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

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CHAPTER 5.

THE PAINTER VERSUS THE CONNOISSEUR? THE BEST JUDGE OF PICTURES IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY THEORY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

One of the most intriguing types of pictures that emerged in the Netherlands during the Golden Age shows art lovers contemplating art in a collector's cabinet or in an artist's studio. For example, a painting by Jan Breughel the Elder and Hieronymus Franken II depicts Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella together with a group of elegantly dressed men and women in a collector's cabinet (fig. 5.1). Despite the verisimilitude of such scenes, many elements depicted were almost certainly fanciful. In this case, the grandeur of the architectural setting does not match the size of private residences at the time, and the fact that the same setting was used in two other pictures showing different art lovers also suggests that the scene is imaginary.¹ Rather than records of actual events, such pictures were presumably variations on a popular theme. Art lovers must have liked looking at pictures of other art lovers contemplating art.

A close look at the Breughel and Franken picture presumably encouraged art lovers to discuss positive and negative attitudes towards the liberal arts. A picture within this picture (prominently placed in the foreground) shows a negative counterpart of the main scene: figures smashing paintings and instruments in a collector's cabinet, which recalls the violent iconoclasm of 1566 in which many works of art were destroyed. While their clothing may suggest that these figures are human, their heads give them away: the figure standing on the table is a donkey and the one smashing pictures on the ground is a monkey – animals associated with ignorance and rudeness.

The positive attitude of the art lovers in the main scene is thus reinforced by the contrast to ignorance and boorishness. Such explicit comparisons are rare in seventeenth-century pictures of art lovers. Most of them simply show people respectfully contemplating art without a negative counterpart either in a gallery of

¹ One of these paintings is in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. 1405; see Padrón/Royo-Villanova 1992, no. 25; another one was on the Brussels art market according to Kristin Belkin. See Bauman/Liedtke 1992, 167; and also Wheelock 1998b, 15 and 60, notes 3 and 4.

paintings or in an painter's studio (fig. 5.2).² The depicted art lovers are as a rule well-dressed and seem to study the works thoroughly, now and again from very close. Moreover, they often point to the paintings, which suggests that they are talking about the works. Yet, despite these lively references to conversations about art, the paintings remain tantalisingly silent about what exactly such an interested, respectful attitude towards paintings would have entailed.

It would be fascinating to know what elegant art lovers might have said when contemplating pictures in the seventeenth century. Would they have been merely admiring the works? The popular French book on eloquence, Etienne Binet's *Essay des merveilles de nature, et des plus nobles artifices*, which was first published in 1621 and subsequently reprinted several times throughout the seventeenth century, recommended precisely such an attitude.³ It provided the reader with ready-made compliments celebrating the illusions created by paintings. When contemplating a beautiful painting, one could, for example, say: 'When painting was still in its cradle, and drank its first milk, the brush was so unrefined, and the works so heavy, that one had to write on them, this is a Bull, this is a Donkey, otherwise you might have taken it for a hunk of veal; nowadays one has to write underneath who painted the work, lest one believes that these are lifeless objects glued to the canvas, and living, but motionless, people, so excellently everything is painted.'⁴

If we are to believe Binet, to be eloquent did not necessarily mean having a balanced opinion. He advises his readers to simply praise admirable elements while urging them to guard themselves against too much curiosity. Although it was necessary to have a good understanding of the technical aspects of painting, he certainly did not believe that everything was interesting enough to discuss. In fact, he stated quite explicitly that small and insignificant things should not leave the studio.⁵

² Examples of gallery paintings can be found in Speth-Holterhoff 1957; Winner 1957; and Filipczak 1987. On depictions of art lovers in painters' studios, see Van de Wetering/Franken 1983; De Koomen 2006; and Kleinert 2006.

³ This text is often mistakenly referred to as the *Brussels Manuscript* by Pierre le Brun, which credits Le Brun as the author. In fact, Le Brun's manuscript is a hand-written copy of Binet's widely read book on eloquence. Binet 1621 [ed. 1987].

⁴ 'Quand la peinture estoit encore au berceau; et à son premier liact; le pinceau estoit si niais, les ouvrages si lourds, qu'il fallait écrire dessus, c'est un Boeuf, c'est un Asne, autrement vous eussiez pris cela pour un quartier de veau; maintenant il faut mettre dessous, qu'un tel peignoit, de peur qu'on ne creut que ce sont des morts qu'on a collé sur la toile, et des personnes vivantes sans vie, tant le tout est bien fait.' Binet 1621 [ed. 1987], 364.

⁵ 'gardez-vous [...] de la recherche trop curieuse, et des petites chosettes qui sont trop minces et qui ne doivent pas sortir de la boutique.' Binet 1621 [ed. 1987], 355.

Would it have been common for elegant art lovers anywhere in Europe to talk about paintings in such complimentary terms? The remark about the first paintings needing inscriptions in order to be legible also occurs in Willem Goeree's 1670 treatise on painting, and they must thus have circulated widely.⁶ Moreover, the practice of writing laudatory poems on high quality pictures and reciting these in polite society seems consistent with Binet's advice.⁷ Yet, would it not have been equally common for art lovers to evaluate these paintings in greater depth and to also discuss their qualities and attributions (as we heard some art lovers do in the previous chapters)?⁸ And more specifically, would art lovers, who were not painters themselves, be considered able judges of artworks in the seventeenth century?

This chapter focuses on the question of who would have been considered a good judge of paintings in the seventeenth century, both in theory and in practice; in other words, I seek to determine who was credited with the ability to analyse a painting's qualities, to attribute the work and to appraise it. In secondary sources, it is often assumed that only painters were considered capable of doing so. For example, Peter Sutton states in his 2004 essay 'Rembrandt and a Brief History of Connoisseurship': 'The few art theorists who discussed connoisseurship in the seventeenth century [...] assign the talent exclusively to artists.'⁹ Earlier, in 1995, Jonathan Brown stated in his influential book *Kings and Connoisseurs* that it was not until the eighteenth century that art theorists began to prefer the 'amateur (art lover)' over the practitioner as the best judge of art, suggesting that the supremacy of the painter as the best judge of art had not been questioned previously.¹⁰

The idea that only an artist can ultimately judge art certainly does appear in some seventeenth-century writings. However, not all of the authors agree on the matter. In order to give a more nuanced idea of seventeenth-century views on the issue, I will discuss a number of art theoretical texts and relate these to market

⁶ Goeree 1670 [ed. 1697], 7-8.

⁷ Although some seventeenth-century poems on paintings have a sharp wit and contain some criticism, the majority are laudatory in the most general of terms, celebrating their lifelikeness, for example. Poetry generally enjoyed a higher status than painting, as Jan Emmens has shown, and it seems important to point out that the laudatory poems themselves were often considered superior to the paintings they described. These poems were thus not meant simply as evaluations of the paintings but rather as creations in their own right. See the article based on his unpublished M.A. thesis in Emmens 1981, vol. 1, 5-60 and 205. On this topic, see also Porteman 1984.

⁸ See 'A Closer Look at Seventeenth-Century Sources: An Introduction', and chapter 3 in particular.

⁹ Sutton 2004, 31.

¹⁰ Brown 1995, 233.

practices. In this area of research, it seems fruitful to study both art theory and the art market, and thus to see who was credited with the capacity to ably judge art on a theoretical level and to see who actually appraised pictures in practice.

‘Painters and art experts’ (*schilders en konstverstandigen*)

In his widely read treatise on paintings *Het Schilderboeck* of 1604, Karel van Mander makes various remarks about attributing pictures and about judging their quality.¹¹ The purpose of his book as a whole was to instruct young painters and ‘art lovers’ (*liefhebbers*) about the art of painting, to give an overview of the most important ancient and modern painters, and – most importantly – to celebrate painting as a liberal art (*de edelhrij schilderconst*) and thus to enhance its status. As Van Mander puts it, painting was still too often seen as a mere craft, and he regretted that in cities such as Haarlem and Antwerp painters of fine art had to share their professional organisation, the Saint Lucas Guild, with house painters, saddle makers and the like.¹² Considering Van Mander’s ambitious premise, it is perhaps not surprising that he did not comment on such pragmatic issues as who appraised paintings on the market.

In Van Mander’s view, hands-on experience was certainly very important when judging art. In the introduction to his treatise, he stresses the fact that he himself is a practitioner of the art of painting and he adds somewhat apologetically: ‘Someone more eloquent might have written this more beautifully and artfully, however if he was not a Painter, one would have to be concerned that he would miss items and characteristics.’¹³ Moreover, when Van Mander discusses a famous anecdote about the ancient painters Apelles and Protogenes, he stresses the advantage of having experience as a painter in order to understand the anecdote. Van Mander knew the story via Pliny, who relates that Protogenes was able to recognise the hand of Apelles in one skilfully painted thin line on a

¹¹ Van Mander 1604.

¹² *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. 251v.

¹³ ‘Yemandt spraeck-condigher hadde moghen dit veel schoon-taliger en constiger te weghe brenghen: doch waer te besorghen, indien hy self geen Schilder en waer, dat hy in onse dinghen, en eyghenschappen, hem dickwils soude hebben verlopen.’ *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. *4v.

prepared canvas: ‘since it was impossible (said Protogenes) that anyone but Apelles could have created with paint and a brush such a pleasant, thin line.’¹⁴

Pliny’s story concerns the earliest attribution known in the history of Western art. Yet it is a particularly confusing account, for how could anyone attribute a work simply on the basis of one thin line? The story has baffled many writers on art since Pliny, including Van Mander, who explained the story by stating that Pliny did not give sufficient information, and that, in fact, this learned gentleman was not a good judge of painting himself.¹⁵ Pliny told of how, after recognising Apelles’ hand in the thin line, Protogenes tried to outdo the master by painting an even thinner line himself. And when Apelles saw Protogenes’ line he added a third one that was so well executed that no one could paint one more precisely or pleasantly.

According to Van Mander these three lines painted by Apelles and Protogenes ‘were not simple straight lines or brushstrokes, as many who are not Painters believe, but some contour of an arm or a leg, or some profile of a head, or something of the kind, a contour which they had drawn very precisely and in some areas through each other’s lines’.¹⁶ Van Mander was all the more convinced of his opinion as Pliny said that many people who were knowledgeable about art greatly admired the picture. According to Van Mander they would not be impressed by a simple, hand-drawn straight line, and he explains that such a line ‘is often done better by a School Teacher, a Writer, or another person who is not an artist, than by the best painter in the world.’¹⁷

¹⁴ ‘want t’was (seyde hy) onmoghelijck, dat yemandt anders als *Appelles* soude connen maken met verwe en pinceel soo aerdighen dunnen treck als desen was’. *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. 77v.

¹⁵ See also Van de Waal 1967.

¹⁶ Van Mander 1604, fol. 78r: ‘waren slechte recht uytgetrocken linien oft streken, ghelijck vele meenen, die geen Schilders en zijn: maer eenigen omtreck van een arem oft been, oft immer eenich pourfijl van een tronie, oft soo yet, den welcken omtreck sy seer net hebben ghetrocken, en t’sommiger plaetsen door malcanders treck [...] henen’.

¹⁷ ‘En mijn meyninghe bevest ick hier mede, dat Plinius ghetuyght, datter de ghene die hun aen de Schilder-const verstonden, grootlijcx in waren verwondert en verbaest. Waer door wel te verstaen is, dat het constighe omtrecken, en gheen simpel linien en waren, die dese soo uytmeneste opper Meesters in onser Const tegen malcander om strijdt ghetrocken hadden: want een rechte linie uyt der handt henen te trecken, soude menigh Schoolmeester, Schrijver, oft ander die geen Schilder en is, dickwils veel beter doen, als den besten Schilder van de Weerelt, en sulcx en wordt by den Schilders niet veel gheacht: want daer toe ghebruyckt men de rije oft reghel. maer de Const-verstandige verwonderen en ontsetten sich, wanneer sy sien eenen aerdigen en constigen omtreck, die met een uytnemende verstandt behendich is ghetrocken, waer in de Teycken-const ten hooghsten bestaet: maer de rechte linien souden sy onghemerckt voorby gaen.’ *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. 78r.

Although Van Mander refers on these two occasions to non-painters who are incapable of interpreting art correctly, he does not exclude the possibility that non-painters could sometimes also make sensible comments on art. When discussing attributions of paintings that he had seen himself or the characteristics of an artist's style, Van Mander repeatedly reinforces his own opinion by stating that 'painters and art experts' (*schilders en konstverstandigen*) would agree with him.¹⁸ By differentiating between painters and art experts Van Mander suggests that these art experts were not just painters. Indeed he uses the term 'art expert' (*konstverstandige*) for knowledgeable art lovers throughout his treatise.

An example of such a reference to 'painters and art experts' can also be found in Van Mander's discussion of Holbein's painting *Henry VIII and the Barber Surgeons* of c. 1543, (see chapter 3, 'Collaborations', fig. 3.13). Van Mander related that some people believed that this painting was finished by someone other than Holbein after the master's death, but that even if that was the case, in his view, it was so well done that 'neither a Painter nor an Art expert would distinguish different hands.'¹⁹ Apparently, in Van Mander's view, knowledgeable non-painters could thus also judge the characteristics of an artist's style and issues of attribution.²⁰

Moreover, Van Mander took general quality judgements from knowledgeable non-painters to heart, witness his description of the life of David Vinckboons. By means of an introduction, Van Mander explains how he decided which artists to include in his book. Whenever he visits the house of an art lover, he says, he pays special attention to the works which are regarded as exceptional. And although he trusts his own opinion, he is also happy to follow 'the common feeling of art experts' (*'t ghemeen ghevoelen der konst-verstandigen*).²¹ For this reason, he

¹⁸ Only in one instance does Van Mander make a distinction between the opinion of painters and that of art lovers; see Van Mander 1604, fol. 256v (biography of Cornelis Molenaer): 'Voorts van d'ordinantien zijner Landtschappen, en achter-uyten, heb ick niet veel te roemen: dan dat alles wat men van hem siet, den Schilders wonder wel bevalt: doch in beelden had hy geen handelinghe. [...] zijn wercken zijn by den Const-liefdighe in grooter weerden.' Although both painters and art lovers greatly valued Cornelis Molenaer's works, Van Mander's wording implies that he believed the painters to have better judgement of the execution of Molenaer's works; see also below, the section 'The Best Judge – The Connoisseur?.'

¹⁹ 'Het zijn eenighe die meenen, dat dit werck by *Holbein* self niet gheheel voldaan en is: maer dat nae zijn doot, het ghene daer noch aen ghebrack van yemandt anders voleyndight soude wesen: doch indient soo waer, heeft den opmaker den *Holbeens* handelinghe soo verstandigh connen volghen, dat het geen Schilder noch Const-verstandighe van verscheyden handen en souden oordeelen.' Van Mander 1604, fol. 222r.

²⁰ This point of view also appears in Van Mander's descriptions of the lives of Lucas van Leyden, Pieter Vlerick and Hendrick Goltzius.

²¹ Van Mander 1604, fol. 299r. On the art lovers mentioned by Van Mander, see Bok 1993.

says, he cannot omit David Vinckboons. Although he subsequently continues to praise Vinckboon's works as 'exquisite' (*uitnemend*), his praise sounds rather ambivalent, for his introduction suggests that if it were up to him, he would have preferred to omit Vinckboons from his treatise (fig. 5.3). Apparently, Van Mander felt he could not ignore the opinions of the collector connoisseurs to whom he refers.

That Van Mander credits the judgement of both painters and non-painters does not mean that he thought that every painter and art lover was indeed an able judge of pictures. What skills or talents did he think were needed in order to successfully judge pictures? This very much depended on the type of picture and on what aspect of it one wanted to judge. In Van Mander's view, people with no previous experience of looking at pictures could make some very sensible comments if they used their own professional expertise. To illustrate his point, he used a famous anecdote about Apelles, who accepted the criticism of a cobbler as long as it was about the sandals of a Venus he had painted, but not when the same man criticized her knees.²² However, Van Mander believed that the opinion of ordinary people could also be useful when judging the passions, desires and suffering of painted figures, their inner lives, if you will.²³ Moreover, when he discussed religious painting, he emphasised that religious images should be relatively easy to understand for onlookers, so in this respect, the opinion of laymen should also be valued.²⁴

Other aspects of a painting, the more complicated subject matter and artistic qualities, he considered more difficult to judge without the proper background. Two passages in which he mocks ignorant judgements are telling in this respect. In his biography of Cornelis Ketel, Van Mander related the story of a farmer, who thought he had understood a painting but who was in fact completely mistaken.²⁵ When confronted with a painting of the mythological figure of Danae, the farmer boasted that he knew the subject. He identified the scene as the Annunciation, mistaking Cupid for the angel Gabriel and mistaking the nude figure of Danae for the Virgin Mary.

In another instance, Van Mander discussed an altarpiece that Pieter Vlerick painted for a convent, as mentioned in chapter 4 ('Style and Function').

²² Van Mander 1604, fol. 78v. On this anecdote, see also Van de Wetering 2005c.

²³ In his chapter on the depiction of passion, desires and suffering, Van Mander writes: 'Dan zijn oock veel des ghemeyn volcx advijsen / hier in seer voordelijk met hooghe prijsen'. Van Mander 1604, fol. 24v.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. 18v-19r.

²⁵ *Ibid.* (note 11), fol. 279v; see also Van Mander/Miedema 1973, vol. II, 454; and Sluijter 2006, 234-235.

According to Van Mander it had been executed with ‘Tintoretto’s spirit and invention’ in mind (fig. 5.4). This was something which ‘painters and art lovers’ (*schilders en konstverstandigen*) could appreciate, but the nuns were not pleased with it, he added. Apparently, these nuns were unable to properly appreciate the altarpiece for its artistic merits. (In their defence, however, one could argue that for them the picture was not merely a work of art, but first and foremost an object of devotion.)

According to Van Mander, a certain amount of erudition was thus necessary to properly interpret certain subjects and appreciate a painting’s artistic merits. To understand a scene from ancient history, the Bible or mythology, it was necessary to know the sources from which the story was taken. As to artistic merits, Van Mander mentions that a basic knowledge of the art of drawing would help in the assessment of works of art.²⁶ Interestingly, Van Mander does not indicate whether hands-on experience in the art of painting was necessary to be able to talk about paintings. He does stress – as we have seen above – the advantage of having the experienced eye of a painter when assessing art on several occasions, but never goes so far as to insist that without this experience one would be unable to properly assess paintings.

Explicit recommendations on learning the art of drawing in order to be able to talk about art intelligently appear in many other seventeenth-century texts.²⁷ For example, Constantijn Huygens, secretary to the stadholders Frederick Hendrik and Willem II, who was closely involved in major painting commissions for the court, noted in his famous autobiography *Mijn Jeugd* that it was very important to learn the basics of the art to be able to talk knowledgeably about paintings. He himself not only learned to draw as part of his education but also how to paint, even though his father only considered the art of drawing essential for his education.²⁸ Recommendations to also get some practical experience in the art of painting are remarkably absent in early modern art theory, presumably because many early art theorists saw drawing as the very core of all visual arts including painting, sculpture and architecture.

A thorough instruction in the art of drawing, as well as some training in how to design scenes and depict biblical and mythological figures, were a common part of a young painter’s curriculum. A well-trained painter thus had the

²⁶ ‘Summa, Teycken-const can alderley staten / Behulpich wesen, t'zy jonghen, oft grijsen, / Iae Vorsten, Capiteynen, en Soldaten, / Soo om van der Conste gheschick te praten, / Als om de gheleghetheden aenwijsen, / Van sterckten en plaetsen, daerom te prijsen’. Van Mander 1604, fol. 10r.

²⁷ See also below ‘The best judge – the connoisseur?’.

²⁸ Huygens/Kan 1971, 65-66.

knowledge and experience that Van Mander considered important when judging art. Was a painter therefore an astute judge of paintings? Not necessarily, according to Van Mander, because he believes envy and vanity can easily cloud one's judgement. For example, when he discusses how engravings by Goltzius in the styles of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden had completely fooled painters and art experts and even engravers who thought they knew the manners and incisions of the Masters well, Van Mander concludes that this shows to what envy, vanity and prejudices can lead (fig. 5.5).²⁹ Some of these painters and art experts held old masters such as Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden in such high esteem that they thought that no one could equal their achievements, while others simply disliked Goltzius. In both instances, this seriously clouded the judgement of these otherwise knowledgeable experts.

Ideal judgements and pretentious comments

Many of Van Mander's general comments on assessing works of art hearken back to antiquity and were shared by most other seventeenth-century writers. The idea that some knowledge was necessary to successfully judge art was very common in both ancient and modern texts; laymen were often credited with the ability to judge the depicted passions and/or to judge elements related to their professions. However, judging attributions and the overall quality of a work was very much a specialist affair. As to precisely what kind of knowledge was necessary for a sophisticated assessment, there was no clear consensus in either antiquity or in the seventeenth century. The question what a successful judge of pictures should know relates to the question of what exactly should be judged, and thus to the question of what elements were considered the most important. This last question had long been the subject of debate.

There was already disagreement on the matter back in antiquity. On the one hand, craftsmanship was considered very important – witness an anecdote about the ancient painter Zeuxis, to which both the art theorists Franciscus Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten refer. According to the ancient writer Lucian, Zeuxis

²⁹ 'Aen dese dingen is te merken, wat onder den Menschen gonst en afgonst vermoghen, oft oock de waensucht: want sommighe die *Goltzium* in zijn Const meenden versmaden oft verachten, hebben onbewist hem boven de oude beste Meesters, en boven hem selven ghestelt. En dit deden oock de gene, die gewent waren te seggen, dat geen beter Plaet-snijders, als *Albert* en *Lucas*, te verwachten waren, en dat *Goltzius* by hun niet te gelijcken was.' Van Mander 1604, fol. 284v. See also Leeftang/Luijten (eds.) 2003, , 210-215, no. 75, 1-6. See also chapter 4, 'Variation and Virtuosity'.

had painted a picture of a female centaur suckling two baby centaurs, which he thought would be greatly praised for its craftsmanship such as the connection between the human skin of the upper part of the centaurs' bodies and their furry lower bodies and legs. However, when Zeuxis displayed the work to a general audience:

'All of them praised most ... the unusual aspect of the subject, and the novelty of its 'message', which was unknown to earlier artists. Thus when Zeuxis realized that the curiosity of the painting rather than his technique was capturing their attention and was putting the refinement of the work to one side, he said to his pupil: 'Micion, cover it up and take it back home. These people are praising the raw mud of our art, but as for the lighting, how well it looks and how carefully done, they have nothing to say. The novelty of the subject surpasses the discipline of the execution'.³⁰

Zeuxis apparently did not agree with the preferences of his audience, and both Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten use his comment about the audience focusing on the 'mud of the art' (*droesem van de kunst*) to stress the importance of knowing what aspects to praise in a painting.³¹

On the other hand, there was another a story from antiquity in which expertise was needed not so much to properly evaluate the execution, but rather to understand the inventive way of conveying meaning. It is a story by Calistrus, which Junius recounts in *De Pittura Veterum*. Calistratus described how he looked at a statue representing Opportunity by the famous ancient sculptor Lysippus. Calistratus discussed the work with his friends and, in doing so, vividly evoked the statue's charm and lifelikeness. However, Junius writes, it took an expert who joined him and his party to open their eyes to the significance of the wings on Opportunity's feet and the forelock on his head, and to make them see the aptness of this very beauty.³²

These ancient stories with their different emphases seem to foreshadow seventeenth-century debates about the relative importance of a painting's execution, in particular the brushwork. Some classicist thinkers, such as the

³⁰ Lucian, quoted in Junius 1694 [ed. 1991], 423. Van Hoogstraten 1678, 76. Jan de Bisschop also discusses the anecdote in his *Paradigmata* of 1671; see the facsimile in Van Gelder/Jost 1985, , vol. II, preface addressed to Jan Six (page not numbered).

³¹ According to both Junius and Hoogstraten it was particularly important to not focus too much on secondary elements or 'Parerga'; see above chapter 3, the section 'The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship'.

³² Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 65, note 14.

French author Paul Fréart de Cambray, valued the invention and arrangement of the subject to such an extent that they dismissed the painter's brushstrokes as mere 'mechanical' aspects of painting.³³ Much earlier, in 1628, the Dutch painter and amateur mathematician Jacques de Ville had already sharply attacked painters and art lovers who only cared for the 'manner of painting' (*handelinghe*). Tellingly, he gave his *Treatise on Architecture and Painting* the subtitle: '... warning to all craftsmen and lovers of this art that they should not gape at the manner alone but look further.'³⁴ In De Ville's view, the drawn design of a picture was essential, which should express a keen knowledge of proportions as well as a thorough understanding of the rules of perspective. These examples show that there were different views on how good quality was defined (see also chapter 6). However, the idea that one needed a certain amount of expertise to properly assess pictures was common.

Similarly, the idea that negative emotions such as jealousy and vanity could cloud one's judgement was widespread. It was especially bad painters who were prone to jealousy and inappropriate expressions of vanity. Van Mander, for example, discusses a mediocre painter who had the audacity to not only criticise a work by a superior master – Peter Vlerick – but to also correct it with his brush, which, of course, greatly irritated Vlerick.³⁵ Since the sixteenth century, poorly educated painters (*daubers*) were often mocked in the literature – a theme which has been researched by Zinsel, Wittkower, Emmens and more recently by Lyckle de Vries.³⁶ These bad painters were described as pretentious, badly mannered, having a neglected look, and a great craving for fame. In the seventeenth century, we find this kind of pretentious bad painter, for example, in a witty poem by Jan Vos:

To Martijn the Painter / Martijn, you always boast about your paintings /
The common people neither understand Art nor its worth, in your view, /
You're right; the commoners are slow to understand its characteristic / If
they were wise; they would not be so fond of paintings by you.³⁷

³³ Fréart de Chambray 1662 [ed. 1968]. See also Delapierre/Krings 2005.

³⁴ De Ville 1628.

³⁵ Van Mander 1604, fol. 252v.

³⁶ De Vries 2004a, 42 ff.

³⁷ 'Aan Martijn de schilder / Martijn, gy snurkt altijd op uwe schildery. / Het volk verstaat noch kunst, dunkt u, noch haer waardy. / 't Is Waar, 't gemeen is bot om d'eigenschap te vatten. / Was 't volk heel wijs, het zou uw verf zoo dier niet schatten.' Vos 1726, no. 583, as cited in Weber 1991, 80.

Like the bad painter, the inadequate art lover is a figure who often pops up in art theoretical writings. Art theorists described the despicable ‘connoisseurs’ they had encountered, and in so doing, they warned their readers not to become like them. These charlatans were pretentious, did not know what to look for in a painting, and were often also corrupt and untrustworthy. In the introduction to his treatise *Sentimens sur la Distinction des diverses manières de peinture, dessin et gravure et des originaux d’avec leurs copies* of 1649, Abraham Bosse stated that he had met many pretentious art lovers who used a great number of art-related terms such as ‘of the antique’, ‘of the great manner’, ‘expression’, ‘union’, ‘well-touched’, ‘day’, ‘half-day’, ‘counter day’ – but who had a poor capacity for assessing paintings. They could perhaps distinguish certain aspects of an artist’s manner ‘that a blind man could recognise when touching the paintings’, but lacked any refinement in their analyses of the works and, even worse – ‘out of ignorance or for some other reason, they despise the works by artists who are worth more than the total value of the Paintings they themselves own.’³⁸ Another example can be found in Junius’ book *The Paintings of the Ancients*, in which the author exclaims:

Away [...] with all of those, who thinke it enough if they can but confidently usurpe the authority belonging onely to them that are well skilled in these arts: it will not serve their turne, that they doe sometimes with a censorious brow reject, and sometimes with an affected gravity commend the workes of great masters: the neat and polished age wherein we live will quickly finde them out.³⁹

Fig. 5.6 Pieter Breughel the Elder, *The Painter and the Connoisseur*, mid-1560s, Grafische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna - *A satirical drawing by Pieter Breughel the Elder mocks a dauber and his foolish client, much like the art theorists did in their writings. While some scholars in the past interpreted the image as a comment on the ignorance of a non-practitioner when judging art, Lyckle de Vries convincingly argued that in fact both figures in*

³⁸ Bosse 1649, 2: ‘il y en a divers autres qui apres avoir retenu & proferé quantité de Termes de l’art comme, de l’Antique, du Raphael, du Grand, de la grande ou forte Maniere, du Bon ou mauvais Goust, d’Ordaonnance, de Disposition, de bein Historié, de belle Groupe, du Fier, d’Expression, D’Union, de bien Ensemble, bien Touché ou Heurté, d’Artiste, Croqué, de Vaghezza, Sevelt, Frais, Tendre, Dur, Coupé, Tranché, Noyé, grand Iour, grand Ombre, Teinte, & demye Teinte, & plusieurs autres telles choses, s’imaginent qu’on les doit tenir pour tres entendüs ou connoissans en icelle; & ce qui leur augmente encore davantage cette bonne opinion, c’est qu’ils ont quelque fois rencontré à connoistre quelques manieres de Peindre, ce qui est pourtant tres-peu de chose, dautant qu’il y en a telles, qu’un aveugle les pouroit discerner en les touchant’.

³⁹ Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 296.

this drawing were being ridiculed.⁴⁰ The painter's wild hairdo, inadequate equipment (he's holding the brush of a house painter⁴¹) and puzzled expression indicate that he is a dauber. His admirer holds a big moneybag, suggesting that he is willing to pay well for the dauber's work, while his glasses only accentuate his lack of discernment.

However, not all art buyers were dismissed as ignorant and pretentious. The counterpart of the ignorant art lover was the knowledgeable connoisseur. According to Franciscus Junius, there was one connoisseur in particular who inspired seventeenth-century art lovers, a famous ancient art expert by the name of Novius Vindex. According to the ancient writer Statius Papinius, Vindex was an aristocrat who was extraordinary skilful at attributing unsigned works. Moreover, he could see from far away which line had been drawn by the ancient painter Apelles.⁴² In the context of this essay it is particularly interesting that this ancient art expert, who reputedly had no equal in his day, was probably not a painter, which brings me back to the question of who was considered an able judge of pictures in seventeenth-century art theory: just painters or also knowledgeable connoisseurs?

The best judge – the painter?

At least three seventeenth-century art theorists – Etienne Binet, Abraham Bosse and Samuel van Hoogstraten – explicitly declared that only painters were able to adequately assess pictures.⁴³ Binet, the author of a popular book on eloquence discussed above, wrote somewhat mysteriously: ‘Good painters always hide some secret knowledge in their works, which is worth more than the rest, but only the

⁴⁰ De Vries 2004a, pp. 38-48.

⁴¹ De Vries 2004a, 38-48. De Vries suspected that the brush was used mostly by house painters. I believe that this was certainly the case for a 1635 emblem of the Haarlem ‘house painters’ (*kladschilders*), which features the same type of brush. See Obreen (ed.) 1877-1890, vol. 1, Appendix ‘Blazoenen van achttien bedrijven behoorende onder het gild van sint Lucas. anno 1635’, plate 7.

⁴² Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 68-69.

⁴³ The French painter Nicolas Poussin and the Italian painter, sculptor and architect Gianlorenzo Bernini expressed similar opinions, although Bernini allegedly made exceptions. See Poussin/Blunt 1964, 123; and Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 226 and 263.

Master Painters recognise it and have a feeling for it.’⁴⁴ As discussed above, Binet simply advised his readers to praise admirable characteristics of pictures; a thorough understanding of the works such as master painters could achieve was beyond their reach, according to him.

The Parisian printmaker Abraham Bosse was somewhat more ambivalent. He wrote a treatise to instruct art lovers on how to recognise various manners of painting, printmaking and drawing, and on how to distinguish between originals and copies (*Sentimens sur la Distinction des diverses manières de peinture, dessin et gravure et des originaux d’avec leurs copies*, Paris 1649). But despite his premise, he expressed his doubts about how good of a judge he thought his readers might become. He acknowledged that there were good judges of art among both painters and ‘art lovers’ (*curieux*).

[O]ne may say that in this art [of judging pictures] as in other Arts, there are natural inclinations for these things, for sometimes even people who have barely any practical experience have or can have some knowledge in this respect. But to say that they come close to the opinion that Excellent Practitioners who are experienced herein may have, that is impossible in my opinion.⁴⁵

However, at the end of his treatise, Bosse, nonetheless, notes that distinguishing between various manners of painting, between originals and copies, and between good and bad paintings, was in fact ‘easy’ and that with the help of good artist connoisseurs, non-practising art lovers could learn it.⁴⁶ Indeed, Bosse seems to have had difficulties reconciling his premise to teach art lovers how to judge art with his desire to celebrate the superiority of practitioners in this respect. As

⁴⁴ ‘13. Les bons Peintres cachent tousjours quelque secrette intelligence dans leurs ouvrages, qui vaut plus que le reste, mais les Maîtres seuls les reconnoissent, et en ont le sentiment.’ Binet 1621 [ed. 1987], 358.

⁴⁵ Bosse 1649, 5: ‘Par ainsi l’on peut dire qu’il y a en cela comme en d’autres Arts, de naturelles inclinations pour ces choses, puis que mesme ceux qui n’ont point de pratique, en ont ou peuvent avoir quelque connoissance; Mais de dire qu’elle soit approchante de celle qu’en peut avoir un Excellent Praticien exercé en icelles, cela est impossible à mon avis’.

⁴⁶ Bosse 1649, 71: ‘Ainsi l’on peut juger, que tous les bons Praticiens qui se s ont appliquez ou adonnez a esplucher toutes ces particularitez, peuvent estre les plus entendus à discerner toutes ces diverses manieres, & distinctions d’Originaux & Copies, & de plus les bonnes d’avec les mauvaises; & aussi qu’il est facile de juger que c’est par le moyen de tels connoissans, que les curieux non Praticiens, peuvent avoir esté & estre instruits à faire la distinction de toutes ces diverses choses’.

Jonathan Brown wittily remarked, Bosse's treatise in fact balances uncomfortably between altruism and self-defence.⁴⁷

Of these three advocates of the hegemony of painters in judging art, the painter Samuel van Hoogstraten was the most outspoken. In the preface to his treatise he declares:

Thus our Introduction will also be opportune for all art lovers, although they are not experienced [in painting itself], so that they will not be deceived when buying pieces of art, because they will appreciate these to the measure of the virtues that are to be seen in them, and they will not remain name-buyers, of which there are so many, who are being led astray by some boaster, to value poor rags, because they have been led to believe that they were painted by a great Master. It certainly is a ridiculous pastime to esteem something as artful and worthy of high respect, whereas there is nothing artful nor eminent to be seen. I do not pretend that this introduction of mine will open the art lover's eyes to the extent that he will be able to judge art by himself: far from it, but he will more easily come to understand what it is in our work that should be judged, and then will be able, with the help of an experienced painter, to clearly and distinctively detect the virtues and failures in any piece of work.⁴⁸

In Van Hoogstraten's view, art lovers could thus develop an understanding of the aspects that should be judged in paintings; however, they would never be able to properly evaluate a picture without the assistance of a knowledgeable painter.

⁴⁷ Brown 1995, 232.

⁴⁸ Van Hoogstraten 1678, **3: 'Soo komt dan deze onze *Inleiding* ook zeer wel te pas voor alle Liefhebbers van de Schilderkonst, schoon zy in de selve onervaere zijn, om in 't koopen van Konststukken niet bedrogen te worden, want zy zullen die waerdeeren nae de maete der deugden, die in de zelve zijn waergenomen, en geen neamkoopers blijven, gelijk'er tans veel zijn, die van d'een of anderen snoeshaen verleyt, kaele vodden in grooten waerden houden, om dat hun is wijs gemaekt, datze van d'een of d'ander groot Meester geschildert zijn. Niet dat ik zeggen wil, dat deeze mijne *Inleiding* allen Liefhebbers de oogen zal openen, dat zy zelfs strax van de kunst zullen kunnen oordeelen: dat zy verre; maer zy zullen uit ons werk gemakkelijk kunnen begrijpen, waer van dat men oordelen moet, en dan zullen zy, met behulp van een ervaren Schilder, de deugden en feilen, die in eenig werk zijn, klaer en onderscheidelijk kunnen naspeuren.'

The best judge – the connoisseur?

Certainly not all early modern art theorists were as negative as Binet, Bosse and Hoogstraten about the abilities of non-practitioners to sensibly judge pictures. As we have seen, Van Mander, for example, took the judgements of non-practitioners to heart when discussing issues of attribution, the characteristics of an artist's style and the general quality of a painter's work. Nevertheless, he also stressed the advantages of the painter's experienced eye, which suggests that he did not find it self-evident that art lovers could be the equals of good painters when it came to assessing art. Writers on art who were not painters themselves generally had more confidence in their own judgements, however.

The Italian collector Giulio Mancini, for example, was quite explicit in his comments on the matter. In the introduction to his unpublished treatise on judging pictures, he raises the question of whether he as a non-painter could write a treatise to teach gentlemen how to assess pictures so they could more successfully purchase and collect paintings. The answer is evidently yes. He believed that some practical experience is important, namely knowing how to draw. However, he did not find it necessary to know how to paint; elements such as colour, perspective, and the expression of the passions were for Mancini common enough subjects that everyone could recognise and judge them without having to be a painter.⁴⁹ He then eloquently turns the question around and asks, why is it that a painter is not necessarily a good judge of painting? Mancini believed it was because the painting and judging of paintings required different talents and qualities. Painting required primarily 'imagination' (*fantasia*). Assessing a painting, however, required prudence, knowledge, intelligence and a certain indifference (to prevent negative passions such as envy from clouding one's judgement). Moreover, to successfully appraise art one needed additional knowledge; because painting was not a necessity like bread and water and thus, its price, Mancini argued, basically depended on the taste and budget of the buyer and the need of the owner to dispose of the work. Mancini believed that creating, judging and appraising pictures were thus three different specialisations, of which the last two did not (necessarily) require painterly experience.

Franciscus Junius also believed that experience as a painter was not necessary to successfully assess pictures, however, for somewhat different reasons. As we have seen, he repeatedly compared ancient views with those of his contemporaries in his treatise *On the Painting of the Ancients*. Indeed, his opinion

⁴⁹ 'S'aggiunge che il colore, la prospettiva, l'espression dell'affetto, et altre cose simili rappresentate et espresse dal pittore, son oggetti comuni / che si riconoscono e giudicano senza l'abito della pittura et suo modo d'operare.' Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 291 ff.

regarding who could best judge art came in a response to Pliny the Younger. The latter had written that:

‘none but an Artificer can judge a Painter, Carver, Caster in brasse, or worker in clay’, to which Junius immediately adds: ‘Observe in the mean time, that in these words of Plinie we must understand by the name Artificer, not such a workman only as doth really paint and carve, but such a Lover [...] of Art as by a rare and well-exercised Imaginative facultie, is able to conferre his conceived Images with the Pictures and Statues that come nearest to Nature, and is likewise able to discern by a cunning and infallible conjecture the severall hands of divers great Masters out of their manner of working.’⁵⁰

Thus, in Junius’s view, trained art lovers could thus also adequately judge the quality and attribution of works of art. Unlike Mancini, Junius believed that judging art required a trained imagination. The connoisseur should be able to imagine what a scene should look like and compare this mental image to what he sees in a painting. He thus needs a kind of knowledge that is very similar to an artist’s, so that he can also imagine how else the painter could have depicted the same scene. When properly trained, Junius believed that non-painters were often better judges than painters: ‘thus provided, they doe often examine the works of great Artificers with better successe then the Artists themselves, the severitie and integretie of whose judgements is often weakend by the love of their owne and the dislike of other mens workes.’⁵¹

In the 1630s, Junius thus touted the trained art lover over the practitioner as the better judge of art. Interestingly, around the same time, three other writers on art praised painters to the extent that they were popular among art lovers. Jan Orlers and Theodoor Schrevelius, in their descriptions of their respective cities of Leiden and Haarlem, refer extensively to the assessments of art lovers when they celebrated certain painters; the opinions of other painters are not even mentioned.⁵² A positive opinion of art lovers, to them, was a guarantee of quality and monetary value. Even the painter Philips Angel focuses primarily on the opinions of art lovers when he lists the faculties and skills of a good painter in his 1641 lecture at the Leiden Guild of Saint Luke.⁵³ Junius was obviously not the only one who preferred the opinions of non-painters.

⁵⁰ Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 68.

⁵¹ Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 64-65.

⁵² Orlers 1641; Schrevelius 1648; see also Sluijter 2003, 15-17; and Sluijter 1993 [ed. 2000], 204.

⁵³ Angel 1642. See also Sluijter 1993 [ed. 2000], 9; and Sluijter 2003, 17.

Moreover, Junius was also ingenious in how he appreciated the laymen's opinion. Junius opined that even laymen could recognise the quality of an artwork, even though they remained incapable of fully rationalising their opinions. He argued forcefully by comparing it to music, noting that anyone can recognise a false note, even those unable to explain exactly what caused it or play the passage better themselves.⁵⁴

In the 1660s and 1670s, the French art theorists André Félibien and Roger de Piles expanded on Junius' view that anybody can basically assess a painting's quality, but that it takes greater expertise to fully rationalise one's opinions. Like Junius, they believed that both painters and connoisseurs could potentially assess a painting, emphasising that both needed the same intellectual background in the principles of painting to adequately explain their opinions. Furthermore, they also added a warning to aspiring connoisseurs about the pitfalls. Félibien points out the dangers of focusing solely on one aspect of a painting about which one is knowledgeable, such as perspective. Meanwhile, De Piles pointed out that it was important to realise that neither a good painter's nor a reputable connoisseur's opinion is necessarily correct regarding a picture, meaning in effect that should also think for oneself.⁵⁵ On a more pragmatic level, De Piles warned beginning connoisseurs not to stand too close to the painting when assessing a large or roughly painted work, as he had witnessed many connoisseurs doing, but to step back to an ideal viewing distance.⁵⁶

Thus, in the art theoretical literature, the question of who is the best judge of art was an issue that led to some debate. I think that rather than try to see the different views as a linear development based on a general consensus, it is more fruitful to see the various views as part of an evolving debate, and to analyse the individual opinions in relation to the background, training and surroundings of these opinionated writers. While the art theorist-painters tended to emphasise the painter's critical capacities, the art lover--non-practitioners appealed for recognition of their abilities. As we have seen, some of these art lovers believed that non-painters were the equals of painters – or even superior – when it came to assessing art. The question then is to what extent these connoisseurs also actually assessed art in practice. As we have seen, Orlers, Schrevelius and Angel believed that the appreciation of knowledgeable art lovers guaranteed the quality and value of an artwork. But did these connoisseurs also assess and appraise art as a dealer, auctioneer or official arbitrator in attribution issues?

⁵⁴ Junius 1639 [ed. 1991], 68-69.

⁵⁵ Félibien 1666-1688 [ed. 1706], 86.

⁵⁶ De Piles 1677, 233 ff. Art lovers are almost always depicted studying pictures from very close by in seventeenth-century paintings, as well.

Judging pictures in practice

In the seventeenth-century, the sale of pictures was controlled by the professional organisation of painters, the Guild of Saint Luke, the rules and regulations of which differed per city. The heads of the guild were the traditional arbitrators involving conflicts. Art dealers had to be members of the Guild of St Luke to be eligible to sell art. The guild also granted permission for public sales such as auctions.⁵⁷

Master painters most commonly sold work produced in their studios directly to clients. Sometimes they also sold work created elsewhere as Johannes Vermeer did. Some painters gave up painting altogether to devote themselves exclusively to the art trade. They included prominent dealers like Gerrit Uylenburgh, Cornelis Doeck, Abraham de Cooge, Crijn Volmarijn, Matthijs Musson, Albert Meyeringh and Jan Colenbier.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it was fairly common for the family members of painters to become involved in art transactions. Did knowledgeable art lovers also sell art?

Interestingly, in the seventeenth century, several membership lists of the various Guilds of Saint Luke mention ‘art lovers’ (*liefhebbers*), a phenomenon that was researched by Jaap van de Veen and Cindy van Keulen.⁵⁹ In the city of Antwerp, 23 art lovers are listed in the guild records during the period 1600-1630. Some of these are described as ‘art lover and merchant’ (*liefhebber en coopman*), so one can assume that they were also dealers. Two of these have been identified as the well-connected art collectors Cornelis vander Geest and Philips van Valckenisse.

‘Art lovers’ (*liefhebbers*) are also listed in documents pertaining to the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke. In response to a draft document from the Haarlem guild heads proposing a ban on public sales (1642), several guild members protested the decision. One of their objections was that this ban would greatly inconvenience art lovers who encouraged young painters by buying all their work. If they were unable to resell these works freely, they could potentially change their minds about encouraging new talent.⁶⁰ Guild records in The Hague also mention

⁵⁷ On dealers in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, see Montias 1988. On guilds and the expanding market, see Romein/Korevaar 2006

⁵⁸ Montias 1988, 245.

⁵⁹ Van der Veen 1993; Van Keulen 1996.

⁶⁰ ‘bij aldien hetzelfde volgens de voorschreven artuculen werd gepractiseert [het aan banden leggen van de handel] soo sullen voor het eerst verscheijde liefhebbers die (om aencomende konstenaeren

art lovers; they paid the guild 6 stuivers per year in membership fees, the same amount as master painters. According to a 1656 guild regulation, these art lovers were allowed to freely purchase art from out-of-town painters; however, they were not allowed to resell these in public sales without the consent of the burgomasters.⁶¹ The rules and regulations varied quite a bit from city to city. In Bruges and Ghent, art lovers were not even mentioned in guild records, which does not necessarily mean that there were no non-practitioner members in the guild of Saint Luke, for they may have been registered as dealers.

The scattered evidence nonetheless leads us to conclude that numerous non-practitioners occasionally sold art and that some even became specialised dealers. For example, one of the most prominent dealers in Amsterdam around the middle of the seventeenth century was a non-practitioner: Johannes de Renialme; other examples include the collectors Marten Kretzer and Herman van Swoll.⁶² Similarly, the best-known auctioneer of the period, Jan Pietersz. Zomer, had not been trained as a painter. Lastly, as Koenraad Jonckheere has shown, at the end of the seventeenth century, collector connoisseurs like Jan van Beuningen played a crucial role in the sale of high-end masterpieces.⁶³

There is also evidence that non-painters acted as official arbitrators in attribution cases in the seventeenth century. As Jaap van der Veen has shown, Marten Kretzer, Isaack van Beest and Herman Stoffelsz. van Swol, among others, assumed this role; they were all paintings collectors.⁶⁴ Interestingly, this practice roughly coincides with the period in which some writers on painting award greater importance to the judgement of non-practitioners than to that of painters when

in haere konst te animeren) nu meest alle hare stucken afkopen genootsaekt syn haere handen thuijs te houden also sij anders geene weeg souden weeten haere gekofte stucken te vertieren', as quoted in Van Keulen 1996, 22.

⁶¹ A 1656 guild regulation stated that: 'Alle liefhebbers Ingezetenen van de Hage ende Jurisdiction van dien sullen sonder becroom en tegeseggen van de Confrerije, vermogen aen uijtheemsche Mrs. eenige stucken en wercken te besteden, deselve haer aff te coopen, In den Hage 't haren huijse te brengen, behoudel.; dat sij daermede niet en sullen vermogen eenige publicque venduen (te houden) ten sij 's selfde bij Burgemeester om redenen wierde toegestaen.' Quoted in Van Keulen 1996, 22; see also Montias 1988, 247.

⁶² Montias 1988, 246. In the most public attribution debate, the Uylenburgh case, Uylenburgh had tried to work with Fromantiou on a committee of 'some unprejudiced master painters and other people who understand the art of painting' (*eenige neutrale meesters schilders ende andere kunstkennde personen hen de schilderkunst verstaende*) that would assess the contested paintings. However, they could not reach agreement, and eventually, the paintings were judged virtually by only painters. Two Rotterdam collectors, one of which was an amateur painter were the exceptions. See Lammertse/Van der Veen 2006, 79-102, esp. 84 and 88.

⁶³ Jonckheere 2008a.

⁶⁴ Van der Veen 2005, 18.

praising artists (see above). Indeed it looks like non-practitioners thus acquired an increasingly important role both in theory and in practice throughout seventeenth century.

Although most pictures were sold by painters in the seventeenth century either directly or in retail, some non-painters were thus able to establish themselves as art dealer, auctioneer and/or as arbitrator. Of course they did not only judge pictures in these capacities. In as far as these connoisseurs have been identified, they were all collectors themselves. And they would have obviously needed to judge pictures when buying works.

The assumption that only painters were acknowledged as having the capacity to assess art in the seventeenth century thus does not hold true. It was a topic of debate among art theorists who was ultimately the best judge, the painter or the connoisseur, and most theorists seemed to agree that there were good judges among both master painters and art lovers. In practice, besides painters, some connoisseurs were also considered able judges of art. Successful dealers and auctioneers were not necessarily painters themselves, and non-practitioners were sometimes called upon to serve as official arbitrators in attribution issues. As we have seen, the connoisseur's increasingly important role on the art market coincides with the increased importance attached to his opinions in city descriptions and in art theory publications. This, in turn, may have provoked stronger expressions of aversion – by Bosse and Van Hoogstraten, for instance – for inept and pretentious connoisseurs.

In hindsight, the conclusion that the opinions of connoisseurs were important both in theory and in practice was perhaps predictable. After all, as De Piles wrote in one of his dialogues on connoisseurship: 'It would have been a strange thing if paintings were made for painters only.'⁶⁵

⁶⁵ 'Ce seroit une chose bien estrange que les Tableaux ne fussent fait que pour les Peintres.' De Piles 1677, 21.