

# EZINE 4 SUMMER 2014

## 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.

## WELCOME

## CODART Director dies under Avalanche of Books

**Gerdien Verschoor**

This might have been the headline of a CODART News item, if I hadn't succeeded in preventing one of my bookcases from falling over and burying me under seven shelves of art books. You may well ask, 'What flashes through your mind in such a situation?' Well, I must confess that my philosophical side surrendered to my practical side, and my first thought was to attempt to hold the bookcase with one hand only, so that I could use my other hand to throw some books

on the floor (*throw ... art books*) until the bookcase was light enough for me to prop it up again. My second thought kept resounding in my mind like a slogan: *eBook. eBook. eBook*. But my third and most meaningful thought concerned CODART: several virtual bookcases appeared in my mind's eye, such as the handy [research guide](#) that has been on CODART's website for years, and the new [RKD explore](#). In a flash I also thought about the future of the research guide now being devised by CODART and the RKD: an up-to-date and complete guide to the body of literature important to every museum curator. Should that guide be placed on the website of CODART, the network, or on the website of the RKD, the research institute?

These questions are exercising our minds, and their answers will be found in consultation with both the website committee and the RKD.

In the short term, however, there will be other additions to [www.codart.nl](http://www.codart.nl). Many of our members have asked us to post their specializations on their personal page. All of our members have recently received an e-mail asking them to inform our webmaster of their fields of expertise. In the future it will be possible, via the search function, to find your colleagues according to their specializations

– and of course you, too, will be more “findable.” You may describe your specialization in terms of specific artists, genres, periods or anything else you think appropriate. The success of this new functionality depends largely on the information you provide. If you have not yet done so, please report your specializations to [webmaster@codart.nl](mailto:webmaster@codart.nl).

Regrettably few CODART members will be reporting specializations connected with the eighteenth century. Last year, when we were brainstorming with the eZine's [editorial board](#) about a number of special issues we had in mind, it soon became clear that the “Silver Age” was high on our list of priorities. It is a period of low visibility among our members, which prompted us to ask ourselves some questions. Are there any members of CODART who operate internationally in the field of eighteenth-century Dutch and Flemish art? Which collections can tell us something about the collecting history of this period? Are there other areas within CODART that suffer from neglect? It proved to be quite a challenge to find members beyond the borders of Flanders and the Netherlands who concentrate on the eighteenth century. Even so, we have succeeded in producing a special issue that focuses on this *niche* with articles on eighteenth-century collectors and their holdings, an article on the heyday of the Dutch country house, and an interview with Paul Knolle, curator of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede, which pays special attention to the eighteenth century in its exhibition planning and collecting policies.

This all goes to show that curators who might describe their specializations in such terms as ‘Cornelis Troost’, ‘allonge perruque’ and ‘crinoline’ are more than welcome to join our ranks.

*Gerdien Verschoor is Director of CODART*

## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

## Bruges Artists Abroad: Neoclassicist Drawings in the Printroom of the Groeningemuseum

Virginie D'haene

The unique collection of Flemish Primitives – including first-rate works by Jan van Eyck (1390/1400-1441), Hugo van der Goes (ca. 1440-1481) and Hans Memling (ca. 1433-1494) – is often the first thing people associate with the [Groeningemuseum](#). In recent years, however, the museum has been focusing more and more on its important and exceptional holdings of neoclassicist artworks. It started with the 2007 exhibition *Bruges – Paris – Rome: Joseph-Benoît Suvée and neo-classicism in Europe*. The exhibition catalogue showcases, in addition to the painted oeuvre of a few neoclassicist figureheads of Bruges, some sixty drawings from the Bruges Printroom. It is an auspicious introduction to a surprisingly large collection which contains quite a few treasures waiting to be discovered.

The neoclassicist collection of the Groeningemuseum owes its existence to the Bruges Academy, which was founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From the 1750s on,

the Academy played a pioneering role in promoting neoclassicism in the Southern Netherlands. This art movement, which began in France, championed a return to the ideals of beauty of Greek and Roman antiquity. Between 1750 and 1830 a remarkable number of students went abroad after completing their training at the Academy. Their main destinations were Paris and Rome, the artistic centers of this new movement. Among them were Joseph Benoît Suvée (1743-1807), Josef Karel De Meulemeester (1774-1836), Joseph Ducq (1762-1829), Joseph Denis Odevaere (1775-1830), Franciscus Josephus Kinsoen (1771-1839), Jan Frans Legillon (1739-1797), Albert Gregorius (1774-1853) and Jan-Robert Calloigne (1775-1830) – each and every one an artist whose oeuvre belongs to the European Neoclassicism movement. Thanks to donations from former pupils and benefactors, as well as purchases made by the museum itself, the Groeningemuseum boasts extensive holdings of high-quality paintings and drawings by these artists.

Among the collection of drawings are academic studies, sketches, preparatory drawings for paintings, architectural drawings and landscapes. They are not only the work of fully fledged artists, but also the first creations of rising stars at the Bruges Academy. This exceptional body of work lends itself, by virtue of its diversity, to the study of drawing of the neoclassicist school. It is an intriguing collection that has as yet scarcely been studied. Many sheets are still awaiting identification, placement within an artist's oeuvre, or a correct attribution.

The majority of drawings come from two important donations, one made by the British collector John Steinmetz (1795-1883) and the other by the Bruges Academy itself. A smaller number of sheets were part of the 1865 bequest of the Oudheidkundig Genootschap (Antiquarian Society), which consisted of a collection of objects related to the history of Bruges. The Printroom's sixty-seven drawings by Jozef Karel De Meulemeester – mainly academic studies made from antique statues and live models – belong to this bequest.

In 1863 John Steinmetz left a collection of around 14,000 prints and 1,000 drawings to the City of Bruges. The collection's large number of neoclassicist drawings by Bruges artists – some 450 sheets – is striking. More than 350 of these drawings were purchased by Steinmetz

at the estate sale of the artist Joseph Ducq. It is the pride of the collection in both quantity and quality. The ensemble shows Ducq to be a surprisingly talented and versatile artist, extremely meticulous in detail studies and portraits, and exceptionally unconstrained and dynamic in his sketches. Examples include the tumultuous compositional fragment displaying the *Rape of Helen* (?) (fig. 1), and the preparatory drawings for Ducq's most important paintings, *Meleager Dismissing the Entreaties of his Family* and *The Return of Scipio's Son* (fig. 2). With the latter work the artist tied for second place in the Prix de Rome contest of 1800 with the now-famous Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867). His drawings document the various stages of creativity in the genesis of his paintings, ranging from studies of details, figures and drapery to sketchy compositional fragments and elaborate oil sketches. They contain a wealth of information on the artist's working method and sources of inspiration.

At Ducq's estate sale Steinmetz possibly also bought some forty drawings by Joseph-Benoît Suvée. This Bruges painter was one of the first to leave Bruges after his training and go to Paris.

His success and influence prompted numerous fellow artists from Bruges to follow him to the French capital. In 1771 Suvée won the Prix de Rome, finishing before Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). This prize enabled him to spend a number of years working in Rome. The Printroom has several academic studies from Suvée's earliest years at the Paris Academy and some thirty landscapes that he produced during his stay in Italy. They are perfect examples of a neoclassicist landscape, in which faithfulness to nature goes hand in hand with an idyllic, pastoral atmosphere (fig. 3).

The Bruges Printroom has approximately twenty drawings by Suvée's good friend and colleague, the landscape and animal painter Jan Frans Legillon. After completing his training at the Bruges Academy, Legillon, too, went to France and Rome. In 1782 he settled in Paris for good. The Bruges biographer Pierre François Ledoux (1730-1807) relates that after Legillon's death, Suvée sent two cabinets containing "more than a thousand drawings" to his friend's family in Bruges. Only a small number of Legillon's drawings can be located today, however. His landscape studies are less idyllic in character than those of Suvée. They do not depict the ruins of past grandeur; instead, they are simple views of nature and farmsteads. The artist strove, above all, for an extremely precise rendering of nature. His depictions of animals betray a similar commitment to observation and precision (fig. 4).

In addition to ensembles, Steinmetz collected various loose sheets by neoclassicist artists, such as Albert Gregorius, Augustinus van den Berghe, Franciscus Josephus Kinsoen, Bernard Verschoot (1727-1783) and Joseph Denis Odevaere. Steinmetz owned a few of Odevaere's preparatory drawings for paintings, including one for the lost *Raphael Being Presented by Bramante to Pope Julius II*. In 1995 the Musea Brugge bought a second, more detailed preparatory drawing for this work (fig. 5).

More rarely, Steinmetz also bought French and Italian neoclassicist drawings, including sheets attributed to (or to "the circle of") Vincenzo Camuccini (1771-1844), Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824) and a few unidentified artists. A striking ensemble is a group of drawings that Suvée collected by several French colleagues in Rome, including a typical (still unidentified) artist's portrait by François-André Vincent (1746-1816) (fig. 6), as well as drawings by Pierre-Charles Jombert (1748/9-after 1777) and François-Guillaume Ménageot (1744-1816) – artists who, like Suvée, had won the Prix de Rome.

In 1840 Joseph-Octave Delepierre (1802-1879) mentioned Steinmetz's large collection of Bruges masters – which included the work of "Ducq, Suvée and other artists of Bruges" – in his *Guide dans Bruges*. In a later edition he listed even more names, including those of Suvée's fellow students in Rome. Apparently this neoclassicist collection

was well known in the nineteenth century but later vanished from the public eye.

A large number of the drawings that came directly from the Bruges Academy were produced by students during their course

of training. They are mainly “prize drawings,” winners of the biennial contest organized by the Academy, for which the drawings were specially made. All the pupils were allowed to participate, according to their department (visual arts and architecture) and level of education (1st, 2nd or 3rd class). These prize drawings have been almost systematically preserved. They comprise a largely unknown and unresearched ensemble of more than 1,000 drawings, dating from 1755 to the 1960s.

The holdings of architectural drawings contain a number of sheets made by students who later became municipal architects of Bruges, such as Emmanuel Speybrouck, Eugenius Goddyn and Jean Rudd (1792-1870). There are not only prize architectural drawings from the Bruges Academy, but also numerous sheets from other contests, such as a Prix de Rome drawing of 1862 by the Bruges architect Louis Delacenserie (1838-1909) and a first-prize drawing of 1812 from the Paris Academy by the important neoclassicist architect Tieleman Suys (1783-1861), court architect to King Willem I and Leopold I. A few rare architectural designs by the painter Joseph Benoît Suvée, namely a ground plan, elevation and façade for a Jesuit Church (fig. 7), can also be found among these drawings. Up to now, only the architectural drawings from the period 1755-1830 have been inventoried. These fine sheets testify to a surprisingly high degree of skill and demonstrate the importance of French neoclassicist examples in instruction, such as the *Recueil élémentaire d'architecture* by Jean-François de Neufforge (1714-1791). The prize-winning sheets that originated in the visual arts classes also include the early, student-in-training work of important neoclassicist painters and sculptors, such as Joseph Benoît Suvée, Franciscus Josephus Kinsoen, Joseph Denis Odevaere, Karel de Meulemeester, Bernard Duvivier and Pieter Pepers II (1761-1794) (fig. 8). In contrast to the architectural drawings, these holdings have not yet been inventoried.

The prize drawings of the Bruges Academy bear extraordinary witness to the talent of these young architects and artists in training. Moreover, they provide insight into the instruction offered at the Bruges Academy,

which played an exemplary role in the Southern Netherlands in the eighteenth century. They show the subjects portrayed, the examples used, and the relationship between theory and practice.

The museum continues to expand its neoclassicist collection through purchases and donations. The largest acquisition dates from 1973, when the museum acquired four albums and forty-five loose sheets by the sculptor Jan-Robert Calloigne from the artist's descendants. This ensemble forms a representative overview of the drawn oeuvre of this artist, who introduced neoclassicism to the sculpture and architecture of Bruges. These drawings, too, are mainly unidentified studies, designs and tracings made on papier calque.

Its current, limited accessibility means that nowadays this fascinating collection can be described only in general terms. Ongoing research, however, promises new insights into the origin, authorship and function of various works. The museum thus foresees the reassessment and more precise description of this important collection.

*Virginie D'haene* is Assistant Curator at the [Groeningemuseum, Musea Brugge](#). She has been a member of CODART since 2013.

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

## “A cabinet of the most delightful drawings”

Eighteenth-century Netherlandish drawings from the collection of Jean de Grez, to be exhibited at the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België (Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Belgium) in 2016

## Stefaan Hautekeete

After the 2007 exhibition on the seventeenth-century *Gouden Eeuw* (Golden Age), this show will highlight the eighteenth century. Under the enthusiastic and expert supervision of [Charles Dumas](#), senior curator of the RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History), and [Robert-Jan te Rijdt](#), curator of drawings at the Rijksmuseum, an informed selection was made of eighty outstanding drawings which span an entire century and show the fascinating diversity of subjects and techniques that are typical of the eighteenth century.

Collecting prints and drawings became more popular in the eighteenth century than ever before, since the prevailing fashion of decorating rooms with hand-painted wallpaper resulted in a sharp drop in the demand for paintings. In 1772 the Amsterdam art lover Cornelis Ploos van Amstel pointed out yet another reason: “Drawings, just like prints, can be gathered together compactly and put away, so that a single art book or album can contain an entire cabinet of the most delightful drawings and prints.” It is hardly surprising that Jean de Grez’s collection is a prime example of such “delightful” holdings, consisting of approximately 1,200 sheets dating from the eighteenth century.

The core of this family treasure was collected by Arnoldus Josephus Ingen Housz of Breda, who was born in 1766 and was therefore a contemporary of many of the artists represented in this exhibition. After Ingen Housz, his nephew Josephus de Grez (Breda 1817 – Ginniken 1902) continued to enlarge the collection until his death in 1902, when it came into the hands of his nephew: the knight Johan (Jean) Marie Hendrik Joseph de Grez. After enjoying the collection for barely eight years, Jean de Grez died on 18 September 1910 in Brussels, where he had moved from Breda. In accordance with De Grez’s wishes, his wife, Gertrude Marie Mahie, donated the collection to Belgium in 1911. Of the 4,250 pieces in the collection, which consists of drawings from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, approximately 3,600 sheets belong to the Netherlandish School.

The oldest drawing in the exhibition is by Gerard de Lairese, a native of Liège who settled in Amsterdam. Although his drawing *Ecce Homo* stems wholly from the seventeenth century, it is perfectly at home in this exhibition because De Lairese’s academic classicism defined history painting until well into the first half of the eighteenth century.

In Amsterdam his influence was apparent in the work of Nicolaas Verkolje, whose drawing of a *Young Couple Accompanied by Putti* (fig. 1) is presented here for the first time. The same movement is represented by the Leiden *fijnschilder* Willem van Mieris, who frequently drew on both blue paper and parchment, as shown by the two drawings selected for this exhibition, particularly the highly refined *Death of Cleopatra* (fig. 2).

Such scenes from classical history were extremely popular, as were mythological representations and allegories, in the form of cabinet pieces as well as ceiling paintings, overmantels and painted wallpaper. Patricians and merchants who had grown wealthy spent a great deal of money on their town houses and country estates, pursuing an elegant lifestyle in keeping with their standing. France, despite the political and military threat it posed under Louis XIV, was the pre-eminent example in the cultural sphere. Jacob de Wit, in particular, managed to attract many patrons with his light-hearted, decorative compositions executed in bright colors. In 1728 he painted an overmantel for the widow of Gerardt Schaep; it depicted the theme of *Paris and Oenone*, and its perfectly worked-out design is included in this exhibition. De Wit also painted monochrome imitations of bas-reliefs in plaster, wood and marble: so-called “witjes” for which he frequently made study sketches. The design chosen for the exhibition, in which the putti symbolize Autumn, illustrates his astounding skill. The selection also contains a vigorous sketch for a history painting of *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, and splendid designs for the allegorical female figures of *Poetry* and *Painting*, which De Wit executed in grisaille in the garden house of his premises on the Keizersgracht.

The prevailing taste in those days favored an idealized world, as a result of which many canal-side houses were decorated with Italianate landscapes featuring architectural elements derived from classical antiquity. An important painter of such scenes was Isaac de Moucheron, who made drawings of well-known sites and buildings during his stay in Bologna, Rome and Tivoli from 1694 to 1697. The views selected for this exhibition, representing the *Ripa Grande* and the *Castel Sant'Angelo* (fig. 3), combine topographic precision with a balanced composition. Back in Amsterdam, Isaac elaborated upon the sketches he had made in Italy and produced magnificent watercolors such as those chosen for this show, which illustrate his exceptional talent as a colorist.

The image of Arcadia as a charming, unspoiled place – the perfect setting for the pastoral life – is represented in the exhibition not only by the work of De Moucheron, but also by two unpublished pendant drawings by Simon van der Does (fig. 4), who was long active in The Hague, and by two gouaches by Abraham Rademaker, who – according to his biographer, Johan van Gool – had much success with such gems. The Amsterdam painter Jean Grandjean managed to rise above the influence of De Moucheron after traveling to Rome himself in 1779 – the first Netherlandish artist of the eighteenth century to do so. His monumental *View of the Via Tiburtina below the so-called Villa of Maecenas at Tivoli* reveals a plainly lyrical, almost pre-romantic approach.

Around the mid-eighteenth century, public taste shifted from the idealized landscape to real-life settings. This was due in part to the popularization of scientific investigation, which was stimulated by the publication of encyclopedias, through which the French ideals of the Enlightenment became more widely accepted. Moreover, by the early eighteenth century it had become obvious that the Dutch Republic had played out its role on the international stage and that the country – thrown back on itself – was forced to seek its fortune within its borders. This explains both the admiration of the Dutch for the beauty of their own country – a sentiment that was much stronger in the Dutch Republic than elsewhere – and the enormous production of painted and especially drawn landscapes, as well as views, intended for the domestic market, of towns, villages, country estates and castles. It also clarifies the predominance in this exhibition of topographical views by Cornelis Pronk, Jacob van Liender, Jan de Beijer, Paulus Constantijn La Fargue, Dirk Verrijk and Anthonie Andriessen. The work of Paulus van Liender, who was influenced by Pronk and De Beijer, is represented in this show by his early *View of IJsselstein* and an unpublished late wooded landscape (fig. 5), one of the high points of his career. A drawing by his pupil Hermanus Petrus Schouten – the *View of the Almoners' Orphanage in Amsterdam*, a pen-and-ink drawing previously known only from a print – is also included in the exhibition.

As the century progressed, the national consciousness grew, and this resulted in a reassessment of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. The artist Egbert van Drielst, for instance, by whom three sheets will be presented (fig. 6), based his work both on the old masters, such as Jacob van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema, and on his careful study of nature, undertaken mainly on his annual drawing expeditions to Drenthe.

His contemporary and friend Jacob Cats, on the other hand, relied on his recollections of the landscape of the Gooi or Gelderland, handily designing winter views and drawings of the four seasons and furnishing them with lively details. A very dynamic sketch by the Dordrecht artist Jacob van Strij is also included (fig. 7). Much of the final drawing deviates from the underdrawing, and it may well be a rare nature study by this artist. Other landscapes by Van Strij that have been selected for the exhibition recall the seventeenth-century masters Albert Cuyp and Anthonie van Borssom. The latter is also referred to in the hushed *View of a Frozen River with Skaters* by Anthonie Erkelens, long thought to be an artist from the circle of Rembrandt. Jan Baptist Kobbell's *Farmstead with Sheep and Cows* betrays his admiration of the seventeenth-century cattle painter Hendrik Potter. Art lovers of that time shared this admiration for the old masters and eagerly bought color drawings made after famous paintings, such as the seascapes by Nicolaas Muys after Willem van de Velde the Younger.

The exhibition also focuses on late-eighteenth-century developments with regard to outdoor views in the work of such idiosyncratic artists as Simon-Andreas Krausz, Hendrik Meijer, Hermanus van Brussel, Jan Hulswit, Daniël Johannes Torman Kerkhoff, Frans Andreas Milatz and Gerrit Lamberts. Attention is also paid to book production and printmaking – activities that increased in the eighteenth century –

by examining the designs of Jan Caspar Philips, Jan Punt and Bernard Picart, including Picart's rare academic study of a female nude.

Genre drawing was dominated in the first half of the eighteenth century by the figure of Cornelis Troost, whose wife was the daughter of actors and who sometimes acted in comedies himself. A striking aspect of his compositions is the gentle mockery pervading such scenes as *The Nocturnal Departure of the Guests* after a Merry Evening Party. Troost's famous theater scenes feature characters placed not in a décor but in real-life surroundings, a device also employed by his only pupil, Jacobus Buys, in the scene from the comedy "Hopman Ulrich" that will be included in the exhibition.

Later in the eighteenth century there was renewed interest in the tranquil interior scenes of the seventeenth century. Some of the genre pieces that originated in that sphere reflect the civic virtues propagated in spectatorial writings. In Dordrecht this trend was represented by Abraham van Strij; three drawings typical of his work will be shown, one of which (fig. 8) he made at Pictura, the oldest drawing society in the Netherlands. Another remarkable work is an unusual interior on blue-gray paper by Tibout Regters, an Amsterdam portraitist and genre painter.

In the still-life genre, the most popular type of work was the flower piece, represented by a watercolor by Willem van Leen. After 1750 it was another Dordrecht painter, the versatile Aart Schouman, who gave the bird picture a new impetus. He often worked from life in such places as the menageries of Willem V in The Hague, producing numerous watercolors of birds and other exotic animals, including the four magnificent specimens in this exhibition (fig. 9). Other than Schouman, there were scarcely any true animal painters in the eighteenth century, apart from the horse painter Tethart Philipp Christian Haag – a native of Kassel who moved to The Hague – by whom an attractive stable interior will be shown.

The exhibition concludes with a few battle scenes by Dirk Langendijk that sketch a lively picture of the many military operations carried out at the end of the eighteenth century, when the founding of the Batavian Republic marked the beginning of a new era in the fields of politics, economics and culture.

The exhibition will be held at the [Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium](#) in Brussels in the autumn of 2016, after which it will travel to several venues abroad, which are still to be determined.

The catalogue – written by Charles Dumas, Stefaan Hautekeete and Robert-Jan te Rijdt, and numbering ca. 250 pages with ca. 120 color illustrations – will be published in English and will include all the available information on the technique, watermark, provenance and bibliography of each drawing.

*Stefaan Hautekeete is Curator at the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België - Museum voor Oude Kunst, Brussels.*

## CURATOR'S PROJECT

## Historic Country Houses in the Netherlands

René Dessing

The Netherlands still has 552 historic country houses, many of them in the provinces of Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel. Unfortunately, these monuments of our national heritage are not very well known either in the Netherlands or abroad. This is a pity, but it is also surprising, because it has been claimed that between 1600 and 1920 this country boasted more than 6,000 of these idyllic spots. The subject offers art historians many unexplored areas of research. Numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits featuring an Arcadian setting have been studied with little or no reference to this background, even though our eighteenth-century ancestors were obviously fond of having themselves portrayed on their country estates. It was there, after all, that they spent the most pleasant part of the year.

**Historic Country House Complex?**

In the Netherlands, a country house that has survived more or less intact is called a “historic country house complex” (*complex historische buitenplaats*). This term is used to describe a monumental house which, together with its service buildings and designed garden, park and/or woods, forms a harmonious and inseparable whole. Many country houses were built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though industrialists were still building them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As early as the Golden Age, country houses were constructed on newly reclaimed land, but large numbers of them were also built behind the dunes and along navigable waterways. There are important differences between country houses and rural estates. In the latter case, agrarian activities are of vital importance. The revenues from tenant farming, cattle breeding, agriculture and forestry were (and still are) essential to the preservation of a rural estate, whereas such activities were less important to the country house, which was maintained with money earned from trade. Sometimes it did have a farm, but frequently its produce supplied only the owner’s kitchen. Another major difference is that country houses are based on an artistic design, whereas a rural estate is formed primarily of natural components (arable land, forest and so on), although sometimes they have designed gardens and parks as well. The dividing line is not always clear. Some country houses grew into rural estates, but the opposite has also occurred: some rural estates came to be used “merely” as country houses. Unfortunately, these concepts can be confusing, and the origins of such estates are often difficult to unravel.

**The Rhythm of the Seasons**

Our ancestors preferred to travel by boat to their country houses, which explains why many of these summer residences were built on river banks, alongside barge canals

and on the shores of lakes (many of which no longer exist) (fig. 1). Moreover, traveling by boat made it easier to take along the baggage needed for a stay that might last for months, generally from the beginning of April to sometime in October. Families who spent the summer in the country took along their live-in domestic staff and the necessary household effects, closed up the house in town, and exchanged the fetid, oppressive atmosphere of the city for the pure country air. A lady who was forced to spend the summer in town once wrote to a friend that the city was “devoid of respectable people.” The effect this yearly exodus had on shopkeepers and other suppliers has never been studied. This pattern repeated itself every year for centuries. Because many families owned both a town house and a country house, renovations and restorations were usually carried out by the same (city) building contractors, who also worked at scores of places across the country.

Many Amsterdam artists received commissions to embellish country houses with wall paintings, sculptures and garden decorations. The large number of well-to-do Amsterdammers played a leading part in the rise, also in the Republic as a whole, of the Dutch country house. This process began around 1600 with the construction of the first country houses on the shores of a former lake (the Watergraafsmeer) in what is now Amsterdam-Oost.

**Various Reasons for Building**

Country houses came about for different reasons. An old form of country dwelling concerns castles, stone houses and dungeons, which lost their military or defensive function in the late Middle Ages (fig. 2). Many of their owners, most of whom were aristocrats, subsequently put these structures to use as country residences. In the class-ridden Dutch Republic,

the lifestyle of wealthy merchants in the west of the country was very different from that of the nobility living on rural estates in the south and the east, where trade and commerce had traditionally been looked down upon. The nobility lived mainly on income derived from rents, customs duties, hunting rights (and spoils) and the yields of the harvest. Naturally they placed great importance on land ownership and the continued expansion of their estates.

Country houses also came into being as a result of the changing social conditions during the Eighty Years' War. After 1568 a considerable amount of church-owned land was expropriated. The increase in availability enabled the new ruling class to acquire land or enlarge existing properties. Land had always been a safe investment, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century newly acquired tracts of land were sometimes used to build country houses. An abandoned monastery or convent could either be converted into a country house or demolished to provide building materials for the construction of a new estate. Examples of converted monasteries are those of Sion near Delft, Hageveld at Heemstede, Marienwaerdt at Beesd and Oostbroek near Utrecht.

Country houses also became more popular because of investments made by Amsterdam merchants in land reclamation in the lake area north of Amsterdam. The impoldered land was divided among the participants in proportion to their investment. Much of the reclaimed land was used for agriculture, and countless tenant farms

were built in the new polders. Often a landowner reserved a room or rooms in one of his farms for his own use during the summer. Such quarters soon came to be called a "gentleman's room" (*herenkamer*). Gradually the owner took over the entire farm and the tenant was forced to leave. The surrounding farmland was then transformed into a formal (walled) garden with water courses, garden decorations, orchards, orangeries, a coach house with stables and an ice house. Numerous country houses that developed in this way could be found in the Purmer (fig. 3), the Schermer and especially the Beemster Polders (fig. 4). Sometimes these country houses were referred to as farmsteads, a word with an unmistakably agrarian element.

In fact, it is possible that additional research will show that agricultural crises played a role in the erection of country houses. In times of economic hardship, land became less valuable, and this could make the construction of a country house more lucrative, or at least less costly.

Finally, there was another noteworthy development, which was instigated by the Amsterdam merchant Joan Huydecoper (1599-1661) (fig. 5). With the money his father had earned in the tanning industry, Huydecoper bought parcels of land on the River Vecht and had his own country house – Goudestein – built at Maarssen. At the same time he acted as a kind of project developer in the construction of a large number of new country houses, which he rented out or sold to prominent Amsterdam families, among whom were wealthy Jewish and Mennonite entrepreneurs. The latter in particular were inclined to buy sumptuous country houses. For example, Zijdebalen, a country house near Utrecht, had a splendid garden with many beautiful sculptures linked by an iconographic program. The whole was commissioned by the silk merchant David van Mollem (1670-1746). Another famous country house was Vijverhof, which belonged to the Mennonite Agneta Block (1629-1704). Related by marriage to the poet Joost van den Vondel, Agneta was the first person in the Netherlands to cultivate a fruit-bearing pineapple tree. She commissioned artists and botanical illustrators to make drawings of her extensive botanical collection. The plants she cultivated and the birds she kept were documented by some twenty artists specialized in botany and zoology, including Herman Saftleven, Pieter and Alida Withoos, Maria Sybilla Merian and her daughter, Johanna Herolts-Graff, as well as Pieter Holsteijn, Maria Moninckx and Johannes Bronkhorst. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Mennonite students of theology were required to pursue higher studies in horticulture and agriculture, since the study of agriculture taught one about God's works and therefore about God himself. Agricultural-historical research is an interesting source of information for the study of country houses (fig. 6). In all of this, land ownership plays an important role, yet until now, scant research has been done on what this large group of Amsterdammers actually did with the considerable acreages they owned.

Altogether these landowners possessed sizable swathes of the provinces of Holland and Utrecht. What was their relationship with the local authorities? How did they manage their forests, dunes and waterways? And how did roads and canals come into being?

## Monumentality in the Dutch Republic

It is sometimes said that, in comparison with neighboring countries, the architecture of Dutch houses is generally modest and displays little monumentality. Yet closer investigation of the Dutch country house reveals that our ancestors did in fact favor monumentality in the construction of their summer residences. After all, there was more ground to build on in the country than in the city, where the canals and overpopulation made it impossible. In the countryside, one could build monumentally with greenery and brick. Today we cannot always appreciate the composite monumentality of country houses, nor are we capable of judging their artistic and social context. Furthermore, the interaction that existed between urban (interior) architecture and Dutch country houses is also a promising field of research.

Within this framework there is another phenomenon that has scarcely been examined, namely the eighteenth-century amateur architect. "Amateurism" increased enormously in that century, when people devoted themselves passionately to (courtly) poetry, music, botany, zoology and dozens of other artistic hobbies. Many people also became experts on architecture. It is known, for example, that the Amsterdam burgomaster Pieter Rendorp (1703-1760) designed Marquette, his manor house near Heemskerk. Does such amateurism, which sometimes approached the professional level, explain why there were so few Dutch architects of repute in the eighteenth century? It is still not known how many country houses were designed by their owners or built – or renovated – under their supervision. I sincerely hope that architectural historians will investigate this subject. The lack of studies in this area is also due to the fact that little research has been done on the influence exerted by Italian architectural treatises on the development of the Dutch country house. Some of the Flemish who were forced to flee by the Eighty Years' War inhabited castles and small forts as though they were country houses.

They, too, must have contributed to the development of the Dutch country house (fig. 7).

In recent years I have lectured frequently on this subject both in the Netherlands and abroad, in the course of which it has occurred to me that the passing of time has obscured this story. Much has been published about individual country houses, but these studies seldom clarify the wider context, which is why this field of research is lacking in synthesis and a much-needed interdisciplinary approach. To my mind, it is high time to draw conclusions based on existing publications and additional research. Perhaps then we will be able to understand how our ancestors experienced and shaped the ever topical connection between town and country. Art historians can make an important contribution to this endeavor by interpreting portraits, objects and illustrations. In my case, I have co-authored a book (with Jan Holwerda), the *Nationale Gids Historische Buitenplaatsen* (National Guide to Historic Country Houses), which includes a brief history of all official "historic country house complexes." Actually, it is remarkable that this book was published in 2012, a year which also saw the appearance of the first online overview of country houses ([www.buitenplaatsen2012.nl](http://www.buitenplaatsen2012.nl)). I am currently writing a piece for a publication due to appear later this year on the country houses of Amsterdammers.

*René W. Chr. Dessing (art historian) is Director at Stichting Digitaal Portaal voor Kastelen, historische Buitenplaatsen en Landgoederen (sKBL) (Digital Portal for Castles, Historic Country Houses and Rural Estates Foundation).*

[rdessing@skbl.nl](mailto:rdessing@skbl.nl)

## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

## Duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel – One of the First Collectors of Dutch Paintings outside the Netherlands

**Silke Gatenbröcker**

In the Baroque era the Duchy of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, part of the German Nation of the Holy Roman Empire, was among the smaller lands of no great political significance, yet it was a flourishing center of art and culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was here that the

extremely art-loving Guelph Duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1633-1714) created a realm of artistic magnificence. The second son of Duke August the Younger, an erudite collector, Anton Ulrich was not his father's designated successor. Zealously pursuing his intellectual and artistic education, he became one of the most important writers of the German Baroque. Anton Ulrich's brother, Rudolf August, nevertheless gave him a role in government and this lent him new authority and probably also provided him with the financial means to build up a prestigious collection of art. In 1688 the cornerstone was laid of Salzdahlum, Anton Ulrich's summer palace, which was officially opened with much pomp and splendor in 1694 (fig. 1). The half-timbered building no longer exists,

but prints convey an idea of the extent and magnificence of the former residence and grounds. Even in old age, the duke was expanding his artistic universe, and in 1704, after the death of his brother, who had no sons, he became the absolute ruler and could pursue more forcefully the expansion of his collections.

The surviving works testify to the duke's great powers of discernment, which put him in a position to amass a truly superb collection. Most of the information we have concerns the formation of his painting collection, in which Netherlandish works play a prominent role.<sup>1</sup> This collection, which survives almost intact, was considerably enlarged by Anton Ulrich's descendants, particularly by his

great-nephew Carl I (1713-1780, reigned from 1735), who contributed new highlights to the collection in the Age of Enlightenment. In 1754 he put his holdings on public display, thus establishing the first museum on the continent of Europe. Braunschweig's Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, heir to the collections of Duke Anton Ulrich, pays tribute to its patron on the 300th anniversary of his death with an exhibition that runs from 10 April to 20 July 2014.

The construction of Schloss Salzdahlum, begun in 1688, was accompanied by the systematic acquisition of paintings, which soon formed one of the most impressive galleries in Germany. An important stimulus to these developments was the Dutch art market, where the growing presence of auctions and auction houses made it possible to amass an extremely prestigious collection in a very short time. Following his father's example, the duke cooperated with such agents as Jan van Beuningen, David Bueno de Mesquita, and Daniel and Antonie de Deutz, who worked for him in Amsterdam, acquiring paintings, jewels and tapestries for Salzdahlum.

The outward appearance of Schloss Salzdahlum not only echoed French examples but also displayed Dutch influences in particular. It was compared to Honselaarsdijk Palace, to Amsterdam's newly built town hall, and to the Mauritshuis and Huis ten Bosch in The Hague. Its interior featured, among other things, a Dutch *pronkkeuken* (a kitchen intended only for show), the walls of which were decorated with Flemish hunting still lifes and kitchen scenes.

In the course of the palace's extension, more and more rooms were devoted entirely to art. A separate, sixty-meter-long picture gallery – the first in Germany – was built between 1702 and 1704. It formed the center of a suite of rooms containing other galleries and cabinets, which housed departments overflowing with sculptures, prints and drawings, and every form of applied art. Here, for the first time, objects were presented as autonomous artworks and not merely as decoration.

In addition to works from Italy and Germany, these rich and multi-faceted holdings were dominated mainly by Flemish and Dutch paintings of outstanding quality. Together with Lothar Franz von Schönborn (1655-1729) and Johann Wilhelm von

der Pfalz (1690-1716), Anton Ulrich was one of the first to collect, in grand style, Netherlandish paintings outside the Dutch Republic.

Anton Ulrich could build on a small collection that he had inherited from family members. It included some very good pictures, among them works by Lucas van Valckenborch and Roelant Savery, and perhaps the paintings by the Braunschweig Monogrammist, such as his *Parable of the Great Banquet of the Rich Man* (fig. 2). Anton Ulrich also purchased works by older masters, including Maerten van Heemskerck's *Baptism of Christ* and Willem Key's *Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan* (fig. 3). A contemporary description of the latter painting emphasizes its narrative quality and life-size figures. From the period around 1600 Anton Ulrich owned, for example, a number of works by Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, whose *Deluge* is still the most important piece by this artist in the Braunschweig collection.

Two imaginary views of ancient Rome by Paul Bril and a still-complete series of *The Four Seasons* (fig. 4) by Joos de Momper and Jan Brueghel the Elder put into perspective the assertion that Anton Ulrich was not interested in landscape painting. The antique subject matter obviously ennobles Bril's depictions, and Brueghel's narrative figural groups certainly appealed to the literary sensibilities of the Baroque poet-duke.

Hanging in the duke's audience chamber was Cornelis de Vos's *Allegory of Vanity* (fig. 5), which combines the opulence of the aristocratic Baroque lifestyle with the ever present awareness of the transience of life. Anton Ulrich also possessed works by the two leading Flemish artists: the *Portrait of a Man by Anthony van Dyck*, as well as Peter Paul Rubens's *Portrait of the Marchese Ambrogio Spinola* and, in particular, his erotic portrayal of the heroine *Judith*, who has just beheaded Holofernes (fig. 6).

Among the various Flemish cabinet pieces in the collection, David Teniers's *Alchemist* and works by Frans Francken the Younger epitomize the traditional character of the duke's holdings.

Of the Dutch paintings, Abraham Bloemaert's *Nativity*, a nocturnal piece with Caravaggesque references, has come to occupy a special position. It is the only Dutch picture to appear in a volume, published in 1710, of seventeen reproductive prints of works in the Salzdahlum gallery.

On the whole, however, Rembrandt and his circle are foremost among the Dutch artists: it was probably no coincidence that the poet-duke owned three works by Rembrandt's teacher, Pieter Lastman, a narrator of biblical history and stories from classical antiquity. The Braunschweig gallery still boasts *Odysseus and Nausicaa* and the remarkable *David in the Temple* (fig. 7).

Three of as many as seventeen paintings formerly attributed to Rembrandt have stood up to critical assessment: the finely painted pendant portraits of 1632/33 of a lady and gentleman, and the *Noli Me Tangere* of 1651. Of the copies (previously not recognized as such), the copy after the *Circumcision of Christ*, delivered to Frederik Hendrik in 1646, deserves special consideration. This replica, executed by a pupil of Rembrandt, gives an impression, at least, of the lost original.

The sources do not say whether Anton Ulrich also bought the most important of the works by Rembrandt that are currently in Braunschweig. The master's late, deeply moving *Portrait of a Family* (fig. 8) and his exceptional *Stormy Landscape* of the late 1630s were, like the majority of the paintings in the collection, first catalogued as part of

the holdings between 1737 and 1744. It cannot be ascertained, therefore, which of these acquisitions were made by the duke and which by his son, August Wilhelm. However, it is beyond doubt that Anton Ulrich was lucky enough to purchase the two pictures by Jan Lievens that are now in Braunschweig.

*The Sacrifice of Isaac* (fig. 9), perhaps Lievens's most impressive work ever, equals Rembrandt in its emotional expressiveness. It is possible that Anton Ulrich was particularly interested in a fact already pointed out by Philips Angel, namely that Lievens based his composition not on the usual pictorial formula but on a text by Flavius Josephus.

The large-format paintings by Jan Victors, a pupil of Rembrandt, also indicate a close connection between Anton Ulrich's collection and the fashionable paintings that decorated Amsterdam's new town hall. One therefore gets the impression that

at least some of the works in a similar style by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Ferdinand Bol and others were acquired by Anton Ulrich. The small cabinets, by contrast, boasted exquisite examples of *Feinmalerei*, such as the nocturnal pieces attributed to Gerrit Dou and his *Self-Portrait*, which is still part of the collection.

One of Anton Ulrich's few – and therefore all the more spectacular – genre paintings is Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Wineglass* (fig. 10). In a broader sense it belongs to the category of elegant genre pieces, which were also produced by the hugely popular Willem van Mieris. Jacob Campo Weyerman described the duke's visit to Van Mieris's studio, where – following the example of Lothar Franz von Schönborn – he tried in vain to acquire a work by the artist.

It was thanks to the duke's visit to Arnold Houbraken that the collection was enriched with Jan Steen's *Marriage of Tobias and Sarah* (fig. 11). Houbraken presented the painting as a visual example of the narrative style he recommended, which featured characters in theatrical poses, a concept that certainly appealed to the dramatist Anton Ulrich.

One of the most modern pictures in the duke's collection was Gerard de Lairese's classicist painting *Achilles Discovered among the Daughters of Lycomedes* (fig. 12), which was probably acquired for him by Jan van Beuningen at the 1707 sale of the collection of Petronella de la Court. Another painting that appeared at this auction was Gerrit van Honthorst's *Soldier and a Girl*, admittedly recorded at Salzdahlum only in 1737 but probably hanging there as early as 1707. The taste of the times is likewise reflected in the view of *Ponte Rotto*, an Italianate landscape in warm colors, painted by Jacob de Heusch in 1696 and taken directly to Salzdahlum.

The palace was also lent contemporary aristocratic flair by the elegant ladies' portraits painted by Adriaen Hanneman, court painter in The Hague, whose works Anton Ulrich no doubt often encountered on his regular trips to the Netherlands from 1709 onward. After the marriage of his granddaughter Elisabeth Christine to Charles III of Habsburg, the later Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI – a highly important, late political success on the part of the duke – he attended the negotiations of the Spanish war of succession, at the same time taking advantage of this opportunity “to buy impressive works of art in Holland and Brabant,” as he himself wrote. In 1711 he even acquired the country seat “De Loo,” situated next to the stadholder's palace in The Hague.

Anton Ulrich's intense efforts in this period to acquire exceptional works of art are illustrated by his visit to Adriaen van der Werff in Rotterdam in 1709. He beseeched this court painter to Johann Wilhelm, Elector Palatine, to sell him one of his works. (Lothar Franz von Schönborn, August the Strong of Saxony and Prince Eugene of Savoy also succeeded in acquiring works by Van der Werff.) The painter let Anton Ulrich have a now-lost *Mary Magdalene* that he had allegedly painted for his wife. The duke immediately returned the compliment by presenting Van der Werff with a costly pocket watch, and, after returning home, he rewarded the painter handsomely by giving him his portrait, studded with ninety diamonds. The *Mary Magdalene* was hung in pride of place at Salzdahlum.

Anton Ulrich demonstrated the pleasure he derived from the Netherlandish sculpture of his day at least once, in 1701, when he commissioned Jan Blommendael, the portraitist of Stadholder Willem III, to make his portrait bust.

In 1713 the eighty-year-old duke, confined to a wheelchair, traveled to Amsterdam to attend Willem III's estate sale in the company of Jan van Beuningen. This time he secured a Venetian masterpiece, Veronese's *Baptism of Christ*, to enrich his holdings of Italian works. Anton Ulrich's enthusiasm for art never waned: on his deathbed he begged his son August Wilhelm always to remember that he had “commended to his care a rare treasure trove of paintings.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article mainly refers to the following literature:

August Fink, *Geschichte des Herzog-Anton-Ulrich-Museums in Braunschweig*, Braunschweig 1954, reprinted 1967, pp. 20-44; Gerhard Gerkens, *Das fürstliche Lustschloss Salzdahlum und sein Erbauer Herzog Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*, Braunschweig 1974; exh. cat. *Herzog Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig. Leben und Regieren mit der Kunst*,

Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig 1983; Jochen Luckhardt (ed.), *Das Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum und seine Sammlungen 1578 - 1754 - 2004*, Munich 2004, esp. the essays by Regine Marth, pp. 44-87, and Koenraad Jonckheere, pp. 88-121; idem, *The Auction of King William's Paintings 1713. Elite International Art Trade at the End of the Dutch Golden Age*, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 190-204; a volume of essays on Anton Ulrich's collections will appear in the summer of 2014.

*Silke Gatenbröcker* is Chief Curator of Paintings at the [\*Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum\*](#) in Braunschweig, Germany. She has been a member of CODART since 2006.

## CURATOR'S COLLECTION

**Collecting at the Court of Poland-Lithuania and the Activities of King Stanislaus II August  
Jacek Tylicki**

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a dual elective monarchy (the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) comprising extensive territories in East-Central Europe, including all of today's Lithuania and Belarus as well as most of Ukraine. It was also situated on the fault line between Latin and Byzantine-Orthodox civilizations, which managed to coexist fairly well under the Polish-Lithuanian state until external pressure and internal governmental problems led to the implosion of the state and three successive partitions in the later eighteenth century. This process was triggered by the development in the surrounding countries of absolutist forms of government with centralized power. The Commonwealth remained largely an obsolete medieval organism, whose inhabitants enjoyed numerous liberties. The system gradually degenerated, however, until the once powerful land had sunken to unprecedented weakness. Thus the period discussed below is that of Poland-Lithuania's decadence, although it must be said that after the 1740s, serious attempts were made – particularly by the last king of Poland – to introduce general reform.

The Polish-Lithuanian court – resident at Warsaw since 1596 – was predominantly Western in character with regard to decorum, but it also reflected the land's unique political system. Since 1573 the Commonwealth had, in reality, been a republic, and its elected rulers were “presidents-for-life.” These circumstances were not conducive to building up large collections and did not encourage patronage, because the ruler had rather limited power and lacked a stable and plentiful source of funds. The art treasures acquired by a particular king or dynasty were mostly private holdings that left the court when the throne was vacated. Some pieces in the residences belonged to the state regardless of its head, notably the fabulous collection of sixteenth-century Flemish tapestries, which were donated by the last hereditary king, Sigismund II August, and can now be seen, in part, at Wawel Castle in Cracow.

In modern times there existed in the Commonwealth a good number of collections of paintings and other artworks, not only at the court, but also in major towns and on rural estates. Most of these collections belonged to patricians and members of the higher nobility (magnates), but these are still insufficiently researched. Numerous wars and revolts depleted both the store of cultural goods and the archival material pertaining to them.

**The Seventeenth Century and the Saxon Period**

Despite the political unrest caused by a polity that did not guarantee smooth governance, the three subsequent

elective monarchs of the Swedish Vasa dynasty in the seventeenth century (Sigismund III, 1587-1632; Vladislaus IV, 1632-1648; John II Casimir, 1648-1668) took a lively interest in collecting art and supporting artists at the court and elsewhere in the country. These kings displayed a preference for both Northern and Italian painting, even though first-rate works by transalpine artists were difficult to secure. John III Sobieski (1674-1696) – one of the chief commanders who defeated the great Turkish army that laid siege to Vienna – had a preference for French and Italian artists, probably owing to the influence of his wife, Marie Casimire d'Arquien, but his cultural activities were relatively limited in any case.

A distinct change came about with the two subsequent kings from the Saxon Wettin dynasty, August II (“the Strong”; reigned 1697-1706 and 1709-1733) and his son, August III (reigned 1733-1763). They both needed the Polish royal title to maintain their privileged position among the German princes, and quickly began to use Polish-Lithuanian resources to make numerous additions to – and display in a lavish way – the older ducal collections in Dresden, in their hereditary lands. Although the Saxon kings did not purchase or commission art for Warsaw, their activities are mentioned here because they were nominally undertaken by the Polish-Lithuanian court. The broad but systematic passion for collecting displayed by King August II is reflected in the varied and extensive cultural goods that he amassed in various locations: the old ducal residence in the center of Dresden, the newly built Zwinger Palace and three other palaces or court buildings in Dresden – the Stallgebäude (now the Johanneum), the Palais im Grosser Garten, and the Japanisches Palais. They included cabinets of graphic arts, scientific instruments and natural curiosities, a splendid picture gallery, a large ensemble of antique sculpture, and various high-quality artisanal products, especially porcelain, pieces of precious metalwork and jewelry, of which the

king was particularly fond. August III preferred painting and the graphic arts, and acquired them in a calmer, more studied way than his father. Among the pictures, Dutch and Flemish works prevailed; they were usually bought at the large annual fair in Leipzig and from art dealers in Antwerp and Amsterdam. August III's most important acquisition, however, was Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, bought in 1754 from the church of San Sisto in Piacenza. The exhibition, held in the converted court stables, betrayed elements of a learned, scholarly systematization – one of the first such instances in history. At the end of August's reign, the cabinet of prints was perhaps the largest in the world. Sadly, the calamitous Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the need to pay off state debts brought about the sale of part of the royal collection of paintings at an auction in Amsterdam shortly after August's death. These works mainly enriched Prussian and Russian holdings. Nonetheless, the collecting activities of the two kings of Poland-Saxony still form the basis of the present art collections in Dresden, one of the most extensive in East-Central Europe.

### **Stanislaus II August Poniatowski (reigned 1764-1795)**

The close proximity of a splendid royal court inspired the development of arts in the Commonwealth, despite its gradual breakdown. Nevertheless, two-thirds

of a century of Saxon rule did not bring about the cultural enrichment one might have expected, for it was Dresden and Saxony that took all the profits. An effort to effect a permanent reversal of this situation was undertaken by the next elected king. A relatively young (b. 1732) member of the lesser nobility, whose family did not become influential until the eighteenth century, made his way to the throne by supporting a major political faction (the Czartoryski clan) and maintaining intimate contacts with the Russian Empress Catherine the Great. His Polish mentors, weary of the stagnation of the Saxon period, sought a candidate for the throne who would have strong ties with Russia but at the same time support reforms: an open-minded and well-educated person. Poniatowski suited this profile very well indeed. He had spent his youth travelling around Europe, staying for long periods in such places as the Netherlands, London and Paris, where he frequented the renowned *salon* of Madame Geoffrin. After his coronation as king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania in a *coup d'état* atmosphere orchestrated by Russia, he instantly embarked on internal political and cultural reforms. Unfortunately, they hardly improved the country's international position, as evidenced by the ensuing partitions that led to the death of the Commonwealth in 1795.

Despite this sad finale, Stanislaus August's achievements in the fields of art patronage and collecting were formidable. From the beginning, with the help of a couple of well-educated councilors, he set out to raise the country's general level of education and culture by founding academies of arts and sciences, a picture gallery and a "Musaeum Polonicum," patterned after the British Museum.

These grand designs usually came to nothing, owing to a shortage of funds and the general political situation. The king only managed to build a new residence in Warsaw (?azienki), organize painting workshops at court, employ several painters – among them Bernardo Bellotto of Venice and Marcello Bacciarelli – give a few talented youths stipends to study abroad, and start from scratch to amass a collection of pictures, using his wits and connections rather than large sums of money. The aim was to provide the country with some decent art that could form the basis of wider schooling in the future, but the monarch never intended to vie with other royal galleries in the region in terms of quality and quantity. A special museum to house

these objects was never built; throughout his reign, they remained dispersed among the various palaces. Nevertheless, at the end of Stanislaus August's reign, he had 2,289 pictures in his possession, including *The Polish Rider* by Rembrandt, which was purchased in Amsterdam and is now in the [Frick Collection](#) in New York. Other objects were mostly of lesser value. Some were produced by contemporary artists (a fine example is Fragonard's *The Stolen Kiss*, now in [The Hermitage](#)), and there were also many copies by court painters. At first the king collected mainly Flemish and Dutch art, but at some point he turned to the Italians; French, German and English artists were also represented in his gallery. It is worth noting that the king took the utmost care to keep a detailed record of his acquisitions by drawing up inventories and formulating attributions, which, of course, were not always credible. Nonetheless, it is due to his efforts that the history of the royal collection could be reconstructed in surprising detail. Various agents continued to acquire paintings for the monarch at various locations until his abdication. One of them was Noël Desenfans in London, who was never paid for the last, sizeable batch of pictures, since his patron was completely bankrupt after the final partition of the Commonwealth. The objects

mostly remained in London and today form the core of the [Dulwich Picture Gallery](#). The king's Polish collections – including a fine ensemble of prints, drawings and miniatures (around 100,000 pieces in 1782), some sculpture – mainly copies after antique objects – as well as porcelain and coins, were sold at auction in the early nineteenth century to cover his debts. Many of the objects found their way to Russia and Prussia. Apart from making purchases at auctions, Russia appropriated Stanislaus August's favorite part of the collection, which he had taken with him to St. Petersburg when he went to live there after his abdication (1796-1798). Many other dispersed objects were confiscated from private owners as a form of repression after the national uprisings of the 1800s. In spite of these developments, a small number of pieces remained in Poland, mainly at the [National Museum in Warsaw](#). All in all, the last king's artistic efforts produced results – despite the losses – because, after the virtual absence of a court on Polish territory during the Saxon period, they were an incentive for supporting high-quality art and culture and possibly paved the way for the very lively collecting and museum entrepreneurship displayed by some high-ranking families in the nineteenth century, after the collapse of the state in 1795. One result of such activities is the still-existing Czartoryski Collection in Paris and subsequently Cracow.

*Jacek Tylicki is Professor of Art History at the [Nicolaus Copernicus University](#) in Toruń and at the [University of Gdańsk](#), Poland. He has been an associate member of CODART since 1999.*

## CURATOR'S INTERVIEW

Paul Knolle interviewed by Andrea Rousová

Paul Knolle studied art history at Utrecht University and was affiliated with the department of art history as a researcher and teacher. Since 1997 he has been Head of Collections and Curator of Fine Arts at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede, for which he has organized various exhibitions on eighteenth-century art. He has published on such subjects as art education, satirical prints and eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century art theory. He is currently working on a dissertation on the origin of Dutch drawing academies in the eighteenth century.

For this eZine devoted to eighteenth-century art and art-collecting, Paul Knolle was interviewed by Andrea Rousová, Curator of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Art at "Národní galerie v Praze."

**I will start with a question to which I'm not expecting a scholarly answer: What is your favorite piece of art from the collection of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe and why?**

It is almost impossible to make a choice from the Rijksmuseum Twenthe's broad collection. Joos van Cleve's subtle portraits of a man and his wife? Or the landscape by Thomas Gainsborough, one of my favorite painters, whose small painting we bought in 2010? Or the intimate landscape of 1862 by Andreas Achenbach?

But by all means let me choose. Actually, I have two favorite paintings which, being pendants, belong together. They are the portraits of the French couple Maria Romain Hamelin and Marie Jeanne Puissant, painted in 1781 by the Swedish artist Alexander Roslin (1718-1793). Not only are these

paintings beautiful in the facial expressions and the representation of the clothes, but they are also characteristic of my favorite period in the history of art: the long eighteenth century. I still think it very special, how the portraits were acquired by the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in 2008.

As usual, the director of the museum (in those days Lisette Pelsers) and I visited [The European Fine Art Fair](#) (TEFAF) in Maastricht. After a few hours we met and exchanged experiences. Lisette said that she hadn't seen any artworks that would fit logically in our museum's collection, apart from two portraits by "a certain Ros ... Ros..." I immediately knew who and what she meant. I had seen Roslin's portraits at Åmell's stand. Roslin was already one of my favorite artists. Just at this time, a large Roslin exhibition was taking place in Versailles. When visiting Stockholm, I had seen several of his masterpieces in the [Nationalmuseum](#). Fortunately, the [Rembrandt Association](#) and the [Mondriaan Foundation](#) agreed with us and gave the museum financial support.

That was not all. When I mentioned the purchase of the Roslins to [Karin Sidén](#), then Chief Curator and Director of Research at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, she told me that the Nationalmuseum would be closing for a long period of renovation. This conversation, which took place during a CODART dinner, resulted in the idea of mounting a Roslin exhibition at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe. The exhibition will open in October 2014 and includes no fewer than sixteen masterpieces from the Nationalmuseum. At last the Dutch public will have an opportunity to become acquainted with Roslin's wonderful works. It is a great pleasure to be able to tell you all of this!

**Please tell us about your professional career after your university studies.**

After studying art history in Utrecht, my first real job was at the [Centraal Museum](#) in the same city. There, in 1978-79, I helped prepare the exhibition *De kogel door de kerk* (or *The die is cast*), to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the signing of the Union of Utrecht. Immediately after that, I started working at Utrecht University, teaching and doing research. After about ten years, I left the university and began working freelance. In the meantime, I had moved to Enschede, in the eastern part of the Netherlands. When I heard that the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in my new home town was planning to pay more attention to the art and culture of the eighteenth century, I approached the director, Dorothee Cannegieter. The museum decided to focus on this period when it became independent in the mid-1990s. Other Dutch museums paid almost no attention to art from the period 1680-1820. Dorothee invited me to help prepare the exhibition *Feesten in de 18de eeuw* (*Festivities in the 18th century*). In 1997, I was asked to become the Head of Collections and Curator of Fine Arts, and here

we are now, seventeen years later.

Since 1997 the Rijksmuseum Twenthe has considerably enhanced its collection of eighteenth-century art through acquisitions and loans. In fact, we have regularly shown eighteenth-century art in the permanent display and organized many exhibitions on this period, from monographic presentations on artists such as Cornelis Troost, Tibout Regters, Abraham and Jacob van Strij, Wouter Johannes van Troostwijk and Nicolaas Verkolje to presentations on architecture, satirical cartoons, and ceramics from this period. A highlight was the exhibition *The Year of the 18th Century*, held in 2007, when more than 130 paintings were exhibited from the museum's collection, as well as from the collections of the [Rijksmuseum Amsterdam](#), the [Frans Hals Museum](#) and the [Dordrechts Museum](#). Now that our public has had ample time to become acquainted with eighteenth-century art, we have decided that art of the eighteenth century is an integral part of the museum's presentation of art throughout the centuries.

I have a broad interest in eighteenth-century art and culture in general. I have published on art education (and am still finishing my PhD dissertation on the rise of art academies in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century), satirical prints, birds in art, and artists of the eighteenth century.

**Your name is mainly connected with the eighteenth century. Was it your own choice, or did you just feel that there is a lack of research on that period, compared to the research done on the Golden Age? Or were you prompted to specialize in this period by the great collection of Dutch classicism in Twenthe?**

My interest in eighteenth-century culture was encouraged by one of my teachers at Utrecht University, Johannes Offerhaus. The more I looked at eighteenth-century paintings and read primary and secondary sources from that period, the more my interest grew. The eighteenth century was in many ways extremely modern – not only art-historically speaking – and in the Netherlands almost no research was being done on that period, because artists and themes from the Golden Age were much 'sexier' and more prestigious. There was so much to do, so much to be studied, that an enormous field of interest opened up. It felt like pioneering work. And even now, decades later, there is still so much to be done!

I was reluctant to confine myself to researching and writing about eighteenth-century subjects, but I was quite happy to get the opportunity, thanks to my work in the museum in Twenthe, to show the Dutch public art and artists that were 'new' to them. The period when we could show not only our own art from 1680 to 1820, but also the most important works from that period on loan from the Rijksmuseum really made me happy. So my interest in the eighteenth century was there rather early, the museum came later.

**The first retrospective exhibition of Nicolaas Verkolje – *Nicolaas Verkolje (1643-1746). The Velvet Touch* – was held at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in 2011 and you were part of the research team. Thinking of the conceptual framework of the exhibition, did you aim to show Verkolje primarily as a technically brilliant painter, or did you want to demonstrate other of his qualities?**

The Verkolje exhibition was inspired by our admiration of his technical skills and the attractiveness of his paintings. Here was an intriguing, wonderful artist, completely unknown to the public, with no monograph written about him – and the museum owns one of his masterpieces, *The Finding of Moses*. Once we had begun our research, Verkolje's work proved interesting in many ways. To begin with, he worked with French engravings and etchings when composing his paintings. He was not only a great painter, but also a brilliant mezzotint maker. An exhibition like this one, in which three versions of *The Finding of Moses* could be compared, was a voyage of discovery for art historians and art lovers alike. It was a joy to work with nine colleagues – all with different levels of experience – on the exhibition and the catalogue.

**Would you please tell us about a few eighteenth-century artworks in your museum that have interesting or remarkable provenances?**

Let me choose one interesting example: Willem Joseph Laquy's painting *Het Wafelhuis (The Waffle House)* of 1775, which we bought in 2006. Laquy, who lived

from 1738 to 1798, is an interesting and attractive painter who deserves an exhibition. He was born in Brühl, between Cologne and Bonn, and came as a young artist to work in Haarlem. *The Waffle House* is a good example of his genre

paintings and of the trend in Dutch painting from the mid-eighteenth century onwards to look to seventeenth-century art for inspiration. The painting comes from a private collection in Belgium, but we also know a little bit more about it. Research has shown that the painting originally belonged to the collection of Jan Gildemeester, one of the most important eighteenth-century Dutch collectors. Gildemeester and another well-known collector, Gerrit Braamcamp, were enthusiastic about Laquy's work and became his patron. The painting in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe is described in glowing terms in the second part of Van Eynden and Van der Willigen's *Geschiedenis der vaderlandsche schilderkunst, sedert de helft der XVIII eeuw*, published in 1817.

And then there's another painting: Willem van Mieris's *Diana with Nymphs* of 1702 has an impeccable provenance, going back to the early eighteenth century. One of the owners was the art collector Jonas Witsen, an Amsterdam politician who had a *kunstkamer* and a collection of curiosities.

**The collection of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe contains art and applied art from the thirteenth century to the present. In the event of an exhibition, you have material to work with from at least nine periods. Could you tell us more about the “dramaturgy” of the exhibitions planned by the Rijksmuseum Twenthe for the coming years?**

The collection is very broad indeed, so we can choose from many different subjects. The themes of the exhibitions planned for the next few years vary from Southern Netherlandish art in the [Royal Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Antwerp (a 'triptych' that includes Flemish expressionists, Baroque art, and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art) to early work by one of the greatest living artists, Jan Fabre, also from Belgium. There will be two exhibitions of art from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the first devoted to the above-mentioned Alexander Roslin and the other to Turner (2015). The Turner show, organized in cooperation with the Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle, will be absolutely spectacular. In fact, we strive to make all of our exhibitions exciting in one way or another. If visitors are indifferent to what they see, we are disappointed. For example, in the Roslin exhibition, we tell the story of each person Roslin painted. A beautiful portrait may be in stark contrast to the sitter's story. Some of the heads he portrayed fell under the guillotine. The presentation shows Roslin at his best, but also provides insight into political and socio-economic developments in the second half of the eighteenth century. Our aim, after all, is to show art in a broader context.

**Are you preparing any project in particular – an exhibition, study or article – that focuses on the history of collecting in the eighteenth century?**

It depends on what you call a concrete project. For example, the museum is preparing, together with the [Dordrechts Museum](#), an exhibition on Aart Schouman, the multi-talented eighteenth-century Dutch artist. In Enschede we are going to show many of his wonderful watercolors of birds and mammals, which he studied in many cabinets of curiosities in the Netherlands. Schouman was in touch with some very important collectors of European and exotic birds. He was an artist turned scientist, or vice versa – a process that interests me very much. I also hope to organize an exhibition of portraits of eighteenth-century collectors from many countries, including the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany and Scandinavia – an extremely intriguing subject.

**You already mentioned the role of CODART in the upcoming Roslin exhibition. What does CODART mean to the realization of exhibitions at your museum?**

CODART remains very important in this respect. For example, when [Karen Hearn](#) told me at a CODART congress about the upcoming renovation at [Tate Britain](#) and the fact that fewer works could be shown during that period, we immediately discussed the possibility of presenting some eighteenth-century British portraits at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe. In the end, we received no fewer than twelve portraits from the Tate – by William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, George Romney, Thomas Lawrence and other artists – for the 2012 exhibition *Ladies and Gentlemen. Portraits from the British Golden Age*. The cooperation with the Tate will continue: the Tate will be the main lender for the wonderful Turner exhibition which the Rijksmuseum Twenthe and the Museum de Fundatie will mount in the autumn of 2015. Moreover, the three incredible exhibitions taking place in 2013-2015, with works from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, would have been inconceivable without the contacts made at CODART activities. Clearly, we are extremely grateful to Paul Huvenne and his staff in Antwerp. CODART therefore plays an important role in the development of exhibition projects at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe by creating a climate of inspiration and cooperation.

*[Paul Knolle](#) is Head of Collections and Curator of Fine Arts at the [Rijksmuseum Twenthe](#) in Enschede, The Netherlands. He has been a member of CODART since 2000.*

*[Andrea Rousová](#) is Curator of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Art at the [Národní galerie v Praze](#) in Prague, Czech Republic. She has been a member of CODART since 2012.*

## FRIENDS

**Brian Capstick interviewed by Gerdien Verschoor**

The British lawyer Professor Brian Capstick is the founder of a large law firm specializing in healthcare related work, and also the founder of Datix, a London company specializing in software for health organizations. He also established an academic society that is now part of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Professor Capstick generously provided financial support for the RKD's Segal Project, a major project that transferred Dr Sam Segal's substantial archive of information about still lifes to the RKD, including the addition of approximately 30,000 still lifes to the [RKDimages database](#). Capstick has been a CODART Patron since 2013.

A number of works from the Capstick Collection were featured in the 2012 Bijbels Museum exhibition, *Geloof in natuur. Bloemen van betekenis* (Belief in nature. Flowers with a message), which was accompanied by an exhibition catalogue by Dr Segal.

**You studied history and physics at the University of Lancaster and made a career in healthcare law and software. That seems very far away from the world of art history, not to mention Dutch and Flemish flower still lifes. Would you please tell us how you went from healthcare to flowers?**

As a student of physics, I was very aware that science, on the whole, gets better over time. Our understanding increases and so do the techniques that we use to understand and manipulate the world. I have also built up two innovative businesses and they follow the same pattern of growing more powerful over time. I was therefore interested in building an art collection that told an art-historical story from the beginning to its maturity, and, as it happens, Dutch flower painting in the seventeenth century does that perfectly. Beginning with Ambrosius Bosschaert and ending with Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum, successive artists increased their understanding of still-life painting and developed a greater range of techniques to create the illusion of a bunch of flowers in three dimensions. So, there is not as much of a difference between science and art history as you might think, although some would say that paintings are more fun to look at!

**When did you start to collect, and have you always focused on still lifes?**

I started to collect in the 1980s. The original plan was to tell the story of how art moved from representing things on to cubism in the early twentieth century and then on to abstraction. This is a fascinating period of history for me. Nothing was the same after it. Picasso got together with Braque to develop Cubism at about the same time as Einstein produced his theory of relativity, which also postulated that how you saw reality depended on how you looked at it. But I got side-tracked and ended up with Dutch still lifes after reading Laurens J. Bol's book *The Bosschaert Dynasty*.

**For the past thirteen years, you have collaborated with Sam Segal, the bio-art historian and expert on flower still lifes. How did you find this specialist on flower painting and in what ways did you two collaborate?**

It wasn't difficult to find Sam Segal. The world of Netherlandish flower painting is very small and Dr Segal is an eminent figure in it. We looked at a lot of pictures together and I learnt much from him, especially through his many learned books. It was Sam who introduced me to paintings I wouldn't have found otherwise. As a connoisseur, Sam helped me recognize the quality of paintings, which has been very valuable for me. That's why I now have paintings in my collection that are often requested by museums. Having said that, I'd also like to stress that we have become very close friends over the years.

**A Dutch broadcasting company showed a documentary last year about your cooperation with Sam Segal and the exhibition of your still lifes in the Bijbels Museum (*Belief in nature. Flowers with a message*). We saw some shots of your rooms with empty walls – your whole collection had been temporarily moved to Amsterdam! How did you feel about that?**

The house is empty again with most pictures out on loan. An empty house is fine with me and I like the idea that other people can enjoy the pictures.

**The *Belief in nature* exhibition was held at the Bijbels Museum, so it emphasized the religious aspects of still-life painting. Is this transcendental component of the genre important to you?**

Yes, the metaphysical aspect is important to me. I think the early artists and some of their audience believed profoundly that the work of God was revealed partly through beautiful things in nature. This was a common belief at the time and may have made the hardships of life in those days easier to bear. Let's not forget that religion is still an immensely powerful force in the world, although Christianity less so than it was. Still, a word of caution is in order. A picture's symbolic nature justified its purchase in the seventeenth century. Religion was especially important in early flower still lifes, but in the course of the seventeenth century, decoration and conspicuous consumption – the ostentatious display of wealth – became even more important.

**Do you feel that your collection is complete, or do you still dream of acquiring certain pictures?**

Most collectors would allow themselves "one last picture." I have many of them! Perhaps a religious picture will come next.

**As a Maecenas, you support various initiatives connected with art history. Thanks to your financial support, the RKD was able to purchase and digitize Sam Segal's extensive archives on still lifes. You also became a Patron of CODART. What motivates you to cooperate with organizations such as the RKD and CODART?**

These are world-class organizations with many charming and erudite people, so it is a privilege to help them when I can. I also support efforts to improve healthcare and charities that help people with serious neurological illnesses, so I try to keep a balance between art and the world outside.

*Last March 15th, the Friends of CODART Foundation organized a public interview of Brian Capstick and Sam Segal as a CODART Patrons Workshop. The interviewer was Adriaan Waiboer. Some fragments of that interview appear in this text.*

The exhibition at the Bijbels Museum was accompanied by Sam Segal's catalogue *Geloof in natuur. Bloemen van betekenis* (Amsterdam, 2012, ISBN 978 90 78381 59 4), of which there is also an English edition: *Belief in nature. Flowers with a message* (Amsterdam, 2012).

## CODART ACTIVITIES

### CODART ZEVENTIEN Congress Review

#### Presenting our Collections: Ideals, Ideas and Practice

Amsterdam, 16–18 March 2014

**Rebecca Long**

The [CODART ZEVENTIEN Congress](#) focused on problems and questions related to the presentation of collections. In all of the lectures, gallery visits and discussions, this focus revealed the tensions and possibilities in such topics as the desire to expand audience access to information, the role of technology in museums and the potential for digital engagement, various methods of presenting museum collections in the twenty-first century, and the roles of both curator and visitor in museum interpretation and audience engagement.

Nearly 140 participants from twenty countries attended the congress. On Sunday, March 16, after optional walking and boat tours of the city, the participants met at the [Museum Van Loon](#) for the opening reception, at which they were welcomed and introduced to the new CODART members in attendance.

The [Rijksmuseum](#) hosted the second day of the Congress on Monday, March 17. [Taco Dibbits](#) (Director of Collections, Rijksmuseum) delivered welcoming remarks, and [Tico Seifert](#) (Senior Curator of Northern European Art, [Scottish National Gallery](#)), chair of the session, introduced the program. The keynote lecture by Krzysztof Pomian (Scientific Director, Museum of Europe), titled “Museum Art Exhibitions: Between Aesthetics and History,” traced the history of the presentation of museum collections from aesthetically informed installations to the era of galleries arranged around national schools, individual artistic “geniuses” and chronology. He then pointed out the difficulties that arise when one attempts to look at art through the lens of social history in a museum context.

Taco Dibbits then presented a talk titled “Playful Simplicity: The Renovation of the New Rijksmuseum.” The re-imagination of the Rijksmuseum began by considering the original purpose of the institution.

Dibbits explained that the goal of the renovation was to take Cuypers’s architecture into the future by reopening the floor plan of the museum and showing the historical collection together with the fine arts, with a view to creating a mixed display of objects grouped around such themes as place of origin, chronology, subject and provenance.

The next keynote lecture was delivered by James Bradburne (Director General, [Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi](#)). In “Collecting our Thoughts: The Palazzo Strozzi as Research Laboratory,” Bradburne spoke about the Palazzo Strozzi’s study of visitors’ experiences and its aim of staging international, high-quality cultural events in an attempt to induce local audiences to return repeatedly to the palazzo. Each exhibition, which is treated like the opening of a new museum, is based on the criteria of creating new knowledge, restoring works of art, and transforming visitors. In designing installations, the program aims to encourage visitors to spend more time looking at the artworks and to listen to new voices in addition to that of the curator (including labels written by children), and to enhance affective learning.

The afternoon program included guided tours by the curators of the Rijksmuseum’s various collections. After the tours, the session began with a presentation by [Jane Turner](#) (Head of the Print Room, Rijksmuseum), “Museum Labels: Bridging the Gap between Curators, Editors and Educators.” Turner argued for greater collaboration between museum curators and educators in creating labels. Her recommendations, based primarily on her experience of editing 7,500 new labels for the Rijksmuseum’s reopening, include maintaining the museum’s authoritative voice but providing thorough explanations to avoid the confusion created by jargon. Above all, she advocates working as a team to improve the final product.

In the following presentation, “Back to the Future: Objects, Design and the Visitor Experience at the V&A,” Kirstin Kennedy (Curator of Applied Arts, [Victoria and Albert Museum](#)) explained the philosophy behind the museum’s ongoing reinstallation projects, focusing on the reopening of the Medieval and Renaissance Gallery in 2009. The thirteen-year

project has no uniform design aesthetic; instead, various designers have been asked to reveal the original architecture and make use of natural light whenever possible, while highlighting important objects in the collection. Project teams engage extensively with various members of the community (including academics, volunteers, and school and visitor groups) to create galleries that feel like theme-based exhibitions.

The final paper of the afternoon, “The Museum as a Laboratory of Aesthetics,” by Ulrike Surmann (curator, [Kolumba, Art Museum of the Archdiocese of Cologne](#)), introduced Kolumba’s innovative approach to the display of its collection. The museum challenges visitors to engage with artwork in a primarily aesthetic way by juxtaposing contemporary works with pieces from the archdiocese’s historical collection, and forgoing labels and other didactic material in installations that change annually. The juxtapositions allow for multiple points of departure for visitors’ experiences of the artworks, in an ongoing conceptualization of the museum as a visual laboratory.

After the conclusion of the day’s proceedings, attendees were treated to a private tour of the Rijksmuseum’s seventeenth-century collection, followed by dinner at NRC Restaurant Café.

The morning session at the Rijksmuseum on Tuesday, March 18 began with a welcome from chair [Chris Stolwijk](#) (director, [RKD](#)), followed by an update on CODART’s activities by director Gerdien Verschoor. [Yao-Fen You](#) (Assistant Curator of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, [Detroit Institute of Arts](#)) then gave a short update on the continuing implications of Detroit’s bankruptcy for the DIA and recent developments to safeguard the collection.

The lightning talks presented in the “Speakers’ Corner” sessions addressed case studies in museum practice related to the presentation of collections and exhibitions. The speakers were [Christi Klinkert](#) (curator, [Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar](#)), [Leila Mehuli?](#) (curator, [Mimara Museum](#)), [Peter Carpreau](#) (curator, [M Museum](#)), [Joaneath Spicer](#) (Curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art, [Walters Art Museum](#), Baltimore), [Mayken Jonkman](#) (head of the Early Modern Art team, [RKD](#)), and [Paul Spies](#) (director, [Amsterdam Museum](#)).

After lunch the participants were taken on excursions that included an in-depth tour of the Rijksmuseum, the conservation department of the Rijksmuseum, the [Jacob van Oostanen exhibition](#) at the Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar, the [National Maritime Museum](#), the [Rembrandt House Museum](#), and the Special Collections of the [University of Amsterdam](#). The CODART ZEVENTIEN Congress concluded with a farewell reception at the Amsterdam Museum and a private visit to the Jacob van Oostanen exhibition.

On a personal note, as a first-time congress attendee, I found the topics presented extremely relevant to issues that have arisen in my own professional experience. The congress was a valuable opportunity to become acquainted with curators both from American institutions closer to my own museum, and from museums that are much farther afield both geographically and programmatically. The opportunity to view and discuss installations with experts was an enlightening experience. I left the conference with many new ideas that will inform my own curatorial practice.

*[Rebecca Long](#) is Associate curator at the [Indianapolis Museum of Art](#). She has been a member of CODART since 2014.*