The fingerprint of an old master: on connoisseurship of Dutch and Flemish seventeenth-century paintings: recent debates and seventeenth-century insights

Tummers, J.C.

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.
CHAPTER 2.
ORIGINAL OR COPY

A Crucial Distinction

In 1663 Constantijn Huygens the Younger (1628-1697), the art lover, amateur draughtsman and future secretary to the Stadholder William III (r. 1672-1702), wrote a letter to his older brother in Paris.¹ He had visited Rembrandt shortly before, who had shown him a drawing in the style of Annibale Carracci (1560-1690). Huygens thought it might be an original Annibale because of the ‘force’ (hardiesse) of the pen lines. Yet he felt the need to research the drawing further and therefore asked his brother Christiaan in Paris to visit Everard Jabach (1618-1695), the city’s most prominent art collector and dealer. ‘I am asking you this for a specific reason. Reputedly, he possesses, among other things, some fifty landscape drawings in pen and ink by Annibale Carracci, and Uylenburg [the Amsterdam art dealer] says that among those there is one with lots of water and little figures who are bathing themselves’.² If Christiaan would come across this drawing, he should ‘quickly make a little sketch [of it], no matter how bad as long as one can distinguish at least where the figures are, and how many they are, to know with more certainty if the one that Rembrandt has in Amsterdam, where one can similarly see figures swimming by this same master, is not a copy.’³ (figs. 2.1 a, b and c)

Constantijn’s request seems a somewhat surprising way to establish the authenticity of the drawing that he had seen at Rembrandt’s place. Rather than carefully analyzing the characteristics of the work at hand and compare these to more firmly attributed works by Annibale, he seems merely interested in the boldness of the strokes in order to establish its authenticity. However, in the seventeenth century, comparable works could be hard to come by; seventeenth-century connoisseurs did not enjoy the advantage of having published oeuvre

¹ Van Gelder 1958. Constantijn’s father, who had the same name, was the well-known art lover who had been Rembrandt’s contact person at the court in The Hague.
² ‘Je le voudrois bien pour une raison particulière. Il y a ce dit on entre autres choses environ une cinquantaine de paysages desseignés à la plume d’Annibal Caracci, et Uylenburg dit que parmy ceux la il y en a un ou il y a beaucoup d’eau et de petites figures qui se baignent.’ Cited in Van Gelder 1958, 238.
³ ‘Je voudrais que si vous voyez cela vous en fissiez vistement un petit brouillon n’importe quelque mauvais qu’il soit pourvue qu’on puisse aucunement discerner ou scont les figures et combien il y en a, pour scavoir un peu au vray si celuy qu’a Rembrant à Amsterdam ou il y a semblablement des gens qui nagent du mesme maistre n’est pas une copie [...]’. Van Gelder, 1958, 238-239.
catalogues. They could only study other originals by the master if these were in their vicinity or, at best, look at a reproductive print (which would not give them a clear idea of the character of the pen- or brushstrokes). This made any indication that a picture could be a copy all the more important. Indeed, Constantijn Huygens Jr.’s interest in distinguishing an original from a copy echoes a widespread concern of seventeenth-century art lovers. This pair of opposites (in Dutch ‘principael’ or sometimes ‘origineel’ versus ‘kopie’) features prominently in attributions in inventories and catalogues, in disputes about authenticity in legal documents, in personal writings and in treatises on ‘judging pictures’ that had started to appear from the mid-sixteenth century onwards.

According to the art lover Franciscus Junius (1589-1677), who had lived in the Netherlands for fifteen years before moving to England in 1619, the connoisseurs of his day (i.e. 1638) always showed their most important skill in that they could quickly distinguish an original from a copy, which was not an easy task as ‘others that are unexperienced in these things cannot perceive any difference’. Indeed, in the 1607 minutes of the Guild of Saint Luke in Amsterdam, the city’s professional organization of painters and related craftsmen, mention is made of laymen who had been duped because they could not tell the copies and ‘rubbish’ from good quality pictures resulting in their purchase of bad pictures for high prices. Similar problems with copies and poor quality pictures that were sold as originals are mentioned in the minutes of The Hague Guild of Luke in the thirties, and again in 1700 in a petition from the fraternity of painters to the burgomasters of Amsterdam. In this last document, the fraternity of painters objects to the fact that house painters and glassmakers were entitled to judge pictures at public sales in Amsterdam, for how could these craftsmen judge ‘what is good, what is beautiful and what are Copies or Originals’?

---

5 Sluijter 1999.
7 The house painters and glassmakers were members of the same professional guild (the Saint Lucas Guild) as the fraternity of painters. Board members of the guild who were house painters and glassmakers were entitled to judge pictures at public sales. ‘Zoo ist dat Wy onderdanigst verzoeken, dat Ued. Groot Achtb. gelieven de goedheid te hebben, van eens te overwegen, hoe bedenkelijk ja apparant het is dat de overluiden van St. Lucas Gild, bestaande uit glazemakers en kladshilders, by verkoop van konstige Schilderijen, zouden konnen oordelen, wat goed, wat fray, wat Copyen of principalen Zyn, en dies, hoe noodzakelijk het zy te achten, dat twee of vier Mannen van de Konstbroederen, tot de Konstzaal behoorende mochten worden gequalificeert pom de liefhebbers van de waarheit te verzekeren, en de Broddelaars van de hand aftewijzen: Ende op dat alzoo de Konstschilders, die nu onder het jok van benadeelders zuchten, en naverlossinge snakken, mochten adem scheppen en, inplaats dat bedriegers haar schilderijen gans
An unique letter from a duped customer offers a glimpse of a buyer’s perspective on such a deceit. In 1645 a certain Mr. de Meulenaere wrote to the art dealer Matthijs de Musson, from whom he had bought two paintings which were said to be originals by Rubens and Snyders: ‘I am very surprised that You have treated me so. It is not the action of an honest man to thus sell to someone who has little knowledge of paintings. I have asked You several times if these were originals (principale), and I trusted You; yet I found myself badly duped.’\(^8\)

The number of copies circulating on the art market must have been high. In fact, copies and imitations of Bosch, Metsys and Hans Bol had been flooding the art market as early as the 16th century, quite a few of which were fraudulently signed.\(^9\) According to Van Mander, Hans Bol even stopped painting in oil altogether because his pictures were not only frequently copied in Antwerp but also sold as originals.\(^10\)

No separate term existed yet for forgeries, and the interest of seventeenth-century connoisseurs in distinguishing between ‘originals’ and ‘copies’ was partly fueled by a desire not to be deceived by forgeries. It was largely for this reason that Italian physician Giulio Mancini had devoted a chapter to ‘Recognizing Pictures’ in his unpublished treatise on painting of ca. 1620 (which has come down to us in over 20 early, hand-written versions).\(^11\) According to Mancini, the foremost skill of a connoisseur was to determine if a work was an original or a copy – which could be difficult ‘since sometimes it happens that it [the painting] is so well imitated that it is hard to recognize’, to which I can add that those who want to sell them [copies] as if they were originals, singe them with the smoke of wet straw, which creates in this way a certain crack similar to the one caused by

---

8 ‘Ick ben seer verwondert dat Ul. met my alsoo ghehandelt heeft, het en is gheene actie van een heerlick man, alsoo te vercoopen aen een die weynich verstand heeft van schilderyen, en hebbe aen Ul. diversche mael ghevraecht ofte deselve principale waeren, ende dat ick my betraude op Ul.; maer hebben my leelick bedrooghen ghevonden.’ Published in Denucé 1949, 37; see also Honig 1995, 258 note 13.
9 According to Filipe de Guevara (1555), many of Bosch’s imitations were fraudulently signed. See Muller 1989, 142. For additional discussion of copies after Bosch and Metsys, see De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996, 44-45.
11 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957. This publication contains both the first version of the treatise Discorso sulla Pittura, written around 1617-1619, and the second (longer) version Considerazioni sulla Pittura, which was written around 1620.
time, and thus they appeared old, while it took away from the works that vivid and noticeable color of novelty and recentness; and besides that they take old panels and work for you on top of these to cover up the deceit even more.'\(^{12}\) The French printmaker and art lover Abraham Bosse made a remark to the same effect in his treatise on connoisseurship of 1649. He criticized contemporaries who thought they could tell how old a picture was by turning it around ‘as if a Painter could not make use of the support or the canvas of a bad old Picture to paint or make one on top’\(^{13}\).

However, differentiating between originals and copies was not just difficult for laymen and beginning amateurs of art; experienced artists and collectors could also be at a loss if the copy was well done. For this reason, the experienced collector Cardinal Mazarin warned his agent to be on guard so as not to be fooled by copies, which he considered a particular problem with portraits attributed to Van Dyck.\(^{14}\) The well-respected art collector Paul Fréart de Chantelou had even decided to not collect any drawings since it was so hard to tell the difference between originals and copies, as he noted in his diary. He had talked about this with the famous painter, sculptor and architect Gianlorenzo Bernini, who had replied that distinguishing between originals and copies could be just as challenging when looking at paintings.\(^{15}\)

In the Netherlands the difficulty is also evident in quite a few notarial deeds which record confusion and disagreements about the value of pictures as well as expert advice on the matter. For example, a document drawn up by an Amsterdam notary in 1614 mentions a sale of 16 pictures by a certain Mr. Willem Bennick, who claimed they were all originals (\textit{principaelen}) by various masters (whose names were mentioned in a now-lost list). The buyer, a Mr. Bronchorst, on the other hand, stated that he thought 13 of these were, in fact, copies, and he

---

\(^{12}\) ‘E sopra tutto se sia copia o originaria, perchè alle volte avviene che sia tanto ben imitata che è difficile riconoscerla, aggiuntovi che questi, che le voglion vendere per originarie, l’affumano con il fumo di paglia molle, che così nella pittura introduce una certa scorza simile a quella che gl’indusse il tempo, et così paiano antiche, levandogli quel colore acceso e resentito della novità e recenza; oltre che, per coprir più l’inganno, pigliano delle tavole vecchie e sopra d’esse vi lavorano.’ Mancini/Salerno 1956, 134.

\(^{13}\) Abraham Bosse criticizes people who are not good at judging paintings and who simply turn them around: ‘& par iewc veulent juger de leur Ancienneté, comme si un Peintre ne se pourroit pas servir d’un fonds ou toile d’un mauvais Tableau vieil, pour en peindre ou faire un dessus.’ Bosse 1649, 64.

\(^{14}\) Gabriel-Jules Comte de Cosnac, \textit{Les Richesses du Palais Mazarin}, Paris 1884, p. 218; as cited in Brown 1995, 187. ‘It is necessary to be on guard not to allow yourself to be fooled, because it is very difficult to discern a copy from an original when the copy is well done.’

\(^{15}\) Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 251. Chantelou had been selected by the King to act as the official companion and guide to Gianlorenzo Bernini when the latter visited France.
seems to have refused to pay. A year later in 1615, the still life painter Ambrosius Bosschaert had a document drawn up in which a man by the name of Michiel Fort testifies that he bought a painting some four years before as a work by Bloemaert himself (‘een eygen werk van mr. Bloemaert’). He had subsequently sold the picture as an original (principael) by Bloemaert for the sum of 60 guilders to a gentleman in Middelburgh and was now requested to pay back this amount, as the painting appeared to be merely a copy.

Similarly, paintings that were sold as originals (principaele) by Steenwijck, Vincent Coebergen, Jan Porcellis, and Brueghel, among others, were officially declared to be copies, witness documents from 1617, 1624, 1643, 1653 and 1666, respectively. Works in the style of Wouter Knijff (1648), Jan Miense Molenaer and Godfried Schalcken (1697) were officially declared to be originals (principaele) by some, yet were pronounced copies by others. In 1701, a painting attributed to Gerard ter Borch was even the subject of a bet. Constantinus Francken had been planning to sell it as the first lot in an auction, which was the number commonly assigned to the item that was expected to fetch the highest price. Yet another gentleman challenged him, stating that the work was merely a copy. To solve the matter, Francken brought in a similar painting by Ter Borch from out of town and asked a group of art lovers to study both. However, they could not reach agreement, and in the end the bet was settled without a winner.

The most public attribution debate in seventeenth-century Holland focused on Italian pictures rather than Netherlandish works, yet the main question was a familiar one: were the paintings to be classified as originals or copies? In 1671 the Amsterdam dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh had sold thirteen old

---

17 Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 3.
18 This document discusses three ‘principaele’ that are deemed to be ‘copies’ without attaching any name to the pictures. Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 14.
19 Van der Veen 2005, Docs. 5a, 8, 14 and 25. Comparable documents can be found in Duverger. In 1653 a painting of a Cattle Market was sold by the Meurs family at auction as an original (principael) by Brueghel, even though the auction master had expressed doubts as to the authenticity of this work. It was bought by Peter van Halen, a painter and dean of the Guild of St. Luke, who apparently did not have a good look at the work before he bought it and subsequently sued the seller. See Duverger 1984-1994, vol. VI, 399, 401 and 424; see also Honig 1995, 256-258.
20 Van der Veen 2005, Docs. 16a, 16b, 21b and 33.
21 Jonckheere 2005, 58-60. This dissertation has been published in English as Jonckheere2008a.
22 Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 34.
master paintings to the Elector of Brandenburg. Uylenburgh believed the works to be originals by masters such as Michelangelo, Holbein, Titian and Palma il Giovane; however, once the paintings arrived in Berlin, the Elector’s court painter Hendrick Fromantiou dismissed twelve of them as copies. According to the art theorist Arnold Houbraken, Fromantiou may have even believed that the works were forgeries done at the request of Uylenburgh himself, ‘having in the past sat on the Galley (as one calls working for cut-throat dealers in Italy) and thus knowing the business of the fox [i.e. Uylenburgh], [Fromantiou] baptized these [works] with the name of ‘copies’.

Fromantiou’s dismissal sparked Uylenburgh to defend his reputation. He traveled to Berlin to speak with the Elector personally and to show him a testimony of his trustworthiness written by the burgomasters of Amsterdam. In order to solve the controversy, the Elector of Brandenburg asked Fromantiou to bring the pictures back to Amsterdam where he would prove to a knowledgeable audience that none of the pieces he had bought were originals and instead that they were all copies.

In May 1672 Fromantiou did indeed return to Amsterdam with the pictures. As Uylenburgh and Fromantiou could not agree on who were to be the judges in the matter, they each gathered separate statements by a range of painters and connoisseurs. This resulted in more than 50 expert opinions, negative if collected by Fromantiou and positive when collected by Uylenburgh.

Although the first batch of negative criticism Fromantiou had gathered convinced the Elector to return the pictures to Uylenburgh, Fromantiou never actually managed to prove that the works were copies, nor did he find a painter or art lover who confirmed this. The expert statements he collected merely contained negative judgments about the quality of the paintings, claiming that

---

24 The one picture that was not contested and remained with the Elector was Giuseppe de Ribera’s *Executioner with the Head of Saint John the Baptist*. See the letter from Uylenburgh in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin, 1 HA Rep. 76, Alt 111, nr. 167. Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 91.
26 Berlijn, Geheimes Staatsarchiv, 1 HA Rep 76, Alt 111, nr. 167, written by the Elector to Hendrick Fromantiou. 12 January 1672: ‘Weil Wir Uns erinneren, das dus solches beständig asseriret hast [i.e. that the pictures sold by Uylenburgh were not orginals but copies], so ist nicht mehr dan billig, dass du solches beweist dahero nötig sejn wird, dass du auf einen gewissen tag, welchen du bestimmen dem Supplicanten benennen wirst, dich nacher Amsterdam begebest, und aldar vor einige in der Mahlernkunst erfahren Meistern klärlich darthust und beweist, das die Uns von dem Supplicanten verkaufften Stück keine wahre Originalen sondern nur nachgemachte Copien seijn’; see Lammerste/Van der Veen 2006, 83, note 148.
these were too poor to be by the purported Italian masters (see also below, Ch. 3). Uylenburgh therefore complained to the Elector that Fromantiou had not kept his word and that he was merely trying to damage the dealer’s reputation.\(^{27}\) Unfortunately only one of the twelve controversial pictures can still be identified with certainty, a picture of *Dancing Nude Children*, which is now in the Six Collection in Amsterdam.\(^{28}\) Uylenburgh had stated that it was by Palma il Giovane, and it is still acknowledged as an original by this master. It was not a new attribution; in fact, most of the attributions of the contested pictures date back to earlier in the century, when the pictures were part of the famous Reynst collection in Amsterdam.

Interestingly, in almost all of the notarial deeds in which painters and art lovers *did* recognize paintings as copies, they did so without identifying the originals on which the copies were based. According to the first treatise devoted solely to ‘judging pictures’, *Sentimens sur la Distinction des diverses manières de Peinture, Dessein & Graveure & des originaux d’avec leur copies*, written by the printmaker Abraham Bosse in 1649, this was exactly the kind of skill that was characteristic for successful seventeenth-century connoisseurs. They could not only attribute paintings to a certain master on the basis of just two or three works that they had seen by this painter, ‘provided he [the painter] had hardly changed his manner’, they could also recognize copies ‘without ever having seen the original.’\(^{29}\) Tellingly, he focused his treatise largely around the question how to differentiate between originals and copies.

**Practical Methods to distinguish Originals from Copies**

**Resolution versus Inhibition**

When Rembrandt showed Constantijn Huygens the Younger the drawing in the style of Annibale Carracci (in 1663), Huygens looked at the force or boldness (*hardiesse*) of the pen lines in order to determine if he was looking at an original or a copy. Although Huygens may well have learned how to recognize this boldness first-hand from talking to artists and art lovers or from his experience as a draughtsman, such an approach was also recommended and

---

\(^{27}\) See an undated letter by Uylenburgh in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, 1 HA Rep. 76, Alt III, nt. 167; GAA, not. A. Lock, NA 2240, pp. 71-72, dated 9 September 1672; and GAA, not. A. Lock, NA 2241a, pp. 11-14, dated 3 January 1673; as cited in Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 86.

\(^{28}\) Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 97.

\(^{29}\) Bosse 1649, 4-5.
explained in contemporary treatises, which provided amateurs and collectors with advice on how to classify art works as either originals or copies. When looking at pictures, spontaneity, resolution and unity in the execution of a picture were considered particularly important, though the methods varied somewhat from one author to the other.

Giulio Mancini (1558-1630), the personal physician to Pope Urban VIII and sharp-eyed art collector, advised art lovers to look for areas which showed ‘not so much the observation of nature but rather the pride and resolution of the manner with the know-how of the inventor [maker].’ In the first version of his manuscript on painting Discorso di Pittura (c. 1617-19) he referred to muscles and drapery folds as examples of passages which could be telling – while he indicated with three dots that he meant to further elaborate his thoughts on the matter. He also noted that the colors are always more unified in originals, as these are older, which seems to imply that he was mostly concerned with the distinction between old originals and recent copies. In the second version of his manuscript (c. 1620), however, he left the remark about the colours out and focused instead on the ‘perfection’ and the ‘boldness’ (franchezza) of the master’s touch. While he does not elaborate much on this ‘perfection’ other than saying that it should match the master under whose name the work is sold, he is quite specific when discussing the boldness characteristic of originals. It can be recognized

‘especially in those parts which demand resolution and cannot be well executed in the process of imitation, as is true in particular for hair, beards, and eyes. Ringlets of hair, if imitated, will betray the laborious effort of the copy and if the copyist does not want to imitate them, then they will in that case lack the perfection of the master. These elements of painting are

30 ‘sempre vi sia qualcuna diffrenza [...] in certi sentimenti di termine, per esempio ne’ muscoli, nelle grinze, nella *** et altro dove non vadi tanto l’osservanza del vivo quanto che la fiera et risoluzione della maniera con il saper dell’inventore, che in qualche copia, per intelligenti et osservanti che sia, mai può farli cosi fieri et osservati.’ Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 327.

31 Marucchi and Salerno transcribed the text with three dots [...]. As this could indicate that the original manuscript could not be deciphered, I checked a seventeenth-century handwritten version of the text in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. The dots were indeed included in the manuscript; as there is no indication that the copyist had any trouble reading the original, we can assume that these dots reflect Mancini’s intention.

32 ‘[...] sempre vi sia qualche diffrenza: prima nell’unioni di colori, che l’originali sono sempre più uniti rispetto al tempo più antico [...]’. Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 327.

33 ‘prima se nella pittura proposta vi sia quale perfettione con la quale operava l’articifce sotto nome del quale vien proposta e venduta; di più se vi veda quella franchezza del mastro [...]’. Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 134.
like the strokes and groups of letters in handwriting which require a master’s boldness and resolution. The same can be observed in those spirited passages and scattered highlights that a master renders with one stroke and with a touch of the brush that is inimitably resolute; as in the folds and highlights of drapery, which depend more on the fantasy and resolution of the master than on the verisimilitude of the thing represented.34

Although Mancini was the first to write a manual with the sole purpose of helping art lovers develop their eye when analyzing pictures, his thoughts were not altogether new. As early as in 1555, students of ancient coins had already been advised to look for details in which the master’s manner was most evident, such as in the execution of the hair, eyes, hands and folds of drapery. In his treatise on coins, Enea Vico stated that the difference between the skill and the comeliness (venustà) of ancient coins and the ‘inferior quality’ of modern replicas would be most visible in these areas.35 In the field of painting, the earliest artists’ biographers Giorgio Vasari and his Northern colleague Karel van Mander had voiced comparable thoughts as to where the individuality of an artist's manner could best be recognized: passages which, as a rule, were seen as virtually inimitable. For example, Vasari praised the spontaneous and free brushwork of Titian’s late style and stressed that it was particularly hard to imitate.

As he did on numerous occasions, Van Mander repeated and underlined Vasari’s remarks when discussing Titian’s late style.36 Yet in his treatise he also

---

34 ‘in particolare in quelle parti che di necessità si fanno di risolutione nè posson ben condurre con l’imitatione, come sono in particolare i capelli, la barba, gl’occhi. Che l’anellar de’ capelli, quando si han da imitare, si fanno con stento, che nella copia poi appirisce, et, se il copiatore non li vuol imitare, allhora non hanno la perfettione di mastro. E queste parti nella pittura sono come i tratti e gruppi nella scrittura, che voglion quella frnachezza e resolutione di mastro. Il medisimo anch’io deve osservare in alcuni spiriti e botte di lume a luogo a luogo, che dal mastro vengon posti a un tratto e con resolution d’una pennellata non inimitabile; così nelle pieghe di panni e lor lume, quali pendono più dalla fantasia e resolution del mastro che della verità della cosa posta in essere.’ Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 134. Translation taken from Muller 1989, 143.


36 Van Mander 1604, fol. 176v-177r. ‘Niet onvoeglijk sal wesen te verhalen, dat Tiziano in zijn jonckheyt een ander handeling he hadde, soo als in zijnen ouderdom: want eerst maeckte hy zijn dingen heel net, datment soo geern van by als van verre saagh: en ten lesten wrocht hy zijn dinghen met clooecke pinceel-streken henen, en ghevleckt, soo dat het van by geen perfectie, maer van verre te sien, goeden welstandt hadde. En dit is oorsaeck gheweest, dat vele, die dit hebben willen volghen, willende hun bewijsen te hebben veerdighe handelinghe, hebben gemaect dingen, die plomp, en onbequaem te sien waren. En dit comt daer hy, dat vele meenen, dat dese dinghen van Tiziano ghedaen zijn sonder arbeydt, maer sy dolen, en bedrieghen hun selven: want men siet merkelyck, datse dordae, en weder herdaen zijn, soo veel reysen, dat men daer arbeydt genoech
developed some new thoughts of his own on which elements in a painting were particularly characteristic of the individual style of an artist. Even when working after nature, Van Mander stated, there are certain elements which one cannot learn from nature itself or even from copying another master’s manner – namely leaves, hair, air and drapery (bladen, hayr, locht, en laken). Their depiction depends on the artist’s individual spirit (gheest), and only one’s own mind can teach one how to depict these elements. However, this did not mean an artist could only have one way of for example depicting leaves; one could also invent different ways, according to Van Mander.38

Like Mancini, the art theorist Junius (1638) explained the difference between originals and copies in terms of resolution versus inhibition in the handling. When describing the connoisseurs of his day, he stated that they recognize ‘a perfect and natural force of grace in the originals, whereas in the copies they can see nothing but an unperfect and borrowed comilinesse (venustas).’ 39 Forty years later Samuel van Hoogstraten underlines Junius’
observation (in his treatise *Inleyding tot de booge schoole der schilderkonst: anders de zichtbaere werelt* of 1678) and stresses the legitimacy of the observation by referring to the same ancient writer that Junius had cited before him: Dionysius Halicarnassus. In the first century B.C. the latter had already emphasized that originals have a ‘pleasing gracefulness’ (*bevallike lusticheit*) about them while copies contain some element that did not derive from nature but is the result of ‘painstaking labor’ (*pijnlijkken arbeyt*). Moreover, Van Hoogstraten compares painted copies to printed texts done by an incapable typesetter after a difficult example; in the painted copy as in such a text, the virtues of the original are surrounded by mistakes which mystify or reverse its meaning. However, he adds, the defects are most of all visible in general harmony and grace. Unfortunately, neither Junius nor Van Hoogstraten, whose treatises are both rather theoretical in nature, gives a concrete example of where such a difference could be perceived.

Abraham Bosse, the Parisian printmaker and art theorist, provided a much more precise analysis in 1649. After first stating (much like Junius had already done) that a copyist can never reach the same perfection as he perceives in the original, just as a painter who imitates nature cannot equal it, he specifies that the profiles, contours, relief, colors and finishing touches will all be weaker in the copy. Subsequently, he makes a distinction between finely and more freely or artistically painted works. Paintings done in ‘a free or bold manner, & which are in some way artistically touched and of a great unity’ are particularly hard to imitate, as the artists often trimmed their brushes especially for painting details such as wisps, tufts and curls of hair. By comparison, finely painted pictures are easier to

---

40 Van Hoogstraten 1678, 197; Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 306.
41 ‘Ook ziet men, dat de deugden des eersten principaels in de kopyen met veele gebreken omringt zijn, min of meer als de gedrukte bladeren, van eenich onverstandich letterzetter nae eenich moeylijk schrift geflanst, vol drukfouten en feylen zijn, die den zin of verduisteren of omkeeren. Daer dan noch aldermeest in de gemeene welstandige Harmonie en Gratie gefaelt wort.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 197. On ‘*harmonie*’ and ‘*gratie*’, see also chapter 6, ‘The Essence of Connoisseurship’.
42 ‘Those [...] that copy the most consummate pieces of excellent Masters, can seldome doe it so well, but that perpetually they fall away from the original. “For as it is hard to hit a similitude after the life,” sayth the same Pliny elsewhere, “so is the imitation of an imitation much more hard and difficult.” Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 306. ‘Or comme le Peintre qui imite le Naturel, ne viêt jamais à la mesma perfection d’icieluv; ainsi le copiste ne rend jamais sa Copie à la perfection de son Original.’ Bosse 1649, 56. These remarks on the impossibility of equaling nature echo Plato’s concept of the visual arts. Similar thoughts can be found in many Italian art theoretical treatises, including Leonardo’s notes on painting (as quoted in Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* 1960 [ed. 1989], 96-97).
43 ‘Les Ouvrages de Peinture qui sont faits d’une maniere libre ou franche, & en quelque sorte artistement touchée, & d’une grande union, & non traitée ou pratiquée à coups de pointe de pinceau, sont assez difficile à imiter, en sorte qu’on ne connosse en eux la peine au’a euë le
copy as they are usually done with the kind of pointed brush every artist owned.\(^{44}\) Thus, the style of the work had a clear influence on the extent to which a work could be successfully copied, and hence on the difficulty it posed to a connoisseur. Boldly painted works were far more easily distinguished as originals and copies than more finely painted works.\(^{45}\) Bosse also adds that copies that are done when the original is still ‘fresh’ (\(\text{fraiche}\)) tend to approach the original the best since it is virtually impossible to recreate the effect that time has on painted color, which indicates an awareness of the ageing of paint and subsequent color change that Mancini had briefly touched upon earlier.\(^{46}\)

Elsewhere, Bosse expresses his belief that usually every painter had something characteristic in his manner: ‘if it is not in the air, the disposition, the arrangement & division of the figures he wants to represent in it (i.e. the painting), it will be in the shapes or the palette of Colors, or the handling of the Brush.’\(^ {47}\)

The handling of the brush could thus be characteristic but this was not necessarily

\(^{44}\) Bosse 1649, 58; see also Muller 1989, 144.

\(^{45}\) The Italian art theorist Filippo Baldinucci made a similar statement in a letter dated 1681 to the Marchese Capponi. According to Baldinucci it is easiest to spot copies in sketchy drawings where the free execution of the original is the most difficult to imitate: ‘Questa universal regola della maggiore o minor franchezza nell’operare, ha luogo anocora nelle cose colorite.’ See Muller 1989, 144, and 148, note 27.

\(^{46}\) ‘C’est [...] l’opinion de plusieurs Copistes, & mesme des Peintres Originaux [...] que c’est le Temps qui leur a donné cette Teinte tant soit peu jaunastre; Je scay bien qu’il y a des Couleurs & des huiles, qui font que le Temps opere en quelque sorte sur icelles, mais neantmoins ceux qui ont les yeux un peu clair-voyant, discernent bien que cela n’est pas de la mesme Teinte, de celle desdits Originaux’. Bosse 1649, 59. ‘Un bon Copiste se trouve aussi souvent tres-empesché, de rencontrer des Huiles & des Couleurs qui puissent estant broyées & aliées ensemble, & en suite appliquées, demeurer apres qu’elles sont seiches de la mesme Couleur & Teinte que celles de son Original, principalement quant il est vieil fait [...] Ceux qui se sont adonner à la pratique de Peindre, & à telles particularitez, savent distinguier les Couleurs qui se sont mortes ou passées promptement, d’entre celles qui le font dès long-temps.’ Bosse 1649, 63-64. On Mancini, see Manci/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 54-55.

\(^{47}\) ‘D’ordinaire chaque Peintre à une manière affectée, si ce n’est a l’air, disposicion, ordonnance & agenagement des corps qu’il veut y representer, ce sera en la forme ou Colory, ou au maniment du Pinceau.’ Bosse 1649, 47.
the case, according to Bosse. Nonetheless, many early writers on connoisseurship place a special emphasis on ‘manner’ when analyzing the characteristic ‘spirit’ of individual artists.

André Félibien defines manner as originating directly from the imagination. The diversity of manners, he states, is a result of the artists following their imagination rather than nature.\(^{48}\) It is a clear definition of a line of thought we already encountered in the treatises by Vasari and Van Mander. The implication is that freer, more imaginative brushstrokes lead to a more clearly recognizable manner and that copies in which the artist did not directly follow his imagination but merely tried to imitate another master’s manner are the result of a quite different working process, therefore showing a lack of imagination, or a certain inhibition. However, when discussing originals and copies, this leaves an important question unanswered. What if a copyist uses his imagination when copying? What if he does not literally copy every brushstroke but rather recreates the picture somewhat freely?

This question was first brought up by Abraham Bosse, who introduced an objection one might have against his method of differentiating between originals and copies by looking at the spontaneity or inhibition in the brushstrokes. What if, he wrote, a good painter copies a mediocre work, and in doing so, freely improves on it? He answers the question by first stating that this case was quite unlikely, for why would a gifted painter copy a work of mediocre invention if he could create better works himself? However, if a painter would improve a painting while copying it, “then his Copy would in a way hold the place of Original by his hand”.\(^{49}\) Thus, by following his own imagination while copying, rather than literally following the copy, a good painter created a new original in a way.

It is telling that Bosse is inclined to classify such a freely painted copy as a new original. Like most early writers on connoisseurship, he divides paintings into the categories of originals and copies, without creating separate categories for works that do not seem to fit comfortably in either category, such as forgeries, pastiches or free imitations. No separate terms had been invented yet for these types of pictures\(^ {50}\), although they could be roughly described with terms that were already in use: by pointing at a ‘false signature’ (eg. Guevara – ‘falsamento inscripto’), by labeling a picture in the ‘manner’ (‘manier’, ‘handelingb’) of another painter, or by identifying specific elements that were copied from earlier works. It was common practice at the time to integrate elements from other master’s inventions into

---

\(^{48}\) Félibien1666-1688 [ed. 1706], 122-123.

\(^{49}\) ...sa Copie tiendroit en quelque sorte lieu d’Original de sa main.’ Bosse 1649, 7.

\(^{50}\) Although the concept of imitating (imitatio) had long held a prominent place in both literary and art theory, the term ‘imitation’ was not used to denote a specific type of painting.
one’s own work, and to better understand the seventeenth-century categories of ‘original’ and ‘copy’, it seems important to not only look into the various descriptions of copies, but also to analyze how the term ‘original’ is defined.

Defining Originals

According to Mancini, the term ‘original’ was used for paintings just like the word ‘archetype’ was used for manuscripts, that is, ‘as in the first writing that was not copied, similarly they call paintings originals if they are first done’. In the Dutch version of his treatise On the Paintings of the Ancients, Junius specifies that the first works that able masters did after life itself are called original pieces (originele stücken) here.’ He had not defined the term ‘original’ in the earlier English version of his treatise, and the reason he chose to do so in the Dutch version may be related to his decision to translate ‘original’ with the term ‘origineel’, which was at the time very rarely used in Dutch. Its equivalent ‘principael’ was far more common. This would also explain why Junius defines how the term is used in his treatise rather than what the term generally denotes.

In Bosse’s treatise the term original is defined as ‘an object of which one cannot find a similar one in the natural world’. Like Mancini and Junius, Bosse emphasizes that an original is not – like a copy – based on another work. It is thus novel by default as it is the invention of a painter or draughtsman who had used the power of his imagination. In Junius’ definition originals are done by ‘capable masters’ (treffelikke meesters), thus not by bad masters or pupils, which allows him to then associate originals with ‘grace’ and a certain level of quality. However, this

---

51 ‘E prima dovrà riconoscersi se siano copie o originali, che delle scritture e libri si dice archetypo come primo scritto non copiato, così della pittura, se prima fatta o originali come dicono, o copiata et secondariamente fatta ad esempio d’un’altra come l’archetypa, cioè originaria.’

52 ‘... plagten de meeste kracht haerer Konst-kennisse daer in voornaemelick te bewijsen, datse d’origineelen staend-voets van de copijen weten t’onderscheyden. d’Oorspronckelicke wercken die de treffelicke Meesters nac ’t leven selver ghemaeckt hebben, worden alhier door den naem van originele stucken te verstaen ghegeven.’

53 Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 306. The occurrence of the terms ‘principael’ and ‘origineel’ is discussed in De Pauw-de Veen 1969, 105-111, esp. p. 109. As we will see in chapter 3, the terms ‘principael’ and ‘origineel’ did not encompass a claim as to the painting’s execution; it could well have been painted by several hands.

54 ‘...une chose de laquelle on ne puisse trouver semblable dans la nature...’. Bosse 1649, 8.


56 See also below, ‘The reputation of the copy’. Junius' juxtaposition of good originals with less impressive copies seems to express the quality associations that the terms ‘original’ and ‘copy’
did not mean that ‘originals’ were necessarily painted by the master only. As we will see in chapter 3, an original could well be painted by several hands (see ‘Distinctions in Seventeenth-Century Inventories and Notarial Deeds’).

In all three definitions the term ‘original’ is basically defined by contrasting it with its opposite, the copy. Nonetheless, originals could partially be based on copies of another artist’s work, a practice which was called ‘rapen’ in seventeenth-century Dutch. A wedding inventory dated 1679 even explicitly mentions the use of copies of another painter’s work as models for the artist’s own creations: ‘Various models (‘modellen’), painted by myself after Poelenburch, which are related to my study and belong to my practice of painting’. This fairly widespread custom did not mean, however, that any type of borrowing or partial copying was permitted and appreciated. Dutch authors agreed that it had to be done selectively and integrated completely into the new picture, not unlike the way in which painters would integrate partial studies and inventions they had explored in their drawings into a painting (see also chapter 6, ‘Invention, Composition and Design’). Cleverly integrated references to other masters paid homage to these painters, whereas poor borrowings, especially copies after famous masters to which only something faulty was added, were far from praiseworthy. According to Philips Angel, the connoisseurs of his time would certainly not be fooled by such dishonorable creations.

---

57 In fact, the Dutch term ‘principaal’ comes from accounting and refers to the ‘principal money’ from which interest is harvested. In painting, the ‘principaal’ is worth more because it could be used for ‘exclusive’ copying as long as the owner could control the distribution of the image. In addition, better copies could be made from a ‘principaal’ than from a copy, according to Marten Jan Bok. See Sluijter 2008, 26, note 60.

58 See the extensive discussion of the concept of ‘rapen’ and the extent to which it was allowed according to Karel van Mander, Philips Angel, Samuel van Hoogstraten and Arnold Houbraken in Sluijter 2006, 253-256. See also Ch. 6 (‘Invention, Composition and Design’) below, p.

59 ‘Verscheyde modellen van myn geschildert naer Poelenburch, en dat dependent is aen mijn studi en behoort to myn doen off schilderen.’ Inventory of goods drawn up at the occasion of the wedding contract between E. Johan van Haensbergen and Sophia van der Snouck, 1679. Bredius 1915-1921, vol. 3, 2077 (no. 64).

60 See below, note 68.

61 ‘tis vry wat anders yet te ontleenen om sijn onvolmaecktheyt tot een meerder volmaecktheyt te brenghen, dan dat het is yet, niets deughende te voeghen by het gene dat nu al-reede goet is, want het eenen dient tot loff van de Meester, daer het af-genomen wert: daer de andere slordighe byvoeginge tot puere nadeel van den geen street daer het by ghevoeecth wert.’ Angel 1642, 36.
Non-Originals and Various Types of Copies

By the end of the seventeenth century, a new term had come into use for works that consisted largely of elements that were taken from other paintings, the Italian term ‘pasticcio’.62 Roger de Piles explained the term in his treatise *L'idée du peintre parfait* as follows:

‘Paintings that are neither Originals, nor Copies, are called Pastiches, from the Italian pastici, which means pastries, because as the different things that flavor a dish are mixed together in order to produce a single taste [*un seul goût*], so, too, all of the imitations that compose a pastiche aim to make one truth appear [*une vérité*].’63

In order not to be fooled by such a work, one should, according to De Piles, ‘compare it to their model and study the style (*Goût*) of the design and of the Coloring, and the character of the Brush.’64 Thus a new category had been created for pictures that seemed neither originals nor copies (see also below Chapter 4, ‘Style and Country’, p. page?).

The type of free and improved copy that Bosse could not really classify was also given a more precise description in the later seventeenth century. The Dutch painter and art theorist Willem Goeree even highly recommended creating such pictures, which he called ‘masterly copying’. In his treatise *Inleiding tot de Praktijk der Algemeene Schilderkonst* of 1670, Goeree explains that when doing so, one should first carefully judge the original and subsequently try to outdo the other master in the areas in which he had failed. He describes this practice as very different from the simple copying done by apprentices when they learn how to handle the brush and to develop a manner of painting.65

---

63 ‘Tableaux qui ne sont ni Originaux, ni Copies, lesquels on appelle Pastiches, de l’Italien, Pastici, qui veut dire Pâtes: parce que de même que les choses différentes qui assaisonnent un Pâté, se réduisent à un seul Goût; ainsi les faussetez qui composent un Pastiche, ne tendent qu’à faire une vérité.’ De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 78, as translated in Loh 2004, 498.
64 ‘...pour ne s’y point laisser tromper, il faut examiner, par comparaison à leur modèle, le Goût du Dessein, celui du Coloris, & le Caractère du Pinceau.’ De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 79. In his translation of Du Fresnoy’s *Arte graphica*, De Piles indicated that ‘Goust’ was also used to indicate a ‘manner’. See De Piles 1668/1673, ‘Goust’.
65 ‘[..] anders dan simpel-nakopieëren dat voor de Jongelingen wel een bequaam middel is, om voor eerst de Pinçeel te leren handelen, een maniere van schilderen te krijgen, de Verwen en Kolorijten te leeren vinden, enz.’ Goeree 1670 [ed. 1697], 84.
In 1699, Roger de Piles subsequently classified copies into three different types: copies that were faithful and slavish, copies that were free and unfaithful, and copies that were both free and faithful, the last ones being by far the hardest to detect. Although De Piles was the first to assign a specific category to copies showing force and freedom in the handling but not matching the design of the original, Mancini had already demonstrated awareness of such works. Mancini had stated that characteristic elements such as ringlets of hair will betray the laborious effort of the copy, and if the copyist does not want to imitate them, then they will lack the perfection of the master (see above, p. 54-55).

Similarly, most writers had acknowledged that free and faithful copies did exist, though such high-quality pictures were rare. As Samuel van Hoogstraten put it, a perfect copy was impossible to realize unless God ‘blesses the copyist with the same spirit as the first master.’ However, it seemed that in some instances God did indeed bless the copyist with the spirit of the first master. And sometimes, it was the exact same master that made a second version.

Roger de Piles warns his readers to keep this last possibility in mind: ‘There is hardly any painter who did not repeat one of his works, because he liked it, or because someone asked him to make one exactly the same.’ (figs. 2.2 and 2.3) Moreover, painters also had their pictures copied by students and then reworked them, which led to second versions which could be very hard to distinguish from the originals, as Abraham Bosse noted in his Sentiments sur la Distinction des diverses manières de Peinture, Dessein & Graveure & des originaux d’avec leur copies of 1649. He believed these works were the hardest to distinguish from originals, especially if the copies were by painters capable of making good inventions and if the retouches were carefully done and finished. He explained: ‘I have also seen various excellent painters freshly retouch copies of their own works done in their studio, with such artistic strokes both wet-in-wet or dry, that

---

66 Among them are Mancini and Bosse. Junius also does not entirely exclude the possibility: ‘Those […] that copy the most consummate pieces of excellent masters can seldomly doe it so well, but that perpetually they fall away from the original.’ Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 306. See also below, ‘The Reputation of the Copy’.  
67 Van Hoogstraten 1678 179.  
68 See below ‘The Reputation of the Copy’.  
69 ‘Il n’y a presque point de Peintre qui n’ait répété quelqu’un de ses ouvrages, parce qu’il lui aura plû, ou parce qu’on lui en aura demandé un tout semblable.’ De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 75. In the 1720s the Italian writer Francesco Saverio Baldinucci gave similar advice in Baldinucci/Matteoli 1755, 58; see Sluijter 2001, 193 and note 26.  
70 ‘Il y a des Copies qui ne se peuvent gueres remarquer telles … à cause qu’elles auront été execute par de bons Copistes, & dans le mesme temps des Originaux fraisement achevez, & souvent sous la conduite de celuy qui aura fait lesdits Originaux, & qui mesme les aura retouches en divers endroits.’ Bosse 1649, 69.
someone not skilled in such particularities would not have recognized these at first.\footnote{‘En plusieurs de ces Copies retouches, il ne soit assez facile de reconnoistre tells retouchemens, mais non aux Copies qui sont faites par des Peintres qui commencent d’estre capables de bien faire d’Invention; Et quand lesdits retouchemens sont fait avec soin & finis, l’ay aussi vue divers Excellens Peintres, retoucher fraisement sur des Copies faites chez eux d’apres leurs Oeuvres, si artistement par des coups comme à creu, ou à sec, qu’une personne tant soit peu verse en ces particularitez les auroit reconnus d’abor’. Bosse 1649, 69.}

\textit{Parallels between Theory and Practice}

When observations and interpretations recorded in seventeenth-century art theoretical writings show striking parallels with the information that can be gained from notarial deeds, guild statutes, inventories and/or personal documents, their relevance seems clear. The different sources combined give us a telling glimpse of seventeenth-century connoisseurship.

As to the practical advice recorded in art theoretical texts, the scant evidence available to us suggests that at least some able connoisseurs looked for the types of elements advocated in the treatises when classifying pictures as either originals or copies. For example, when the collector Louis-Henri Comte de Brienne described in his diary that the collector Everhard Jabach and the painter Charles le Brun had tricked the Duke of Liancourt by selling him a copy by Sébastien Bourdon as an authentic masterpiece by Annibale Carracci, he explained: ‘I perceived that Bourdon had applied his manner in some of the drapery folds and that made me aware of the deception.’\footnote{‘Je m’aperçus que Bourdon avoit mis sa manière dans quelques plis de la drapperie et cela me fit évanter la mine.’ Hourticq 1905, as cited in Brown 1995, 231-232. See also the next chapter, “‘By his Hand’: The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship”.} He also implied that finely painted works could be particularly troublesome when distinguishing between originals and copies when he wrote that certain copies were easy to recognize, ‘But when it comes to paintings by Gerard Dou, one can be deceived. I have a copy of one which fooled many good painters.’\footnote{‘Mais pour les tableaux de Gérard Dow, on peut y estre fourbé. J’en ay une copie où de tres bons peintres ont esté trompés.’ Hourticq 1905, 327.} Another telling insight comes from the diary of Paul Fréart de Chantelou. When discussing the difficulty of distinguishing copies from originals, Bernini advises Chantelou to look specifically at the manner in which the hands are painted, presumably because of the freely applied contours...
(see also below, chapter 3 ‘masterly passage’).\footnote{Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 251. Bernini also singled out drapery in a painting as characteristic of Poussin’s manner (on the same page). See also below, chapter 3, “By his Hand”: The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship’ (‘Masterly Passages’).} Also, as we have seen, Constantijn Huygens Jr. focused on the boldness of the penstrokes when trying to establish if a drawing was by Annibale Carracci or merely a copy.

Although only in very exceptional instances do seventeenth-century sources specify under which consideration exactly were copies distinguished from originals, it is striking that the few available sources documenting the practice of connoisseurship seem to focus on exactly the type of aspects that were also identified as telling in art theoretical writings. On a more general level, both art theoretical writings and personal documents confirm that the distinction between original and copy was one of the key concerns of seventeenth-century connoisseurs.

On the market, the distinction between originals and copies were certainly very relevant, as the various legal disputes discussed above indicated. In fact, it seems that even if the copy was done by the same master as the original, its price was often significantly lower, as Neil De Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet have revealed.\footnote{De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996. Of course, copies could also cost less than half the price of originals, especially if they were not done by the master himself or were not of similar quality. For example, copies by Van Goyen's pupils after works by the master were valued only about 1/5 of the price of the originals. See Sluijter 1996, 42 (unabbreviated version available via the author).} Interestingly, the diary of Jan Breughel the Younger (1626-1636) mentions four examples of copies that were executed by the same master(s) as the originals and in each instance, the copy is valued at least 50% less than the original.\footnote{De Marchi/Van Miegroet, 55.} On an average, copies valued 40% of the original’s price when both the copy and the original were done by the same master(s), according to the examples studied by De Marchi and Van Miegroet.\footnote{De Marchi/Van Miegroet, 58.} In 1636, the Antwerp art dealer Chrysostomos van Immerseel even wrote explicitly that ‘copies can only cost half of the price of originals (principaelen)’ in a letter in which he discusses the payment for two originals and two copies which were all done by the painter Simon de Vos.\footnote{‘Sien dat Ul betaelt hadde aen Simon de Vos hondert guldens voor 2 principaelen ende 2 coppien, dat my dunct abus moet wesen, want voor myn verteck [sic] hem 2 principaelen betaelt hebbe, ende de coppien en connen maer de helft van de principaelen bedraegen.’ Letter from Chr. Immerseel to Antoon Cossiers 1636, in Denucé 1934, 108; see also De Marchi/Van Miegroet, 70.}

However, it seems that not everyone agreed with Van Immerseel’s principle. As several theorists pointed out, the difference in quality between such
originals and copies was often barely noticeable. Rubens, in particular, must have agreed with them on this point. Although he once explained that ‘well-retouched copies show more for their price’, suggesting that retouched copies were often cheaper than originals, he nonetheless charged virtually the same price for certain copies by pupils that he had retouched as he did for originals by his hand, as we will see (see chapter 3, ‘Further distinctions: a preference for autograph pictures?’). According to Rubens’s own saying, he had worked up the copies so well that these could count as originals by his hand, thereby confirming the warnings from Bosse and De Piles that copies could be particularly hard to distinguish from originals if they had been touched up by the same master who had made the original.

As to the question whether or not the thinking about originals and copies of hands-on connoisseurs became increasingly refined as the century progressed, it is hard to draw firm conclusions. The increasingly refined thinking in art theory suggests that there may have been a similar evolution in practice. At the same time, it seems important to remind oneself that the practice of distinguishing originals from copies may well have encompassed more insights than that were recorded in the treatises on connoisseurship. Indeed it looks like some sharp-eyed connoisseurs were not only able to distinguish deceptive copies without knowing the original, but that they could also make distinctions which are not discussed in the art theoretical texts, such as recognizing a spoiled original.

For example, when Jacob van Ruisdael was asked his opinion about a work in the manner of Porcellis, he stated that the work might have been begun by Porcellis but was subsequently overpainted to such an extent that it could not possibly be called a ‘Porcellis’ anymore. Similarly, the painter Balthasar Gerbier, who worked as an art agent for the British King, identified a picture as a Raphael in a very poor condition, ‘repainted by some devil whom I trust was hanged’. A sound technical knowledge of paintings and their ageing process was widespread among both painters and connoisseurs in the seventeenth century, as Margriet van Eikema Hommes has revealed. This makes it all the more likely that these early experts had a keen eye for damaged and overpainted pieces.

---

80 Van Eikema Hommes 2004. See also Carlyle 1998.
The Reputation of the Copy

Although the distinction between originals and copies played a very important role in seventeenth century connoisseurship, as we have seen, this does not imply that copies were necessarily considered inferior to originals. Copies certainly enjoyed a higher status than they do today. Tellingly, when Van Mander praises the specific qualities of painters from antiquity, he not only mentions Zeuxis’ talent at painting fruits, Tymanthes’ intelligence at incorporating some hidden meaning into his works and Appelles’ grace in all aspects of paintings, but also Nicophanes’s talent in copying other masters’ works.81 Similarly Van Mander praises certain contemporary painters, including the son of Pieter Coeke van Aelst, for their skill in copying other masters’ works.82

Copying famous predecessors was not only a part of the standard learning curriculum of apprentice painters, it could also be a means to acquire a reputation for oneself; and if done very well, it could be a means to show one’s virtuosity, especially if the copy fooled connoisseurs. Some copies were even legendary, such as Andrea del Sarto’s copy after Raphael’s Portrait of Leo X with Two Cardinals (figs. 2.4 and 2.5).83 According to Vasari, Andrea del Sarto did such a good job that he even fooled Raphael’s assistant Giulio Romano, who had worked on the painting. A cross scratched into the copy, when the paint was still wet, convinced Giulio Romano that he had indeed been deceived. A copy by Rubens after Titian and one by Lievens after Ketel were similarly celebrated.84

According to some, such excellent copies were even better than the originals. Mancini relates that Cosimo de Medici, the Grandduke of Florence, believed that copies that cannot be distinguished from the original when they are both present are to be preferred over the original, for they have two arts in them, the art of the creator and the art of the copyist.85 Mancini himself calls such works ‘true jewels among the paintings’ (veramente gioie fra le pitture).

It was thus not below the status of a great master to copy a work by another great master. We know that several well-reputed painters were indeed commissioned to create copies, and the did so very successfully. For example,

81 Van Mander 1604, fol. *5v-6r, and fol. 84r.
83 This story was first told by Vasari and subsequently repeated by, among others, Van Mander 1604, fol. 126r & 126v; Baldinucci in 1681, cited in Bottari/Ticozzi (eds.)1822-1825, vol. 2, 506-507; and De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 99-102.
84 On Rubens’ copy, see Muller 1989, 145 and 149, note 35. On Lievens’ copy after Ketel, see Orlers 1641, 376. For a similar anecdote about Van der Werff, see Houbraken 1719-1721, vol. II, 21. On such successful copies, see also Liedtke 1997.
85 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 135.
Poelenburg’s copies after Elsheimer were said to be better than the originals, and Willem van Mieris was paid well to copy works by his father, Frans van Mieris, about which the owner noted that they passed for the originals and were sold as such after the owner’s death!  

The difficulty when defining the reputation of the copy is that this one term could encompass many different things, from highly sought-after collector’s items to very cheap and poor pictures and even deliberate forgeries. As we have seen, in the Uylenburgh case the term ‘copy’ is equated with a relatively poor picture, and in Houbraken’s account of this controversy, the term even seems to denote forgeries. For Junius the term ‘copy’ also had a negative connotation, since he assumed copies to be poor pictures by pupils. According to Jan de Bisschop, many collectors were reluctant to have their works copied as they feared this might decrease the value of the original. And Baldinucci even wrote that many of his contemporaries believed that copies were to be ‘shunned like the plague’.  

Yet at the same time high-end copies could be very popular with connoisseurs, who were even interested in the attribution of such works. A remarkable document dated 27 February 1630 stipulates that the art dealer Charles de Coninck in Middelburgh guaranteed that he had sold a copy after Caravaggio by Louis Finson to a certain Jacob van Nieulandt for 600 guilders. Should the work not be by Finson, then the sale was invalid; the painters Pieter Lastman, Adriaen van Nieulant and François Venant were to be the judges. Also Constantijn Huygens was interested in the attribution of a copy. In 1652 he wrote to the Antwerp art dealer Matthijs de Musson to enquire about some work the Duchess of Lorraine was purchasing. Huygens wondered if one of these works could be a copy by Joos van Cleve after an original by Quinten Metsys.  

As these examples show, high-end copies after famous originals could be valued more highly than originals by lesser masters. Art theorists gave various
reasons for this phenomenon. Hoogstraten, for example, stressed that good copies helped to spread a master’s fame (whereas bad copies harmed the master’s reputation).\footnote{Van Hoogstraten 1678, 197.} Also, copies preserved the appearance of lost originals, as Federico Borromeo and Baldinucci pointed out.\footnote{Federico Borromeo in 1625 and Baldinucci in 1681, as reported in Muller 1989, 147.} Moreover, good copies provided delight through their successful imitation, according to Mancini and Baldinucci,\footnote{Mancini in 1617 & 1621, see above 'A Crucial Distinction' and Baldinucci in 1681.} and they augmented the supply of excellent pictures.\footnote{Baldinucci in 1681, as reported in Muller 1989, 147.}

In the early eighteenth century, Jonathan Richardson explained in great detail why copies of good originals are often better than originals by lesser artists: ‘A copy of a very good picture is preferable to an indifferent original; for there the invention is seen almost entire, and a great deal of the expression and disposition and many times good hints of the colouring, drawing and other qualities. An indifferent original hath nothing that is excellent, nothing that touches which such a copy I am speaking of hath.’\footnote{Spear 1977-99.} Copies were thus both ‘shunned like the plague’ and highly sought after; the copy’s reputation depended largely on its quality.