

## The current state of research on Dutch Golden Age painting

Review of:

Wayne Franits (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016, 478 pages, 91 b&w illustrations, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-4094-6594-2, £105.00

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*The Ashgate Research Companion to Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century* provides an excellent overview and synthesis of the voluminous scholarly literature produced on 'Golden Age' Dutch art in the last thirty years. Wayne Franits edited this invaluable resource for both established scholars in this field, and those who are just starting their advanced study of Dutch art. In spite of its significantly different scope, this book feels like a follow-up to Franits' 1998 *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, an important set of essays by leading scholars that sought to address head-on the most fraught aspect of Dutch art, its apparent realism.<sup>1</sup> The essays in the 1998 volume offered a diverse set of opinions on the function and status of realism in Dutch painting, and its possible relation to meaning. The question of how 'real' Dutch art is, while not the theme of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Dutch Art of the Seventeenth*, is still an underlying concern of, and often an explicit topic of discussion in, almost all of the essays in the current volume.

As is perhaps unavoidable with a book of this scope, the nineteen essays are somewhat uneven. However, this is due less to the inherent weakness of some essays, and more to the ambitions of others. All of the essays admirably fulfil their brief, which was apparently to offer a coherent overview of the major scholarly work produced in a particular area of research, and the broader themes and developments in scholarship of which those works are a part. Some of the authors went above and beyond what was required of them, and rather than categorizing and listing the influential texts that have been published in the last thirty years, these authors openly acknowledge their own points of view and make pointed suggestions for necessary changes in methodology. Those essays that make clear their points of view are often stronger than those that do not, as they are more able to present a convincing argument for the possible directions of future scholarship in their particular area of expertise. Regardless, any scholar of Dutch art will be able to easily read between the lines of all of the essays to find evidence of the methodological allegiances of the authors, in spite of the fact that most of the authors have attempted to present their material objectively. David A. Levine on

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Franits, ed., *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

the relationship between Dutch artists and Italy,<sup>2</sup> Junko Aono's discussion of late seventeenth-century painting,<sup>3</sup> Claartje Rasterhoff on economics and Dutch art,<sup>4</sup> John Loughman on the validity of city schools (the concept of distinct styles of painting associated with particular urban centres),<sup>5</sup> and Karolien de Clippel on the relationship between Dutch and Flemish art<sup>6</sup> are especially stimulating. It is perhaps no coincidence that all of these essays, with the exception of Rasterhoff's, cover aspects of Dutch art that continue to be on the periphery of scholarly attention. We thus encounter a typical problem with 'state of the field' research companions such as this one: that, while they may accurately capture where the field has been, they largely re-inscribe and further the very problems and categories that have held a particular field back. Even when editors and individual authors work to demonstrate new possibilities and directions for research, this kind of look back walks a fine line between objective summary and critical appraisal.

This larger issue can be seen in discrepancies that emerge between some of the essays. While this is to be expected from an edited volume of this scale, it is revealing to read one essay that stirringly makes the case for a more nuanced approach to one aspect of Dutch art or culture, and then another essay a chapter or two down the line that makes exactly the sort of assumptions that the previous essay derided. To point out just one example among many, in chapter 12, Junko Aono, writing about the traditional marginalization of Dutch art produced in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, states that, 'characteristic features of this later period, among others a classicizing style, were seen as "foreign" intrusions that further separated these later paintings from a the 'authentic' Dutch pictures of the earlier period.'<sup>7</sup> Yet in chapter 14, Judith Noorman ends the introduction to her chapter on the scholarship on Dutch drawings with the offhand proviso that her essay 'focuses on drawings made by artists active in the Northern Netherlands and during the first three quarters of the seventeenth century. After this, drawings took on an international and even more classicist character.'<sup>8</sup> Noorman does not explain why the 'international' and 'classicist character' of these late seventeenth-century

<sup>2</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 10, David A. Levine, 'The Dutch encounter with Italy. The state of research', 265-285.

<sup>3</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 12, Junko Aono, 'Out of the shadow of the Golden Age. Recent scholarly developments concerning Dutch painting of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', 286-301.

<sup>4</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 16, Claartje Rasterhoff, 'Economic aspects of Dutch art', 355-371.

<sup>5</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 17, John Loughman, 'Urban identity and the validity of city schools in Dutch art', 372-389.

<sup>6</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 18, Karolien de Clippel, 'Dutch art in relation to seventeenth-century Flemish art', 390-405.

<sup>7</sup> Aono, 287.

<sup>8</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 14, Judith Noorman, 'Drawn into the light. The state of Research in seventeenth-century Dutch drawings', 321.

drawings disqualifies them from being discussed in a volume about seventeenth-century Dutch art; it is presumably self-evident.

Franits opens the volume with a brief introduction to the essays that follow. The first part of his introduction is an overview of some of the state-of-the-field essays produced since the late 1980s. Franits therefore places the current set of essays within the context of the scholarly debates and controversies that so enlivened the field in the wake of the publication of Alpers' *Art of Describing*. He draws attention to Mariet Westermann's acknowledgement, in her stimulating 2002 *Art Bulletin* article,<sup>9</sup> that the agreement to 'agree to disagree' over Alpers' theories in the 1990s led to a 'resultant lack of vigor in the face of the new scholarly détente.'<sup>10</sup> Ending his fascinating discussion of the theme of debate and methodological diversity that runs through these state-of-the-field essays, he invites readers of the present volume 'to draw their own conclusions about the degree to which irresolution still characterizes the field today.'<sup>11</sup> This broad view of the overall state of the field is a welcome acknowledgement that passionate disagreement was actually quite good for the study of Dutch art, and it is perhaps time for the gloves to come off once again. The essays in this volume amply illustrate that there is plenty of debate about how Dutch art should be studied and understood, but they also lead the reader to the conclusion that the stakes in this field, as in most of the more well-established areas of art history, are simply not felt to be high enough to incite the sort of 'spirited debate' that characterized post-*Art of Describing* scholarship on Dutch art. Franits goes on to describe the organization of the volume (although he does not explain the reasoning behind that organization), and then offers brief synopses of the nineteen essays that follow.

A welcome addition to the introduction would have been a synthesis of the essays that follow, rather than merely a summary. There are definite themes that run through all or most of the essays, in terms of where the field has been and where it needs to go, and it would have made this volume even more useful if those themes had been explicitly drawn out. The lack of such a synthesis makes this book more of a set of mini states-of-the-specific-area-of-study, rather than a state-of-the-field more broadly.

The nineteen essays that follow the introduction each take as their subject the scholarship of approximately the last thirty years in a particular area of the study of Dutch art. The first section, entitled 'The Traditional Genres', covers the types of art most popularly associated with the Dutch 'Golden Age': portraiture, still life, genre, landscape, and architectural painting. The fact that history painting is not only not included in this section, but is not addressed in its own essay anywhere in this volume, is perplexing. It is discussed in a piecemeal fashion in essays on other

<sup>9</sup> Mariet Westermann, 'After iconography and iconoclasm: Current research in Netherlandish art, 1566-1700', *Art Bulletin*, 84:2, June 2002, 365.

<sup>10</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Wayne Franits, 'Introduction', 3.

<sup>11</sup> 'Introduction', Franits, 3.

topics, such as those on Rembrandt, Vermeer, Dutch mannerism, and 'Italianate' painting. This is another case of the type of discrepancy I discussed above, but in this case, it is perhaps more problematic since it has to do with the conception of the entire volume itself. When Gero Seelig, in his essay on Dutch mannerism, notes that the concept of 'Dutch mannerism' is outmoded and unhelpful,<sup>12</sup> or Levine addresses the damage done by the problematic term 'Pre-Rembrandtist',<sup>13</sup> it is difficult for a specialist not to read these arguments as relating to the overall marginalization of Dutch history painting that often occurs through the categorization of it with these unhelpful and old-fashioned stylistic designations. History painting was a popular and esteemed genre for both artists and patrons in the Dutch Republic and thus the absence of a dedicated essay prevents this volume from being comprehensive.

This is one example of the ways in which the organization of the book itself seems to reinforce the very problems that many of the essays seek to redress. Some of the authors, notably Almer Pollmer-Schmidt on architectural painting and Levine on Italianate painting, forcefully critique the validity of the very categories that they have been asked to write about. There is a tension between the supposed status quo that this book's organization reflect on the one hand, and the realities of recent (and in some cases, not even that recent) research in the subfields that are delineated. In other words, one can argue that the arrangement of the book is simply a result of the book's purview, a review of where the field is now, but the authors themselves make it fairly clear that this is not, in fact, where the field is now. A more comprehensive and critical introductory essay could have addressed these issues directly, thereby providing a better sense of some of the broader problems that the field is still in the process of tackling.

The first essay, covering portraiture, is by Ann Jensen Adams, and begins by placing the increasing interest in Dutch portraiture within the context of scholarly interest in identity politics, and more recently, the rise of the selfie. While her reference to the selfie might appear to be frivolous, Adams extensively discusses the long-standing tendency to ignore portraits that are not by major artists, and do not depict important sitters. She argues that focusing on the social function of portraiture makes the importance of the artist or the sitter less important than traditional scholarship allowed for. Like the selfie, portraits, regardless of who they represent, offer significant insight into the ways in which identity, class, and social relations functioned within society. Adams describes the central role that the 'iconographic turn' played in bringing portraits by artists other than Rembrandt and Hals, and of unknown sitters, into scholarly view: 'with the introduction of iconographic studies into seventeenth-century Dutch art, portraits have been reexamined for what their motifs, gestures, compositions and even formats might

<sup>12</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 10, Gero Seelig, 'Dutch mannerism', 253-4.

<sup>13</sup> Levine, 266 and 279.

tell us about how their sitters wished to be viewed.<sup>14</sup> Iconographic studies have gotten a bad rap since *The Art of Describing*, but Adams' essay, and many others in this volume, reminds readers of how important they were, and continue to be, in broadening the scope of works of art that are considered worth studying. The bulk of the essay focuses on archival research that has helped flesh out our understanding of the identities of both sitters and the artists painted the huge number of unattributed portraits. In the suggestions for future study at the end of her essay, Adams focuses on what more archival and technical research might reveal about the mechanics of portrait-sitting and portrait-making.

Julie Berger Hochstrasser's essay summarizes scholarship on still-life painting since the late 1980s. Her article is arranged by type of publication, for example, surveys of Dutch art with significant sections on still life, exhibition catalogues on Dutch still life, scholarship on still life subspecialties, monographs, and what she calls 'general theoretical works'. Hochstrasser, like Franits in his introduction, points to the current scholarly 'détente' (in Franits' words) between the Alpers proponents and the iconographers, but puts it in a much more positive light, writing that "the signal development in recent decades has been the move beyond the polarization to a more balanced acceptance of multiple—and many new—avenues for understanding Dutch still-life painting."<sup>15</sup> While Hochstrasser therefore appears to embrace the more peaceful coexistence of iconographic and contextual studies on the one hand, and those that focus more on the descriptive power of these images, she is far more critical of theoretical readings, and in particular those of Norman Bryson and Hanneke Grootenboer. While most of Hochstrasser's article provides quick summaries of major works, she devotes nearly three pages to a critique of these two works alone.

In her excellent essay on genre imagery, Linda Stone-Ferrier makes many suggestions for possible future studies of this material. She begins, however, by pointing out that the category of genre painting did not exist in the seventeenth century, and that inventories of collections identify paintings by far more specific subject matter than merely 'scenes of everyday life', with, for instance, 'gambling', 'dancing', 'peasant dance', and 'view or view into a room' just a few of the many possible descriptors.<sup>16</sup> This lack of a single category suggests that studying these works of art as part of the same genre does not do justice to the more complex and nuanced ways in which they were likely understood by their owners. Stone-Ferrier goes further, arguing that the tendency in studies of Dutch genre imagery to focus on one of these specific subjects 'sacrifices the idiosyncrasies of individual paintings

<sup>14</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 1, Ann Jensen Adams, 'The Seventeenth-century Dutch portrait comes of age', 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 2, Julie Berger Hochstrasser, 'Still lively. Recent scholarship on still-life painting', 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 3, Linda Stone-Ferrier, 'An Assessment of recent scholarship on seventeenth-century Dutch genre imagery', 73.

to the lowest common denominator of interpretive conclusions.<sup>17</sup> Her essay, then, makes a plea, somewhat unusual for this volume, that works of art be addressed and analyzed individually, and in terms of their specific contexts, imagery, and style. Among the many topics of future study that Stone-Ferrier illuminates or proposes are the reception of genre paintings produced in the first half of the century by collectors in the second half of the century,<sup>18</sup> textual inscriptions on objects in genre paintings,<sup>19</sup> the curious ‘omissions and exaggerations’ that characterize the choice of aspects of daily life that are depicted in genre imagery,<sup>20</sup> and the relationship between genre painting and print and other realms of Dutch visual culture (for instance, newsprints, *alba amicorum*, and decorative arts).<sup>21</sup>

Boudewijn Bakker points out two very different problems with the study of Dutch landscape painting, the topic of his essay. On the one hand, the formal and stylistic elements of landscape painting have been largely ignored, with the exception of studies of artists like Jan van Goyen. However, as Bakker points out, these studies discuss style only insofar as it pertains to an analysis of how market forces affected paintings.<sup>22</sup> As he puts it, ‘the purely artistic aspects of landscape painting—brushwork, composition, perspective, materials etc.—have attracted remarkably little research over the last three decades when compared with the general problem of the relation between reality and art.’<sup>23</sup> This is the case for the study of Dutch seventeenth-century painting in general, as his other critique of the scholarship on Dutch landscape imagery, which is that many scholars have tended to either ignore contemporary art theory’s relevance to the study of these works of art, or they have, perhaps more problematically, misinterpreted or simply not bothered to define the terms (period or stylistic) that they use in their studies. On the most basic level, the term ‘realist’ itself is generally used imprecisely. Bakker defines four separate aspects of realism that he has detected in the scholarship on Dutch landscape, none of which are explicitly specified, in spite of the fact that they refer to very different qualities: everyday subject matter, a seemingly indiscriminate description of all aspects of the visual world, naturalism, and illusionism.<sup>24</sup> One of the most useful passages in his essay is the section in which he discusses various terms from contemporary art theory, and how they have been defined and interpreted by different scholars.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Stone-Ferrier, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Stone-Ferrier, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Stone-Ferrier, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Stone-Ferrier, 89-91.

<sup>21</sup> Stone-Ferrier, 91-92.

<sup>22</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 4, Boudewijn Bakker, ‘Points of view. Recent studies on Dutch landscape painting’, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Bakker, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Bakker, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Bakker, 116-118.

In marked contrast with Bakker's critique of the study of landscape, Almut Pollmer-Schmidt argues that scholarship on architectural painting continues to be plagued by 'rigid thinking in terms of defining historical groups by their style', and by 'isolation of architectural painting from its cultural-historical context.'<sup>26</sup> With regards to the latter, Pollmer-Schmidt points out how strange it is that church interior paintings tend to be discussed in relation to perspective, style, nationalism, and realism, but not in relation to contemporary religious practice.<sup>27</sup> Her article also questions the relevance of the very category of architectural painting, which she argues places too much emphasis on the generic subject of built structures, and therefore implies, as many studies have, that these paintings, whether they depict Protestant churches, Catholic churches, synagogues, town halls, or middle-class homes, are 'invariably an expression of a strong interest in architecture.'<sup>28</sup> She goes on to highlight those studies that have provided socio-historical context for the types of buildings that are depicted in these paintings, revealing that many artists were indeed 'capable of associating distinctly confessional messages with their interiors, and of depicting either Catholic or Reformed churches, or portraying them in such a way as to underscore their overarching function for the urban community.'<sup>29</sup> In a fascinating passage that goes beyond a summary of current scholarship, Pollmer-Schmidt argues that paintings of churches, for instance, could serve to enforce a particular idea of how the space of a Reformist church should be actually be used.<sup>30</sup> Pollmer-Schmidt's essay is one of the few in this volume that offers a sustained and convincing discussion of how Dutch paintings actually related to their viewers.

The second section of this volume is a bit awkwardly titled 'Major Artists, Movements, and Other Media.' As the title perhaps suggests, this section is made up of essential topics that do not fit into the traditional categories of Dutch artistic production, which is represented by the essays on various genres that make up the first section. These outliers include the artists who have been seen to surpass those artists who are defined by mere subject matter: Rembrandt, Hals, and Vermeer. The second set of essays in this section deal with art that is likewise exempted from the major genres, but in this case, because they are seen to be 'foreign' or 'un-Dutch.' These include Dutch mannerism, the 'Dutch encounter with Italy', as the title of that essay cautiously puts it, and painting of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The last set of essays in Part II deal with the genres that are otherwise largely ignored in the rest of the book, print, drawing, and sculpture. A common theme to these essays does emerge, although it appears to be unintentional, or is at

<sup>26</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 5, Almut Pollmer-Schmidt, 'Imagined spaces. Perspectives on the study of church interiors and cityscape', 130-131.

<sup>27</sup> Pollmer-Schmidt, 131.

<sup>28</sup> Pollmer-Schmidt, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Pollmer-Schmidt, 136-137

<sup>30</sup> Pollmer-Schmidt, 139.

the very least left unacknowledged: the very large percentage of Dutch art that does not fit into the problematically narrow definitions of Dutch art that continue to dominate the field implicitly, in spite of the ample evidence that these definitions are outmoded and unhelpful. The scholars in this section of the book each argue that their subjects should be viewed within the context of the type of art discussed in the first section, but again, the organization of the book itself somewhat undermines their arguments.

Christopher D. M. Atkins starts off this section with his essay on Frans Hals, which begins by noting two related problems with the early study of Hals that are addressed by current scholarship: the exceptionalism of Hals (and Rembrandt), and the divorcing of Hals from his cultural and artistic context.<sup>31</sup> Atkins' review of current scholarship shows a marked interest in combating these problems with the help of technical and archival research. This research has shown, for instance, that Hals used common materials to make his paintings, if in uncommon ways,<sup>32</sup> was aware of and influenced by the work of his contemporaries, both Dutch and Flemish,<sup>33</sup> and produced his singular style as a self-conscious marketing strategy.<sup>34</sup> This last point in particular clearly suggests that taking Hals' exceptionalism for granted impoverishes our understanding not only of Hals, but of Dutch art and society in general.

The market-driven nature of stylistic originality is not discussed by Stephanie S. Dickey in her essay 'Rembrandt and His Circle', but she does note other ways in which Rembrandt marketed his work by marketing himself, through, for instance, his immense oeuvre of self-portraits.<sup>35</sup> Dickey had the unenviable task of summarizing the main strands of the massive body of research on Rembrandt published in the last thirty years. Her essay is organized into a series of necessarily brief sections that each address a different major theme of inquiry, beginning with important archival and biographical studies that have contributed to our understanding of Rembrandt's life and early career, then moving on to the continued problem of attribution that plagues the study of Rembrandt's oeuvre, his usage of biblical imagery, and finally numerous sections on Rembrandt's relationship to contemporary artists, students, and antecedents. Dickey points out that while it is necessary to understand Rembrandt within his artistic and cultural context, his 'ability to invest his figures with emotional complexity and "inner life"' was understood in his own time to set him apart from his contemporaries, and continues to be important evidence of Rembrandt's exceptionalism.<sup>36</sup> Dickey believes Rembrandt's superiority to other Dutch artists transcends even this aspect

<sup>31</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 6, Christopher D.M. Atkins, 'Frans Hals and his time', 153.

<sup>32</sup> Atkins, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Atkins, 159-161.

<sup>34</sup> Atkins, 163-165.

<sup>35</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 7, Stephanie S. Dickey, 'Rembrandt and his circle', 180-181.

<sup>36</sup> Dickey, 184.

of his art, and states that, 'the diversity of Rembrandt's subject matter elevates his art above that of many Dutch contemporaries who found a comfortable niche in the burgeoning art market and stuck to it.'<sup>37</sup> Dickey does not explain why this aspect of Rembrandt's oeuvre makes him superior to other Dutch artists, and her assumption that his work in multiple genres, rather than sticking to 'a comfortable niche', sits uneasily with the rest of the essays in this book, which make such strong cases for the rejection of the concept of genius that seems to implicitly drive this assessment.

Even more jarring is the fact that the essay that comes directly after Dickey's, Thijs Weststijn's essay on Rembrandt and his relation to contemporary art theory, explicitly argues that much of what makes Rembrandt's work so unusual was part of a conscious marketing strategy, aimed at the very art market that Dickey seems to think Rembrandt transcended. Weststijn's stimulating and forcefully argued essay uses contemporary art theory to show that his style, whether lauded or reviled, was consistently associated with his 'rustic' and 'simple' 'Dutchness', and that 'a putative "Batavian" origin did, in fact, play a significant role in his self-image.'<sup>38</sup> Contradicting Dickey's statement about Rembrandt's transcendence of other Dutch artists, he writes: 'In the uncommonly competitive art market in Amsterdam, as of the 1640s Rembrandt found a specific stylistic niche, which he marked out even more strongly in the following decades through his idiosyncratic brushwork.'<sup>39</sup> Weststijn's essay provides not only a thorough summary of scholarship on Rembrandt's relationship to contemporary art theory, but also a lively and enlightening discussion of the theory itself, and a convincing demonstration of how Dutch art theory can be productively used to reveal important insights into the reception of art in the seventeenth century.

H. Perry Chapman addresses the scholarship on the third exceptional Dutch artist, Johannes Vermeer. She begins her excellent essay with a meditation on Vermeer's *The Little Street* (Rijksmuseum), which she uses to illustrate three main areas of recent research on Vermeer: Vermeer as a historical figure; his remarkable combination of naturalism and idealization; and how his paintings might be interpreted and understood to create meaning.<sup>40</sup> The first section summarizes the wealth of information about Vermeer's personal life, working method, artistic circle, and relation to the art market that has done a great to change the scholarly understanding of the artist and his work, once and for all dispensing with the idea of Vermeer as an isolated and mysterious genius.<sup>41</sup> Recent studies have also clarified his working method and style. Though Chapman is more reticent than either Atkins on Hals or Weststijn on Rembrandt, Chapman, too, hints at an

<sup>37</sup> Dickey, 177.

<sup>38</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 8, Thijs Weststijn, 'The Rules of art and Rembrandt, 1630-1730', 222.

<sup>39</sup> Weststijn, 222.

<sup>40</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 9, H. Perry Chapman, 'Johannes Vermeer', 234-35.

<sup>41</sup> Chapman, 235-240.

economic explanation for Vermeer's style. She writes that 'Vermeer cultivated a signature style that combined breathtaking naturalism with measured, harmonious idealizing',<sup>42</sup> and later writes of his *The Art of Painting*, 'it would have been a delightfully complex display of mastery that advertised Vermeer's brand.'<sup>43</sup> In a beautiful passage, Chapman explains why that signature style is often described as 'optical': 'he paints as if he is trying to comprehend and convey the workings of sight.'<sup>44</sup> Chapman's essay manages to describe in concrete and yet elegant terms paintings that strike many viewers as so insistently optical that they are hard to do justice to in writing.

Dutch mannerism is Gero Seelig's topic in the first essay of this section that deals with art that has been banished from inclusion in the essays on various genres. While Seelig ends his essay by stating that 'the term itself [Dutch mannerism] seems to be of little use in that it limits artists who had a much broader scope than a simple allegiance to a particular and, for that matter, a rather short-lived style',<sup>45</sup> he argues earlier that 'the term still remains useful to designate the unmistakable power and expressiveness, as well as the preoccupation, both with the human body and the theoretical foundations of art, of artists working Haarlem and Utrecht, which is so different from the outlook of subsequent generations.'<sup>46</sup> Seelig goes on to summarize important scholarship on the main Dutch mannerist artists, Karel van Mander, Hendrick Goltzius, Jacques de Gheyn, Cornelis van Haarlem, and Abraham Bloemaert. He ends his essay by discussing developments in the scholarship on Dutch mannerism more broadly, and notes that in addition to proving the irrelevance of the category of Dutch mannerism, scholars have also shown how central printmaking was to these artists, the influence that these artists had on later generations, and how market forces contributed to the disappearance of this type of art, and the extent to which Dutch mannerist artists were in dialogue with artists in Antwerp and Italy.<sup>47</sup>

The title of David A. Levine's essay, 'The Dutch Encounter with Italy', reflects the author's frustration with the ghettoization of his subject matter, as well as the nationalist, even ethnic, undertones that separate out and lump together the art under consideration, in spite of its diversity of genre, style, and patronage. He writes, 'Not unlike the status of Italo-centric Dutch art vis-à-vis 'native' Dutch painting, the language used to categorize the material under consideration here has come about largely as a matter of historical happenstance and, as such, carries with it biases of the times of its coining.'<sup>48</sup> Levine's essay makes clear the absurdity of the

<sup>42</sup> Chapman, 240.

<sup>43</sup> Chapman, 247.

<sup>44</sup> Chapman, 241.

<sup>45</sup> Seelig, 259.

<sup>46</sup> Seelig, 254.

<sup>47</sup> Seelig, 260-261.

<sup>48</sup> Levine, 266.

category of 'Italo-centric' art that continues to plague the field. Recent scholarship has revealed that the Dutch artists who depicted Italian places or subjects were neither simply transferring the typical Dutch 'descriptive' mode to new landscapes and subjects, nor were they uniformly or even primarily imitating Italian models of which they were in awe. These artists came to Italy or depicted Italian subjects for a wide variety of reasons, and Levine explains that their attitudes towards Italy ranged from emulous to descriptive to satirical and critical.<sup>49</sup> Archival research has also shown that Dutch collectors valued this type of painting quite highly; further revealing how problematic it is that 'Italianate' Dutch painting continues to be marginalized. Levine ends by arguing that, 'full integration of the history of Italo-centric painting in the history of Dutch art...probably cannot occur before the significance of Italy and Italian artistic forms for the visual culture of the 'Golden Age' Netherlands undergoes extensive reconsideration.'<sup>50</sup> Levine makes an excellent case for how much the field as a whole stands to benefit from the migration of Italo-centric art from the margins of Dutch art history to the centre.

Junko Aono's thoughtful essay on Dutch painting of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries takes on yet another marginalized aspect of Dutch art. Like Seelig and Levine, Aono first demonstrates that her subject has been largely ignored because it has been traditionally viewed as 'foreign', 'inauthentic', and inadequately Dutch.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Levine, however, Aono does argue that there is some justification for treating paintings produced in the last thirty years of the seventeenth century as diverging from what was produced before, and points to 'a different aesthetic that began to play an important role in Dutch painting after 1670', one that is characterized by a more refined, smoother application of paint that matched more 'elevated' subject matter.<sup>52</sup> Rather than viewing this as an inevitable (due to an economic downturn) decline in Dutch art's originality, Aono points to studies that suggest that many of these artists might have consciously chosen a more classicist, or 'French', style to appeal to the changing tastes of their customers. Thus, Rembrandt's student Nicolaes Maes shifted from his 'Rembrandtesque' manner in favor of a smoother application of paint around 1670 because he was 'encouraged by his clientele's strong preference for being portrayed in a most sophisticated and civilized way, so as to identify with the aristocracy',<sup>53</sup> according to a study by Wayne Franits.<sup>54</sup> Some of the most interesting material that Aono covers is research into the reception of and market for earlier seventeenth-century

<sup>49</sup> Levine, 273.

<sup>50</sup> Levine, 279.

<sup>51</sup> Aono, 287.

<sup>52</sup> Aono, 289.

<sup>53</sup> Aono, 290.

<sup>54</sup> Wayne Franits, "Young women preferred white to brown, some remarks on Nicolaes Maes and the cultural context of late seventeenth-century Dutch portraiture," *NKJ* 46 (1995): 394-415.

paintings at the end of the century. Recent research has revealed that there was a strong market for second-hand paintings, and that ‘the period after 1670 can be regarded as the starting point of the reception of earlier seventeenth-century Dutch art, that is, at the moment in which the concept of the “Golden Age” actually came into existence.’<sup>55</sup> Thus, in light of research suggesting ‘that the emerging idea of the Golden Age, or, at least the awareness of it, played a crucial role in the activities of authors, collectors, and dealers’, she poses the intriguing question, ‘Did this also hold true for the artists themselves?’<sup>56</sup> Aono thus makes an excellent argument for the critical importance of a better understanding of late seventeenth-century Dutch painting and the influence of dealers, writers, and collectors on significant shifts in style and subject matter.

The last three essays in Part II deal with the literature on media other than painting, which, as discussed above, are largely absent from the rest of the essays in the volume. These essays cover prints, drawings, and sculpture (decorative arts and architecture are noticeably absent, and would have been useful additions to this book). Nadine Orenstein’s essay summarizes the multitude of studies published on Dutch prints in the last three decades. It is hard not to imagine Orenstein’s frustration that prints, universally ‘fêted [by scholars of Dutch art] for the insight they provide into contemporary culture, history, and economics, as well as the more personal and complex side of an artist’s oeuvre that they reveal’, are given a single essay in the current volume.<sup>57</sup> While numerous excellent articles, monographs, and exhibitions have shown not only how much prints can tell us about Dutch art and society, but also how innovative, influential, and popular they were in their own right, it is given decidedly short shrift in books and exhibitions that are not primarily about print. As Orenstein puts it, ‘They keep a low profile in large monographic exhibition catalogues and catalogues raisonnés, where discussions of prints are often to be found at the back, if included at all; a postscript to a master’s activities as a painter and draftsman.’<sup>58</sup> Orenstein’s essay is organized by type of publication and broad research themes. She focuses largely on prints by known artists, and discusses news prints and other cheaper, popular types of print only briefly.

Judith Noorman’s essay notes that, for practical reasons, the study of Dutch drawings has been a ‘niche specialty’ mostly undertaken by museum curators, and is therefore ‘typically object-based, monographic in approach, and connoisseurial in nature. This has barely changed since the nineteenth century.’<sup>59</sup> Although Noorman writes that, due to the digitization of museum collections, this state of

<sup>55</sup> Aono, 295.

<sup>56</sup> Aono, 296.

<sup>57</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 13, Nadine M. Orenstein, ‘Stepping up to the plate. The state of research in seventeenth-century Dutch prints’, 302.

<sup>58</sup> Orenstein, 302.

<sup>59</sup> Noorman, 321.

affairs has indeed begun to change, she concludes her essay by stating that 'connoisseurship will remain fundamental to the study of seventeenth-century Dutch drawings. Without this knowledge, cataloguing projects—digital or otherwise—cannot provide reliable knowledge.'<sup>60</sup> Thus, Noorman's article seems to end up arguing that the increasing availability of drawings to scholars other than curators or drawing specialists is perhaps irrelevant.

Bieke van der Mark, in her essay on Dutch seventeenth-century sculpture, makes a more explicit case than either Orenstein or Noorman for the critical importance of her medium to the study of Dutch art more generally, perhaps because sculpture has been marginalized far more than either prints or drawings. While the idea that sculpture was insignificant in the seventeenth century compared to paintings or prints 'is a persistent cliché against which Dutch sculpture has been judged ever since Gerard de Lairese's pejorative remarks about it in his *Groot schilderboek* (1707)', van der Mark argues that 'Arguably even more so than in the surrounding countries, sculpture in the Dutch Republic was an extremely important means by which to convey political ideas, and to express personal, civic and national pride.'<sup>61</sup> The bulk of van der Mark's essay focuses on the ways in which grave monuments, portraiture, and sculpture associated with architecture played a key role in promoting a variety of political agendas, from the republican to the dynastic.<sup>62</sup>

The third and final section of the book is entitled simply 'Topics of Recent Research', and includes essays on 'economic aspects of Dutch art', city schools, the relationship between Dutch and Flemish art, and finally, Dutch art within its global context. This category, again, seems like the inelegant solution to the problem of how to include topics that are clearly important to the field, but do not relate to each other in any significant ways. While there is certainly quite a lot of important research currently being done on the relationship between Dutch art and the economy, it has also been a well-established part of the study of Dutch art for many decades now. Likewise, the problem of the relationship between Dutch and Flemish art has been a persistent topic of interest since at least 1946, as Karolien de Clippel demonstrates in her article on the subject.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, all four of these essays amply demonstrate that the study of Dutch seventeenth-century art still has its fair share of lively pockets of debate and new areas for important research.

Claartje Rasterhoff's essay on the contributions of economic art history to the study of Dutch art is one of the most informative essays in this volume, and the precision and clarity with which she lays out the terminology and methodology that inform this important area of study makes her brief essay an essential primer for all

<sup>60</sup> Noorman, 332.

<sup>61</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 15, Bieke van der Mark, 'Towards a reassessment of Dutch seventeenth-century sculpture', 338.

<sup>62</sup> Van der Mark, 341-346.

<sup>63</sup> De Clippel, 390.

art historians of Dutch art. Many, perhaps most, of the essays in this volume point to the invaluable contributions that the application of economic and market data to art history. Perhaps more so than other types of empirical information utilized by historians of Dutch art, economic data 'became paramount to understanding not only the development of the market for art, but also to interpreting stylistic features of artworks.'<sup>64</sup> Rasterhoff begins by noting Dutch art history's indebtedness to economist John Michael Montias' contributions to the field.<sup>65</sup> She notes, however, that 'The fact that most of Montias's assumptions and conclusions have gone largely undisputed is a major achievement, but perhaps it is also a cause for concern. Arguably, his work has been so convincing that in many ways it has not yet received the critical empirical testing it really deserves.'<sup>66</sup> Rasterhoff asks art historians to exercise caution in their application of economic data to their studies in other ways. She notes that 'Viewing artworks as commodities, buyers as maximizing agents, and painters as entrepreneurs has greatly improved our understanding of the Dutch art scene, but...reality was more complex. The tandem of favorable economic circumstances combined with the invisible hand of the market alone cannot fully account for the extraordinary rise of seventeenth-century Dutch painting.'<sup>67</sup>

John Loughman's essay questions the very validity of his topic, the so-called city schools. In part as a corrective to the traditional idea of Dutch Golden Age art as reflecting a common set of cultural values, scholars in the last two decades have argued that urban regionalism rather than national style is a more helpful framework in which to study seventeenth-century Dutch painting.<sup>68</sup> This approach has been most consistently and explicitly argued for by Elisabeth de Bièvre, most comprehensively in her 2015 *Dutch Art and Urban Cultures, 1200-1700*. In contrast to Bièvre, Loughman argues that local schools did not really exist in the Dutch Republic, and that scholarship that relies on the city school model ignore the high degree of mobility of both artists and patrons in the seventeenth century, and misrepresent what are in actuality simply 'small clusters of artists working in a common style with shared themes, and officially promoted subject matter, rather than a more pervasive confluence of painters.'<sup>69</sup> In other words, the city school model heavily exaggerates Dutch urban regionalism at the expense of what archival

<sup>64</sup> Rasterhoff, 356.

<sup>65</sup> Rasterhoff, 355-356.

<sup>66</sup> Rasterhoff, 366.

<sup>67</sup> Rasterhoff, 363.

<sup>68</sup> Loughman points to Bob Haak's *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, which, in an admirable attempt to be more inclusive than any other study of Dutch seventeenth century, organized works of art by urban center, as an important impetus for this scholarship. Loughman, 375; Bob Haak, *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth*, trans. Elizabeth Willems-Treeman, New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Loughman, 372.

and economic research have revealed about the interdependence of Dutch urban centres in the seventeenth century.<sup>70</sup>

Karolien de Clippel's essay addresses the relationship between the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, and how it continues to be misrepresented in the scholarship produced on Flemish and Dutch art today. De Clippel begins by pointing that Pieter Geyl's plea in 1946 for an exhibition that surveys Flemish and Dutch art together has yet to be answered.<sup>71</sup> While most historians of both Flemish and Dutch art recognize that 'contemporaries made no distinction between artists of the Northern and Southern Netherlands', very few exhibitions of scholarly publications have actually reflected this well-known historical reality.<sup>72</sup> It is largely accepted that the dichotomy between Dutch and Flemish art is 'a nineteenth-century fabrication in line with a growing European nationalism, in which the boundaries of particular states at that time played a decisive role in delineating art-historical narratives', and nothing more.<sup>73</sup> De Clippel's essay demonstrates all that is lost or misunderstood by adhering to this indisputably manufactured and anachronistic model of cultural and artistic difference, but also for how enormously we stand to gain by finally getting rid of this distinction, reinforced though it is by the very volume in which her essay is included. De Clippel cautions that 'a strictly additive presentation of Northern- and Southern-Netherlandish art' might be an appealing and obvious response, and that scholars looking to break down the barriers between art produced in the Northern and Southern Netherlands should focus on how they can "shed light on the fascinating process of cultural transmission between the two."<sup>74</sup>

Rebecca Parker Brienen's essay on Dutch art in its global context begins with the promising and stirring statement that 'Our understanding of Dutch art as a whole is nonetheless both impoverished and inaccurate when we fail to take non-European content, as well as the non-European context, into account.'<sup>75</sup> However, her essay, arranged geographically, does not end up supporting this statement. The relationship between Dutch art and artists and the world beyond Europe is arguably one of the newest and most important areas of research in this field, and the placement of this essay at the end of this volume points to the sense of novelty and discovery that still characterizes the research and findings in this area, so it is especially disappointing that this essay does not include an analysis of this fascinating body of work in terms of its broader implications and concerns, ones that transcend geography. Her catalogue of some of the work being produced on

<sup>70</sup> Loughman, 373, 376-377.

<sup>71</sup> De Clippel, 390-91.

<sup>72</sup> De Clippel, 391.

<sup>73</sup> De Clippel, 392.

<sup>74</sup> De Clippel, 398.

<sup>75</sup> *Ashgate Dutch Art*, Chapter 19, Rebecca Parker Brienen, 'Dutch art and artists from a global perspective. The state of research', 407.

art representing the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia certainly reveals that quite a lot of important work has been done, particularly in the last fifteen or so years, yet Brien Parker simply summarizes the subjects and some of the findings of this work, but does not discuss how any of it impacts the study of Dutch art as a whole, perhaps leading the reader to the (incorrect) conclusion that the representation of the extra-European world did not in fact have any impact outside of individual works of art. When Parker Brien begins by stating that our understanding of Dutch art is incomplete without taking into consideration the art discussed in this essay, she appears to imply that we need to simply add 'global' art as a separate category that can then continue to exist in a vacuum. The global turn should not simply add to our body of knowledge; it should challenge how we define Dutch art more generally. Excellent work has been done in other areas of early modern art, and it can only be hoped that scholars in this field will continue to consider how 'global' themes had a major impact on the production and reception of even the most seemingly 'pure' Dutch works of art.<sup>76</sup>

In his introduction to the present volume, Wayne Franits invites his readers to 'draw their own conclusions' about the extent to which Westermann's description of the field of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish art as characterized by an unproductive 'irresolution' still holds today.<sup>77</sup> It seems that this aspect of scholarship on Dutch art since Westermann published her article in 2002 has not, in fact, changed. The essays in this volume present diverse and at times conflicting ideas about the future of the field, and yet there are only rarely brief and not particularly hostile irruptions of disagreement throughout the book. Hochstrasser's criticism of Hanneke Grootenboer's philosophical analysis of still life,<sup>78</sup> Weststeijn's questioning of the ways in which Rembrandt has been understood to relate to seventeenth-century art theory,<sup>79</sup> Rasterhoff's pointed yet very polite questioning of the overly enthusiastic and wholesale acceptance of Montias' findings,<sup>80</sup> and Loughman's sustained critique of Elisabeth de Bièvre's insistence on the importance

<sup>76</sup> To offer just two examples: Byron Hamann's 2010 article on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* makes a sustained case for the inextricability of that painting for its contemporary audience from the context of Spanish colonialism in Latin America. Byron Hamann, 'The Mirrors of *Las Meninas*: Cochineal, Silver, and Clay', *Art Bulletin* 92:1/2, March-June 2010, 6-35. In her 2013 *Art History* article on the Italian Renaissance nude, Jill Burke argues that scholars have missed that a key source for the revival of the nude in the fifteenth-century Italy is the contemporary attitude towards non-European bodies. Jill Burke, 'Nakedness and other peoples: Rethinking the Italian Renaissance nude', *Art History* 36:4, September 2013, 714-739. Burke's upcoming book will presumably expand upon this argument. Jill Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Nude*, New York; London, Yale University Press, 2018.

<sup>77</sup> 'Introduction', Franits, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Hochstrasser, 63-64.

<sup>79</sup> For instance, Weststeijn, 204.

<sup>80</sup> Rasterhoff, 366.

of city schools<sup>81</sup> stand out as some of the few examples of explicit critique of either methodology or interpretation. While outright hostility is certainly not something that this field needs to return to, the general consensus reflected by these essays, that the future of the study of Dutch art in the seventeenth century lies largely in using technical and economic art history to discover more empirical and contextual information that can shed light on how, why, and by whom paintings were made, is not particularly heartening. One of Westermann's main critiques of the field fifteen years ago was that 'Consciousness of the constructed nature of class, race, nationality, and gender eventually reshaped Netherlandish art history, but the field has been retooled more slowly and less fully than, say, studies of nineteenth-century painting or modern photography', or, for that matter, medieval art.<sup>82</sup> A wariness of 'the analytic disciplines that conditioned the new art history (literary criticism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, neo-Marxism, cultural anthropology)' continues to characterize this field today.<sup>83</sup> Thus, while great strides have certainly been made in filling out and sharpening our picture of Dutch art's social and economic context in the last thirty years, for the field to continue to be relevant and exciting in the future, it will need to be more open to more theoretical, philosophical, and formalist readings that move beyond the empirical and firmly historical bent that currently dominates the study of Dutch seventeenth-century art.

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<sup>81</sup> Loughman, 381-382.

<sup>82</sup> Westermann, 351.

<sup>83</sup> Westermann, 351.