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 6.
THE ESSENCE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
CONNOISSEURSHIP

The Riddle of Quality

None of the early writers on connoisseurship believed that the most important task of the connoisseur was to attach names to pictures. It was at least as important— if not more—to judge a picture’s quality. The connoisseur had already taken quality into account while attributing paintings, for only a thorough analysis of a picture’s quality could help one decide if the work was worthy of carrying a master’s name, even if it were not executed entirely by the hand of that master. Yet quality also mattered in its own right. As Roger de Piles had one of his protagonists state in his Conversations sur la Connaissance de la Peinture of 1677: ‘[..] if one has a beautiful Painting [...] it is always very pleasant to know who made it. But to be honest with you, the true knowledge of Painting consists in knowing if a painting is good or bad; in making the distinction between what is good in a certain painting and what is bad, and to rationalize the judgment one has made of it.’ This raises the question how seventeenth-century experts would have defined good quality in painting. Was it a matter of taste? Or did they devise rules? And if so, would such rules have a universal validity to them? And what aspects did they find particularly important?

In the introduction to his treatise on painting of 1678, Samuel van Hoogstraten uses a specific term for art lovers who were not able to distinguish quality in pictures: ‘name buyers’ (‘naemkoopers’). Unable to rely on their own expertise, these art lovers simply bought pictures that were said to be by well-
known masters. This was of course a rather risky undertaking, for they could easily be deceived. Moreover, pictures worthy of carrying a well-known master’s name could range in quality. In his treatise, Samuel van Hoogstraten explained that also within one and the same painting there could be differences in quality. As we have seen, he warned art lovers to not excessively praise unimportant elements in a painting, which were often executed by pupils or assistants. One of the purposes of Van Hoogstraten’s treatise as a whole was to make art lovers appreciate paintings to the measure of ‘virtues’ (‘deugden’) inherent in the works, so they would no longer be deceived. His reasoning implies that there was a certain consensus about the quality of paintings among experts and that the appreciation of quality was – at least partially – learnable.

Van Hoogstraten was not the only painter who worried about art lovers being deceived when buying art because they could not properly evaluate quality in paintings. As we have seen, several seventeenth-century documents related to painters’ guilds and public sales indicate a similar concern. Sometimes even experts were at a loss when trying to distinguish subtle differences in quality, such as the difference between an original and a retouched copy. For the early eighteenth-century scholar Abbé du Bos, the occasional confusion among experts

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4 Compare a diary entry of 3 October 1665 by the Parisian collector Paul Fréart de Chantelou, in which he criticizes art lovers who cared for names but not quality: ‘those who looked for a name and not at the thing itself would be quite satisfied with M. Gamart’s collection, but in my opinion names were nothing’. Fréart de Chantelou/Blunt 1985, 248. See also below ‘The Sum of the Parts’.

5 Like Franciscus Junius had done before him, Van Hoogstraten used the Latin term ‘parerga’ to denote such unimportant elements. See also chapter 3, “By His Hand”: The Paradox of Seventeenth-Century Connoisseurship’.

6 See quote above, note 3. According to Samuel van Hoogstaten non-painters would never be able to do this entirely by themselves, but would always need the assistance of a good painter. As we have seen, other writers were more positive about the abilities of non-painters to assess paintings; see chapter 5 ‘The Painter versus the the Connoisseur? The Best Judge of Pictures in Seventeenth-Century Theory and Practice’.


8 For example, Justus van Egmont, a former assistant of Van Dyck, had trouble recognizing his own hand in copies after his master. When asked his opinion of a series of Apostles in the style of van Dyck, he stated that he believed that ‘one or two’ were copies by him after van Dyck. See Galesloot 1868; Roland 1983; Roland 1984; and Bok 1991. In art theory, the most well-known example of an expert being fooled was Raphael’s former assistant Giulio Romano, who believed he recognized his own brushwork in Raphael’s Portrait of Leo X with Two Cardinals, despite the fact that he was actually looking at a copy by Andrea del Sarto (see chapter 2, figs. above, p. and figs. 2.5 & 2.6).
was a reason to dismiss connoisseurship as inherently faulty. Nineteenth-century writers, however, were not so pessimistic.

Even though seventeenth-century art theorists disagreed as to who was ultimately the best judge of the quality of paintings (as we have seen in the last chapter), many of them were optimistic as to the degree of consensus true experts would reach about the quality of specific characteristics, such as the artist’s ability to draw and arrange figures or his skills in expressing emotions and movements. As we have seen, Karel van Mander repeatedly emphasized that ‘all painters and art experts’ would agree with him when he discussed the quality of specific pictures. Only in one instance does he suggest that his opinion differed from that of art lovers whom he respected; he writes that he felt he could not omit the painter David Vinckboons from his treatise since the art lovers of his time admired this painter (see chapter 5, ‘Painters and Art Experts’). Junius seems even more optimistic since he stated that also non-experts could successfully judge the quality of a painting, just like everyone could recognize a false note in a piece of music without necessarily knowing what caused it (see chapter 5, ‘The Best Judge - The Connoisseur?’).

In a more indirect way, many writers on art reveal their optimism by trying to capture quality in a set of rules in which high quality was the result of a coherent system of rules and requirements, such as well-proportioned figures and a clear emphasis on the most important elements (see further below). Among others Karel van Mander, Giulio Mancini, Franciscus Junius, Philips Angel, Willem Goeree and Samuel van Hoogstraten tried to define the essence of pictorial quality in such a way.

Although certain aspects such as ‘grace’ could not readily be defined in a rule, its characteristics did not seem to contradict a systematic, rational explanation of quality. At least this did not discourage these writers from devising a coherent explanation. In fact, one could simply state, as many writers did, that in order to obtain the highest quality it was not enough to laboriously apply all the rules, but that one also needed a certain ease and looseness, occasionally even an element of chance.

9 ‘[…] l’expérience nous enseigne que l’art de deviner l’auteur d’un tableau en reconnaissant la main du maître est le plus fautif de tous les arts après la medicine […]. On sait que plusieurs peintres se sont trompés sur leur propres ouvrages, et qu’ils one pris quelque fois une copie pour l’original qu’eux-mêmes ils avaient peint.’ Du Bos 1719 [ed. 1993], 296.

10 This does not mean that all art experts would have interpreted a depicted emotion in the same terms, but merely that they would have agreed upon the intensity of the expression. In particular, paintings by Rembrandt, which have always been well-known for their strongly expressive qualities, have evoked different interpretations; see below, 'Expression'.

Yet some scholars did think perfection was necessarily at odds with rules of art. Much to the annoyance of Samuel van Hoogstraten, the British philosopher and playwright Francis Bacon had mocked the ancient painter Apelles and the Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer for this reason. One had tried to reach perfection in human figures by combining the most beautiful facial features seen in nature into one painted face, while the other sought to establish rules of geometry to define human proportions. According to Bacon, such efforts were bound to fail; only a sort of heavenly chance could lead to perfection in his view. In the Netherlands, the poet and writer Jan de Brune de Jonge took a similar stance in his collection of essays Wetsteen der Vernuften of 1644. He praised painters who had let their ‘artful brush’ express ideas which were more perfect than any beauty found in nature, and he emphasized that such perfection resulted from ‘a lucky touch, and chance’ and ‘not at all from rules of art’. Samuel van Hoogstraten classified De Brune therefore as someone who favored brushwork and the application of colors (colorito) over proportionate draughtsmanship (disegno). Van Hoogstraten himself strongly disagreed with Bacon (and De Brune) and emphasized that this wise man had no practical experience as

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12 Van Hoogstraten 1678, 279-280. Francis Bacon, ‘Of Beauty’: ‘There is no excellent beauty, that hath not some strangeness in the proportion. A man cannot tell whether Apelles, or Albert Durer, were the more trifler; whereof the one, would make a personage by geometrical proportions; the other, by taking the best parts out of divers faces, to make one excellent. Such personages, I think, would please nobody, but the painter that made them. Not but I think a painter may make a better face than ever was; but he must do it by a kind of felicity (as a musician that maketh an excellent air in music), and not by rule.’ This story about Apelles does not appear in Junius’ compendium of sources on ancient artists (Junius 1694 [ed. 1991]), and I have not been able to determine the source Bacon may have used. A similar story is known about Zeuxis, who allegedly combined the most beautiful body parts of five different women into one image of the famous Helena. See Dionysius Halicarnassensis, De oratoribus veteribus I; Cicero, De inventione, II.1.1-3.

13 Samuel van Hoogstraten 1678, 280; De Brune de Jonge 1644, vol. II, chapter 6 (p. 119 ff.).

14 ‘Ik kom van een plaats daar ik een vrouwenbeelt gezien heb, dat oneindigh schoonder was, dan yemand zou konnen gelooven. […] Daarom hiel ik haar ook dadelik, niet voor ’t afzetsel van eenige Ioffer, die ergens in wezen was; maar voor een lustelijke luim van een konstich pinceel, dat d’Ideen van de schoonheid nagebootst hadde, zonder haar te zien. Apelles meende ’t anders te klaren, want zoo hy gezint was een volmaakte schoonheid te verbeelden, nam hy uit verscheiden aanzichten de beste deelen. Zulke taferelen, geloof ik, zouden naaulix yemand behagen, dan hem dieze gemaakt hadde. Niet dat ik denken zou, dat een schilder ons geen moojer beelden kan beschaffen, als ’er oit uit van handen van natuur zijn voortgekomen; (het tegendeel heb ik alree aangewezen,) doch dat moet hem gebeuren, door een slagh van ’t geluk, en by geval; (als de zangmeesters hunne geluyen,) maar geensins deur regels van de konst.’ De Brune de Jonge 1644, vol. II, 119. This passage is largely taken from Bacon; see note 14 above.
a painter and therefore no true understanding of the art (*dit is vermetelheyt buiten uw leest*).15

Although the definitions of high quality thus differed somewhat from one writer to the next, the fact that a fair amount of writers believed in the possibility of establishing certain rules of quality is telling. Interestingly, no seventeenth-century writer states that measuring quality was (partially) a matter of personal taste. Occasionally, a seventeenth-century writer did relate people’s character to their preference for pictures. Mancini, for example, stated that people with a choleric or melancholic character react best to light subjects.16 Yet this did not reflect the quality of the paintings, which, in his view, could firmly be established by applying clear rules. It was not until the eighteenth century that thinkers such as Emmanuel Kant would inherently link quality to personal taste by stating that the appreciation for quality is necessarily subjective and that therefore no objective rules can be established to measure aesthetic quality.17

In the seventeenth century scholars believed that quality *could* be objectively established. It was seen either as something which experts would recognize but that ultimately defied explanation (as Bacon and De Brune argued), or as something which could be captured in clear rules. The seventeenth-century belief in quality as a solid characteristic did not mean, however, that art experts were unaware of controversies about matters of quality. Out of all the writers who defined the rules of art, Roger de Piles went the furthest in that he not only articulated an elaborate definition of high quality but also rated the achievements of famous painters in absolute numbers (fig. 6.1). In his table each painter

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15 Van Hoogstraten 1678, 280. Van Hoogstraten describes Bacon as very wise, yet nonetheless ignorant about art (*konst onverstandig*), and exclaims: ‘ô Bakon! Uw hooge wijsheyt doet u doolen, en dit is vermetelheyt buiten uw leest. Zeker ’t geene G. Vossius zegt, dat hoe groot een schoonheyt is, zy wort van verscheide beelden overwonnen, geschiet niet by geval, schoon er somtijts wel eenige toeval van gratie de hulpende handt toe verleent heeft. Onze grooten Verulamius [i.e. Bacon] wort van een ander schrijver nagevolgt [i.e. Jan de Brune, mentioned by Van Hoogstraten in the margin], hy meent, zegt hy, de beste meesters hebben altijts de schoonheid gestelt in de gelijkmaetichey van deelen, of anders in een alderbeste medemeetlijkheyt van ’t geheel tot yder deel, en wederom van de delen onderling tegen elkander. Maar andere hebben in een zekere bevallijkheyt van gedaente en verwe begrepen, en om dat zy haer niet en kenden zoo hebbenze haer als onkennelijk beschreven [emphasis added by the current author]. En dus voortgaende meent hy al verder, dat wanneer kunstige Schilders een groote schoonheit uitgebeelt hebben, het zelve geenszins deur regels van de kunst, maer alleen door een slach van ’t geluk, en by geval gebeurt is.’ Contrary to what Van Hoogstraten suggests, the underlined passage is not based on Jan de Brune’s *Wetsteen* but Van Hoogstraten’s explanation.

16 Mancini based this idea on Ficino; see Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 330 and 142-143.

17 Kant relinquished the belief in an objective reality independent of our perception; see Kant 1790.
received four different grades, reflecting the main fields of painting as De Piles defined them: composition, line, color and expression. Yet De Piles was well aware of the different opinions on the quality of these painters: ‘opinions are too various on this point to let us think that we alone are in the right.’ He even expected to be ‘severely criticized’, and warned possible opponents that ‘in order to criticize judiciously, one must have a perfect knowledge of all the parts of a piece of painting, and of the reasons which make the whole good’, adding that many judge a picture only on the basis of one aspect in which they are interested.

His insistence on a ‘perfect knowledge of painting’ necessary to judge pictures, and on ‘the reasons that make the whole good’, indicates that he believed many controversies stemmed from different (read: faulty) emphases when judging pictures. Of course, even if the quality of specific aspects could be judged with certainty, one still had to determine whether all these aspects were equally important or if some counted more than others. A strong advocate of the importance of color, Roger de Piles knew well that opinions varied as to what elements of a painting counted the most.

As we have seen, the disegno-colorito debate (in which Roger de Piles partook) played an important role in the appreciation of various types of European paintings in the seventeenth century, including Netherlandish works. Also, specifically with regards to Netherlandish pictures, there were different views on, among other things, what kinds of subjects were worth painting, what type of lighting was admirable in a picture, and to what degree brushstrokes should be visible. Also, opinions varied on what effect a high quality picture should ultimately have. Was it to inspire the viewer by showing the good and the beautiful? Or should it mostly show a deceptively real mirror of God’s creation, that is, the visible world, in which humble, sinful and even ugly subjects could be visually appealing? Despite the optimism of early writers on pictorial quality, many aspects of it were thus not easily captured in a definition upon which all experts could agree. Quality remained somewhat elusive, subject to change and interpretation, a riddle never permanently solved.

It is clear that there cannot be just one answer to the question how of the quality of Netherlandish pictures was defined in the seventeenth century. Therefore I will analyze seventeenth-century views on the topic as part of an evolving debate. On some topics (such as the question of what counted as ‘masterly’) there seems to have been a relatively large consensus, while other

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18 De Piles 1708 [ed. 1743], 294.
19 De Piles 1708 [ed. 1743], 296. See also chapter 5 ‘The Best Judge’ above.
20 See above chapters 2, 4 and 5; and Sluijter 2006, chapter 7.
topics were the subject of more discussion in the literature on art (such as the importance of color and its proper use). As mentioned before, the vocabulary of art criticism expanded in the seventeenth century, and this allowed for increasingly refined categories of thought. In order to get a clearer idea of seventeenth-century views on quality, I will first look into the general framework of the thought about quality and address the question of to what degree standards of quality were related to picture types, nations and periods. Subsequently, I will have a closer look at the criteria used to measure quality, that is, terms and concepts of seventeenth-century art criticism and the ways in which these were used. By thus tracing the contours of seventeenth-century discussions on quality, I intend to shed light on the types of aspects that mattered most to the seventeenth-century experts whose opinions have come down to us and on the range of quality judgments they made.

Categories of Quality: Genres, Nations and Periods

In his Considerazioni sulla Pittura (1617/1621), the sharp-eyed paintings collector Giulio Mancini was quite specific in his advice on how to determine a painting’s quality: “Once you have found out whether a painting is an original or a copy, you should subsequently consider if it is good or bad, and this according to the type of picture, following the above provided rules on perfection.”

His rules grouped pictures according to the type of subject, the painting school and the period in which they were made. Landscape pictures, portraits and history paintings each required different analysis, and these picture types also had further subcategories with their own standards of quality.

When judging a static portrait painting, for example, two things mattered in the eyes of Mancini: the likeness and the ‘art’. With the latter, he meant whether the portrait was well-drawn (ben contornato), well-colored, well-shaded, and executed soundly (con franchezza) (see also below for a further discussion of such specific measures of quality).

21 ‘Supposto e riconosciuta che sia originale o copia nel modo detto simulato, si deve considerare poi se sia buona o cattiva, e ciò a grado e specie di pitture, secondo le regole della perfettione date.’ Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 135 (and also 328 ff).
22 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 135 ff. In his categorization of picture types (Tavola sinottica delle pitture), Mancini mentions also other types of pictures, such as those with groups of figures ‘without action’, like market scenes. See Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 149.
23 ‘se il ritratto senz’attione, se habbia similtudine die quel tale secondo se con arte, cioè se ben contornato, colorito, ombregiato e condotto con franchezza, che così haverà l’arte e similtudine che si desidera in questa sorte di ritratto [...]’. Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 135-136.
By comparison, it was more complicated to judge the quality of a history painting. First, one had to know which scene was depicted. Subsequently, one should focus on the main figure and event, and consider issues of ‘decorum’ or propriety.\(^{24}\) In Mancini’s view, high quality was first and foremost a matter of decorum. Was the person depicted in the right posture, with the right attributes, and did his costume, beauty and grace match the story?\(^{25}\) Evidently, a shepherd should not look like a gentleman, and vice versa. Also, the main figure should be easily recognizable as such and occupy a central position; other figures should be secondary to this figure.\(^{26}\) Then, one should consider if the location was consistent with the action or history depicted, and if there was no striking chronological inconsistency, such as for example a Saint Francis with the stigmata attending the baptism of Christ, long before Christ had even received the stigmata himself.\(^{27}\) Lastly, one should look into the ‘truth’ (verità), or the historical accuracy, of the depicted scene. This could sometimes pose difficulties since the well-known version of a story was not necessarily accurate. Saint Sebastian was usually depicted as a beardless young man attached to a tree and dying from arrow wounds (fig. 6.2); however, according to Mancini, in reality Saint Sebastian died at a later age from a beating and in a location where there were no trees. The question then was which representation would be better, the popular scene or the historically accurate one?\(^{28}\) Mancini preferred the first one, since a painting of this

\(^{24}\) Mancini does not elaborate on his sense of aesthetics. In his chapter ‘requisiti per la bontà delle pitture’, he equates beauty to decorum. At the end of his writings, he emphasizes that he barely discussed ‘grace’: “Della gratia s’è detto pochissime”. See Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 147.

\(^{25}\) Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 136-137: ‘Per la recognitione della bontà della pittura che rappresenta l’istoria, bisogna saper prima quale istoria sia quella che vien rappresentata. […] Saputo questo, bisogna vedere e costituire la persona principale che attion deva fare e che requisiti deve havere per la persona che rappresenta, e da questo poi vedere se corrisponda con la bellezza, decoro e gratia e vestito, et apresso se in conveniente sito d’esser prima viasta e risonosciuta per la figure principale, et che ad essa tutte l’altre servono; di poi sconsider il luogo dell’attion o dell’istoria, si corrisponda al sito rappresentato dal pittore, così del tempo, concedendo però qualche trasportatione e dilatatione / come si è detto, non permettendo però all’intutto l’impossibilità […] Considerat e queste cose, si deve ritornare alla figura principale e vedere se il pittore in essa habbi osservato la verità, come per esempio, rappresentando il trinfo di Cesare, se la figura principale s’assomiglia secondo il decoro e decenza che si ricerca, perchè, se trionfò di quaranta anni, la figura principale che l’esprime, doverà dimostrat quest’èta con il decoro di vestito et atto di godere di questo honore trionfale, che in tutto questo consiste il decoro.’

\(^{26}\) See also ‘Appropriate Design’ below.

\(^{27}\) Mancini, according to his own admission, allows for some liberty on the part of the painter, as long as one avoided clear chronological inconsistencies.

\(^{28}\) Mancini,/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 137 ff. See also Puttfarken 1985, 27 and 58.
type should ‘persuade’ the viewers, and this was best done if it agreed with popular belief.  

This last remark in particular gives a clear insight into Mancini’s analysis of quality. In Mancini’s view, quality was related to purpose. As different types of pictures had different purposes, they could not be judged by the same standards. The question with which Mancini struggled was how to evaluate a picture with conflicting purposes. The picture of Saint Sebastian, which he used as an example, should on the one hand depict the martyrdom of the Saint as truthfully as possible, yet on the other hand it should also persuade people of the truth of the scene, which was done best if the painter conformed to a widespread misconception. In this case, Mancini believed the ultimate goal of convincing viewers was more important than historical accuracy. Yet he is not very definitive in his answer, since he designates neither solution as entirely right or wrong. Rather, it was a matter of priorities.

Like Mancini, many other writers applied the most complex system of quality requirements to history painting, as we will see. It was commonly seen as the most challenging type of painting, though that did not mean that it was necessarily the most expensive or sought-after type of picture on the market. From a theoretical point of view, it was undisputedly the most complex, which warrants its special status in analyses of quality. While other writers thus similarly showed an awareness of the relation between quality and picture type by applying requirements only to history painting, Mancini was unique in his systematic analyses of this relationship and in his elaborate definition of the different criteria of quality.

As mentioned above, Mancini also differentiates between various nations and periods in his analysis of quality. When discussing the development of Italian painting, for example, he uses an analogy with human growth, which he had borrowed from Vasari. The period between 1200 and 1350 Mancini labeled ‘childhood’ (fancinlegzha), which is the beginning of the Renaissance (rinascimento), a period of ‘rebirth’ during which the rules of art would be rediscovered. After a period of ‘sleep’, he subsequently distinguishes a period of ‘adolescence’

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30 Compare, for example, Karel van Mander, who discusses high quality in history paintings in his chapter ‘Van der Ordinaty ende Inventy der Historien’. See also below ‘Composition’.

31 On the question to what degree requirements for history paintings were also applied to other picture types, see below ‘Composition’.

32 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 104.
adolescenza) from circa 1390/1400 until 1450, during which linear perspective was introduced in painting. The period 1450-1500, during which painters mastered the rules of perspective and had intelligent design, yet exhibited a rather dry painting style, according to Mancini, he called ‘youth’ (gioventù). The period in which Michelangelo and Raphael reached perfection in their design, coloring, rendering of perspective and the decorum he identified as the age of virility (virilità) or the age of perfection (perfettione). His own time, the ‘succeeding period’ (età susseguente) in which he distinguished four important painting schools, including one led by Caravaggio and one headed by the Carracci brothers, was necessarily less perfect, although Mancini stresses that this did not mean that every painter from his time was of lesser quality than the painters from the perfect age.

Mancini believed that painting in other nations developed in similar cycles of growth and decay. Like Vasari, he both applied absolute standards when judging quality (the rules of art) and stated that the achievements of painters should be seen in relation to the level of perfection common in their time. Michelangelo and Raphael had been able to reach perfection only by building upon the achievements of their predecessors. Moreover, Mancini added to Vasari’s evaluation system by pointing out that nations had different aesthetic preferences, which he explained by means of physiology. Mancini understood blue-eyed northerners to have a cool cranial temperature and therefore cool temperaments, which made them appreciate blue eyes and pale skin, whereas the dark-eyed Southern Europeans with their ‘spirited, sanguine temperament’ were

33 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 104 and 106.
34 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 106.
35 Mancini specifies that this period knew ‘ogni perfettione con disegno, colorito, prospettiva e decoro’. Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 106.
36 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 106. See also Philip Sohm’s entry on Mancini in the Grove Dictionary of Art (online version, October 2008).
37 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 35.
38 Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 35: ‘per dar giudizio delle pitture, bisogna considerar i tempi nei quali sono state fatte e le nazioni che hanno queste diversità di tempi.’ Vasari writes in the concluding remarks to the 1568 edition of his Vite, The Grove Dictionary of Art, online version, October 2008: ‘I may seem to have been over generous in praising some older or more recent masters … I can only reply that I believe I have not praised such artists unconditionally, but always conditionally, with due regard to place, time and other such considerations. In truth, although Giotto was undoubtedly very praiseworthy in his own day, I do not know what people would have said about him and other old masters had they lived at the time of Michelangelo. What is also worth noting is that the artists of our century, who have attained the highest degree of perfection, would not be in the position they hold today had not those who came before us been what they were.’
prone to like dark eyes, which, according to Mancini, lent itself better to expressing powerful emotions.\textsuperscript{39}

This reasoning again makes the question of purpose relevant, since it presents the differences between national styles in terms of the different aesthetic preferences of these nations.\textsuperscript{40} Although Mancini discusses various Netherlandish painters, including Goltzius, Honthorst, Paulus Bril, and Rubens, he does not, unfortunately, expand on what he considered characteristic for the Netherlandish painting of his time and how he judged its general quality.\textsuperscript{41}

Other writers were more explicit on this topic, commonly praising Netherlandish painters for their excellence in depicting details and in the coloring (colorito) and/or criticizing them for their lack of draughtsmanship (disegno). As early as 1538, Michelangelo reputedly stated that while Flemish devotional pictures excelled in moving the devout and in deceiving the eye through their many naturalistic details, it lacked reason and art, symmetry and proportion, design, good judgment and choice – essentially, substance and vigour.\textsuperscript{42} For this

\textsuperscript{39} Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 128-129: ‘Quant’al colore, apresso diverse nationi è stato diversamente stimato, perchè le settentrionali preferiscono il bianco, ma però con un po’ di rossezza delle parti che si vedono e godono, come è la faccia e in particolare le guancie [...]; li Spagnoli, l’Italiani e Greci non reputan così bello il bianco [...] ma un certo color bianco acceso di negro, con scintilla di color rosso, qual colore seguita al lor temperamento sanguigno spirituoso. [...] Ma se noi parliamo del color dell’occhio, son varie opinioni, perchè questo, seguitando per il più la temperatura del cervello secondo che apresso a diverse nationi è diversa temperatura,e che così s’è visto di questo o quell’altro colore, vien preferito questo o quell’altro: secondo che lo vedano i tramontani, i paesi settentrionali, il colore d’acqua marina, perchè questo va seguitando al temperamento del lor cervello e questo vedono; l’Italiani, li Spagnoli e Greci fra di loro son differenti, perchè alcuni preferisican il nero, come quello che habbi vehemenza et è un non so che d’imperio, altri I color d’occhio caprino. Che per denotar meglior temperamento di cervello, per veder meglio et in più longhezza d’età, et per haver più bellezza e gratia nell’atti di perturbazioni di piangere o ridere o simile, lo preferiscono e meritamente, perchè è della visione non accade dubitare vedendosi con il senso, e la ragione ne dimostra che quest’occhio riceve più facilmente, perchè [...] ricevano meglio l’influssi dello spirito del cervello [...]’. See also Sohm 2007, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{40} Although Mancini does not explicitly say so, this could be the reason that he makes little comparison of the quality of pictures from different nations. On the relationship between styles and nations/geographic regions, see also chapter 4, ‘Style and Country’.

\textsuperscript{41} In fact, Mancini hoped that later writers would describe other European schools of painting like he had described Sienese and Roman painting; see Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 146. On Netherlandish painters, see Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 37 and 258 ff. Mancini uses the terms ‘fiamminghi’ (‘Flemish’) and ‘tramontani’ (Northern Europeans).

\textsuperscript{42} When asked why Flemish painting lends itself better to devotional purposes than Italian painting, Michelangelo is supposed to have answered: ‘La pittura fiamminga […] soddisferà un devoto qualunque più che la pittura italiana; questa non gli farà versare una lagrima, mentre quella di Fiandra glie ne farà versare molte, e ciò non per vigore e bontà di quella pittura, ma per la bontà di quel tal devoto. Essa piacera assai alle donne, principalmente a quelle molto vecchie e a quelle molto giovani, e così pure ai frati, alle monache, e a qualche gentil uomo privo del senso musicale
reason, he called good (well-designed) pictures ‘Italian’, even those made in Flanders, according to his contemporary Francisco de Holanda.\footnote{D’Olanda/Aureli 1939, 63.}

While Netherlandish painting evolved tremendously throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it continued to be criticized and praised in the above mentioned two respects by both local and foreign writers alike. In 1604 Karel van Mander urged Netherlandish painters to improve their drawing skills especially with regards to figures, so they could compete better with their Italian colleagues.\footnote{Van Mander 1604, fol. 7r: ‘Want d’Italianen ons altijts gissen / Daer [in landschap - at] fraey in te zijn, ende sy inbeelden, / Dan ick hoop of wy haer deel oock ontsteelden. / Iae hoop hier in te zijn geen ydel hoper, / Sy sien self alree ghenoech d’apparency, / In doecken, steenen, en platen van coper, / Oock ghy Ionghers siet toe, griipt moet, al droper / Al veel door de mande, doet diligency, / Op dat wy gheraken t’onser intency, / Dat sy niet meer en segghen op haer spraken, / Vlaminghen connen geen figueren maken.’ Van Mander also believed Northern artists could learn from the Venetians, who were celebrated for their ‘\textit{colorito}’: ‘Brengt van Roome mede teyckenen zedich, / En t’wel schilderen van de stadt Venedich’. Van Mander 1604, fol. 7v.} Yet as the century progressed, Jacques de Ville (1628) and Samuel van Hoogstraten (1678) continued to criticize many of their contemporaries for not sufficiently following the rules of proportion and perspective and for poor draughtsmanship, respectively.\footnote{See chapter 4, ‘Style: artful or artificial’.} On a more positive note, several local writers praise the many details and lifelike colors of Netherlandish painters. Hugo Grotius, for example, celebrates the works by Lucas van Leyden and Maarten van Heemskerk in particular for their variety (\textit{varietas}) and truth (\textit{veritas}).\footnote{Hugo Grotius, \textit{Parallellon}, III, pp. 29-31 and pp. 44-48; Van Mander 1604, fol. 213r; both sources are taken from Becker 1998, 34.}

In the 1670s, the German painter and art theorist Joachim von Sandrart praised Netherlandish painters, especially Rembrandt, for their subtle balancing of tones and colors (see further below). Also, the French secretary of state and avid collector Louis-Henri Comte de Brienne praised Netherlandish pictures for this reason in his unpublished treatise on painting (written between 1665 and 1693).
Although the specific section dedicated to Netherlandish artists, including Rubens and Gerard Dou, has not survived, a passage in the surviving text indicates that he especially admired Van Dyck for his ability to unify and mix colors and for his subtle use of tones to make figures look ‘real’ (vray). 

By the time the French writer Roger de Piles sums up the characteristics of the Netherlandish style in his brief overview of national styles of 1699, he may have simply confirmed a widespread perception. Flemish art, he wrote, portrays nature with its defects – something which he saw as a shortcoming since he preferred a high level of idealization – yet excels in a great union of well-chosen colors, an excellent use of lights and shades and fluent brushwork.

By describing the aesthetic preferences of various nations, De Piles completed the task that Mancini had outlined at the beginning of the century. In 1671 the Dutch draughtsman and etcher Jan de Bisschop had also briefly touched upon the topic. In his view, there had been a ‘manner, feeling or [so to say] fashion’ for depicting common and even ugly subjects in paintings in the Netherlands, while French painting was characterized by a preference for beautiful and pleasant subjects. In his view this was partially caused by the innate character and mind of the people in these countries, and partially by the leading painters who set the tone. In 1676 Samuel van Hoogstraten similarly related

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47 Only the title is known: ‘de Rubens et des meilleurs peintres flamands où on verra un bel éloge de Dow, peintre hollandais, etc.’; see Hourticq 2005, 340.
48 Hourticq 2005, 337. Brienne uses term ‘vaghezza’ in this respect. According to Brienne, Van Dyck was even better than Titian, the great Venetian master of colour.
49 ‘Le Goût Allemand ... C’est une idée de la Nature comme elle se voit ordinairement avec ses défauts, & non comme elle pourrait être dans sa pureté... Le Goût Flamand ne diffère de l’Allemand que par une plus grande union de Couleurs bien choisies, par un excellent Clair-Obscur & par un Pinceau plus moëleux.’ De Piles 1699 [ed. 1707], 85. See also Barasch 1985, 354.
50 See above note 41.
51 On the debate about subject matter, see also below, ‘Criteria of quality’, esp. the section “Painterly” Topics and Motifs’.
52 Van Gelder/Jost 1985, dedication to Jan Six. ‘Dan nader bedenken, schijnt dit wel van dat misverstand geweest de oorsaek, dat, gelijk alles bestaat in geduyrich verloop en veranderingh, yder eeuw zijn manier, gevoelen en om soo te seggen mode mede brengt; dewelcke wert ingevoert door een meester of meer alsdan in groote achtching zijnde en derhalven machtich om gevolgh te maken; so hebben sommige van groote geest en konst synde geoordeelt, gelijk wel waerachtich maer qualijck begrepen en gebruyckt is, het leven te sijn het beste en volmaeckste voorbeeld en alles daer uyt te moeten gehaelt werden… Waer by noch werderende ingebeeld dat het lelijck heeft een vremdighet of ongeenheyt, ... het welle een deucht is in de konst, soo is men … afgeweken vande goede verkiesingh.’ On the topics of which he disapproved, see also below, p. ‘Painterly’ subjects. On the character of French painting: ‘de huydendaeghse naerstigheyt en yver … van het geestich Vrankrijk ... en heeft als eygen de goede verkiesinge van ‘t schoon en aengenaem, te dele uyt onderrichtingh van Poussin en ‘t sien van goede voorbeelden, te dele uyt de aengeboren aerdt en geest des volcks.’
painting styles to the intrinsic character of various people. Italians had quick spirits that were rich, pleasant and sharp, he wrote; Dutchmen, on the other hand, had heavy, slow minds. It thus followed that Italians were often better painters, he explained. However, if a Dutchman with his concentrated attention and cool spirit had specialized in a particular type of painting that agreed with his nature, he was seldomly defeated.53

By relating national characters and tastes to painting styles, these authors made it possible to understand national styles as the result of aesthetic preferences. Like individual painting styles, national styles could differ without necessarily ranging in quality.54 Moreover, stylistic differences between subsequent periods were not necessarily the result of an increase or loss of knowledge but could also simply be caused by changing aesthetic preferences. This did not mean that these authors believed that the various local and period styles were equal in artistic merit. While Mancini and De Piles emphasized the importance of establishing a picture’s relative quality, that is, its level of perfection in relation to other works made by the same people and in the same period, they nonetheless also applied absolute rules of perfection, which allowed them to characterize the strengths and weaknesses of national styles in general. Similarly, De Bisschop related painting styles to changing fashions and aesthetic preferences, but nonetheless sharply dismissed the taste of his predecessors as misguided and inferior to the insights of his own time.

Regardless of these value judgments, the fact that quite a few writers tried to define the unique character of Netherlandish paintings is telling. It suggests that the idea of a ‘Netherlandish style’ was widespread. When analyzing the specific criteria applied to Netherlandish pictures, it will therefore be interesting to see if the main debates were focused around quintessentially ‘Netherlandish’ qualities.

53 ‘Want schoon de vlugge geesten rijk, aerdich en scherp zijn, en wel te recht by een scheermes geleken worden, dat fijn en dun van metael is, maer lichtelijk gaet omliggen: Zoo zijn die loch en traeg van begrijp zijn, gelijk een bijl, die taey en zwaer zijnde, alles doorklieft, wat’er voor komt. En hierom zijn de italiaenen beter in ’t gros van de konst: maer onze Nederlanders, die niet zoo vlug van geest en gedachten zijn, maer aandachtiger en kouder, zullen ’t den Italianen in eenich byzonder deel, daer hun natuer toe neigt, zelden gewonnen geven.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 13.

54 See above chapter 4, ‘Style and Individual Character’.
Criteria of Quality

‘Painterly’ Topics and Motifs

One of the fiercest debates about the quality of seventeenth-century paintings concentrated on the question of which objects and motifs deserved to be painted and which did not. Tellingly, experts disagreed about the interpretation of a key term in debates about this topic: ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig). In seventeenth-century Dutch the term ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig) denoted something worthy of being painted; it did not yet signify a loose painting style, as it does today. Instead, the term was used for curious and interesting objects, people and landscapes, in other words, topics suitable to being depicted, as Jan Emmens and Boudewijn Bakker have shown.55 (fig. 6.3 Frans Floris, The Painter Rijk met de Stelt as Saint Luke painting the Virgin, 1556, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp – In his Schilderboeck of 1604 Karel van Mander described the face of Saint Luke in this painting as ‘schilderachtig’).56

For example, the poet Andries Pels described how Rembrandt used to scour ‘the entire city, on bridges and in odd corners, in the New and North markets, for armor, helmets, Japanese daggers, furs and rags, which he found painterly (schilderachtig).’57 (fig. 6.4) In a more general sense, the German painter Joachim van Sandrart used the term for Rembrandt’s choice of subjects. He had familiarized himself with the master’s work when he stayed in Amsterdam in the 1640s, and he later described Rembrandt’s choice of subjects as follows: ‘He painted few, classical poetic poems [sic], allegories or uncommon histories, but generally simple things that were easily understood, things that just appealed to him and were schilderachtig (as the Dutch say), which were nevertheless full of characteristic motifs sought directly from nature.’58 To Sandrart the term was thus

55 Another meaning of the term ‘schilderachtig’ was ‘like a painter’. Emmens 1979, 60, fig. 12. Bakker 1995, 153.
58 Compare also Filippo Baldinucci, who stated that Rembrandt collected clothing that was ‘bizzarro e pittoresco’. see Baldinucci 1686, 80; Bakker 1995, 148-149.
59 ‘Er hat aber wenig antiche Poetische Gedichte, alludien oder seltsame Historien, sondern meistens einfaltige und nicht in sonderbares Nachsinnen lauffende, ihme wohlgefallige und
typically Dutch and related to an interesting selection of subjects from life. In this sense the term seems to cover a wide range of paintings that were popular in the Netherlands around the middle of the seventeenth century: landscapes and still lifes but also figural scenes, which all stand out for their powerful sense of immediacy. For example, Vermeer's famous Milk Maid is unusual in that this very refined painting centers around a surprisingly modest and real-looking topic, a maid pouring milk. (fig. 6.5) It was an innovative subject but not one that could boast a lofty literary source; the master must have simply found it ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig). 59

Unfortunately, Sandrart does not elaborate on the Dutch concept of ‘schilderachtig’, citing only Rembrandt’s choice of subject as an example. Presumably he had Rembrandt’s many modest subjects in mind, such as the master’s head studies of elderly men and his landscapes. 60 (fig. 6.6) Precisely these types of subjects became the topic of controversy in the second half of the seventeenth century.

In 1671, the draughtsman and etcher Jan de Bisschop made a passionate plea that art lovers stop applying the term ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig) to ugly people with wrinkled faces and to dilapidated and overgrown cottages, and to reserve it for well-proportioned people and idealized landscapes. 61 What is beautiful in real life is worth depicting in art, he reasoned, and he therefore believed that the term ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig) should be equated with ‘beautiful’. Rembrandt’s pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten and the painter and art theorist Gerard de Lairesse
expressed similar views in their treatises on painting of 1678 and 1707, respectively. Promoting a classicist taste, which had become increasingly popular since the late 1650s, these writers aimed to persuade young painters to follow the example of ancient Greek and Roman artists and to select only the most beautiful from the natural world for use in their paintings. Though this striving for beauty may seem superficial at first, it resulted from the conviction that ethics and aesthetics were inseparable.

According to the classical doctrine, a painting should edify through showing the good and the beautiful, two qualities which were seen as intrinsically linked. Jan de Bisschop, for example, explained that ‘beauty is [..] propriety combined with grace’ ("fatsoen met bevallicheyt"). The logical consequence of this line of thought was that history paintings – depictions of beautiful or appropriately idealized people performing admirable actions – were celebrated as the highest possible achievement in painting. Already in 1638, Franciscus Junius had celebrated history painting for precisely this reason, as did Samuel van Hoogstraten in 1678.

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63 Surprisingly, neither Emmens nor Bakker relates the classicist understanding of the term ‘schilderachtig’ to their sense of ethics. Also, Bakker assumes that Jan de Bisschop’s concept of beauty, in particular, was very restrained and limited to healthy young people, noble people, green branches and strictly symmetrical landscapes (as opposed to elderly people, dry branches, people of a low social status, and more varied landscapes). However, I believe Jan de Bisschop’s ideas were more subtle. As De Bisschop explained, ‘Soo ister schoonheyt in een boer soo wel als in een Koningh; in een Hercules, Apollo, Mercurius, Satyr; in een out en jongh mensch, in een vette en magere, groove en tengere, man en vrouw en soo voort, maar in yder een verscheyden.’ , Van Gelder/Jost 1985, preface addressed to Jan Six (page not numbered). This suggests that beauty is related to decorum (betamelijckheyt) and to ethics in general, which means that itdoes not conflict with a certain variety in age and body types, for example.

64 Van Gelder/Jost 1985, preface addressed to Jan Six (page not numbered): ‘het schoon mach gheseyt werden een bequame gedaente of fatsoen met bevallicheyt.’

65 Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], see esp. the excellent introduction, xxi ff.; Van Hoogstraten 1678, 319: ‘ô konstlefide zieloh, […] wilt gy uw hart op eenige Schildery zetten: zoo let eerst wel, of ’er beminnens waerdige deugden in zijn; of de zaek, die verbeelt wort, wel zoo waerdigen inhout begrijpt, als van Clio [the personification of history] vereyst wort’.
This also meant that indecent and ugly motifs were to be avoided.\(^{66}\) Jan de Bisschop, for one, was quite explicit in his dismissal of the type of ugly subjects that had widely been celebrated as ‘painterly’ (\textit{schilderachtig}) until a few years before his book was published: ‘groups of crippled, hunch-backed and battered beggars, brothels filled with disorder, drinking feasts of gluttonous farmers despicable in many ways, too filthy to describe in words’; even famous beauties from mythology, such as Danae and Leda, were depicted with ‘swollen belly, hanging breasts, and the marks of stockings in their legs’, De Bisschop lamented.\(^{67}\) (figs. 6.7 and 6.8)

In his view, some talented masters had misunderstood the principle that nature is the most perfect example for painters. They had erroneously believed that everything in the real world was worth imitating and had even started celebrating the ugly, which is unusual and strange (hence people paid to see freaks of nature, he explained), as a virtue in art, as something ‘holy’ and ‘special’ and thus a worthwhile pursuit.\(^{68}\) In doing so, these leading masters had created a regrettable fashion (\textit{mode}), which led many other painters astray. He predicted that this painting style would certainly not be able to keep its popularity among future generations, just like the artifices and curves of Spranger and his followers had fallen out of fashion (fig. 6.9). Samuel van Hoogstraten and Gerard de Lairesse

\(^{66}\) Compare also Du Fresnoy c. 1647 [ed. 1722], rule L.V, 114: ‘Afschuwelijke dingen in de Schilderkonst die men vermyden moet. ’See also De Lairesse: ‘de Schilderkunst [...] is met zulk een vermogen verzeld, dat zy den mensch op twee zeer verschillende wyzen ontroert; eerslyck door schoone, deugdsaame en aangenaame; en ten anderlyck door slegte, mismaakte en verachte verbeeldingen, beide in tegenstreevigheid even krachtig. De eerste verkweit en bekoort de regtzinnige aanschouwers; de tweede, in tegendeel, baard hun een afkeer en walging. Derhalven is het onwiderspreekelyk, dat het Schilderachtige, naamentlyk het schoonste en uitgeleezenste, niet anders betekent als het geene waardig is geschildert te worden; en dath et slegste, of onschone, het allerminst die eere verdient...’; as quoted in Emmens 1979, 158.

\(^{67}\) Van Gelder/Jost 1985, preface addressed to Jan Six (page not numbered): ‘geselschappen van bedelaers, kreepel, gebult en ongehavent, bordelen vol slordigheyt, droncke gelagen van gulsige boeren op velerley manier afsienelijck te vuil om met woorden af te schelden. Ja selfs als een Leda of Danaë soude warden uytgebeeld (so veer gingh de ghewoonte) wieret gemaect een vrouwe-naeckt met een dicken en gheswollen buycyk, hangende borsten, knepen van kousse-banden in de beenen, en veel meer sulcke wanschappenheyt.’ On this topic, see also Sluijter 2006, 195-219.

\(^{68}\) Van Gelder/Jost 1985, preface addressed to Jan Six (page not numbered): ‘so is die goede regel qualities begrepen en misbruyckt geweest, en geworden een orseaek van soo grooten verloop en misleydingh; geacht werdende, datmen derhalven het leven most volgen sonder onderscheit en soo gelijck het sich meest en over al vertoonden. Waer by noch werdende ingebeelde dat het lelyck heeft een vremdigheyt of ongemenenheyt, gelijck daerom de wanscheplsen om gelt gezien werden, het welck een deucht is in de konst’. Earlier, he stated: ‘soo dat by na alles dat voor het oogh verwrepelijck was, tot schilderen en teeken en verkozen ja gesocht wiert als heilichdom en wat biszonders.’
similarly believed that it had been a regrettable error of painters to depict beggars and adulterers; in their view, only morally uplifting topics and motifs could command long-lasting fame.\textsuperscript{69}

In reality, however, the ‘error’ signaled by these classicists harkened back to antiquity. As Dirck Pietersz Pers explained in his 1644 translation of Cesare Ripa’s \textit{Iconologia}, the ancient thinker Aristotle had already indicated that the imitation of ugly and common things could be laudable when done well.\textsuperscript{70} Also, Pliny had commented on the topic when discussing an incident in Rome. When a Teuton (Northern European) passed by a picture of an ugly, old shepherd at the Forum Romanum, he was asked what he thought of it, according to Pliny. The man answered that he would not want to receive this man as a gift even in real life. Erasmus, who cited the anecdote, explained that the man was ignorant about art and therefore only looked at the shape of the figure, not realizing that those things which are deformed in nature can be more artful and attractive in a painting.\textsuperscript{71} Constantijn Huygens, however, who discussed the anecdote in his autobiography, sympathized with the man’s reaction. He related the anecdote to a powerfully atrocious painting of the mythological head of Medusa by Rubens (fig. 6.10) and exclaimed: ‘Come on, you all who measure beauty to the extent of the horror it evokes: Let us assume that someone would be willing to sing about murder and manslaughter with the same harmonious voice as that he would use for joyful things, fibs and jokes, then I would request him to please me both through his subject and through his performance.’\textsuperscript{72}


\textsuperscript{70} Aristotle’s idea is reflected in Ripa 1644, 256; see also Emmens 1979, 163.

\textsuperscript{71} ‘Barbarus non agnovit artificium, tantum spectatab formam, Atqui quae natura deformia sunt’. Emmens 1979, 163; compare also Dürer’s remark quoted on the same page: ‘Dan es ist eine grosze Kunst, welcher in groben bäurischen Dingen ein rechten Gwalt und kunst kan anzeigen…’

\textsuperscript{72} ‘Komaan gij allen, die het schooner afmeet naar de afschuw, die het inboezemt: Stel eens, dat iemand mij met dezelfde welluidende stem moord en doodslag zou willen voorzingen, die hij bij vroolijke dingen, jok en scherts weet te gebruiken, dan zou ik hem toch verzoeken mij zowel door
The selection of subjects for paintings had thus long been an issue of debate. In the Netherlands, it was especially in the second half of the seventeenth century that certain subjects were rejected overtly. Nonetheless, the extent to which connoisseurs applied moral criteria must have varied greatly, depending not only on general fashions and a changing sense of decorum, but also on the connoisseurs’ personal background, beliefs, social status and individual character. It is a topic which is much too complex to discuss in detail here. However, it is important to understand that to some connoisseurs, issues of morality were of quintessential importance when judging the quality of paintings (see also below ‘The Sum of the Parts’).

An example of a concrete painting which was rejected on moral ground concerns a work by Paulus Potter: *The Great Farm* (fig. 6.11). In 1649, Potter reputedly offered this painting to the wife of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik, Amalia von Solms, who refused it on account of the urinating cow – a detail not befitting a lady at the court. This incident was described by the painter and art theorist Arnold Houbraken. Although no documents have surfaced that confirm his story, there seems little reason to doubt it. The urinating cow must have been intended as a joke – a conscious breach of the rules of decorum; yet someone with a strong sense of propriety may well have interpreted it as offensive.

While certain motifs led to mixed reactions in practice, art theorists also started to apply more stringent criteria in their writings, as we have seen. The moral lenience which had allowed a great variety of ‘painterly’ motifs to be explored previously became more contested, and the fashion in painting shifted away from low-life motifs and a certain unflattering lifeliness towards more idealized and uplifting scenes (fig. 6.12). Towards the end of the Golden Age, Adriaen van de Werff was one of the best paid painters in the Netherlands).

_Invention, Composition and Design_

When judging a picture, apart from the subject matter itself, the manner of representing the narrative through composition and design was very important. Throughout the century, criteria of quality that had originally been developed for
ancient tragedies, such as the unity of time, place and action, played an important role – in an adjusted form – as general standards for pictures. Besides, pragmatic concerns, such as the question of to what degree masters should borrow from inventions by other painters, triggered a lively debate. Writers on art also discussed how figures should be shaped and arranged in paintings, and how they should be placed in the illusionistic space. Technically, the idea of a pictorial composition, in the sense of a conscious balancing of the various elements in the picture plane, may not have been invented until the mid- or late seventeenth century. This idea first occurs in Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy’s *De arte graphica*, which was translated and extensively annotated by Roger de Piles (Paris, 1668).\(^{75}\) Yet important steps towards developing such a concept were taken earlier, notably by Karel van Mander (1604), who was the first to not merely discuss the grouping of figures but also the role of landscapes, flora, fauna and objects in designing complex pictures.\(^{76}\)

When discussing Mancini’s measures for judging history paintings (see above ‘Picture Types, Nations and Periods’), we came across a number of notions that echo Aristotle’s rules for ancient tragedies: the unity of time, place and action.\(^{77}\) In a history painting, Mancini wrote, the scene depicted should not include chronological inconsistencies (unity of time). Also, the location in which the story is set should be logical (unity of place). And most importantly, the figure performing the main action should be clearly recognizable as such and potential secondary figures should help explain the subject (unity of action). Aristotle’s rules were meant to create unity and truth in ancient tragedies by prescribing that all the events should unfold within one day, in one and the same area, and that the entire story should serve to highlight one main storyline. This concept inspired particularly classically-oriented art theorists to strive for a similar unity in painting. Willem Goeree for example, stated that one can often find out how experienced or inexperienced a painter is by studying (among other things) ‘the explanation and truth of the History’ (the painter’s knowledge of the story and his ability to convey the essence of it without creating inconsistencies), ‘the reason of the

\(^{75}\) See Puttfarken 2000, 263 ff. The question of the extent to which De Piles’ translation and comments reflect Du Fresnoy’s original text and thinking has not yet been extensively studied.

\(^{76}\) See Puttfarken 2000, 189-199, esp. 193-195. Also, in 1642, Philips Angel states that a ‘sweet blending, combining spirit’ (soet vloeyende bijeenvoegende gheest) would allow the successful painter to create unified, pleasing paintings. Unfortunately, he did not expand on the precise manner by which a painter could do so; he believed that a good painter could more easily demonstrate it than that he could explain in words. Angel 1642, 38-39.

\(^{77}\) Aristotle, *Poetics* (Ποιητικός) c. 335 BC. Mancini refers to Aristotle’s text in his *Considerazioni*; see Mancini/Marucchi/Salerno 1956-1957, 123.
location’ (the unity and appropriateness of the place) and ‘the probability of the action’ (the convincing and truthful depiction of the action).\textsuperscript{78}

Less classically oriented thinkers, such as Karel van Mander and Philips Angel, had somewhat different priorities. They emphasized the importance of understanding the true character of the story, so as to depict it naturally (\textit{naturerlick}) and true to life (\textit{eygentlick}), and to appropriately highlight the main subject (\textit{scopus}).\textsuperscript{79} In doing so, these writers created a pictorial equivalent of the literary unity of action, in which a clear visual organization and a convincing lifelikeness had become more important than the literary unity of the narrative.\textsuperscript{80} No reference is made to the unity of time or place in Van Mander’s \textit{Schilderboek}. Since the medieval practice of depicting several moments of a story in one painting was no longer in fashion, he may have found such unity self-evident. Interestingly, Philips Angel did advocate a certain consistency in the depicted place and time, which he deemed indispensable for a truthful and convincingly true-to-life depiction of a story. He explained, for example, that it was crucial to choose the right setting for a story and to not paint a lush landscape, for example, if the story asked for a barren one.\textsuperscript{81}

To further illustrate how one could successfully depict a biblical setting, Angel referred to Rembrandt’s painting \textit{The Wedding Feast of Samson} (fig. 6.13). Here Rembrandt had improved on the traditional representation of this biblical scene by depicting the guests as laying beside the table as had been the custom at the time. Angel greatly appreciated the thoughtfulness of Rembrandt’s invention, which made the scene look ‘true to life’ (‘\textit{eigen}’ or ‘\textit{eigentlick}’) – an effect the master had further enhanced through the ‘natural’ (\textit{natuurlicke}) expressions and gestures he had given the figures. Angel points out that Samson makes a very appropriate gesture with his hand to indicate that he was telling a riddle and that the postures and expressions of the guests are very convincing: a couple was kissing, others were drinking and laughing, just as people did at wedding parties in the

\textsuperscript{78} In his treatise \textit{Algemene Praktijk der Schilderkonst}, Goeree explains that by studying the following qualities in a picture, one may determine how experienced a master painter is. See Goeree 1670 [ed. 1697], 45-46: ‘d’uytleg en waarheid der Historie, de reden van de plaats, d’Ordonnantie, de mogelijkheid der doening, de ware proportie in Teekening, Kleedingen, en toestelselen en andere behoorlijke hoedanigheden meer’.

\textsuperscript{79} On ‘\textit{eygentlick}’ and ‘\textit{natuurlick}’, see below ‘The Sum of the Parts’. Karel van Mander emphasizes the importance of the scopus, see below (this section).

\textsuperscript{80} In his chapter on the design of history paintings, Van Mander literally explains that the quality of a painting was as important as the content of the story, for poets and painters were equals: ‘Men behoeft wel op den sin der Historien te voor mercken, doch heefmen alleen, oft meest op welstant te letten: want Schilders en Poëten hebben ghelijke macht.’ Van Mander 1604, fol. 18v.

\textsuperscript{81} Angel 1642, 44-46.
seventeenth century. Angel advised other painters to develop similar ‘high and deep thoughts’ (hooge en verre na-ghedachten), which he had also encountered in paintings by Jan Lievens, Jacob Backer and Gerrit Bleker.82  

According to Angel, painters also had the freedom to add explanatory figures which were not literally a part of the story – such as a figure of Cupid to indicate that someone was falling in love or a matchmaker (koppelaarster) to highlight amorous intentions (figs. 6.14 and 6.15).83 Interestingly, he mentions these in passing as an illustration to the importance of knowing and representing the true character of the story, even though such figures, technically, served to clarify the story. He thus presented a new priority under the heading of a more familiar one.  

Another specifically pictorial recommendation of Karel van Mander and Philips Angel concerned the question of to what extent it was permissible to copy inventions from other masters and integrate these into one’s own inventions. When listing the key qualities of a good painter, Philips Angel even stated as the first requirement that a painter must have good judgment in these matters. It happened all too often in practice, he explained, that mediocre masters largely copied the invention of a better master, adding something faulty as their sole contribution, and subsequently presented the work as a new invention of their own.84 Evidently he did not approve of such theft (eer-dievery) and warned painters that art experts (Konst-verstandigen) did not value such works. As to when borrowings should be allowed, Angel stated that only if a painter was able to integrate the borrowing well (aerdich) while ‘blending it sweetly’ (soet vloeyende [onder] voughen) into their own work was it permitted. Such a borrowing would bring honor to the first master’s invention, a recommendation that both Samuel van Hoogstraten and Arnold Houbraken were to repeat.85

82 Angel 1642, 47-48.  
83 See the convincing interpretation of these ‘stereotypes’ in Sluijter 1993, 75. Earlier Karel van Mander had advised painters to add explanatory subsidiary elements, such as a crocodile and a horse, to differentiate a river from a sea. See Van Mander 1604, fol. 21r.  
84 Angel 1642, 35-36: ‘Ten eersten, [...] een recht oordeel dient voor-al in een Schilder bevonden te werden [...] Een die shesonde kennissee heeft [...] sal hem wel wachten van deselordige [sic] foute te begaen, die nu niet dan al te veel in swang en sijn: dat is, hy en sal int na-botsen van soodanigh werck niet meer dan sijn arbeyt daer toe doen, niet willende (alser nu vele doen) met die hyycck te Kereken gaan, datse door yet van haer eygen Ordonnantie daer toe gedaen hebben, hetzelve aan de lieden willen wij maken, dat het teenemael haer Inventien sijn.’  
85 Philips Angel cites Karel van Mander: ‘De Rapen sijn wel goede kost, wanneerse wel ghestooft sijn’. See Angel 1642, 37. Angel emphasizes that borrowings should be integrated so well as to be unnoticeable. At the same time, he assumes that connoisseurs would recognize these borrowings as a tribute to the quoted master. On the subject of imitation, see the chapter ‘Imitation, Artistic
An interesting court case in Antwerp indicates that there was a fine line between honorable borrowings and plagiarism. In the late 1640s the painter Gonzales Coques had received a commission from the stadholder Frederik Hendrik to create a series of ten paintings illustrating the story of the mythological figure Psyche. Coques, in turn, had commissioned the painter Abraham van Diepenbeeck to create the designs for this series, which Coques believed to be original inventions. However, when he showed the designs at the court in The Hague, Constantijn Huygens reportedly confronted the sketches with prints after inventions by Raphael, which made everyone present laugh and Coques ‘wish that he was far from there’. Coques subsequently refused to pay Van Diepenbeeck, which led to a court case in which Van Diepenbeeck argued that he had been asked to create works inspired by famous examples and that he did not believe that Coques considered his designs to be mere copies. Van Diepenbeeck believed that it was not because of the design but because Coques had not retouched the works that the finished paintings did not meet with approval in The Hague. Van Diepenbeeck eventually won the case.

The difficulty of distinguishing between honorable borrowings and plagiarism seems to have been a widespread concern. Tellingly, in a text addressed to the same Constantijn Huygens, Jan de Bisschop celebrated the practice of imitating the inventions of famous ancient masters. He explained that both Michelangelo and Raphael had integrated inventions from ancient statues to such an extent that they had almost become ‘thieves’ (rovers) rather than ‘followers’ (navolgers), and that art lovers usually praised such borrowings above all else in a painting.

Competition and “Rapen” by Eric Jan Sluijter, which includes a bibliography of earlier publications on the topic. Sluijter 2006, 251 ff, esp. 254-255.

86 Gonzales Coques described Abraham van Diepenbeeck as a ‘wyt vermaert meester van inventiën’; he stated that he thought Van Diepenbeeck would create the designs ‘uijt sijnen geest ende inventie’. Duverger 1972, 189.

87 ‘Soo is daernaaer als den Heere van Zuylichem [Huygens] de voorschreven printen te voorschyn brachte ende liet confronteren met de scetsen, met deselve sulcken gespot ende geguychel omegegaen dat den verweerdere [Coques] wel ghewenscht hadde verre van daer te syn.’ Duverger 1972, 191; this passage is cited by Beatrijs Brennickmeyer-de Rooy in Brenninckmeyer-de Rooy 1984, 67.

88 Duverger 1972, 193.

89 ‘die oude overbyffels van Beelden en half ronden zijn van de grootste volmaecktheyt in de konst en voor de leerlingen het alderbeste voorbeeld [...] komt daer by oock de eenparighe toestemmingh van Rafael d’Urbijn, Bonaroti en al de treffelijckste Meesters: die bekendt is dit niet alleen met woorden rondelijck verklaerdt, maer oock metter daedt betoont te hebben; haer hele werck stellende nae dese richtsnoer: jae soo verre, datse dickmael niet ontsiende daer uyt hele
As to the composition of paintings in general, several authors had emphasized the importance of successfully ‘combining’ (byeenvoeghen) different elements into one picture. In practice, painters were indeed commonly faced with the challenge of combining figures and motifs from their own drawings as well as occasional inventions from other masters into one coherent picture. In Philips Angel’s list of requirements for a good painting, the ability to combine the different parts ‘sweetly’ (soet vloyend) and ‘properly’ (eygentlick) into a picture is mentioned at the beginning, not far below the painter’s good judgment in matters of borrowing. However, he does not specify how one could create such a visual unity, concluding simply that a good painter could show what he meant much more easily than that he could explain it in words.

In the seventeenth-century literature on art, Karel van Mander and Pieter de Grebber were the most explicit in giving practical advice on how to combine different elements into a picture. As a general rule, Van Mander advised painters to adjust the size of their figures to the size of their painting so as to ‘avoid the figures carrying the picture frame or laying stifled, as if in a box’ (compare figs. 6.16 and 6.17). Furthermore, Van Mander advised painters to fill both corners of a picture with bold foreground figures, architecture or other furnishings, place the main scene in the middle ground, and include a view into the distance (doorsien). (fig. 6.18). Such views into the distance both enhanced the sense of depth in a picture and helped the artist structure complex scenes with large amounts of figures by convincingly situating them on different planes.

Interestingly, Van Mander’s discussion of this pictorial device marks the first occasion in which an art theorist presents landscape as a structuring element in complex scenes; prior to this time, only the grouping of figures had been discussed. However, according to Van Mander’s own saying, he was not truly the first to do so. Some contemporaries of his (he gives no names) had criticized

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stucken in hun wercken in te voegen by nae roovers zijn geworden in plaets van naevolgers.’ Van Gelder/Jost 1985, preface addressed to Constantijn Huygens, 3.

90 Van Mander 1604, fol. 15v: ‘mijden / Dat de Beelden de lijsten niet en draghen, /Oft datse benouwt als in kisten laghen.’

91 Van Mander 1604, fol. 16r: ‘Eerst suldy bevinden uyt ondersoecken / In u ordinancy welstants fundacy, / Wanneer ghy u perck alle beyde hoecken, / Bequamelijk vervult met uwen cloecken / Voorbeelden, bouwingh’, oft ander stoffacy, / En dan de middelste vry open spacy, / Gh’ en sult soo weynich daer niet brenghen binnen, / Of ten sal stracx eenen welstandt ghwinnen.[...] Als wy daer een insien oft doorsien lieten / Met cleynder achter-beelden, en verschieten / Van Landtschap, daer t’ghesicht in heeft te ploeghen’.

92 See also Hollander 2002.

Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* for lacking both a repoussoir (‘something big in the foreground’) and such a view into the distance (fig. 6.19). Van Mander felt that Michelangelo could be excused, however, since he excelled in depicting a great variety of nudes, which had been his main goal. Moreover, Michelangelo had arranged his figures neatly in ‘heaps’ (*hoopkens*) – an Italian habit, which Van Mander appreciated.

As to creating a clear focal point (*scopus*), Van Mander explained that one could do this by placing the most important figure on a platform or slightly higher plane, a device employed by many ambitious painters throughout the century (fig. 6.20). The other figures could subsequently be grouped in circular fashion around the main protagonist. There were also stories that were more easily ordered, according to Van Mander, ‘and in these one sets to work like the stallholder who cunningly arranges his wares on high shelves, down either side, and across the bottom. Thus it is that one introduces the witnesses of an event, on hills, in trees, on stone stairways, or clinging to the pillars of a building, together with other in the foreground, on the ground below.’ At the same time, it was important to avoid confusion of figures and limbs (*hasteling*) and to make
sure that the viewer could easily distinguish which body parts belonged to which figures.99

As to subsidiary work Van Mander recommended that painters strive for a certain richness (copia) and variety (varietas) in their pictures by including – if befitting – ‘a profusion of horses, dogs and other domestic animals, as well as beasts and birds of the forest; but it is particularly pleasing to behold fresh youths and beautiful young maidens, old men, matrons, and children of all ages’.100 Although this long list may suggest that Van Mander preferred extremely crowded scenes, he also explained that ‘good masters of originals often avoid abundance or Copia and rejoice in achieving quality in simplicity’. It was almost as if he could predict the fashion for a certain simplicity which was to set the tone throughout much of the seventeenth century.101

As we have seen, Mancini made a similar remark in his Considerazioni when he recommended verifying that a picture did not have too few or too many figures to explain the characteristics of a story (see above 'Picture Types, Nations and Periods'). Interestingly, a Rembrandt drawing bears an inscription indicating that this master was occasionally also concerned with Copia (richness): ‘this [scene] is meant to be provided with many neighbors who observe the departure of this esteemed bride’.102

Lastly, Van Mander added that it could be very pleasant to include one figure looking out of the painting towards the viewer, thereby making the viewer empathize with the story by pointing out what is happening.103 It was a device he

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99 ‘In d'Ordinanty en salmen niet ... seer laten haspelen d'en door d'ander, / Armen en beenen, schijndende te vechten, / maer eenvloedich, ghelijckelijck, in rechten / Ganck laten die dinghen volghen malcander’. Van Mander 1604, fol. 18v. This advice was later repeated by De Grebber in his Rules, see below note 108. Broos does not discuss this reference in his article.


101 ‘goede meesters van den principalen / D'overvloet oft Copia veel vermijden / En in ’t weynich eensaem / weldoen verblijden’. Van Mander 1604, fol. 17v; see also Broos 1975-1976, 228.


103Van Mander 1604, fols. 18r-18v: ‘Ten gheeft d'History oock gheen cleyn vercieren, / Als een er bootsen ghewent nae de lieden / Is gheordineert, op sulcker manieren, / Als wilde hy hun, met neerstich bestieren, / Medelijdich eenich jammer bedieden, / Of yet dat schrickelijck staet te gheschieden, / En doet schier t'Ghembaals beschouwers toevloeyen, / Door zijn aanwijsen, een druckich bemoeyen.’
had taken from Alberti, which the Dordrecht painter Nicolaes Maes seems to have wittily transformed into the main subject of several of his paintings, including The Eaves Dropper (fig. 6.21).

Although Karel van Mander wrote at the beginning of seventeenth century about the pictorial devices he recommends, many of his recommendations can be discerned in pictures created much later in the century, as we have seen. As the century progressed, Van Mander's recommendations were applied somewhat more freely. In particular, the compositional devices which Van Mander had discussed only in relation to history painting, were also employed in other picture types. For example, views into the distance (doorsien) became one of the hallmarks of Pieter de Hooch's interior scenes (fig. 6.22). Interestingly, Philips Angel does not distinguish between history paintings and other types of figural scenes when he discusses composition (byevenoeghen) in his lecture In Praise of Painting of 1641.

In practice, both in history painting and in other types of picture, painters continued to find new means to organize their scenes and to focus the viewer's attention on the most important elements. Many findings must have passed down informally in workshops and through meetings and conversations among painters and art experts. In the art theoretical literature there is relatively little mention of these matters between Karel van Mander at the beginning of the seventeenth century and Pieter de Grebber's Rules of 1649.

As Albert Blankert and Margriet van Eikema Hommes have convincingly argued, De Grebber's involvement in the prestigious decoration project of the stadholder's palace Huis ten Bosch and his efforts to co-found a painting academy in his hometown of Haarlem presumably inspired him to explain some of his design principles in writing. While most of his recommendations are based on Van Mander's Schilderboek, he was selective in his borrowings and made some adjustments. For example, he did not mention the importance of the repoussoir and emphasized that the most important figures should be placed in the foreground, not in the middle ground as Van Mander had recommended. However, much like Van Mander, De Grebber focused exclusively on the composition of history paintings, and he was aware of the possibility of using subsidiary elements to structure a scene. After explaining the importance of grouping figures together to

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104 See also Hollander 2002.
106 More generally, Van Mander and De Grebber both recommend that the major figures should be placed in the principal part of the painting – advice that also occurs in Junius. See Puttfarken 2000, 196-197. See also Van Eikema Hommes 2005a.
create unity, De Grebber adds: ‘And if the story requires only one figure, then use the subsidiary work to create unity’.  

He also agreed with Van Mander that it was advisable to use various heights in a scene (if this agreed with the story) to place the most important figure clearly higher than the others, and to avoid confusion by not overlapping figures too much or by cutting them off by the picture frame. Moreover, De Grebber believed it was crucial to avoid placing the heads of various flanking figures at the same height and therefore recommended including a variety of figure types, a pragmatic rule which may be partially based on Van Mander’s recommendations to generally strive for variety in the subsidiary figures. The most striking characteristics of De Grebber’s rules, however, are the emphasis he places on the importance of adjusting a painting to its intended location by adjusting, among other things, the perspective inherent in the picture – something Karel van Mander had not done so explicitly in his chapter on design – and the absence of any reference to a painter’s individual manner of painting (handeling). Presumably he did not want the apprentices for whose benefit he made the list to focus on consciously developing an individual manner.

De Grebber’s advice to create unity in a painting through the grouping of figures and subsidiary work encompasses a rough definition of what ‘composing’ a painting entailed throughout much of the seventeenth century. Both Samuel van Hoogstraten and Gerard de Lairesse gave similar advice in their treatises and used the terms ‘joining’ (koppeling) and ‘connecting’ (binding) to describe the desired effect. As to precisely what shape such groupings could have, the sources give no examples. According to Junius there were no rules as to how one should group figures in the picture plane; ‘our eye must teach us here what to do.’ And Gerard de Lairesse explained what painters should avoid: all too rigid symmetry was not advisable, nor was an effect he called ‘sprawl’ (sparteling), or the impression of free, undirected movement that results from a lack of unity in the way in which shapes were combined. Moreover, according to Gerard de

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107 ‘En soo de Historij maer een beelt vereyscht, sult ghy sien door het bywerck bindingh te maecken.’De Grebber, 1649, rule VII.
108 De Grebber 1649, rules V, VIII & IX.
109 See also above chapter 4, ‘Style and Location’.
110 Van Hoogstraten 1678, 193. Van Hoogstraten describes the space between groups as ’sprong‘ (‘jump’). On Gerard de Lairesse’s vocabulary, see De Vries 2004b, esp. 84.
111 ‘What concerneth this disposition, we have no rule for it, our eye must teach us here what to do.’ Franciscus Junius, cited in Puttfarken 2000, 198; see also Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 306-320.
112 A large shape will make the adjacent one appear smaller, an oblique one makes another one seem straight, and a square makes the neighboring shape seem pointed or round. If a painter did not take this principle sufficiently into account, a round flower could come to look triangular,
Lairesse, painters should not place small figures in an ample space but rather center their composition around large figures (compare figs. 6.23a and b, see also Van Mander’s advice above.\textsuperscript{113}

However, the details of composition issues were not easily explained in writing. Most writers simply stated that one should learn how to combine elements in a painting from an experienced master (see for example Philip Angel’s remark quoted above). Also, they referred to specialist works on the rules of proportion and perspective, which helped painters define their figures and place these and other elements convincingly in the pictorial space.\textsuperscript{114} As Van Mander already explained at the beginning of century, the rules of perspective were of great importance not only to painters of buildings, but also to painters of land- and seascapes; indeed, the works of Simon de Vlieger and Willem van de Velde the Younger, for example, testify to a keen knowledge of the basic rules relevant to their specialty (fig. 6.24).\textsuperscript{115}

While De Brune’s comment that high quality results from painters freely expressing ideas through their brush and ‘not at all through rules of art’ may give a modern reader the impression that non-classicist painters would paint their thoughts with no consideration for the principles of perspective or proportion, a detailed inventory dated 1659 from the baron Willem Vincent van Wyttenhorst suggests otherwise. When describing a brothel scene by Jacob Duck, he notes for example: ‘a little brothel by Duyck [Duck] very neat (\textit{curieus}) and pleasant to the eye (\textit{aangenaam int oog}), everything well arranged and the figures well-proportioned’.\textsuperscript{116}

In fact, without exception, all seventeenth-century authors of treatises on painting stressed the importance of these aspects of the painter’s designs.

\textsuperscript{113} De Lairesse 1704 [ed. 1740], vol. I, 135-139; and De Vries 2004b., 84.
\textsuperscript{114} Nu paste ‘t my wel de gronden der Deurzigtkunde hier te verhandelen, maer andere hebben daer zo breet en omstandig in geweyt, dat het my verveelt hier ter plaetze iets of, of toe te doen. En ‘t zal in deeze myne Inleyding genoeg zijn, dat ik u voor eerst een deel boeken in de hand geef: lees dan, dien ‘t u lust of Albert Durer, Hans de Vries, Maroldis, Guido Baldi, of de nieuwe vond van Des Argues.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 276.

\textsuperscript{115} On these perspectival constructions, see Ruurs 1983 and Tummers 2005.

\textsuperscript{116} ‘een bordeelken van Duyck heel curieus en aengenaem int oog alles wel geassorteert de beelden wel geproportioneert’. See Boers-Goosens 2004, 223 (transcription of inv. fol. 26, no. 150). In seventeenth-century Dutch, ‘\textit{curieus}’ meant ‘careful’ (\textit{zorgvuldig}) or ‘neat’ (\textit{nauwkeurig}). It was not the equivalent of ‘\textit{net}’, as shown in catalogue no. 63 in this same inventory: ‘een tyckken met de pen van Adriaen Matham, seer curieus [doorgestreept: ende net] gedaen soo het lantscap de beesten als de personagie daer in ende heft myn vrouw daer voor aen hem self betaelt veertig gl dus alhier pro memoria sonder de lyst 40:0:0’. Cited in Boers-Goosens 2004, 223.
Classicist thinkers such as Samuel van Hoogstraten and Gerard de Lairesse included plates to illustrate ideal human proportions. But also Philips Angel, who was certainly not a classicist, stipulated that a sound knowledge of the rules of proportions and perspective was indispensable for any painter. He emphasized in the text how important it was for painters to not only have ‘knowledge of mathematical matters’ (kennis van matematische dingen) in general, but also specifically knowledge of perspectival constructions, human proportions and anatomy. Tellingly, he included a painting with perspectival construction prominently on the frontispiece of his published lecture (fig. 6.25).  

As with the brothel scene, Wytenhorst praises the proportionate depiction of the figures in many of his pictures while simultaneously celebrating how pleasantly painted or neatly finished most of these works were. Ideally, the design of a picture, the handling of the brush and the use of color and light all contributed towards the same goal of creating a pleasing and convincing image of a ‘virtual’ space.

Colours, Light and Brushwork

No seventeenth-century text treats color or tonal values as isolated objects of aesthetic analysis. Instead, color and tonal values were considered very important means to create illusionistic effects, to thus infuse a painting with ‘life’ and to highlight the main subject. A variety of art critical terms, developed throughout the seventeenth century, described its correct use and desired effects. The rendering of light, shade and colors was the domain of painting par excellence, and it was presumably for this reason that the brushwork, colors and light were often discussed in relation to one another. Moreover, the brushwork was not only a means for painters to show their mastery through resolute, loose touches or through reaching great precision; painters also created specific surface structures with their brush so as to manipulate light effects and thus to reinforce the overall effect of lifelikeness in the paintings, as we will see.

As mentioned above, several art theorists emphasized that the most important figure(s) in a painting should be placed in the central part of the painting, in the middle of the piece or in the foreground. De Grebber explained...
in his Rules that this should be the clearest part of the painting (het schoonste van het stuk).\textsuperscript{121} The term ‘schoon’ had been used to describe clear light as early as the sixteenth century, and in the seventeenth century it also came to be used as an adjective for colors, meaning ‘pure’ or ‘unmixed’\textsuperscript{122}. Such intense colors were most likely to stand out when placed within the right context, that is, when juxtaposed with somewhat less intense colors. The challenge for painters was to use light and colors to unify their work and to make it appear lifelike while favoring its most prominent part.\textsuperscript{123}

The careful balancing of colors and tones in order to create a sense of three-dimensionality was called ‘houding’ in seventeenth-century Dutch. As Ernst van de Wetering and Paul Taylor have convincingly shown, this concept was very important to seventeenth-century painters and art theorists.\textsuperscript{124} For example, Willem Goereee wrote in 1668: ‘Houding is one of the most essential things to be observed in a Drawing or Painting […] there is nothing in the whole of art that runs more against reason than to place things without [it].’ As a general rule, bright colors and sharp tonal contrasts tend to come forward, while muted tones and soft transition seem to recede towards the distance. Painters used this knowledge to convincingly place elements in the pictorial space. Note how Rembrandt used the most saturated colors and strongest tonal contrasts for his protagonist in his painting The Anatomical Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, while using increasingly muted colors and softer contrasts for the other figures (fig. 6.26).\textsuperscript{125}

Contrasts in colors and tonal values were also used to set figures and objects apart from their background. Gerard de Lairesse explained this in great detail in his Groot Schilderboek. The example of a black and white print enabled De Lairesse to indicate very precisely how a painter could create a successful houding.

\textsuperscript{121} De Grebber 1649, rule III: ‘Het principaelste van de Historie moet in het schoonste van ‘t stuck en vooraen ghebracht werden.’ De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1740], vol. I, 286: ‘men [moet] groote voorzichtigheid in het schikken derselve lichten […] gebruiken, opdat zy [...] niet gezocht schynen, maar natuurlyk, en onvermydelyk zo moet geschieden; dat het generaal aan een gebonden en vereenigd blijve; en dat de voornaamste party haar voordeel become en uitmunte.’


\textsuperscript{123} See, for example, De Lairesse 1707, vol. I, 286: ‘men [moet] groote voorzichtigheid in het schikken derselve lichten […] gebruiken, opdat zy [...] niet gezocht schynen, maar natuurlyk, en onvermydelyk zo moet geschieden; dat het generaal aan een gebonden en vereenigd blijve; en dat de voornaamste party haar voordeel become en uitmunte.’


This Boat, being the foremost thing in the picture, we depict heavily gilded, and forcefully gleaming, against the shadows of the trees and rock. To the foremost flying figure, which is at the same distance, I give a light red garment against the dark of the same rock, with sufficient force to make it match the boat. The second, following the first, has a pure green garment, just as light, against the aforementioned rock, although the same [i.e. the rock] is weaker by half a tint; whilst the third – who is situated still further back and in the shadow, against the deepest part of the cavern or 'through-view' ('doorzicht'), which is light being beside the yellowy blue of the open air – wears a dark blue garment, which is set off and holds its proper place. The standing figure, on the reeding side of the boat, stands against the 'through-view' in a dark and glowing yellow garment, with more force than the blue garment, and less than the prow of the boat which has the most power, being the largest part, doubled as it is by its reflection in the water. On the other side of the river, against the trees, are other figures, naked as well as draped in weakly colored cloths, like apple blossom, blue, light shot silk, and white, chequered here and there with yellow; and their reflections play in the water with those of green trees stretching to the opposite part of the other side. These figures, although weak and light, are equal in their lessening of force with the middle flying figure and at the same distance; whilst they are all of one nature and are depicted in half-tints; just as the red of the foremost flying figure corresponds to the yellow of the boat, both being powerful colors. The Rowers are in dark blue.

This example is meant not only as an instruction for a Composition of this sort, but in general for any composition one can think of. Not that a yellow object has to be in front, with blue behind and green, purple or mauve in the middle; but any color one wants; for one could, instead of this gilded boat, have had a red one; and have dressed the foremost flying figure in a yellow, rather than a red garment; provided, of course, that each was given a suitable background. Although the yellow of the boat and the red garment of the figure are two powerful colors, they are also slightly different in nature: and since the yellow is in itself lighter than the red, the red requires a darker colour to be set off by.

If one wishes to dress the figures on the other side of the water, who are clad in apple blossom, blue etc., in other colours, like green or red; one can do so freely, so long as ... one places a suitable ground behind, from which they can be set off to their distance; for although they are in the background, there is no law saying they must be painted in weak or half tints. There is no colour so powerful that it cannot be moderated and modified to its distance or interval. That in this example the colours are arranged according to their rank, with the powerful at the front, and the less forceful further and further back according to their nature; that is to show clearly, and to make completely plain, what each colour is fit for, whether to come forward by means of its force, or to recede by means of its weakness. Nevertheless it is scarcely likely that a subject, where all the colours appear so advantageously according to their particular natures, will appear before
As De Lairesse indicated, certain colours, especially red and yellow, were by nature stronger and therefore more likely to stand out than others. Nonetheless, their strength (kracht) depended largely on their setting, in other words, the colours used to set them off. Although De Lairesse was the first to describe these effects, he does not claim credit for being the first to discover these. In fact, he must have recorded widespread knowledge. As Paul Taylor has argued, flower painters from Roelandt Savery onwards tended to place flowers with yellow and reddish colours at the front of their painted bouquets.\textsuperscript{127} Even the sea-painter Willem van de Velde the Younger used this knowledge in order to make his ships appear at various distances from the viewer. For example, in his \textit{Ships at Sea}, Van de Velde not only gave the sails of the ship that appears closest to the viewer the most yellowish color, he also systematically arranged clusters of ships by slightly adjusting the colors of their sails (fig. 6.28). In each group, the ship nearest to the picture plane has the most yellow sail, whereas the sails of slightly more distant ships in the same groups have a more grayish/bluish hue.

Although many painters must have had a nuanced understanding of how they could use colors and tones to suggest three-dimensionality, this did not mean that they all agreed on exactly what color and light combinations were preferred. Gerard de Lairesse, for example, criticized Rubens’s predilection for pure colours, which he thought resulted in a ‘crude motley’ (bonte rauwigheid). He also disapproved of the mixed colours so characteristic for Rembrandt, Lievens and their followers, which he called ‘mure’ and ‘rotten’. In De Lairesse’s view either extreme was to be avoided.\textsuperscript{128} However, he was well aware that not all art lovers agreed with him in this respect. He wrote that some art lovers were of the opinion that Van Dyck’s portraits seemed mere water colours when compared to portraits

\textsuperscript{126} This translation is taken from Taylor 2002, 215-216.
\textsuperscript{128} ‘Gelyk het helder licht de oorzaak is, waar door al de koleurige voorwerpen, zich suyver en schoon voor onze oogen opdoen; zo is ook onwaderspreekelyk, dat hoe meer het zelve door duisterheid besmet en verbrooken zy, hoe gezegde voorwerpen zich ook duisterder en minder schoon zullen vertoonen. Veele doorluchtige meesters, hebben zich jammerlyk hier in vergreepen; onder de Brabanders, Rubbens; in Holland, Rembrant, Lievens en veelere anderen, die hun trant hebben nagevolgd: de eene willende het leeven al te schoon hebben, is tot een rauwe bontigheid, een ander om de mure heen hebben, tot de ryp en rottigheid vervallen; twee buitensporigheden, als twee gevaarlyke klippen by ons aangemerkt, om dezelve als een baak tot waarschouwing aan andere voor te stellen.’ De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1969], vol. I: 41-42. The concept of ‘clarity’ and its effects on colours will be discussed in great length by Ulrike Kern in Kern (forthcoming).
by Titian (compare figs. 6.29 and 6.30). They believed that the latter’s portraits had much power in colours, light and shade, and that Van Dyck could not equal Titian’s coloring – an opinion that De Lairesse dismissed as ‘ridiculous’ (*belagehelyk*).129

Besides, the desirability of dark backgrounds became an issue of debate towards the end of the century. Strong juxtapositions in tonal values were necessary to focus the viewer’s attention on the main subject. Moreover, for the general unity in a painting it was important to create groups of lighter and darker colours – an effect called ‘rest’ (*repos* or *verpozing*) by Du Fresnoy and his translators and ‘arranging’ (*reddering*) by De Lairesse (fig. 6.31).130 However, a dense use of dark colours in the background was criticized towards the end of century for being ‘unnatural’ and for affecting the clarity in the background. According to Arnold Houbraken, his contemporaries readily criticized such mistakes: ‘When it occurs that some make their work powerful in the foreground and dark in the background, one promptly hears people say that in these works the ‘natural clarity’ (*natuurlyke helderheid*) has not been observed, and that it is not an Art to set off white against black.’131 And if such a painting appeared somewhat uncertain in the background, people reputedly said that the dark was used to cover up mistakes.132 Although Houbraken does not specify which artists exactly were criticized, these comments suggest that these were painters who worked in a style inspired by Rembrandt and his hallmark dark brown backgrounds. Indeed Houbraken noted that Rembrandt’s manner had gone out of fashion towards the end of this master’s life time when ‘true connoisseurs’ (*ware Konstkenners*) developed a taste for clear painting styles (*helder schilderen*).133

A particular type of brushwork that was used to enhance the intensity and power of colours triggered a similar debate. As Samuel van Hoogstraten explained, thick and rough splotches of paint were likely to catch light irregardless of the location of the light source, thereby calling attention to the surface of the painting. It was an effect he called ‘recognizability’ (*kenlijkheyt*), and as Ernst van de Wetering has shown, Rembrandt used this device to accentuate his highlights

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130 Du Fresnoy c. 1647 [ed. 1722], 25-26; De Vries 2004b, 85-86.
132 ‘Zyn ‘er onder die in de bruinte wat twyffelagtig zyn, men zeit straks, ‘t is om de misslagen te bedekken.’ Houbraken 1718-1721, vol. II, 298-300. See also Kern (forthcoming).
and to enhance the effect of his strongest colors (see chapter 4, fig. 4.3 b). The master even seems to have alluded to this effect in one of his surviving letters, in which he advised Constantijn Huygens to hang the painting he had given him in a stark light so it would best ‘sparkle’ (voncken). When this means was first discovered is not known, but its use seems to have been widespread, as highlights were often applied with thick, uneven strokes both in the Netherlands and abroad. Despite its effectiveness, however, it was criticized by Gerard de Lairesse, who wrote that an uneven paint surface was unacceptable as a means of enhancing the ‘glow’ (gloeijendheid, that is, the intensity) and ‘power’ (kracht) of colours. In his view, light and dark passages of equal strength reinforced by glazes, if needed, brought about sufficient glow (intensity) and relief. However, De Lairesse generally did not like recognizable brushwork. Not unlike Philips Angel, he maintained that brushwork should be smooth and barely noticeable.

As discussed in chapter 4, over the course of the seventeenth-century a variety of terms was developed to discuss brushwork. At the beginning of the century, Van Mander advised artists to specialize in either a ‘fine’ (net) or in a ‘rough’ (ruw) manner. Some forty years later, Philips Angel advocated a very fine painting style while at the same time praising a certain ‘looseness’ (lossicheyt) of the brush. Ideally, he wrote, one’s brush should be ‘lively’ (wacker) and ‘bold’ (kloeck), yet at the same time ‘sweet-flowing’ (soetvloeyend) and ‘soft-blending’ (soet-verliesent). In his view, the art was to reach a very high level of precision while avoiding stiffness (stijvigheyt).

Around the same time, however, Jan de Brune de Jonge favored loose brushwork that allowed for an element of chance in his Wetsteen der Vernuften; in his view, painters needed a ‘lucky touch’ (een slagh van ’t geluk) to achieve the best results. The variety of terms developed to describe loose brushwork throughout the Golden Age suggests that many other art lovers were fascinated by it. The poet Govert Bidloo used the term ‘master strokes’ (meesterstreken) to celebrate resolute strokes defining highlights and drapery in paintings by Frans Hals and

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136 De Vries 2004b, 92; De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1969], vol. I, 12. ‘Men moet weeten dat de kracht en gloeijendheid in de Verwen, niet in de ruwigheid der schildery bestaat; men moet het, als voor gezegd is behandelen, zo zal het zyn welstand evenwel bekomen, en zich daar by houden, en welstandig zyn. Want wy konnen het even sterk hoogen en schaduwen, waardoor dezelve gloed en verheevenheit zal bewerkt worden, is het niet aanstonds door de bloote kracht der Verw, men schommel en lakseer het zo lang, totdat het die eigenschap bezit.’
137 See chapter 4 “‘Without Changing his Manner’”, Seventeenth-Century Views on Style’.
138 Angel 1642, 55. See also chapter 4, section ‘Developing a Manner’.
Jacob Jordaens in the 1680s (fig. 6.32). Moreover, De Lairesse’s *Schilderboek* and Verhoeck’s translation of Du Fresnoy’s *Graphic Arts* yields terms and descriptions such as: ‘well-painted with a resolute hand’ (*wel geschildert met een vrijmoedige hant*), ‘applied with bold strokes’ (*stoutelijk getoetst*), ‘nimbly’ (*lugtig*), ‘thickly indicated’ (*lijvig aangezet*) and ‘painted loosely with much paint’ (*wakker in de verf*).

In fact, seventeenth-century thinkers equated looseness to a certain extent with mastery. Especially in resolute brushwork, masters reputedly revealed themselves; the looser the strokes, the more experience was needed to place them convincingly, hence the difficulty of the rough manner (see above chapter 3 ‘Masterly Passages’ and chapter 4 ‘Developing a Manner’). However, loose brushwork that hindered the suggestion of reality showed the shortcoming of the master who executed the work. It was thus very important for painters to know exactly what parts could be painted relatively loosely, and to skillfully place their strokes, especially when working in a rough manner but also when working in a more detailed style.

Like colors and light, brushwork was judged in relation to the overall ‘reality effect’ of a painting. However, this did not yield a clear answer as to the question of what type of brushwork ultimately marked the highest quality. For both precise and rough brushwork could result in a powerful suggestion of reality. In fact, their effectiveness depended largely on the position of the viewer. While neatly finished works achieved the greatest effect when seen from close nearby, more roughly painted works needed a certain distance to ‘sparkle’ and convince. When assessing brushwork, the viewer therefore faced a choice. Did he prefer paintings that deceived the eye from close by and, as it were, invited to be touched (such as Philips Angel)? Or did he value powerful, rough paintings more highly (like Jan Brune de Jonge)? Alternatively, one could also favor a more moderate manner that would impress both from nearby and from far off, such as the resolute – but not rough – manner advocated by Gerard de Lairesse. Lastly, the viewer could also refuse to take sides and simply try to value each type of brushwork according to its own merits, which is what Karel van Mander, Abraham Bosse and Samuel van Hoogstraten did.

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139 Bidloo 1719, 181-182. See also below, ‘The Sum of the Parts’.
140 Verhoeck’s translation of Du Fresnoy’s *Graphic Arts* also mentions the Italian and French equivalents: ‘svelto’ and ‘svelte’.
141 De Lairesse amply discusses the importance of adjusting one’s style to the subject and the intended location of a painting. Yet he does not believe that these adjustments should alter the desired effect that the painting has on the viewer. In his view, brushwork should be nimble (*lugtig*) and tender (*mals*), regardless of the circumstances under which the painting is created. See De Vries 2004b.
142 See above chapter 4, ‘Developing a Manner’ (on rough and fine manner).
Since the brushwork played a key role in creating the suggestion of reality, seventeenth-century viewers often, somewhat paradoxically, admired both the brushstrokes and the convincing effect of reality in a painting, thus simultaneously celebrating the artifice and the illusion. Not only fine but also rough brushwork that enhanced the illusion of depth and life was praiseworthy. Tellingly, when Bidloo praised Hals and Jordaens for their ‘master strokes’ (meesterstreken), he also complimented them on having placed ‘life’ itself into their paint (‘het is het leven zelf, en in de verf geplaatst’).144

In short, the assessment of brushwork, light and colors invited art lovers to make choices. For not so much the general goal but rather the specific applications made the difference.145

Expression

In the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci noted that painters only had two principal things to paint: ‘man and the intentions of his mind’. He continued, ‘The first is easy, the second difficult, because it has to be represented by gestures and movements of the parts of the body.’ Although the subsidiary work had become increasingly important in the seventeenth-century, and had even led to separate picture types, figures and their expressions nonetheless remained a key challenge for ambitious painters. According to Willem Goeree, for example, a master painter should above all be able to depict ‘the Passions of the Human

143 See also above chapter 4 (on Angel’s paradoxical recommendations in this respect).
144 ‘Wat voord Jordaens, en Hals mijn’ aandacht met zich heen? / Wat zijn die troniën, die handen, hulsels, kleën? / Wat zijn daar in ’t fluweel, en paarlen meester streeken? / Als was het leeven, juist, het leeven afgekeken, / En in de verf verplaatst.’ Bidloo 1719, 181-182.
145 Debates concentrated not only on the aspects mentioned above but also on various related matters, which I have left out for the sake of brevity. For example, the use of contour lines led to discussions among artists in the seventeenth century, as Margriet van Eikema-Hommes has shown. They could be used to set off a subject against its background, but they could also create too much sharpness (‘kantigheid’) and thus decrease the total effect of three-dimensionality. See Van Eikema-Hommes 2005b. Also, writers on art were concerned with the question of to what extent reflections (‘reflectien’) should be portrayed. Some reflections were crucial to depict certain materials successfully; yet a great number of reflections could cause diffusion. While the various seventeenth-century writers on painting all agreed that it was important to create an illusion of three-dimensionality and to use light and colours to accentuate the main subject, they nonetheless proposed different practical solutions to these matters.
146 ‘The good painter has two things to paint, that is, man and the intentions of his mind. The first is easy, the second difficult, because it has to be represented by gestures and movements of the parts of the body.’ Clayton 1992, 16.
Mind’ (‘de Passien des Menschelijken Gemoeds’). In his view, this constituted ‘the greatest force of the entire art of painting’ (de grootste kracht der gantsche schilderkonst).  

Interestingly, when Rubens described his depiction of a biblical scene in a letter to Dudley Carleton, he focused solely on the expression of the figures: ‘It represents Sarah in the act of reproaching Hagar, who, pregnant, is leaving the house with an air of womanly dignity.’ The painting represented a story from the Old Testament (Genesis 19). When Sarah, the wife of the Jewish leader Abraham, was not able to get pregnant, she allowed Abraham to marry her servant Hagar so that the latter could provide him with an heir. However, Sarah subsequently also conceived herself, and the relationship between the two women became increasingly tense. As Abraham’s first and most beloved wife, Sarah had her husband’s full support, even when treating Hagar harshly. The latter, however, could not bear it and decided to leave. It was this moment that Rubens had chosen to depict (fig. 6.33). Rubens’s letter reveals that the master was interested in Hagar’s state of mind, the dignity with which she carried herself in such a difficult and uncertain situation. He emphasized this figure by giving her a powerfully red dress, which constitutes the most powerful color in the painting (see above, ‘Colours, Light and Brushwork’).

A history painting was commonly focused around one main figure and his or her ‘movement’, that is, the expression of the figure’s state of mind in all outward signs of the body. It was not until the eighteenth century that painters started to express their personal emotions in any direct way in their paintings. In the seventeenth century, painters aimed to depict the motions and emotions befitting the subject at hand. In order to represent a story, they condensed it into one telling scene, the essence of which was expressed through the action, attitude and facial expression of the main figure.

In his lecture for the Leiden guild of painters in 1641, Philips summarized the challenge as follows. If a painter would choose to depict the biblical story of the prophet Elias meeting the widow of Sarepta (who was kind enough to share her last meal with the prophet at a time of extreme drought), it was important to

147 Goeree 1670 [ed. 1697], 69 ff.
149 The painting Rubens described is currently in the collection the Duke of Westminister. See d’Hulst/Vandenven 1989, nos. 9 & 10, 51-56.
150 See, for example, Karel van Mander 1604, ‘Wtbeeldinghe der Affecten, passien, begeerlijkheden, en lijdens der Menschen’, fols. 22v-29r.
choose an ‘action’ that would represent Job’s passion convincingly, more specifically, ‘a begging, yet sufficiently-commanding desire’ (smeekend en nochtans genoeg-gebiedende begeerte). The more spirited the outer movement and expression of this figure (sijn beweginge) would be, the more honour the painter would receive.\textsuperscript{151} The purpose was to create ‘something special yet natural’ (iets byonders doch natuerlicx).\textsuperscript{152}

Indeed this was what Constantijn Huygens focused on when he praised the young Rembrandt in his autobiography of the 1630s. Huygens had seen a painting of Judas returning the money for which he had betrayed Christ in Rembrandt’s Leiden workshop (fig. 6.34 and fig. 6.35). It had made a great impression on him, especially the expression of the main figure Judas: ‘The gesture of this one desperate Judas (to say nothing about all the other amazing figures in this one painting), this one Judas, who raves, wails, begs forgiveness, but without any hope, and in whose face all traces of hope have disappeared; his countenance wild, his hair pulled out, the clothes torn, the arms twisted, the hands pressed together until they bleed; in a blind impulse he has fallen onto his knees, his whole body contorted in pitiful hideousness.’\textsuperscript{153} According to Huygens, Rembrandt had surpassed all the painters from antiquity with this one figure, and he had also outdone his contemporary Jan Lievens through the ‘liveliness of the passions’ (affectuum vivacitas) and the ‘lifelike inventions’ (vivida inventio) in his paintings.

This [Huygens’s] description constitutes the earliest record of praise for Rembrandt’s ability to depict the ‘movements of the soul’ (beweegingen van de ziel). According to Rembrandt’s pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten, this was the master’s main strength.\textsuperscript{154} Rembrandt alluded to this challenge in a letter that he wrote to Constantijn Huygens accompanying two paintings the master had created for the stadholder Frederik Hendrik. He expected the paintings to please Huygens, he wrote, since in these he had observed ‘the greatest and the most natural movement’ (Meeste Ende die Naetuerelste Beweechgelickheijt).\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} ‘hoe hy nu de selve geestiger weet te verthoonen, ten aensien van sijn beweginge die hy doen moet, hoe hy te meer eer behalen sal’. Angel 1642, 46.
\textsuperscript{152} Angel 1642, 48. He also uses the phrase ‘onghemeen, en evenwel eygentlick’.
\textsuperscript{153} ” Worp 1891, 126: ‘Unius IUDAE desperati gestum, ut omittam tot in uno opera stupendas fromas, unius, inquam, IUDAE furentis, ejulantis, deprecantis veniam, nec sperantis tamen aut spem vultu servantis, faciem horridam, lanitios crines, scissam vestem, intorta brachia, manus ad sanquinem compressas, genu temero impetus prostratum, corpus omne miserandâ atrocitate, convolutum.’ The English translation appears in Sluijter 2006, 100.
\textsuperscript{154} Van Hoogstraten 1678, 75.
\textsuperscript{155} Gage 1969.
According to Samuel van Hoogstraten, a convincingly lifelike expression of emotions in a painted figure would cause the viewer to feel the same – hence the power of such images. In his *Inleiding* he used a poem by the ancient writer Horace to explain the phenomenon: 'One laughs, one cries, and the spectator will follow, so if you want me to cry, then show me your tears'.\footnote{56} He advised apprentice painters to practice depicting emotions by studying their own face in the mirror while acting out various passions – a method that he might have learned in Rembrandt’s workshop.\footnote{57}

As Leonardo da Vinci had already indicated, depicting emotions convincingly was far from easy. According to Van Mander, many a painter was not able to differentiate between laughing and crying in a painted figure; both emotions were very difficult to express realistically. In order to inspire apprentices Van Mander described how both ancient and modern artists had succeeded in expressing emotions in their works (among them Michelangelo and Lucas van Leyden). One ancient painter by the name of Euphranor had even managed to express various emotions in one figure: his depiction of the mythological figure of Paris reputedly showed wit, courage, amorous desire and manliness all at once. It was such an extraordinary achievement that Van Mander found it hard to believe.\footnote{58} [In fact, it may have been a description like this one that inspired ambitious painters such as Rembrandt to pursue similar effects.] Van Mander also urged apprentices to closely observe ‘the World and people’ (\textit{de Weerelt en lieden}).\footnote{59} Actors in particular and the gestures they used in both comedies and tragedies could help teach a painter how to express similar emotions in his figures, according to Van Mander.\footnote{60}

In scenes with several figures, it was important to not only express the emotions of the individual figures convincingly but also to bring these into accordance with each other. Relatively few writers addressed this issue (presumably authors like Van Mander and Philips Angel found such a unity self-evident, see also above 'Invention, Composition and Design' ) Interestingly, Samuel van Hoogstraten emphasized the importance of such a harmony in

\footnote{56} ‘Men lache, of ween', d'aenschouwer raekt op 't spoor: Dus wilt gy dat ik schreye, schrey my voor.' Van Hoogstraten 1678, 293. See Brenninkmeyer-de Rooy 1984, 69. See also Weststeijn 2005, 113.
\footnote{57} A series of Rembrandt etchings dated 1630 show the master’s face expressing different emotions. See White/Buvelot (eds.) 1999, nos. 20-23.
\footnote{58} Van Mander 1604, fol. 24v.
\footnote{59} Van Mander 1604, fol. 28v.
\footnote{60} Van Mander 1604, fol. 23r: ‘Om nu dese dinghen wel uyt te beelden, / Op dat al onse personnagen speelden / rae \textit{Histriona} Const, en ontgorden / Suleke gesten, daer sy toe sullen worden / Op de \textit{Scena} ghestelt, t'zy in Comedy / Met blijschap, oft in droeflijcke Tragedy.'
expression (eenstemmicheyt) while at the same time advocating a sense of immediacy: ‘Whether one uses one single figure or many together, one should pay heed that one shows only one sudden movement (een oogenblikkige beweeging), which primarily expresses the action of the history’.\(^{161}\) It is a recommendation that seems directly inspired on the powerful immediacy of paintings by Rembrandt. As Brenninkmeyer-de Rooy noted, the master’s depictions are so sudden that one can even see a sword falling in mid-air before hitting the ground in his painting *The Resurrection of Christ* (fig. 6.36).\(^{162}\) Although Van Hoogstraten only refers to history paintings in this passage, his emphasis on sudden, momentary expressions also brings other types of picture to mind, such as Frans Hals’s *Malle Babbe*. (see chapter 4, fig. 4.7)

Apart from Samuel van Hoogstraten, Gerard de Lairesse also discussed the importance of creating unity in the expression of a scene. Interestingly, he uses a mistake that he made himself as an example. In his early years as a painter, he had painted the story of the mythological figure of Procne. She took revenge for the rape and abuse of her sister by making the rapist, King Tereus, eat his son. De Lairesse had depicted the moment that Procne showed the head of the son, already half eaten, while the King, furious, stood up from his seat, a knife in his hand. The table had already fallen over and the floor was covered with broken dishes. This depiction, however, contained an ‘unnaturalness’ (onnatuurlykheid), he admitted. For it made no sense for Procne to continue to stand still and show the head, while the king had already knocked over the table and was coming towards her with a knife in his hand. By that time, she would have tried to flee. In hindsight, he therefore believed it would have been better to depict Procne furiously showing the head before the table was knocked down, or to depict her after she had thrown the head on the table while she was trying to flee, one arm raised in anger.\(^{163}\)

When Gerard de Lairesse wrote his treatise at the end of the Golden Age, it had become common to capture virtually everything related to the depiction of human emotions in rules. As Gerard de Lairesse’s example showed, ‘naturalness’ (naturulykheid) was still important, but that did not mean that theorists found it advisable to base painted emotions directly on expressions one could see in the natural world or in the mirror. In fact, Gerard de Lairesse advised his readers to

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\(^{161}\) ‘Het zy nu, datmen een enkel beelt, of veele te zamen voor hebbe, men moet toezien, datmen alleenlijk een oogenblikkige beweeging, welke voornamentlijk de daed der historie uitdrukt, vertoone; gelijk Horatius zegt: Breng yder werk stuk, zoo ‘t behoort, Slechts enkel en eenweejich voort.’ Van Hoogstraten 1678, 116.

\(^{162}\) See Brenninkmeyer-de Rooy 1984, 65 and fig. 70. Weststeijn 2005, 117-119.

\(^{163}\) De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1969], vol. I, 98.
study a set of prints created by the French painter Charles le Brun, in which the latter demonstrated how psychological characteristics are reflected in facial expressions.\(^{164}\) (fig. 6.37) Moreover, De Lairesse included further examples of expressive gestures and attitudes in his *Groot Schilderboeck*.

He showed, for example, how one could express different states of mind pertaining to prayer: a figure praying ‘with desire and perseverance’ (*met verlangen en aanhouding*), one praying ‘with extreme shyness’ (*met uiterste verleegenheit*) and a third one bravely asking the gods for help (*smeekt ootmoedelijk de goden om bulp*).\(^{165}\) Also, he explained at great length the kinds of gestures and movements that befitted different types of people, and how one could differentiate between little and well-educated people within each type.\(^{166}\) For example, a rude farmer could be recognized by his posture: his elbows leaning on a table, his back arched and arms embracing his bowl of food as if to defend it, whereas a farmer with a good upbringing would sit straight up, hold his bowl by its handle and eat more neatly, according to De Lairesse.

According to De Lairesse, it was essential to strive as much as possible for dignity (*deftigheid*) and ‘politeness’ (*welgemanierdheid*) in the depicted movements. He considered these qualities the ‘soul of an artful painting’ (*de ziel van een konstig schildery*).\(^{167}\) At the beginning of the century Van Mander had maintained that depicting the passions in general constituted ‘the soul of the art of painting’ (*de siele van de Schilderkonst*), and De Lairesse’s statement seems a deliberate variation on this observation.\(^{168}\) His emphasis illustrates that the classicist taste which had become fashionable towards the end of the century did not only have implications for a painter’s choice of subject, the execution of the design and choice of colors and light effects, but also for the depicted ‘movements’ or expressions.

While the requirement of a dignified expression and the rather strict rules on how to represent the passions must have caused debate as the classicist taste spread in the second half of the seventeenth century, the assessment of the quality of painted expressions in general was far from controversial. For despite the much-emphasized difficulty of depicting the various expressions successfully, all theorists agreed that assessing these expressions was an easy task.\(^{169}\) They did not explain how to read the passions depicted; they believed their power was such that

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\(^{165}\) De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1969], vol. I, 34, figs. 4-6.

\(^{166}\) De Lairesse 1707 [ed. 1969], vol. I, 54.


\(^{168}\) Van Mander 1604, fol. 27r.

\(^{169}\) ‘Dees Affecten, zijn niet soo gaer en lichte / T’exprimeren, als sy wel zijn te loven’. Van Mander, fol. 23r.
even those with little knowledge of painting would immediately recognize and experience a personal connection to them. This also meant that painters could profit from the feedback of virtually everyone in this respect (see also above, chapter 5).

*The Sum of the Parts*

When the French scholar Etienne Binet explained to his readers how to talk eloquently about paintings in *Essays* of 1621, he emphasized how important it was for a painter to make his work appear real, not painted:

‘One must deceive the eye or all is worthless;  
One must believe that this is hollow,  
And pressed inwards, that swollen and pointing outwards,  
That this sticks out and launches itself entirely out of the Painting,  
That this is far away in the distance, that of a prodigious height,  
This pierced by rays of light, this full of life and movement,  
That this horse gallops and foams at the mouth through its hard breathing,  
That this dog barks loudly, that this blood flows out of the wound  
That the clouds really thunder, and are torn to pieces  
by the flashes of lightning that one can see appear one by one,  
that this man breathes out his dying breath  
and that one sees his soul escaping on his lips,  
that [actual] birds will try to pick at these [painted] grapes,  
but break their becks, that [the viewer] cries out loudly  
that the curtain should be removed to show what is beneath it,  
However, there is nothing of that  
for the entire image is flat, nearby, shallow, dead,  
Created so artistically that nature seems to lie beneath it,  
to help the painter deceive us through subtlety,  
and laugh at our gullibility.’

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170 ‘il faut tromper l’oeil or tout n’y vaut rien; / il faut qu’on croye que cela est creux / et enfoncé,  
cela enflé et boursouflé, cecy hors d’oeuvre, et qui se jete entierement hors du Tableau, cecy  
esloigné d’une bonne lieuë , / cela d’une hautesse extreme, cela perçé à jour, / cecy tout vif et plein  
de movement, / que ce cheval court et excume à force de souffler / que ce chien jape voirement,  
que ce sang coule de la playe, / que les nuées tonnent en effet, / et que les nuages sont tous  
décousus / à force d’esclairs qu’on void sortir coup sur coup, que cét home rend l'esprit / et qu'on  
vois l’ame sur ses lévres, que les oyseaux becquettent ces raisins / et se cissent le bec, qu’on crie
Like the ancient painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius that allegedly deceived birds and man with their painted grapes and curtain, modern painters also tried to cleverly mislead their public, according to Binet. When discussing their works, it was crucial to take this into account (see also below). Although Binet only mentioned Italian artists (including Michelangelo and Raphael), his text applies equally well if not better to other European painters. The ‘reality effect’ that he valued so highly was in any case quintessential to Netherlandish painters and their critics throughout the Golden Age.

Not only did this effect play a key role in the assessment of the design, colors, light and shade in a painting, it could also make or break a painting’s overall effect. Tellingly, theorists such as Angel, Goeree and Gerard de Lairesse linked the common word for high quality, ‘welstand’, directly to the suggestion of three-dimensionality. Literally, the term means ‘standing well’, and to them it meant, among other things, just that: the successful placement of objects and figures in the imaginary space.\footnote{Van Hoogstraten 1678, 25. ‘Want een volmaekte Schildery is als een spiegel van de Natuer, die de dingen, die niet en zijn, doet schijnen te zijn, en op een geoorlofde vermakelijke en prijlsche wijze bedriegt.’ The English translation appears in Brusati 1995, 159.} Also, when Samuel van Hoogstraten defined painterly perfection, he placed much emphasis on the overall suggestion of reality: ‘A perfect painting is like a mirror of nature which makes things which do not actually exist appear to exist and thus deceives in a permissible, pleasurable and praiseworthy manner.’\footnote{Angel 1642, 39.} Philips Angel used even stronger terms. In his view, especially the successful use of light and dark could give paintings the ‘power to appear real’ (schijn eygentijcke kracht), which he found ‘magical’ (tooverachtigh). It resulted in a ‘miraculous’ overall quality (een wonderbaerlijcke welstandt).\footnote{Binet 1621 [ed. 1654], 354. See Taylor 1992, 219.}

In seventeenth-century France such reality effects were not only celebrated but also criticized. For example, several members of the French Academy believed that very real-looking figures and materials could distract from the essence of painting, its design and intellectual message. Therefore Perrault praised the way in which masters such as Poussin and Le Brun had depicted drapery: ‘They even refrain from dressing [their figures] in velvet, satin or taffeta, they give them fabrics which are nothing like those people use, [instead] generic...
and universal fabrics, if one can say so, without getting into their specific materials."\(^{174}\)

In the Netherlands, however, no painter or art critic expressed such a view. Even the classicist Gerard de Lairesse, who shared Perrault’s preference for intellectual content, was nonetheless convinced that all parts of a painting, including drapery, should look ‘real’.\(^{175}\) The desirability of a successful suggestion of reality in all parts of a painting was not a matter of discussion in the Netherlands; it was the most important quality any painting should have. Foreign enthusiasts of Netherlandish paintings appreciated the works for precisely this reason. The French Comte de Brienne, for example, admired the way in which Netherlandish painters distinguished between different textures such as satin, silk and velvet.\(^{176}\)

While the importance of a convincing ‘reality effect’ was thus generally acknowledged, there were nonetheless discussions about how exactly such illusionistic effects should be achieved and which subjects should be depicted. As we have seen, debates evolved around questions of how best to use light and colors to create a powerful suggestion of three-dimensionality and highlight one’s main subject. Also, there were differences in opinion as to what type of brushwork was the most convincing. Moreover, there were lively discussions as to the kinds of topics that were worthy of being painted, and in what way painters should aim to move the viewer.

In 1638, Junius defended the art of painting against critics who claimed it had no use by saying that paintings not only paid a tribute to God by depicting His Creation, but that they could also ‘bridle the most violent passions of love and anger’.\(^{177}\) This last effect is what Aristotle called \textit{catharsis}, the purifying impact of the extreme emotions that were acted out in ancient tragedies.\(^{178}\) Although it is still unclear if many painters and viewers attributed such purifying powers to paintings, depictions of sudden, powerful emotions were certainly in vogue at the time and believed to instill viewers with the same emotion. According to Huygens,

\(^{174}\) ‘Ils s’abstiennent mesme de les revestir [leurs personages] de velours, de satin ou de taffetas, ils leur donnent des étoffes qui ne tiennent rien de celles don’t les homes se servent, des étoffes génériques et universelles, si cela se peut dire, sans descendre dans leur espèces particulières.’ Hourticq 1905, 339.


\(^{176}\) ‘Que l’on distingue la laine avec la soye, le satin d’avec le velours, le brocard d’avec la broderie, et qu’enfin l’œil soit trompé, pour ainsy dire, par la vérité et la diversité des étoffes.’ Hourticq 1905, 339.

\(^{177}\) Junius 1638 [ed. 1991], 73.

\(^{178}\) See Aristotle, \textit{Ars Poetica}, 1449b, 21.
the effect of horror was particularly admired in paintings in the 1630s. He himself felt rather ambivalent about this effect, however. While he much appreciated Rembrandt’s depiction of the desperate Judas (see above, figs. 6.34 & 6.35), Rubens’ powerful depiction of the terrifying dead head of the mythological figure of Medusa caused him to declare that he preferred more pleasing subjects (see above, fig. 6.10).

It was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that the subjects of painting became the topic of fierce debates. Theorists increasingly called for graceful, dignified subjects that would excude a sense of propriety and inspire viewers through their example. Given the powerful effect paintings were believed to have on people’s imagination, it is surprising that only then did ethics and esthetics come to be widely seen as inseparable. Previously, a certain moral lenience had allowed for a great variety of lifelike picture types to be developed and for a fascination with the visual appeal of people and objects that were not necessarily beautiful but were nonetheless considered ‘painterly’ (schilderachtig), i.e., worthy of being painted.

As to the question whether or not the discussions about seventeenth-century painting in the Netherlands focused on typically Netherlandish qualities, the answer is partially. Many of the criteria used for paintings from the Netherlands also apply to paintings from other European countries.

As we have seen, critics considered a wide range of aspects. Was the topic suitable for a painting? Was it amusing or offensive? Did the painting show a clear focus on the main subject in the design as well as in the use of color, tones and light? Were the main figure’s proportions correct, and was his or her expression appropriate, natural and powerful? Was the brushwork pleasant and loose in the highlights and other accents? Furthermore, did secondary figures and elements help emphasize the main action? Were there no mistakes in the depiction of the time, the place or the action? Was the design not a (bad) copy of another master’s design? Had the painter convincingly structured and unified the scene? And ultimately, did the painting bring about the essence of the subject in a convincingly lifelike and pleasant way?

None of these concerns were unique to Netherlandish painting. Nonetheless, the precision with which the use of colors, light and brushwork is discussed in the surviving sources on Netherlandish paintings was unique in Europe, and reveals a preoccupation with colorito effects. For example, the term ‘houding’ (used to indicate the balancing of colors and tones) had no true equivalent in other European languages.179 Nonetheless, disegno aspects were far

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from forgotten and especially those aspects of the design that could enhance the lifelike qualities and immediacy of a painted scene received much attention – and led to yet another unique art critical term, ‘eigentlick’ (true-to-life in the sense of probable, befitting and historically accurate). Even the fierce debates about subject matter that erupted in the second half of the seventeenth century may be related to the particular realistic quality of Dutch and Flemish paintings. The powerful immediacy of many of these paintings made the question of what subjects deserved to be represented with such force presumably all the more relevant.

Although seventeenth-century connoisseurs thus discussed the quality of painting with an elaborate set of criteria, it seems unlikely that they would have applied every criterion to every painting at hand. Instead, it seems more likely that true connoisseurs revealed their expertise by quickly identifying those characteristics that were unique and praiseworthy in a particular painting. A poem by the playwright Govert Bidloo offers a glimpse of such expertise. Bidloo wrote his poem between 1683 and 1685 with the intention of demonstrating his knowledge of paintings and sculpture; it was a tribute to the wealthy Amsterdam collector Philip de Flines and his art collection. The latter had taught Bidloo how to assess art, and Bidloo admired him for not getting ‘addicted or attached’ to names or fame._according to Bidloo, De Flines had explained in what way both contemporary and old masterpieces ‘have recognizable different characteristics’ (keurkennelijck verschillen), and in doing so, he had helped him discover various masters and their times. Bidloo’s poem is based on the insights he had acquired through their conversations and illustrates the expertise of these early modern connoisseurs in both a direct and an indirect way.

By complimenting De Flines on his ability to look beyond the name and fame of an artist, Bidloo emphasized that De Flines was not the type of art lover that Samuel van Hoogstraten would have disdainfully called a ‘name-buyer’ (naemkoper). Not easily impressed by the artist’s reputation, this early connoisseur based his assessment on careful, first-hand observations of the master’s work. One of the elements on which De Flines made Bidloo focus was the depiction of

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180 Bidloo 1719, 173-185, esp. 173: ‘uw ervaren oog, dat zich verslaaft, noch bind aan naam, noch eergerucht’; p. 175: ‘laten zien of lessen beklijven...’ Since the poem describes five allegories which Gerard de Lairesse had painted in De Flines’ house, it must have been written after these were finished in 1683. In 1685 Bidloo and De Flines ended their friendship after a bitter fight about ethics and aesthetics in theatre. Bidloo went as far as to ridicule De Flines (as well as the other members of the classicist theatre society Nil Volentibus Arduum) on stage in a biting satire. See Kooijmans 2004, 218 ff.

181 Bidloo 1719, 175.
foliage. When done well, foliage showed distinctively individual touches of the brush, as Karel van Mander had observed at the very beginning of the century, and this was presumably one of the reasons De Flines focused specifically on these passages. Moreover, foliage could serve as a repoussoir, a large foreground item which enhances a painting’s suggestion of ‘height and depth’ (boogte en diepte), as Bidloo put it.

In a more indirect way, Bidloo demonstrates his knowledge of paintings in his descriptions of specific works. For example, he distinguishes between the main parts (that is, the figures) and subsidiary work (bywerk) in paintings by Rubens. As we have seen, this is a distinction that Franciscus Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten deemed very important. According to them, inexperienced art lovers often betrayed themselves by not making such a distinction and by focusing too much on the subsidiary work. Bidloo, however, seems to have divided his attention commensurately. He admired the ‘natural postures’ (ongedwongen poses) of Rubens's figures, his subtle light effects and his rough but carefully blended brushstrokes.182

Repeatedly, Bidloo showcases his knowledge of particular painters by pointing out some of their hallmark characteristics. He praised the expressive eye of a biblical figure by Rembrandt (hoe fier weeet Rembrandt het oog van Hanna uit te drukken), the ‘masterstrokes’ (meesterstreken) of Hals and Jordaens, as well as the strong suggestion of life with which these latter two masters infused their portraits (figs. 6.38 a & b and above fig. 6.32). Also, he specifically mentions the satins and silks in paintings by Ter Borch and points out the characteristic brushwork (handeling) of Cesar van Everdingen and Simon Kick (unfortunately without describing it further) (fig. 6.39).

Interestingly, Bidloo also mentions a contemporary debate about quality. The painter Van der Lisse was both admired and despised, he explains, for he included ‘brothel scenes’ and ‘friskiness’ (dartelheid) in every painting of his (fig. 6.40). However, Bidloo believed his painterly skills made up for this stain on his reputation (smeet): his light effects were praiseworthy, he had a certain force in his outlines, and he infused his painting with an overall sense of harmony and three-dimensionality (welstand).183 Other connoisseurs may not have been so forgiving. As we have seen, towards the end of the seventeenth century, ethics and esthetics were increasingly seen as inseparable. While the quality of specific paintings and

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182 Bidloo 1719, 181.
183 ‘De ligte Lis, die zich verachten doet, en roemen, / Bordeel, en dartelheid op al zijn’ doeken maalt, / Maar door zijn’ kunst die smeet beschaduwt, en betaalt; / Toont wat het licht, dat door geboomte, en lustpriëlen / Op beelden, en gebouw komt van ter zijden speelen, / Een kracht van tekentrek, en welstand geeven kan.’ Bidloo 1719, 180.
the criteria for excellence thus continued to be the subject of debate, Bidloo’s
generic emphasis on the importance of quality seems entirely characteristic of
seventeenth-century connoisseurs.