

# EZINE 1 AUTUMN 2012

WELCOME

Twice Seven

**Gerdien Verschoor**

In the Netherlands of the 1960s, which was characterized by socio-religious compartmentalization (called in Dutch *verzuiling*, or “pillarization”), it was completely normal to describe a village as Catholic, Protestant or communist. Although this phenomenon has largely disappeared from the cities and villages of the Netherlands, there is the occasional exception: the city I live in, Zutphen, has a clearly anthroposophic character. Free-range butchers, organic bakers and women wearing “healthy” sandals are conspicuous features of the urban landscape.

According to the principles of anthroposophy, life is divided into cycles of seven years. Each seven-year span marks the end of one period and the dawn of another. I realized this last summer, when I celebrated my seventh anniversary as the director of CODART, which coincided with the fourteenth anniversary of the organization itself. One would think that after seven years, and certainly after twice seven years, CODART would finally be a “finished” product.

Nothing could be further from the truth, however. A great deal has happened, of course, since CODART was registered as a foundation on 18 June 1998.

In just seven years, Gary Schwartz oversaw the development of the organization from a mere idea to a concrete and indispensable, worldwide association of curators of Dutch and Flemish art.

In the past fourteen years the group has grown into a fine-meshed network consisting of more than six hundred curators, active at some three hundred museums in fifty countries. Thanks to CODART, all of those curators have acquired a face, and I’m not merely referring to the fact that each one has a personal page on CODART’s website. These curators have materialized at conferences and on study trips, and appear to be men with moustaches, beards or glasses, women wearing sensible shoes or high heels, people speaking English, Dutch, Russian or Spanish, and often a mixture of several of those languages. They have taken on the contours of real-life individuals who have contributed more and more to the network by giving lectures at CODART conferences, writing articles for the *Courant*, and serving as members of the various CODART committees. Knowledge and experience are generously shared by one and all.

CODART continues to evolve. Its headquarters have meanwhile been moved from Amsterdam to The Hague, study trips have become CODART*focus* meetings, the printed *Courant* is now an eZine, the RKD has become an increasingly important partner, and collectors and art dealers are involved in the network as Patrons.

Luckily, I have no illusions about CODART ever being “finished.” On the contrary, there are new developments all the time: a magnificent CODART ZESTIEN congress will take place in Vienna, the Stichting Dioraphte has given CODART a grant that will enable it to devote more attention to sculpture and the applied arts, and there is plenty to look forward to in the coming years.

Even so, there are reasons to worry. Back in May [[29 May 2012](#)] we reported the proposed cutbacks in government spending, as a result of which the subsidies given to Dutch cultural institutions will be reduced drastically. Every cultural body in the Netherlands – CODART and the RKD included – has been hit in recent years by several rounds of cutbacks, and in the near future the entire Dutch museum establishment will be thoroughly overhauled. Prinsjesdag (Princes’ Day), which was yesterday, marked the opening of parliament and the presentation of the budget for 2013. Fortunately, the subsidy for the RKD (including CODART) has been approved for the next four years. Our delight at this news was instantly tempered by the knowledge that a number of institutions will be receiving severely reduced subsidies or none at all. New perspectives are offered by the founding of the Karel van Mander Institute, which is being set up in close cooperation with the Rijksmuseum and under the supervision of Rudi Ekkart, who elaborates on these developments in his farewell interview in this issue of the eZine. CODART welcomes this new institute and looks forward to contributing to its projects and activities.

In this issue you can become better acquainted not only with Rudi Ekkart, but also with George Abrams, who has been involved with CODART from the very beginning and a Patron since 2010. It also contains articles by Lucy Davis, Nico Van Hout, Christian Tico Seifert, Magda Sobczyk and Yao-Fen You, as well as Anja Sevcik's report on the CODARTfocus meeting in Prague on 14 May.

The articles have been gathered and selected by the eZine's brand-new [editorial staff](#).

"It is my dearest wish," Nico Van Hout writes in "The Unfinished Painting," his contribution to this eZine, "that museum-goers will look at unfinished paintings with new eyes after reading my book." There are no better words to describe this crucial task of the curator: stimulating the public to look at art in a new way. Particularly in these years of austerity, it is vital that CODART continue to support curators in their efforts to carry out that important task. So save the date for [CODART ZESTIEN in Vienna!](#)

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

**Masterpieces from Mount Stuart – The Bute Collection****Christian Tico Seifert**

It is always a delight to present works of art from private collections to your audiences. It becomes something even more special if these are little known. If, moreover, you are able to exhibit a cream selection that the owner is happy to give on long-term loan to your institution, you may count yourself particularly fortunate. Such has recently happened to the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh. Thanks to the generosity of the present Marquess of Bute, some of the finest northern European Old Master paintings from the famous Bute Collection at Mount Stuart are currently on public display in Scotland for the first time in more than sixty years.

**The Exhibition**

CODART members who joined the trip to Scotland in 2002 may remember some of the paintings in the exhibition, as they had the privilege to view the private rooms at Mount Stuart. The house, a magnificent Victorian Gothic mansion on the Isle of Bute in the Firth of Clyde, about an hour from Glasgow, was built by the 3rd Marquess of Bute and is home to one of the greatest collections of Old Master pictures in the United Kingdom.

Nineteen Dutch, Flemish, early Netherlandish and French masterpieces are on show, and this is the largest display of works from the estate seen in public since the 1949 Edinburgh Festival.

Among the highlights are two exquisite rural landscapes from about 1650 by Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), an artist enormously popular with British collectors in the eighteenth century, and an important winter landscape by Aert van der Neer (1603/04-1677). Jacob van Ruisdael's impressive *Mountain Landscape with a Waterfall* (ca. 1665-70) is shown alongside his rare winter view of Amsterdam, appearing for the first time in a public exhibition.

The portraits on display include Jacob Jordaens's beautiful picture of a girl (probably his daughter) with cherries, from the late 1630s, and Joos van Cleve's enigmatic *Portrait of a Lady* (ca. 1530).

Also exhibited is a remarkable group portrait by Antoine Le Nain (ca. 1600?-48), depicting the artist and his two painter brothers in the studio they shared in Paris.

One of the most outstanding works in the Bute Collection is Willem (Guillam) van Haecht's picture of an imaginary art cabinet – a room housing a rich collection of paintings and artifacts – which is one of only five such works by this Antwerp artist. The painting dates from around 1630 and, although the collection it depicts is an imaginary one, most of the artworks can be identified, including Van Dyck's *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* at centre front, which is now in the Royal Collection.

Genre paintings include famous examples by Pieter de Hooch (1629-84) and Gabriel Metsu (1629-67), as well as by Adriaen van Ostade (1610-85), Cornelis Bega (ca. 1631/32-1664), Jan Steen (1626-1679) and David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690). *Masterpieces from Mount Stuart* also features a superb and rare guardroom scene by Rembrandt's pupil Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621-74), a cityscape of Haarlem by Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-98), showing the majestic Church of St. Bavo, and an unusually large picture by Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657), depicting the biblical story of Joseph selling corn in Egypt.

**The Bute Collection**

The celebrated Bute Collection – which was formed by the Stuarts, later Crichton-Stuarts, earls and marquesses of Bute – now resides at Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute, the ancestral home of the family for over six hundred years. The core of the collection was formed in the second half of the eighteenth century by John, 3rd Earl of Bute (1713–1792) and his son, John, 4th Earl and 1st Marquess (1744–1814). Although not the first, it was arguably one of the greatest collections of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings in Britain, and influenced the taste of other collectors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries.

The 3rd Earl may well have developed a taste for seventeenth-century Dutch paintings while studying at the universities of Groningen and Leiden. In 1736 he married the eighteen-year-old Mary Wortley Montagu, only daughter of the immensely wealthy Edward Wortley Montagu. The 3rd Earl was appointed a Lord of the Bedchamber to Frederick, Prince of Wales in 1750, and Groom of the Stole to George, Prince of Wales in 1756, and reappointed as such after George's accession to the throne in 1760. That same year the death of Bute's father-in-law transformed his financial position and he could now collect on a grand scale. In 1762-63 Bute served as prime minister to King George III, and afterwards transferred his building and collecting ambitions to Luton Hoo, his house in Bedfordshire, sadly destroyed by fire in 1843. He preferred Dutch and Flemish art, and was particularly keen on Dutch genre painting from the mid to late seventeenth century, including the work of Metsu, Ostade, De Hooch and Steen, all of which feature in the exhibition.

The landscape painter Aelbert Cuyp was his particular favorite. Bute was among the very first collectors to bring Cuyp's paintings to Britain. He owned at least five paintings by the artist, two of which are included in this display.

Successive marquesses added to the collection, perhaps most notably the 4th Marquess (1881–1947). He purchased Pieter Saenredam's masterpiece, *The Interior of St. Bavo's Church in Haarlem*, acquired by the Scottish National Gallery in 1982, as well as Jacob van Ruisdael's *Winter View of the "Hekelveld" in Amsterdam*. Over the years, the paintings were placed in a number of Bute family residences, including properties in London and later at Dumfries House and Cardiff Castle. During the 1940s and 1990s, the paintings were transferred to Mount Stuart.

### **Mount Stuart**

The "new" Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute replaced the early Georgian building destroyed by fire in December 1877. It was the creation of John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute (1847–1900), who was one of the greatest architectural patrons in nineteenth-century Britain. Working with his architect, Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, who also designed the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Bute built a remarkable gothic palace. Fusing powerful architecture with intricate details and rich decoration, they created one of the finest gothic revival interiors in the British Isles. However, the medieval inspirations behind Mount Stuart should not disguise the fact that this was a house at the forefront of modern technology and building techniques: it had the first electric lighting, modern central-heating system, telephone and passenger lift in all of Scotland; it was also the first house in the modern world to boast a heated indoor swimming pool.

Today, Mount Stuart is a visitor attraction – its opening to the public in 1995 acted as a catalyst for the resurgence of the tourist industry on Bute, traditionally Scotland's holiday island. An award-winning contemporary visitors' center was opened in 2001, major restoration and redecoration works have been undertaken in the house, and an innovative contemporary visual arts program, also begun in 2001, has gained international recognition.

At the heart of this enterprise remains the extraordinary Victorian mansion as realized by the 3rd Marquess of Bute, which houses the equally remarkable art collection of the 3rd Earl of Bute and his son the 1st Marquess, formed in the second half of the eighteenth century.

### **Publication**

Anthony Crichton-Stuart & Christian Tico Seifert, *Masterpieces from Mount Stuart: The Bute Collection*, 64 pages, hardback, 33 ills., ISBN 978-1-906270-50-6, £9.95

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## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

## Sculpture and Decorative Arts from the Low Countries in the Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts

Yao-Fen You

Most CODART members are familiar with the Detroit Institute of Arts's collection of early Netherlandish paintings and seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings.

For many a curator of Dutch and Flemish art, Detroit is Bruegel's *Wedding Dance*, Rembrandt's *Visitation* or Ruisdael's *Jewish Cemetery*. The museum's holdings of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, the great majority of which are by signature artists of the Golden Age, is one of the larger collections of its kind in the United States.

Less well known are the DIA's rich and varied holdings in sculpture and decorative arts from the Low Countries, from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. With the exception of the Arenberg *Lamentation*, few can readily identify significant works in the collection that are not paintings.

But as an encyclopedic museum with more than 60,000 works of art, including a highly regarded collection of textiles numbering over 6,000 pieces, it comes as no surprise that the Low Countries' achievements in the textile arts are well represented at the DIA.

Of the almost 700 pieces of European lace in the permanent collection, more than 300 are Flemish. Another great strength is European tapestry, which is dominated by Flemish and Franco-Flemish examples. Of the eighty-one weavings, fifty were woven in one of the major centers of the Low Countries. Sculpture, glass and ceramics are less comprehensive, but notable examples from the Low Countries enrich the museum's overall breadth and depth in European sculpture and decorative arts. Much of this area of the collection from the Low Countries is understudied; in what follows, I highlight several key objects, including recent discoveries.

No work of art better illustrates the Southern Netherlandish sculptural tradition than the *Lamentation* (1470-80), which was once part of the prestigious collection of the Dukes of Arenberg. Acquired on the heels of the 1960 landmark exhibition, *Masterpieces of Flemish Art: Van Eyck to Bosch*, the *Lamentation* is arguably the most important extant example of Netherlandish wood sculpture from the second half of the fifteenth century. Carved from three blocks of oak, the grouping shows Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus carrying Christ's body to the sepulcher.

The *Lamentation* is exceptional in its quality, size and mastery of execution. Despite having had its polychromy stripped, the work remains highly charged and deeply moving – a testament to sculpture's unparalleled capacity to trigger empathy.

When the grouping was first published in 1919, it included a fourth block of wood with an additional figure of a bearded man. That figure, the whereabouts of which have been unknown since the object was acquired from Rosenberg & Stiebel in 1961, miraculously surfaced on the London art market in October 2011. The museum quickly moved to purchase the statuette; its discovery and subsequent acquisition is of enormous consequence for the museum and the field.

By contrast, an exquisite boxwood miniature *Triptych* (ca. 1520), acquired in 1979 from the distinguished collection of Ernest Brummer, exemplifies the late medieval tradition of microscopic boxwood carving for which the Duchy of Brabant served as a major center. This *tour de force* of carving is only nine inches high, including its base. The central portion combines a Nativity scene with an Annunciation to the Shepherds, while the left shutter shows an Annunciation, and the right, a Presentation in the Temple. An Adoration of the Magi is carved in high relief in the foot below. Together, the Arenberg pieces and the *Triptych* testify to the extraordinary heights of virtuosity attained by Brabantine artists working in wood.

Northern Netherlandish sculpture is superbly demonstrated by an ivory *Pax* made in Utrecht and dating to the third quarter

of the fifteenth century. Sensitive carved, the convex *Pax* showing the Virgin and Child flanked by Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine is one of a group of eleven ivory reliefs defined most notably by their crosshatched grounds. A related object is a *Polyptych with the Virgin and Child and Scenes of the Life of the Virgin*, made from bone, wood and elephant ivory. Also a product of Utrecht and datable to between 1450 and 1475, the polyptych was catalogued as a northern Italian product of the Embriachi workshop at the time of its acquisition in 1923. The two objects contribute meaningful breadth to the museum's collection of Gothic ivories and bone carvings, which is the third largest in the United States.

The extensive holdings in Flemish tapestries constitute the museum's most important cluster of decorative arts from the Low Countries. As is typical of many American collections of European tapestries, the collection was formed primarily between the 1920s and the 1960s, under the tenure of Adele Coulin Weibel, the museum's curator of textiles from 1927 to 1960. The more than fifty pieces of Flemish origin date from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries and illustrate the history of artistic styles and major weaving centers throughout the Low Countries, the hub of European tapestry production. Noteworthy late medieval and Renaissance examples include a *Millefleurs Tapestry with the Arms of the Brachet and Other Families of Orléans, Blois and Anjou* (ca. 1500-20), an early sixteenth-century Brussels group of four tapestries referred to as the "Virtues and Vices" set, a *Triumph of Spring* from the "Triumph of the Seasons" series, woven in Bruges, and a Brussels *Saint Paul before Porcius Festus, King Herod Agrippa and His Sister Berenice* from the "Saint Paul" series, designed by Pieter Coecke van Aelst. An essential eighteenth-century Brussels example is the *Don Quixote and the Windmills*, from the popular "Don Quixote" series, woven between 1715 and 1747 to designs by Van Orley and Coppens in the Leyniers-Reydam workshop.

This area of the collection is ripe for further study. In August 2009 a seventeenth-century weaving of major importance was discovered when it was unrolled for photography: a tapestry of *The Captive Rulers* from "The Deeds and Triumph of Scipio Africanus."

Previously misidentified as a generic *Roman Triumph* woven in the Brussels workshop of Franz van den Hecke, the tapestry belongs to a huge set commissioned by Don Luis Francisco de Benavides Carillo de Toledo, Marquis of Caracena, and Governor General of the Spanish Netherlands from 1659 to 1664. Documents indicate that Benavides's set comprised thirty-nine pieces altogether, with no fewer than fourteen large historiated pieces. Eight of the fourteen have now been located throughout Europe and South America, with the Detroit piece being the most recent discovery. Although Benavides's coat of arms is no longer visible because the borders are lost, the motto – "Nisi dominus aedificaverit domum, in vanum laborarunt qui aedificaverunt eam" – is still extant. The tapestry was most likely woven in Brussels around 1660. Whether or not it was woven in the workshops of Jan van Leefdael, Geraert van der Strecken and Hendrik I Reydam, following the three in the Toms Collection, Lausanne, remains a question mark because of the lost borders. The tapestry's discovery was a great coup. Apart from its distinguished provenance, it shows off the splendor of Flemish Baroque tapestry. It is the museum's only weaving enriched with gilt-metal-wrapped thread.

The DIA can lay claim to the most significant collection of stained glass in the United States after the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Pitcairn Collection, Glencairn, Pennsylvania. While the museum's greatest strength lies in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century examples from German-speaking lands, one should not overlook three prominent examples from the Low Countries, including a painted roundel of the *Last Supper*, after a design by Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen, a *Flight into Egypt*, attributed to the Master of the Seven Acts of Mercy, and a panel of a *Huntsmen and a Dice Thrower* after Dirck Crabeth. Particularly noteworthy in its meticulous application of silver stain is the *Last Supper*: the effect is intense. All three were acquired at the same time in 1936 from the leading dealer of medieval and Renaissance stained glass, Thomas and Drake. A fourth panel, a quatrefoil roundel originally thought to be the product of a Netherlandish workshop, was correctly reattributed in the mid-1980s as Middle Rhenish.

The museum also possesses a set of five large-scale rectangular windows from Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, the origins of which remain debated. Recent research has indicated that the windows are most likely from Cologne, but it is difficult to rule out the strong possibility that they might be the work of glaziers from the Lowlands.

Seventeenth-century Dutch decorative arts are relatively underserved in comparison to the museum's collection of paintings from the same period.

In fact, it is a major area of potential growth. With the exception of a *Tulip Vase* (1690-1700), attributed to De Grieksche A Factory, and a delightful *Pair of Shoes* (ca. 1700), attributed to De Dobbelde Schenckan Factory, Dutch Delftware is poorly represented. Nevertheless, one can point to two handsome silver beakers by the Hague silversmith Adam Loofs (active 1680-1710). They were added to the collection in 1971 as part of a larger bequest from Robert H. Tannahill and catalogued as a pair of tumblers. It has been suggested that they are actually nesting beakers, since one is slightly smaller than the other. Their coat of arms awaits identification.

An unusual but noteworthy piece is the 1612 *Box of Coin Weights and Scales*, also from the estate of Tannahill. Such kits were essential to early modern European merchants, who needed to calculate the rate of exchange for foreign currency, and assure themselves that the foreign coins they were offered were, in fact, legitimate. The box is marked with the sign of an unidentified Cologne master carpenter, but fourteen of the thirty-one weights contained within were hand struck by the Amsterdam instrument-maker Guilliam de Neve (ca. 1600-1654). Each weight is stamped with the reproduction of the coin whose weight it represents. The majority of the weights represent coins in circulation in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Most likely, the box was carried and used by a merchant conducting business in the environs of the busy port of Amsterdam.

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## CURATOR'S INTERVIEW

Rudi Ekkart, interviewed by Geerte Broersma

Rudolf Erik Otto Ekkart (1947) studied art history at the University of Leiden. After completing his studies, he worked at the Academisch Historisch Museum in Leiden and then at the Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum / Museum van het Boek in The Hague. In 1987 he was appointed deputy director and three years later general director of the RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History). In 1997 he obtained his doctorate at the University of Amsterdam, having written his dissertation on "Portrettisten en portretten: studies over portretkunst in Holland, 1575-1650" ("Portraitists and portraits: studies on the art of portraiture in Holland, 1575-1650").

Since 1997 he has also served as chairman of the "Ekkart Committee," which carries out research into works of art stolen during the Second World War. In 2004 Ekkart was appointed Affiliate Professor of Methodological Aspects of Art-Historical Documentation at the University of Utrecht. In addition to these activities, he serves on the board of numerous organizations in the national and international cultural sphere and is the author of many articles, books and catalogues. On 1 November 2012, Ekkart will retire as director of the RKD and hand over his duties to Chris Stolwijk, Head of Research at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

*A lot has happened and many things have changed at the RKD in the past twenty-five years. What was it like when you arrived, and what kind of institution are you leaving behind?*

In general it can be said that twenty-five years ago the RKD was not a very popular institution. In those days the RKD actually consisted of at least ten separate, small RKDs, all of which had their own rules and regulations. So it was difficult to find one's way around. It was reproached for being too static and introverted. But in spite of that, I arrived here to find an institute with good, hard-working people. That's still true, only now there are many more of them. In all those years, four important things have happened: the RKD has become an organization that has built up, and operates within, a network of national and international contacts in the museum world and the sphere of scholarship. It collaborates constantly with others. I can say, not without pride, that it has acquired some degree of popularity.

The second point is the revolution we have undergone in digitization. Computerizing a documentation center hasn't been easy. This has been going on for the whole of my tenure and continues to be a "work in progress." We've come a long way, but it's a never-ending process. We've already achieved a great deal, though: the RKD is no longer accessible only to physical visitors, but also, increasingly, to virtual visitors.

I had also set myself the task of ensuring that the RKD would become an indispensable center of excellence for nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, just as we were for old art. Our areas of specialization thus had to be filled in more evenly, and this has been accomplished. The fourth important change was, of course, our accommodation. It took years for this change to come about, but the RKD is now modern and welcoming, completely different from what it used to be.

In addition to these changes, I can also point out a similarity between the period of my arrival and that of my departure: the climate of economic austerity. I started at a time when the national government was cutting back sharply on spending, and I'm also leaving at a time of severe budget cuts. In the intervening period there were also several rounds of cutbacks, but my arrival and departure happen to coincide with the most serious reductions in government spending I've ever experienced.

*Last year Halbe Zijlstra, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, asked if the RKD and the Rijksmuseum could work together to form one top-notch institution. This led to the founding of the Karel van Mander Institute. Broadly speaking, what form will this institute take in 2013?*

That isn't entirely clear yet, but we do see possibilities to collaborate closely with the Rijksmuseum. Together we have a broader base of expertise; we complement and reinforce one another. An essential feature of the Karel van Mander Institute

is that it will have its own research agenda and the capacity to develop into a service institution. For example, it could collaborate with other museums in conceiving exhibitions. One thing in particular will be important to the success of the new institute: it must remain rooted in both organizations and not become detached from either of them.

*Do you think that CODART has a role to play in the Karel van Mander Institute?*

Yes, of course. I imagine that CODART will organize special “expert meetings.” There is a need for seminars with a strong emphasis on content, as was the case in Prague at the last CODARTfocus meeting. CODART is very capable of organizing such events, and has a lot of experience in this field. It would be better for the Karel van Mander Institute to call upon CODART for help than to try and do such things itself. So CODART can certainly be a good addition to the new institute, but it should retain its own character. After all, CODART is not a scholarly institution in itself, but an organization that maintains and encourages contact among its own members and with other institutions. So on the whole, CODART can certainly offer the Karel van Mander Institute support and backup.

*You joined CODART quite soon after its founding, first as a member of the board and more recently as an advisor to the board. What exactly is the connection between the RKD and CODART?*

CODART and the RKD are both networking organizations that overlap to some extent. The members of CODART – those who work in the museum world – also make use of the RKD. The two institutions complement one another in fulfilling the needs of their “clientele”: the RKD does this mainly by providing museum curators, for example, with scholarly material and documentation, while CODART provides them with a structure for their professional networks. The RKD organizes symposia as well, though on a much smaller scale, and is also a kind of meeting place, whereas CODART is a networking system for professional contact among those occupied with Dutch and Flemish art. So we give one another a tremendous boost.

*How important is an organization like CODART to the museum world?*

I think it’s extremely important – indispensable, in fact. If Gary Schwartz hadn’t had the idea, we would have had to invent CODART ourselves. In the modern world, collaboration is vital: big plans are realized only with the help of others. An example of one small but very useful thing is CODART’s listing on its website of the e-mail addresses of all its members. The news items sent through its notification service keep us informed about each other’s activities. The website is terribly important, especially if you’re unable to attend the congresses, so that members who work in a rather isolated context still feel involved and can keep abreast of what is going on elsewhere. This infrastructure for maintaining ties with colleagues is very important.

*You’ve collaborated on numerous catalogues and exhibitions at museums in Central and Eastern Europe. What draws you to these countries and why do you have special ties to them?*

Soon after I started working at the RKD, the Iron Curtain fell, which increased the opportunities for working together and made collaboration a more attractive option. As early as the 1990s, I was in rather close contact with museums in such countries as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Russia. My connection with these countries is actually bound up with the history of the RKD, because at an earlier stage, in the days of Gerson, it was one of the few institutions that maintained ties with museums in Eastern Europe. The RKD was already known there, and it was easily accessible to them. Whenever they needed advice, they turned to the RKD. In the early 1990s, moreover, there were nice opportunities to do something there, because in those days there were subsidies for projects in Eastern Europe.

*What was the single most important event in your RKD career?*

A lot of nice things have happened, but something concrete that finally came to fruition after nearly fifteen years of work was the move to our new accommodation. The opening even coincided with our seventy-fifth anniversary, which was wonderful of course.

*You're the director of the RKD, an Affiliate Professor and a member of several boards. You also collaborate on exhibitions and write scholarly books and articles. In short, you do a wide variety of things. Do you see yourself more as a manager or as a researcher?*

I consider myself an art-historical researcher and a schoolmaster of sorts, but unfortunately I have too little time for these things. I've gradually had to take on more and more managerial tasks. Those tasks are not my calling, and my scholarly research suffers as a result.

*What are you going to do after retiring at the end of October?*

One of the nice things about retirement is that I'll be able to devote myself again to research, at least that's what I intend to do.

In addition, I have the right for another five years to supervise PhD students; I have more than ten students whose doctorates I'm supervising at the moment. That takes up a lot of time, but I enjoy it immensely. Of course I'll continue to hold a number of administrative positions, but I'm looking forward to returning to research.

*What do you wish the RKD for the future?*

A productive period of further growth, characterized by alertness to the opportunities offered by, among other things, technological and political developments. In any case, the RKD shouldn't mummify in the form in which I leave it. It should continue to flourish, and of course go on benefiting from its fruitful collaboration with CODART!

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## CURATOR'S OBJECT

**The recent restoration of the Groeningemuseum's copy of The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist**  
**Magdalena Sobczyk**

In 1961 the city of Bruges acquired from a private collection in Belgium a copy after Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* that has since been on extended display several times as part of the permanent collection of the Groeningemuseum. The discolored varnish and some minor retouches gave the panel a yellowish patina that detracted from the otherwise superb state of conservation

of the pictorial surface. The question was raised in 2011 whether the panel should undergo conservation treatment to remove the varnish and to enhance the few retouches. Since the wood of the panel's frame was warped on one side and therefore gave a distorted impression, the possibility of reframing was put forward. The issue of a custom-made frame and the objectives of the conservation treatment were discussed by Nadia Vangampelaere (Collection and Documentation Department at Musea Brugge), Francine Huys (Paintings Conservator at Musea Brugge), [Till-Holger Borchert](#) (Chief Curator at the Groeningemuseum) and [Manfred Sellink](#), Director of Musea Brugge and eminent specialist on Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

It would have been impossible for Francine Huys to carry out the treatment in a reasonable amount of time in addition to her regular tasks. She agreed, however, to supervise an external conservator, so Musea Brugge entrusted the task to the Brussels-based picture conservator Laetitia Golenvaux, on the condition that she carry out the treatment in the museum's conservation studio in Bruges, which made it possible to discuss problems instantly with the curatorial staff and the museum's conservation staff. This manner of working proved to be very efficient, and gave rise to frequent discussions about the condition, date and authorship of the Bruges panel. In particular, its connection with Jan Brueghel the Elder rather than Pieter Brueghel the Younger merits further investigation.

Fortunately, the recently published study on the workshop of Pieter Brueghel the Younger by Christina Currie (KIK-IRPA Brussels) and Dominique Allart (University of Liège) includes detailed technical examinations of the different versions of the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*. As the study focuses on in-depth technical research and the relationship between the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and those of his son Pieter Brueghel the Younger, the three-volume dissertation provides new insights into such basic issues as doubtful attributions, technical problems, provenance, workshops, early copying techniques and so on. Seen in this light, the treatment of the version in the Groeningemuseum is even more interesting.

The study confirms the authenticity of the panel in the Szépművészeti Múzeum in Budapest as an autograph work by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. However, there are speculations about the provenance of the panel. It is impossible to verify its purchase by the Hungarian nobleman Boldizsár Batthyányior with a view to establishing its provenance from the collection of the Archduchess Isabella. In the first place, documentary evidence is lacking, and the measurements noted in Isabella's inventories differ from those of the Budapest panel. Moreover, even though Pieter Stevens, a famous art collector from Antwerp, noted in the margin of his copy of Karl van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* (Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana) that he had seen the original painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, he failed to mention where he had seen it. Even the possibility that Bruegel painted more than one version of the Sermon (as he apparently did of the *Tower of Babel*) cannot be dismissed. Currie and Allart confirm what has long been accepted by the majority of scholars, namely that the Budapest panel is an original, signed painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

The Groeningemuseum's unsigned version differs from the original in its proportions, although the figures and details of the landscape are of approximately the same size. The panel marks – two right hands and a tower – confirm that the panel was produced in Antwerp some time between 1618 and ± 1626. The panel's underdrawing is closely related to other copies made after the Budapest prototype, namely a version in the Stedelijk Museum Lier and another in a private collection in

Brussels. Currie and Allart suggest that all of the versions were produced in the same workshop, using the same model drawing, and think that this workshop must have been the Antwerp studio of Pieter Brueghel the Younger. This stands to reason, given the underdrawing, but the attribution is not entirely convincing in terms of the palette, the painter's technical skill, and finally, the quality of the paint surface. With regard to the paint surface in particular, it would be worthwhile to make a close comparison of the panel in the Groeningemuseum and the two copies after Bruegel's *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* that are attributed to Jan Brueghel the Elder (Alte Pinakothek, Munich and Kunstmuseum Basel).

*Magdalena Sobczyk is an intern at the Groeningemuseum in Bruges. The internship is part of the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme. She is studying art history at the University of Gdansk, Poland.*

## CURATOR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Lucy Davis, Wallace Collection, London

Lucy Davis

I was appointed Curator of Old Master Pictures at The Wallace Collection in November 2011, just in time to find myself fully involved with the major refurbishment of the building (Hertford House) that began in 2000, involving the renovation of a sequence of galleries with new lighting. My first major project was to devise a new hang for the Dutch pictures in the [newly refurbished East Galleries](#). This is the leading collection of Dutch paintings in the United Kingdom, after the National Gallery London and the Royal Collection,

and it was a great opportunity, since my postgraduate training at the Courtauld Institute was in seventeenth-century Dutch art and my PhD was on Rubens's Bacchanals. I had also been trained as a curator at the National Gallery, where, as Curatorial Assistant, I provided cover for the Curator of Dutch Paintings, Axel Rüger, during his one-year sabbatical from the gallery.

The new display at the Wallace Collection reflects the particular strengths of the Dutch collection: portraiture, genre scenes and Italianate landscapes, particularly by leading artists such as Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Metsu, Berchem and Wouwermans.

The first gallery is dedicated to painting by Rembrandt and his Circle, starting with a display of Rembrandt and his pupils during his Leiden years, continuing to Rembrandt in Amsterdam, with three paintings by Govert Flinck and Rembrandt's moving portrait of his son, Titus, and two genre scenes by Nicolaes Maes. The paintings by Rembrandt and his School are juxtaposed with a display of Dutch landscape paintings, from Flinck to the mature Ruisdael. The second gallery contains a display of Golden Age paintings of domestic scenes, cityscapes and landscapes, with a particular focus on Jan Steen and Gabriel Metsu. The third gallery is dedicated to Dutch Italianate painters, particularly Nicolaes Berchem, Philips Wouwermans and Adriaen van de Velde, which leads appropriately into the Great Gallery of masterpieces of the early modern period. You can read more about the arrangement of the hang in the recent article in *Apollo Magazine*, "A Taste for Blue," which I co-wrote with the Director of the museum, Christoph Vogtherr.

Another major change in the display has been to separate the Dutch and Flemish pictures, formerly hung together. The Flemish paintings will be displayed in the East Drawing Room, which is adjacent to the East Galleries that house the Dutch pictures. This room is currently undergoing refurbishment, and is re-opening as a temporary display of masterpieces by Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens, during the closure of the Great Gallery

The Wallace Collection has its own very distinct personality as a leading collection of works of art and furniture displayed in an impressive London townhouse. As a specialist of the Baroque period, my favorite gallery is the Great Gallery, for it houses a collection of European Baroque paintings unrivalled in their quality and variety: altarpieces, compositions such as landscapes painted for art collections, portraits of various formats and of sitters from George IV to Dutch merchants and, of course, Frans Hals's *Laughing Cavalier*, and a superb series of game pictures by Hondecoeter, the Weenixes and others. In preparation for the forthcoming refurbishment of the Great Gallery, which begins at the end of September 2012, we will rehang the highlights of the Great Gallery throughout the smaller rooms of Hertford House, and put the rest of its contents in storage for the coming two years.

Since starting at the museum, I have become particularly interested in Bartolomé-Esteban Murillo, a painter whose works are exceptionally well represented, thanks to the collecting activities of the 4th Marquess of Hertford.

I am currently planning a show in our temporary exhibition galleries devoted to Murillo and the nineteenth-century taste for this artist in Britain. The show will be held in February 2013 to coincide with the exhibition on Murillo at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Our show will focus particularly on three paintings that belonged to the Capuchin church in Genoa before they were sold to the dealer William Buchanan and brought to England.

I am also in charge of a major research project on Sir Joshua Reynolds, The Reynolds Research Project, which was set up by my predecessor Christoph Vogtherr (now Director of the Wallace Collection). Its aim is to investigate the techniques and materials used by Reynolds by examining twelve of his paintings in the Wallace Collection. A collaboration between the Wallace Collection and the Scientific and Conservation Departments of the National Gallery, it involves thorough technical analysis of each painting. A small number of our paintings are currently being assessed for further conservation treatment. The results of this project will be made public later in the project; the research will culminate in an exhibition, a catalogue and a conference at the Wallace Collection in the autumn of 2014.

Since arriving at the Wallace Collection, I have been involved with picture conservators in the conservation work on our Jordaens painting, *An Allegory of Fruitfulness*.

The technical analysis and cleaning of this painting have yielded some fascinating insights into Jordaens's working method and the relation of this painting to a second version of the theme at the Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. The treatment will be finished to coincide with the major monographic exhibition in Brussels, and I will publish the results of the conservation project next year.

I came to the Wallace Collection from the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, where as a postdoctoral fellow I was completing a monograph on Silenus, the foster father of the wine god Bacchus, in early modern European painting. Previously, I had worked on a Rome-based project for several years, beginning as Research Associate for the major project "The History of the Accademia di San Luca" under the supervision of Dr. Peter Lukehart at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington. This two-year placement also allowed me to expand my research interests to the Italian context, and to begin a research project on the Dutch and Flemish painters who held office in the Accademia di San Luca. I continued to research this topic in the archives of Rome during a postdoctoral Rome Fellowship at the British School at Rome. My published articles include a study of Stradanus's *Nova Reperta* series, "Color Olivi: van Eyck's workshop as a site of invention and transformation," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek: The Artist in the Early Modern Netherlands*, 59 (2008), pp. 225-49, and on Rubens's Bacchanals,

"A Gift from Nature. Rubens' Bacchus and Artistic Creativity," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (Rubens and the Netherlands)* 2004, vol. 55, pp. 227-43.

What I like particularly about my new role is its breadth. I am responsible for all pre-1800 paintings, in addition to eighteenth-century British painting, miniatures and manuscript cuttings. I have 488 works of art under my remit from the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Germany and France. Rather than confining my interests to one national school of art, I have the freedom to work on new areas, such as the Spanish collection. Every project, whether Reynolds or Murillo, generates its own specific questions. It is hard to choose two favorite paintings or miniatures from such a rich and outstanding collection; in any case I find that my preferences are always changing as new works compete for my attention.

This summer, my two favorite paintings are Murillo's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (P34) – because of the sfumato brushwork and wonderful details, such as the still life of blankets and a straw hat (although his small panel of the *Marriage of the Virgin* competes for first place) – and *The Migration of Jacob* by Adriaen van de Velde. This curious painting has a most remarkable skyline, with the figure of the monkey, perched on the side of the camel, silhouetted against the clouds which themselves mirror the undulations of the volcanic landscape.

The Wallace Collection has a fairly small staff, which means that the curator is directly involved in all of the museum's activities, contributing to the education program, working with conservators to move objects, answering enquiries while keeping up with research on the permanent collection and preparing for exhibitions. I really enjoy this dynamic working environment and look forward to seeing these projects realized in the years to come.

*Lucy Davis is Curator of Old Master Pictures at the Wallace Collection in London. She has been a member of CODART since 2011.*

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

**The Unfinished Painting****Nico Van Hout**

The idea of writing a book about unfinished paintings arose more than a year ago. I had wanted to organize an exhibition on this theme seven years earlier, but there was no room for it on the exhibition program of the Koninklijk Museum in Antwerp, where I've been a curator since 1999. The subject wouldn't let go of me, however, and I decided that it was time to publish my findings.

Since my youth, in fact, I've been fascinated by unfinished paintings. Maybe this has to do with the fact that from a young age I received painting instruction at an art academy, and in addition to studying art history, I also trained as a conservator and restorer. The incompleteness of such works makes them at once eye-catching and not entirely presentable, certainly when surrounded by pictures that attract attention because of their highly developed illusionism. What makes unfinished paintings so captivating, though? In my opinion, they fascinate us because they trigger questions that are not prompted by finished works. Why did the artist leave the work unfinished? Why is the most important figure still missing from the composition?

What would the finished painting have looked like? Incomplete works are bathed in mystery. Much more so than a finished work, an unfinished painting consists of a support and paint. It is more matter than image. This is certainly true of works that are less than half-finished. Viewing an unfinished painting is like looking over the shoulder of an artist at work, which is a privilege for all those who delight in observing the creative process. When they are in good condition at least, unfinished paintings can be first-rate visual sources of information on an artist's studio practice. One must be on one's guard, however, because some paintings merely look unfinished, owing to inept "restoration," for example, which can inadvertently cause underpaintings to surface.

In the time of the Byzantine icon painters, unfinished paintings were considered imperfect and thus useless, because they were not exact copies of the sacred examples. In the Middle Ages, therefore, religious representations that remained incomplete because their maker had died were invariably finished by others. The completeness of a depiction was, after all, more important than the regard in which the artistic achievement was held, which is why so few unfinished works of that time have survived. In this respect Van Eyck's Saint Barbara is exceptional. The fact that it was preserved in an unfinished state says a great deal about the fame enjoyed by the artist in his own day, and suggests that no one was considered capable of finishing it. In the following centuries, unfinished paintings were tolerated more and more, certainly when they were the work of an important artist.

In the early nineteenth century, romantics thought they could see in unfinished paintings either a stroke of genius or the artist's inability to put his concept into material form.

Quite a few unfinished paintings are not recognized as such, because we look at the work of Old Masters with modern eyes. The modernist movements of the early twentieth century overturned – or destroyed – the principles of ancien régime painting to such an extent that it has become difficult to view certain works matter-of-factly. El Greco's *Vision of Saint John* ("The Opening of the Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse") in the Metropolitan Museum is seldom seen as an unfinished altarpiece, the top half of which was cut off. The canvas is considered, above all, the source of inspiration for Picasso's *Demiselles d'Avignon*. Instead of an amputated embryo, therefore, the El Greco is regarded as a work of vital importance to modern art. It is only when viewing certain paintings by Velázquez, Van Dyck and Rembrandt from close quarters that one notices shortcomings that are not usually encountered in their finished works. No one ever remarks upon the fact that some of the paintings in the Fragonard room at the Frick Collection in New York are rather monochrome, and differ so

much from the other works in the room. Bearing in mind some abstract paintings from the 1940s, the sketchy color landscapes of Turner suddenly seem very polished and visionary indeed.

In addition to paintings that remained unfinished owing to the artist's death, to a disagreement with the patron, or to a changing political context (just think of Rubens's Henri IV-cycle or several prematurely abandoned revolutionary canvases by Jacques-Louis David), there are also paintings in which the artist intentionally demonstrates a certain studied nonchalance, an illusion of incompleteness known as *non finito*.

Titian was the first to let such evocative brushwork develop into a new style. The impact of Venetian *sprezzatura* on the handling of paint by such artists as Rubens, Van Dyck, Hals, Rembrandt, Fragonard,

Delacroix and the Impressionists is abundantly clear. From the seventeenth until the end of the nineteenth century, artists took pleasure in deceiving, seducing and impressing their public by means of oil paint in all its degrees of consistency.

Omitting information from a painting became the basis of an intellectual game artists played with viewers who found it amusing to fill in the missing element – an evolution that was brilliantly observed by Ernst Gombrich in his *Art and Illusion*. For this reason *non finito* and unfinished paintings – whether maligned or admired, cut into pieces or misunderstood – are as compelling as ever. The same is true of oil sketches, which today are often considered more interesting than the large-scale paintings traditionally regarded as the culmination of the artistic concept. This modern point of view might explain why there are so many unfinished paintings in American museums (in the large institutions in New York and Chicago, as well as in university museums, such as that of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts). Remarkable unfinished paintings that did not find their way into the large aristocratic and encyclopedic collections of Europe were snapped up in the twentieth century by savvy American collectors.

My book consists of an introductory essay, after which fifty unfinished paintings are discussed in chronological order, ranging from Jan van Eyck's *Saint Barbara* from the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp to Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. All the great European and two American masters from the last five hundred years are represented, some of them by two works. In each case I elucidate the context of the commission (if indeed the painting in question was a commissioned work), the creative process and its interruption. Finally, I discuss the artists' reasons for abandoning a work prematurely. The publication is aimed at a broad, interested public. In the essay, the references to sources can be found in the footnotes. The relevant literature is listed at the end of each case study. It is my dearest wish that museum-goers will look at unfinished paintings with new eyes after reading my book. Unlike reading, "looking properly" is not a subject taught at school, but something that we teach ourselves in the course of daily life. "Looking properly" maximizes knowledge and pleasure, and surely that is the point of art. The book will be published in the autumn by Ludion Publishers.

A happy consequence of this publication is the fact that my director, Dr. Paul Huvenne, has put my original suggestion for an exhibition back on the table as a project to coincide with the reopening of the Koninklijk Museum in 2018. This exhibition is being planned as a collaborative effort with the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts. Naturally I am looking forward immensely to this show, which will, however, consist largely of loaned paintings that are not necessarily discussed in my book.

*Nico van Hout is a curator at the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp. He has been a member of CODART since 2004.*

## FRIENDS

## George Abrams interviewed by Gerdien Verschoor

The American collector George Abrams built up his collection in very close cooperation with his late wife, Maida Stocker Abrams (1938-2002). The Maida and George Abrams Collection is one of the finest collections of Dutch drawings with a focus on the seventeenth century ever brought together in the United States. In addition to his Boston-based legal career, he is a member of the visiting committee of the Harvard Art Museums, a trustee of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and a member of the Board and Chairman of the Prints and Drawings vetting committee of TEFAF. Since 2010, George Abrams has supported CODART as a Patron, and he has kindly agreed to tell us more about his passion for Dutch drawings and the history of his collection.

**Collection**

*The decision to build up a collection of drawings (rather than paintings) was unusual when you started to collect in the 1960s. Could you tell us more about it? Why did you focus on drawings, and why Dutch drawings?*

Maida and I were drawn to the spontaneity and directness of drawings. We loved the fact that Dutch drawings often depict the world around us: people, animals, landscapes – palpable, touchable things we could see and to which we could relate.

In the United States, serious interest in Old Master drawings really developed only in the twentieth century, and initially with an emphasis on Italian and French drawings. Dutch drawings were considered a little pedestrian. We did not agree and happily went off in our own direction.

There were very few collectors of Dutch drawings in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, in part because of fashion and in part because the drawings and most of the dealers were centered in Europe. We had to build our knowledge of the field mostly in Europe, and the extensive traveling this required was not always easy, especially with young children. Books and catalogues and print rooms became a big part of our lives.

In the early years there were very few books and catalogues with good illustrations of Dutch Drawings. The only exhibition catalogues were coming from Frits Lugt and Carlos van Hasselt at the Fondation Custodia, occasionally from the Rijksmuseum, and from some of the dealers, such as Colnaghi, C.G. Boerner, Houthakker and Douwes. We studied everything available.

*Did you make a deliberate decision at some point to build up a collection? When did you actually begin to call yourself a collector?*

No, it really wasn't a conscious choice. We just went about buying drawings we liked during the 1960s. In 1968, Frank Robinson, whom we knew from the time he was studying at the Fogg, was then teaching at nearby Wellesley College and asked if we would consider doing an exhibition of some of our drawings. We hesitated, but then finally agreed, and Frank produced a small but very lovely catalogue to accompany an exhibition of sixty-three drawings which went to six museums in the United States. We still have and cherish most of the drawings from that exhibition. By that time, we realized we were collectors.

*You built up your collection together with your late wife, Maida Stocker Abrams. Can you speak of a "Maida" and a "George" part of the collection or of typical "Maida" or "George" choices?*

Maida was more drawn to people and portraits at first. I was too, but along the way I began to appreciate landscapes.

Gerbrand van den Eeckhout's exquisite *Woman Doing Handwork* was one of Maida's favorites, and I was swept up by the two stunning and rare Cornelis Vroom drawings we acquired, one of which is his *River Scene*.

Each of us had the power of veto, but usually we agreed on our choices. Once Maida vetoed the purchase of a portrait by a rare artist of an extremely unattractive man. She said it was possibly the ugliest drawing she had ever seen, and she was right.

I got carried away by the rarity. The advantage of collecting together is that you have different views and that you see other things. It is also hard to collect together, because sometimes you have to decide quickly, and it wasn't always easy for both of us to see a drawing quickly. Then, I sometimes acted on my own and hoped I would not get into trouble. Luckily, we knew each other's taste pretty well after the first year or two.

## **Drawings**

*In one of your interviews you spoke about the two levels of a drawing: the "material" and the "spiritual." Could you tell us about the spiritual level, with one concrete drawing as an example?*

I have spoken of the two levels of drawings: the material, physical level and the magical, almost spiritual aura that really wonderful drawings can radiate. It is possible to look at a drawing and see the physical side but not feel anything more. But when I look at a drawing, Jacques de Gheyn's Gypsy Mother and Child (fig. 3), for example, I feel much more. Look at the way the child holds onto the mother's finger. Look how they interact – the care and tenderness of the mother and the child's acceptance of her affection. De Gheyn has done far more than merely depicting a mother and child. He has captured their whole relationship. That is what I mean when I talk of the magical side of drawings.

*A lot has been written about your collection. How would you characterize it yourself?*

I think I would characterize our collection as one made up of a number of area concentrations. We loved Rembrandt and the people around him.

We thought it would be hard for us to collect in this area, but surprisingly we managed to build up a group of nine or ten Rembrandts and about ninety others by his students and circle. We also concentrated on the early draughtsmen around Goltzius and De Gheyn, with a number of drawings by Jan Muller, Jacob Matham, Joachim Wtewael, Willem Buytewech and Jan van Bouckhorst. In the early landscape area we were able to find drawings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Hans Bol, C. J. Visscher, Esaias and Jan van de Velde and others. Another concentration was centered around Adriaen van Ostade, his brother Isaak, Cornelis Bega, Cornelis Dusart and other genre artists. We also put together a large group of watercolor still-life artists running from Joris Hoefnagel and Jacob Marrel to Jan Bronkhorst, Aart Schouman and Jan van Huysum. By choice we are weakest in the Italianate Dutch and seascape artists. Our collection is large by today's standards, close to 700 drawings if you include the Fogg group. I have trouble understanding how it grew to that size when I think of how many times we turned down a drawing with hopes of finding one a little better or more to our taste. But then I remember it has been over fifty years of collecting.

## **Parallel lives**

*You have parallel lives: as a lawyer and as an art collector. Can you tell us more about the relationship between these two lives? How do they "feed" each other? In which ways do they compete?*

When I was at law school, instead of working summers at law firms in order to advance opportunities for

employment, I worked with NBBS in Leiden and elsewhere in Holland in connection with student tourist interchanges, which was an early introduction to the country and its art. Since then, I've had an interesting law practice, including working in the United States Senate and being a director of several large corporations. I also developed a number of hotel projects, including one in Amsterdam that took me to Holland on a regular basis for some twenty years. I was able to do some collecting on the side. It's also true, however, that my law practice sometimes interfered with my collecting. I regret having missed some sales and other buying opportunities because of legal obligations.

## **Supporting Cultural Institutions**

*In 1999 you donated a major part of your collection to the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University "in recognition of the institution's leading role as a teaching and research museum." However, your cooperation with the Fogg goes beyond this donation. You support the Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings, CODART member William Robinson. Would you please share with us your reasons for supporting the museum not only by donating works of art, but also by supporting the education of scholars and curators? How do you see the role of CODART in the world of Old Masters aficionados, and why did you decide to join our network as a Patron?*

Harvard University had a great tradition of involvement with Old Master drawings. Over the years, I got to know Paul Sachs, Agnes Mongan, Jacob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, Konrad Oberhuber and Bill Robinson. My involvement with them and with the Fogg Museum has covered the whole period of my collecting from the beginning to the present.

I believed in Harvard's emphasis on connoisseurship throughout this period, even when connoisseurship was severely attacked in some academic quarters. I have had several other museum involvements, particularly the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All my museum involvements have been important to me. I have always wanted to encourage and help as many people as possible to have direct contact with art, just as Maida and I did. Such contact can provide life-changing, humanizing experiences, and I would like to do as much as I can to make access available on a wide scale.

Now, having said that, I believe there is a special world of scholar-curators in the field of Dutch drawings and paintings. I love the research and scholarly side of drawings and have always tried to encourage and support this type of activity. The general public may not be involved in this scholarly world, but it has always fascinated me. When Gary Schwartz first spoke to me about his ideas for CODART, I was totally convinced of the importance of his initiative. One of the things I learned early on was that a curator's scholarly work can be a lonely pursuit, and Gary's idea of uniting curators of Dutch and Flemish art in a central organization with regularly held meetings and educational travel opportunities seemed a way to get a more cooperative and supportive environment. Think of how many more interchanges occur now among curators of Dutch and Flemish art. There are even more opportunities for loans, discussions of scholarly work with other knowledgeable people, exhibitions and publications. A lot of this is due to the success of CODART. Gary's idea has become an important factor in furthering scholarship and in strengthening the work of curators of Dutch and Flemish art all over the world.

## **Selected Bibliography: Maida and George Abrams Collection Exhibitions dedicated to the Collection:**

*Drawings by Rembrandt, his Students and Circle from the Collection of Maida and George Abrams.* Greenwich, Connecticut, Bruce Museum, 24 September 2011 - 8 January 2012 and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 15 April - 8 July 2012. Catalogue by Peter Sutton and William W. Robinson.

*Mirror of Holland: Drawings from the Maida and George Abrams Collection. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts,* Part 1, 20 November 2010 - 6 March 2011; Part 2, 26 March - 31 July 2011. No catalogue.

*Bruegel to Rembrandt: Dutch and Flemish Drawings from the Maida and George Abrams Collection.* London, British Museum, 13 June - 22 September 2002; Paris, Institut Néerlandais, 10 October - 8 December 2002; Cambridge, Massachusetts, Fogg Art Museum, 22 March - 6 July 2003. Catalogue by William W. Robinson.

*Seventeenth-Century Dutch Drawings: A Selection from the Maida and George Abrams Collection.* Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 23 February - 28 April 1991; Vienna, Albertina, 16 May - 30 June 1991; New York, Morgan Library, 22 January - 22 April 1992; Cambridge, Massachusetts, Fogg Art Museum, 10 October - 6 December 1992. Catalogue by William W. Robinson.

*Things of This World: A Selection of Drawings from the Collection of Maida and George Abrams.* Williamstown, Massachusetts, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 31 October 1972 - 25 February 1973. Catalogue by Franklin W. Robinson.

*Selections from the Collection of Dutch Drawings of Maida & George Abrams, A Loan Exhibition.* Hanover, New

Hampshire, Hopkins Center Art Galleries, Dartmouth College, 27 March - 18 April 1969; Wellesley, Massachusetts, Wellesley College Museum, 4 May - 4 June 1969; Providence, Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 17 September - 12 October 1969; Storrs, Connecticut, The University of Connecticut Museum of Art, 18 October - 16 November 1969. Venues added after publication: Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton Museum of Art; Sarasota, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Catalogue by Franklin W. Robinson.

**Exhibitions to which Mr. and Mrs. Abrams were major contributors:**

*Jan Lievens. A Dutch Master Rediscovered.* Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art, 26 October 2008 - 11 January 2009; Milwaukee, The Milwaukee Art Museum, 7 February - 26 April 2009; Amsterdam, Rembrandthuis, 17 May - 9 August 2009. Catalogue by Arthur K. Wheelock and others.

*Rembrandt and the Aesthetics of Technique.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Art Museums, 9 September - 10 December 2006. Brochure by Ivan Gaskell and William W. Robinson.

*Time and Transformation in Seventeenth Century Dutch Art.* Poughkeepsie, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 8 April - 19 June 2005; Sarasota, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 20 August - 30 October 2005; Louisville, The Speed Art Museum, 10 January - 26 March 2006. Catalogue by Susan Donahue Kuretsky.

*From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art.* Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art, 31 January - 31 May 1999. Catalogue by Arthur K. Wheelock.

*From Lowlife to Rustic Idyll: The Peasant Genre in 17th-Century Dutch Drawings and Prints.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, 29 March - 22 June 1997. Catalogue by Anna C. Knaap.

*Landscape in Perspective: Drawings by Rembrandt and his Contemporaries.* Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 15 April - 29 May 1988; Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 20 February - 3 April 1988. Catalogue by Frederik Duparc.

*Haarlem, The Seventeenth Century.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 20 February - 17 April 1983. Catalogue by Frima Fox Hofrichter.

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## CODART ACTIVITIES

### CODARTfocus in Prague

Anja K. Ševčík

In both quantity and quality the 550 paintings of the Dutch Golden Age in the collection of the National Gallery in Prague form one of the most important holdings outside the Netherlands. They also represent the most prestigious part of the Prague Collection of Old Masters, yet they are still insufficiently known, both to the domestic and international public and to the scholarly world.

In February 2012 a long-term research and restoration project on the Prague Dutch Masters culminated in the publication of the first Summary Catalogue and the opening of the exhibition *Rembrandt & Co. – Stories Told by a Prosperous Age*, the first large overview of seventeenth-century Dutch art in the Czech Republic. Both projects would have been impossible without the support of many, many CODART members and affiliated institutions, in particular the RKD and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

This was all the more reason for us at the National Gallery to be delighted and honored to welcome CODART for the first time in Prague for a scholarly [CODARTfocus](#) meeting, generously supported by the Royal Dutch Embassy in Prague and the ING Bank, Czech Republic.

The group of twenty-eight members and Friends of CODART, representing eight countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Germany, The Netherlands, England, Canada and Brazil), started on Sunday, 13 May with an attractive optional program. CODART member Eliška Fučíková invited us to study paintings by Rudolfine court artists on loan to the Prague Castle Gallery. This glance at the Prague imperial collection was followed by a visit to a princely collection at the Lobkowitz Palace. The ruling prince William Lobkowitz offered us an inspiring and enthusiastic behind-the-scenes view of a private noble collection, and told us about the challenges posed by the confiscation, restitution and maintenance of the family heritage.

Monday, 14 May was devoted to the Dutch Masters at Sternberg Palace. An introductory lecture – discussing the collection's history and structure, the research that went into the inventory catalogue, and the preparations for the exhibition – was followed by two case studies: the long-awaited restoration of the *Portrait of Jaspas Schade* by Frans Hals (presented by Adam Pokorný)

and the spectacular loan of the *Anatomical Lesson of Dr. Frederik Ruysch* by Adriaen Backer from the Amsterdam Museum (presented by Norbert Middelkoop). A visit to the *Rembrandt & Co.* exhibition on the evocative *piano nobile* of Sternberg Palace opened the afternoon program. The selection of 120 pieces from Prague, some of which are totally unknown, augmented by twelve loans (from European collections) of paintings closely related to the Prague works, stimulated a fruitful discussion. Even livelier discussions arose during the workshop led by Rudi Ekkart on unattributed paintings in the National Gallery's depot. Taking a fresh look at unsolved problems of attribution gave the participants new ideas for further research.

The recently published inventory catalogue and the *Rembrandt & Co.* exhibition served to spotlight the Dutch collection and to heighten public awareness of the Czech cultural heritage. More than 34,000 people viewed the exhibition between February and May 2012 – six times as many visitors as usual. The appreciation and enthusiasm shown by our foreign colleagues at this CODARTfocus meeting boosted both our success with the public and our motivation for future projects. Thank you, CODART!

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## **Publications**