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

Tummers, J.C.

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CHAPTER 3.
‘BY HIS HAND’: THE PARADOX OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CONNOISSEURSHIP

Introduction

The question of whether seventeenth-century painters and connoisseurs had a different understanding of authenticity than we do today has been the cause of much debate. Several scholars have even wondered if present-day connoisseurship is anachronistic in its efforts to distinguish the hand of a seventeenth-century master from those of his assistants and pupils. For was it not common for a seventeenth-century master to collaborate with his assistants and to sell the various studio products under his own name? Nowadays connoisseurs tend to differentiate sharply between what is believed to be purely autograph work and paintings done in part or entirely by assistants, which can make for a price difference of several millions of dollars.¹ Yet, among scholars, there is no consensus as to whether such a distinction corresponds with seventeenth-century categories of thought.

Seventeenth-century connoisseurs were certainly interested in attaching names to paintings. In fact, attributing pictures seems to have been an entertaining pastime among the upper echelons of society in Europe. For example, the British King James I reputedly removed the labels from his paintings to see if his courtiers could guess the artists.² A letter sent from Paris by the Dutch scientist and art lover Christiaan Huygens to his brother Constantijn in The Hague shows that these rather playful attribution debates were not an exclusively British phenomenon. After visiting the Flemish dealer Valcourt with a group of Parisian connoisseurs, Christiaan wrote to his brother on 1 June 1668:

¹ Jephta Dullaart (Sotheby’s Amsterdam) kindly informed me that, currently, a good ‘Rembrandt studio’ painting is valued at about 5-10 percent of the price of an ‘autograph Rembrandt’ at auction. This basically means that a ‘Rembrandt studio’ picture tends at best to fetch a price in the range of six figures, while paintings considered to be entirely autograph Rembrandts start at about $5 million.

² According to an agent of Pope Urban VIII, Inigo Jones boasted that he was able to correctly attribute all the works. See Brown 1995, 47. A further indication that attributing paintings was considered an entertaining pastime comes from Franciscus Junius, who argued in his *Painting of the Ancients* that analysing pictures was a better and more innocent pastime than gambling. See Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 72-74.
You would have had unparalleled pleasure to see [the collector-
connoisseur] Jabach determine the authenticity of those [Valcourt’s]
pieces with a magisterial complacency; only to conclude in the end that
out of 300 drawings that were given to Raphael there were but two
originals. I would give a good thing to see him censure yours and that you
were [listening in from] behind the tapestry. When we were at his place,
there was also no shortage of ‘controllers’, of which I was one of the
minor figures, who challenged the attribution of what he [Jabach] believed
to be true Giulio Romanos and Raphaels, which drove him into a rage
that made us all laugh, so much so that there would be hardly any comedy
that would equal such a conference. 3

Christiaan’s account is so vivid that it is not hard to imagine the
excitement of these early connoisseurs. However, the precise considerations and
assumptions of these gentlemen remain elusive. On what grounds exactly would
they have attributed and de-attributed pictures? What elements were seen as
particularly telling? Would they have differentiated between different types of
studio products, and if so, how?

It is very rare indeed that one can find evidence of early connoisseurs
weighing arguments when making an attribution. Roger de Piles’ imaginary
dialogue from 1677, which I cited extensively above, suggests that some of these
early experts may have been quite sophisticated in their judgements (see ‘A Closer
Look at Seventeenth-Century Sources: An Introduction’). The protagonists even
discuss how feasible and necessary it is to attach a name to a painting. For
example, they consider how difficult it can be to recognise works made in a
transitory period in which an artist changes his style, or how impossible it is to
even know all the painters from the past – especially those who worked for others
and never really acquired their own reputations. Yet primary sources addressing
these issues are scant. Also, it is only in very exceptional instances that we know
with any certainty exactly which pictures these early connoisseurs were discussing

3 ‘Vous auriez un plaisir nonpareil à voir comme Jabach determine sur l’authenticité de ces pieces
avec une suffisance magistrale; concluant enfin que de 300 dessins qu’on donnait pour des Raphael
il n’en avoit que 2 d’originaux. Je donnerois quelque chose de bon pour le voir censurer les vostres
et que vous fussiez derrière la tapisserie. Quand nous fusmes chez luy, il ne manqua pas d’y avoir
des controllers, dont j’estois des moindres, qui lui contestoient des pieces qu’il donnait pour
veritables Julio Romano et Raphael dont il se mettoit dans une colere a nous faire rire tous,
tellement qu’il n’y a point de comedie qui vaille une pareille conference.’ Letter from Christiaan
Huygens to his brother Constantijn, dated 1 June 1668, cited in Grossman 1951, 18. See also
Huygens 1888-1950, vol. 6, 47.
and that we can thus clarify their comments by matching their accounts to the very pictures at which they must have been looking.³

Reconstructing seventeenth-century views on authenticity is mostly a matter of critically analysing and connecting circumstantial evidence, including relevant passages in guild statutes, notarial deeds, personal writings, art theoretical treatises, probate inventories and sales catalogues, and matching these to what we can see in pictures wherever possible.⁴ Interestingly, the available sources seem rather ambivalent. On the one hand, surviving guild statutes indicate that it was common practice for master painters to sell works produced in collaboration with their studio assistants under their own name, as we will see. On the other hand, some early art theoretical treatises that discuss attribution practices advise art lovers to look for brush marks that seem distinctively individual, much like someone’s handwriting, which suggests they were indeed interested in attributing paintings to a specific hand.

It is this seeming contradiction that I propose to call the paradox of seventeenth-century connoisseurship. After first analysing the scholarly debate, I will have a closer look at seventeenth-century sources and introduce some new source material into the discussion in order to better understand the seventeenth-century appreciation for authenticity and the practice of both signing and attributing pictures. The underlying goal is to bridge contradictions in previous interpretations in this field and, in doing so, provide a clearer frame of reference for attributions to seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish masters such as Rembrandt, Rubens and Honthorst. Although commercial and social interests must have played an important role in seventeenth-century attribution practices (as they do today), I will not speculate much about their impact but will focus mostly on the more general question what types of distinctions were made and what their implications are for present-day connoisseurship.⁶ Also, I will not pay much attention to the question of how the insights of painters may have differed from those of buyers since – as we will see – there is little reason to assume that their insights into these general distinctions would have differed greatly.⁷

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³ See below, fig. 3.13 & 3.14.
⁴ Sales catalogues are discussed in Jonckheere 2008b, 69-95. As he argues, commercial interests seem to have strongly influenced the connoisseurship found in sales catalogues.
⁵ On the trustworthiness of the judgements of painters and connoisseurs, see also chapter 5, “The Painter versus the Connoisseur”, below. For a discussion of dealers’ interests, see Jonckheere 2008b, . In the same publication, Neil De Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet trace larger developments in the mentality of art sellers as the art market evolved. See De Marchi/Van Miegroet 2008.
⁶ By contrast, auctioneers in the later seventeenth century did use different standards when attributing pictures. See Jonckheere 2008b.
The Debate: Autograph Pictures, The Holy Grail of Present-Day Connoisseurs?

Ernst van de Wetering, the head of the Rembrandt Research project, phrased the issue most poignantly in 1992 when he gave a lecture entitled ‘The Search for the Master’s Hand: An Anachronism?’ at the 28th International Art History Congress in Berlin. If seventeenth-century viewers would have found it self-evident to regard all works produced in a studio as works by the master that headed the studio, even if they were carried out by others, then, ‘the idea at the basis of the Rembrandt Research project, namely that there is a need to isolate works of Rembrandt’s hand from that of his pupils and assistants, would be a complete anachronism, a wrongly applied projection of the 19th-century cult of genius to everyday 17th-century workshop practice.’

Earlier in 1984, he had addressed the same concern in the second volume of The Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, stating that there was too little evidence to draw any conclusion with certainty. However, in the meantime, several other scholars had been pondering the same issue and voiced different opinions. In 1988, Svetlana Alpers published her book The Rembrandt Enterprise, in which she analysed Rembrandt as a talented artist and entrepreneur who created pictures, together with his studio, that give the effect of individuality but are not necessarily by his own hands. Referring to the Rembrandt Research Project, she pointed out that it seemed that Rembrandt had not collaborated much with his assistants on particular works, yet she emphasised that the master had his name attached not just to his own works but also to works done by others in his studio. Therefore, she stated, the master’s oeuvre cannot simply be reduced to his autograph works.

Also, Eddy de Jongh had briefly touched upon this matter when he analysed the attribution debate that was sparked by the Frans Hals exhibition of 1990. As the lack of consensus in the definition of Frans Hals’ oeuvre became

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8 Van de Wetering 1993b, 627-628.
9 Bruyn et al. 1982-, vol. 2, 60-76and 89-90. The issue itself was not new; it had also been discussed, for example, by Frits Lugt in Lugt 1936, 110-112; and by Albert Blankert in his monograph on Ferdinand Bol. See Blankert 1976, 14 and 18.
10 Alpers 1988. On Rembrandt’s marketing abilities, see also Bok 2004, 159-178.
11 Alpers 1988, 69 and 143, note 24. Alpers refers to a statement by Houbraken that Flinck’s work was sold under Rembrandt’s name. In 1991, Josua Bruyn pointed out that quite a few works listed as being by Rembrandt in the artist’s inventory of 1656 appear to be studio works. See Bruyn 1991, 70-71; see also Wheelock 1995b, 208 and 209, note 27.
12 Alpers 1988, 122.
painfully clear (Seymour Slive approved 222 paintings, while Claus Grimm agreed with only 145 of these), De Jongh wondered if what he called the ‘19th- and 20th-century fixation on authenticity’ can be historically justified. In his view, a seventeenth-century viewer would have certainly been aware of the difference in value between originals and copies, and an occasional connoisseur may have had a preference for works done entirely by the hand of a famous master. However, he suspected that it was typically the rule rather than the exception in seventeenth-century studios for painters to collaborate with their assistants. It seemed quite probable that, in various instances, the only autograph detail in a picture from Frans Hals’ studio would have been the master’s monogram FH.

In his 1992 lecture, Ernst van de Wetering weighed evidence both in favour and against the idea that seventeenth-century painters and their clientele had a preference for autograph paintings by the master without reaching a definitive conclusion. On the one hand, Van de Wetering argued, it was perfectly normal for pupils and assistants to work in the style of their master. However, that did not mean that various types of studio products were interchangeable in his view; and he claimed that there was a ‘substantial amount of documents which indicate that the aspect of autographness was relevant in 17th-century Holland’ (which Jaap van der Veen was in the process of assembling and interpreting). But he suspected that master painters may have worked in close collaboration with their studio all the more confidently since many art buyers could not easily recognise poor quality pictures.

At the Berlin conference Claus Grimm – the scholar that had not only sparked the Frans Hals attribution debate in 1990 but had also just published a book on Rembrandt’s portraits (1991) in which he limited the selection of autograph works even more strictly than the Rembrandt Research Project – also addressed this issue. In his lecture The Question about Autographness and the Practice of Attribution, Grimm emphasised that much research remained to be done in order to get a clearer idea of seventeenth-century workshop practice and to establish better standards for attributions to old masters.

Close inspection of just a few pictures by Rembrandt led Grimm to conclude that the master must have collaborated with his assistants in different ways. He pointed to the build-up of the paint in the man’s face in The Shipbuilder and His Wife (1633): in the shadow part at right, a relatively thin first layer is applied somewhat hesitantly, presumably by an assistant. It is topped by confident strokes which Grimm identified as corrections by the master. (fig. 3.1).

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14 Van der Veen’s research is discussed below.
comparison, another group portrait done in the same year, *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Tulp*, does not show a similarly sharp distinction in its build-up. Instead, it seems to have been worked up much more coherently and smoothly (fig. 3.2). This led Grimm to conclude that Rembrandt sometimes, but not always, had assistants execute the general building-up of the top layer, while adding the light and shadow parts himself. In a third example taken from the same year, Rembrandt’s *Portrait of the Remonstrant Minister Johannes Uyttenbogaert*, Grimm pointed out the differences in style and execution between Uytenbogaert’s face and the definition of the hands (fig. 3.3). This, according to Grimm, indicated that the different parts were executed by different artists, that is, the head by the master and the hands by an assistant.\(^\text{16}\)

What should we conclude from all this? Would such collaborations have been the rule or the exception? The exact extent of collaboration in Rembrandt’s studio remains an issue of much debate. A number of specialists believe that Rembrandt tended to distinguish rather sharply between his own paintings and those done by students and assistants, and that he would have priced them accordingly (even though he may have also sold non-autograph works as ‘Rembrandts’). In particular Josua Bruijn stated that Rembrandt hardly ever collaborated with his pupils and assistants on the same composition, and Ernst van de Wetering wrote that such collaborations occur almost exclusively in portraits created before 1642.\(^\text{17}\) However, there have also been other scholars like Grimm who believe that Rembrandt’s studio output and his working practices may have been more diversified.

In 1995, Arthur Wheelock distinguished four different types of collaborative works produced in Rembrandt’s studio: works done by an assistant on the basis of a sketch or drawing by the master, works blocked in on a canvas

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\(^{16}\) This is also the conclusion drawn by Wouter Kloek and Guido Jansen in *Kloek/Jansen 1992*, who state that, among other things, the lack of wrinkles in the hands seems unusual for Rembrandt.

\(^{17}\) Bruyn explained his view as follows: ‘On the whole, one may say that with Rembrandt design and execution were closely bound up. Instead of making use of sophisticated workshop procedures which could in part replace the share of the master’s hand, he seems to have allowed invention and execution to be separated only in the early stages of an assistant’s activities. Later, they would be welcome to their own design and only rarely did they intervene with his own work.’ Bruyn 1991, 83-85. Also quoted in Wheelock 1995b, 209; Bruyn et al. 1982-., vol. 2, 49-90; and vol. 4, XXII. See also Nygaard 2005, 39: ‘we tend towards the view that in general, Rembrandt distinguished quite sharply between works by himself and those done by his students – in terms of price, too. We imagine that Rembrandt, the pupils at his workshop, and the customers all knew who painted what, and that the prices were set accordingly. Rembrandt’s signature was a brand name for the students, and for that reason it sometimes appears on works done by pupils. This does not, however, make such works forgeries.’
by the master and worked up by an assistant (such as the National Gallery’s of Art’s *Man in Oriental Costume*, c. 1635), portraits done by the master in which the costume and even the hands are done by an assistant, and lastly works produced by pupils or assistants and retouched by the master.\textsuperscript{18} Walter Liedtke also made a plea for a thorough re-evaluation of Rembrandt’s studio practices in 2004; in his view, the input of students and assistants, in many instances, has not been properly recognised.\textsuperscript{19}

These differences of opinion regarding the studio practice of the most studied painter from the Dutch Golden Age illustrate just how little is certain about the historical context in which these pictures were made. It makes the question of how seventeenth-century painters and connoisseurs would have thought about issues of authenticity all the more relevant. Do seventeenth-century sources give us any indication as to what types of pictures to expect? Can we safely assume, for example, that most seventeenth-century master painters created at least a part of their oeuvre entirely by their own hand? And that present-day connoisseurs can thus take an autograph ‘core oeuvre’ as a point of departure for their attributions? Or is such a core oeuvre much like the Holy Grail: highly desirable (for the amount of certainty it would give in matters of attribution), yet eternally elusive?\textsuperscript{20}

At the time of the Berlin conference, many primary sources had not yet been extensively studied, in particular, archival documents and art theoretical texts. Since then, Jaap van der Veen has written a thorough analysis of Netherlandish archival documents and probate inventories in relation to issues of authenticity titled ‘By his Own Hand, The Valuation of Autograph Paintings in the Seventeenth-Century’, which was published in *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, volume IV (2005).\textsuperscript{21} In the appendix, he listed and transcribed 36 relevant notarial documents. These documents mostly concern pictures by or after Netherlandish masters (including Porcellis, Bloemaert, Jordaens and Den Uyl) and also some paintings by or after Italian masters such as Titian and Caravaggio.

\textsuperscript{18} Wheelock refers to several primary sources which mention pictures that were ‘geretukeeerd’ (retouched) by Rembrandt, including his 1656 inventory which also mentions one painting which was ‘gemodelf’ (designed) by Rembrandt. Wheelock 1995b, 207.

\textsuperscript{19} Liedtke 2004, 57.

\textsuperscript{20} Grimm suspected that there was no reason to believe that seventeenth-century masters created a core oeuvre of entirely autograph pictures. He therefore stated that if the opposite could be proven more probable, most monographic studies of old masters would have to be re-edited with the dual purpose of establishing the output of the old master’s workshop and of analysing the master’s share in the workshop production. See Grimm 1993, 643.

\textsuperscript{21} Van der Veen 2005, .
One of the difficulties with the interpretation of this material is that most of these notarial deeds deal with the status of particular paintings as either an ‘original’ (principael/origineel) or a ‘copy’ (kopie).\(^{22}\) The same holds true for seventeenth-century inventories and sales catalogues. As mentioned in chapter 2, ‘principael’, the most commonly used word for ‘original’, simply meant that the work was not a copy, but it did not encompass a claim as to the execution; it could well have been painted by several hands.\(^{23}\)

In the case of the 36 documents accumulated by Jaap van der Veen, only six make a specific claim as to the execution of a work.\(^{24}\) These six documents state that a certain work is done entirely ‘by the hand of the master’ and sometimes even specify that it was done ‘without help from others’. This seems to suggest that there was indeed an interest in purely autograph works. Jaap van der Veen believes that this was the case among well-to-do burghers who could afford the better paintings. (He assumes that issues of authenticity would not have been of great concern to the producers and buyers of cheap pictures.) Furthermore, he speculates that the interest in autograph works may have increased throughout the century, reaching a high point in around 1650, and that the less commonly used term for ‘original’ (origineel) may have implied that a certain work was autograph.\(^{25}\) He therefore concludes that the premise of the Rembrandt Research Project to distinguish the master’s hand from those of his assistants and pupils is not anachronistic.

However, there is also another way to interpret the evidence that Jaap van der Veen has gathered. Similar statements about pictures, namely that they were done ‘by the hand of the master’, also occurred in other countries, most notably in Italy. However, scholars of Italian art believe that these should not be taken literally. The Italian equivalent of this phrase, ‘fatto di suo mano’, had a certain legal validity and was more of a guarantee of personal, moral responsibility than of a necessarily physical involvement.\(^{26}\) Could the same be said of the Netherlands? Did painters’ names function mostly as guarantees of a certain style and quality?

In the following I will try to bridge some of the contradictions in current interpretations by re-evaluating some existing evidence, bringing some additional

\(^{22}\) Van der Veen 2005, , Docs. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16-17, 21-22, 25, 27, 31, 33, 34-36.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 2. See also below ’The Master’s Name and Its Implications’ and ’Distinctions in Seventeenth-Century Inventories and Notarial Deeds’.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., Docs. 1, 4, 5, 19, 20, 22 (dated, respectively: 1606, 1615, 1616, 1653, 1649 [sic], and 1658).

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 2, 3, 8, 14, and 28. On the meaning of the term ‘origineel’ see also below ’Distinctions in Seventeenth-Century Inventories and Notarial Deeds’.

\(^{26}\) The first scholar to analyse these phrases was Charles Seymour. See Spear 1989, 98; and Spear 1997, 253-274.
research into the discussion and introducing a number of previously overlooked primary sources, mostly taken from a still relatively little explored field, that of art theoretical discourse. First, I will explore seventeenth-century categories of thought by looking at the importance attached to painters’ names in general and by analysing the kinds of distinctions made in seventeenth-century inventories and notarial deeds, in particular, the distinction between works identified as by a master and those given to a pupil. Subsequently, I will discuss the evidence that suggests that master painters sold entirely autograph pictures, whether or not buyers may have had a special interest in these, and what – if anything – we could deduce from master painters’ signature habits. Secondly, I will look into seventeenth-century texts on connoisseurship and further explore insights as to attributing pictures, some of which were already briefly discussed in chapter 2. The question here is, do these texts indicate that seventeenth-century connoisseurs were as keen as we are today to recognise the master’s hand, or do they suggest that they had somewhat different priorities?

The Master’s Name and Its Implications

No longer the anonymous craftsmen they had often been in medieval times, successful, early modern European artists were able to gain an increasing amount of fame and independence for themselves. They appeared from behind their works and placed themselves in the foreground, attracting attention to themselves by signing their works, initially with monograms, and later with their names spelled out in full. If they were really famous, their first names would have sufficed: Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, Rembrandt ....

The artist’s position changed most rapidly in Italy. In 1501, having tried to commission a specific subject from the painter Gentile Bellini, Isabella d’Este eventually let him decide which scene from classical history or mythology he would paint for her. Another collector, Federico Gonzaga, went a step further in his 1527 request to Michelangelo. He had no requirements at all as to the subject

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27 While Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian (predominantly) signed their works using their full names, they were known by their first names. Rembrandt signed most consistently using only his first name from the early 1630s onwards. Ann Jensen Adams gives a good overview of the development of signatures and their cultural historical implications in Jensen Adams 1993.

28 ‘Qualche istoria o fabula antiqua aut de suo inuentione ne finga una che rappresenti cosa antiqua e de bello significato.’ Letter dated 28 June 1501, State Archive of Mantua, Copia lettere Isab., Busta 2993, letter 188. See Fletcher 1971.
matter, format or medium; all he wanted was that the work was ‘of his [Michelangelo’s] genius’, ‘an example of his unique ability’.29

In the Netherlands, the artist’s reputation as the creator of ‘unique’ works also gained weight, and it gradually increased over time. Tellingly, around 1600, print collectors started to organise their prints by artists’ names, whereas sixteenth-century print collections had usually been grouped by subject.30 As the art market boomed in the early seventeenth century, more artists than ever began to sign their works, often still with monograms, yet increasingly with their full names, to emphasise their role as individual creators.31 Although the signing habits of painters could vary considerably (Rubens, for example, barely signed his works at all), the general knowledge of artists names increased greatly. Witness the dazzling variety of artists names mentioned in probate inventories throughout the century, for instance (see below).

But, despite this growing emphasis on the artist’s individual name, its use was not very individualised in early modern Europe. A striking example comes from Vasari’s biography of the Renaissance master Giulio Romano, in which he describes an artwork as follows: ‘It was the best carton that he [Giulio] had ever made, and it was executed by Fermo Guisoni, who has since then become an excellent master himself.’32 A work could count as being by a master if it was done under his supervision and after his design, and it was common for masters to collaborate with their assistants not only on large-scale commissions but also on modestly-sized paintings. For example, when Giulio himself was not yet an independent master, his teacher Raphael reputedly used his assistance in his greatest works, including his famous panel paintings Portrait of Leo X with two Cardinals (Uffizi, Florence) and his Portrait of Giovanna of Aragon (Louvre, Paris).33

It was also common in the Netherlands of the early seventeenth century for masters to attach their names to paintings that were in part or largely executed by their pupils and assistants. Witness, for example, a laudatory poem on Van Mander’s Schilderboeck (1604) that precedes the artist-theorist’s text. The writer likens Van Mander’s book to a picture of Pictura, the personification of the art of

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29 ‘una cosa fatta di mano sua o sia di sculptura o di pittura ... Et se per caso vi dimandasse che subietto voressimo, gli diresti che non cerciamo ne desideriamo se non un’opera dell’ingegno suo ... un esempio della sua singularissima virtù.’ Federico Gonzaga stipulated his request in a letter to his agent in Florence, Giovanni Borromeo. See Luzio 1913 [ed. 1974], 246-247.
30 See Robinson 1981, xxxivff.
31 On the different ways of signing, see also below. Rembrandt seems to have signed 90 percent of the works thought to have been produced between 1632 and 1642; by comparison, Raphael signed only 14 of the 156 paintings that he is believed to have produced. See Jensen Adams 1993, 581.
33 The Portrait of Giovanna of Aragon was later transferred to canvas.
painting. This metaphorical portrait has benefited from many contributions in the form of painted jewellery, much in the same way that Van Mander benefited from those who brought the art of painting to greater heights and thus enriched painting as an art. However, Van Mander deserves to sign the work as an ‘original’ (*principael*), since he is responsible for the most impressive part, a crown of pearls on Pictura’s head. He would have made ‘a mistake’ (*faut bedrijvet*), ‘if he had not written his name at the bottom of the work’ (*Soo hy sich self daer onder niet en schrijvet*).\(^{34}\) Admittedly, a lot of research remains to be done as to specific masters’ studio habits. However, on the basis of the available evidence, we can already conclude that the master’s signature could function as a ‘trademark’, a ‘logo of a studio style’ or even as a ‘brand name’, in the terms coined by Svetlana Alpers, Ann Jensen Adams, Koenraad Jonckheere and Tine Nygaard, respectively.\(^{35}\) However, it was not a guarantee that a work was painted solely by the hand of the master.\(^{36}\)

But if a painter’s name did not guarantee that the work was executed by the master himself, then how did seventeenth-century painters and connoisseurs classify different types of studio products? Did seventeenth-century painters and their public differentiate between various types of studio products? And what role, if any, did signatures play in this respect?

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\(^{36}\) Placing one’s signature onto a painting could even be considered a means of appropriating a work from another master. This is demonstrated by a remarkable incident in Hasselt, Overijssel. When the now little-known painter Adam van de Plancke had painted the picture *The Judgement of Count Willem de Goede* for the Hasselt town hall in 1657, the local painters’ guild filed a complaint because Van der Plancke was not a member of the guild and thus had no right to receive the commission from the city. The issue was resolved by having a local painter sign the work, and municipal authorities paid the guild a fine. See Verbeek 1970, 339. Placing one’s signature on a painting could also be a means to claim authorship of a painting that one had designed but not executed, as in the case of the print maker Romeyn de Hooghe (1645-1708). Towards the end of his career, De Hooghe designed large-scale interior paintings, which he had executed by others, see Van Eikema Hommes/Bakker 2008.
Distinctions in Seventeenth-Century Inventories and Notarial Deeds

Seventeenth-century inventories and notarial deeds give a fairly coherent view of seventeenth-century categories of thought. As briefly mentioned above, artists’ names appear with increasing frequency in probate inventories from the beginning of the seventeenth century, not only in those inventories belonging to painters and collectors but also in those of burghers who owned but a modest amount of works. So far, research into inventories in Delft, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Haarlem, Leiden and Dordrecht indicate similar patterns.

While in sixteenth-century inventories the creators of pictures were seldom mentioned, the number of pictures attributed to a particular master rose around the turn of the seventeenth century. In Antwerp, for example, the numbers of pictures that were identified as by a specific master rose steadily to about a quarter of all pictures between 1601 and 1620.\(^37\) From the beginning of the seventeenth century the number of attributed pictures also increased in Amsterdam, while in Delft, the 1640s and 1650s in particular witnessed a growing number of attributions in inventories.\(^38\) In Leiden, the number of attributed pictures in a sample of collectors’ inventories from the 1650 and 1660s was particularly high, amounting to about 40 percent of all the works mentioned.\(^39\)

Admittedly, the specific implications of these early attributions in inventories can be tantalisingly hard to interpret as we often cannot identify the works mentioned and relatively little is known about the notaries and experts that compiled these lists.\(^40\) Moreover, the general boom in the production of paintings and the increasing numbers of works that were signed must have also influenced the listings. Yet, some general patterns are unmistakable. Firstly, there was a growing awareness of both the names of specific master painters and of their hallmark styles. An inventory of the Leiden collector Hendrik Bugge van Ring

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\(^{38}\) Montias 1983, 218, 227 and 247-258; Montias 1989, 245. In Dordrecht, artists’ names appeared mostly in inventories from the 1650s and later; however, many notarial deeds have gone missing. See Loughman 1992, 45-46; Van der Veen 2005, 4 and 15 ff. In contrast, a recent analysis of inventories from the province of Friesland shows a relatively large share of cheap pictures and relatively little interest in painters’ names; presumably, connoisseurship was concentrated in large urban centres. See Bakker 2008.

\(^{39}\) Fock 1990, 5. Fock’s analysis is based on a deliberate selection of rich collectors’ inventories (which include many paintings) numbering twelve per decade.

\(^{40}\) Montias assumed that the expertise of notaries varied considerably. Jaap van der Veen questions how much the inventories reflect the knowledge of the notaries that usually composed them, as these notaries may have profited from existing inventory lists, from knowing the owner of the works, and from signatures and monograms on the pictures (which are sometimes literally transcribed). Van der Veen 2005, 16 and note 82. See also Montias 1993, 103, note 16.
even mentions as many as 98 different painters’ names and specifies that two pictures by Jan Steen and Gerrit Dou, respectively, were done ‘in their youth’ (*in zijn jonkheyt*). Secondly, a number of different descriptive terms were used to classify works. Basically, two main distinctions were made, and these categories partially overlap. Pictures were often labelled as an original, a copy or a work in a certain master’s style (see below). Another distinction concerned the master’s share: the overwhelming majority of the attributed works is given to master painters, but in a few rare instances, a picture is identified as by a pupil (*discipel*) of a master and/or mentioned as retouched (*geretokkeert*) by the master. Before discussing these distinctions further, I will briefly indicate the other descriptive terms that may be found. Artist’s inventories occasionally contain terms indicating that a picture was unfinished. For example, pictures were described as ‘*gemodelt*’ / ‘*gebootst*’ (sketched), ‘*gedoodverwet*’ (underpainted), or simply as ‘*niet opgemaect*’ (not completed). Lastly, one can also find descriptive terms indicating the quality of a work, often in very general terms. For example, the 1682 inventory of the painter Claes Moyaert mentions 11 ‘*sleghte schilderijen*’ (insignificant paintings), while the abovementioned inventory of the collector Hendrik Bugge mentions two pictures by an unidentified yet ‘good master from the province of Brabant’ (een goet Brabants meester).

As to the distinction between originals and copies, the term ‘original’ (*principael* / *origineel*) meant that a certain work was a new creation, thus not a copy. It was used for works attributed to master painters; new compositions invented by pupils were usually described as simply a ‘piece’ (*stuckje*). A copy, on the other hand, was based on a prototype and therefore generally a cheaper type of picture. As Hans Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi have shown, copies were valued at about 50 percent of the original’s price when done by the same master as the original. However, this does not mean that copies could not occasionally be valuable. The 1659 inventory of the well-informed collector baron Willem Vincent van Wytenhorst specifies that two copies by Cornelis van Poelenburch after originals by Adam Elsheimer were ‘held in higher esteem than the original’

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42 Given the large number of surviving inventories and the many variables affecting the circumstances in which the inventories were compiled, an in-depth quantitative analysis requires a separate study. However, a number of general conclusions regarding the existence of terms and the frequency with which these terms were used can be drawn; see below.
44 In the 1687 inventory of the art dealer Hendrick Meyeringh we find, for example, ‘133. Een stuckje van de discipulen van Sonjé’; see Bredius 1915-1921, , vol. 1, 340.
45 See De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996, .
Lastly, pictures could also be described as ‘in the manner’ (aert, handelinge, manier) of a particular master. Usually the maker of such works is not identified, and their price estimates were low, though there were exceptions. A document related to the inventory of the painter Cornelis Dusart, dated 7 March 1703, mentions two paintings ‘done in the manner (manier) of’ Berchem by Dusart’s pupil, Wynand de Haas, that were estimated at 20 guilders, which was double the price of Jan Steen’s small picture representing a smoking figure mentioned in the same document.

As mentioned earlier, the most commonly used term for ‘original’, ‘principael’, only specified that the picture was not a copy and thus did not make any claim as to whether a work was autograph or not. In my opinion, the less commonly used term for ‘original’ (origineel) had the same meaning. Jaap van der Veen suspected that ‘original’ may have implied that the work was purely by the hand of the master based on a passage in Junius’ treatise The Painting of the Ancients, in which he describes the connoisseurs of his time: ‘…most are wont to prove their knowledge of art by being able to immediately distinguish originals from copies. The works that the excellent masters themselves have made after life, are here referred to as original pieces.’ However, this passage is so vague – Junius contrasts originals by masters and copies by pupils in a very general way without mentioning any other type of painting – that the reasoning becomes circular. If ‘original’ implied that a picture was autograph, then the occasional use of the term would illustrate that there was an interest in purely autograph pictures. As I have not come across a seventeenth-century use of the term ‘origineel’ which clearly differentiates its meaning from the term ‘principael’, I subscribe to the conclusion of the linguist Lydia de Pauw-de Veen, namely that these terms were used

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46 Boers-Goosens 2004, 217, nos. 37-38. Wyttenhorst also mentions a copy after Poelenburch by a certain Steenbergen, which was subsequently reworked by Poelenburch himself. He specifies that he paid Steenbergen 36 guilders and Poelenburch 100 guilders for this piece, which makes the picture more expensive than many originals by Poelenburch. See Boers-Goosens 2004, 217, no. 152.

47 Bredius 1915-1921, vol. 1, 54-55. This document also mentions a painting in the manner of Berchem by Van der Meer: ‘Een Capitaal stuk van van der meer (in) den aert van Berghem met menschen, beesten en landschap’.


49 Eric Jan Sluijter kindly informed that the term ‘origineel’ was mostly used in the Southern Netherlands.

of course, this does not exclude the possibility that some originals may have been purely autograph. However, before discussing the questions of how common it may have been for painters to create purely autograph works and if connoisseurs and art theorists had a particular preference for these, I will first look more closely at the distinction between masterpieces and works by pupils.

**Master, Pupil or ‘Retouched’**

By far most attributions in seventeenth-century inventories concern master painters, although occasionally, especially in inventories belonging to artists and dealers, a picture is identified as a work by a pupil (‘disciple’ or ‘leerling’). For example, the 1669 inventory of the Amsterdam collector Laurens Mauritsz Douci identifies a picture as ‘A cave by a pupil of Karel van der Hooch’ (*Een grot van een discipel van Karel van de Hooch*), estimated at the relatively low price of 8 Carolus guilders. This differentiation between works by masters and those by pupils indicates that not all paintings produced in a master’s studio could pass under his name. In fact, the master’s name must have guaranteed at least a minimum level of quality.

The same conclusion can be drawn from a variety of contracts and notarial deeds, which both suggest that a variety of pictures could pass under artist’s name and that there was a bottom line in terms of quality. For example, when the painter Isack van Duijnen was confronted with a buyer who believed he had just bought a good picture by Van Duijnen, the painter reputedly replied, ‘that is not by me, but by one of my humblest pupils, I pity you, for you have been deceived. Broekman [the dealer] bought it from me for five guilders and I do not want to pass it off as a painting by me’. As we have seen in chapter 2, Jacob van Ruisdael suggested in a notarial deed from 1661 that a certain amount of input by others would be acceptable in a work sold under Porcellis’s name but also that there was a definitive bottom line, stating that ‘it would be inapt to sell [a

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51 De Pauw-de Veen 1969, 107-111.
52 The attributions and taxations in this inventory are done by the painter Ferdinand Bol and the dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh. See Bredius 1915-1921, vol. 1, 425. See also, for another example, note 45 above.
53 ‘dat is van mij niet, maer van een van mijn slechtste discupels, ick beclaeg je, u bent bedrogen. Broekman heeft het van mij gecocht voor vijff guldens en ick wil dat voor mijn schilderij niet laten gaan’. Bredius 1891, 148-149; Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 28 (dated 1676).
particular painting] as a Porcellis’. Together with the other painters who were consulted in this attribution issue, Van Ruisdael eventually concluded that the picture was simply ‘not worthy to be sold ... as a piece by Porcellis’.

In a work contract drawn up in 1648 for the prolific painter Jacob Jordaens, this line of thought is explained even more explicitly. Jordaens was to produce 35 ceiling paintings for the Swedish court, which would be painted ‘partly by himself and partly by others, as Jordaens can most aptly judge himself. And that which will be painted by others, he is obliged to paint over to such an extent that it will be considered Jordaens’ own work and therefore be entitled to bear his name and signature.’ Another example involves the Rotterdam painter Johannes van Vucht, who agreed in 1635 to deliver paintings which ‘will be allowed to pass as work by Van Vucht, such as he has previously delivered to [the art dealer] Van Waesberge, and signed with his own hand’. Similar statements can be found in a variety of commissions drawn up throughout Europe, such as a commission given to the Italian sculptor Bernini by the French minister of State Colbert on 9 December 1669. Bernini was to use students from the newly founded French Academy in Rome to execute an equestrian statue of King Louis XIV. But Bernini had to execute the head himself and apply the final touches so that ‘one

54 ‘Verclaert Jacob van Ruisdael, dat bij aldien den voorsz. Parcellus het voorsz. stuck schilderije begonnen heeft, dat hij oordeelt hetselve tegenwoordig sodanich is toegestelt, dat het onbequam is om voor een stuck van Parcellus geleverd [te worden].’ Bredius 1888a, 21-24; Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 24.
55 ‘Verclaren sij getuygen noch al t’zamen t’oordelen dat dienvolgende het voorsz. stuck schilderij niet waerdich is voor een stuck van Parcellus gecocht en geleverd te werden.’ Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 24.
56 ‘... well ende curieuslijck ten deele zelffs te schilderen ende ten deele door andere, sooals het bequamst door hem Jordaens goet gevonden sal worden. Ende ‘t gene door andere geschildert sal wesen blijft hij gehouden zoo te overschilderen, dat het voor zijn signors Jordaens eygen werck gehouden sal worden ende oversulckx zijnen naem ende teecckininge daer onder stellen.’ Antwerp, City Archives, not. H. van Cantelbeck Jr, NA 3399, dated. 21 April 1648; Van den Branden 1883, 828; d’Hulst 1982, 30. Van der Veen 2005, 13-14. Jordaens explained his workshop practice himself in similar terms. Rooses 1906, 139. Since Jaap van der Veen assumes that well-to-do buyers had a preference for autograph paintings, he believes that Jordaens’ workshop practice may have been shocking to the buyers. However, the documents give no reason for this assumption. on the contrary, the statement that Jordaens himself could judge most aptly how to use his assistants indicates that the patron had faith in Jordaens’ judgement and the resulting quality of the work.
57 ‘... sullen vor hem Van Vuchts werck mogen passeeren, te weten soodaenich als hij aen hem Van Waesberge voor desen heeft geleverd ende met sijn eygen hant geteekent’. Van Rijsewijk 1891, 43. See also Van der Veen 2005, 13.
can say with truth that the work is entirely by you’. Similarly, Rubens used the phrase ‘by my hand’ to describe works which he had not painted entirely by himself, as we will see.

Phrases such as ‘the master’s own work’ or work ‘by his hand’ thus denoted a specific level of quality. The drawing of the line between a work that could count as by the master's hand, worthy of carrying the master’s signature, and one identified as by a pupil and/or as retouched by the master must have depended on the individual master and his personal judgement. It is very rare that we can identify a painting that is listed in a seventeenth-century document as by an anonymous ‘pupil’ and/or as retouched by the master. However, the little available evidence suggests that works described as by a ‘pupil’ and/or as ‘retouched’ must have differed noticeably from the master’s usual level of quality.

This can be deduced from statements in contracts and notarial deeds explaining that if a work was retouched enough, it could be considered as by the master, such as the above-cited examples of Jordaens and Van Vucht illustrate. Thus, if a work was explicitly identified as ‘retouched’, it must have been a cheaper kind of picture. Rubens, for example, sold retouched student copies for cheaper prices than his higher quality pictures. As he explained in a letter to the British collector Dudley Carleton, ‘well-retouched copies … show more for their price’. The mention of six retouched paintings in Rembrandt’s inventory of 1656 (drawn up during the master’s lifetime) suggests that Rembrandt also produced cheaper pictures.

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58 ‘... et y mettre la dernier main, en sorte que l’on puisse dire avec vérité que tout cet ouvrage sera de vous.’ Letter from Colbert to Bernini, 9 December 1669, cited in Wittkower 1961, 521 (Doc. 23). See also Spear 1989, 98.
59 See below ‘Further Distinctions: A Preference for Autograph Pictures?’.
60 Rooses/Ruelens (eds.) 1887-1909, vol. 2, 149 (letter CLXVIII): ‘... copie en ritocci … luçono piu per il lor prezzo’. See also above chapter 2.
61 Strauss et al. 1979, Doc. 1656/12, nos. 25, 27, 28, 33, 295 and 301; for another early mention of a retouched Rembrandt, see Van der Veen 1998, . Two pictures carrying inscriptions indicating that they were retouched by Rembrandt suggest that such works were indeed quite different from pictures worthy of the master’s name: Head of a Boy, Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. A2391 (the now illegible inscription was once read as ‘Rembrandt geretuecer … [naar?] Lieve… [i.e.: Lievens]’) and The Sacrifice of Isaac, Alte Pinakothek, Munich [inscribed: ‘Rembrandt, verandert. En over geschildert’]. Admittedly, the attribution of both these pictures remains an issue of debate, and no works sold under the name of a ‘pupil’ in the seventeenth century have been definitively identified. However, if these works are in any way illustrative, the quality of ‘pupil work’ must have been rather poor. In fact, these works look so little like accepted Rembrandts that some scholars doubted whether Rembrandt had touched them at all. See Bruyn et al. 1982, vol 3, no. A108; Tümpel et al. 1991, no. 9; Royalton-Kisch 1989; Hubert von Sonnenburg reputedly recognised retouches in the Munich painting. See Van der Veen 2005, 25, note 136.
As to works by pupils, the terms used in such descriptions seem telling: ‘leerling’ or ‘discipul’.

These names denoted pupils training with their first or second masters. Although the term ‘discipul’ seems to have indicated a more advanced student than the term ‘leerling’, the use of these terms seems to have varied. For example, an elaborate draft statute of the Haarlem painter’s guild, dated 1631, uses the terms ‘leerling’ and ‘discipul’ interchangeably to refer to pupils in their first three years of training, and it distinguishes them sharply from paid assistants or journeymen (in Dutch ‘werckgesel’ or ‘vrije gast’). In order to become an independent master, one had to work at least three years as a pupil (‘leerling’ or ‘discipul’) and subsequently at least one year as journeyman ‘werckgesel’ or ‘vrije gast’) for a master, according to this draft statute.

Interestingly, no seventeenth-century document lists a painting as by a ‘gesel’ or paid assistant of a certain master painter, which suggests to me that their share in the studio production must have commonly counted as ‘by the master’ as long as it was done in the master’s style. In some instances, these journeymen or paid assistants even worked quite independently, creating works of their own invention and signing these with their own names. In Haarlem, this was not uncommon; Judith Leyster and Pieter de Grebber signed and dated paintings before they became independent masters. As master painters had to pay the guild a much higher fee for having journeymen (paid assistants) than for having pupils in the studio, it seems unlikely that they would have sold a journeyman’s work as by a ‘werckgesel’ or ‘vrije gast’.

To conclude, the seventeenth-century distinction between works that could pass as by a certain master and those ascribed to usually nameless ‘pupils’ of his cannot be equated to the present-day tendency to separate purely autograph paintings from works which were partially or entirely done by pupils and assistants. Although it may not be possible to reconstruct exactly where a seventeenth-century master would have drawn the line, the quality of ‘pupil work’ must have contrasted with the usual quality of pictures sold under the master’s name.

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63 Obreen (ed.) 1877-1878, vol. 1, 222-293, esp. stipulations 3, 239-240, and 6, 243-244.
64 Goosens 2001, 89-90.
65 Obreen (ed.) 1877-1878, 73.
Further Distinctions: a Preference for Autograph Pictures?

The fact that various types of studio collaborations – though certainly not all studio products – could leave the studio under the master’s name raises the question of the value enjoyed by these works. Did master painters make further quality distinctions? To what extent were contemporary buyers aware of the different types of studio collaboration? Did painters keep their working methods a secret, or were they relatively open about their practices? And is there any evidence that painters or buyers had a special interest in autograph works done by the master alone, or was the master’s name merely a guarantee of a certain involvement and quality?

As with the exact type of studio collaboration, the openness of master painters about their studio practices must have varied from one master to the next. And although some connoisseurs were able to confidently recognise the master’s hand (see below), certainly not all buyers had such a keen eye. Some, in fact, did not realise that a signed work was not necessarily painted by the master himself. A curious document in the Delft archive illustrates such a misunderstanding. In 1644, a certain Sybert Dogger, the owner of a painting signed by Willem van Aelst, claimed in an official bet that his picture was by the master and referred to the signature to prove his point. He was challenged by Adam Pick, a little-known painter of farm scenes, who stated he could demonstrate that, despite the signature, the work was not painted by Van Aelst and that the latter had not even touched it. Interestingly, Dogger seems unaware of the possibility that master painters could sign works that they had not (entirely) executed by themselves and that signatures could even be falsified. Pick, on the other hand, who had himself been a pupil of Van Aelst, was clearly not impressed by the signature.

Four legal statements that Jaap van der Veen gathered address the question of whether a certain picture was executed entirely by the master. 67 In a


67 Van der Veen, Docs. 1, 4, 19, and 22. Two other documents simply state that certain pictures were done ‘by the own hands’ of Hendrick van Steenwijk and Pouwels [Paulus] Bril (Docs. 5 and
document dated 1606, a certain Mr. van Leeuwen declared he would provide two ‘originals’ (principale stukken), one by Abraham Bloemaert and one by Gillis van Coninxloo, and that ‘no one but the aforementioned two masters had worked on the aforementioned pieces’. Also, Ambrosius Bosschaert declared in 1615 that he had created a flower still life entirely by his own hand ‘without having anyone else contribute with their hand or work on it’. Similarly, Jan Miense Molenaer declared in 1653 that two paintings, a peasant scene and one with a stone surgeon, had been made by him ‘without anyone else having contributed something to these’. Lastly, in a document dated 1658, two witnesses declared that Bartholomeus van der Helst had stated that he had painted a certain picture of Diana and that it was an original, not a copy. When he was subsequently asked if anyone else had contributed to the piece, he shook his head.

While Van der Helst may have been lying – since he only shook his head, he could always say that he had never actually said no – these sources are nonetheless revealing. These documents indicate that it was not self-evident that a work signed and sold as by a certain master was indeed entirely executed by that master. They also suggest that at least some painters deliberately created autograph works, and in doing so, provided both seventeenth-century buyers and present-day connoisseurs with the certainty that some of their works were executed solely by their own hand. Moreover, at least four owners were so keen on proving that their work was indeed by a specific master that they demanded a written guarantee, an ‘expert-opinion’ or ‘Gutachtung’ avant-la-lettre.

As to the manner in which painters presented their pictures when selling them to customers, very little is known. One unique exception is the correspondence between Peter Paul Rubens and the British ambassador to the Netherlands, Sir Dudley Carleton. In exchange for Carleton’s collection of antique sculptures, Rubens offered him a choice of a number of ‘paintings by my hand’, which he had available in his studio, in such a way that the total value of the

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68 ‘Hendrick van Leeuwen belooffde te leveren voor principale stukken […] ende gemaeckt te zijn ‘t eene van Bloemaert tot Utrecht ende ‘t ander van Coninxloo, sonder ymanden anders als d’voorsz. twee meesters aen de voorsz. twee stucken hebben gearbeyt’.

69 ‘een blompot […] met sijn eygen hant gemaect heeft, sonder datter yemant anders de hant aen gehadt ofte geweret heeft.’

70 ‘sonder dat bij ymant anders daeraen iets is gedaen.’
pictures would match that of the antique sculptures.\footnote{In the letter Rubens refers to all the paintings in the list as ‘delle pitture de mia mano qui da basso nominate’, which means that all works mentioned were to be considered as by Rubens’ hand, that is, the master’s own work. He subsequently makes further distinctions in quality. See Rosenberg (ed.) 1881, 42 ff, esp. 43-44.} As Carleton did not have the opportunity to see the paintings for himself, Rubens described the pictures fairly extensively in a letter dated 28 April 1618. Although all of the pictures counted as by Rubens’ hand, they were not literally painted solely by him. In fact, Rubens distinguished five different types of studio products: ‘originals’ by his hand, ‘originals’ by his hand with a contribution by a specialist (an animal by Snyders or a landscape by an unidentified landscape specialist\footnote{The fact that Rubens does not mention this specialist’s name (see also letter of 28 May 1618, quoted below) suggests that he was not a master painter but rather a ‘gesel’ or paid assistant.}, copies by pupils after his own work that he retouched, one unfinished copy by a pupil that Rubens promised to finish so well that it would count as an original by his hand, and lastly, works started by pupils and retouched by Rubens.

Interestingly, the copies and works begun by pupils that were subsequently reworked by the master do not differ significantly in price from originals by Rubens’ hand. For example, a single-figure 4 x 7 foot painting of Saint Sebastian by Rubens was the same price of 300 guilders as a single-figure 5 x 7 foot painting of Susanna, which was started by a pupil and retouched by Rubens. A worked-up copy of a Lion Hunt (8 x 11 feet) carried the same 600 guilder price as a slightly larger original painting of Daniel in the Lion’s Den by the master himself (8 x 12 feet). Because we can only identify the last work, it is hard to explain this remarkable price difference; perhaps the picture of the hunt contained more figures. In general, the relatively similar prices indicate that Rubens considered all these works to be of good quality - worthy of carrying his name and the stipulation ‘by my hand’.

Carleton subsequently chose works Rubens described as by his own hand and the ones he did with specialists.\footnote{Unfortunately, one of these works, a Crucifix described by Rubens as ‘perhaps the best thing I ever made’ (forse la meglio cosa chio facessi giama), turned out to be too large for Carleton’s house; he therefore removed it from his selection. See Rosenberg (ed.), 1881, 44.} For this reason, the correspondence between Carleton and Rubens has been interpreted as unique evidence that at least one affluent art lover had a preference for purely autograph originals.\footnote{De Jongh 1990; Van de Wetering 1993b, 628; Van der Veen 2005, 7.} However, it seems more accurate to state that among the works that could considered as as by Rubens’ hand, Carleton picked the works of the highest quality, regardless of whether these were entirely by Rubens’ hand. Carleton did not seem to mind the hand of another master or a specialist assistant; he picked a
painting of Prometheus with an eagle by the animal specialist Snyders, as well as a
painting of leopards with a landscape by an unnamed specialist. Moreover, he did
not protest when Rubens let him know that his landscape specialist had worked
up parts of several pictures that the master had described as purely by his own
hand: ‘According to my habit, I have taken a specialist gentleman to finish the
landscapes only to increase the taste of Your Excellency, but in the other parts,
please be assured that I have not allowed a living soul to touch these works’,
wrote Rubens on 28 May 1618.\textsuperscript{75} By that time, Carleton had also accepted a
worked-up copy (the \textit{Lion’s Hunt}) and a work started by a pupil (the \textit{Susanna}) as
part of the exchange, after Rubens promised he would retouch them so
extensively that they would have the same ‘quality’ (\textit{bontà}) as originals by his
hand.\textsuperscript{76}

When describing the various pictures to Carleton, Rubens indicated subtle
gradations in quality and price among works all described as ‘by his hand’. As to
what extent other masters differentiated between pictures they sold under their
own names, much research remains to be done. It seems likely, however, that
master painters who collaborated with pupils and / or assistants in various ways,
like Jordaens and Van Miereveld, would have made similar price and quality
distinctions. Interestingly, one such master, Gerrit van Honthorst, seems to have
indicated variations in the quality of his paintings by altering his signature.

**Quality Distinctions Reflected in the Signature**

In the paintings Gerrit van Honthorst produced for the Oranjezaal in Huis ten
Bosch, he used two distinct signatures: his name ‘GvHonthorst’ and
‘GvHonthorts fe[cit]’, the latter reads in Latin ‘made by Gerrit van Honthorst’.
(figs. 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6) Jolanda de Bruijn, who extensively researched three of the
five works which Honthorst was commissioned to execute for the Oranjezaal,
\textit{Allegory on the Marriage of Frederick Henry and Amalia van Solms, William II’s Reception of
Mary Stuart upon her Arrival in the Netherlands, and Frederick Henry’s Steadfastness},
noticed distinct differences in execution in these three pictures. She considered
\textit{Frederick Henry’s Steadfastness}, signed with the longer signature, to be more skilfully
and efficiently executed than the other two works: the figures were well-rounded

\textsuperscript{75} ‘Ho preso secondo il mio solito un valenthuomo nel suo mestiere a finere li paesaggi solo per
aumentar il gusto di V.E. ma nel resto la sia sicura ch’io non ho permesso animo vivente vi metta
la mano’. See Rubens’ letter dated 28 May 1618 in Rosenberg (ed.) 1881, 49.

\textsuperscript{76} Rosenberg (ed.) 1881, 46; see also p. 45 where Rubens explains that the works he had described
are not ‘simple copies’, referring to the price as an indication of their quality.
and showed subtle gradations in skin colour, including a bluish middle tone, that were largely lacking in the other works. She thus speculated that the signature ‘GvHonthorst’ indicated studio products of lesser quality than the painting signed ‘GvHonthorst fc[icit]’. While the master must have obviously thought the pictures worthy of carrying his name in both instances, he seemed much more closely involved in the execution of the work signed with the longer signature.

Although the most recent oeuvre catalogue does not distinguish various levels of quality among the pictures attributed to Honthorst, the articulation of these differences seems a worthwhile pursuit. Out of the 295 history paintings and pastoral scenes labelled authentic, 31 carry the longer ‘GvHonthorst fc[icit]’ signature, including some of his most famous masterpieces, such as his Saint Sebastian (National Gallery, London) and the Merry Fiddler (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). If authentic, these signatures certainly are worthy of further study. Interestingly, only about 14 of the 224 portraits attributed to Honthorst in the catalogue carry the ‘GvHonthorst fc[icit]’ signature, which could possibly mean that the master was less closely involved with many portraits produced in his studio.

While Honthorst’s practice may seem rather curious at first, an anecdote which was mentioned by several seventeenth-century art theorists, explains it. Already in antiquity, artists reputedly used their signature to indicate distinct variations in quality. According to the ancient writer Pliny, some of the most famous painters and sculptors had inscribed the majority of their works with a signature disclaiming finality, such as 'Apelles faciebat' (being made by Apelles) or simply 'Polycitus'. Reputedly, they did so out of modesty to indicate that these

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77 Interestingly, she also noticed strong differences in execution between the two works signed with simply Honthorst’s name. See De Bruijn 2001, 63-111. While De Bruijn believed the 'Honthorst fc[icit]' signature indicated entirely autograph works, more recent research of his paintings in the Oranjezaal makes this very unlikely. See the entries on the six Van Honthorst paintings by Margriet van Eikema Hommes, Lidwien Speleers and Jolanda de Bruijn, as well as the chapter "The painting technique of the twelve painters in the Oranjezaal' by Margriet van Eikema Hommes and Lidwien Speleers, in the forthcoming book on the Oranjezaal, edited by the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), The Hague 2010.


79 Judson/Ekkart 1999, cat. nos. 11, 23, 76, 85, 99, 109, 120, 122, 137, 142, 143, 145, 171, 189, 192, 193, 208, 211, 215, 221, 222, 229, 236, 240, 241, 242, 249, 253, 255, 275 and 276. Please note that not all pictures discussed in the catalogue could be traced by the authors; therefore, some paintings could not be properly studied.

80 Judson/Ekkart 1999, cat. nos. 303, 307, 309, 332, 338, 401, 407, 422, 455, 458, 471, 495, 497 and 508. As with the history paintings and pastoral scenes, not all portraits could be studied by the authors in person.
artworks were not finished. Moreover, it gave them a means by which they could save face, should one such work be criticized. They could claim they would have made a desired correction if only the work had not been taken from them by forces beyond their control. According to Pliny, only three artworks were known to carry a signature implying completion ('X fecit', 'Made by X'), testifying to the supreme confidence the artists had in these particular pieces.  

In the seventeenth century, this story was recounted by Karel van Mander, Etienne Binet, Franciscus Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten among others.  

Thus far, the signing habits of seventeenth-century Netherlandish painters have not been studied in relation to this story. Netherlandish painters all regularly used Latin phrases when signing their works, and many of them probably realised the connotations of the different Latin terms. In the case of Honthorst, his signing habits match the art theoretical account so literally that he must have known the story. Other painters who signed both with and without the addition ‘fecit’ include Karel van Mander, Hendrick ter Brugghen and David Teniers the Younger. It would be interesting to know to what extent exactly these and other painters (especially those heading larger workshops) used specific signatures to distinguish between various grades of quality in their paintings and how price would have reflected such distinctions. Also, could the addition of ‘f’ after the artist’s name, commonly interpreted as an abbreviation of ‘fecit’, also stand for ‘faciebat’, and indicate a deliberate attempt by the painter to not identify his evaluation of the work’s degree of completion?

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81 C. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, c. 77 A.D., Praef. 27: ‘quare plenum verecundiae illud, quod omnia opera tamquam novissima inscripsere et tamquam singulis fato adempti. tria non amplius, ut opinor, absolute traduntur inscripta ILLE FECIT, quae suis locis reddam. quo apparuit summam artis securitatem auctori placuisse, et ob id magna invidia fuere omnia ea.’

82 Van Mander 1604, fol. 80r; Binet 1621 [ed. 1987], 353; Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 36. Junius also refers to Poliziano – *Observationes et Emendationes* – who refers in turn to Giovanni Lorenzi da Venezia, an antiquarian who states that several such formulations of completion are extant; see Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 44. See also Van Hoogstraten 1678, 320.

83 Marten Jan Bok kindly informed me that Hendrick Terbrugghen may have also used his signature to distinguish between various levels of quality, see also figs 2.4 & 2.5 (previous chapter). The signing habits of Karel van Mander and David Teniers the Younger have not yet been studied to my knowledge, but examples of signatures with and without the addition ‘fecit’ can be found in Klinge (ed.) 1991 and Köhler et al. (eds.) 2006, esp. nos. 296-299.
Seventeenth-Century Insights as to Attributing Pictures

Studio practices and signing habits are crucial when trying to recognise the master’s hand and to attribute seventeenth-century pictures. Various seventeenth-century sources on connoisseurship throw further light on contemporary ideas about authenticity, for they give an impression of seventeenth-century attribution practices, thereby helping to answer the question of whether these early connoisseurs faced the same problems that we face today. What elements did they consider particularly revealing? How did seventeenth-century connoisseurs go about attributing paintings that were not necessarily painted by the master alone? Were they able to distinguish between different hands within a painting? And did they care to distinguish workshop assistance?

Manner

Although the design of paintings could be of great importance when attributing works, many recommendations in the early literature on connoisseurship focus on the execution.\(^84\) As mentioned in chapter 2, most early writers on connoisseurship believed that a painter’s characteristic manner could best be recognised in areas executed with a certain boldness and resolution. Such areas were seen as particularly hard to imitate, which also explained why paintings done in a bold or free manner were more easily distinguished from copies than pictures done in a very precise and fine manner. As a general rule, the painter’s characteristic handwriting was to be found in those passages in which the painter did not follow nature too closely but relied more on his imagination and inborn talents. As we have seen, Giulio Mancini believed that locks of hair, ringlets in beards, the definition of eyes as well as confidently applied light and dark accents in the folds and highlights of drapery were all good examples of areas where the master’s manner and resolution could be recognised.

(fig. 3.7 Jan Steen, *So de Oude Songen, Pijpen de Jonge* (detail of the drapery), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam – Mancini himself did not give a specific example of these confident drapery folds, however, his analysis seems applicable to the execution of drapery in Jan Steen’s paintings, particularly the characteristic accents that Van Dantzig labelled the ‘mussel stroke’.)

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\(^84\) Roger de Piles, for example, distinguishes between the ‘character of the hand’ and the ‘character of the mind’ for which one could look in a picture. According to one of the protagonists in his *Conversations*, the first approach was useful but rather superficial. De Piles 1677, 10-11.
As mentioned before, Karel van Mander had been even more explicit. In his view, a painter’s characteristic ‘spirit’ (gheest) could best be recognised in the depiction of ‘leaves, hair, air and draperies’ (bladen, hayr, locht, en laken). He specified that draperies, in particular, reflected an artist’s inventiveness – presumably because they allowed the painter the greatest freedom of invention and execution, as they can be depicted in an endless variety of shapes, textures and colours.85

When Van Mander discussed the uniqueness of an artist’s manner of painting,86 he indeed frequently focussed on characteristic details such as the depiction of hair and drapery. For example, when comparing Lucas van Leyden’s prints to similar works by Dürer, Van Mander observes that Lucas van Leyden had ‘a different, sweeter, more continuous manner of incision with which he depicted his receding and flowing drapery’.87 (compare figs. 3.8 and 3.9)

Moreover, when discussing Holbein, Van Mander notes that the painter had a certain ‘firmness in drafting and painting’ which one can see in all his works and an orderly way of building up his paintings that was ‘very different from other painters’. He explained this by pointing out how Holbein depicted hair or a beard. He would first paint the area in general terms with perfectly accurate shadows, and once this layer was dry, he would paint the hairs or beard in a very natural manner over it with a free-flowing brush.88 (fig. 3.10)

As to the depiction of leaves, Van Mander praises Cornelis van Molenaer for having a ‘more beautiful and painterly manner of depicting leaves’ than any other artist he knew.89 In this context, it is important to realise that in Van

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85 Van Mander 1604, fol. 43r: ‘Doch is Laken meer als loof, hayr, oft baerdren, / Een gheestich soecken, jae versierich vinden, / Met een aerdich vatten, schorten en binden.’
86 This was not the prime purpose of Van Mander’s book; in fact, the first and foremost aim was to elevate the status of painting as a liberal art. It was written for both young painters and art lovers. It is certainly not a manual for aspiring connoisseurs, although some passages in the treatise are nonetheless very revealing in this respect.
87 Van Mander 1604, fol. 212r: ‘Men siet oock in Lucas dinghen ... een ander soeter eenparige handelinghe van snede, daer zijn drijvende en vloeyende lakenen soo verstandich, als constich mede zijn uytgebeeldt, als men doet in ander van zijnen tijt, ghelijck ick achte my de verstandighe sullen toestemmen.’
88 Van Mander 1604, fol. 223v: ‘Desen uytnemenden Holbeen hadde in alle zijn wercken en handelinghe een seker vasticheyt in stellen, en schilderen, zijn dinghen al by order aenlegghende, en op doende, veel anders als ander Schilders: ghelijck onder ander, waer baerdts oft hayr over te comen hadde, schilderde hy doch volcomelijck alsoot te wesen hadde, de schaduwen daer in recht waernemende, en maekte als het droogh was baerdts oft hayr seer vloeyende en natuurlijck daer over.’
89 Van Mander 1604, fol. 206v: ‘so sie ick van niemant frayer, en schilderachtiger slach van bladen als van hem.’
Mander’s time, Netherlandish painters did not typically base their depictions of trees on close observation of them in nature but preferred to invent a manner that would convincingly evoke nature.\footnote{In printmaking, it was not until the early seventeenth century that an artist developed a keen interest in botanical accuracy. Johannes Brosterhuizen’s etchings of trees are the first in which specific species can be identified. Leeflang 2004, 24-29.}

Having a convincing manner and corresponding technique to suggest leaves in paint remained important throughout the century; compare, for example, Jacob van Ruisdael’s hallmark dense foliage with Meindert Hobbema’s airy depiction of leaves, often silhouetted against the sky (fig. 3.11). However, very few painters (Jacob van Ruisdael being one of the exceptions) combined their specific manner with botanical accuracy. (fig. 3.12)

By the mid-seventeenth century, Van Mander’s observation that a painter’s characteristic spirit could readily be recognised in the depiction of leaves was fairly widespread knowledge, as revealed in Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy’s dictionary of painting terms, which lists ‘the touch of trees’ (\textit{de slag van bomen}): ‘One says that the trees in this landscape have been depicted with a very recognisable touch, or this Painter hits his trees well.’\footnote{In the Dutch translation: ‘De Slag van bomen / Men zegt de bomen van dit Landschap zyn zeer onderscheidentlyk getoest, of deeze Schilder slaat zeer wel zyn bomen.’ Du Fresnoy c. 1647 [ed. 1722], 29.} Also, Van Mander’s observation that the depiction of hair, skies and drapery revealed a painter’s spirit was repeated by Samuel van Hoogstraten in 1678.\footnote{Van Hoogstraten cites a rhyme: ‘De rechte zwier komt uit den geest alleen, / Van aerdich hair, gewolkte, en losse kleën.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 229.}

Nonetheless, the insights into which elements were ‘telling’ varied from one author to the next. For example, Cornelis de Bie believed that light and dark accents in the paintings of Gerard van Honthorst were particularly ‘spirited’ (\textit{gheestig}), while Paul Fréart de Chantelou recorded in his diary that Bernini believed that the depictions of hands were especially revealing.\footnote{De Bie 1661, 164, on Gerard van Honthorst ‘Soo gheestich is zijn Const gehiedept en uyt ghebooght’. De Bie’s remark is reminiscent of Mancini’s suggestion that confidently applied light and dark accents in the depiction of drapery can be particularly revealing; on Bernini’s remark see also above chapter 2, ‘A Crucial Distinction’. A similar suggestion to look particularly at the execution of hands can be found in Enea Vico’s treatise on coins of 1555; see Muller 1989, 142.} However, all these characteristics seem to have one common denominator: an inventive and resolute execution.
The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship

So far, the elements described as important are those which show distinctly individual brushstrokes. Indeed, much like handwriting specialists who look for resolute turns and curves in freehand writing, aspiring connoisseurs were advised to look for characteristic habits of the brush. 94 This practice of singling out the individual handwriting of the painter seems to be in sharp contrast with what is known about seventeenth-century studio practices. For how can the practice of singling out individual hands be reconciled with the habit of master painters to sign works that they had not necessarily executed by themselves? It is this seeming contradiction that I call the paradox of seventeenth-century connoisseurship.

While some of the abovementioned advice suggests that at least some early modern connoisseurs were looking primarily for individual habits of the brush and thus for individual hands, there is reason to believe that their thinking was, in fact, not necessarily at odds with contemporary studio practice. Their search for the master’s characteristic touch did not necessarily mean they were looking for purely autograph works. In my opinion, two passages in Junius and Hoogstraten’s treatises are particularly illuminating in this respect. Although both authors have been mentioned before in relation to seventeenth-century studio practices, these passages have not yet been studied in this context. When discussing how a knowledgeable art lover should look at a painting, Junius stresses the fact that not all of the elements in a painting were equally important. He therefore advises his readers not to pay undue attention to unimportant areas, to the mere ‘byworke’ or ‘parerga’ as they were called in Latin, ‘because the Artificers goe over these workes slightly and with a light hand, so it is that we doe likewise for the most part examine them more negligently’. 95

Some forty years later, Samuel van Hoogstraten repeated Junius’ warning and used his practical experience as a painter to clarify the reasoning: ‘It is certainly amusing to listen in when sometimes ignorant yet conceited art lovers, wanting to point out the best part of a certain piece, pick out something so ordinary, which the Master executed practically in his sleep, or at least while he was resting from his more important tasks. The ancients saw these as excesses or

94 The comparison with handwriting was already much in use in early modern times; see, for example, Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 134; and Du Bos 1719 [ed. 1993], 297.
95 Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 310. Earlier, Mancini had stated that when observing a painting one should start with the main figures and only afterwards look at the less important figures. See Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 135 ff & 329.
extras to the important tasks, and they called these *Parerga*; in the works of great Masters these are usually done by pupils and novices, or by some others, who were able to create these."96 According to Van Hoogstraten, the workshop practice should thus be taken into account when looking at a painting; erudite art lovers (connoisseurs) should focus on the masterly passages, not on the subsidiary work.

Contrary to Junius, however, Samuel van Hoogstraten had first-hand experience as a painter. He had trained with Rembrandt, and it is tempting to think that his treatise, which often reflects views he overheard in Rembrandt’s studio, also does so in terms of his discussion of *parerga*. His statement that all great masters used assistance in their work is, in any case, revealing. It was a practice that Hoogstraten condoned, as he also stresses elsewhere: ‘I will gladly allow a master to use the assistance of others, who are experienced in ‘subordinate passages (bywerk)’ in major works; but he who wants to rightfully carry the name of Master of History Painting should also know how to do the ‘subordinate passages (bywerk)’ [himself] in case this is urgently needed.’97

The distinction between masterly and subordinate passages is, in my opinion, very important. Interestingly, the passages that were labelled by the early art theorists as particularly telling when trying to attribute a picture parallel what was seen as ‘masterly’ and ‘difficult’, as we will see below. Although the specific areas that the art theorists singled out as illustrative could also refer to secondary passages – in particular, leaves and draperies were not necessarily key elements in a seventeenth-century painting – their description of how to recognise a master’s characteristic style suggests that such elements were considered important only if executed soundly. In the history paintings that Rubens sent to Carleton, for example, the figures, not the background landscapes, were key elements. I suspect it was for this reason that he had his landscape specialist (probably a paid assistant, since he is not mentioned by name) finish these secondary passages,

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96 ‘Zeker ’t is onvermakelijk te hooren, als somtijds onweetende, doch verwaende liefhebbers, het beste deel in eenich stuk willende aanwijzen, iets zoo gemeens uitpikken, dat by den Meester schier als slapende, of ten minsten van zijn voornaemen arbeyt rustende, gemaekt is. Deeze dingen zijn by de ouden als overmaet of toegift tot het voornaemste werk geacht geweest, en werden van hen *Parerga* genoemd; en zijn by groote Meesters gemeenlijk door de hand van jongers en aenkomelingen, of van de geene, die daer een handwerk van konden, gemaekt.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 76.

97 ‘Ik zal gaerne toestaen, dat een meester in groote werken hulp van anderen nemen, die in bywerk geoeffent zijn: maer die met recht den naem van Meester in Historyen draegen wil, moet ook raet weten, als ’t nood doet, tot bywerk.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 72.
while assuring Carleton that the other (read: key) parts were entirely by himself.\(^98\)

In any case, it looks like seventeenth-century connoisseurs, contrary to later thinkers\(^99\), did not, in principle, judge all areas of a painting equally important. Instead, when analysing the brushwork, the art theorists and connoisseurs whose thoughts have come down to us all seem to have been looking for bold, resolute and spirited strokes, that is, for touches showing mastery.

_Masterly Passages_

In the art theoretical literature, a certain looseness and boldness in the execution of both sketches and finished paintings was associated with mastery. Willem Goeree, for example, explains in his 1668 treatise on the art of drawing that a finely executed drawing done in the ‘reusel’ technique (with parallel strokes placed immediately next to each other so as to create a uniform result) will not look ‘masterly’ (meesterlijk) unless it also contains some quickly and loosely applied accents.\(^100\) Even Philips Angel, who believed it was better for painters to imitate nature as closely as possible rather than to develop a manner of painting, still strongly praised the ‘curious looseness’ (curieuse lossecht) in the brushwork by his favourite painter, Gerard Dou.\(^101\)

Vasari and Van Mander described masterly applied loose strokes not only as difficult to execute, but also as difficult to imitate and, therefore, all the more characteristic of the artist who had created them. Van Hoogstraten also praised the difficulty and mastery evident in loosely executed masterpieces.\(^102\) In France, art lovers even called freely and loosely applied brushwork ‘artistically touched’ (artistement touché).\(^103\) The interest in loose brushwork is further underscored in the

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\(^98\) Interestingly, a contract drawn up for Rubens’s Medici cycle in Paris (dated 26 February 1622) stipulates that the master would ‘faire, parfaire et peindre de sa propre main toutes et chacunnes des figures’. The contract furthermore specifies that: ‘Aussy entend sa majesté ne recepvoir aucun tableau qui ne soist tout peint de la proper main dudict Rubens pour ce qui concerne les figures’. Rooses 1910, 218-220. See also Balis 2007, 36 and 49, note 90.

\(^99\) According to Hayden B. Maginnis, Giovanni Morelli’s most important contribution to connoisseurship was his emphasis on the execution of various details, which made experts focus not only on the key elements but on the entire picture. See Maginnis 1990, 104-117.

\(^100\) Goeree 1668, 47.

\(^101\) See Sluijter 1993 [ed. 2000], 244-258; and Angel 1642, 52.

\(^102\) Van Hoogstraten 1678, 27. According to Van Hoogstraten, ‘connoisseurs’ (kenders) also very much appreciate rough sketches.

\(^103\) Bosse1649, sommaire (with an explanation of different terms used). ‘Artiste & croquée’ is explained as roughly applied paint which looks unfinished from nearby and has been painted with
amount of terms used to indicate bold and resolute brushwork. Abraham Bosse, for example, uses no less than four different terms: ‘artistically touched, sketchy, forceful and proud’ (artiste, croqué, sevelt, and fier).\(^{104}\)

Together with the design of a picture, the accents that were applied while working up a painting after the main parts had been painted, were seen as some of the most difficult parts of the painting. This is evident, for example, in a passage from a 1621 French book on eloquence, which aims to give the reader a quick overview of the knowledge necessary to talk eloquently about art: ‘The profile, the gestures, the symmetries and proportions, the faces and expressions are those which give a sound to the brush and they are the principle elements in the entire enterprise. The inside is easy to make, but the profile, the last touches and the plasticity of the objects are difficult.’\(^{105}\) Abraham Bosse similarly stresses how the contours and light and dark areas are often hard to execute: ‘a large part of that which makes an element appear in the round and to move away from the viewer and seem to disappear, as well as the contours are all rather difficult to do well.’\(^{106}\)

It seems logical that master painters would execute such difficult areas single-handedly and that they would finish and retouch pictures which were (partly) done by pupils and assistants especially in these areas.\(^{107}\) Interestingly, it is exactly these features, the light and dark accents and final touches, which Mancini and De Bie singled out as particularly characteristic when describing a painter’s personal style, for these are areas where one can expect to see the master’s resolute handling of the brush.\(^{108}\) According to the painter and art theorist Arnold Houbraken, Frans Hals even had a habit of calling these final touches ‘the recognisable features of the master’ (het kennelyke van de meester).\(^{109}\)

\(^{104}\) Bosse 1649, sommaire. All these terms appear in the introduction and are explained throughout the treatise.

\(^{105}\) ‘Le pourfil, les gestes, les symmetries et proportions, mines et bonnes contenances sont celles qui donnent bruit au pinceau, et le point principal de tout cet Estat. Le dedans se fait aisément, mais le pourfil, les derniers traits et l’arrondissement de la besongne est mal-aisée.’ Binet 1621 [ed. 1987], 360. An explanation of what is understood by ‘contenance’ can be found under no. 9 on 359-360: ‘Donner contenances aux Images, et bonne mine, ouvrant la bouche, l’oeil, le ris, etc., Peindre l’esprit, les moeurs, les passions, etc.’

\(^{106}\) ‘une bonne partie de ce qui fait arrondir, tourner & fuir, ainsi que les contours est assez difficile à bien pratiquer ’ Bosse 1649, 57.

\(^{107}\) See above ‘Master, Pupil or ‘Retouched’ (on contracts Bernini & Jordaens).

\(^{108}\) On passages by Mancini and De Bie, see above ‘Manner’.

\(^{109}\) ‘Men zegt, dat hy [Hals] voor een gewoonte had, zyn Poutretten vet, en zachtzmelgende aan te leggen, en naderhand de penseeltoetsen daar in te brengen, zeggende: Nu moet ’er het kennelyke van den meester noch in.’ Houbraken 1718-1721, vol. I, 92. On the close connection made in art theory
In fact, it seems like the vocabulary of early modern connoisseurs was mostly geared towards discerning masterly elements in a painting, as in, for example, the terms which De Chambray described as typical of the connoisseurs of his day:

‘The Freshness and Loveliness of the Colouring, the Freedom of the brush, the bold Touches, the Colours thickly impasted and well nourished, the separation of the Masses, the Draperies well cast, the rare Folds, the Masterful Strokes, the Grand Manner, the Muscles strongly felt, the beautiful Contours, the beautiful Tints, and the Softness of the Flesh tones, the beautiful Groups, the beautiful Passages, and a great many other chimeries of this kind.’ (Roland Fréart de Chambray 1662). 110

The flesh tones – mentioned by De Chambray in connection with ‘softness’ – were also considered hard to paint. In France, there was even a specific expression for the depiction of flesh tones, as Etienne Binet explained in 1621. He writes, ‘The painter has a good touch, that is to say, he is good at depicting bare skin, that is to say, of the face, of the hands and of the feet, for the rest is clothed.’ 111 Not surprisingly, perhaps, in seventeenth-century portraits, the face and hands (areas of exposed flesh tones) were commonly painted by the master himself, while pupils and assistants occasionally helped with the secondary elements, such as the clothing and the background. 112

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111 ‘Le Peintre touche bien, c’est à dire, fait bien la carnation du nud, c’est à dire, de la face, de la main, du pied, car la reste est habillé.’ Binet 1621 [ed. 1687], 364. There are many other sources which discuss the flesh tone as particularly hard to depict; see Lehmann 1996; Sluijter2005.

112 Tummers 1995.
Beyond the Paradox

Although primary sources on seventeenth-century connoisseurship are relatively scarce and there is no reason to assume that all seventeenth-century connoisseurs would have agreed on the most telling elements for attributing pictures (if only because master painters’ studio practices and styles could vary considerably), the surviving sources seem coherent enough to formulate a hypothesis. I suspect that an awareness of contemporary studio practices made knowledgeable connoisseurs focus all the more on masterly aspects, that is, more on the main elements and the difficult and resolute brushwork than on the subsidiary work (‘bywerk’) and subordinate passages.\(^\text{113}\) Also, I suspect that this made the overall quality of the picture all the more important. As we have seen, a picture was worthy of carrying the master’s name if it was made under a master’s supervision and of high enough quality regardless of the purity of its execution. It is interesting how many sources on early attributions underscore this reasoning; witness, for example, the largest seventeenth-century controversy over attribution, the Uylenburgh case.

As discussed in chapter 2, the Amsterdam dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh had sold thirteen old 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. Subsequently, the paintings were returned to the Netherlands and toured the country while both Uylenburgh and Fromantiou collected expert opinions on the status of the pictures.

When asked whether the contested pictures were indeed done by the master under whose name they were sold, most painters and connoisseurs did not answer the question directly but instead stated that the pictures were either good or not good enough to be sold under the various master’s own names. For example, Philips Koninck reputedly responded that he thought the pictures were ‘painted with virtue and art’ and ‘worthy of carrying the names of the masters under whose names they were sold, and that they were estimated and judged to be

\(^{113}\) See above ‘Masterly Passages’.
so by unbiased connoisseurs of Italian art and painters. Dirck Santvoort and Anthonie de Grebber judged the pictures worthy of hanging in a cabinet of Italian pictures, while, on the other hand, the heads of the painters guild in The Hague considered the quality of the pictures ‘not worthy to carry the name of a good master, much less those of such exquisite masters as the ones under whose name they were sold’. Similarly, a number of Antwerp specialists believed the works were ‘not notable [enough] to be sold by such masters’.

Comparable comments can be found in other legal statements. For example, a picture in the manner of the still life painter Den Uyl the Elder was judged ‘not beautiful enough’ (niet fray genoech) to be by the master in 1650. Moreover, in the case of a painting in the manner of Porcellis, four painters, including Jacob van Ruisdael and Allart van Everdingen, concluded that the painting was not ‘worthy’ (waerdich) to be sold as a Porcellis.

These kinds of general quality assessments could also be explained by the possibility that the specialists involved did not have sufficient knowledge of the painter’s specific manner to produce a more accurate assessment. This may indeed have been true, especially in the Uylenburgh case, which concerned exclusively Italian pictures. But even if this was the case, this in itself would also be interesting. For, if it was in any way common to officially record opinions of painting specialists who did not necessarily know much about the specific manners of the painters under whose

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114 ‘deugtsaem en kunstich geschildert’; ‘datze de namen van de meesters daerse voor verkocht sijn waerdich sijn te dragen en van onpartijdige Italiaense kunstkenders en schilders daer voren behouden geestimeert ende gehouden te werden’, as quoted in Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 85.

115 Their opinion was shared by the painters Johanna van Aerssen van Wernhout, Caspar Netscher, Pieter Moninckx, Dirck Dalens, Johan von Sandrart, Johan Moninckx, Johan van Haensbergen, Martinus Mijtens, François van Santwijk and Daniel Haringh.


117 ‘niet considerabel sijnde om voor sulcken meesters verocht te worden’; quoted in Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 88.

118 Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 17c (dated 28 April 1650): ‘Doncker [=owner] seyde te sijn van den Den Uyl, waerop hij deposant vraeghende of het van den Ouden was, alsoo hij deposant [=Bleker, a connoisseur] daeraen twijffelde als zijnde niet fray genoech’.

119 ‘Verclaren sij getuygen noch al t’samen dat dienovolgende het voorsz. stuck schilderij niet waerdich is voor een stuck van Parcellus verocht en geleverd te werden.’ Bredius 1888a, 21-24; Van der Veen 2005, Doc. 24 (dated 9 June 1661).

120 Many Italian pictures were sold in the Netherlands, and collectors also owned more Italian pictures than may be found today in the Netherlands. It is often too easily assumed that there was little knowledge of Italian art in the Netherlands.
name contested works had been sold, then to these seventeenth-century viewers, quality apparently mattered much more than the specific recognition of the master’s hand. Interestingly, this is also the impression one gets from the high-end market for paintings in the second half of the seventeenth century. Both attributed and unattributed paintings fetched high prices. Apparently, the increased interest in painters’ names did not mean that the highest end of the market was exclusively reserved for attributed works.121

The interest in quality regardless of a painter’s name is also evident in a diary entry from Constantijn Huygens Jr., in which he described the art collection of the Elector of Brandenburg, which he saw in Berlin in 1680. One of the works he found noteworthy he described as ‘a good portrait of a woman by the master who made the two figures near a table in the collection of Mr. van Ommeren’.122 Apparently, Huygens thus memorised the characteristics of paintings he found interesting even without knowing the artist’s name.123

**Collaborations**

Although seventeenth-century connoisseurs were, in various cases, able to distinguish different hands within a certain painting, they did not always do so. The desire to identify individual hands seems to have been related to the type of collaboration evident in the picture. Recognising the input of two different masters in one painting was a very different matter from identifying anonymous studio assistants in a well-known master’s work.

In art theoretical treatises we can find various examples of paintings mentioned as by a certain master that were certainly not done solely by this painter. When Van Mander discusses the famous *Portrait of Pope Leo X with Two Cardinals* (c. 1518, Uffizi, Florence, see fig. 2.6) painted by Raphael with the aid of Giulio Romano, he repeats most of Vasari’s account yet fails to mention the input of Giulio Romano. In Vasari’s account, Giulio plays a key role since he is fooled by a copy of the portrait, thinking he recognised his own brushwork (though what it was exactly that he painted remains unclear). To Van Mander, however, Giulio’s involvement was apparently not worth mentioning, and he discusses the portrait simply as a ‘Raphael’.

121 See Jonckheere 2008b.
122 ‘un bon portrait de femme du maistre qui a fait les deux figures auprès dune table, qu’a Mr. van Ommeren’; see Huygens 1876-1888, vol. III, 35-38. See also Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 81.
123 Compare also the mention of two pictures by ‘a good Brabant master’ (*een goed Brabants meester*) in the inventory of the Leiden collector Hendrick Bugge van Ring, see note 43 above.
When discussing Holbein’s painting of *Henry VIII’s Barber Surgeons* (fig. 3.13), Van Mander’s reasoning becomes even more explicit. Van Mander observes that “There are some people who believe that this work has not been completed in its entirety by Holbein himself, but that after Holbein’s death it was completed by someone else. However, if this was the case, this painter has imitated Holbein’s “manner” (handelinghe) so “judiciously” (verstandig) that neither a Painter nor an Art expert would distinguish different hands.”

The attribution discussion that Van Mander (and later Von Sandrart also mentions) is very interesting for several reasons. It is often stated that early connoisseurship developed at a time when the practice of art collecting became more widespread and the art market flourished. And while this was certainly the case, it is important to remind oneself that this relation was not mutually exclusive that is, attributions and judgements of quality were not necessarily made in the context of the art market. Holbein’s picture in the Hall of the Barber Surgeons Guild was obviously not for sale, and its attribution or partial de-attribution was not a prelude to giving the work a price tag. The attribution of this large, prestigious work was an end in itself, an interesting topic for intellectual debate.

Van Mander’s conclusion is also revealing. Even if the picture is partly done by another hand, he writes, as long as it is well done he does not care to distinguish different hands and neither would, according to him, another painter or art expert. Unfortunately, it is hard to judge the brushwork in this painting since the work has been very heavily restored after it was severely damaged by the Great Fire of London in 1666. However, in this particular instance, we know for sure that the picture was finished after Holbein’s death in 1543, since two men depicted in the top row on the right, Mr. X. Salmon and Mr. W. Tully, only became wardens of the guild after Holbein had passed away.

The people who in Van Mander’s time stated that the work was finished after Holbein’s death were thus right. In my opinion, it is significant that the early seventeenth-century debate focused on a possible contribution to the work executed when the master himself could no longer supervise the work. Had the

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124 Van Mander 1604, fol. 222r: ‘Het zijn eenighe die meenen, dat dit werck by Holbeen self niet gheheel voldaen en is: maer dat nae zijn door, het ghene daer noch aen ghebrack van yemandt anders voleyndight soude wesen: doch indient soo waer, heeft den opmaker den Holbeens handelinghe soo verstandigh connen volghen, dat het geen Schilder noch Const-verstandighe van verscheyden handen en souden oordeelen.’

125 Von Sandrart 1675-1680 [ed. 1994], vol. 1, 250.

126 Von Sandrart states that if indeed part of the picture was completed after Holbein’s death, this part is done so well that it is hard distinguish see the previous note.

127 Rowlands 1985, 148-149 (cat. no. 78).
work been completed under Holbein’s supervision, I very much doubt there would have been any discussion at all.\textsuperscript{128}

Even though this work was completed after Holbein’s death, Van Mander believes that no one knowledgeable about the arts would have minded. A similar view can be found in Giulio Mancini’s \textit{Considerazioni}. When discussing quality in art, Mancini uses the \textit{Sala di Costantino} as an example of an exquisite Raphael painting.\textsuperscript{129} However, it was common knowledge at the time that this room had been largely completed after Raphael’s death, a fact that Vasari had discussed extensively in his \textit{Vite}.\textsuperscript{130} Mancini knew Vasari’s treatise very well, as he wrote a concise comment about it. Moreover, he worked as the personal physician to the Pope in the very building in which this fresco series can still be seen. In short, he must have been well aware of the execution process. But, in his view, a work done after Raphael’s designs by his own assistants could simply be called a ‘Raphael’.

Seventeenth-century connoisseurs were not necessarily against identifying studio input, especially if a picture produced in a master’s studio was not worthy of carrying the master’s name or if the relevant shares of execution by master and pupil could be relevant when differentiating between various quality levels.\textsuperscript{131} And if a certain pupil had executed a specific figure in a painting by his master, this might be worthy of mention. For example, when Van Mander discusses a painting by Maarten van Heemskerk, he somewhat casually mentions that ‘the angel is very strangely and richly decked out; the innermost layers of clothing are purple and these were done by Jacob Rauwert who lived with him [Van Heemskerk] at the time, as I have heard him say.’\textsuperscript{132} A curious contribution by an assistant could thus, in some instances, be noteworthy, but in general, seventeenth-century connoisseurs did not seem to be particularly interested in identifying studio input in great detail. The remarkable absence of descriptions of such collaborations in inventories, notarial deeds and personal writings suggests that connoisseurs did indeed examine subordinate passages ‘negligently’, as Junius and Hoogstraten advised.

\textsuperscript{128} In fact, John Rowlands thought that the execution of the work, even allowing for its present condition, suggests that Holbein employed a studio assistant extensively. Interestingly, neither Van Mander nor Von Sandrart discusses to what extent Holbein may have used assistance in this work when he was still alive.

\textsuperscript{129} Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 330.

\textsuperscript{130} Vasari/Milanesi 1878-1885, vol. 5, 527-531.

\textsuperscript{131} See the correspondence between Rubens and Dudley Carleton discussed above.

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Den Engel is seer vreemt en cierlijk toeghemaeckt: de onderste slippen zijn purperigh, welcke ghedaen zijn van \textit{Jacob Rauwert}, die op die tijdt by hem woonde, also ick hem wel heb hooren verhalen.’ Van Mander 1604, fol. 246r; the English translation is taken from Van Mander/Miedema 1994, vol. 2, 242.
As to recognising the hand of two different masters in one painting, this was a pursuit that already intrigued connoisseurs in the early seventeenth century. Especially in the Southern Netherlands, where specialist collaborations were widespread, the interest seems to have been considerable. For example, in Antwerp, roughly one percent of the attributions recorded in inventories between 1611 and 1650 concerned attributed collaborations, in a sample researched by Elizabeth Honig.\footnote{Honig 1995, 294-295; on the difference between the Northern and the Southern Netherlands, see also 285, notes 14 and 15.} In the North, collaborations between two masters also occurred, especially in landscape and architectural paintings in which the figures were sometimes added by another master.\footnote{Occasionally other types of collaborations are mentioned. For example, the inventory of the art dealer Johannes de Renialme lists a picture that was by Rembrandt and Dou; see Bredius 1915-1921, vol. 1, 235.} However, in the North, the opinions seem to have been divided on the artistic merits of these collaborations. For example, Willem Goeree warned his readers in 1670 that it was better to paint the figures oneself than to have these added by another master. Even if the other master painted better figures, the painting as a whole would not necessarily be improved, according to Goeree, since additional figures usually did not agree with the ‘houding’ in a painting, or the subtle use of colours, shadows and light to create a sense of pictorial depth.\footnote{Goeree 1670 [ed. 1697], 100. Earlier in 1628, Jacques de Ville had stated that those artists who could paint both architectural perspectives proportionate human figures (and thus did not need others to do this for them) deserved ‘double honour’. De Ville 1628, 13. On the term ‘houding’, see also chapter 6, ‘Colors, Light and Brushwork.’} Gerard de Lairesse even disapproved of such collaborations if the second painter did not behave like the first master’s assistant. In his view, the second master should imitate the first painter’s characteristic brushwork (handeling) to such an extent that the final painting appeared to be done only by one hand.\footnote{Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1740], 114.}

A fascinating account of the interest in recognising the hands of two different Southern masters within a single picture comes from a letter by Toby Matthew to Sir Dudley Carleton on 25 February 1617. In this letter, Matthew discusses a hunting piece by Rubens in which Carleton and Matthew thought they had recognised the hand of Snyders:

“Concerning the causinge of anie part thereof to be made by Snyders, that other famous Painter, Y[ou]r L[ordshi]p and I have been in an errour, for I thought as y[ou]u doe, that his hand had been in that Peece, but sincerely and certainty it is not soe. For in this Peece the beasts are all alive, and in
act of eyther escape or resistance, in the expression whereof Snyder doth
infinitilie come short of Rubens, and Rubens saith that he should take it in
ill part, if I should compare Snyders with him in that point. The talent of
Snyders, is to represent beasts but especiallie Birds altogether dead, and
wholly w[i]thout anie action … 137

Less than a year later, however, Rubens seemed to contradict himself
when he informed Carleton that the eagle in his picture of Prometheus was done
by Snyders (fig. 3.14). 138 It was a picture that Carleton acquired as part of the
collection of works he exchanged with Rubens, 139 and the eagle in this picture is
certainly not represented ‘without anie action’. On the contrary, it looks very
dynamic. To reconcile these contradictory accounts, one could state, as Peter
Sutton has done, that the eagle must have been designed by Rubens and
subsequently executed by Snyders, which would explain the expression of
energy. 140 After all, Snyders’ individual paintings do look somewhat stiff and lack a
comparable dynamism. In fact, this kind of assessment of the possible merits and
characteristics of these two masters may have been exactly the type of activity that
would have delighted a seventeenth-century connoisseur like Carleton.

Like present-day experts, seventeenth-century painters and connoisseurs were
keen on attaching names to pictures. However, their ways of labelling pictures
differed somewhat from ours. Master painters could claim pictures as their own
and even describe works as ‘by their hand’ which they had not literally painted
themselves, as Rubens did. Moreover, the term ‘original’ (principael or origineel) did
not mean that a picture was executed by the master alone. They did distinguish
works worthy of carrying their name from those they sold anonymously as by a
‘pupil’ (leerling / discipel) and/or works they had merely ‘retouched’ (geretukkeert),
though if done well these last works could also be considered paintings by the
master. Input from a ‘paid assistant’ (gesel) would have presumably counted as by
the master if done in the master’s style. Furthermore, it seems likely that many
master painters made distinctions of quality between the works that counted as by
their hand, possibly using Latin phrases to differentiate various levels, as Apelles
and other ancient painters had reputedly done. For example, Gerrit Honthorst

137 Rooses/Ruelens (eds.) 1887-1909, 1887-1909, vol. II, Doc. CXLVIII, 99. See also Honig 1995,
283. I would like to thank Ariane van Suchtelen for bringing this passage to my attention.
138 Rosenberg (ed.) 1881, 42-44 (letter 28 April 1618).
139 See above ‘Further Distinctions: A Preference for Autograph Pictures?’. 
140 Sutton et al. 1993, 238-241 (no. 10).
seems to have added ‘fecit’ (has made) to his signature to indicate the highest level of quality. In studios, the highest quality presumably stemmed from a closer involvement by the master himself; these pictures could be autograph, though this was not necessarily the case (witness Rubens’s correspondence). The main seventeenth-century categories of thought (the distinctions between originals and copies and between masterpieces, works by pupils and retouched works) do not represent a special interest in purely autograph pictures by the master. This does not, however, exclude the possibility that such works were (occasionally) made and that some buyers may have had a special interest in these works purely by the master. In fact, a handful of documents indicate that at least some painters (namely Ambrosius Bosschaert, Jan Miense Molenaer, Abraham Bloemaert, Gillis van Coninxloo, and possibly Bartholomeus van der Helst) created one or more autograph pictures and that four buyers wanted to have certainty as to the execution of one such work.

Early modern art theorists also suggest that seventeenth-century connoisseurs were keen on recognising the master’s touch. However, they do not seem to have been particularly preoccupied with deciding whether or not a picture was entirely autograph. Several seventeenth-century art theorists recommended that readers look for distinctively individual brushwork in order to recognise a master’s hallmark style, which at first seems to imply that seventeenth-century attribution practices could have been at odds with contemporary studio practice. It is this seeming contradiction that I have called the paradox of seventeenth-century connoisseurship. However, upon close study, seventeenth-century attribution practices (in as far as these can be reconstructed on the basis of the surviving texts on the topic) do not seem to have conflicted with studio habits. Both Franciscus Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten emphasise the importance of focusing on key elements in a painting while looking at the secondary passages more heedlessly. Van Hoogstraten further explained his advice by adding that great masters commonly had their pupils and assistants execute the secondary elements. My hypothesis is that this somewhat hierarchical way of looking at the situation was quite common among connoisseurs. For example, one should consider the emphasis put on masterly passages by early writers on connoisseurship and the absence of primary sources that distinguished studio input in pictures worthy of carrying a master’s name. Although an occasional art buyer may have had a particular preference for purely autograph pictures, this does not seem to have been a very widespread concern; if we are to believe Karel van Mander and Samuel van Hoogstraten, knowledgeable art lovers did not mind contributions by other hands if these were done well and/or only concerned secondary elements. By comparison, connoisseurs seem to have been more
interested in recognising the hands of two different masters if they had collaborated on the same composition (and I suspect that in doing so they focused again on masterly elements).

As to present-day connoisseurship, do seventeenth-century categories of thought (in so far as they can be reconstructed on the basis of the sources I studied) call for thorough revisions of the oeuvre catalogues of seventeenth-century painters? Possibly, yes. In my opinion, the seventeenth-century sources studied here raise three important questions that deserve further study (though they may prove to be hard to answer in individual cases). The need to rewrite existing oeuvre catalogues depends on the outcome of these questions. Firstly, to what extent did seventeenth-century painters such as Honthorst and Rembrandt consciously produce works of various levels of quality? Secondly, the relatively modest amount of evidence that suggests painters created purely autograph pictures calls for caution when attributing paintings entirely to the hand of a master or entirely to the hands of his pupils and assistants. Moreover, this warrants the question of determining the master’s share in the various studios. Thirdly, if the point of departure for attributions to a specific master is no longer a group of works considered to be entirely autograph, but rather the key characteristics in documented or firmly attributed works, such as the design and the execution of the main areas and accents, does this lead to a different understanding of the master’s hallmark style and his oeuvre? If the answer to any of these questions leads to new insights about a seventeenth-century painter, there is cause for a revision.