

PAINTINGS OF PAINTINGS: THE RISE OF GALLERY PAINTINGS IN
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ANTWERP

by

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by

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Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2016

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my mother; whose strength and resilience inspire me every day.

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I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen. My mother and father assisted me by editing this paper and helping me develop my ideas. Dr. Angela Ho and Dr. Michele Greet, were of invaluable help, and without them this project never would have come to fruition. Finally, thanks go out to my ladies for keeping me sane.

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Abstract

PAINTINGS OF PAINTINGS: THE RISE OF GALLERY PAINTINGS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ANTWERP

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In this paper I examine the conditions that fostered the development of gallery paintings; a type of cabinet painting invented and refined in seventeenth-century Antwerp. Numerous authors have acknowledged the primacy of Antwerp in giving rise to this subgenre of painting, no previous scholars have considered at length why this subgenre arose in this city. I demonstrate that a confluence of factors coalesced at the same time precipitating their rise. Notions of authorship, unique to seventeenth-century Antwerp, underpin how works of art and specifically gallery paintings were valued and discussed. These ideas of authorship embrace collaboration between high masters and laud the creation of art through imitation and emulation all while building on tradition and the artistic developments of the preceding century. They are the same ideas that frame how gallery paintings were viewed by a contemporary audience. I consider how these ideas of authorship served the interests of both collectors and artists, to explain the conditions of the city that fostered the development of gallery paintings.

Introduction

The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest, painted by Willem van Haecht, is a quintessential example of a Flemish seventeenth-century gallery painting (Figure 1).¹ Images of paintings hang on the walls with luxury goods, natural wonders, and scientific objects interspersed between them and displayed on tables. Groups of people gather in front of the depicted paintings on display to discuss them, pointing, at times taking them off walls, or kneeling before them. The people depicted here include the wealthy spice merchant, Cornelis van der Gheest, who is entertaining a group of famous artists, intellectuals, and even the archducal couple Albert and Isabella.² While gallery paintings almost always contain people, rarely can they be identified, so the fact that almost all the people in this image have been identified makes this piece atypical. However, many of the paintings depicted in this image were real pieces of art in the merchant's possession, while others are copies, imitations, or emulations of works in other collections across Europe. This is very typical of gallery paintings as the "paintings" on display in these fictive rooms can almost always be identified and attributed to a specific artist or workshop. This gallery painting is a historical painting, as it depicts real people and

¹ For the sake of brevity, I will consistently refer to these images as gallery paintings unless directly quoting another author. Other literature refers to them as picture of collection paintings, constkamer (Flemish) or constkamer (Dutch) paintings, or Cabinet of Curiosity paintings.

² Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 190

events, but at other times gallery paintings could act as allegories, visual riddles, or provide a moralizing message to the viewer. Some gallery pictures were completed by one artist, such as this one, but other were produced through the collaboration of two or more masters.

This subgenre of painting originated in Antwerp in the seventeenth century where it remained a distinctive genre, with sustained production, until it gained international popularity in the eighteenth century. These gallery paintings were produced exclusively by Antwerp-trained artists, and predominantly featured images by Antwerp masters. The paintings depicted in these gallery paintings are easily identified by type or genre and display the diversity and virtuosity of Antwerp painters. The inclusion of coins, miniatures, objects from antiquity, folios of prints, items from nature, and connoisseurs of painting allude to the inextricable link that existed during this period between art, science, history, and the quest for knowledge. This type of painting became very popular among the Antwerp elite, who at times commissioned artists to paint their own collections.

Many attempts have been made to ascribe meaning to these works by examining their content, history, and legacy. For example, many different authors have studied *The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest* to understand how the painting generated meaning in its original historical context.³ Early scholarship suggested that these images, such as this

³ The historiography of the genre is discussed here in greater detail. Key studies include: S Speth-Holterhoff, *Les peintres flamands des cabinets d'amateurs au XVII siècle* (Brussels: Elsevier, 1957); Zirka Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing art in Antwerp, 1550-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-aware Image an Insight into Early Modern Metapainting* (London: Harvey

one, were faithful representations of every-day life.⁴ This has been disproven, as seventeenth-century Antwerp homes would have never contained rooms as large as the one in van Haecht's painting. Additionally, many gallery paintings do not show real collections, rather they depict an idealized one. These paintings were produced both on commission and on speculation for the open market, so painters would not always have had a model to faithfully record.

Zirka Zaremba Filipczak wrote one of the first monographs on these works and argued that van Haecht painted this work to pay tribute to his patron's, Cornelis van der Gheest's, actions as a collector.⁵ Collecting was an important practice all over early modern Europe and having a notable collection could garner social prestige. A decade later, Victor Stoichita suggested that it is only through an intertextual reading of the painting that one can understand its main aim; to emphasize the conversations and discussions that took place as connoisseurs decoded the visual meaning of a work of art.⁶ Stoichita believes that viewers of these images would strive to find links between the

Miller, 1997); Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Ariane Van Suchtelen and Ben Van Benden, *Rooms for Art in 17th Century Antwerp* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgeverij, 2009); Alexander Marr, "The Flemish 'Pictures of Collections' Genre: An Overview," *Intellectual History Review* 20, no. 1 (2010); Sven Dupré, "Trading Luxury Glass, Picturing Collections and Consuming Objects of Knowledge in Early Seventeenth-Century Antwerp," *Intellectual History Review* 20, no. 1 (2010); Michael John Gorman, *A Mysterious Masterpiece: The World of the Linder Gallery* (Florence: Mandragora, 2010); Annette De Vries, "The Hand of the Artist: Reflections on the Notion Of Technê in Some Antwerp Gallery Paintings by Frans II Francken and His Circle," *Intellectual History Review* 20, no. 1 (March 5, 2010); Lisa Rosenthal, "Art Lovers, Pictura, and Masculine Virtue in the Konstkamer," (*Midwestern Arcadia*, 2015); Lara Yeager-Crasselt, "Knowledge and Practice Pictured in the Artist's Studio. The 'art Lover' in the Seventeenth-century Netherlands," *De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in De Nederlanden in Interdisciplinair Perspectief* 32, no. 2 (2016).

⁴ S Speth-Holterhoff, *Les peintres flamands*

⁵ Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing art in Antwerp*, 49-58.

⁶ Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-aware Image*, 132-146

works in these fictive displays by drawing on their own knowledge of other artistic precedents. One of the most recent investigations was conducted by Ariane Van Suchtelen and Ben Van Benden for the first ever exhibition on gallery painting, *Rooms for Art in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp*. The authors highlight the documentary value of his work emphasizing the recognizable works in the image and linking his choice of subjects to the will of his patron.⁷ They suggest that it is possible van Haecht had little to no control over the content of his works.

Scholars have reached no consensus as to what the main function of the subgenre was. They have tried to link depicted collections to actual collections, patrons, or works of art. They have traced the rise and fall of the genre, both within Antwerp and internationally, trying to categorize and chronologize these developments. These paintings have been considered as objects of knowledge, as self-referential images crafted as a response to contemporary discourses on painting, or as representations of the real-life actions and pursuits of connoisseurs. Many methodologies have been used to try to learn how these images generated meaning within their original historical moment. These methods include semiotics, social history, economic history, and many more.

The purpose of this paper is to try to understand why these images arose and gained traction in Antwerp. Every exhibition, monograph, book, and essay, has acknowledged the primacy of Antwerp in giving rise to this subgenre of painting, but no

⁷ Ariane Van Suchtelen and Ben Van Benden, *Rooms for Art*, 37

one has considered at length why these images arose and gained traction in Antwerp.⁸ I examine the value, function, and meanings accorded to these works to elucidate the circumstances that fostered the development of gallery paintings within the rich economic, social, and cultural milieu of seventeenth-century Antwerp.

To understand the rise of gallery painting in Antwerp, I have used a multidisciplinary approach that mainly relies on semiotics, social history, behavioral economics, and art history. My primary aim is not to provide a *definitive* answer to the question “Why Antwerp”, but to consider the variety of different factors or influences that coalesced to precipitate the rise of this new subgenre. Gallery paintings maintained the same fundamental formal characteristics and continued to be produced and consumed across the century. This demonstrates their importance and cultural value and justifies this exploration.

I begin by examining these works within the framework of seventeenth-century discourse on authorship, originality, authenticity, and copies. The specific visual characteristics of an artist’s manner—the evidence of *his* hand in a work—were given increasing attention and notions of authorship began to determine the ways in which

⁸ In *Picturing Art in Antwerp* Filipczak provides a few sentences to answering this question suggesting that the “social climate” of Antwerp was perfectly suited to receiving these works. She cites the strong professional consciousness of artists, the extensive study and collecting of art by non-artists, and the association of painting with virtuous behavior and intellectual and gentlemanly pursuits. While she is not wrong in these assertions, I believe they are incomplete and warrant further elucidation. Filipczak, 73.; In *Rooms for Art* Van Benden and Van Suchten echo these sentiments, but also suggest the “continued strength of the guild system” influenced their creation, but again this is an incomplete assertion that requires further scholarly attention. Van Suchtelen and Van Benden, 18

works of art were valued.⁹ Theories of imitation, ideas first espoused in classical Greece, resurged in popularity during the Italian Renaissance and were eventually brought to Antwerp. These theories of creative and selective imitation provided artists with instruction on how to formulate their compositions. They were encouraged to look to nature as a model for their works, as the truly great artist was described as one who imitated nature so perfectly s/he was able to surpass it. At the same time, many artists and workshops began to work in the style of old masters, producing copies, forgeries, and pastiches of their most famous works, catering to a market that increasingly demanded derivative images. I examine how these seemingly contradictory ideas can help us understand gallery paintings, which assembled the specialized products of a variety of artists and artistic “hands” into one work. I suggest that it was due only to increased awareness and discussion of these theories of imitation that gallery paintings generated meaning to contemporary connoisseurs and collectors and emerged as a subgenre in Antwerp.

Next, I identify and describe the intended and ideal audience of these paintings, the *liefhebbers*, who formed a distinct and varied group in society known for their love of paintings. This elite class of connoisseurs shared a deep sense of civic pride in the art and artists of their city and delighted in using connoisseurship and their knowledge of the canon as a form of social currency. The demand for new and distinctive works by the *liefhebbers* fueled many innovations in the market and helped to change the ways works

⁹ My use of “his” is intentional. While there were female artists in seventeenth-century Antwerp I have not come across any evidence to suggest that women worked within this subgenre of painting.

of art were produced and discussed. Gallery paintings reflect these demands, and clearly speak to the intellectual preoccupations of the city. They include emulations and copies of the works most prized by collectors, while simultaneously portraying *liefhebbers* in a favorable and elevated manner. Gallery paintings had many different functions and could act as allegories, lessons on morality, allude to religion or classical antiquity, record a historical moment or collection, making them deeply encoded with visual meaning. This gave *liefhebbers* opportunities to deploy the language of connoisseurship to decode these meanings and flaunt cultural capital.

In the final section I consider what the artists could gain from crafting these highly discursive and self-referential pictures. I suggest that social, economic, and intellectual aspirations of artists in seventeenth-century Antwerp can all be viewed as motives for producing these works, through which artists could advertise their abilities as painters, curators, and inventors. Additionally, I analyze what it was about Antwerp that encouraged master artists to produce collaborative works. Both gallery paintings and high-level collaboration are traditionally associated with one specific moment in history: seventeenth-century Antwerp. The same evolving notions of authenticity, originality, and authorship that informed the production of gallery paintings also shaped the reception of collaborative works. By examining these two innovations in tandem, I aim to better elucidate the economic and cultural milieu that led to the development of gallery paintings.

While it is impossible to define what one work may have meant to one specific individual, through the breadth of images and writings available it is possible to infer

some of the different ways gallery paintings may have served the interests of viewers and artists. By situating these paintings within the emerging body of knowledge concerning authorship, originality, copies, and the changing status of the artist, I hope to start a discussion that considers what it could have been about Antwerp that allowed for the development of this subgenre of painting.

Historical Context

First, it is necessary to provide some basic historical context outlining the development of the art market and the commercialization of painting, because an examination of these historical conditions illuminates the social, cultural, and economic significance gallery paintings held to a seventeenth-century audience. Prior to the sixteenth century, the priorities and interests of Netherlandish visual culture were radically different, and painting did not hold the same level of cultural prestige or privileged status as in other areas of Europe.¹⁰ However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the primacy of painting was undisputed in Antwerp. Clearly, there was a radical shift in how paintings were discussed, valued, and appreciated by contemporaries. During this transition, notions of authorship, the prestige of collecting, and what constituted “good” art, began to develop. These ideas shaped consumer taste and preference while artists searched for ways to respond and give visual form to these new ideas. The cultural and artistic achievements of the sixteenth century continued to be

¹⁰ Burgundian nobles favored other rich and elaborate displays, preferring tapestries and other decorative items over paintings. For further information see: James Bloom, "Why Painting?," in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750*, by Neil De. Marchi, ed. Hans J. Van. Miegroet 17-34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 18

celebrated long after the century ended, due to deeply felt civic pride and nostalgia for this golden age of painting. These developments informed both how gallery paintings were viewed in the subsequent century and the conditions that fostered the development of the subgenre.

Key to the development of the market and the commodification of paintings was the rapid economic growth and development the city experienced in the sixteenth century. Antwerp became one of Europe's leading commercial centers, surpassed in size only by Paris, London, Venice, and Naples.¹¹ The city became an international crossroads as foreign merchants and traders flocked to the city to take advantage of its position as a major port on the banks of the river Scheldt.¹² The Portuguese made Antwerp the commercial hub of their spice trade, the English began to use it as the gateway to the East for cloth exports, and the Germans flocked to the city with pockets laden with silver to buy these newly available items.¹³ Antwerp became the leader in global trade.

Art became an important commodity in this new market for luxury goods and in Antwerp images became ubiquitous. They could be found in churches, guild halls, and private collections; even laborers and other workers of modest means owned cheap prints or small devotional images.¹⁴ Capital required to support the arts was readily available as merchants and traders grew rich. Commercial ties with remote destinations meant that

¹¹ Ronni Baer, *So Many Brilliant Talents: Art and Craft in the Age of Rubens* (Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, 2000), 11

¹² Filip Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerps Golden Age* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market*, 141

artists had access to exotic dyes and pigments, and global exchange gave artists the knowledge of the latest fashions and trends, helping them craft paintings to supply international demand. Scholars are unable to agree upon the exact mechanisms that led to the primacy of painting in Antwerp, but there is no doubt that images increasingly gained importance in the city.¹⁵

Production and demand for painting increased exponentially, and as a result, artists began to explore new methods to increase their creative output to improve their economic standing. Division of labor in paintings developed where portions of paintings were increasingly assigned to apprentices. Additionally, artists began to specialize in a specific type of painting, such as animals, figures, or backgrounds, allowing low-level artists opportunities to collaborate and produce more works. They used pattern books and models to replicate quickly successful compositions, which allowed artists to produce significantly more works for the open market. All these developments, while considered innovative in the sixteenth century, became integral to the production of painting in the seventeenth century.

It is also important to note that in addition to working in an unprecedented variety of styles and experimenting with new mode of production, Antwerp artists were

¹⁵ The emergence of a local interest and demand for *painting* in Antwerp is something that James Bloom investigates in his article “Why Painting?”. He suggests that the demand for painting in Antwerp was due to the direct influence of foreign art dealers and brokers who, in the fifteenth century, began traveling to the Southern Netherlands to procure paintings for export providing a “conspicuous model of consumption that directly affected the demand for painting amongst the Flemish elite”. Bloom, *Why Painting*, 29; Conversely other scholars, such as Filip Vermeulen suggest that there was massive domestic demand for painting as well framing the demand within the needs of religious and civic institutions as well as private collectors. Vermeulen, *Painting for the Market*.

developing what we now call different “genres” of painting.¹⁶ Landscapes, still lifes, scenes of daily life, and others, unknown in the early sixteenth century, became common place by the seventeenth century, forever changing European visual culture. The motivations behind these product innovations are complex but were in part a response to the tastes of consumers.¹⁷ Now that paintings were available for purchase on the open market, artists had to produce works that would attract buyers, rather than relying solely on commissions by patrons. The elite buyers demanded novelty, and innovation in pictorial form is one way artists responded to these demands.

As the market economy in Antwerp flourished so did standards of living, and with that booming economy came an increase in disposable income. The art market gradually became flooded with new buying options and choices for consumers, and as artists improved techniques for the mass production and distribution of their works, the prices of paintings dropped, making them available to broader segments of society.¹⁸ There was clearly an abundance of ready-made art in the city. Members of the middle class bought and displayed paintings in their homes, concentrating on hanging paintings in the public rooms of their houses, mimicking the practices of the higher classes.¹⁹ This required a

¹⁶ The origins and motives for the development of these new genres are complex. For further reading see Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006)

¹⁷ A product innovation, according to economist and historian J. Michael Montias, generates “either totally new products or products whose characteristics depart significantly from those known in the past.” J. Michael Montias, "Cost and Value in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art," *Art History* 10, no. 4 (1987): 456, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8365.1987.tb00268.x.

¹⁸ Antwerp houses 39

¹⁹ Martens and Peeters, *Paintings in Antwerp Houses*, 39

shift in the practices of the upper class as it constantly tried to demonstrate its superiority in virtue and taste.

To do this, the elite continued to collect art, but concentrated on works of “particular excellence”. It was not enough to simply own paintings, but now one had to own the right kind of painting. Excellence appears not to have been defined by iconography, but by price and through comparisons with nature.²⁰ This becomes clear when one analyzes a specific group of artists in Antwerp who worked parallel to the artists responsible for the mass production of inexpensive paintings. These were first-rate artists such as Quinten Metsys, Joachim Patinir, Pieter Bruegel, and Frans Floris who worked primarily on commission at the top end of the market. While they produced works in a variety of different styles and with a variety of different subject matters, they were all lauded for their ability to rival or even surpass nature through their meticulous and illusionistic representations.²¹ Their works commanded the highest prices and were the most sought after by the Antwerp elite.

Maximiliaan Martens and Natasja Peeters have suggested that this shift in consumption practices by the upper class could explain the appearance of the first large coherent private collections of paintings that began to appear in Antwerp in the 1560s, such as the collections of the Antwerp mintmasters Nicolas Jonghelinck and Jean Noirot.²² These collections consisted of works produced by some of the most highly

²⁰ Honig, *Picturing Art*, 190

²¹ Orrock, *Bruegel: Defining a Dynasty*, 15

²² *Ibid.*, 43

valued artists of the time, with an emphasis on local artists like Pieter Bruegel and Frans Floris. These large collections represent the beginning of the tradition of collecting that lasted through the seventeenth century and beyond, directly informing the content of gallery paintings.

The main reason why seventeenth-century collectors celebrated the innovative and artistic achievements of the sixteenth century is because by the time the sixteenth-century ended, Antwerp's the golden age of painting was over. There is no real consensus as to when exactly Antwerp's decline began, but in the 1560s it began to face economic and social difficulties.²³ There were food shortages in the city and grain prices skyrocketed. The English withdrew from Antwerp in 1563, no longer using it as their commercial hub, leading to widespread unemployment. The Dutch revolt began in 1566, and economic and social difficulties provided an excellent platform for the emerging Protestant churches to gain followers. Additionally, Antwerp experienced what scholars and sixteenth-century contemporaries refer to as the iconoclastic fury.²⁴ One of John Calvin's main teachings was that using images to aid in devotion was akin to worshipping false idols, and thus he decreed that a church should be "pure," or devoid of art to be used for worship. Many churches were destroyed, and images were ripped from their walls.

In 1576, enraged by the fact that they had not been paid for their service, the Spanish armed forces sacked Antwerp. The brutality and conquest lasted several days,

²³ Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market*, 109-116

²⁴ *Ibid.*

which resulted in the death of more than 8,000 people. It was widely considered to be one of the worst atrocities of the sixteenth century, and a blow from which Antwerp was slow to recover.²⁵ Spain continued to lay siege to the city, blocking off the river. In 1585, the Spanish, under Phillip II, regained control of the city, but many residents had fled to the Northern Netherlands, taking with them their knowledge, expertise, and capital.

While the effects of the civil war dealt a severe blow to the economy of Antwerp it did not destroy it. Domestic demand for works of art fell to an absolute low as people were more concerned with survival, but most branches of the artistic sector continued to produce and export luxury goods.²⁶ In addition, the merchants and traders who had fled the conflict stayed in touch with networks and mediators who did not flee, continuing to inform them of the needs of the foreign markets.²⁷ The city remained in an important geographic position for international trade, and continued to attract foreign merchants.²⁸ Many painters were still active and helped replace the religious images and altarpieces destroyed during the iconoclastic riots. The Catholic rulers of Antwerp demanded ecclesiastical repairs, and this stimulated artistic production. The arrival of newly appointed Archducal couple Albert and Isabella in Brussels sparked a substantial investment in works of art throughout the Southern Netherlands.²⁹ Soon after their arrival, a truce between the Northern and Southern Netherlands freed up funds that could be injected into the economy.

²⁵ Baer, *So Many Brilliant Talents*, 15

²⁶ Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market*, 111

²⁷ Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market*, 100

²⁸ *Ibid.*, and discussed in Dupré, “Trading in Luxury Glass”, 58

²⁹ Dupré, “Trading in Luxury Glass,” 114

Antwerp continued to thrive and rebuild as the seventeenth century progressed, but its economy and importance never again reached the heights it had during the sixteenth century. However, while Antwerp had relied on foreign talent and money to establish luxury trade in the sixteenth century, by the seventeenth, it had become a producer of luxury goods in its own right.³⁰ The product and process innovations developed by artists of the sixteenth century continued to inform the content and production of works of art in the seventeenth century. The city had a rich artistic heritage on which it could build, fostering civic pride. This eventually led to the formation of a canon of worthy artists, resolutely local in character, that directed the collecting practices of the Antwerp elite. These collectors, keen to emulate the practices of the Spanish noble court, encouraged the revival of artistic production, building up collections with ever increasing attention to authorship and artistic skill. The primacy of painting had survived the crash of the previous century, creating conditions that fostered the development and appreciation of gallery painting.

³⁰ Dupré, "Trading in Luxury Glass," 59

Chapter One

The Value of Authorship, Originality, Copies, and Invention

The painting and collecting practices of the sixteenth century helped to form the basis on which works were consumed, evaluated, and collected in the subsequent century, but they do not adequately explain the ever-increasing attention to authorship and style that foregrounded the development of gallery paintings. Sixteenth-century collectors had already begun to develop certain criteria for evaluating a work of art. These collectors lauded works that skillfully emulated or even surpassed nature, while the introduction and development of new genres provided artists with new ways of displaying their technical skills. A canon of worthy artists began to develop in the sixteenth century based on the works of first-rate local masters like Frans Floris and Pieter Bruegel. Before 1610 however, most collections contained few paintings that were attributed to specific artists, unless they were the works of these canonical masters, and were usually composed of only about thirty-five to fifty paintings.³¹ After 1610 we see a marked change as the size of the average collection shoots up to almost seventy, with nearly a third of them being attributed to specific artists. In addition, we now see paintings being labeled as copies or as collaborative works, something which had never appeared in descriptions of inventories in the sixteenth century.³²

³¹ Honig, *Picturing Art*, 190

³² Dupré, "Trading in Luxury Glass," 59

This demonstrates that while clearly there was cursory awareness of the importance of authorship in the sixteenth century, these notions really gained traction in the seventeenth century, and were expanded to allow for distinctions between originals, copies, and reproductions. Moreover, these ideas coalesced into a defined and agreed upon system for evaluating works of art, where different types or levels of copies, after or in the style of old masters, were assigned different merits, functions, and values and all found their place within the hierarchy of painting. This system was framed by the comparative worth of originals, copies, and imitations, ideas underpinned by emergent notions of authorship and invention.

Gallery paintings manifested at the same time as these ideas were being disseminated and talked over by collectors in Antwerp, and an understanding of these developments is integral to a successful and informed reading of the subgenre. It is due to the readily identifiable and attributable nature of the works produced in these fictive displays that gallery paintings were able to generate meaning. Copies, derivative images, and reproductions were common in the sixteenth century, but the way these reproductions came together and were recombined in gallery paintings was new. Additionally, theories of imitation and emulation, first explored by writers in Italy during the Renaissance, were introduced to the Southern Netherlands and discussed by contemporaries.³³ These

³³ Seventeenth-century Netherlandish writings used the same classical and humanist language as the Italians when discussing works of art even though they had differing views on what constituted authorship and invention. Karel van Mander highlighted the choice of subject and the arrangement of the composition as key to the “invention” of a painting Karel Van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters: From the First Edition of the Schilder-boeck (1603-1604) ; Preceded by the Lineage, Circumstances and Place of Birth, Life and Works of Karel Van Mander, Painter and Poet and Likewise*

theories informed the ways in which artists could “correctly” borrow and copy from their predecessors but were adapted and transformed to reflect local values directly influencing modes of artistic production. In this chapter I will examine how the taste for derivative images, which emerged in the sixteenth century, collided with newly emerging seventeenth-century notions of originality, authenticity, authorship, invention, and imitation, cultivating the conditions that led to the development and reception of gallery paintings.

Modern criticism has often commented on the remarkable demand for derivative imagery that began in Antwerp around 1550 and continued well into the seventeenth century.³⁴ Derivative images are those that directly transform, adapt, or modify another artist’s original work. Traditional scholarship derides derivative images, writing them off as imitative and without originality or uniqueness.³⁵ An oft cited example is the works of Abel Grimmer, who imitated Pieter Bruegel in small panel pictures produced quickly at low prices.³⁶ His images were simpler than Bruegel’s, as he used limited varnishing and subtle- to- no modulation in his landscapes. Grimmer also used formulaic repetition of stock motifs to produce his works quickly and efficiently.³⁷ These types of images

His Death and Burial, from the Second Edition of the Schilder-boeck (1616-1618), trans. Hessel Miedema (Davaco, 1996).

³⁴ Neil De Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet, "Uncertainty, Family Ties and Derivative Painting in seventeenth-century Antwerp," in *Family Ties: Art Production and Kinship Patterns in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Koenraad Bossen, Leen Kelchtermans, and Katelijne Van Der Stielen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2012) 62

³⁵ Discussed in Silver, *Peasant Scenes*, 190; and Alexandra Onuf, "From Print to Paint and Back Again: Painting Practices and Print Culture in Early Modern Antwerp," in *Prints in Translation, 1450-1750: Image, Materiality, Space*, ed. Suzanne Kathleen Karr. Schmidt and Edward H. Wouk (Abingdon: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

formed the bulk of works produced for export, but also enjoyed large-scale domestic demand. While they cannot be compared to works produced by masters, recent scholarship suggests that we should not write them off as low-quality paintings by uninventive painters. Instead, we should examine what their bulk production and consumption indicate about the ways in which images were produced, used, and exchanged.³⁸

One way to do this is to consider what the mass consumption of derivative or imitative works implies about the value of authorship in seventeenth-century Antwerp. Clearly authorship was important as artists were willing to copy or emulate the works of other master painters, but authorship was not always tied to the name of the artist executing the painting. For example, Abel Grimmer paintings were avidly consumed, not because they were by Abel Grimmer, but because they emulated the style of Pieter Bruegel. In a similar fashion, gallery paintings, although produced by affluent artists, rely on the styles and trade mark imagery of canonical masters to generate meaning. In both cases the paintings are prized not just for their aesthetic content, but for the recognizable and signature style of the original artists. This was clearly an acceptable and even economically encouraged practice in the seventeenth century.

Producing replicas of paintings was not a new practice as many artists produced copies of paintings in the sixteenth century. As time went on, successful compositions were imitated by lesser or fledgling artists.³⁹ Certain names soon became identified with

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*, xvi.

favorite subjects or characteristic forms, so that a certain “brand” or prototype image became readily associated with a specific artist. The earliest manifestation of this “brand name” imagery can be found in the hell scenes of Hieronymus Bosh, leading to the numerous copies and imitations of his style that flooded the market.⁴⁰ This trade in copying continued through the seventeenth century, and numerous paintings were bought and sold with the tacit acknowledgement that they were copies. In many cases collectors were more than happy to purchase a high-quality copy of a work if an original was not available, and sometimes patrons commissioned masters to paint identical copies.⁴¹ A master artist might produce an original and then make numerous copies after the original for the market while retaining the principal for future use. In most cases a copy would suffice just as well as an original, providing it was a faithful representation of the original.⁴²

The artist as inventor, originator, or “creative genius” is assumed in modern discourse, but while these notions had been discussed in artistic treatises in sixteenth-century Italy, they had not taken hold in Antwerp. Clearly notions of authorship were beginning to take shape, but they were linked to artistic reputation for commercial gain. We traditionally think of authorship as the invention and property of a single mind. While

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Annette De Vries, "The Hand of the Artist: Reflections on the Notion Of Technê in Some Antwerp Gallery Paintings by Frans II Francken and His Circle," *Intellectual History Review* 20, no. 1 (March 5, 2010) 82; While a more thorough examination of this phenomena can be seen in both Jeffrey M. Muller, "Measures of Authenticity: The Detection of Copies in the Early Literature on Connoisseurship," in *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions*, ed. Kathleen Preciado (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989) and Hans Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention: "Originals," "Copies," and Their Relative Value in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish Art Markets," in *Economics of the Arts: Selected Essays*, ed. Victor A. Ginsburgh, (Bingley: Emerald, 2008).

⁴² Ibid.

it is true that invention requires the mind and ideas of an individual as impetus, at that time the repeated and “trade mark” execution of that invention mattered far more than the initial invention itself. As Elizabeth Honig points out, this is the opposite of traditional Renaissance values where the “artist’s originating *idea* was the locus of value” and the way in which it was executed was “to some degree glossed over.”⁴³ Thus celebration or recognition of authorship relied on the name of the original inventor because he repeated and popularized a specific style. It was not, or not only, the “moment of genius” that gave birth to the style that mattered, but the reputation or status of that style. Copies and imitations could hold value even if they were executed by an inferior hand because they replicated a celebrated and recognizable mode of representation.

Problems arose however, when a painting masqueraded as something other than what it was. Artists began to try to capitalize on the successful styles and types of old masters by producing phantom copies or forgeries of old master paintings. Pieter Bruegel in fact began his artistic career by reworking images and painting in the style of Hieronymus Bosch. He designed prints for Hieronymus Cock in the 1550s and won initial recognition for his ability to recreate hybrid demons and biblical scenes. Bruegel sometimes replicated Bosch’s images and at other times crafted phantom copies.⁴⁴ He was marketed as Bosch’s artistic heir and was praised by contemporaries for the technical mastery and skill of his imitations.⁴⁵ Originals were scarce, since many masterpieces resided in the collections of the nobility or royalty, so it could be difficult to know

⁴³ Honig, *Painting and the Market*, 189

⁴⁴ Amy Orrock, *Bruegel: Defining a Dynasty* (London; New York: PWP, 2017) 15-25

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

whether an image was truly a copy or an original in disguise. This was a real problem; in Antwerp a 1575 decree forbade the forging and selling old master paintings.⁴⁶

This was a problem because of the ways in which paintings were evaluated. As I have said, in most cases a copy was just as likely to suffice as an original, but an original almost always sold for more than a copy.⁴⁷ There are numerous correspondences and records that outline the clear acknowledgement, among artists, collectors, dealers, and patrons, that a copy was not worth as much as an original. These opinions rested on the premise that a copy was inherently inferior.⁴⁸ An initial explanation suggests that there were differences in quality, but a master could craft a copy after his own original, and the copy would still sell for only a third to a quarter of the price of the original.⁴⁹ Clearly, technical mastery and authorship were not the sole factors that contributed to the value of an image.

Neil de Marchi and Hans van Miegroet have suggested that the price difference can be ascribed to the valuation of invention, an economic category they assert was not widely recognized until the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ The authors acknowledge the difficulty in separating invention from authorship, echoing the sentiments of Honig. They also highlight other mitigating factors such as scarcity and reputation. Regardless, contemporary language, contracts, and correspondence all seem to indicate that the

⁴⁶ De Marchi and Van Miegroet, "Uncertainty," 63

⁴⁷ Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention," and Muller, "Measures of Authenticity"

⁴⁸ See numerous different anecdotes to this affect in Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention," and Muller, "Measures of Authenticity" and Elizabeth Honig, "The Beholder as Work of Art: A Study in the Location of Value in Seventeenth-century Flemish Painting," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 46, no. 1 (1995)

⁴⁹ Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention," Introduction

⁵⁰ Ibid.

original, regardless of technique, is always the more valuable painting due to its perceived uniqueness. This strange interplay between originals, copies, and authorship is what gave rise to the bizarre phenomenon of originals being sold as copies. An unknown artist could craft an original but would make more money if he used the inventions and styles of a famous master painter and claimed it was a copy. This is because while originals were of higher value, the trademark invention of the initial author—the one who achieved fame and renown—was more valuable than the invention of an unnamed artist. Invention cannot be viewed as equal to creative genius however, as attribution only became common several decades after price distinction between originals and copies became accepted.⁵¹

Invention clearly won economic reward, but producing the right invention was neither always easy nor straightforward. As De Marchi and Van Miegroet explain, “viewing pleasure is sustained by just the right amount of visual challenge and by constant alteration in the nature of that challenge.”⁵² To achieve the “right amount” of challenge, an image needed to combine invention with legibility or accessibility. Decoding an image that was completely new, with no referent or allusion, could be too great a challenge. Artists needed to find a way to differentiate their products while still providing familiarity.

Artists employed and were taught numerous different ways to achieve this goal. During the Italian Renaissance, artists were encouraged to look to nature for inspiration,

⁵¹ Ibid., 30

⁵² Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Introduction," in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750*, ed. Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006) 1

perpetuating ideas first espoused in antiquity. By imitating nature, the artist sought not only to approximate the model, but to surpass it. This made originality dependent on comparison with the model, that is to say nature, or through distinction from that model.⁵³ The artists of the Italian Renaissance were praised for mastering this representation of nature so as time progressed, works of art began also to be viewed in relation to works of art from the past. Elizabeth Cropper explains that post-Renaissance artists were just as concerned with “inventing, disposing and ornamenting themes through illusive references as they were with the representation of the natural effects or the invention of new subject matter altogether.”⁵⁴ This technique became known as selective or creative imitation.

This process can be traced back to antiquity and humanist writers frequently likened the imitative pursuits of the artist to Seneca’s famous metaphor: the bee gathers nectar from the most fragrant flowers and transforms them all into honey. This means that while invention was part of what made a work successful it was dependent on summoning forth memories of other works as reference or comparison.⁵⁵ Vasari famously lauded Raphael as being the ultimate artist because he was able to combine and transform the various styles and achievements of other Renaissance masters into his own inventions.⁵⁶

While seventeenth-century Netherlandish writings on art do not associate invention with individual creative genius, invention is still discussed using the same

⁵³ Elizabeth Cropper and Agostino Carracci, *The Domenichino Affair: Novelty, Imitation, and Theft in Seventeenth-century Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 6

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jeffrey M. Muller, *Rubens: The Artist as Collector* (Princeton: N.J., 1989), 14

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

classical and humanist teachings. Karel van Mander highlighted the choice of subject and the arrangement of the composition as key to the “invention” of a painting.⁵⁷ A few decades later Franciscus Junius went a step further, insisting that correct choice of subject was dependent on having a classical education.⁵⁸ Rubens’s writings demonstrate that he thought in similar terms and urged artists to engage with the art of the past but urged them to make “judicious and discreet” choices when choosing referents because a poor or common example would devalue their own work.⁵⁹

Rubens’s activities as a painter and collector also help demonstrate one way creative imitation could be used in seventeenth-century Antwerp. When he died, Rubens had in his inventory at least 156 of his own paintings. Of these, 55, or over a third, were copies he had made after old master paintings.⁶⁰ These copies often varied from their models in significant ways, such as changing the color scheme, style of brushwork, or adding new details.⁶¹ More than mere copies, they represent a dialogue with the artists of the past, absorbing the model and transforming it into his own inventions. In some cases, he would retouch originals in his collection to transform them, but in other cases it was simply to restore them, requiring him to utilize different styles depending on which goal he was hoping to accomplish.⁶² In his home he displayed his own originals and copies alongside the works of other artists, in essence inviting visitors to compare his works to

⁵⁷ Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention," 32

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Muller, *Rubens*, 9

⁶⁰ Ibid., 15

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 16

those of other famous painters.⁶³ In his will, he stipulated that rather than selling the drawings he had collected or made by his own hand, they should not be sold but should be kept in case he had a son or son-in-law who wanted to become an artist he could follow Rubens's example.⁶⁴

In creating gallery paintings artists pick and choose from the works of a variety of masters and assemble them in new and inventive ways in a process like selective imitation. It is different in that within these fictive galleries artists are not simply imitating these masters to enhance or create their own style. They are directly copying or emulating the entire painting but putting it in a new context. The importance accorded to authorship in terms of style and reputation is what informed and accounted for their choices. Unlike Rubens, who would intentionally change the brushstrokes, color scheme, or composition when copying another artist, the painters crafting gallery paintings intentionally assumed the hand of the artist they were emulating, staying true to his form and invention. Comparison with Rubens however, demonstrates that different master artists were harnessing imitation in a variety of ways in seventeenth-century Antwerp. These masters were actively picking and choosing what they liked from prevailing ideas intentionally to forge their own artistic identities.

Copies and imitations clearly had their own distinctive place in sixteenth and seventeenth-century treatises on art, but the skills of attribution and the ability to distinguish between an original and a copy were the purview of connoisseurs. This was

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the same group of people who were most likely to favor an original over a copy.⁶⁵

Occasionally however, even these experts were unable to distinguish between an original and a copy. How then did this group deal with copies or imitations executed so well that they tricked the viewer into thinking they were originals, and where did they fall within the hierarchy of value ascribed to originals and copies?

Karel van Mander provides a most useful and illustrative anecdote that describes this very problem in his *Schilder-Boek* of 1604 in the biography of his friend and artist, Hendrick Goltzius. In 1594 Goltzius crafted a series of six engravings depicting the life of the Virgin, choosing to render each image in the style of a different old master.⁶⁶ *The Circumcision of Christ* (Figure 2) is one of the scenes he included, and the artist chose the style of Albrecht Dürer to pay homage to the master. After completing the series, Goltzius decided to play a trick and he burned away his self-portrait and monogram, manipulated the print to make it appear old, and then hoodwinked contemporaries into thinking it was an original print by Dürer.⁶⁷ Van Mander explained that “artists and experienced connoisseurs saw it with great wonderment and pleasure; some paid a high price for it, delighted to have secured a completely unknown print by the great Nuremberger.”⁶⁸ The author continues by arguing that in essence the *Circumcision* is a new work by Dürer, confirming Goltzius’s claim to the title of Proteus given to him in the dedication quatrain that introduced the original series of engravings. The quatrain composed by Schonaeus, engraved on the series’ opening plate, asserted “As Proteus

⁶⁵ Van Miegroet and Neil De Marchi, "Pricing Invention," 47

⁶⁶ Muller, "Measures," 144

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 146

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

transformed himself in the billows, seized by fond love for the beautiful Pamona, so by his mutable art Goltzius, astonishing engraver and inventor, alters himself wholly for you.”⁶⁹

Both Schonaeus and van Mander laud the artist for his ability to imitate so convincingly the hand of Dürer and other masters, thus demonstrating that copies can have value in their own right. By recasting his own hand as that of Dürer’s, Goltzius has chosen to ignore the adaptive models upheld by connoisseurs, and instead retains the integrity of Dürer’s style, recasting his own hand as that of the great master. While the point of *The Circumcision of Christ* was to deceive, that was not his main goal when he set out to craft this series. Goltzius is actively asserting that there is skill and value in being able to imitate so well and completely the style of another artist through his decision to craft his six engravings of the life of the Virgin after six different canonical masters. Certain authors and collectors even went so far as to suggest that if a copy was rendered so well it was capable of deceiving then it should be valued more than the original. Vasari outlined how Giulio Romano, assistant to Raphael, was deceived into believing that an image by Andrea del Sarto was a work by his former teacher. When confronted with the fact that it was a copy, the artist shrugged and said that he then appreciated it even more than the original “because it is extraordinary that one great artist should be able to imitate so well the style of another.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Walter S. Melion, "Cordis Circumcisio in Spiritu: Imitation and the Wounded Christ in Hendrick Goltzius's "Circumcision" of 1594," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 52 (2001): 32

⁷⁰Muller, "Measures," 144

This demonstrates that there were clearly different gradations or levels of copies, each with different merits, functions, and value. The works of Abel Grimmer were never mistaken for Bruegel originals, but they still found their place and function within the hierarchy of painting allowing those lower on the economic spectrum to possess, in a way, their own Bruegel. The imitations and copies made by Rubens served a different function as he worked to craft his own signature style and images through the incorporation and reworking of important Renaissance masters like Titian. While he borrowed compositions and iconography from other artists, he was never attempting to assume their hand. Instead, he aimed to invite favorable comparisons between his works and abilities and those of other canonical masters. Direct copies of famous paintings or artists, commissioned or produced for the open market, could “fill in” for originals when scarcity or demand overtook supply, and could even attain a value greater than the original if executed so skillfully as to deceive.

Gallery paintings appeared at a time when all these ideas, the value of authorship, originals, copies, imitation, emulation, and invention, were beginning to be firmly defined in Antwerp. A successful reading of these images required an understanding of this confluence of factors. All gallery paintings contain attributable images such that even twenty-first-century art historians can’t help but try to name the “artists” displayed in these fictive galleries. The faithful representation of multiple masters and recognizable works was possible and meaningful only because of the importance accorded authorship as defined by style and reputation. Price differentials favoring originals over copies demonstrate that invention had become an important and recognized economic category,

and artists used different ways to differentiate their works from those of their peers. In gallery paintings artists subscribe to the tenets of selective and creative imitation as the juxtaposition of works act historically to ground the composition, successfully recalling previous works and inviting comparison between the images of the past and their transfiguration into a new sub-genre of painting. Paradoxically, they invite this comparison through competitive imitation, directly copying or emulating entire compositions to showcase their abilities so masterfully to emulate not one, but numerous signature styles. This accomplishment creates a double-mediatory function for the viewer who must judge both the selection and ordering of subjects, in addition to the technical skill of their execution.

Clearly, the ways in which gallery paintings conveyed meaning were deeply engrained in contemporary discourse. An accurate reading of these images necessitated an informed viewer knowledgeable of this discourse and well educated in art history. The viewer also needed to be aware of the established canon of great artists, and required a specialized and discerning eye, one that could distinguish and appreciate the multiplicity of “hands” on display. The continued production of gallery paintings in Antwerp demonstrates that there clearly was demand for these works and an audience of such viewers. Artists would have continued production only if they were an economic success. This ideal and intended audience was a group of connoisseurs and collectors collectively known as *Liefhebbers* and their values, consumption practices, and specialized knowledge are the focus of my next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Intended Audience: The *Liefhebber*

The methods employed for interpreting and framing gallery paintings are varied and diverse, but one of the few things that scholars agree upon is that, generally the subgenre was developed for, and appreciated by, an elite group in society known as *liefhebbers der schilderijen*, or lovers of painting.⁷¹ The fact that these images were crafted for a specific audience is useful to my investigation primarily as it allows me to limit my analysis of reception to one social group. Historians have pointed out the difficulty in analyzing how works of art were received or discussed within a historical time period or place, as different groups of people respond to works of art in a variety of ways. As historians Bal and Bryson have pointed out, different viewers “bring to the image their own cultural baggage” and possess “different codes of viewing,” making it impossible to ascribe a singular meaning to a work of art.⁷²

My goal in this section is not to try and ascribe a fixed meaning to any one work, or even to the genre as a whole, but to define the multiplicity of meanings that gallery paintings may have signaled to this particular group. The paintings could act as allegories, as lessons on morality and good behavior, or record specific historical

⁷¹ For more information on the various iterations and definitions of the term *liefhebber der schilderijen* see Filipczak, *Art and the Market*, 47-57.

⁷² They discuss this when examining the various applications and uses of semiotics when applied to the study of art history. See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991)

moments or people. The ways in which paintings were “arranged” in these fictive rooms also affected the ways they were received by contemporary viewers. Focusing on the *liefhebbers* can help us understand the reasons for the creation and success of gallery paintings in seventeenth-century Antwerp.

Liefhebber was an official designation introduced to the registration categories of the guild of St. Luke, the artists guild, in Antwerp during the first decade of the seventeenth century, the same time that gallery paintings began to be produced.⁷³ The first person to register with the guild under this designation was innkeeper Peeter Peetersen in 1602, who was followed four years later by four more men, including art dealer Jan Cooymans and art collector Filips van Valckenisse.⁷⁴ A steady stream of people began to register with the guild. From art collectors and dealers to burgomasters and lawyers, people from all professions claimed official designation with no apparent reason other than to gain the official status that came with the recognition of the guild.⁷⁵

In the late sixteenth century, *liefhebber* was defined variously as a “lover, favorer, maintainer, patron or amateur of art.”⁷⁶ This group was usually not involved in dealing or trading pictures, but was more interested in the art itself and amassing collections.

Typically, art historical literature uses the term as a synonym for a connoisseur or

⁷³ Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, 51

⁷⁴ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 202

⁷⁵ The only people who sought out this designation were men as women were not given permission to register with the guild. Only as widows were women sometimes able to carry on their husband's occupation. Harald Deceulaer and Bibi Panhuysen, “Dressed to Work: A Gendered Comparison of the Tailoring Trades in the Northern and Southern Netherlands, 16th to 18th centuries,” in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation*, ed. Maarten Roy Prak, Jan Lucassen, Catharina Lis, and Hugo Soly (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Pub., 2006) 133

⁷⁶ Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, especially page 51 and 215

enthusiast of painting. By the early decades of the seventeenth century, the term implied both knowledge and actions. More than just an art dealer or collector, the term *liefhebber* came to describe a man with in-depth knowledge and learning about art.⁷⁷ Elizabeth Honig outlines some of the most significant abilities of these gentlemen: to make judgements about works as connoisseurs, to discern individual artistic hands, and to be able to engage in intellectual conversations about paintings.⁷⁸

This phenomenon was not limited to Antwerp as the inscription of *liefhebbers* into Dutch guilds, both in Haarlem and The Hague, took place a few decades later, in 1642 and 1656 respectively. As Lara Yeager-Crasselt points out, the situation was not very widespread: the guilds in Bruges, Ghent, and Brussels did *not* denote this separate category.⁷⁹ She suggests that this does not mean that other cities lacked the presence of a *liefhebber* culture, but that this is instead indicative of the difficulty in assigning meaning to this official status.⁸⁰

Recent scholarship has attempted to understand some of the motivations that may have caused an individual to register with the guild of St. Luke under this title. Angela Ho has recently outlined the motivations of the *liefhebber* within the Dutch context. She suggests that art collecting and connoisseurship became markers of social prestige. “Economic capital” could be turned into “cultural capital” through gentlemanly displays and conversations that demonstrated knowledge of the *right* kind of painting and

⁷⁷ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 202

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Lara Yeager-Crasselt, "Knowledge and Practice Pictured in the Artist's Studio. The 'art Lover' in the Seventeenth-century Netherlands," *De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in De Nederlanden in Interdisciplinair Perspectief* 32, no. 2 (2016):191

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 192

discerning taste.⁸¹ Honig states that these motivations were like those of the *liefhebber* in the Southern Netherlands. Collections of paintings flaunted social status not by being owned and displayed, but by being discussed. Talking in front of a painting and “wielding the language of connoisseurship” won social recognition.⁸² To earn the title, one had to continue to build up one’s art, be able to discuss the works at a high level, and be seen as a connoisseur of the arts.⁸³ It appears as if one of the primary motives for registering under this moniker was not direct economic gain, but rather to receive official recognition of knowledge and taste, which conferred status. In addition, the pursuits of the *liefhebber* were closely linked to interests in humanist learning, scientific knowledge, and the visual arts which were defining attributes of the cultured upper class across Europe.⁸⁴ By aligning his interests with those of royal and noble blood, the *liefhebber* was asserting his cultural pedigree.

While knowledge could be conveyed through letters and correspondence, the most effective way of displaying one’s intellect was through conversation. One of the main pursuits of *liefhebbers* was social interaction that allowed them to display and gain knowledge; this was accomplished in a variety of ways. Collectors would visit one another, and both host and guests would enjoy the opportunity to talk about the paintings on display. By the 1620s a routine had been established by those registered with the guild. In addition to paying dues they also paid *wijngelt*, wine money, to fund elite

⁸¹ Angela Ho, *Creating Distinction in Dutch Genre Painting*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 45

⁸² Honig, *Painting and the Market*, 206

⁸³ Rosenthal, “Art Lovers,” 1

⁸⁴ Ho, *Creating Distinction*, 40

gatherings of artists and collectors.⁸⁵ These were banquets that enabled new networks of commercial contacts and allowed for opportunities to exchange knowledge. In gallery paintings, we frequently see these conversations and displays of knowledge being reenacted, as finely dressed men and women engage with the works on display, such as in the *Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest* (Figure 1). The figures point to images and take them off the walls or kneel down for a closer look. This is typical as there are practically no gallery paintings that are devoid of people. Conversation was integral to the viewing and judging a work of art. Knowledge and connoisseurship became a vehicle of friendship and improved social standing, leading to the formation of a community with shared preferences and tastes.

An examination of seventeenth century inventories reveals the presence of an established canon of master painters, as certain artists were repeatedly included in almost all the notable collections formed by Antwerp's elite. These are the same artists who repeatedly appear in gallery paintings, while these same images frequently depict works "painted" by the same group of master artists. For example, *The Battle of the Amazons*, a painting by Rubens, features prominently in the background of *The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest* (Figure 1 and Figure 3). In a later painting, *The Art Cabinet of Nicolas Rockox*, painted circa 1630 by Frans II Francken, another Rubens, his *Sampson and Delilah*, features prominently over the fireplace (Figure 4 and Figure 5). This is because the basis of the canon of worthy artists was the important old masters of Antwerp's golden age, sixteenth century painters such as Frans Floris, Pieter Bruegel, and Quentin

⁸⁵ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 202

Metsys, coupled with a few and more select modern masters such as Rubens, Jan I Brueghel and Frans II Francken.⁸⁶ Honig points out the “resolutely local character” of this canon, explaining that, in marked contrast to contemporaries in other important civic centers across Europe, Antwerp’s culture of collecting was highly conservative. Antwerp collectors wanted Antwerp paintings by Antwerp masters, and primarily painters who were in some way related to the city were collected.⁸⁷ This is representative of a deep civic pride that must have been felt by members of the artistic community in seventeenth century Antwerp and perhaps also nostalgia for the artistic heyday of the previous century. As the century progressed it was only rarely that new painters were added to the list of accepted canonical masters.

Gallery paintings themselves featured regularly in major collections that subscribed to the collective taste defined by Antwerp’s *liefhebbers*. The painted collections on display almost always contained the signature works of these canonical masters. These paintings included floral still lifes by Jan Brueghel, rocky landscapes by Joos de Momper, histories by Frans Floris, church interiors by Pieter Neefs, battles by Sebastiaen Vrancx, and numerous other readily identifiable paintings and genres remade within these painted collections.⁸⁸ The palatial rooms seen in gallery paintings often featured tables covered with sculptures, prints, scientific instruments, and other implements of knowledge and learning, thus linking collecting and display to other

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 202

humanistic ideals. The presence of *liefhebbers* gesturing and discussing these paintings solidified this link.

Early scholarship on these works therefore suggested that these images were simple pictorial representations of what was taking place in the real world.⁸⁹ Zirka Filipczak denies this claim, demonstrating that these images are far removed from the reality they purport to depict.⁹⁰ The rooms in these galleries are far larger than the rooms that were in contemporary Antwerp houses. In addition, we know from inventories that it was common for paintings to hang in many different rooms on many different floors, rather than in grand halls or rooms that are common in gallery paintings. Also, the same exact paintings appear in different painted “collections.” For example, in the, *Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest*, (Figure 1) the painting does not record the way he displayed his collection; the artist “constructed” the room to do justice to his patron’s achievements as a collector.⁹¹

A few paintings depict actual historical rooms, such as *The Art Cabinet of Nicolaes Rockox* (Figure 4). The paintings on display hang in the large ground floor room of Rockox’s house, which still stands today in Antwerp and has been a museum since 1970.⁹² In the room hangs a sampling of Rockox’s renowned collection, with a painting by Rubens, *Sampson and Delilah*, prominently displayed over the mantelpiece, while the view through the doorway gives us a glimpse of another Rubens, *Doubting Thomas*.

⁸⁹ See one of the earliest monographs on gallery painting, S Speth-Holterhoff, *Les peintres flamands des cabinets d’amateurs au XVII siècle* (Brussels: Elsevier, 1957)

⁹⁰ Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp*, especially pages 58-61

⁹¹ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 202

⁹² Van Suchtelen and Van Benden, *Rooms for Art*, 27; and Rosenthal, “Art Lovers”

Also, on display is a diptych of *The Virgin and Christ* executed by Quentin Metsys, *St. Jerome* by Jan Sanders van Hemessen, and other examples of Antwerp masters displayed alongside his renowned collection of sculptures.

The fact that gallery paintings occasionally depict real rooms is one reason why gallery paintings have been misidentified as direct copies of reality. All these paintings have been recorded as being part of Rockox's collection, so it is tempting to think of the painting as a faithful record of his collection and its display, but this is unlikely to be the case. Further investigation shows that *Christ Doubting Thomas* never hung in his house, but instead is from a funerary chapel painted by Rubens in 1613. Inventory records reveal that the paintings by Metsys and van Hemessen hung in different rooms in the house, and that Rockox used three different rooms, as opposed to a single room, to display his collection.⁹³

Another discrepancy is the difference between the people who populate these galleries and their real-life counterparts. *Liefhebbers* were members of the bourgeoisie such as merchants, legal professionals, or members of the city government, but the painted *kunstkamers* emphasize only those of noble rank.⁹⁴ Carrying swords and canes, attributes usually associated with the nobility, in addition to being frequently accompanied by the Archducal couple, the *liefhebbers* in fictive galleries are almost always depicted as being of a much higher social rank than they were in life.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Filipczak first points this out in *Rooms for Art*, 53. Echoed by Honig, *Art and the Market*, 202

Filipeczak explains this disparity by framing these works as evidence of the desires of the *liefhebbers* for upward mobility and social distinction.⁹⁵ In addition to collecting, many *liefhebbers* made formal appeals for noble titles, while some illegally assumed titles and coats of arms. Lisa Rosenthal has highlighted the “aristocratization” of the Antwerp elite. She suggests that conspicuous consumption, such as the purchase and display of art, was an instrument of social distinction, and that “living like a noble could be the first step towards obtaining a [noble] patent”.⁹⁶ Thus the burgher class, much like their sixteenth-century counterparts, continued to strive for elevated rank and markers of status that would differentiate it from artisans, traders, and laborers. This time the burghers were imitating the Spanish nobility, which had settled in Brussels and was therefore not far removed.

Clearly then, these images cannot be taken as realistic depictions of collections of patrons, but it is equally clear that they represent some of the key concerns, aspirations, and actions of the *liefhebber*. The highly identifiable nature of the works of art in gallery paintings was clearly important to both the artist and the collector. The artist was able to demonstrate his versatility—his ability to paint in the style of multiple masters—thus arguing for his inclusion within the canon of Antwerp masters, while the connoisseur was able to demonstrate his knowledge and gentlemanly virtue by identifying the “authors” of the various works on display.

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Rosenthal, “Art Lovers,” 1

Identifying canonical masters was not the only action these paintings invited. Frequently the images had meanings and visual cues that only a gentleman, well versed in classical texts, religious doctrine, and contemporary discourse on painting, would understand. For example, usually the largest or most prominently displayed “piece” of art within these fictive galleries was not chosen arbitrarily, but instead directly contributed to the meaning of the work.⁹⁷

An example is the earliest securely-dated gallery painting, *Kunstkamer with Debating Scholars* (Figure 4), sometimes known as *Art Cabinet with Scholars Around a Globe*, which exhibits this trend and follows many of the conventions that appear in subsequent compositions.⁹⁸ The most prominently featured piece depicts the Queen of Sheba kneeling before Solomon out of respect and deference to his wisdom. This wisdom and discernment is mirrored by the scholars who are engaged in discussion while surrounded by instruments of science, but also mirrors the qualities a connoisseur must exhibit when choosing the works to add to his collection.⁹⁹ Only a viewer who is familiar with this biblical tale and contemporary discourse surrounding art collection and acquisition would understand the hidden message of the piece.

Sometimes artists would invent paintings or compositions based on familiar iconographical tropes to convey a moral message. One of the most frequently included examples is that of an ass-eared or animal-headed figure or group of figures that destroys

⁹⁷ Van Suchtelen and Van Benden, *Rooms for Art*, 100

⁹⁸ Marr, “Flemish Pictures,” 8

⁹⁹ Van Suchtelen and Van Benden, *Rooms for Art*, 100

paintings and other objects of art and learning. A quintessential example of this can be seen in the foreground of *Archdukes Albert and Isabella in a Collector's Cabinet* (Figure 6 and Figure 7). These images represent the stupidity and ignorance of the iconoclastic fervor that swept Antwerp in the previous century in direct opposition to both the Catholic church and the noble pursuits of the *liefhebber*.

The portrayal of the senses within the collector's cabinet also represented the link between courtly life, the culture of collecting, and the humanistic and intellectual values of music, science, and the arts. This is an example of gallery paintings acting as allegories. A pair of these impressive paintings was commissioned by the city of Antwerp as gifts to Albert and Isabella in 1618. Jan Brueghel oversaw their production. They were meant to represent the five senses, and twelve celebrated masters of the city were involved in their production¹⁰⁰ The original paintings have been lost, but a copy of the *Allegory of Sight* (Figure 9) hangs in the Prado and was probably painted after the original by Jan Brueghel in collaboration with Rubens. Sight contemplates an image of Christ healing the blind; this central image alludes to spiritual sight and physical sight, considered the most important of the senses since antiquity, and a necessary attribute for the discerning collector.

Both the allegories crafted for the Archducal couple and the copy made after them that hangs in the Prado were made through collaboration. This type of collaboration—cooperation between two or more master painters—is largely associated with Antwerp in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 28

the seventeenth century.¹⁰¹ Rarely, in any other moment or place, did masters engage in “high collaboration.” The result of this partnership was a painting that exhibited the distinct artistic “hands” and styles of multiple artists. If a painting by one master was considered desirable, then a painting by two or more must have been exceptionally so.

I will explain why this practice became popular in the next section of this essay, but for now it is enough to say that collaborative paintings were prized by collectors in seventeenth-century Antwerp. Whole pictorial genres arose thanks to this phenomenon, one of the most popular and easily recognizable being the Madonna or Saint surrounded by a flower garland – the joint invention of Rubens and Jan Breughel (Figure 10).¹⁰² In addition to being highly sought after, collaborative works featured disproportionately in gallery paintings. That they featured so prominently is probably because they provided the ideal opportunity for the *liefhebber* to display his knowledge by demonstrating an eye so discerning that he could pick out where the different masters hands appear in a work.

Gallery paintings could convey a wide variety of messages and meanings. They could be allegorical, historical, and/or instructive, and were executed for a multiplicity of reasons. What all these images have in common, is that they subscribe to the canon of good taste, they conform to the ideals surrounding gentlemanly behavior, and demonstrate the knowledge that was prized in seventeenth-century Antwerp. It is perhaps their ability to signal so many different meanings or readings that *liefhebbbers* found so appealing; a single image could be read in more than one way. Being able correctly to

¹⁰¹ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 177

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 185

read or decode the visual cues in these paintings allowed the viewer to demonstrate his cultural pedigree through his knowledge of antiquity, the classics, the canon, and through the differentiation of artistic hands. While these images did replicate the real-life actions of *liefhebbers*, they did so in a way that linked them to the nobility, portraying them in a favorable and complementary way.

Chapter Three

The Antwerp Artist as Author, Inventor, and Collaborator

In the previous chapter I discussed gallery paintings in terms of reception, analyzing the various socio-cultural and economic values that the genre could signal to the ideal viewer. These paintings clearly spoke to some of the main intellectual preoccupations of the age, signaling the merits of virtue, discernment, knowledge, and prestige. I have focused mainly on how these paintings were consumed, addressing how they conformed to the demands of the buyer and beholder. In this chapter I will shift from the consumer to the producer and examine the influences that encouraged artists to produce these works.

There were clearly very specific conditions that led to the production of these paintings as they were crafted to fulfill the needs of a specific audience, and there is no evidence that there was any one artist who painted *only* gallery paintings.¹⁰³ Even for Frans II Francken, the most prolific painter of these scenes, gallery paintings are only a small percentage of his oeuvre.¹⁰⁴ Far more numerous than gallery paintings are religious scenes, followed by historical, mythological, and then allegorical. Additionally, a wide

¹⁰³Artists in the Southern Netherlands tended not to “specialize” in one genre or type of painting in the same way as artists in the Northern Netherlands.

¹⁰⁴For an analysis of his output see Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp*, 62 and Natasja Peeters, “From Nicolaas to Constantijn: The Francken Family and Their Rich Artistic Heritage (c.1550-1717),” in *Family Ties: Art Production and Kinship Patterns in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Koenraad Brosens, Leen Kelchtermans, and Katlijne Van Der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012) 108.

range of artists contributed to the genre, including both Jan Brueghel's, Francken's sons and his brother Hieronymus II, Willem II van Haecht, Jan van Kessel, David II Teniers, and Adriaen van Stalbemt.¹⁰⁵ The number and range of artists who contributed to the development of the subgenre suggests that there were a variety of motivations and reasons an artist would choose to try his hand at painting his own "gallery".

The goal of this chapter is to investigate what some of these motivations must have been. To begin, I look at how artists chose to represent themselves and their craft within these fictive displays. Many examples of gallery paintings include representations of artists mingling with nobles, scholars, and art lovers or portrayed in portraits that adorn the walls. In other images the artist makes a phantom appearance through the inclusion of an easel, palette, brushes, or other items relevant to the painter's craft. It is with these self-reflexive representations that I will begin to analyze the presence of the artist, his hand and his likeness, to discern what the seventeenth-century artist chose to convey about himself to gain commissions at the top level of the art market. I frame these images within the context of seventeenth-century discourse concerning the status of the artist, and new or evolving contemporary attitudes towards the act of painting.

In the next section I examine collaboration, because gallery paintings were frequently produced through collaborative efforts; gallery paintings frequently featured collaborative paintings; and both gallery paintings and collaborative paintings were prized by the *liefhebbers*. Collaboration is frequently tied to this emerging body of

¹⁰⁵ Marr, "Flemish Pictures," 1.

collectors, as it was their acknowledgment of the importance of authorship that enhanced the market value of these works.¹⁰⁶ Even when these images are not collaborative, the final product still references a gathering together of different artistic styles and brush strokes. Gallery paintings almost masquerade as collaborative paintings as the artist must assume the “hand” of many masters successfully to depict the range of genres and objects in these paintings.

The most compelling reason to study the origins and developments of collaboration is that, just like gallery painting, it is most strongly related to one specific place and time: seventeenth-century Antwerp. Both collaboration and gallery paintings are informed by the same concepts of originality, authorship, and value. By investigating the development of collaboration as a novel form of production, my hope is to better understand the development of the equally novel and subgenre of gallery painting. I am not suggesting that the two have a directly causal relationship, rather that there is value at examining their development in tandem.

The Artist in Gallery Painting

The goal of the seventeenth-century artist was to redefine the professional activities of the painter to conform to the Italian ideals of the Renaissance. According to Filipczak, gallery paintings give form to those intellectual aspirations. She begins her book by stating, “Between 1550 and 1700 Antwerp painters produced a phenomenal number of pictures that refer to their own profession.” She asserts that “no previous

¹⁰⁶ Silver, *Peasant Scenes*, 9

European artists had so often made works of art and their manner of production the subject of their own painting.”¹⁰⁷ The self-reflexive nature of art produced during this period in Antwerp is her main focus as she examines how artists tried to change their position within the social hierarchy, and assert that painting was not a mechanical craft, but instead should be upheld as a liberal art. To Filipczak, gallery paintings were a product of this drive, since the focus of a gallery painting is the “paintings” within them. These pictures are finished, framed, and on display, collectively creating a positive self-referential image. What this did was link paintings, and those who produce them, to the pursuit of knowledge and display of intellect that took place within real *kunstkamers*.

Numerous images demonstrate that Filipczak is correct in asserting that artists were trying to improve the social status of painting. A prime example is *The Linder Gallery Interior* (Figure 11).¹⁰⁸ In the center of the image sits an old man, while a young woman leans back and rests her head upon his knee. The man is probably an allegorical representation of *Disegno*, drawing or design, while the female figure has been identified as an allegory of paintings, evidenced by the palette, brushes, and maulstick in her hand and lap.¹⁰⁹ The suggested interpretation of this image is “‘the Arts and Virtue rest on Design’, where design encompasses both mathematics and astronomy.”¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁷ Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, 1

¹⁰⁸ This painting was not examined by Filipczak in her book. I chose it intentionally to demonstrate that even images she did not explicitly mention still exemplify these characteristics.

¹⁰⁹ Michael John Gorman, *A Mysterious Masterpiece: The World of the Linder Gallery* (Florence: Mandragora, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Also the fact that there is a personification of painting is important. Prior to the mid-sixteenth century no personification of painting had been produced in Antwerp as it was not considered an important enough subject to merit personification. By the seventeenth century it became a common place practice which does demonstrate that the status of painting was beginning to change and the intellectual skill necessary to produce paintings was being acknowledged. Filipczak, *Picturing Art*

relationship between the two is further emphasized by the intermingling of scientific instruments, such as the globe, compass, and drawn diagrams, with objects of art, such as the drawings and portrait medallions.¹¹¹ Scattered upon the other tables are more objects of knowledge, while paintings hang on the wall, almost all of them identified and attributed to Flemish artists.¹¹² A final reference to painting can be seen through the inclusion of *Apelles Painting Campaspe* (done in the style of Joos van Winghe), whose portrait of Campaspe was so beautiful that Alexander the Great is said to have been willing to give up his mistress to the painter and take the portrait in her place (Figure 12).

There are merits in asserting that painters were actively striving to improve their social standing. Being a painter did make it difficult for one to attain respect at the upper levels of the social scale, to the point that even Rubens grappled with his lowly status as a painter. In a letter to his friend Peiresce, Rubens wrote that he “married a middle-class girl in order to not be ashamed whenever she saw him work.”¹¹³ As he was widely considered to be one of the best painters of his generation, this comment is even more revealing of the struggle for status and recognition of artists in seventeenth century Antwerp. Rubens rose through the ranks at the Hapsburg Court, but he continued to face prejudice. Philip IV has famously been recorded as decrying Rubens’s status as a diplomat, objecting to the fact that he was being represented in England by a mere

¹¹¹ Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, 15

¹¹² Gorman, *A Mysterious Masterpiece*, 5

¹¹³ De Vries, “The Hand,” 85

painter, although he was clearly overruled by his aunt Isabella, who made the appointment.¹¹⁴

There are however, problems with Filipczak's assertions; not all the actions of painters nor their patrons reflect the ideas espoused by Italian Renaissance writers. As I have demonstrated, traditional Italian humanist notions of authorship do not fit entirely with modes of production, nor with the collecting practices of the Antwerp elite. Most sought-after were works that were crafted by multiple hands, and most collectors were happy with paintings that had been "touched up" by master artists. These practices contrast with the Italian Renaissance ideal of a single artist as creative genius exemplified through his designs, and demonstrate that developments regarding the aspirations of the artist in Antwerp need to be considered in a way that is more nuanced and in keeping with Northern developments. Filipczak also claims that artists stopped adding visual allusions to the nature of their craft, such as brushes or easels, to remove the "stigma of manual work for profit" and to distinguish themselves from other artisans who worked with their hands.¹¹⁵ Anette de Vries has convincingly shown that this is not the case, and that artists *intentionally* included references to the manual side of their profession to highlight the artist as maker, and by extension this hand, to "make more explicit the wonders of their craft."¹¹⁶ Returning to *The Linder Gallery Interior*, this more nuanced

¹¹⁴ R. Malcolm Smuts and Luc Duerloo, "Occasio's Lock of Hair: The Artist and the Ruler in Pursuit of Opportunity," ed. R. Malcolm Smuts, in *The Age of Rubens: Diplomacy, Dynastic Politics and the Visual Arts in Early Seventeenth-century Europe*, ed. Luc Duerloo and R. Malcom Smuts (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016) 8

¹¹⁵ Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, 11-18

¹¹⁶ De Vries, "The Hand,"

argument allows for a unified reading as Painting does in fact hold the manual attributes of her craft and Apelles is pictured actively painting. In addition, Anette de Vries provides numerous examples of gallery paintings that allude to the manual nature of the painter's profession, effectively countering Filipczak's argument.

Regardless, artists were clearly attempting to portray themselves as talented and learned men deserving of recognition in society. In *The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest* Van Hecht has made this point: a richly dressed Rubens stands in front of the Archducal couple gesturing to a Madonna by Quentin Metsys.¹¹⁷ Another illustrious painter, Anthony van Dyck, is given a prime position behind their host, van der Gheest. In addition, the group of six men in the right-hand corner of the painting contains at least three painters—Frans Snyders, Hendrick van Balen, and probably Jan Wildens—and they are all pictured in the pose traditionally associated with the personification of geometry: holding a compass over a terrestrial globe.¹¹⁸ Clearly these men are more than simple craftsman, given their company and implied intellect. I believe this was not simply because they wanted painting to have an elevated status, but because there were economic benefits to being perceived as a gentleman.

As Michael Montias, Neil De Marchi, Hans Van Miegroet , and other economic art historians have shown, painters were forced to become economic agents; they had to sell the “products of their labor, and the demand for their products reflected the

¹¹⁷ This is a rare example of an image that displays an actual collection and real people although the architectural setting has been fabricated.

¹¹⁸ Only three of the figures in this group have been identified thus far. Filipczak, *Picturing Art*, 114

preferences and purchasing power of collectors.¹¹⁹ The only way an artist could be deemed successful economically was by selling paintings for more than they cost to produce. Artists needed to find patrons, win commissions, or successfully sell their works on the open market, and one of the most effective ways of doing this was through courtly or wealthy patronage. During the seventeenth century, consolidation and demonstration of power relied heavily on the arts. Rulers and other members of the wealthy elite recruited artists to convey their power by producing portraits that extolled their greatness and by crafting images to be exchanged as acts of diplomacy. By the 1620s, collecting had become a competitive activity as rulers and nobles vied with one another to amass the largest collection of prestigious works.¹²⁰ By maintaining contacts amongst the wealthy, acting as accomplished connoisseurs, and through courtly manners and dress, artists could secure lofty commissions. More importantly, they could carve out a niche for themselves through their painterly abilities paired with the cultural knowledge they displayed.

We see this union between the aspirations of the artist and the demands of the court and collector in gallery paintings. As the previous section has demonstrated, gallery paintings met the demands of these elite collectors in Antwerp as non-artists became more and more involved in the study and discussion of art. These amateurs prized discernment, the display of knowledge, and an appreciation for and pride in the “great”

¹¹⁹ Neil De Marchi and Sophie Raux, "Introduction," in *Moving Pictures: Intra-European Trade in Images, 16th-18th Centuries*, ed. Neil De Marchi and Sophie Raux (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014)

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¹²⁰ Smuts and Duerloo, "Occasio's Lock of Hair," 5-8

artists of Antwerp. All these attributes are pictured in these fictive displays. This is not a coincidence, as artists were aware of what collectors wanted through the banquets organized by paying *wijngelt*, visits by *liefhebbers* to their studios or workshops, discussions with other artists, dealers, and contacts within their social networks, and through contemporary publications such as Van Mander's *Schilderboek* and Van Dyck's *Iconography*. Artists were therefore able to shape perception of their craft by dictating the visual form that these demands could take. To be sure, something that was too unconventional, wild, or unfamiliar most likely would not sell, but subtle references to their intellectual and technical prowess could help change the perception of the artist as craftsman and elevate him to something more, even in images that were commissioned to depict specific collections.

Some of the artists who produced gallery paintings, such as William van Haecht and David Teniers, were hired specifically to curate private collections. When one looks at a gallery painting there is always a measure of order and balance between the paintings and the other objects such as sculptures, architectural features, and scientific instruments. It has been suggested that possessing a collection of masterpieces was not enough to win acclaim. One had also correctly to display or order one's collection.¹²¹ For example, Rubens was given the task of reorganizing the Gonzaga collection while he was working for the Duke in Italy. When Charles I purchased a large portion of the same collection

¹²¹ Raffaella Morselli, "Rubens and the Spell of the Gonzaga Collection," in *The Age of Rubens: Diplomacy, Dynastic Politics and the Visual Arts in Early Seventeenth-century Europe*, ed. R. Malcolm Smuts and Luc Duerloo (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016) 34

after the Duke's death, the artist was called to London to replicate the original display.¹²² Charles I clearly recognized that the value of the collection lay not only in the pieces it included, but in the way proper arrangement could reveal the connections between the works.¹²³ Great collectors needed great displays.

Artists could display their abilities and knowledge through the curatorial choices they made when crafting gallery paintings. While gallery paintings did not depict actual collections, they were modeled on the "ideal" collection. Many of the works featured in these paintings would not be present in an actual collection. There would however be similar works, and at least some of the same artists, in almost any prominent collection. By demonstrating his abilities to make meaningful connections between works in a painting, an artist could attest to his prowess at "displaying" works to their best advantage.

Lastly, gallery paintings provided artists with the opportunity to demonstrate versatility and advertise their skill at rendering all different types and styles of images, which were meant to be readily identifiable. As Honig has explained, the artist became "another Proteus, assuming the recognized styles of every great artist and inventing their works in miniature."¹²⁴ An informed viewer with a discerning eye would have been able to identify the different styles and artists being emulated in a work. Even when the images were produced collaboratively, artists were still able to demonstrate their

¹²² Ibid., 33

¹²³ Ibid., 34

¹²⁴ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 204

individual skill, humanist intellect, and knowledge of the canon, as these same viewers could identify the authors of each “painting”.

In a world where art was becoming increasingly important, it behooved the artist to display his cultural pedigree and advertise his talents. It is not surprising that the successful artist tended to be a well-travelled man with broad contacts and courtly manners. Rubens is the most spectacular example of how an artist gained access to high society, having not only worked for the Archducal couple but also with kings, queens, and nobles all over the world. Other artists too, such as Anthony van Dyck, could count monarchs and courtiers amongst their patrons and friends.¹²⁵ It is not surprising that some of the most prodigious producers of gallery paintings also were linked to famous names in society. David Teniers was the court painter and curator of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, and Jan Brueghel was named “painter to their Royal Highnesses” in the court of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella and was a lifelong friend and correspondent of Cardinal Federico Borromeo.¹²⁶ People wanted to buy the works of successful artists, and the most successful had the most elite contacts and patrons.

The artists and patrons I have examined in this section were at the top tier of society and are not reflective of the average artist or consumer in seventeenth-century Antwerp—but this is intentional. These paintings were firmly rooted in the aspirations and the activities of the upper class. While some of these gallery paintings were produced for the open market, in many cases space was left on the canvases with the intent of

¹²⁵ Smuts and Duerloo, “Occasio's Lock of Hair,” 6.

¹²⁶ Orrock, *Bruegel: Defining a Dynasty*, 10

customizing them for the buyer.¹²⁷ Coats of arms and other identifying markers would be added to extol the “patron” of the works depicted, demonstrating that even works made on speculation were produced for a discerning buyer who knew how to acquire cultural capital. In addition, most of the artists who produced these works were master artists who would certainly have been recognized by name. The world in which these images were consumed was the world of the elite, and it is only by framing them within the top tier of the social hierarchy that the reasons for their production can be understood.

Clearly gallery paintings *did* relate to the intellectual aspirations of the artist, but I believe they also represent their economic aspirations which were closely linked during this time period. There was much to be gained from crafting these images. Artists could meet the demands of the market by creating new inventions that would win initial economic success because there was an audience interested in purchasing these works. Additionally, these images provided them with an innovative way to demonstrate their abilities as painters, able to produce a variety of genres and styles of image. By extolling their virtues as gentlemen and advertising their abilities as curators, artists could also gain commissions, patrons, and ensure further economic success. Artists in Antwerp shared the goals of fame and economic success with their counterparts in other European cities, but, the way they worked to achieve them relates directly to the concerns and demands of the market for painting in seventeenth-century Antwerp.

¹²⁷ Marr, “Flemish Pictures”

Collaboration

Gallery paintings were a totally new and innovative form of painting that deviated significantly from images produced and exchanged within the previous century. This was just one of the many innovations that can be ascribed to Antwerp. By the seventeenth century the city had become known as a leading center of innovative painting-related products, such as painted musical instruments, art cabinets, and collaborative paintings.¹²⁸ As art historian and economist Michael Montias has pointed out, “Innovations of all sorts... tend to flourish when information flows freely and copiously between and among potential innovators.”¹²⁹ While travel, access to notable collections, and contact with dealers facilitated this information exchange, in many cases it can be difficult to determine the exact mechanisms by which information was transmitted.

In Antwerp, however, we see masters actively working together to produce works of art through collaboration, allowing historians to be certain of one mechanism of information exchange. Collaboration, as a mode of production, required the free flow of information between masters. Elizabeth Honig has outlined the motivations behind artistic collaboration. She suggests that when they worked together to execute the different aspects of a scene, “specialists” could spur innovation, experiment with a wide variety of pictorial effects, and enhance narratives in one another’s work.¹³⁰ It allowed for artistic experimentation, which frequently led to innovation. Whole pictorial genres

¹²⁸ Katlijn Van der Stichelen and Filip Vermeulen, “The Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke and the Marketing of Painting 1400-1700,” in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe, 1450-1750* ed. Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, 189-206. (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2006), 190

¹²⁹ Montias, “Cost and Value,” 457

¹³⁰ Honig, *Art and the Market*, 177-189

Figure 10), arose out of these partnerships and, as Honig points out, this cooperation and artistic exchange became a viable alternative to personal competition as a creative stimulus.¹³¹ These efforts were clearly successful as collaborative images were highly desirable. According to Honig, they were considered “the best, the ultimate, the epitome of local art.”¹³² Artists in Antwerp clearly recognized the benefits of working together or of “information flowing freely” as a catalyst for innovation.

The merits of collaboration have been thoroughly explored, but why collaboration between masters developed in Antwerp specifically has received little attention. Not only was collaboration between masters in other cities rare, but contemporaries elsewhere derided Antwerp masters because they collaborated. Joachim von Sandrart for example, a German-born writer living in Amsterdam, warned masters against collaborating saying, “too many cooks spoil the broth.”¹³³ Initially even Rubens, as a young man in Italy, believed that collaboration could threaten his artistic identity, and yet upon returning to Antwerp he became not only the city’s greatest artist but also one of its greatest collaborators.¹³⁴ Clearly something about the artistic environment in Antwerp changed his mind.

If the exchange of information is what leads to innovation, then the cultural milieu that led to the formation of an artistic community that encouraged and rewarded

¹³¹ I have already mentioned the Brueghel and Rubens flower and saint collaboration but Honig mentions others specifically market scenes which are the focus of her book.

¹³² Other authors have touched on collaboration, but Honig is generally credited with asserting that the market value of a painting was enhanced and increased when it featured the hand of two or more artists. Honig, *Art and the Market*, 177-189

¹³³ Van der Stichelen and Vermeylen, “The Antwerp Guild,” 183

¹³⁴ Ibid.

cooperation requires examination. Collaboration is not only a result of this exchange, but also a mechanism for it. Thus, it is worth trying to understand what about Antwerp specifically led artists to collaborate, and this may help us understand the conditions that led to innovations such as gallery paintings. I posit that the institutional structure of the guild system, the decreased need for artistic competition, and the importance of social networks between artists, were crucial to the bonds of camaraderie and cooperation between artists. The rest of this section is devoted to the evidence for these assertions.

As Katlijne Van der Stichelen and Filip Vermeulen have pointed out, it is impossible to give a full account of the development of markets for paintings in the Netherlands without examining the roles of guilds. Guilds were organizations of craft workers who specialized in a particular occupation, and most guilds were primarily associations of masters.¹³⁵ Their main functions were twofold: they regulated the quality and number of works produced and they were a monopoly against outsiders. Dedication to quality and production control helped curtail competition between members of the same guild, which furthered the economic gain of its members. While guilds all had the same objectives, they varied widely in their practices, and at times even guilds in the same city occupied highly variable economic, social, political, and cultural positions.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Some guilds accepted journeymen and others were formed of only journeymen in situations where there were no masters (peat-porters or heavers). Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, "The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds in the Low Countries, 1000-1800," in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation*, ed. Maarten Roy Prak, Jan Lucassen, Catharina Lis, and Hugo Soly (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Pub., 2006) 32

¹³⁶ Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, "Craft Guilds in Comparative Perspective: The Northern and Southern Netherlands, a Survey," in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation*, ed. Maarten Roy Prak, Jan Lucassen, Catharina Lis, and Hugo Soly (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Pub., 2006) 2

The guild that regulated artistic production in Antwerp was the Guild of Saint Luke. Established in 1382, it counted among its earliest members goldsmiths, sculptors, painters, glass makers, embroiderers, and various other artisans, and was responsible for organizing production and training of talents.¹³⁷ Beginning in 1442, the guild required all artists to register as members and to pay annual dues. To protect the livelihood of their members they tried to limit the supply of various products and impose quality controls on goods produced for sale by members. As the years went by registration increased. By the middle of the sixteenth century close to 50 different professions could be counted amongst the newly enrolled members.¹³⁸ Throughout the sixteenth century, most members were painters, which explains why the guild is sometimes referred to as the guild of painters, but some individuals whose profession had nothing to do with art joined the guild. For unknown reasons at one point a herring salesman, a seller of pens, and a pastry baker became some of the strange additions to the registrar during the last decades of the century.¹³⁹

This “all inclusive” membership policy differentiated the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke from those of other artistic centers in the Southern Netherlands, such as Bruges and Brussels.¹⁴⁰ In Brussels, sculptors and painters belonged to two different guilds, which meant that disputes between the two were not uncommon and there was not a streamlined production process when a sculpture or carving required the finishing touches of a

¹³⁷ Van der Stichelen and Vermeylen, “The Antwerp Guild,” 190.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Vermeylen, *Commercialization of Art*, 129

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 137

painter. In Bruges, the pattern was similar: artists were separated by technique and medium, preventing cross over between artists and skills.¹⁴¹

In Antwerp the fact that painters, sculptors, furniture makers, art dealers, and members from all different professions were members of a single organization facilitated collaboration, and there were other advantages to this method of organization.¹⁴² As Vermeulen and Van der Stichelen describe it, “If division of labor, subcontracting, and collaboration could all occur within a single guild, transaction costs... must obviously have been lowered.”¹⁴³ De Marchi and Van Miegroet have also noted that when guilds were open to the idea of cooperation across skill categories, it led to a series of marketing experiments and the development of novel products. They even go as far to suggest that the mechanism by which the guild operated in Antwerp directly helped create a tradition of picture making in Antwerp that was based on collaboration and the division of labor.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the guild organization in Antwerp fostered a culture of collaboration. Artists already familiar with it profited from working together on projects that stimulated the production of new and innovative products. Gallery paintings represent just one of the product innovations that came out of this cultural milieu.

The long-standing tradition of artistic “dynasties”—families of masters who set the tone for the local art world—further contributed to a culture of cooperation and

¹⁴¹ Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Rules versus Play in Early Modern Art Markets,” *Recherches Économiques De Louvain / Louvain Economic Review* 66, no. 2 (2000), 147

¹⁴² Vermeulen, *Commercialization of Art*, 137 and Van der Stichelen and Vermeulen, “The Antwerp Guild,” 192

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ De Marchi and Van Miegroet, “Rules versus Play,” 148

friendship amongst artists. Family members would work together, but artists, too, formed relationships with one another that became more than just business partnerships. They were at one another's weddings, acted as godparents to each other's children, and the children of artists often married each other. Artists frequently lived in the same areas of the city, which facilitated collaboration by minimizing the distance paintings would have to travel between shops.¹⁴⁵ Even contemporaries remarked on the importance of social relationships. Karl van Mander frequently details the relationships of artists in his *Schilder-Boek*. He emphasizes relationships and contacts between colleagues and their families, suggesting they had direct influences on the painter's performance work or social life.¹⁴⁶ These collaborative circuits also enabled artists to expand and maintain their social networks, the importance of which I have demonstrated in the previous section.

Finally, there was considerably less competition between artists in Antwerp for patrons and commissions than in other cities and provinces in the Netherlands. Honig has asserted that this was due to the size and dominance of Rubens's workshop, since it absorbed much of the excess talents in the city.¹⁴⁷ The dominance of Rubens, however, is not the only factor that reduced competition.

¹⁴⁵ De Marchi and Hans Van Miegroet, "Uncertainty", 39

¹⁴⁶ In her article Hissel Miedema's purpose is to demonstrate that Van Mander rarely makes mistakes about something that he considers important saying that "this is particularly true about the relationships between painters, be they family ties, apprenticeships or of other nature" Hessel Miedema, "Kinship and Network in Karel van Mander," in *Family Ties: Art Production and Kinship Patterns in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Koenraad Brosens, Leen Kelchtermans, and Katlijne Van Der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012)13. I rely on the evidence that she provides in this article for my assertions.

¹⁴⁷ Honig, *Painting and the Market*, 184

Economic historians have spent the past few decades giving increasing attention to the economic forces that have driven artistic innovations, markets, and international trade networks. A recent study by Neil De Marchi, Sandra Van Ginhoven and Hans J. Van Miegroet examined the supply-demand imbalance within the Antwerp market for painting in the seventeenth century. Looking specifically at data from 1630 to 1680, they show that while paintings were in “over-supply,” the price for paintings never seemed to decline. This is unusual because ordinarily an oversupply of any good lowers prices.¹⁴⁸ Not only did prices remain steady, but a remarkable number of artists owned or could afford to rent property in upmarket areas of the city. A wealth assessment conducted in 1659 shows that the average tax levied on artists was twice the median for the city, and so generally, artists fared well.

How were they able to maintain such high standards of living with such a surplus of goods? Paintings in excess of local demand were exported to markets all over the world through networks that were established by local artists and dealers after the market crashed in 1585. There is substantial evidence that many surplus paintings left Antwerp and appeared in places like Italy and Paris.¹⁴⁹ Competition was nowhere near as fierce in a city such as Antwerp, a net exporter of paintings, as it was in such places as Amsterdam, a net importer of paintings.¹⁵⁰ Artists still had to win commissions, but it

¹⁴⁸ Neil De Marchi, Sandra Van Ginhoven, and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Supply-Demand Imbalance in the Antwerp Paintings Market, 1630-1680," in *Moving Pictures: Intra-European Trade in Images, 16th-18th Centuries*, ed. Neil De Marchi and Sophie Raux (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014) Especially 38

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

appears that competition was far less cutthroat in Antwerp than in the cities of the north. Across the fifty years examined in De Marchi's, Van Ginhoven's and Van Miegroet's study, the average price for paintings rarely changed regardless of the surplus.

There is no doubt that the close-knit relationships between artists and their families contributed to the formation of "collaborative circuits", but the specific workings of the Guild of St. Luke and the general economic success of painters in seventeenth-century Antwerp must have also played a role in creating a culture that encouraged artistic collaboration and innovation. These partnerships extended beyond the realm of painting, as easel painting became adapted to the decoration of other niche luxury items, such as sounding boards and writing cabinets, adorned with small paintings on copper.¹⁵¹ Art cabinets, another collaborative product for both local consumption and export, could sometimes involve cooperation between cabinetmakers, embroiderers, carvers, painters, mirror makers, inlayers, and others just to produce a single piece.¹⁵² Luxury products produced in Antwerp were prized for their novel forms and production techniques.

It was within this cultural milieu that gallery painting developed, where innovation, cooperation, and collaboration were both encouraged and prized. While there is not enough evidence to suggest that this is the reason gallery painting developed in Antwerp it does begin to explain why artists worked with one another to produce these works and celebrated each other's trademark products by replicating them on the walls of fictive displays. Not only did they have economic and cultural value, but gallery

¹⁵¹ De Marchi and Van Miegroet, "Rules versus Play," 149

¹⁵² Dupré, "Trading in Luxury Glass," 73

paintings represented the specific cultural milieu that surrounded art production in seventeenth-century Antwerp. Artists were able to advertise their skill and virtuosity in a way that demonstrated their own technical prowess, but they also paid homage to the networks of painters that came before them and to contemporary artists they counted among their friends. Within these displays they could try to elevate their craft while also positioning themselves for future commissions and economic gains.

Conclusion

As Victor Stoichita has pointed out, the “convergence of more than one stimulus would seem to be behind the establishing of ‘Cabinets of Curiosity’ as a pictorial genre” in seventeenth-century Antwerp.¹⁵³ These paintings act as a visible manifestation of the wide ranging and highly varied discourses on art. While ideas about painting, its value, and the social status of its producers were being discussed across Europe, we see in gallery paintings only those concerns that were relevant in Antwerp. Additionally, while these images were produced and consumed in the seventeenth century, their emergence as a pictorial genre rests largely upon the commercialization of the market that took place during the previous century. Had Antwerp not risen to commercial success and won a reputation for innovation—particularly within the realm of painting—there would be no canon or history for both artists and connoisseurs to refer to in these paintings. The emergence of the genre reflects the city’s economic and cultural wealth both then and in the sixteenth century.

An analysis of the conditions of reception demonstrates that these images had a variety of new meanings, many of which grew out of the specific cultural milieu of Antwerp. They are visual references to new theories of imitation, and to the value of invention, authorship, and copies. The distinctive notions of authorship that emerged in the city are reflected in these works, as artists included direct quotations of other masters’

¹⁵³ Stoichita, *The Self Aware Image*, 127

paintings in their works, but transfigured them into their own distinctive inventions. Gallery paintings were thus both originals and copies, paying homage to the great canonical masters of the city, while artists hoped for their own inclusion in the canon. The culture of cooperation between artists created a free flow of information between them, that spurred innovation and artistic experimentation, and led to collaboration. These partnerships resulted in entirely new genres of painting, and while not all gallery paintings were collaborative, collaborative images were prominent in their works.

All this would have been seen and understood by the *liefhebbers*; showing familiarity with contemporary art theory was one of the main ways they could display their cultural pedigree. These displays of knowledge are portrayed in a fictive manner in gallery paintings, as artists catered to the ego of this group by linking them to the nobility. *Liefhebbers* idealized collecting, viewing it as a marrying of social, political, intellectual, and spiritual ideals, and gallery paintings represent those ideals. The numerous categories of gallery paintings mean that collectors had many opportunities to make connections in works and decode hidden meanings.

While I have not provided a definitive answer to why gallery paintings originated in Antwerp, I believe I have begun to explain some of the most significant factors that contributed to the formation of this subgenre. I did not have access to primary sources, such as inventory records and seventeenth-century writings, so this examination is not comprehensive. My hope however, is that through this paper I have offered signposts to future scholars on the factors that gave rise to the genre.



Figure 1 *The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Gheest*
Willem van Hecht – 1628 - Rubenshuis



Figure 2 *The Circumcision of Christ*
Hendrick Goltzius – 1594 – The Met Museum



Figure 3 *Battle of the Amazons* – Peter Paul Rubens.



Figure 4 *The Art Cabinet of Nicolaes Rockox*
Frans II Francken – 1630-5 - Bayerisches Nationalmuseum



Figure 5 *Sampson and Delilah* – Peter Paul Rubens. A detail from *The Art Cabinet of Nicolaes Rockox*



Figure 6 *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella Visiting a Collector's Cabinet*
Jan Brueghel the Elder and Hieronymus Francken II – c. 1621-63. The Walters Museum.



Figure 7. A detail from *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella Visiting a Collector's Cabinet*



Figure 8 *Kunstkamer with Debating Scholars*
Frans II Francken – 1612 – Private Collection



Figure 9 *Allegory of Sight*
Jan Brueghel and Rubens – 1618 – Prado



Figure 10 *Madonna and Child*
Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens – 1621 – The Louvre



Figure 11 *The Linder Gallery Interior*
Unknown – C. 1630 – Private Collection



Figure 12 A detail from *The Linder Gallery Interior* - Apelles Painting Campaspe, in the style of Joos van Winghe

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