

## EDITOR'S NOTE

## Eighteenth-century Art

**Tom van der Molen**

“In the previous century, when Art sat on the Throne, the Netherlands could pride itself on a multitude of outstanding artistic heroes, whose works are now sought with lanterns and taken abroad, because unfortunately there is no demand for the paintings of contemporary painters (apart from a few), since they differ vastly in artistic capabilities from those valiant luminaries of the last century.”

Thus lamented Gerard Hoet the Younger in 1751. Two hundred years later Wilhelm Martin, in his authoritative *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw (Dutch Painting of the Great Period, 1650-1697)*, wrote the following about the eighteenth century: “The causes of the waning greatness of our painting must therefore be sought, above all, in the artists themselves. The young ones among them – children of their times as they were – lacked fresh vigor and daring.”

Eighteenth-century art has always wrestled with its problematic image. And even though the passages quoted above describe the Dutch situation, the same negative view has plagued the perception of the Flemish eighteenth century. After all, Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens were dead, and who would ever be able to follow in their footsteps?

Today, too, twenty-first-century art lovers do not stand in line with the tourists at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to see the paintings of Nicolaas Verkolje, Arnold Boonen and Jan Ekels, nor will many visitors to the Groeningemuseum in Bruges have Matthias De Visch, Joseph Benoît Suvée and Jan Anton Garemijn in mind.

This is why the editorial board of the eZine decided to publish a special issue on the eighteenth century: not because fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century subjects have been exhausted, but because we are convinced that the eighteenth century, too, is a rich and fascinating period for curators of Dutch and Flemish art. Though the art of that century partly represents a continuation of traditions and developments already present in previous centuries, it was also subject to international, mainly French trends.

The academy and similar institutes were on the rise in many cities in the Low Countries, and it was the heyday of classicism. This is precisely why art historians of yesteryear thought that eighteenth-century art displayed little that could be called “Flemish” or “Dutch.” Any continuity was mainly to be seen in the less academic genres, such as landscape, town views, still lifes and portraiture.

An essential artistic skill taught at the academy was draughtsmanship, which led drawings to acquire the status of autonomous works. The art of drawing therefore plays a prominent role in this issue of the eZine.

Eighteenth-century Dutch and Flemish art can be found, moreover, in museums around the world that are already considered “CODART museums”: institutions with a significant collection of Netherlandish art. The museums in [Enschede](#), [Brussels](#) and [Omsk](#) have eighteenth-century pearls in their collections – you just didn’t know it yet.

It is hoped that this eZine will convince you that eighteenth-century art deserves special attention, not least because of the interesting stories, told with such enthusiasm, that have found their way into this eZine.