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

Tummers, J.C.

Citation for published version (APA):

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

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
CHAPTER 4.
‘WITHOUT CHANGING HIS MANNER’: SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIEWS ON STYLE

Introduction

When Roger de Piles discussed the works of the painter Laurent de la Hyre in his *Abrégé de la Vie des Peintres* (1699), he cited a family member of the artist who explained that De la Hyre ‘made several cabinet pieces executed with great diligence’ and that ‘when the opportunity arose, he also painted several large-scale church pieces, without changing his manner’.¹ The phrase ‘without changing his manner’ is remarkable; apparently, it was not uncommon for a painter to use a different manner for painting cabinet pieces than for large-scale religious works for display in churches. Presumably, painters changed their manner of working depending on the type of work they were creating. Yet De la Hyre did not do so, which made it worth mentioning.

This rather casual remark provides insight into seventeenth-century ideas on painting styles and their variability. It raises the question of how widespread these notions may have been. Did Netherlandish painters commonly adjust their personal manner of painting depending on the subject matter or function of the work? Was there any consensus on how and when to adjust one’s manner? Or, more generally, what was understood by ‘manner’, and with what terms would seventeenth-century painters and connoisseurs have discussed painting styles? Ultimately, can these seventeenth-century views provide us with some general rules or patterns as to the stylistic coherence we can expect in a seventeenth-century painter’s oeuvre?

The realization that painters may have consciously adjusted their style to the subject or function of a work calls attention to variations in the oeuvres of several Dutch and Flemish painters. For example, Anthony van Dyck combined distinctively different brushwork in one and the same painting (fig. 4.1). His *Madonna and Child with Donors* (1641, Louvre, Paris) shows feathery brushwork and soft transitions in tone and color in the depiction of Mary and Christ, while the donors have been painted with much sharper contrasts. As we will see below (in chapter 6) variations in color and tonal contrasts were often used to situate

---

¹ ‘Il faisoit plusieurs Tableaux de Cabinet qu’il finissoit avec un très grand soin & qu’il ornoit d’architecture & de paysage qu’il entendoit très-bien. Il ne laissoit pas de faire suivant l’occasion, plusieurs grands Tableaux d’Eglise, sans sortir de sa manière.’ De Piles 1699 [ed.1715], 481. On page 482, the author adds that De La Hyre’s large-scale paintings for churches were highly finished.
elements convincingly in the pictorial space, yet in this case, the stark difference in handling does not agree with the figures’ position in the illusionistic space. (The saints would have necessitated placement further away from the viewer to enhance the illusion of depth.) In fact, the variation in handling seems to have been used not to make the illusionistic space look coherent but rather to stress that even though the donors and saints at first sight seem to have been depicted in the same physical space, their reality is of a different nature. Moreover, the function of the figures varies; while the saints may have served a devotional purpose, the other figures are merely portraits of mortals, and a sharper, more detailed depiction may therefore have seemed more appropriate. Yet before discussing individual examples more in detail, I will first look into seventeenth-century concepts about style and manners of painting more in general.

**Style or Manner**

By the early seventeenth century the idea that an ambitious young painter should develop a distinctively individual manner of painting was widespread. Sixteenth-century writers, most notably Giorgio Vasari, had already outlined local styles and personal styles, as well as one or several ideal styles of working, classifying all of these categories of meaning with one and the same term: ‘maniera’ or ‘manner’. The term derived from the Latin word for hand ‘manus’ and had originally been used to characterize handwriting styles. And although sixteenth-century writers with a literary background, such as Baldassare Castiglione, had started using the term ‘stile’ for a personal style of painting, transposing the dominant term used in literary analysis to painting, the use of this term would not become widespread among art theorists until the beginning of the eighteenth century. As we will see, some thinkers in the seventeenth century, including the French painter Nicolas Poussin, cleverly used the terms ‘stile’ and ‘maniera/maniere’ to distinguish between general and personal painting styles. Yet even among authors who made this distinction, there was no consensus as to what each of these terms denoted. Both the terms ‘manner’ (manier, handelinge) and ‘style’ (stijl) could thus denote several.

---

2 See Treves 1941; Panofsky 1960; Pfisterer 2001; Sohm 2001, 118-122. On ideal styles see also below: ‘Developing a Style’; on personal styles see also below: ‘Style and Character’.

3 In addition to Baldassare Castiglione, Giulio Camillo Delminio, Pietro Bembo, Pietro Aretino, and Domenico Fiorentino also used the term ‘stile’ in this way. See Dempsey 1977, 102-103; and Sohm 2001, 122, note 32, and 246-247.
types of painting styles (fashionable or ideal manners, as well distinctively personal ways of painting), depending on the context in which they were used.\footnote{See also below and Sohm 2001, 118-122. In seventeenth-century Dutch, the term 'handelingen' was most commonly used to denote a painter’s characteristic manner. 'Manier', however, could have the same meaning, and Karel van Mander used the terms interchangeably. 'Stijl' occurs only rarely, mostly to denote a literary style.; see Van Hoogstraten 1678, 175 (see also note 40 below).}

In the sixteenth century, writers on art adapted terms used for literature and other liberal arts when discussing painting styles (such as ‘invention’ and ‘grand style’).\footnote{See Baxandall 1971; Miedema 1989, 122. On the concept of a ‘grand style’, see also Sohm 2001, 122.} However, by the end of the seventeenth century, they had developed a jargon which was increasingly apt to discuss the particularities of paintings. If one compares, for example, Giorgio Vasari to Roger de Piles in terms of the discussion of brushwork, the difference is evident. In Vasari’s days it was unusual to discuss brushwork in great detail, and when Vasari tried to describe some of Titian’s roughly painted late works, he seemed at a loss for words. Titian, he writes, paints with ‘strokes drawn roughly’ (tirate via di grosso) and with ‘stains’ (macchie) (fig. 4.2). In comparison, Roger de Piles expresses himself with much greater ease when he addresses brushwork in his treatise \textit{L’Idée du Peintre Parfait} of 1699. ‘The brush should be bold (hardi) and light (leger) if possible; but whether the brush seems even (uni), like Correggio’s brush, or uneven (inégal) and rough (raboteux) like Rembrandt’s, it should always be fluent (moëlleux)’ (compare fig. 4.3 and 4.3.b) (See also chapter 6, ‘The Essence of Connoisseurship’, on the different terms used for brushwork). This increasingly refined vocabulary allowed for increasingly precise recommendations and debates as various writers tried to define the personal style of specific painters and raised the question to what extent painters should develop an individual style.

\footnote{‘Ma è ben vero che il modo di fare che tenne in queste ultime è assai differente dal fare suo da giovane. Conciò sia che le prime son condotte con una certa finezza e diligenza incredibile e da essere vedute da presso e da lontano, e queste ultime, condotte di colpi, tirate via di grosso e con macchie, di maniera che da presso non si possono vedere e di lontano appariscono perfette; e questo modo è stato cagione che molti, volendo in ciò immitare e mostrare di fare il pratico, hanno fatto di goffe pitture, e ciò adviene perché se bene a molti pare che elle siano fatte senza fatica, non è così il vero e s’ingannano, perché si conosce che sono rifatte e che si è ritornato loro addosso con i colori tante volte, che la fatica vi si vede. E questo modo si fatto è giudizioso, bello e stupendo, perché fa parere vive le pitture e fatte con grande arte, nascondendo le fatiche.’ Vasari/Barocchi 1966-, vol. IV, 166.}

\footnote{‘Que le pinceau soit hardi & leger s’il est possible; mais soit soit qu’il paroisse uni, comme celuy du Corrège [Correggio], ou qu’il soit inégal & raboteux comme celuy de Rembrant [sic], il doit toujours être moëlleux’. De Piles 1699 [ed. 1707], 10.}
Developing a Style

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Karel van Mander repeatedly stressed the importance of having a good manner (handelinghe or manier) in his treatise on painting, *Het Schilder-boeck* (1604). He often combined a statement to this effect with a remark on the importance of closely studying nature. In his view, a painter should both strive to create a convincing suggestion of reality, while at the same time displaying a distinctive manner of painting. As he put it, “[t]here is nothing better than to paint every object after life […] and to use a particular characteristic manner.”

In his artist biographies, he praised painters for having successfully accomplished both. For example, he writes about a portrait by Hans van Aken that the “head and hair, being very high in quality, resemble nature very closely, and have been painted in a very neat and good manner (suyver en wel gehandelt).” In Van Mander’s view, the two pursuits do not seem to have been contradictory; yet, as we will see below, other writers on art did see them as potentially conflicting.

Apprentice painters could develop a good manner of painting by copying works by masters, according to Van Mander. It was a long established practice of learning the art of painting, which was still very common in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. The early artistic development of the renowned portrait painter Michiel van Mierevelt illustrates such learning by imitation. According to Van Mander, the latter started his career by creating engravings in the manner of Anthonie van Blocklandt. When he reached the age of twelve, Van Mierevelt had the opportunity to learn the art of painting from Blocklandt himself, and when he started working independently, he created history paintings which resembled his master’s work, especially in their ‘invention’ (inventie) and in the ‘figures’ (beelden).

---

8 ‘Datter niet beter en is, als alle dinghen nae t’leven te schilderen, merrickende op alle actien, en bysonder aerdich te handelen.’ Van Mander 1604, in the margin of fol. 42r.
9 Van Mander 1604, , fol. 291r on a portrait of Jacob Poppe by Hans van Aken: ‘welcks tronie en hayr in schilderije welstandich wesende, seer natuerlijk ghelijkende, suyver en wel zijn ghehandelt.’ [Miedema’s translation in Van Mander/Miedema 1994, 422: ‘whose face and hair look very well painted and a very true likeness, purely and well executed’.]
10 See below, ‘Style: artful or artificial’.
11 Van Mander 1604, fol. 281r.
12 Van Mander 1604, fol. 280v–281r. ‘Voort heb ick noch van hem [Mierevelt] ghesien een Judith, schier op de manier van Blocklandt, bysonder t’hooft van Holophernes, t’welck is uytneemende met den Graef-ijser gehandelt, en t’heel stucxken wat cloecker als t’voorgaende gedaen. Ten lesten is hy ontreint zijn twaelf laer gecomien by Blocklandt, daer hy met den verwen begon te handelen, en schilderen, oock niet ongheluckigh, also men corts door zijn toenemen wel conde sien. Hy volghde in inventie, beelden, en anders, heel geestigh de manier van zyns Meesters handelinghe, alsoo ick ghesien hebbe an verscheysden dinghen, die hy in zijn jongheyt gheinventeert, en
In fact, Van Mander believed that if it were not for the market situation, which led Van Mierevelt to specialize in the more profitable genre of portrait painting, he would have become a history painter working in a style closely related to his master’s manner. (see figs. 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6)

The common studio practice in which apprentice painters were supposed to absorb their master’s manner served both a commercial and an educational purpose: master painters could use a pupil’s assistance in their works while the pupils developed a good manner of working. The painter and art theorist Willem Goeree simply described the practice of copying works by well-known masters as a means for apprentice painters to develop a manner (handeling), as we have seen above.\(^{13}\) In practice, however, the collaboration of masters and pupils was not always so advantageous. Van Mander describes various instances in which a young painter came to work for a master whose manner of painting was far from admirable. Pieter Vlerick worked briefly for an Antwerp master, agreeing to paint in the latter’s style (handelinghe) even though he thought it was ‘scarcely good enough for cats and dogs’.\(^{14}\)

Van Mander urges young painters to improve upon a bad manner of working and change it for a better one if the opportunity arose: “Do not persevere in a poor manner (of painting), for you did not marry it, and it is no shame to exchange it for something better.”\(^{15}\) In Van Mander’s view, it was more important that a painter specialize in a type of picture which agreed with his

---

\(^{13}\) See above, chapter 2, ‘Original or Copy’.

\(^{14}\) Van Mander 1604, fol. 250r. “T’Antwerpen quam hy by een Oly-verwe Schilder, die stelde hem te copieren een Serpent-bijtinghe van zijn handt, en vraeghde Pieter of hy die handelinghe wel volgen soude, en alsoo ’t een handelingh was die Pieter docht nouw voor Katten noch Honden te deughen, seyde jae.

\(^{15}\) Van Mander 1604, fol. 49v. ‘In quade maniere blijft niet volheerdeh, / Ghy hebts niet ghetroouwd, ten is geen schande / Haer voor een beter te wisselen.” Other writers, including Samuel van Hoogstraten, warned apprentices to choose their masters wisely since a poor manner, once appropriated, was often hard to shed. See Van Hoogstraten 1678, 20.
specific talents and that he choose a manner of working which was not too
difficult, which would make the picture look forced. \footnote{Van Mander 1604, fol. *5v on the importance of specializing in a type of picture that agreed with one’s talents. See also chapter 6, ‘The Essence of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship’, ‘‘Painterly’ Topics and Motifs’; Van Mander 1604, fol. 15v & 16r: ‘Laet vloeyen uwen gheest, om Const vergroenen, [...] Vry en onbeschroemt, dit moet ick vermanen, Op dat ghy u vermijdet van soodanen Maniere die swaer is, en niet wel stellijck, / Al te ghestenteert, moeyelijck oft quellijck.’} “Difficult to make, difficult to see”, warned a seventeenth-century proverb. \footnote{‘Moeilijk gedaen, moeilijk om te zien, zegtmen.’ The proverb is mentioned by Samuel van Hoogstraten in Van Hoogstraten 1678, 237. See also ibid., 236: ‘Een meester valt de handeling niet zwaar.’}

More specifically, Van Mander presents his readers with a choice of two
principle manners of painting: the rough (\textit{ruwe}) and the neat (\textit{net}) manner. \footnote{Van Mander 1604, fol. 47r ff. On the distinction between the rough and the neat manner, see also Gombrich 1960 [ed. 1989], 195-197; and Van de Wetering 2002, 154 ff.} It is a
distinction that also occurs later in the writings of Abraham Bosse (1649) and
Samuel van Hoogstraten (1678). \footnote{Bosse 1649, 47-48; Van Hoogstraten 1678, 239-240.} Interestingly, Van Mander presents both
manners as equal in artistic merit, even though the rough manner was more
difficult to execute successfully because it required a lot of experience. Van
Mander therefore recommends apprentice painters start by learning a neat
manner. \footnote{Van Mander 1604, fol. 48v, in the margin: ‘Veel hebben Tiziaen meenen volghen, en zijn
verdwaelt.’ In the main text: ‘En hebben miswanch hun self bedroghen, / Om dat sy zijn werck
sonder arbeydt dachten / Te wesen ghedaen, daer d’uyterste crachten / Der Consten met moeyt’
in waren gheploghen’. [The passage on Titian is taken from Vasari; see note 6 above.] Further
down on the same page in Van Mander: ‘Hier heb ick, [...]V voor ooghen willen beelden en stellen
/Tweederley, doch welstandighe manieren, [...] maer soude doch raden u eerst te quellen, / En u
te wennen, met vlijtighe sinnen, / Een suyver manier, end’ een net beginnen.’} At the time, Van Mander’s presentation of these two manners was
innovative, for earlier art theorists celebrated only the specific painting styles of
particular predecessors.

For example, Vasari celebrated Michelangelo’s style as the highest achievement in
painting (especially in the first edition of his \textit{Vite} \footnote{In the second edition of his \textit{Vite}, Vasari credits several painters for having excelled in specific
areas – Raphael in narrative aspects, and Titian and Correggio in the use of color. See Vasari/Veen
1996, vol. II, 16.} ), whereas Marco Boschini and
Paolo Lomazzo presented the styles of several great masters as ideal in their own
right. \footnote{See also Barasch 1985, 228-229 and 236-237. Other examples include Armenini, who gave
Raphael’s style the highest praise and believed his own time to be one of decline because the
quality of Raphael’s style could not be equaled, and Danti, who, like Vasari, believed
Michelangelo’s style to be ideal and aimed to successfully imitate the latter’s style in painting.} In contrast, Van Mander presented the two painting styles as entities in
their own right by contrasting them with one another and urging apprentice painters to specialize in one of these two manners, which he illustrated by using the example of famous protagonists including Titian and Van Eyck. It is a subtle nuance but nonetheless an important one. Some of the most famous Netherlandish painters from the Golden Age specialized in one of the two manners outlined by Van Mander. Frans Hals and Rembrandt were to develop very innovative ‘rough manners’ of painting, whereas Gerrit Dou specialized in an unusually precise style of painting, which was to remain popular until well into the eighteenth century. (see figs. 4.7 and 4.8)

Although Van Mander differentiated two types of styles which could be equally admirable, these categories did not suffice to describe what he considered to be a good manner. As he explained with regards to a precise painting style: “Fine painting is praiseworthy, [...] especially if it is closely combined with character (aerdt), spirit (gheest) and resolution (cloeckbeyt).” For this reason he praised the work of Jan van Eyck, Lucas van Leyden, Albrecht Dürer and Pieter Breughel (figs. 4.9 and 4.10).

According to Van Mander, even a finely painted work should thus show spirit and a characteristic and resolute manner of painting. These were traits that did not just depend on a painter's conscious choices. In fact, Van Mander believed that even though painters could make many conscious choices when developing a style, ultimately, the individual character of their style was not the result of a learning process or a conscious choice but rather the reflection of the artist’s spirit and innate talents.

23 Van Mander 1604, fols. 48r & 48v, esp. fol. 48v: ‘Hier heb ick, o edel Schilder scholieren, / V voor ooghen willen beelden en stellen / Tweederley, doch welstandighe manieren, [in margin: Van twee een te kiesen, is gheraden.] / Op dat ghy met lust u sinnen mocht stieren / Tot het gheen’ uwen gheest meest sal versnellen:/ maer soude doch raden u eerst te quellen, / En u te wennen, met vlijtighe sinnen, / Een suyver manier, end’ een net beginnen.’ On subsequent writers who distinguished between the 'rough' and the 'neat' manner, see also chapter 2 and below.

24 See also Gombrich 1960 [ed. 1989], 195-197.

25 Van Mander 1604, fol. 48r: ‘Netticheyt is prijsich, die den ghesichte / Soet voedtsel ghevende doet langhe merren, / Bysonder als haer aenelevend’ is diche / Oock aerdt, gheest, en cloeckeyt, en datse lichte / Haren welstandt niet en weyghert van verren, / Niet meer als van by’.

26 See Sluijter 1993 [ed. 2000], 250-251. See also the next section on style, individual character and the imitation of nature.
Style and Individual Character

According to Van Mander, the individual traits of a painter’s style depended on the artist’s ‘spirit’ (gheest). This is a term he contrasted with the imitation of nature; ‘uit de gheest’ (‘from the mind’) was the opposite of ‘naer ‘t leven’ (‘after life’). Indeed, Van Mander uses the term ‘spirit’ to refer to the artist’s innate talent, something which could not be learned or taught. As we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, he believed that a painter’s characteristic ‘spirit’ could best be recognized in those areas in which the painter could not simply imitate nature or follow another master’s manner, but in areas in which he had to rely on his own talents and inventiveness. The depiction of leaves, hair and drapery was characteristically revealing, in his view.27

Van Mander’s reasoning implies that a painter’s style necessarily reflected the strengths and weaknesses of an artist’s spirit and innate inventiveness, and he indeed pointed out such characteristics. He indicated that Willem Key’s paintings were less spirited (gheestig) than those by Frans Floris (compare figs. fig. 4.11 and 4.12); yet Key’s style (handelinghe) was nonetheless praiseworthy because he always infused his pictures with a pleasing sweetness (behaaghlijcke soetheyt) and showed intelligence and good judgment in his designs.28

A similar trail of thought seems to underlie Rubens’s remark on the difference between his own depictions of animals and those by his colleague Snyders. As discussed above (chapter 3), when asked how his depictions of animals could be distinguished from those by Snyders, Rubens simply pointed at his colleague’s inability to depict animals in action, something of which he could not be accused, as he was well aware (compare figs. 4.13 and 4.14).

These remarks by Van Mander and Rubens imply that the most individual and therefore the most characteristic aspects of a painter’s style were determined not much by a painter’s skills and conscious choices, but rather by the artist’s innate talents and individual nature. This suggests that every painter necessarily

---

27 See above, chapter 2 ‘Resolution versus Inhibition’ and chapter 3 ‘Manner’. Van Mander also uses the term ‘spirit’ (gheest) to refer to brushwork (handeling) in general, to the design (ordonnantie) and to the positioning of figures (steldselen der beelden). See Van Mander 1604, fol. 267v.

28 The passage on Willem Key reads in the original text (fol. 232v): ‘Aengaende zijn werck oft manier van handelinghe, hy was een seer goet Conterfeyter na t’leven, de natuere in alles seer na comende, zijn dingen seer wel verderijvende, en verwerckende, met een seer behaaghlijke soetheyt, waer in hy boven anderen te prijzen was: alhoewel hy niet soo wilt oft gheestigh en was als wel Floris, soo en was hy doch niet slecht in zijn ordineren, hebbende goet verstandt en oordeel.’ See also Van Mander/Miedema 1994-1999, vol. I, 1994, 189.
had an individual manner.\textsuperscript{29} To the Italian historian Agostino Mascardi, this idea was so self-evident that he used it in his popular book on historiography, \textit{Dell’arte historica} of 1636, as an argument to support the idea that writers also inevitably had an individual style.\textsuperscript{30} In his view, all good painters followed the same rules of art and strived for a regulated design (\textit{disegno regolato}), a proportionate - though not uniform - use of colors (\textit{colorito proportionato benche non uniforme}), a well-ordered composition without confusion (\textit{composizione ben ordinata senza confusione}), and a lively expression of the costume (\textit{d’esprimer vivamente il costume}).\textsuperscript{31} Yet even master painters who succeeded perfectly in all areas differ greatly in painting style, which becomes evident when considering the oeuvres of Raphael, Correggio, Parmigianino, Titian, Cavaliere d’Arpino, Lanfranco, Guido Reni, and Pietro della Cortona. According to Mascardi, that which distinguished each of their painting styles, their ‘\textit{maniera}', is comparable to a writer’s ‘\textit{stile}'; both are based on ‘spirit’ (\textit{ingegno}) and therefore cannot be learned or taught. Even when a writer adjusts the character (\textit{caractere}) of his text to the subject matter, the unalterable essence of his ‘\textit{stile}’ will remain the same.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, Mascardi does not relate a painter’s ‘\textit{maniera}’ to the content of his pictures but only to the painter’s individual nature.\textsuperscript{33}

At the end of the sixteenth century, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo had also related painting styles to the individual character of the artist in his treatise \textit{Idea del tempio della pittura} (Milan, 1590).\textsuperscript{34} He connected four of the most famous Renaissance artists to the four temperaments, which were thought to govern people’s personalities: Michelangelo to the melancholic temperament, Polidoro to the choleric temperament, Titian to the phlegmatic temperament and Raphael to the sanguine temperament. According to Lomazzo, these natural inclinations

---

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} This does not mean that some artists could not be particularly skillful at mimicking another artist’s style, although it does imply that it was nearly impossible to do this perfectly. Hendrick Goltzius, paradoxically, was praised by several art theorists for his extraordinary ability to imitate old masters’ styles in print. See below ‘Variation and Virtuosity’.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Mascardi 1636; see Sohm 2001, 116. Mascardi credits Cicero as the first author to use painters as proof of the individuality of style; see Mascardi 1636, 404-405 and Sohm 2001, 120, note 20. [The relevant passages by Cicero are cited by Junius: ‘There is only one discipline of painting, yet Zeuxis, Aglaophon, and Apelles are highly dissimilar painters, although none of them appears to be deficient in any manner in his art.’ Junius 1694 [ed. 1991], 32 (Cicero, \textit{De Or.} III.7.26).]
\item \textsuperscript{31} Mascardi adds parathetically: ‘benche l’costume sia conosciuto da pochi, & osservato da pochissimi’. See Mascardi 1636, 405.
\item \textsuperscript{32} See also Sohm 2001, 120. Sohm states that Mascardi illustrates ‘maniera’ by explaining that some painters always impose ‘delicacy’ onto their figures, whereas others use a ‘resolute and virile style’. Unfortunately, I could neither find this passage in Mascardi 1636 on the page indicated by Sohm nor elsewhere.
\item \textsuperscript{33} On the relation between a subject matter and manners of painting, see below ‘Style and Subject’.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Lomazzo/Klein 1974. See also Kemp 1987 and Kemp 1990.
\end{itemize}
affected the style of their works. The idea that one’s personality affects one’s professional disposition harkens back to Antiquity, and it was still common in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. This association usually reflected only a general correspondence; for example, people governed by the element ‘black gall’ were believed to have a melancholic personality and to be likely to display artistic talent. Yet by the seventeenth century it had become increasingly common to distinguish more direct connections between artists’ personalities and their working styles, as exemplified in a witty poem by Jan Vos:

“To L. the painter, when he showed me a certain painting.
I cherish this image; for it is made very loosely,
but your being just as loose as your painting: that I hate”

The idea of an individual style resulting from one’s personality did not imply, however, that the artist had no control at all. A painter might not be able to determine his nature, but he could still decide whether or not to follow it and/or to exaggerate certain traits. Moreover, he could develop many characteristic styles.

**Style: Artful or Artificial**

As to the choice artists had when deciding to follow their nature, the church father Augustine had already indicated in the fourth century A.D. that he considered it immoral to imitate another’s nature, a statement which was quoted by the seventeenth-century Dutch art theorist Franciscus Junius: ‘In order that we remain constant to our own nature, we should not falsify ourselves by imitating some other creature’s nature, in the manner of actors or mirror-images, or the

---

35 See, for example, the classic study Panofsky/Saxl 1964. On the four temperaments and related professional inclinations, see Barasch 1985, 183 ff.
37 For example, Van Mander writes that a painter could invent various distinctive ways to represent leaves. See above chapter 1.
bronze cows of [the ancient sculptor] Myron.\footnote{Augustinus, \textit{Soliloquia}, 386/87, II, 18.7; see Junius 1694 [ed. 1991], 256.} In the Renaissance, the famous writer Petrarch expressed a similar concern when he wrote: ‘I much prefer that my style be my own, rude and undefined perhaps, but made to the measure of my mind … rather than to use someone else’s style.’\footnote{Spear 1989, 98.}

Such ethical considerations might have been a motivation for seventeenth-century painters to strive for a distinctively individual style. However, Samuel van Hoogstraten believed it was due to pragmatic reasons that painters should follow their own nature, for it was impossible to achieve something that did not agree with one’s nature. He reinforced his opinion with a series of ancient quotes, including Horatius’ advice to poets: ‘think about what you are able to manage […] then you will lack neither a clear style (\textit{stijl}) nor organization(\textit{ordening}).’\footnote{Van Hoogstraten 1678, 175: ‘denk wat gy draegen kunt […], Zoo zal u klaere stijl noch ordening ontbreeken.’}

Since the Renaissance it had become increasingly common for painters to have a distinctively individual style, yet the extent to which painters developed one varied. When a particular master’s style was fashionable, such as Rembrandt’s in the 1630s and 1640s, many other masters chose to imitate it.\footnote{See also below ‘Stylistic Changes over Time’ for discussion of Houbraken’s comments on the fashion for pictures in the style of Rembrandt), and chapter 2, ‘A Crucial Distinction’, on Van Mander’s thoughts on the taste for pictures in the style of Hans Bol.} Nevertheless, it remained common for painters to develop their own signature style. And while those who mimicked another master’s style could be accused of lacking ‘spirit’, ‘invention’ or even denying their own nature, painters who were keen on developing their own manner, risked neglecting other artistic challenges.

In the Netherlands especially the painter-writers Jacques de Ville and Philips Angel saw danger in this. According to Jacques de Ville, the painters of his time were so focused on having a striking style (\textit{handelinghe}) that they often neglected the proper rendering of perspective, foreshortening, and proportions of the figures in their paintings.\footnote{De Ville 1628. See also Sluijter 2006, 209-210.} Samuel van Hoogstraten confirmed De Ville’s observation in 1678, when he wrote that it was an ‘old and widespread feeling that there were more painters who lacked skills in drawing than painters who could not color well’.\footnote{‘het oud en algemeen gevoelen is, dater meer Schilders zijn , die ’t aen ’t wel teykenen, als aen ’t wel koloreeren gebreekt.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 26.} Indeed, this criticism harkens back to the famous \textit{disegno-colorito} debate, which erupted in sixteenth-century Italy and remained a lively topic of debate in the seventeenth century. For example, Bernini believed that Titian and Veronese had already neglected ‘drawing and reason’ in some of their pictures by
painting whatever came to their mind without pausing for reflection, which produced works ‘in which there is nothing but the handling’.44

According to these various writers, striking brushwork could thus overshadow the design of pictures, and in doing so, jeopardize a successful representation of figures and their surroundings. In the seventeenth century, it was the brushwork (more than the design of paintings) which was criticized for its potential to distract painters from mimicking life to the best of their abilities.45

Apart from De Ville, Philips Angel also warned painters not to focus too strongly on brushwork. A strong advocate for the extremely precise manner of painting developed by Gerard Dou, he advised painters to try to not have a specific manner but to simply follow nature as accurately as possible.46 Ideally, a painting should ‘approach real life without […] [showing] the manner of the master who made it’, according to Angel (fig. 4.15). A painter’s manner should thus not interfere with the picture’s mirror-like illusion of reality.

Angel did not believe, however, that one could really avoid any kind of recognizable brushwork.47 In fact, he admired the looseness (lissicheyt) in the brushwork of his favorite painter Gerrit Dou.48 Yet, in his view, painters could not achieve Dou’s level of perfection if they focused on developing a particular manner of working rather than on mastering a precise and successful imitation of nature. Should a painter ultimately not be able to compete with Dou in terms of precision, it was still better in Angel’s mind to maintain a certain looseness in the brushwork than to achieve a greater precision with a more stiff and forced manner of painting.49

Angel thus recommends both a ‘mannerless manner’ and a certain looseness in the brushwork. A similar ambivalence occurs in Abraham Bosse’s treatise Sentimens sur la distinction des diverses manières (1649). Bosse focuses his discussion of a ‘mannerless manner’ on portraiture; contrary to other types of

44 Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 282-283. See also Spear 1997, 261.
45 An exception is Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero’s criticism of the contorted figures in mannerist paintings, which he deemed ‘alien to nature’. See Sluijter 2006, 208.
47 In my opinion, this seeming contradiction relates to a general ambivalence in early modern art theory. A perfect illusion of lifeliness is often celebrated as one of the most important goals of the art of painting, yet a perfect illusion cannot be appreciated if the viewer does not realize that he or she is looking at a picture. In other words, a perfect illusion requires an awareness of the deception. Praise of the illusion created in a painting and of its excellence as a work of art were necessarily at odds with each other. See also below, the next section, and Tummers 2010 (‘The Reception of Trompe-l’Oeil Paintings in the Dutch Seventeenth-Century’).
48 See also Chapter 3, ‘Masterly Passages’.
49 Angel 1642, 56. See also Sluijter 1993 [ed. 2000], 244-246.
paintings, portraiture aimed solely at a convincing imitation of nature, in his view. If a painter was able to mimic nature perfectly according to the rules of art, one should not be able to distinguish the painter’s manner in a portrait. However, according to Bosse, many painters were ignorant of, in particular, the rules of perspective and instead employed their fantasy; in doing so they deliberately created a myriad range of styles. If only they had better known the rules of art, Bosse states, there would have been significantly fewer manners, and, ideally, none at all. Yet while this passage sounds quite definitive, Bosse elsewhere seems less certain that brushwork should be without manner. In fact, he explicitly and repeatedly celebrates a certain looseness in the brushwork, as virtually all seventeenth-century art theorists did. (See Chapter 3 ‘masterly passages’.)

These rather ambivalent recommendations illustrate the difficulty early art theorists experienced when trying to define ideal styles, which required uniting the divergent goals of painting. Resolute brushwork was not easily combined with the goal of a perfect, mirror-like illustration of reality. A personal style and mimetic qualities could certainly conflict, and many Renaissance art theorists had already pointed this out. Vasari, for example, repeatedly stressed that certain manners lacked a convincing imitation of nature. Like other writers, he used the expression ‘di maniera’ to refer to the negative counterpart of a distinctive manner, to an exaggerated style; in contrast, ‘di maniera’ suggests a style that is not artful but artificial.

Stylistic Changes Over Time

Once a painter had developed a particular manner of his own, he could decide to remain faithful to it throughout his career. According to Karel van Mander, this had been the choice of his famous contemporary Cornelis Cornelisz. Van Haarlem (whom he knew very well): “He developed a firm manner of painting, with a personal, resolute way of applying the brush, in which he persevered ever since without changing it or trying something else.” Although some of Cornelis

---

50 For a similar statement in Mancini, see also the next chapter, ‘The Essence of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship’. For more details on the different standards used to judge different types of pictures, see the next sections.
51 Bosse 1649, 39-40.
52 See Brückle 2005, 115. In the seventeenth century Filippo Baldinucci even invented a new term to refer to such an exaggerated or artificial style: ‘ammanierato’ (1681). See Sohm 2001, 122.
53 Van Mander 1604, fol. 292v: ‘Hy heeft hem aengewent een vaste manier van schilderen, met een eyghen seker wijse van strijcken, daer hy tsindert altijt sonder verwisselen, oft anders te versoecken, gestadigh tot noch toe is by gebleven.’
Cornelisz. van Haarlem’s pictures are more highly finished and neatly painted than others (compare figs. 4.16 and 4.17). Cornelis Cornelisz.’s work seemed exceptionally constant in style to Van Mander. His remark suggests that many other painters deliberately switched from one style to another.

As we have seen above in the introduction, Roger de Piles discussed such changes explicitly in his *Conversations sur la Connaissance de la Peinture* (1676). Damon, one of the protagonists in the dialogues, explained that most painters of his time changed from one style to another throughout their career. He added that in doing so they made the task of the connoisseur more challenging, for they almost always created paintings in the transitional phase which neither belonged to the first nor to the second manner and which were therefore extremely difficult to attribute.

De Piles was the first writer on art to discuss the implications of such stylistic changes over time for connoisseurs. However, the framework for his thinking had long been laid out. Earlier writers including Vasari and Van Mander had given much attention to individual painters’ stylistic developments, and by the mid-seventeenth century it seems to have been quite common to think of a painter’s artistic development in terms of a succession of styles. For example, when the Italian architect and artist Gianlorenzo Bernini admired a copy after a picture by Raphael in a Parisian collection in 1667, he praised it for being an excellent copy done after Raphael’s latest and grandest manner. An inventory of a wealthy Leiden collector, Hendrick Bugge van Ring, drawn up in the same year, identifies pictures by Jan Steen and by Gerrit Dou as done in their youth (*in zijn

---

54 This painting (*Followers of Cadmus devoured by a Dragon*, 1588) was famously reproduced in print by Hendrick Goltzius in the same year. It seems likely that Van Mander would have been familiar with it since he knew both painters well, reputedly even founding a drawing academy with them.

55 Van Mander, however, specifies that after having completed this picture of the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis, Cornelis Cornelisz. refined his way of rendering skin tones. ‘Daer is oock ter selver plaetse in een Camer een groot stuck, een heel vack muers beslaende, wensende een Goden bancket, oft Bruyloft van *Peleus en Thetis*, daer den twist-appel door Tweedracht wort geworpen, en is een uytнемende constigh stuck, en aerdigh van inventie. Nae dese en meer ander heerlijcke werekten, heeft Cornelis meer als voorhenen beginnen letten op het coloreren der naeckten, daer hy nu wonderlijck in is verandert, waer in te die deele nu een groot mercklijck onderscheyt wort ghesien, ghelijck zijn werekten tegenwoordigh, by de voorleden ghestelt wesende, deaeldigk tuyghen.’ Van Mander 1604, fol. 293r. See also below ‘Alternating and Adjusting Styles’ and ‘Style and Subject’ on such variations in brushwork. Eric Jan Sluijter kindly informed me that Constantijn Huygens considered Cornelisz’s manner hopelessly old-fashioned in the 1630s.

56 See above ‘A Closer Look at Seventeenth-Century Sources: An Introduction’.

57 This was not to say that painters only changed their styles once throughout their career. As will be discussed extensively below, Roger de Piles was aware of various types of stylistic developments and adjustments.

58 Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 77.
Also, when the Italian art collector Antonio Ruffo ordered a pendant to a painting by Rembrandt from the Italian painter Guercino in 1660, the painter agreed to execute the work in his ‘first, exuberant style’ (prima maniera gagliarda).

However, the earliest texts dedicated to connoisseurship hardly address such stylistic changes over time. For example, Giulio Mancini pays ample attention to larger stylistic developments, which served as frame of reference for making attributions, and to the difficulties in distinguishing between originals and copies, but he does not mention how individual painters may have changed their styles over time. Abraham Bosse, however, is more sensitive to stylistic changes over time, though he spends few words addressing the issue. He indicates that artists who did not change their styles had great difficulty in recognizing works by painters that did, and even in distinguishing between originals and copies. Yet he does not specify what added knowledge a painter who had changed his style would have accumulated by this experience. Were there certain characteristics one should or should not take into account to more easily recognize works done by the same artist but in a different period?

The reason for the relative scarcity of remarks about stylistic changes over time in these early texts could be due to breadth inherent in the concept of “stylistic change”. Some changes were the result of a painter’s increased experience and subsequent refinement in painting techniques. Rembrandt, for example, changed from a fairly detailed painting style with great attention to differentiating textures to a much bolder and looser way of painting towards the end of his career. Similarly, Aelbert Cuyp gradually exchanged the careful, descriptive painting technique he used in his sun-drenched landscapes of the 1640s for a much more suggestive, at times almost pointillist, technique towards the end of his career. (compare figs. 4.18 and 4.19).

In other instances, changes in style were market-driven. According Houbraken, the young Govert Flink grew up at the time that Rembrandt’s manner of painting was so popular that “everything had to be done this way, if it was to

60 ‘In quanto poi alla mezza figura che ella desiderava da me per accompagnamento di quella di Reimbrant, ma della mia prima maniera galgiarda, io sono prontissimo per corrispondere et eseguire li di Lei ordini’. Letter from Guercino, dated 13 June 1660; see Ruffo 1916 and Strauss et al. 1979, 457, nr. 1660/7.
61 Bosse 1649, 14: ‘Raison des Peintres qui ne sont point adonné à reconnoitre les diverses manieres des Peintres, ny à discerner les Originaux d'avec leur Copies. [...] ‘ils ont choisi [...] une seule maniere qu’ils on crée bonne, & de laquelle ils ne sont point voulu departir.’
62 On Cuyp’s Van Goyen-like manner, see below ‘Style, Price and Quality’ and ‘Style and Subject’. 
please the World”. Therefore Flink trained with Rembrandt for a year, which allowed him to subsequently imitate the master’s manner so well that several of his pieces were mistaken for Rembrandt’s own work and sold as such. When the fashion shifted to a lighter and clearer painting style, Flink subsequently made a great effort to shed the habit of painting in Rembrandt’s style. Similarly, Van Mander related Mierevelt’s later style and subject matter to the market situation, as we have seen. Should history paintings have been more in demand, then Mierevelt would not have specialized in portraits and would have developed a style related to that of Anthonie van Blocklandt instead, according to Van Mander. (see above 'Developing a Style')

The stylistic transitions in painters’ oeuvres were thus far from uniform. As theories of connoisseurship had only just begun to develop in this period, the first-hand knowledge of artistic developments that painters and art lovers possessed must have been far greater and more nuanced than what the pioneering theorists could integrate into a coherent verbal discourse.

Moreover, it was not easy to reconcile the idea of a personal style as an expression of inborn talents with the idea of artistic development or conscious choices that resulted in drastic changes of manner (and indeed it proved difficult even to twentieth-century connoisseurs such as Van Dantzig – see Chapter 1). For if the crucial elements of an individual style were not learnable, how does one explain stylistic changes? While the first concept seems to imply that a personal style was recognizable in certain constant features over which the painter exerted little control, the idea of change emphasised its relativity.

In order to reconcile these different points of view, one would have to conclude that a painter could invent or develop various individual styles and change from one to another, or that he could even decide to mimic someone else’s style. Although not stated explicitly, such a line of reasoning may have inspired Bosse’s statement that three paintings would be enough for an experienced connoisseur to define a painter’s personal style provided that the

---

63 ‘Maar alzoo te dier tyd de handeling van Rembrant in’ t algemeen geprezen wierd, zoo dat alles op die leest moest gescheoit wezen, zouw het de Waerelt behagen; vond hy zich geraden een jaar by Rembrant te gaan leeren; ten einde hy zig die behandeling der verwen en wyze van schilder gewendde, welke hy in dien korten tyd zoodanig heeft weten na te bootzen dat verschelen van zyne stukken voor echt penceelwerken van Rembrant wierden aangezien en verkocht. Doch hy heeft die wyze van schilderend naderhant met veele moeite en arbeid weer afgewezen; naerdien de Waerelt voor’t overlyden van Rembrandt, de oogen al geopent wierden, op ’t invoeren der Italiaansche penceelkonst, door ware Konstkenners, wanneer het helder schilderen weer op de baan kwam.’ Houbraken 1718-1721, vol. II, 20-21.

64 See the previous note.

65 See chapter 1, 'Pictology and the Search for Objectivity'.
painter had not changed it. 66 In other words, an artist’s personal traits could be distilled from just a few of his works if the painter had steadily produced a similar type of picture throughout his career (for these could be expected to contain comparable traces of the painter’s inborn talents). 67

Yet even if a painter did not actively decide to change his style, his manner of painting was likely to develop. Several early modern writers assumed a painter’s style developed in a cyclical fashion, reaching a high point once the painter fully developed a style of his or her own, and entering a period of regeneration in the painter’s later life.

Giorgio Vasari interpreted the oeuvres of many painters along these lines, which led his contemporary Raffaello Borghini to exclaim that old artists should stop painting entirely and devote themselves to theory instead. 68 On a similar note, Karel van Mander wished Titian had given up painting in the last decade of his life, since his last works only damaged the master’s reputation in the Northerner’s view. 69 More optimistically, Samuel Van Hoogstraten refused to believe Titian really painted works of lesser quality towards the end of his life, stating that when old age clouds a painter’s eyes in darkness, he tends to paint with more courage (stoutigheyt). 70

The first writer to systematically describe the effect of ageing upon a painter’s style and its implications for connoisseurs was (again) Roger de Piles in his Abrégé de la Vie des Peintres of 1699. His fairly nuanced explanation is worth quoting in full:

‘There is hardly [a Painter] who has not had his beginning, his progress and his end; that is: three manners: the first, which derives from the style of his Master; the second, which he has formed according to his own Taste & in which resides the measure of his talents & Genius, & the third, which usually degenerates into what one calls ‘mannered’ (maniéré); because a Painter, after having spent much

---

66 Bosse 1649, 3-4; see also chapter 2, ‘A Crucial Distinction’.
67 In contrast, Roger de Piles stressed that connoisseurs often wrongly assumed that they could judge matters of attribution after having seen only three or four pictures by a certain master. See below, ‘Style and Pricing’.
68 Borghini 1584; see Sohm 2007, 7.
69 Van Mander 1604, fol. 177v.: ‘Hy [Titian - at] overtrof binnen Venetien seer ghemacklijck alle Schilders, die hem wilden trosten: Maer hy, die overvloedich genoec in zijnen tijdt gewonnen hadde, soude wel hebben ghedaen, in zijnen lesten ouderdom te hebben gherust, oft om tijtverdrijf maer ghwroote te hebben: want sulcke leste zijn wercken verminderen zijn vermaertheyt oft gherucht. Hy was t’zijnen 86. Iaer noch ghevonden met den pinneelen in de handt, en sitten werckende. Hy is ghestorven Avo. 1576. doe te Venetien de groote sterfte was, zijns ouderdoms 96. Iaren.’ In the margin of the page, Van Mander added: ‘Tiziano in sijnen grooten ouderdom was afghenomen in de Const.’
70 Van Hoogstraten 1678, 242.
time studying Nature, wants to revel in habit instead of consulting nature further.”

In De Piles’ view, painters thus commonly developed three manners, the second usually demonstrating their full potential. The remarks by the collector Bugge van Ring and the artist Bernini, quoted above, suggest that such categories of thought may have already been quite common in practice.

**Alternating and Adjusting Styles**

Seventeenth-century painters did not exclusively change their working styles over time; they could also alternate between various styles in the same period of their career, as De Piles’ discussion of Laurent de La Hyre suggested. Moreover, they could adjust their manner of painting to various circumstances, such as the specific lighting conditions of the location in which the picture was meant to be displayed, or to the price that they expected the work to fetch. As we will see, in many instances, it is hard to determine when such an adjustment would have counted as an actual change in painter’s individual manner or style, or even if there was consensus on the matter. (Van Mander’s remark on Cornelis Cornelisz. quoted above suggests that his concept of an artist’s individual manner may have been broader than that of de La Hyre’s relative that was cited by De Piles, as it seems to have allowed for a considerable amount of variation in the execution). Whatever the case, it seems important to discuss such adjustments in all their variety, as these give a rough indication of how much consistency one can expect in seventeenth-century painters’ oeuvres.

Although the sources are relatively scant, I believe nonetheless that it is possible to distinguish various categories of such alternations and adjustments: changes related to price and quality, to the architectural location or place from

---

71 De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 94-95: ‘Il n’y en a point [de Peintre-at] qui n’ait eu son commencement, son progrès & sa fin; c’est à dire, trois manières: la première, qui tient de son Maître; la seconde, qu’il s’est formé selon son Goût, & dans laquelle réside la mesure de ses talents, & de son Génie; & la troisième, qui dégénère ordinairement en ce qu’on appelle maniéré; parce qu’un Peintre, après avoir étudié long-temps d’après la Nature, veut jouir, sans la consulter davantage, de l’habitude qu’il s’en est faite.’ In his translation of Du Fresnoy’s *Arte graphica*, De Piles indicated that ‘Goust’ was also used to indicate a ‘manner’. See De Piles 1668-1673, ‘Goust’. Before De Piles, Baldinucci had described the late style of several painters as ‘mannered’ (*ammanierato*); see Sohm 2007, 145.

72 See the introduction to this chapter.
which the work was meant to be seen, to foreign taste, to subject matter, to the function of the work and lastly, to the display of artistic virtuosity.

Style and Pricing

The Italian painter Luca Giordano reputedly adjusted his painting style depending on the payment he would receive. According to his biographer Francesco Baldinucci, the painter claimed that he had ‘three brushes’: one golden, one silver and the third copper, which he explained with the proverb ‘As the pay, so the painting’ (*qualis pagatio, talis pingatio*). For great lords and public display he created excellent paintings with his consummate skill; for private clients he exerted enough effort to procure silver, while he produced mediocre things for poor people who would pay him mere copper. The very fact that a seventeenth-century proverb addresses the relation between a painting’s quality and its payment suggests that Giordano was not the only painter who adjusted his manner of working depending on the reward he could expect. Indeed, Giordano’s contemporary and fellow countryman Amico Aspertini reputedly claimed he had two types of brushes, some cheap (*da buon prezzo*) and others esteemed (*di stima*); apparently, he had developed two different manners of painting. Similarly, Titian and Schiavone were said to have adjusted their manner of painting to their compensation. Albrecht Dürer, in a letter dated 29 August 1509, had already made a similar distinction:

“In one year, I can make a pile of common pictures (*gmaine gmäll*), so that no one would believe it possible that one man could do them all. One can earn something with these. But assiduous, hair-splitting labor gives me little in return.”

The practice of adjusting one’s manner of painting to the expected price of a picture seems to have also been quite common in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. The well-known playwright P.C. Hooft, for example, distinguished three different brushes – golden, silver and copper – in the oeuvre of a much

---

73 Francesco Saverio Baldinucci, cited and translated in Enggass/Brown (eds.) 1970, 146-147. See also Spear 1997, 10 and 323, note 41.
74 Malvasia 1841 [1678], I, 115; see also Spear 1997, 10 and 323, note 41.
75 See Spear 1997, 10 and 323, note 41.
76 ‘Den gmaine gmäll will ich ain jahr ain hauffen machen, das niemandt glaubte, das möglich were, das ain man thun möchte. An solchen mag man etwas gewinnen. Aber das fleisig kleiblen gehet nit von statten.’ Cited and translated in Koerner 1993, 206-207 and 487, note 17.
earlier painter than Giordano, the popular Netherlandish painter Dirck Barendszoon, who had reputedly studied with Titian (fig. 4.20). Samuel van Hoogstraten, who cited Hooft’s remark in his chapter on manners of painting, added that he believed such a practice to be dishonest. Van Hoogstraten did not mind painters finishing certain pieces more than others, yet he stressed that all works should be of high quality: “Whether you wish to briefly point out the objects, or finish them with the greatest precision, do let the hand and brush obey your eye and judgment, so that your manner of painting will agree with the natural character of the objects.” The fact that Van Hoogstraten urged painters to always strive for the highest quality suggests that he had witnessed the opposite, that is, that quite a few painters not only consciously varied the degree of finish of their pictures but also their level of excellence.

In the first recorded year of Aelbert Cuyp’s career, 1639, the painter displayed noticeably different manners of painting, which seems to indicate a difference in price. On the one hand, he started producing diminutive landscapes and city views inspired by Jan van Goyen’s monochrome style, which was fashionable at the time. Like Van Goyen, Cuyp used a small format and a limited range of colors and tones. The dense paint and vigorous brushstrokes are hallmarks of this particular style of Cuyp (fig. 4.21).

On the other hand, Cuyp also produced three relatively large, highly finished, and colorful paintings of the mythological scene depicting Orpheus charming the animals (fig. 4.22). In these works his brushwork is smooth and carefully blended. Not only the mythological subject matter and size but also the refined, labor-intensive execution indicate that these works must have constituted a more prestigious and expensive type of painting. Interestingly, one of these works was recorded in the 1696 inventory of Albertina Agnes van Nassau, suggesting that it may have once been part of the collection of the stadholder Frederik Hendrik and his wife Amalia von Solms. Presumably, at the outset of his career, the young Aelbert Cuyp tried to please wealthy art lovers by painting in a very refined style, while simultaneously producing cheaper pictures that could be attractive for a wider public.
Other examples of differences in style and quality which seem related to a paintings monetary value involve the painters Pieter de Hooch and Gabriel Metsu. Towards the end of his career in the 1670s, De Hooch produced several works which seem to have been swiftly executed with relatively broad brushstrokes (fig. 4.23). Although the lesser quality of these works has been related to early signs of mental illness, his splendid *Musical Party in a Courtyard* (1677, The National Gallery, London) proves that he was perfectly capable of producing works of high quality at this stage of his career, as Peter Sutton has observed (fig. 4.24). It seems therefore more likely that the economic downturn of the 1670s inspired the artist to produce cheaper pictures, but when given the opportunity, he could still produce accomplished and finished works.

Metsu’s later work shows a similar variation. In his forthcoming oeuvre catalogue of the painter, Adriaan Waiboer notes that Metsu produced many small, somewhat quickly painted single-figure scenes in the late 1650s and 1660s, such as *A Woman Peeling Apples* (fig. 4.25). However, his pendants *A Man Writing a Letter* and *A Woman Reading a Letter* of 1664-1666 show that he could also paint in a much more refined and highly finished style (figs. 4.26 and 4.27).

Before the end of the seventeenth century, Roger de Piles warned connoisseurs to pay attention to the amount of effort a painter had exerted in a picture. He sharply criticized art lovers who believed they could attribute pictures after having seen only three or four works by a certain master and who neither considered the amount of care invested in the works nor the age of the painter at the moment that he created the work. In de Piles’ opinion, there was hardly a painter who had not produced both good and bad works, depending on the amount of effort the painter had put forth and on ‘the movement of his genius’, or the availability of his innate talents.

---

81 Many authors mistakenly assume that Pieter de Hooch died in an asylum in 1684. Frans Grijzenhout has convincingly demonstrated that the man who died in an asylum was Pieter de Hooch's son. See Grijzenhout 2008, 216.
83 I would like to thank Adriaan Waiboer for generously sharing his research and insights, which will be published in his upcoming catalogue raisonné of Metsu.
84 De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 94-95: ‘On voit des Curieux qui se font une idée d’un Maître sur trois ou quatre Tableaux qu’ils en auront vus, & qui croyent après cela avoir un titre suffisant pour décider sur sa manière, sans faire réflexion aux soins plus ou moins grands que le Peintre aura pris à les faire, ni à l’âge auquel il les aura faits.’ On the effect of ageing on art, see above ‘Stylistic Changes over Time’.
85 Ibid., 95: ‘il n’y a point de Peintre qui n’a fait quelques bons & mauvais Tableaux, selon ses soins & le mouvement de son Génie.’ See also above, ‘Stylistic Changes over Time’ and below, ‘Style and Country’ on Rubens’ ‘Génie’.
In the sales catalogue of one of the foremost late seventeenth-century collections of paintings, the Rotterdam cabinet of Jacques Meijers, the painter’s effort is explicitly mentioned in the description of two paintings by Veronese. Albeit different in subject, the works are described as well-suited to be pendants since they were made ‘around the same time’ and ‘with the same care’ (avec le même Soin / met d’eige netheid).\footnote{Auction catalogues 1714 and 1722, cat. nr. 27. See Jonckheere 2005, 274.} Also, a picture by Benedetto di Castiglione is said to have been done with more care (soin) than any other work by this painter.\footnote{‘Le Soin avec lequel le Benedetto a fait ce Tableau surpasse tout ce qu’il a fait.’ Auction catalogues 1714, cat. nr. 34. See Jonckheere 2005, 275.} Presumably, Jacques Meijers had paid attention to such aspects when purchasing his pictures.

**Style and Location**

Another way in which artists adjusted their manner of painting is by the consideration of location. Depending on the setting in which the picture was meant to be hung, painters could adjust the depiction of light and the perspective to best suit the viewing conditions. Such alterations may seem unusual for Netherlandish paintings of the seventeenth century since the majority of these pictures were not created on commission for a specific location. Yet even high-quality pictures made for the market were often created with a particular lighting situation and/or viewing position in mind, and such adjustments were recommended by several art theorists.

For example, the curious perspectival distortion in the lower right corner of Gerrit Dou’s *Lady at her Toilet* (note the wine cooler) does not seem to be a clumsy mistake of the artist or an addition by a less capable pupil, but, instead, a deliberate adjustment to a very particular viewing point. Only when seen from up close at the height of the main figure’s eyes does the perspectival construction fall into place (fig. 4.28).\footnote{This was first noted by Eric Jan Sluijter at the Dou study day in April 2000 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. The work matches the 1678 description of a painting ‘with an open door’ (een vrouwij dat gekapt wordt, met openlaende deur en daarop een svgent vrouwij bij de lamp), which would explain the close proximity of the viewing point. The perspective seems to be adjusted to position the viewer as if he is opening the door.} Also, we know that at least one of Rembrandt’s paintings was made to be seen in a stark light and from a sufficient distance, as the artist himself indicated in a letter to the art lover Constantijn Huygens: ‘My Lord, hang this painting in a stark light and so that one can see it from afar, so it will sparkle...
best’. Moreover, architectural and landscape paintings were necessarily created with a specific vantage point in mind if they were constructed according to the rules of linear perspective. Such perspective constructions commonly required the viewer to stand directly in front of the picture with his or her eye at the height of the horizon line. Indeed, the painter and art theorist Gerard de Lairesse complained that he had seen many landscape pictures hanging so high on the wall that viewers could not possibly adjust to the height of the depicted horizon.

If a painter had adjusted a picture to particular viewing conditions, this could make the work look somewhat peculiar when extracted from its original context, thereby confusing art lovers. Indeed, early connoisseurs seem to have been aware of the importance of viewing conditions. Karel van Mander noted that a visitor to the Pope’s private apartments, who had the opportunity to step onto scaffolding and see paintings by Hans Soens from close by, remarked that Soens’ pictures were painted too roughly and without the appropriate precision. However, in Van Mander’s opinion, the paintings looked exceptionally good when seen from below, as they should be. Van Mander also described Maerten van Heemskerck’s painting of *St. Luke Painting the Virgin*, which was meant to be seen from below (‘everything is depicted in such a way as to be seen from below’). (fig. 4.29). Like many religious works, this picture was no longer displayed in its original church setting after the iconoclasm of 1566 and had been placed instead in a municipal building, which may well be the reason that Van Mander explained so explicitly how the picture was meant to be viewed.

In other instances the original context guaranteed the correct viewing conditions, which in some cases demanded the movement of the viewer. For

---

90 As Gerard de Lairesse went blind in the 1690s, his observation must date from before this period. De Lairesse 1707, vol. I, 345-47. See also Loughman/Montias 2000, 106.
91 Van Mander 1604, fol. 288v-289r: ‘Hy [Hans Soens] is oock ghereyst in Italien, en was in mijnen tijt te Room, alwaer ick met hem oock ghemeensaem hebbe gheweest. Veel dinghen heeft hy hier gedaen, besonder eleen stueckens op coper, en anders van Oly-verwe, en veel voor groote Heeren: oock in’t Paleys van den Paus, verscheeyden dingen op den natten muer. Onder ander liet hy ons sien een deel Landschappen, in een Frijse op t’nat ghedaen, in een van des Paus Cameren, terwijlen datter noch de steygheringhe stondt, soo dat ick die [fol. 289r] origineel dinghen van by sagh, met een wonderlichke aerdigh practijcke oft veerdicheyt ghedaen, alsoo dat van s’Paus Schilder oft yemant wiert gheseyt, datse te rouw, en niet net genoegh waren gedaen, doch waren dingen van grooten en uytnemende welstandt, sonderlinge van beneden, also sy mosten wesen gesien.’
92 Van Mander 1604, fol. 245r on a picture of St. Luke painting the Madonna, which Maarten van Heemskerk created for the Altar of the Guild of St Luke: ‘alle dingh is genoegh gemaect van onder op te sien’.
example, a painting with an unusual linear perspective (which could be misinterpreted as a peculiar mistake) by Jan van der Heyden had a device attached to the frame which helped the viewer find the perfect viewing point for this work. The same held true for many types of perspective boxes which usually contained a peep hole.

The importance of adjusting pictures to viewing conditions is underscored in a pamphlet written by the Haarlem history painter Pieter de Grebber in 1649. For the benefit of studious apprentice painters, he stipulated eleven rules that should be observed by a ‘good Painter and Draughtsman’. The very first rule reads: ‘It is important, for several reasons, to know the location where the painting is to be hung: because of the lighting; because of the height of the location; to determine our distance and horizon, which also means that all draughtmen (ordineerders) should thoroughly understand the basic rules of perspective.’

Technical analysis of three paintings that Pieter de Grebber created for the Oranjezaal in the Huis ten Bosch has shown that De Grebber adjusted the entire build-up of these pictures to their respective location. (figs. 4.30, 4.31 and 4.32 a & b). *The Triumphal Procession, with Spoils of War* flanks a window, and the lighting in the painting mimics the fall of natural sunlight onto the work, as Margriet van Eikema Hommes and Lidwien Speelers have convincingly shown. De Grebber modeled the figures with light from the side and strong tonal contrasts and reflections, using few contour lines. In contrast the triumphal procession with the sacrificial bull, which faces a window, has a more even lighting from the front and almost no shadows. Here De Grebber consistently used dark outlines to define his figures (fig. 4.33). Lastly, *The Ascension of Frederik Hendrik into Heaven*, which was painted for the cupola, is painted with looser, more pronounced strokes and a variety of contours reflecting both the actual light from the lantern in the cupola and heavenly beams of light in the painting (fig. 4.34). If these paintings were seen in another setting, one might think that the artist who used dark outlines and almost no shadows could not be the same as the one who worked without contour lines and with heavy tonal contrasts.

In the Renaissance it was already common to make adjustments specific to location and lighting conditions in pictures meant for interior decoration. Raphael, for example, used sharper light-dark contrasts in his paintings destined for walls.

---

93 ‘I. De plaets is van noode te weten daermen hangen wil dat gemaeckt sal worden, om verscheyde redenen; om ‘t licht: om de hooghte des plaets: om soo vorder ons afsant en Orisont te nemen; waer toe oock dient dat alle Ordineerderd de grondt van de Perspectif behooren grondigh te verstaen.’ De Grebber 1649. See also Van Eikema Hommes 2005a.

94 Van Eikema Hommes/Speelers 2005.
which received relatively little light, such as walls which did not face a window, and these adjustments are present even in his drawn designs for such paintings.\textsuperscript{95} It is interesting that even though the majority of pictures produced in the seventeenth-century Netherlands was not made on commission for a specific location, such site-specific adaptations seem to have been far from forgotten. In fact, the prominent place and explicit mention of the importance of location in Pieter de Grebber's list suggests that the awareness of the viewer and viewing conditions was very strong among artists.

Indeed, Samuel van Hoogstraten not only urged painters to adjust their manner to the intended location of a picture, but he also used an ancient anecdote to warn viewers to withhold their judgment until they could see a work in the appropriate circumstances. Reputedly, the ancient sculptors Alcamenes and Phidias once competed to create the most beautiful statue of Minerva for display on a column in the city of Athens. When they had finished their work, Alcamenes’ statue pleased everyone who looked at it; the piece was wonderfully sweet and executed in a pleasant manner (aengenaem gehandelt). Phidias’ work, however, looked so misshapen and deformed that the public wanted to stone its maker. His Minerva had wide open eyes, a nose with three bumps and widely parted lips. Yet when displayed up high, the appearance of both works changed dramatically: Alcamenes’ statue lost its grace, while Phidias’s work appeared spirited, ornate and beautiful.\textsuperscript{96} Similarly, an elevated location requires paintings to be done with broad, barely blended brushstrokes, according to Van Hoogstraten, for ‘the altitude and thickness of the air will make many things appear blended’.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{95} See Joannides 1983, 26-27. In my MA thesis, I argued that the sharp light-dark contrasts in the Chatsworth portrait of Leo X are related to the lighting in the Sala di Costantino. See Tummers 1999.

\textsuperscript{96} ‘Toen eens de Atheniensen voor hadden ter eere van haere beschermgodinnr Minerve, een schoon beeld op een hoge pijler op te rechten, zoo verkoren zy Alcamenes en Phidias, belooovende den best doender van deeze twee heerlijk te beloonen. Zyom alkander te tarten, teegen vierich aen ’t werk, en brachten eindelijk yder zijn beeldt te voorschijn. Dat van Alcamenes was wonder lieflijk en aengenaem gehandelt, en beviel yder een, die ’t zach. Maer dat van Phidias was met wijdjt opgesperde oogen, en driebultige neus, gapende en van een gescheide lippen, en in d’oogen der aenschouwers zoo mismaekt en wanschapen, datmen de menichte nauwelijx beletten kon van hem te steeningen. Maar hy met veel smeekens badt hen, zy wilden hun oordeel opshorten, ter tijdt toe men de beelden om hoog gestelt zou hebben: ’t welk gedaen zijnde veranderde de kans; want de bevallijkheden verdweenen uit het beeld van Alcamenes, toenmen ’t van verre zach, en de wilde draeijen, en harde steeken, in ’t heelt van Fidias, versmolten tot een geestige en sielijke schoonheit; ’t welk hem en zijn konst hooger eeren bracht.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 236.

\textsuperscript{97} ‘de hoogte en de dikheit der lucht zal veel dingen smeltende vertoonen’. Van Hoogstraten 1678, 235; see also \textit{ibid.}, 236: ‘Nu zoo moeten ook zijn handeling voornamentlijk veranderen na de plaets, daer het werk te staen heeft.’
For seventeenth-century connoisseurs it must have been important to realize that the depiction of light, the specific perspective inherent in a picture and even the relative roughness of the execution may be related to the setting for which the painting was destined. Such elements were therefore not necessarily a reliable feature by which to evaluate a painter’s style. In any case, the knowledge that seventeenth-century painters may have consciously modified these elements calls for caution when attributing pictures from this period.

**Style and Country**

At the end of the seventeenth-century the French art theorist Roger de Piles stated that one of the most challenging types of picture for connoisseurs to recognize were those done deliberately in a foreign style (*Goût d'un autre Pays*).\(^9^8\) As he believed a successful connoisseur should first classify a picture according to local painting school (Roman, Venetian, Lombardian, German, Netherlandish or French), and subsequently determine its author, it is not hard to understand that a picture executed in a foreign style might be misleading.\(^9^9\) The question of what types of pictures he had in mind is harder to answer.

The description first calls to mind the œuvres of painters who consistently and for long periods worked in a foreign style, such as the Utrecht Caravaggisti, who followed the manner of Caravaggio (see chapter 2, figs. 2.4 and 2.5). However, Roger de Piles does not give such examples and focuses instead on more temporary variations in style in his writings. Especially when discussing Rubens in his *Conversations sur la Peinture*, 1677, De Piles stresses the diversity of this master’s manners of painting, as seen above (‘A Closer Look at Seventeenth-Century Sources: An Introduction’ and chapter 4, ‘Alternating and Adjusting Styles’). According to the protagonist Damon, ‘it seems that after having made one [painting] in one manner (*goust*), he [Rubens] seems to have changed his mind (literally: ‘*genie*’) and taken another spirit to make another [painting] in another taste’.\(^1^0^0\) The interlocutor Philarque remarks that Rubens had ‘hardly a particular

---

\(^9^8\) “On a vû plusieurs Peintres qui ont suivi le Goût d’un autre Païs que le leur, comme il y en a eu, qui, dans leur Païs même, ont passé d’une manière à une autre, en changeant ainsi & en cherchant une manière particulière, ils ont fait plusieurs Tableaux fort équivoques, & dont il est difficile de déterminer l’Auteur.’ De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 96.

\(^9^9\) De Piles 1699 [ed. 1715], 94. Roger de Piles’ list of schools of painting suggests that he interpreted the styles of various Italian city-states as distinctive ‘national’ styles; indeed, Italy had not yet unified as a nation.

\(^1^0^0\) De Piles 1677, 223.
way of handling the brush or a habit of employing the same tones (teints) or colors’. Rather than a personal habit, it is a ‘firm and happy execution’ which characterizes his work.

More specifically, Roger de Piles celebrates Rubens’ altarpiece in Santa Maria in Vallicella as done in the manner (goût) of the Italian painter Veronese, as did several other seventeenth-century authors (see below). Similar classifications occur in the auction catalogue of the late Jacques Meijers collection in Rotterdam, in which a picture by the painter Veronese (commonly representing the Venetian school of painting) is described as ‘in the manner of the Carracci’ (dans le Gout des Carachei), the Bolognese painters that ran a painting academy. Changes in style related to foreign or regional traditions may have constituted a fairly common category of thought among early modern painters and connoisseurs; these traditions, therefore, deserve more extensive - though necessarily tentative - analysis.

According to Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Rubens’ altarpiece showed the ‘intention’ (intentione) of Veronese in the figures of Saint Gregory and Saint Maurice on the left side panel; while Filippo Baldinucci and Roger de Piles stated that these figures were done in the taste (gusto / goust) of the Italian master (fig. 4.35). Although these authors did not expand on the similarities they observed, they presumably alluded to the exceptionally rich and lifelike clothing of the saints. According to Van Mander, Veronese was known particularly for his ‘beautiful silken materials and other well-painted things’. In Rubens’ altarpiece, the plasticity and richness of the clothing lends the work a powerful sense of festiveness and immediacy, which unquestionably recalls the famous Venetian master.

Although this altarpiece by Rubens was mentioned explicitly for its similarity to the work of a foreign painter, it is certainly not the only instance in

---

101 Ibid., p. 223.
102 This picture’s current location is unknown.
105 See also Costamagna 2005.
which Rubens seems to have matched his manner of working to a local taste. During his stay in Italy, he developed a lively portrait style, much less formal than the courtly schematic format of ceremonial portraits. Rubens enhanced the sense of physical reality by opening up the background with a vista appearing between pillars or across a balcony. This echoes a Venetian portrait style created by Titian and Veronese. (fig. 4.36). Interestingly, when Rubens returned to Antwerp, he abandoned this portrait style and reverted to a more schematic form of portraiture that seems old-fashioned compared to his Italian creations (fig. 4.37). Rubens, in fact, adjusted his style to match the taste of his Antwerp clientele, as Hans Vlieghe has pointed out.\footnote{Vlieghe 1987, introduction, esp. 22.} The master’s ability to match the taste of his diverse clients is one of the reasons that the portraits he executed outside of the Southern Netherlands have been discussed in a separate volume of the \textit{Corpus Rubenianum}.\footnote{Huemer 1977.}

Another example of pictures done in a foreign style that are mentioned by Roger de Piles include pastiches by David Teniers in the style (\textit{maniére}) of Veronese and Bassano.\footnote{De Piles 1699 [ed. 1707], 79. De Piles called these ‘pastiches’ after the Italian term ‘pasticcio’.} Though Teniers’ works had fooled many connoisseurs and continued to do so when De Piles was writing his treatise, the latter claimed that both Teniers’s brushwork and coloring gave the painter away. Teniers’ brushwork was smooth and light, yet it not as spirited as Bassano’s and not as capable in characterizing objects, especially when depicting animals, according to De Piles. Moreover, although Teniers had achieved unity in his coloring, he could not shed a certain greyness to which he had grown accustomed, and his colors were neither as powerful (\textit{de vigueur}) nor as convincingly placed in the imaginary space (\textit{suave}) as Bassano’s (compare figs. 4.38 and 4.39).\footnote{De Piles 1699 [ed. 1707], 79. ‘David Teniers […] avoit un talent particulier à contrefaire les Bassans: mais son Pinceau coolant & ‘eger qu’il a employé dans cet artifice, est la source même de l’évidence de sa tromperie. Car son Pinceau, qui est coulant & facile, n’est ni si spirituel, ni si propre à caractériser les objects que celuy des Bassans, sur tout dans les Animaux. / Il est vyre que Teniers a de l’union dans ces Couleurs: mais il y regnoit un certain Gris auquel il étoit accou’tumé, & son Coloris n’a, ni la vigeur, ni la suavité de celuy de Jacques Bassan.’ On the meaning of ‘suave’, see De Piles 1668-1673, ‘union’.} The original painting on slate by Bassano was part of collection of the Archduke Leopold; Teniers depicted it in one of his paintings of the Archduke in his gallery of paintings. Interestingly, Teniers also mentioned it in his published catalogue of the Archduke’s collection, \textit{Theatrum pictorum}, but included an engraving not after the original painting (which has a vertical format), but after this pastiche (fig. 4.40).\footnote{See Klinge (ed.) 1991, no. 103, 292-293.}
The example of Teniers brings to mind a series of prints by Hendrick Goltzius, which were new inventions in the styles of old masters, among them Albrecht Dürer (fig. 4.41). According to Van Mander, this print in the manner of Dürer had fooled both artists and experienced connoisseurs.111

Stylistic adjustments such as the ones discussed above are more abrupt and less consistent than changes related to the creation of a painter’s new personal style and could therefore be all the more puzzling for connoisseurs. Like more consistently used foreign styles of painting, these variations remind us that styles were fairly fluid and adaptable.

**Style and Subject**

The idea that different subjects required a different stylistic approach has a long tradition in literary theory. Already in ancient Greece it was common to think in terms of ‘genres of style’. For example, a tragedy required a different structure and form of speech than a comedy. Such distinctions were also very common in the seventeenth century. The Dutch secretary to the stadholder Constantijn Huygens, for example, wrote in his diary around 1630: “If I were to treat amusing subject matter, then a difficult style would be misplaced”.112 By the time Huygens noted this remark, quite a few writers on painting had also applied such a subject-related approach to painting styles. Initially strongly indebted to rhetorical traditions, such distinctions in painting styles gradually became more elaborate and more suited to the peculiarities of pictures.

In antiquity, the philosophers Hermogenes and Demetrius tried to distinguish and define various types of writing styles.113 Following their example, the Renaissance scholars Paolo Arese, Francesco Panigarola, and Pier Vittori further elaborated upon the issue. Traditionally, three main stylistic categories were distinguished: the grand, the middle and the plain style, although the terms used for these categories (maggiore, mezzano, minore; sublime, temperato, tenue; etc.) and the exact characteristics associated with them could vary.114 The most prestigious

---

112 Huygens/Kan 1971, 39: ‘Indien ik een amusante stof behandel, dan zou een moeilijke stijl misplaatst zijn’.
or ‘grand style’ caused the least debate. This style was seen as the most difficult one to realize and also the most persuasive and impressive one for the reader or listener, and it was therefore described with adjectives such as magna\nica, grande, eroico, grave, sublime and maestoso.\n
Moreover, it had strong masculine connotations; the grand style was forceful, virile, violent, and heroic, and also exemplary, elevated, and noble.

First defined in antiquity, the ‘grand style’ has been associated with this period ever since; it was an ideal style inspired by the ancients. When the term came to be applied to painting styles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some writers were more concerned with the establishment of a canon with absolute standards than with the definition of the ‘grand style’ as one of various subject-related styles from which a painter could choose. Vasari used the term to praise Michelangelo’s art as the highest achievement in painting and to discuss Michelangelo’s influence on Raphael. He was subsequently criticized by Dolce for focusing too much on ideal and absolute qualities of painting styles and not taking the relationship between style (form) and subject matter, that is, ‘decorum’ (lit.: ‘appropriateness’), into account. It was not the last time such a tension arose between the interpretation of style as an absolute measuring stick and style as a relative and subject-related phenomenon. In fact, it seems to have been a recurring topic of debate, which illustrates the difficulty of setting a standard of stylistic excellence without dismissing modifications in style related to subject.

Much like Dolce’s criticism of Vasari at the end of the sixteenth century, the painter Nicolas Poussin criticized art lovers who did not take the different ‘modes of painting’ into account when assessing a painting’s style. ‘I am not one of those who always sings in the same key’, he retorted when his patron Paul Fréart de Chantelou had expressed disappointment over his painting The Baptism for being ‘too sweet’ (trop doux) (fig. 4.42).\n
Later he explained that the ancient Greeks had developed different ‘modes’ of painting: a modest Dorian style for grave, serious and learned subject matter; a severe Phrygian style for sharp, vehement, furious, very severe and surprising topics (suitable for the depiction of wars, for example); a Lydian style for lamentable subjects; a Hypolydian style for a certain sweetness and softness (suavité et douceur) for joyous, divine, glorious and paradisical topics; and an Ionic style for humorous dances, bacchanales and

\n\n115 Sohm 2001, 122.
116 Sohm 2001, 122-123.
parties. Similarly, Poussin varied his manner of painting, though his applications of such styles were not always readily understood. Like De Chantelou had done, Poussin’s friend and fellow painter Jacques Stella also criticized a painting by Poussin for being ‘too soft’ (mol). The painting in question depicted a love story (Rinaldo and Armida), which presumably explains the softness of Poussin’s approach.

Poussin’s view is unusually elaborate compared to the surviving sources on this topic, yet he was certainly not the only painter or art lover to be concerned with the relation between style or form and content. At the very beginning of the seventeenth century, Karel van Mander had already outlined what was appropriate for a number of different subjects. In religious pictures, for example, clarity was crucial according to Van Mander, and therefore he recommended placing important figures clearly in the foreground of the picture, just as previous generations of painters had done (see also below ‘Style and Function’). He also explained the ways in which male and female subjects should be treated differently, the so-called ‘decorum personae’. In his view, women should always be depicted with their legs and feet close together, whether standing or seated, to suggest demureness (zedigheid), whereas men looked more elegant while sitting with their knees wide apart and their feet close together, according to Van Mander. With a reference to Baldassare Castiglione, the famous sixteenth-century writer on courtly manners, he stressed that pictures of women should not exclude ‘nobility’, that manly works should be powerful and noble, and that female topics should be predominantly demure and soft.

Much like Italian writers on art, Van Mander thus strongly infused pictures with a gender-related sense of decorum. This is hardly surprising at a time in which most Northern painters had such a strong sense of decorum that they depicted men and women as a rule with a different skin color: men having a light-

---


119 This painting is now lost. See Sohm 2001, 124-125. As in contemporary usage, ‘softness’ and ‘sweetness’ carried female connotations, which may be the reason that patrons criticized this style, as Sohm suggests.

120 On the general topic of modes in painting, see also Bialostocki 1961.

121 Van Mander 1604, fols. 18v-19r: ‘Wy sien ons Voorouders, wanneer sy naemlijck, / Een devoot’ History wilden beleyden, / De besonderste Beelden sy bequaemlijk, / Voor aen uytmuntich (soot wel is betaemlijk) / Seer mercklijk stelden, om wel t’onderscheyden / Soo dat d’Aenschouwers sonder langhe beyden / Den sin oft d’History wel raden conden, / Sulcx te volghen is nut en goet ghevonden.’

122 Van Mander 1604, fols. 12v and fol. 14v.
brown skin while women were given a much lighter pinkish-white skin. As the century progressed and lifelikeness became increasingly important, this practice disappeared. Yet a more general sense of decorum, in particular a sense of ‘male’ and ‘female’ styles as well as ‘noble’ and ‘lowly’ subjects, seems to have lingered.

For example, it cannot be a mere coincidence that Rembrandt often chose to depict typically male subjects, such as a soldier and apostles, with particularly loose brushwork. In an early series of three small paintings on copper topped with gold leaf, he even juxtaposed a soldier done in a particularly bold and rough manner with a pious, elderly lady in a highly finished and polished painting style, which in my view showcases his mastery of these two opposite manners of paintings (fig. 4.43 and fig. 4.44).  

The third work in the series is an intriguing self portrait, pensive in character, done in what appears to be a flowing, loose manner not unlike the manner advocated by Philips Angel as an alternative to a very neat painting style.  

Although the variation in brushwork had caused the Rembrandt Research Project to relegate two of these three works to their B category of paintings, the very unusual support and the fact that the Laughing Soldier was reproduced in print as early as 1630 by Jan van Vliet (fig. 4.46 Jan van Vliet, Print after Rembrandt’s Laughing Soldier, 1630, British Museum, London), made the removal of these works from Rembrandt’s oeuvre rather unconvincing. Instead, the unusual support strongly suggested that the works were conceived as a series and deliberately done in different manners, as several reviewers of the first part of A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings had remarked.  

Indeed, Ernst van de Wetering has re-attributed the works in the latest Corpus volume (IV, 2005), in which he interprets the paintings as the visual equivalents of the genera dicendi, the three main rhetoric styles, namely the depiction of an elderly lady as a representation of the stilus humilis or modest manner, the soldier as a representation of the stilus gravis, the severe style, and the self-portrait as the equivalent of the stilus mediocris or middle style.  

The interpretation of the stilus mediocris proved especially difficult, and in my opinion, it is more likely that Rembrandt juxtaposes a bold, rough and male style with a softer, more refined, female style in this series, while using a third manner - expressive but not unduly violent or rough - for his self-portrait. This

123 See also above 'Developing a Style'.  
124 See above 'Style: Artful or Artificial '.  
125 Among them Peter Schatborn, editor of The Burlington Magazine, and Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann. See Bruyn et al. 1982-, vol. IV, 166, note 197; and above chapter 1, ‘Rembrandt Research and the Integration of Scientific Techniques’.  
126 Bruyn et al. 1982-, vol. IV, 166-171.
would also explain why only the *Laughing Soldier* was reproduced in print. Van Mander had already celebrated a successful rough manner as an unusual *tour de force* that required a significant amount of experience, and Rembrandt’s mastery of this most difficult style in the first years of his career as a master painter is indeed highly impressive.

Interestingly, a head study of a soldier attributed to Rembrandt’s most talented pupil, Carel Fabritius, has caused an attribution debate similar to Rembrandt’s *Laughing Soldier*. As we have seen in chapter 1, this painting of a *Man in a Helmet* was initially attributed to Fabritius on the basis of its confident rough brushwork, and it was subsequently de-attributed because it did not have a parallel in Fabritius’ oeuvre in terms of this bold execution (fig. 4.47). Yet in the context of the Fabritius exhibition of 2004, Fabritius specialist Christopher Brown once again argued in favor of its attribution, describing it as a ‘powerful and original painting’. Although Brown does not relate the particularly rough brushwork in this picture to the subject matter, such reasoning could provide an explanation for this particular variation in style. The painting is not a portrait but a study of a specific figure, a soldier, which could justify a different type of brushwork.

On the other end of the spectrum, a ‘sweeter’ and ‘softer’ painting style seems to have been preferred for a different kind of subject, as the so-called fine painters combined polished brushwork and subtle movements and expressions with elegant interior scenes of women combing their hair, polite encounters of lovers, well-dressed men and women focused on reading or writing letters, or elegant companies making music for example. (fig. 4.48)

In contrast, lowlife scenes were usually treated more roughly (fig. 4.49). Seen in this context, the rough brushwork of Frans Hals seems exceptional when used in elegant portraits, yet Hals consciously changed his painting style to suit the decorum appropriate for the subject. While he depicted a woman known as ‘Malle Babbe’ (‘silly Babbe’) with surprisingly loose and unblended brushwork, a commissioned portrait that he executed around the same time is much smoother and softer in its description of the sitter’s face. (compare figs. 4.50 and fig. 4.51).

This type of adjustment has often been ignored by later connoisseurs. Rembrandt’s smoothly executed portrait of Anna Six-Wymer was even temporarily de-attributed because of the elegant sfumato painting style in the sitter’s face, which did not seem to match Rembrandt’s other, looser brushwork (fig. 4.52). Instead it was given to an anonymous member of Rembrandt’s workshop. Yet the fact that this wealthy woman must have commissioned Rembrandt to paint her likeness, which has since stayed in the family and has

---

127 Brown 2006, 140.
been celebrated in a laudatory poem by Joost van de Vondel, made the idea that the master was not involved in the most crucial part of the portrait, namely the face, rather unlikely. Indeed, in the most recent attribution of this work, Ernst van de Wetering interprets the face as by the master while attributing other parts to an unknown assistant (without however explaining why Rembrandt used a sfumato painting style in the sitter’s face).128

Although much remains to be researched as to the exact relationship between style and content and its applications, it seems to have been an important concern for many an ambitious painter (see also ‘Style and Function’ on religious art and ‘Style and Virtuosity’). This does not mean, however, that there was a clear consensus as to how style and subject could and should be combined in both theory and practice. Apart from general notions of decorum, the individual views and specific adjustments seem to have been plentiful. In fact, Aelbert Cuyp’s two types of landscape painting seem related to his subject matter (not just to the price of the works), for all three of his more elaborately finished landscapes contain the mythological figure of Orpheus charming animals with his music, while his monochrome landscapes simply show seventeenth-century rural life (see 'Style and Pricing').

To conclude, painters adjusted their styles to the subject in a variety of ways. History paintings, lowlife scenes, portraits, as well as rural and idealized landscapes, could each require a different way of handling the brush. Changes in subject are therefore of great importance when tracing a painter’s stylistic development and defining his or her hallmark style.

*Style and Function*

In the case of religious paintings, not only the subject but also its function as an object of devotion may have influenced the style. As we have seen, Anthonie van Dyck used a distinctively different touch for saints and mere mortals. He made the faces and clothing of Mary and Christ not individualized or sharply defined, but rather somewhat ephemeral and idealized, clearly distinguishing these figures from the donors at their side. Transcending the particular, van Dyck’s soft strokes emphasize the sanctity of Mary and Christ,
presenting them as worthy focal points for contemplation and prayers. The rather unusual contrast in style in this picture thus seems linked to its function.

Already at the outset of the seventeenth century, Van Mander stipulated specific requirements for religious works. Although he generally recommended that painters depict their figures in elegant poses with their heads pleasantly turned, he believed they should not do so in religious works, for religious figures should look pious (devotich) and modest (modeste). Moreover, as we have seen above, he believed clarity was crucial in devotional pictures, and therefore he recommended placing important figures clearly in the foreground of the picture as previous generations of painters had done. In this way it was easy for a viewer to understand the work and/or recognize the story.

It is interesting that Van Mander specifically urges painters to follow the visual tradition when creating devotional images. As function and appearance were often closely intertwined in such works, religious paintings were likely to resist innovation.

Another indication that the religious function of devotional images could call for a traditional style comes from an anecdote about the painter Pieter Vlerick. According to Van Mander, Vlerick painted an altarpiece for a nuns' convent in the style of Tintoretto. Unfortunately, Vlerick’s work has not been identified; it was presumably inspired by Tintoretto's *Crucifixion* in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice (fig. 4.53/5.4 Tintoretto, *Crucifixion*, 1565, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice). According to Van Mander, Vlerick’s picture showed Christ on the cross in the middle ground and lit from the side, his face largely in the shadow. Although painters and art experts reputedly appreciated the work for its artistic merits, the nuns were not pleased (see also below chapter 5). Presumably, they had expected a clearer and more conventional ‘Flemish’

---

129 Compare Michael Baxandall’s interpretation of Perugino’s religious works in Baxandall, 1972.
130 Van Mander 1604, fol. 12v: ‘dit wordt in de stellinghe ghepresen / Werckelijcker, nac Actitudens orden, / t’Hooft elders als t’Lichaem gheweynt te worden. / Oft tammighen onaerdt wil ons ontpaeyen, / /Dus moetmen op veelderley wijse pooghen / Ter beste welstandicheyt t’hooft te draeyen, / Want sulex can gantsch bederven oft verfraeyen / Den aerdt eens Beeldts, in verstandighen ooghen: / Doch gheen omdraeyen is wel te ghedooghen / Aen gheestlijcke Beelden, die men op’t beste / Soeckt te maken devotich en modeste.’ See also Van Mander 1604, fol. 13v: ‘Dus moet men houden matelijc ganghen, / In wenden en buyghen, volghende t’eleven’.
131 Van Mander 1604, fols. 18v-19r: ‘Wy sien ons Voorouders, wanneer sy naemlijck, / Een devoot’ History wilden beleyden, / De besonderste Beelden sy bequemlijck, / Voor een uytmuntich (soot wel is betaemlijck) / Seer mercklijck stelden, om wel t’onderscheyden / Soo dat d’Aenschouwers sonder langhe beyden / Den sin oft d’History wel raden conden, / Sulcx te volghen is nut en goet ghevonden.’ On the placement of figures, see also chapter 6, ‘Invention, Composition and Design’. See also above ‘Style and Subject’.
132 See chapter 5, ‘Painters and art experts’ (schilders en konstverstandigen)’. 
picture in line with Van Mander’s general recommendations about devotional works. Instead, Vlerick had created a prominently artistic altarpiece in the Venetian virtuoso style of Tintoretto.

As we have seen, De la Hyre’s relative, who was quoted in De Piles, expected painters to use a different manner for cabinet pieces than for large-scale ‘church pieces’ towards the end of the century. Whether such a change in manner could merely be due to the different scale and lighting conditions or also to the religious function of ‘church pieces’ is not known. It would be a fascinating topic for further research.

As to other functions which may have had an impact on a painter’s style, the portrait’s function of capturing one’s likeness for posterity has already been briefly mentioned. It called for a certain precision, and according to at least one writer (Bosse), even for a ‘mannerless manner’, a perfect suggestion of reality undisturbed by recognizable brushstrokes (see above, ’Style: Artful or Artificial’). In practice, of course, a likeness could also very successfully be captured with more pronounced brushstrokes – as demonstrated in portraits by Frans Hals, Rembrandt and Anthonie van Dyck, some of the seventeenth century’s foremost masters in the genre. Yet even masters which were well-known for their bold brushwork seem to have restrained themselves in their portraits, especially in the depiction of women’s faces, presumably because they deemed a smoother style more appropriate and because it allowed them to portray their sitters with a greater precision.

Lastly, the function of a picture as either a study or a complete work evidently had implications for its level of finish and thus its style. Particularly with regards to Rembrandt attributions, such function-related aspects have played an important role in recent attribution debates. Ernst van de Wetering has argued that this function has often been overlooked by twentieth-century connoisseurs and that therefore pictures such as Woman with a White Cap (Private Collection) and Woman Weeping (Detroit Institute of Arts) had been incorrectly de-attributed (fig. 4.54 and fig. 4.55). In his view, the artist’s intention for these paintings explains their sketchy character, as well as a certain lack of definition. Indeed, given the potential impact of a picture’s function on its style, it seems far from negligible.

133 See Van de Wetering 2005b, 16; see also Van de Wetering 2006,
Variation and Virtuosity

According to Nicolas Poussin 'vulgar painters' did not adjust their style to the topic of their pictures, and as a result, he thought their works looked like engravings, reduced to a kind of mechanical uniformity. Similarly, Abraham Bosse portrayed painters who had not changed style as rather inadequate – they were, after all, unable to recognize pictures by other masters who had created works in a variety of styles. In contrast, painters who were able to freely manipulate their brushwork or burin were highly celebrated for precisely this reason, such as Rubens (by Roger de Piles) and Hendrick Goltzius (by Karel van Mander). The ability to change one’s style at will was thus associated with mastery.

As we have seen, De Piles emphasized the flexibility of Rubens’s brush and manner of painting, thus portraying him as a painter who exerted an astonishing amount of control over the execution of his work. Hendrick Goltzius’ accomplishment in the field of printmaking was even more remarkable, since he could not only freely vary his style but also create new inventions in the styles of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden that fooled many an expert (see also above 'Style and Country'). He could thus literally equal the accomplishments of these famous masters (see above fig. 4.41). According to Van Mander, Goltzius had also successfully appropriated the styles of Maerten van Heemskerck, Frans Floris, Anthonie van Blocklandt, Federico Zuccaro and Bartolomeus Spranger. Moreover, Samuel van Hoogstraten praised Goltzius in his short list of the greatest masters and their particular talents for having excelled in 'convincingly imitating the hands of several famous masters' (eenige groote Meesters hand eigentlijk na te volgen).

Yet a praiseworthy variety of manners was not necessarily related to the styles of famous predecessors or even to the subject, location or function of a picture, it seems. According to Karel van Mander, Cornelis Ketel decided at the height of his career to show his mastery by painting without brushes. Interestingly, his first work of this type was a self-portrait, done not only with his

134 Letter to Chantelou dated 7 April 1647: 'Je n'ignore pas que le vulgaire des peintres ne dise que l'on de manière si, tant soit peu, l'on sort de son ordinaire, car la pauvre peinture est réduite à l'estampe.' Poussin/Blunt 1964, 118. See also Sohm 2001, 128-129.
135 See above 'Stylistic Changes Over Time'.
136 See also above, 'A Closer Look at Seventeenth-Century Sources: An Introduction' and 'Style and Country', below for a further discussion of Goltzius's achievements in this respect.
137 Van Mander 1604, fol. 284v; see also Leeflang/Luijten (eds.) 2003, no. 75, 210-215.
138 See Van Mander 1604, fol. 284r; and Van Hoogstraten 1678, 75.
fingers but also in various manners (manieren), which captured his likeness better than he could have done with brushes. 139 By specifying that this work showed a better likeness than earlier works and that Ketel was even able to develop different manners without using brushes, Van Mander highlighted Ketel’s exceptional virtuosity. 140 Though Ketel’s technique of painting without brushes was unusual, the deliberate showcasing of different styles as a ‘tour de force’ seems to have been a more widespread challenge. 141  

As we have seen, Rembrandt created a series of three head studies on copper topped with gold leaf, which he executed in distinctively different styles. The interpretation of these works as subject-related style adjustments has only recently been recognized by modern connoisseurs. One wonders if a seventeenth-century connoisseur would have more readily recognized such changes, since a painter’s ability to vary his style at will was considered a highly praiseworthy achievement. 142

Such considerations also seem relevant to the much-debated Portrait of Rembrandt with Gorget in the Mauritshuis. As we have seen in chapter 1, this painting, which had long been celebrated as an authentic Rembrandt painting, was dismissed as a copy when it was closely compared to Self-Portrait with Gorget (Nuremberg) in the context of the Rembrandt self-portrait exhibition (see chapter 1, figs. 1.27 & 1.28). The discovery of an underdrawing, a technique not known to have been used by Rembrandt, in the Mauritshuis picture had confirmed its status. Yet the question remained if the picture could nonetheless be a second version by the master in a demonstratively different manner, adjusted to

---

139 Van Mander 1604, fol. 278r: ‘In’t Iaer 1599. quam hem in den sin eenen lust, te schilderen sonder Pinceelen metter handt [..]Het eerste dat hy dede, was zijn eyghen Conterfeytsel, welck hy op verscheyden manieren dede, en geleek so wel oft beter, als een ander met reetschap ghedaen, en stondt wel uytter handt.’

140 Unfortunately, this self-portrait is now lost. It remains unclear if Ketel used different manners of painting within one portrait or if he created different versions.

141 Compare Enggass/Brown (eds.) 1970, 146 on Luca Giordano. Luca reputedly created a work with his fingernails and partially in the dark to impress a group of potential buyers, who all subsequently bid upon it at auction. The profits were allocated to a poor girl’s dowry.

142 Compare also the case of Cornelisz Cornelisz. van Haarlem. Around 1588 Hendrick Goltzius reproduced five paintings by Cornelisz. in print (Holstein nos 4-8) Four of these show the fall of Icarus, while the fifth represents the dramatic story of Two Folowers of Cadmus Devoured by a Dragon. This last painting is presently in the National Gallery of London where it had been dismissed as a copy until 1961. The painting presumably confused connoisseurs before of its rather unusual brushwork, which differs from Cornelisz.’s hallmark style. It is painted with remarkable vivacity and vigorous brushstrokes reminiscent of Venetian masters. See the entry by E.K.] Reznicek on Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem in The Grove Dictionary of Art, From Rembrandt to Vermeer, Jane Turner (ed.), New York 2000, 77-78.
a more aristocratic portrait type. The debate that followed the contrasting interpretations of Wadum and Sluijter presented at the exhibition conference never reached a definitive conclusion, which underscores the complexity of this attribution issue.¹⁴³ For how can one define the oeuvre of a gifted painter such as Rembrandt if part of his mastery seems to have consisted of a unique ability to change his style? Can we assume that his inventiveness allows for enough coherence to firmly attribute experimental works?

¹⁴³ See chapter 1, 'An Ongoing Debate'.