the Middle Ages. Several authors have expressed their fascination with the blue skirt of the Kitchen maid at a Window (Karlofsche) and of The Young Mother (see fig. 8). Minute spots of blue paint arranged in parallel lines give a convincing impression of the textile of the skirts. It is striking how the pattern continues without taking any notice of the folds in the skirt, something often found in the beautiful patterns of brocade in 15th and 16th century paintings. We actually have to look at this period to find the origin of Dou's method. In order to imitate the textile a piece of cloth with a distinct weave structure was used as a stamp.31 It was pressed on a thin layer of paint on the slab or glass plate, and by successively pressing the cloth on a specific area in the painting, the pattern was transferred (fig. 17).

Handprints
Dou also used his own hand to create some unique patterns. The small almost square area of blue skirres seen in the Old Woman with Jug at a Window (Vienna) has diagonal, slightly curved lines created by pressing the palm of the hand into a thin blue glaze over the folds of the skirt (fig. 18). He also used this technique to create a convincing textile pattern in the cloth with the skull in the Hermit Preying, 1670 (Minneapolis).

In the 16 and early 17th centuries many painters used these special effects. A pristine example can be found in Joachim Wtewael's Mars & Venus surprised by Vulcan (1601), where the green-yellow changeant curtain above the bed obtained its interesting textile-like appearance by Wtewael pressing his fingers into the, still wet, green glaze, which was applied over the yellowish undermodelling of the curtain.32

Penimment
Almost all of Dou's paintings show some form of change in the composition. This is contrary to Schödel's observations when he states that neither Dou nor the other Fijnschilders made corrections other than in the final details.33 Baer mentions a number of these so-called pentimenti and we will add to this.34 Pentimenti, demonstrations of the search for the final shape or composition as well as signs of the freedom and control of the artist, play an important role in Rembrandt's working practice.35 In Dou's case it is revealing that even though he may have made preparatory sketches on paper and definitely made underdrawings, during the actual painting process a rearrangement of certain elements took place, which indicates his continued search for the right form.

There are some quite significant changes. Below the lute in Still life with globe, lute, and books a fully painted fiddle can be discerned. It is turned around with the bridge holding the strings clearly visible. Also in the delicately executed Man interrupted in his writing,36 supposedly from c.1653, changes were made. The large book, originally positioned flat on the table, is placed against the globe, which allowed Dou space to include the skull, lacking in the first composition. Dou may have based his original composition on Rembrandt's etching of Jan Uyttenboogaert (1635), where several books and papers lay relatively flat on the table. He therefore may initially have followed Rembrandt's prototype much closer than so far suggested. Also the small oval portrait of a Young Girl37 shows significant changes in her right arm from the originally planned shape that was scratched into the wet paint of the undermodelling - a method comparable to what was found
Houbraken claimed that Dou painted everything "...with the greatest care looking through a frame sttung with [horizontal and vertical] strings..." Such a procedure was used to carefully reproduce and transfer the image onto a panel where a similar grid was drawn. In Dou's paintings

...in the headgear below the surface paint in slightly earlier Old Woman in Cassel (fig. 19).

As noted by Baer there are several pentimenti in the Young violinist including the shape of the book on the table, the table itself, the chair, and the position of the figure.44 Also the basket on the wall next to window was shortened, but most interestingly, seen in the light of Baer's interpretation of the youngster as of a higher social class, is the change in the window. Originally the lead bars were painted a few millimetres below their current horizontal position, and there was an decorated glass oval painting, or glass-in-lead, between the fourth and sixth horizontal bars. Such elegant and costly decoration would fit Baer's interpretation, but does not go along with the rather worn and modest interior. Dou apparently changed the window thus adapting it to the rest of the house. In connection to the artistic need to change and rearrange, we recall Sandrart's recording of Dou's painting process. He notes how it took Dou up to five days just to underpaint a hand, and he continues by imagining how much time would have been required to finish the rest of the painting.45 Sandrart may have been slightly exaggerating when he praised Dou for the extraordinary energy and focus he had devoted to painting a broom the size of a fingernail. However, Dou allegedly commented that he would need three days work to finish it.46 Therefore a series of corrections in his Self-portrait (Brunswig)47 instead of faithfully following his underdrawing must have cost him a lot of extra time. Changes were made to the hat, hairline, collar and fingers. The standing figure in this small image was originally depicted in profile, but is now facing us. The head of the seated woman was slightly changed, as well as the position of her right hand. An underdrawing indicates that the table was originally planned to be larger than in the final depiction.

We know that Dou kept strict accounts of the number of working hours and days on each of his paintings, probably just like Adriaen van der Werff did in his notebook a generation later.48 This does not only indicate a craftsman-like attitude towards the art of painting but also underlines his need to document the enormous effort put into his work. Layer after layer, detail after detail was carefully rendered with smooth and fine brushes. A good example can be found in The Doctor, 1653.49 The folds of the heavy blue curtain now bundled against the architecture to the right were, in an earlier stage, arranged differently. This change would not necessarily require much extra work, however, the complete re-painting of the doctors head and his right hand would have taken several days. The head was held straight in the earlier stage. The hand was originally positioned only a few millimetres higher than now, a change that seems of minor importance for the overall composition compared to the labour involved (figs. 20-21). However, the alteration of the position of the hand and the head certainly adds significantly to the intensity of the doctor's gaze at the flask with urine. With his meticulous working practice it must have been a major decision for Dou to abandon what looks like a fully finished head, several times the size of a fingernail. Although Scholzel calls the change of the head of the Music Teacher (Dresden) from three-quarter profile to a minor detail,44 for Dou this must have been very laborious. It was however an artistic necessity.

The illusion of space

Houbraken claimed that Dou painted everything "...with the greatest care looking through a frame sttung with [horizontal and vertical] strings..." Such a procedure was used to carefully reproduce and transfer the image onto a panel where a similar grid was drawn. In Dou's paintings

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the use of this technique could not be confirmed by van Sandtart. He stated that Dou "... painted all his works wearing glasses, even when he was still young and in his early thirties." This seems possible if we consider Dou's refined technique. Roger de Piles in 1715 suggested Dou's possible use of a convex mirror, an assumption that cannot be verified.

However, Dou seems to have used at least one pragmatic and straightforward traditional manner in painting his spatial interiors: the well-known method of positioning a pin in the central vanishing point of the composition, probably with a string attached to it, or a ruler guided by it. In, for example, 'The Young Mother' the pinhole, now only visible on the X-ray, is placed above the head of the girl by the cradle. In the Lady at her Toilet the pinhole is found on the shoulder of the maid.

Dou's contemporaries such as Gabriel Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Johannes Vermeer, and practically all the architecture painters also practised this method. A perspective construction is, however, not always as straightforwardly appreciated, as it is created. The perspective in the Lady at her Toilet has been described as mistaken or not convincing. The reason for this statement is found in the prominent wine cooler in the foreground, which appears to be sliding off the floor. We have observed comparable phenomena in the early paintings by Vermeer, where the floor tiles in the Glass of Wine also show a certain distortion. However, the distortion is only apparent if the observer is standing too far from the painting to be able to appreciate the construction of the perspective. Therefore, in order to arrive at a true valuation of the spatial illusion of the image, ideally we should have our eyes positioned exactly at the same distance from the painting as the distance points are from the vanishing point. If we observe Dou's Lady at her Toilet with our eyes positioned approximately 50 cm from the painting, the distortion disappears.

Connoisseurs in Dou's time would undoubtedly look at the paintings from close by to value the refined technique. In fact, Dou deliberately drew his admirers close to his images by often having them framed behind hinged doors. Upon opening the doors one would necessarily be very close - roughly within the 50 cm mentioned above - and subsequently be totally overwhelmed by the treasure revealed. We may thus have an explanation for why present-day museum crowds who are kept at a safe distance from the paintings, some of the paintings appear too elaborate in their spatial illusion.

There is even evidence that Lady at her Toilet (fig. 22) originally had a painted door depicting a woman nursing her baby, when it was still in the Sylvius collection in Leiden, 1673. The perspective in this painting is therefore not at all skewed but essential for the full appreciation of the scene when viewed at close range. Dou's Lady at her Toilet is in many ways a compositional paraphrase of his earlier Doctors Visit, 1663. Here too, there seems to be an exaggerated perspective in the interior, accentuated by the steeply receding lines in the windows. However, the Doctors Visit is particularly interesting as its doors are preserved. The two doors, measuring closed 102,5 x 82 cm, represent a silver jug standing in a dish with a cloth in a shallow niche. A modified repetition of this still life is also found on the table in the later Lady at her Toilet. Twenty-two out of twenty-seven of Dou's paintings in the De Bye's collection were mounted in 'een kas' [in a box] and four of these had paintings on the exterior. Out of the eleven Dou paintings in the aforementioned Sylvius collection, four had painted doors. A pristine example
of one of Dou's paintings owned by De Bye is the Still life with candle and watch, now in Dresden.\(^6\) This painting formed the door of a box in which, originally, a dark candlelit cellar scene could be found.\(^7\) Possibly an additional pair of doors by Dou are to be recognised in Still life with Book and Purse (Los Angeles, Fischer Gallery) and Still life with Hourglass, pen case, and Print (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.) from 1647.\(^8\) The objects are depicted from a close vantage point and are arranged on wooden shelves. Unfortunately we can only guess which painting would have been hidden behind them. As closed doors, the two panels would have measured approximately 23.5 x 36 cm, thus the painting behind the doors would have been slightly smaller, close to 20 x 33 cm. In contrast with the Louvre painting it would have a for Dou unusual horizontal format. These measurements, however, are strikingly comparable to the (supposedly) ten years earlier Still Life with Globe, Lute, and Books (Hornstein Coll.).\(^9\)

What we encounter in Dou's use of perspective is an artist very conscious of the defects of space, leading the gaze of the spectator by drawing him close to study every subtle detail. Dou could proudly do this, as it was precisely the perfect rendering of a super-natural detailed world that became his trademark. This firmly places Dou amidst the fashion of making trompe l'œil, perspective boxes and other 'bedregerijen', so eloquently described and performed by two other Rembrandt apprentices, Samuel Hoogstraten (1627-1698) and Carel Fabritius (1622-1654).\(^10\)

**Dou's early oeuvre revisited**

There are more paintings attributed to the early period of Dou than those who found their way to the most recent Dou exhibition. We feel that in this exhibition weak imitations were presented as early works by Dou, and thus an explanation for our judgement is relevant.\(^11\) The young Rembrandt spent time copying internationally known masters like Lucas van Leiden, Titian, Rubens, and Lastman. Dou, maybe less ambitious, found his models in his master's workshop. The practice of an apprentice, grinding paint, drawing, and copying the master's works, is sufficiently explained elsewhere.\(^12\) It would seem obvious to assume that the young Dou would have produced paintings not only emulating the master's technique but also his compositions. However, simultaneously with Dou, other pupils may have been working in Rembrandt's studio, which makes the identification of Dou's early oeuvre very difficult.

Later on in Dou's career he, too, had students who copied his works or other paintings within his collection. One just needs to recall the fact that nine copies or variations are known of the Old woman watering a pot of flowers (Vienna).\(^13\) Possibly Dou even kept some of his own early copies for this purpose, something that theoretically could result in 'second-generation' copies after Rembrandt.

An attempt to recreate Dou's oeuvre from when he entered Rembrandt's studio until his earliest dated work in 1637 will therefore, as was also agreed by Baer, have to be an art historical reconstruction.\(^14\) We shall attempt to define the technical criteria for this research. Two aspects have to be combined: Dou's training in understanding drawing, engraving and painting on glass, and Rembrandt's influence both as a technician and as a history painter. The latter specialisation would seriously require the creation of a convincing spatial illusion. Baer mentions that Dou never painted historical scenes himself.\(^15\) Interestingly, on the easels within Dou's studio-interiors, we often find a history painting in progress. This must be interpreted as a clear and significant signal about his early training.

**Flesh paint as a key characteristic**

The particular aspects of Dou's technique, as described above, will form the basis for our critical reading of some of his paintings. By doing this it will become difficult to
understand why some of the paintings described as Dou's earliest work lack so many of those specific qualities. For example, the following three paintings lack the typical hatching in the flesh areas: Old woman Peeling apples, c.1629-1631 (fig. 23), Old man Reading behind the easel, c.1631-1632 (New York), Old man lighting his pipe, c.1635 (fig. 24). Instead, the paint is either too smooth or too heavily applied. Is it conceivable that the young Dou in his early paintings would abandon a hatching technique he must have fully mastered as a draftsman and engraver before his start in Rembrandt's studio? And, if so, what made him pick it up again in 1637, in the Young Violinist, several years after Rembrandt left for Amsterdam? In our opinion Dou never actually abandoned this refined technique of giving skin its special slightly furrowed character. In a number of paintings, which must have been made prior to 1637, this can be observed. Is it most obvious in the very small Portrait of an old woman (Rembrandt's Mother) tentatively dated c.1630? In the head of the old woman the thin parallel curved lines are clearly visible under slight magnification. There are also a few smooth areas where glazes are used to erase most traces of the brushwork. The painting is executed over a greyish ground, which gives the portrayed the somewhat pale and transparent aura of nearing death. Also in the larger Geograher from the early 1630s, we find hatching in the flesh of the hand. It is therefore hard to imagine that the artist who employed such a refined technique in the two aforementioned paintings, created with such virtuosity in paint handling, a few years later painted the Old man lighting his pipe without employing this special effect. A painting relevant for a critical comparison to Dou's Old woman Peeling apples, c.1629-1631, is an Old woman eating next to a spinning wheel. In an overall subdued tonality (somewhat abraded in the woman's skirt) the hands and the face of the eating woman are rendered with exquisite detail in hatching. The scene is painted over a grey-buff ground, with few pentimenti and slightly open contours between some of the objects.

If we accept that both the Portrait of an old woman (Berlin), the Schwerin painting, and the two small, oval portraits of a Portrait of an Old Man and Portrait of an Old Woman (Cassel), both without any doubt revealing the typical Dou paint handling, predate the Young Violinist (1637) then there is within Dou's oeuvre hardly room for the technically insecure and much weaker Old woman peeling apples. This painting, and also Old man lighting a pipe and Old man reading behind the easel, is typified by an artist carefully positioning the various objects on the panel in some kind of drawn medium before the painting process began. The cautious planning is characterised by the open contours between the objects and the lack of overlapping areas. It demonstrates how the painter in the Old woman peeling apples kept reserves for the chair, and for the bread on the table. Also the technique of rendering a tablecloth with numerous small brushstrokes, applied in an orderly, yet 'woolly' paint application, is more comparable to the technique we find in a painting of a Scholar in his Studio, formerly attributed to Dou but recently ascribed to Jan van Speelev (fig. 25).2

Dou and Rembrandt

In An old woman eating next to a spinning wheel (Schwerin) the space in the depicted room is convincingly packed with objects showing the typical Dou repoussoirs left and right. The more subdued colours are contrary to the harsh, purplish colours seen in a painting in Montreal that is believed to be its antecedent, Interior with an Old Woman eating porridge. And indeed, if this painting precedes Dou's replica in Schwerin, we may have found the transition towards An interior with Young Violinist (1637), in both the depiction of a crammed interior and the more subtle use of colours.
The vitality of the young Rembrandt in his Leiden history pieces, (Leiden), the Tobias accusing Anna of stealing the kid (Amsterdam), and the Music Allegery (Amsterdam), all from 1626, is striking. Rembrandt packed these paintings with objects and applied bright colours with a heavily loaded brush where needed, and smoothly in other areas.44

Rembrandt's transition towards a more subdued palette starts in 1627-1628, the year Dou enters his studio. It seems therefore conceivable that the young Dou, after spending the first period copying Rembrandt's stock of earlier works, during his later years in Rembrandt's atelier abandoned the harsh colouring. We are convinced that a talented young artist like Dou, confronted with Rembrandt's works such as An old usher examining a coin53 from 1627, Simeon in the Temple,66 and Judas and the thirty pieces of silver from 1629 as well as By Simon's song of praise from 1631,67 would not only obtain a good understanding of subdued colouring, but also of the spatial illusion which Rembrandt achieved in these paintings.

History painting

The young Dou was, during four years, confronted with the works of a cherished history painter. Therefore it seems hard to imagine that Dou did not attempt this genre himself. The detail with which the Budapest picture of a Leiden Military officer with still life is painted does indeed point towards Dou as the author.68 The use of the brownish undermodelling is visible in the warm glow in the saddle, which again reveals the skilful master in the fine, opaque hatching in the leather. The head of the soldier shows some impasto. This area probably troubled the young Dou at other shapes and positions of the head can be discerned below the current surface.

Recently it was convincingly suggested that the large Prince Rupert of the Palatine, c.1631, was most probably begun by Rembrandt but finished by Dou.69 The detail used to render textiles, fur and other materials as well as the paint handling direct us towards Dou. The x-ray of the painting reveals a Rembrandtesquestart to this composition.70 In the 1639 inventory of Johannes de Renialme a collaborative painting is mentioned.71 In order to further understand the lack of convincing earlier history paintings by Dou we probably have to look at currently misattributed paintings. It is true that Rembrandt developed a delicate touch during his late Leiden period, something most obvious in his Judas and the thirty pieces of silver,72 and in the Abduction of Proserpina from 1631.73 Here, apart from a subtle brush and almost Vermeersque globules of confusion in the highlights on the lion's head, small vital scratches in the wet paint accentuate the arabesques in the shawl of Proserpina.

However, the qualities of Anna and the Blind Tobit (fig. 26)74 show, in our opinion, all the virtues of the upcoming Fijnschilder. The technique of hatching in the flesh areas is evident and the minute dots of paint in the headgear of Anna are more characteristic for Dou than for Rembrandt. Anna's spinning wheel was changed during the creation of the composition.75 Other changes are the alteration of the outline of Anna's left shoulder and the lower positioning of Tobit's head and back.

With x-rays, paint fragments of drawn lines in the face of Tobit were revealed, a feature that also links this picture to the creative process of the young draftsman Dou. More information has surfaced with the x-ray examination: bold brushstrokes, primarily in Anna's back, laid in at the first stage of the painting process; in the undermodelling or 'dead-colouring' stage (fig. 27). Above we demonstrated how Dou utilised broad brushes and dynamic movements in his initial creative process. Dou's 'Rembrandtesque hand', one could call it, however fine and smooth the superimposed paint layers were to be. No paintings by Dou's contemporary Fijnschilders have so far revealed this characteristic feature.76

During the confrontation at the large Rembrandt exhibition in 1991-92 of the weak Dou-like Old woman Peeling apples with Anna and the Blind Tobit the latter painting again became attributed to Rembrandt. However, comparing these two works is almost equivalent to comparing apples with pears. We have to compare Anna and the Blind Tobit with paintings of a higher quality to arrive at the more plausible conclusion namely that...the entire picture is in fact by a single hand and that hand is Dou's.77 The dating of the painting, around 1631, seems convincing.78
Young portrait of Rembrandt

During the recent exhibition Rembrandt by Himself, arguments for a de-attribution of his early self-portrait in the Mauritshuis were presented. Based on comparative technical examination between Dou's Old woman reading a letter and the Young portrait of Rembrandt we suggested Gerrit Dou as the possible candidate. Apart from the comparable underdrawings in both paintings, and the correspondences with the underdrawings observed in the two portraits of old people in Cassel, elements in the technique of paint application appeared similar too. An opportunity for a first time confrontation between the Old woman reading and the Young portrait of Rembrandt occurred during the Dou exhibition. With surprise this confrontation turned out in favour of the Old woman, which technically and as an image appeared superior to the formerly so cherished Young portrait of Rembrandt. The latter appeared less refined in the detailed brushwork, and the strong claire-obscure seemed almost caricature-like compared to the somewhat more balanced light effects in the Old woman. We must therefore consider it to be rather unlikely that the same hand made these two paintings - at least not if the timeframe between the creations of the two paintings is as narrow as claimed in another recent Rembrandt catalogue. We shall, however, end this argument about Dou's early oeuvre with the words of Alan Chong who emphasised that it may be dangerous to uphold an attribution to any artist whose early work produced in Rembrandt's workshop cannot yet be identified with assurance. This is, we must admit, certainly the case with Dou.

Conclusion

Sluiter has observed that, just like Rembrandt who distanced himself from Lastman's painting practice, Dou also quickly departed from the technique of his master. In contrast with Rembrandt's choice of subjects, Dou chose to paint non-narrative scenes where realism was more important then depicting emotions or action. However, it should not be forgotten that Rembrandt only stayed a few months in Lastman's studio whereas Dou remained for almost four years with Rembrandt, which implies a much stronger influence. Actually, Ockers commented on this when he wrote that Dou during this four-year stay became an excellent master-painter. Rembrandt's influence is therefore not only to be traced in Dou's early paintings but also visible in works much later in his career. Although Dou was a trained draftsman, his widespread use of sketching his compositions directly on the support and the fact that he used the commonly employed pin-and-string method for his perspective, may account for the fact that there are hardly any drawings or sketches known by the artist. The use of underdrawings is for Dou more rule than exception. Dou's smooth paint surfaces hide a much more 'Rembrandtesque', vigorous manner of a semi-translucent undermodelling of the scene in broad paint strokes, a technique that remains characteristic throughout his career. For an artist so devoted to the meticulous rendering of the tiniest elements on objects, the constant change of proportion or pose of fully finished elements must have been an overwhelming inner conflict. It is no wonder that his works took such a long time to create.

Dou was definitely obsessed by inviting the spectator up close to cherish the objects that were framed behind doors ornamented with trompe-l'oeil, or that contained painted curtains folded aside in order to give us the opportunity to peer into his miraculous world. This, however, is an interesting contrast to Rembrandt, who is supposed to have kept visitors in his studio at a distance from his paintings in order to make them appreciate his work better. Dou's early paintings continue to pose a problem in chronology; certainly the current dating is random and not in accordance with the technical development of the young artist. Some of the paintings lack typical elements of Dou's technique and must be regarded as copies by other hands. In our opinion Dou also executed a number of finely painted history pieces early in his career. His techniques as well as his understanding of space were much better developed than several of the paintings currently attributed to him make us believe. One question remains. How many painters exercised their hand in order to reproduce comparable images to those of Rembrandt and Dou, in only slightly different handwriting?
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people for their invaluable assistance in this study:

1. Erik J. Biurier, De Lees van scholenhuis. Omtrekken van Gesi Dau (1613-1720) (Amsterdam, 1993), p. 117. This is a truly successful one-man


3. P. Nouwenheulens, Le lid Fijns


6. Hilmam, HSU de wurdering Brollyl.l.

7. This no cion is Art Innovat:ion Tricnnal 19.21,17.

8. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.


10. This study is Art Innovation Tricnnal 19.21,17.

11. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.


13. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.

14. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.

15. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.

16. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.

17. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.


19. This work is done with the multiple-spectral artist camera and a CTS 100 tripod.
and in particular 12-22.


47 Drucker, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no. 200.4.1.1.273. in Gal. Nr. 1272.


49 Sandert 1994, ibid., who goes in quite a different direction in the view that the view in a door of the painting is that of the viewer, as shown in the drawings.

50 According to a letter (18.06.1985) from Hildegard Kesse, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Hanover, to Van der Leest, the Mauritshuis, Oil on canvas, 27 x 24.3 cm, inv. no. 303. Four paintings by Dou in Bruges all show similar treatment of the small, rectangular canvas, Oil on panel, 26 x 15 cm, inv. no. 1572. Visible 1653 (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Hanover), and The Young Scholar (by Dou?), Oil on panel, 21.5 x 15 cm, inv. no. 1314. Both show the same proportions as the Mauritshuis, Oil on panel, 21.5 x 14.9 cm, and show prominence.

51 See Adri van den Weerf’s letter of 10 November 1993 to Ernö van der Werff, Knoebel.

52 The Mauritshuis, Amsterdam, 1997.

53 Figs. 44-45.


55 Schiaffo 1999, 12 and 24-16.

56 178 x 127 cm, vol. 1, 2.

57 Soniuet 1995, 199.


59 See also Becerra 2000, 57.


62 See also Becerra 2000, 58.

63 Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, inv.no. 387.

64 Schoen, Staatliche Museen Preussisher Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, inv.no. 359.

65 See also Becerra 2000, 58.

66 Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, inv.no. 387.


