

EZINE 7 WINTER 2015

WELCOME

What is the most beautiful thing ever?

Gerdien Verschoor

‘What’s the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen?’ That is the question that the designer duo Viktor&Rolf asked 99 Dutch academics, scientists, entrepreneurs and artists. Their answers were recently gathered together in the book *Dit is het mooiste ooit. Nederland in ideeën 2016*, which gives a surprising insight into the many forms of beauty that touch people deeply. The museum director, not surprisingly, chose his most beautiful painting, the literary theorist his most beautiful poem, and the planetary scientist the launch of the Atlas V rocket to Mars. But what do people choose if the most beautiful thing has nothing to do with their field of study? And what does someone really see when he or she sees ‘the most beautiful thing’? Those are the surprises in the book. The Leiden researcher Stijn Bussels feels that the Christ and St. John group in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. But it is not just the sculpture itself, he writes. ‘The sculpture becomes even more beautiful to me when I think of those who have looked at it in the past.’ Yoeri Albrecht, director of the De Balie cultural centre in Amsterdam, singled out Benvenuto Cellini’s sculpture of *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*. But it is not the stylistic or technical perfection that moves Albrecht. No - it is the ‘melancholy of killing’ that is the most beautiful thing that he has ever seen, as if the victor ‘seems to have been moved by the death of the divine monster’.

On the recent CODART study trip to the Midwest I myself saw one of the most beautiful paintings I had ever seen. It was also a very special experience to observe the enthusiasm of the other participants. In the process people ended up balancing precariously on stepladders to discover whether particular paintings were among the most beautiful (interesting, strange, astonishing) that our curators had ever seen. Their reactions? You will find the [first report](#) on the study trip in this eZine, and in future issues we will naturally be telling you more about specific results resulting from our visit to the Midwest. New attributions, exhibitions, research projects: we’ll keep you posted. In any event, the experiences gained on the trip, by the CODART members, the museums that welcomed us so hospitably, and the patrons who came on the journey, gave us every reason to investigate the possibility of organizing other study trips in the future.

In the meantime, preparations for next year’s [CODART NEGENTIEN congress in Madrid](#) are in full swing. On its subject, ‘Connoisseurship: between Intuition and Science’, we read the following on the congress page: ‘Connoisseurship has long been at the heart of the work of attributing an artwork – that is, associating it with a specific artist, period, and/or location. Ever since the 17th century, attributing works of art has ranked among the foremost tasks of the art historian. Traditionally, attribution is

predicated on meticulous examination by a connoisseur. Yet for some time now, art-historical attribution has been virtually absent from academic training. Indeed, it has even been denigrated as an unscientific, anachronistic activity. For museums and the art market, however, it has lost none of its significance.’ But what is the connoisseur’s future role? ‘Is it based solely on intuition, or can it be called a kind of science? Do we need technical “evidence” to corroborate a connoisseur’s opinion? Will the voices of connoisseurs continue to make themselves heard in an age that is becoming ever more dominated by technical approaches?’ We could ask, freely citing Viktor&Rolf: is it the intuition or the science that is the deciding factor when it comes to determining what the most beautiful thing is that we have ever seen? And can we measure it? Plenty of material for interesting papers and discussions.

We will be announcing the definite congress programme shortly, but for this eZine we have asked several CODART members to give us their views or experience of connoisseurship in their daily work. Food for thought for a congress that we can start looking forward to already. Note the date in your diaries now, 19-21 June 2016, CODART NEGENTIEN in Madrid!

CURATOR'S PROJECT

Max J. Friedländer and the Essence of Connoisseurship

Suzanne Laemers

Connoisseurship. It is a discipline that is inextricably bound up with art history. The introduction of scientific research methods, hesitantly at first but swelling to a flood in the 1970s and 80s, signified an enormous enrichment of art-historical research, and for a while it looked as if subjectivity, the fundamental characteristic of connoisseurship, had been banished forever. After all, thanks to research methods like X-radiography, dendrochronology, IRR (infrared reflectography) and MA-XRF (macro X-ray fluorescence), we are now in a far better position to chart the physical history of a work of art. In addition, those tools often provide essential keys for interpretation. But connoisseurship also plays a part in the assessment of technical findings, for those results are by no means always unequivocal, and are thus open to several interpretations. Subjectivity, a judgment that is based partly on intuition - the art historian must learn to live with it.

No one expressed the essence of connoisseurship, together with its inevitable pitfalls, so well as the German art historian Max J. Friedländer (1867-1958) (fig. 1). He devoted scores of articles and separate publications to the subject, and his carefully polished sentences, that seem to have flowed from his pen like lapidary maxims, still command admiration.

Friedländer was a museum man, although one would not suspect it from his bibliography, which lists more than 800 publications. Under the energetic and tireless leadership of Wilhelm Bode (1845-1929), the modest, slightly shy but highly ambitious Friedländer developed in the early decades of the twentieth century into a formidable connoisseur, mainly of early Netherlandish painting, with a network that spanned the globe.

Having grown up barely 200 meters from the [Altes Museum](#) in Berlin, a factoid that he loved pointing out (fig. 4), Friedländer joined the city's Gemäldegalerie in 1896 as Bode's academic assistant. Their very different personalities must have meshed together almost seamlessly, for in the years that followed the Bode/Friedländer duo evolved into a well-oiled machine, with Friedländer as the subordinate doing the preparatory work and Bode taking the decisions (fig. 2). In 1908 their collaboration gained Friedländer first the directorship of the Berlin [Kupferstichkabinett](#) and four years later the daily running of the [Gemäldegalerie](#), with Bode retaining overall control as *Generaldirektor*.

In the early years after the Second World War, when paintings from the Berlin museum went on a tour along various museums, including Amsterdam's [Rijksmuseum](#) in 1950, the renewed acquaintance with the collection made a great impression on Friedländer, who had emigrated to the Netherlands just before war broke out. Seeing Bode's life's work outside its familiar surroundings touched the now elderly Friedländer deeply, as if, wrote Rudolf Heilbrunn in *Max Friedländer. Erinnerungen und Aufzeichnungen* (1967), an ardent, youthful, lost love was finally found again.

On Art and Connoisseurship

Although there were a few forerunners of *On Art and Connoisseurship*, such as *Der Kunstkenner* (1919) and *Echt und Unecht. Aus den Erfahrungen des Kunstkenners* (1929), the later work can be regarded as the most important articulation of Friedländer's thoughts about the connoisseurship as a method. The first half of the 38 chapters are mainly devoted to such subjects as the art of looking, formal aspects and different genres of painting. The second half focuses mainly on the practical side of connoisseurship and its attendant limitations. Friedländer probably started writing *Von Kunst und Kennerschaft* in 1933, after the Nazis had purged the Berlin museums of Jewish influence and he was forced to pass his time at home. *Von Kunst und Kennerschaft* was announced in 1938 in a prospectus from Sperber-Verlag in Zürich, but the publication never appeared. The printed material became stranded in Bohemia, which had been annexed by Germany. Fortunately Bruno Cassirer, Friedländer's German publisher, took the manuscript with him when he fled to England (figs. 3-4). Cassirer had it translated into English, so *On Art and Connoisseurship* appeared in 1942 after all. The book was a great success in England, judging by the many reviews it attracted, which were all faithfully forwarded to the author by Cassirer's son-in-law, George Hill (Günther Hell). The first edition quickly sold out. Hill, in collaboration with Oprecht publishers in Zürich, ensured that a German edition was published in 1946, to Friedländer's great joy.

Scholarly Method or Not?

Connoisseurship as practised by Friedländer is the ability to

recognize an artist's hand, as well as to classify a work of art by period and place. In his view, the connoisseurship method most definitely did not consist of a formal analysis in which individual forms and colors were compared with each other, but of an inner observation, with the overall impression, the interplay of form and color, being the deciding factors. One thing that is absolutely essential for the exercise of connoisseurship is wide knowledge of the oeuvres of the artists who were active in a particular period and area, and more specifically a knowledge of the stylistic features that characterize their work. 'Memory of forms' (*Formengedächtnis*) accordingly has less to do with remembering forms one has already seen and far more with reexperiencing feelings about something that one has already seen.

When Friedländer began his career many paintings were anonymous or had dubious attributions (fig. 5). This, of course, was because early Netherlandish paintings are rarely signed. There were barely any reference books or monographs, and in most cases a start had yet to be made with the construction of artists' oeuvres. Since many pictures were still in private hands or the art trade they were often difficult to access. As a result, one deduces from his notebooks, Friedländer spent many months each year traveling around so as to see as many paintings with his own eyes as possible. He also tried to collect as many photographs (black-and-white, of course) as he could. He was one of the first generation of art historians to benefit from the growth of reproduction photography by putting together photographic documentation to assist them in their art-historical work. In *On Art and Connoisseurship*, though, he stresses that photographs cannot possibly replace the original works of art: 'as a basis of judgment they are to be excluded as far as possible'.

Friedländer's method was to arrange paintings systematically, primarily on the grounds of style criticism, and then to tease out an artistic personality in their common characteristics and thus put an oeuvre together. The point of departure was usually one or more paintings with little or no doubt about the authorship, for example because the artist's name was known from archival sources. He then tried to expand that core group by drawing up a hypothesis. His scholarly approach was not, in the main, to attribute those additional works to the master with absolute certainty, but to leave room for doubt. In that way he tried to sketch the most objective view possible of the various artists and their oeuvres, and to argue an elegant case for the characteristics that defined the work of a particular artist. Needless to say, the research done by subsequent generations of art historians have refined that picture, partly due to the advent of technical examination, but the foundations laid by Friedländer still keep their value today, and that is remarkable.

The results of his stylistic analysis were presented in countless articles and in his first survey, *Von Eyck bis Bruegel* (1916; revised edition 1921), but above all in *Die altniederländische Malerei*, which was published in 14

volumes between 1924 and 1937. In his foreword to the first volume he said a little about the aim of the series, which gathered together the work of several artists in each volume. His purpose was to present his findings as clearly as possible, but as he warned the reader, subjectivity could not be ruled out, and any attempt to arrive at an irrefutable cohesion was doomed to failure. The surviving artists' oeuvres are too fragmentary for that. Whoever strives for objectivity and complete cohesion will inevitably fall into the traps of bias and assumption of patterns, thus creating a false picture of the subject. Friedländer did his utmost to avoid that. He did not believe in a method that consisted of anything other than 'modest integrity' (*bescheiden Redlichkeit*).

So Friedländer was well aware of the fact that connoisseurship embodies a subjective form of scholarship, the essence of which was formed by intuition. In his view, the absence of measurable facts, and arriving at a judgement that springs from personal feelings, make connoisseurship a branch of knowledge that does not rely on providing irrefutable proof but on the search for the highest degree of probability. That connoisseurship rests on a shaky basis is because errors are inevitable, but, Friedländer says, what sets the true connoisseur apart is that he or she has the courage to revise their opinion.

There was criticism of connoisseurship even in Friedländer's day. The main objection was that it could not really call itself a method, not only because it lacks any theoretical underpinning but also because factual verification is impossible, whereas it is precisely that verifiable burden of proof that lies at the heart of any scientific method. Nowadays we know that, despite the verifiability of the results of technical examination, it too is not a method that always leads to irrefutable answers. With

his characteristic sense of irony, Friedländer answered his critics in a contribution to *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt* (1919), in the firm conviction that the essence of connoisseurship simply cannot be altered with the aid of method. ‘Can one imagine a physicist being accused of an inability to characterize a superb sunrise? No, of course not, because the emotion evoked by a sunrise lies outside his field of research. The researcher who studies art, on the other hand, is concerned in essence with nothing other than the splendor of a sunrise. A painting is my research subject insofar as it is a work of art and excites the eye and the mind. A method that neglects this distinction between physics and art can hardly suffice.’ All the same, Friedländer would have embraced the introduction of scientific research methods in art history. Like the generations that came after him he would have been convinced that technical examination makes an indispensable contribution to the search for the highest degree of probability.

With thanks to [Edwin Buijsen](#) and [Michiel Franken](#).

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CURATOR'S COLLECTION

Connoisseurship and the John G. Johnson Collection in Philadelphia

Christopher D.M. Atkins

John G. Johnson bequeathed his collection of 1,279 paintings to the city of Philadelphia in 1917. Among his primary interests were early Netherlandish and seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. Indeed, the Johnson Collection has over 425 early northern European paintings. When combined with the nearly 100 paintings that entered the museum from other sources, the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) hosts one of the largest collections of its kind in the world.

The size of the collection is imposing. Having only joined the museum in 2012, I am still very much in the process of discovering its treasures. This task is made more difficult by the lack of a current catalogue of the early northern pictures. Peter Sutton produced a magisterial catalogue in 1990 of all the northern paintings in the museum's permanent collection, excluding those in the Johnson Collection. The latter were catalogued early on, in 1913 and 1914, by Wilhelm Valentiner, who advised Johnson on his purchases. Barbara Sweeney updated his catalogue in 1972, and hers is an exercise in brevity. Readers find only dimensions, inscriptions, published references and provenance. Well, I should say that each picture has a section labeled 'provenance'. Many entries identify the provenance as 'unknown', 'completely unknown' and 'entirely unknown',

without clarification as to what distinguishes an unknown provenance from entirely unknown one. And no discussions, interpretations or other forms of analysis are offered. As a result, the 1972 catalogue serves primarily as an illustrated checklist. Furthermore, it is pushing 50 years old at this point. Many attributions were updated for the concise catalogue of the European and American paintings in the museum's collection that was published in 1994. However, that is merely an illustrated summary catalogue, and is itself over two decades old now.

A long line of distinguished curators at the museum have focused on the northern European paintings, among them [Peter Sutton](#), Katie Lubber, [Larry Nichols](#) and [Lloyd DeWitt](#). Fortunately, their research and insights are reflected in the collection files. While this information is not readily accessible to others, the accumulated knowledge in those files has been a tremendous resource for me as well as for visiting scholars. Even so, due to the great size of the collection there remains much to do. The following remarks sketch some recent advances in studying the Johnson Collection; ideas for progress beyond these recent projects are also included.

The museum can count eleven Boschian paintings among its holdings, all but one of them in the Johnson Collection. Unfortunately, the best of the lot, *The Adoration of the Magi*, is also the one in the poorest condition (fig. 1). In preparation for the exhibitions in the [Noordbrabants Museum](#) and the [Museo del Prado](#) marking the 500th anniversary of Bosch's death, we have undertaken a full conservation treatment. After removing layers of discolored varnish and later campaigns of inpainting, the picture offers opportunities for fresh appraisals.

The paint surface was abraded, significantly in some passages, but much of those passages, including the figures, remained in good condition. The standing, forward-facing magus on the right, for example, is well-preserved and extremely fresh. The lively facial expression and confidently assured execution suggest the hand of the master. The opportunity to see it alongside the other paintings in Den Bosch and Madrid will present a chance to reconsider its attribution.

Although not on show in Madrid, the Philadelphia's great Rogier van der Weyden panels have also been the subject of recent exhibition-related research, this time for the monographic exhibition of the artist's work in the Prado (figs. 2 and 3). Mark Tucker, The Aronson Senior Conservator of Paintings and Vice-Chair of Conservation at the museum, and Griet Steyaert co-published a provocative essay on the panels and the ensemble of which they were a part in the most recent [Boletín del Museo del Prado](#). This essay argues that the panels in Philadelphia originally formed part of the exterior of a carved altarpiece. It also presents the case for the identification of the reverse of the Philadelphia works. Steyaert identified paintings now in the [Musée des Beaux-Arts](#), Dijon, and the [National Gallery of Art](#), Washington D.C., as coming from the backs of the Philadelphia panels and thus being the far left and right panels of the open interior. In preparation for this essay,

I happily studied not only our paintings but also the cited

example in Washington, together with Tucker and Steyaert. We reviewed the relevant images and IRRs of all manner of Rogierian panels together as well. As significant as their findings are as regards original function and context, they merely open the door to further research into the components of the proposed painted and sculpted ensemble.

This past spring we completed a reinstallation of our gallery devoted to small-scale fifteenth-century early Netherlandish paintings. In the new presentation we use Jan van Eyck's *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata* as a focal point and interpretive anchor (fig. 4 and 5). In so doing, thanks to an interpretation grant from the Kress Foundation,

we built an interactive touchscreen that presents information on the subject, style and impact of the painting, as well a pinch and zoom feature that enables deep exploration of the picture's minutely detailed surface. In total, the touchscreen enables us to present far more information than is possible on a label or dive card, while also allowing visitors to explore the subjects that interest them most. The topics and themes explored in the interactive are then continued in the labelling of other objects in the gallery, so that the entire installation coheres.

Though the reinstallation and digital interactive have been geared primarily to general visitors, the project has reinvigorated our scholarly research into *St Francis*. We reexamined the publications issued on the occasion of 1997 exhibition that united the picture in Philadelphia with the version of the subject now in the [Galeria Sabauda](#) in Turin. As exhaustive as this study was, new questions have arisen. We very much hope to conduct new scientific examinations and documentations of the Philadelphia and Turin paintings together in the not too distant future. Likewise, I intend to investigate more deeply the support for the Philadelphia picture. Unlike the one in Turin, which was painted in oil on panel, it is in oil on vellum mounted on

panel. This is not a later mounting, as the panel has been shown to have been cut from the same tree as that of the two portraits by Van Eyck now in the [Gemäldegalerie](#) in Berlin. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that such painterly experimentation with oil and other paints on vellum mounted on panel explored the boundaries and intersections between panel paintings and illuminations and, further, that this medium was particularly vital during the first half of the fifteenth century in the Burgundian Netherlands. Indeed, the museum has a related picture by Simon Marmion that was painted in tempera on vellum mounted on panel (fig. 6). I very much look forward to investigating the techniques and motivations for this overlooked pictorial phenomenon.

The storage depot of the museum's collection of European paintings, including the Johnson Collection, contains many unsolved mysteries. Among those that intrigue me the most is the *Lady with a Guitar*, which follows Vermeer's painting in Kenwood House (fig. 7). The Philadelphia picture almost exactly reproduces the Kenwood one with the exception of the woman's hairstyle. Johnson acquired the picture as a Vermeer but it was gradually removed from the artist's accepted oeuvre over the course of the twentieth century. The painting's compromised condition prevents its installation and exhibition. As a result, few current specialists have actually seen it in the flesh, and it has only been reproduced with black-and-white photography. Pigment analysis also banned it from the oeuvre. An old

study seemed to have identified Prussian blue, but more recently that has been dismissed as a false positive. The same study also found the presence of lead-tin yellow, so it seems that the Johnson picture was completed before 1715, making it an extremely early, and rare, variation on Vermeer. Indeed, early copies and reproductions of Vermeer paintings are rarer than are paintings by the master himself. I look forward to pursuing whether any further insights into the authorship of the painting can be made.

For now, at least, we are operating on a case-by-case basis. There are no immediate plans for a systematic catalogue, although such a project is certainly merited by the unexplored riches of the collection. I am hoping, however, that the upcoming centennial of the Johnson Collection in 2017 will offer some additional opportunities to dive in more deeply. We are in the process of developing our plans to mark the occasion, but I hope that we can devise a framework for presenting more collection information online in addition to sharing research into specific case studies.

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CURATOR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Elizabeth Morrison, Senior Curator of Manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum

When I was fifteen years old, I took an art history class in my high school in Kansas City, Missouri, and when we arrived at the Middle Ages, I simply fell in love. I also lived within walking distance of the [Nelson-Atkins Museum](#), which has a fine, though small, collection of medieval and Renaissance works. I spent a great deal of time at the museum, and early on realized my deep appreciation for how a museum can influence and enrich its community. As an undergraduate at Northwestern University, I studied with Sandra Hindman (who is now a dealer of manuscripts), and then completed my PhD at Cornell University, with Robert Calkins, on Gothic French secular manuscript illumination. I arrived at the [Getty Museum](#) as a Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Manuscripts in 1996, and was fortunate to be involved in the opening of the new Getty Center in 1997. In 2012, I became Senior Curator of Manuscripts, responsible for a collection of about 220 objects.

The Getty Museum was established as part of the J. Paul Getty Trust after the death of oil tycoon J. Paul Getty in 1976. It seems that J. Paul Getty (unlike myself) was

uninterested in the Middle Ages. His collecting centered around Greek and Roman Antiquity, paintings, and French decorative arts. Because Greek and Roman painting and then Renaissance painting on up through the nineteenth century were already part of the collection, the full history of European painting was not represented because of the looming gap posed by the Middle Ages (the Getty does not collect modern or contemporary painting). The Getty's acquisition of the Ludwig collection (Peter and Irene Ludwig of Aachen, Germany) in 1983, which some considered the last great private collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts in the world, began to redress that lacuna. Their collection was particularly strong in Northern Renaissance manuscripts, including devotional works such as the famed *Prayer Book of Albrecht of Brandenburg* (Ms. Ludwig IX19) and the *Spinola Hours* (Ms. Ludwig IX 18), and secular manuscripts including lavish copies of the *Livre des fais d'Alexandre le grant* (Ms. Ludwig XV 8) and Froissart's *Chronicles* (Ms. Ludwig XIII7). Since 1983, one hundred and twelve objects have been added to the collection, including such Northern Renaissance masterpieces as *Les Visions du Chevalier Tondal* (Ms. 30), the *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold* (Ms. 37), and a miniature from a French translation of Valerius Maximus's *Faits et dits mémorables des romains* (Ms. 43). These manuscripts are complemented by the Getty's Northern Renaissance painting collection, including Dieric Bouts *Annunciation* (85.PA.24) and Martin Schongauer's *Madonna and Child in a Window* (97.PB.23).

Although the Getty's small collection will never rival those of the great European institutions like the [British Library](#), the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), and the [Bayerische Staatsbibliothek](#), each object is a true gem. In addition, as the department's curatorial staff, we pride ourselves on hosting one of the world's most ambitious programs for the display of manuscripts. We have a permanent gallery devoted to manuscripts, where we mount three or four exhibitions a year from our permanent collection, as well as periodically creating large international loan exhibitions on manuscripts. This year, the Art Newspaper's annual visitor attendance survey recorded the five most visited medieval exhibitions in the world for 2014: all five were mounted by the Getty. Through our exhibitions program and the associated publication of both exhibitions and the permanent collection

we feel that we are not only making the often little-known art form of medieval illumination available to the public, but also establishing the Getty as an important center for manuscripts scholarship.

One of the most formative experiences of my career at the Getty was the opportunity to work on the ground-breaking 2003 exhibition on Flemish manuscript painting, *Illuminating the Renaissance*, under the guidance of [Thomas Kren](#), curator of manuscripts at the Getty, and [Scot McKendrick](#), head of Western manuscripts at the British Library. I had always been interested in Flemish illumination, but working as an administrator on the exhibition and contributing to the catalogue were formative in my scholarly development in this field. I was particularly intrigued by the artists known as the Master of James IV of

Scotland and the Master of the David Scenes in the Grimani Breviary, on whose works I have continued to publish since the

exhibition. On the day of the opening, seeing the display of over 150 monuments of Flemish manuscript painting from almost fifty different institutions was an unparalleled visual experience.

The exhibition was also important to me in terms of building my connoisseurship skills. This area of art history is integral to almost everything we do in the museum, from display to research to acquisition. Many of the curators who have been featured in this "Curator in the Spotlight" section of the CODART eZine have talked about their work on collection catalogues. The Getty is currently in the process of

developing online scholarly tools concerning its collection, and we have recently added over 3,000 images of manuscripts to the Getty's website. These images are part of our Open Content system which allows members of the general public and scholars alike to download publication-quality images at no cost. As part of this process, we are reviewing the tombstone information on images, which of course includes artist attribution. Unlike paintings, which are commonly given to a single hand, manuscripts have long been an area in which it is common to see attributions such as "Boucicaut Master and workshop," with the best images being given to the "master" and the less accomplished ones to his "workshop." Manuscripts scholars in academia have been moving in some cases towards a less sharply-defined division, championing a new understanding expressed in terms such as the "Boucicaut Masters" that de-emphasizes

the tradition of distinguishing between a great artist-creator and his less able students/workshop members/imitators. But should we recognize that model in museums, where attribution is not simply a matter of academic semantics, but has very real consequences for loans, acquisitions, and insurance values?

An excellent recent example of confronting this dilemma was an important addition to the manuscripts department, the *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies*, acquired at a Sotheby's auction by the Getty in late 2012 (now Ms. 111 in the collection). It is unquestionably one of the most important masterpieces by the great Flemish illuminator Lieven van Lathem. He undoubtedly painted all eight extant large miniatures in the book. But what of the 44 additional, much smaller, historiated initials? This was an important question for me to address in the publication I began soon after the manuscript's acquisition. One of the great advantages museum curators have is the ability to study the original objects repeatedly over long periods of time, and often with the help of knowledgeable conservators who can bring their considerable abilities to bear on such issues. The Getty was also fortunate to own Lieven van Lathem's only documented manuscript, the *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold*. At first, the differences between the large illuminations and the historiated initials in the *Gillion* manuscript tempted me to consider the initials as workshop productions. However, the initials themselves were on a small scale, much closer to the size of the images found in the *Prayer Book*. After much careful study and consideration, I decided that the initials were most likely by the hand of Van Lathem. This determination was key to delving into other issues pertaining to production, dating, and relationships with another copy of the same text that had images with similar compositions. It was clear that deciding in my own mind what was really by the "master" actually was important before I could move on to other aspects of the manuscript. It was in fact the most basic part of the process of considering the manuscript, even though, in the end, it is, as always, a personal opinion that may well be questioned by another scholar (you can judge for yourself when the book appears this winter, Elizabeth Morrison and Zrinka Stahuljak, *The Adventures of Gillion de Trazegnies: Chivalry and Romance in the Medieval East*, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Trust). To me, the value of giving

these opinions is that hopefully they will spark conversations about attribution, workshop methodology, guild structure, and other important art historical areas of research.

The *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies* was the first official acquisition of the department under my leadership, and happened to combine a number of interests of mine, including Flemish manuscript painting, secular illumination, and connoisseurship. It is not surprising then, perhaps, that I count it among my favorite objects in the collection.

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CURATOR'S INTERVIEW

Till-Holger Borchert interviewed by Marringje Rikken

Till-Holger Borchert studied art history in Bonn, and wrote his thesis about the early work of Hans Memling. In 2002 he became curator at the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, where he organized numerous exhibitions. Since December 2014 he has been director of the Bruges Museums, which encompass fourteen institutions, including the Gruuthusemuseum, Arentshuis and the Hospitaalmuseum.

For this eZine devoted to connoisseurship, Till-Holger Borchert was interviewed by Marringje Rikken, curator at the RKD in The Hague and associate curator at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.

Congratulations on your appointment as director of the Bruges Museums. What were the biggest changes from being a chief curator to becoming a director, and is there something that you miss not being able to do any more?

The biggest change was from having no time to absolutely having no time. But seriously: now I have more responsibilities towards the entire organization. As long as you are willing to make compromises, for example in scholarly output, which I am not, it might be doable. I still give lectures, and still do research on specific works of art, and I am also still involved in curatorial processes. I sometimes find myself looking at my calendar to discover that I have one free weekend in three or four months in which I have to finish an article. But I also have to develop visions for the museum and the departments. This is a slow process but we're working on it.

What I haven't been doing is putting together a major exhibition. I would very much like to make a large-scale scholarly exhibition in my field of interest again, but that will have to wait a while. We have a couple of shows coming up, but not like the Memling exhibition (in 2014) for example.

Thinking about museum directors who have been appointed in recent years, you could argue that there have been two dominant types: directors with a scholarly background and previous experience as a curator, and directors without a scholarly background, but with many management skills. But there has also been a trend towards having both an artistic director and a financial director, as is the case in Bruges. What are your thoughts about these developments?

To start with the types of director: both models work well, unless you are unwilling to acknowledge that management is important, or on the other hand believe that museums thrive on collections and scholarship above all else. You have to be open to the aspects that are not your primary field of expertise. I am not at all indifferent to management but my focus is art history. I believe it is important to know for yourself where you can make an impact, and by what means.

There has already been a dual directorship in Bruges from the time of Manfred Sellink. Hubert De Witte and I work very much as a team, and there has never yet been a controversy about decision-making. We share the same values and ideas, and we are compatible. Dual directorship becomes a problem if the ultimate goals and agendas of the administrative director and artistic director are divergent, if there are hidden agendas or if there is a lack of communication.

What the Bruges Museums stand for is making exhibitions that advance scholarship, rather than putting on shows with the 100 most popular paintings. We have to strike a balance. My task as a director with a scholarly background is to add to what we know and to make sure that the museum remains a place where research becomes public knowledge.

The museums in Bruges consist of fourteen different institutions. What kind of challenges does this bring about?

It is not so much about managing institutions as about managing the people who manage the institutions. It is a very divergent collection with different personalities. The main challenge is to make sure that the ambitions of every employee are heard. Not all institutions are geared towards the same public, we have to make sure that they are complementary for different audiences. We should diversify our goals while spreading the workload efficiently within the budget that we have.

In the museums there are always several exhibitions on view at the same time. At present there are

exhibitions about the Bruges printroom and the 19th-century mythical primitives. How do you cope with this?

I have been privileged to work with an exceptionally good team of people, I can trust them blindly. It is a young curatorial team, but they are working very well together, because they share the same values in terms of work ethics and scholarship. When we acquired the print collection that is on view now, it was obvious that after spending half a million Euros we now have an obligation to the public to make the material accessible. I always knew that the prints were fantastic, but the exhibition exceeds my expectations. The different approach in highlighting the prints establishes a basis for new exhibitions for many years to come.

In July we organized the Summer Course, the *Age of Van Eyck*. In a very distant past I was working on issues about collecting history and historiography and was giving lectures about the perception of Flemish primitives. So we wanted to make a small show with works from our own collection and a few loans about how the 19th century looks back at Van Eyck. And next time I woke up there was an exhibition ready, because my colleague [Laurence van Kerckhoven](#) picked up the challenge and made it happen.

You have made a lot of exhibitions in the past about the Flemish primitives. Could you explain how connoisseurship played a role in these?

Some of these shows displayed many works that had not been seen together before. Of course you have to put names and dates on the works and then it appears to be about connoisseurship. Connoisseurship should have an aim, not be

the aim. The big shows, such as Van Eyck in 2010, had a cultural historical approach, asking questions, such as what is happening there, what are the incentives? I am interested in how older historical concepts, such as the history of power, would work in the 21st century. If I am critical of the 2010 exhibition on Central Europe it is because it seems that we, both as historians and art historians, were unable to show the historical and dynastic context of these artistic exchanges.

You wrote an article 'From Intuition to intellect: Max J. Friedländer and the verbalization of connoisseurship' in *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen 2004/2005* in which you say that connoisseurship is intuitive. Do you believe art historians still trust their intuition enough these days?

Sometimes I'm sure they don't. There is the desire to objectify, but that is not possible. Algorithms won't necessarily answer questions. If you don't realize what you are looking at, for example if there is overpainting, then there is a problem of course. Connoisseurship is very tricky. One of the greatest difficulties that I have encountered is the compatibility of words. I was at a conference once where people were trying to talk to each other, but although they spoke the same language, they were using a completely different vocabulary and they couldn't understand each other. If you're a connoisseur but are unable to communicate your insights, then you are not part of a discourse. Friedländer had a mind-blowing way of communicating, combined with a beautiful style. He was able to use words in a way that stimulates your own observations. Very few people can do that. Connoisseurship becomes problematic when people are too stubborn. I see connoisseurship as a public responsibility, in a way. We have an obligation to make sure that our opinions, if asked for, are also accounted for.

In recent years there have been a lot of developments in technical art history. How do you see the position of connoisseurship changing in relation to technical art history?

They are both complementary and in conflict. Essentially, the answers that technical study can provide are not necessarily the answers to the questions that a connoisseur would ask. Unfortunately, not enough people realize that. Technical art history is a great aid and it helps us tremendously, not least in making well-informed decisions in the field of conservation. Yet the interests of technical art history and connoisseurship are not necessarily the same. Technical art historians are far more interested in the chemical structure of a specific resin, say, but our interest is to know whether an overpaint is by a specific painter or of a much later date. Rembrandt and Rubens, let alone Flinck or Van Dyck, would all have used pretty much the same pigments, and analysis would show us that. There needs to be a renewed sense of modesty in looking at the results and trying to combine them.

Do you think that young art historians should still be educated in connoisseurship?

Has it ever been on the curriculum? It is one of the hardest things to teach. Art history has a lot of questions to ask. Whether it is a Rembrandt, is just one of many. It becomes a problem if one question is conceived as being more important than another. If a discourse based on theory is considered to be more valid or less valid than a technical approach, that is a major problem. I see that happening today, especially when it comes to students.

We have to realize that it is not easy for universities to include the study of objects in a curriculum. In a way that is our responsibility, as educational museums. That is what we are trying to do; we have formed a research group and an internship program to this end. The Summer Course is very important in that respect. We want to offer privileged access to masterpieces to students from all over the world who are interested in early Netherlandish painting, and provide guidance towards studying the objects. This is not entirely altruistic, because it means that we will know who the best candidates are to whom we can entrust our collection for the future.

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CURATOR'S PROJECT

'Neat finishing, smooth Painting, and labour in drapery': the distinctive portrait style of Cornelis Jonson (1593-1661)

Karen Hearn

Cornelis Jonson van Ceulen (1593-1661) has been one of the forgotten figures of seventeenth-century British – and to a certain extent – Dutch portrait painting, yet the characteristics of his style make his work comparatively easy to identify.

Prolific and successful in his lifetime, his works are found in most public collections in Britain (often, it must be said, in their reserves rather than on display). There are portraits by Jonson in many private British collections, hanging on the walls of country houses, frequently in the possession of descendants of the original sitters. All his known surviving works are painted portraits (plus a handful of portrait-related drawings).

Jonson was born in London in 1593 into a Flemish/German immigrant family. Late sixteenth-century London was full of exiles from continental Europe, many of whom were Protestants escaping the re-Catholicization of the southern Netherlandish provinces. He apparently trained in the northern Netherlands, but was back in London by the

beginning of 1619. His earliest known portraits are of English sitters and are dated 1619 (fig. 1). From then on Jonson painted men, women and children from the upper strata of British society - including King Charles I, whose official 'Picture-drawer' he became in 1632. He also made

portraits of members of the Netherlandish community in London, especially those who attended the Dutch Church there, Austin Friars.

During the 1630s Jonson evidently worked extensively in Kent, too, for a network of interconnected gentry families (see fig. 2), and may possibly latterly have stayed in the house of Arnold Braems, a wealthy merchant of Flemish

descent. After the outbreak of the English Civil War and the resultant collapse of court patronage, Jonson (by now aged 50) migrated with his family to the Dutch Republic in October 1643. He continued to work successfully as a portraitist there – first in the Zeeland coastal city of Middelburg, where he joined the painters' guild, then in Amsterdam and The Hague (where there were, of course, other British exiles), and briefly returned to Middelburg before finally settling in Utrecht, where he died in prosperous circumstances in the late summer of 1661.

In terms of connoisseurship, although Jonson constantly and subtly modified his style of presentation during his long career, his portraits do tend to be moderately recognizable. Certain characteristics persist. The sitter's head is often placed unexpectedly low in the frame (see fig. 2). The range of poses is carefully limited. The sitters are seldom presented in the act of movement, but in a modestly dignified stasis. There is a meticulous precision in the handling of jewelry, textiles and dress, and above all of the lace collars that were such signifiers of rank and wealth in early seventeenth-century Britain and the Dutch Republic (see figs. 1 and 2). The handling of his sitters' eyes is often particularly distinctive, with their enlarged, rounded irises and deep, curved upper lids. There may also be a gleam on the tip of the nose. In his later Dutch works there is often a light-blue or green background, although the pigments tend to have become discolored with time. As the British writer Bainbrigg Buckeridge observed in 1706: 'He ... was contemporary with Vandyck, but the greater fame of that master soon eclipsed his merits; though it must be owned his pictures had more of neat finishing, smooth Painting, and labour in drapery throughout the whole.'

Because Jonson's handling is so quietly distinctive, identifying his work can often be straightforward. This is in contrast to other portrait painters active in London in the period 1620-1645, whose styles and identities can be extremely challenging to disentangle, and who often did not choose to sign their works. Jonson has, however, been surprisingly neglected in British, and perhaps also Dutch, art history. As a painter at the court of Charles I, he had the misfortune first to be overshadowed by the Flemish superstar Anthony van Dyck (as Buckeridge noted) and, then, after Van Dyck's death, to find his own British

career curtailed by the Civil War.

For centuries there was retrospective confusion as to whether Jonson could be called an 'English' or a 'Dutch' artist. As a result, the forms of his name used by art historians vary considerably. Jonson himself must inadvertently take some responsibility for this confusion, for at different times and in the different places where he worked he successively altered the monograms and forms of signature that he used. For instance, after he migrated to the Netherlands he signed his largest surviving work – a group portrait of the civic dignitaries of The Hague - 'Cornelius

Jonson Londini fecit, [Cornelius Jonson of London] / Anno 1647'. He subsequently signed as 'Cornelis Jonson van Ceulen' (of Cologne), the city from which his great-grandfather had come.

So in the Netherlands Jonson seems to have emphasised his 'foreignness', presumably to set himself apart within a crowded market. As a result, if one looks up Johnson in the index of a Dutch publication one needs to go to the letter 'C' (for 'van Ceulen') rather than to 'J', as in an English-language volume.

Recent historians of British art have only rarely discussed Jonson's work, possibly unwilling to have to tackle his Dutch period as well, while few Dutch scholars have been interested in his earlier, 24-year career in England. Indeed, it was only in 2012 that the first English works by Johnson entered a Dutch public collection, when Ruud Priem master-minded the acquisition of the paired portraits of *Willem Thielen and his wife Maria de Fraeye*, dated 1634, by the [Catharijneconvent museum](#) in Utrecht (figs. 3 and 4).

My own recent small exhibition on Jonson at the [National Portrait Gallery](#) in London, which ran from 15 April to 13 September 2015, was the first to focus solely on his oeuvre. The public response to the works displayed was strikingly enthusiastic. Meanwhile, the accompanying book, *Cornelius Johnson*, has been the first one devoted solely to Johnson's work and career. Both projects have benefited greatly from the assistance of and information supplied by CODART members. My research into this artist, his life and his oeuvre will continue.

Jonson worked on every scale, from the tiny oval portrait miniature to the full-length and the large group image. He was the first British-born large-scale painter to sign his portraits as a matter of course, and he generally dated them as well. This makes his work of considerable interest to historians of dress, because it means developments in fashion can be traced from one year to the next by studying the details of his portraits (see fig. 2).

Cornelis Jonson's portraits are not grand Baroque imaginative constructs. On the contrary, they have a delicacy, a dignity and, indeed, a humanity that seem to speak directly to present-day viewers.

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Karen Hearn, *Cornelius Johnson*, 72 pages, 260 x 215 mm, 59 illustrations; Paul Holberton Publishing, €20 / £14.95 / \$25, ISBN: 978 1 907372 81 7

CURATOR'S PROJECT

Jheronimus Bosch and Connoisseurship. Remarks Prompted by the Bosch Research and Conservation Project (BRCP)

Matthijs IJssink¹

'To paint or to draw always meant to him to invent', wrote Max J. Friedländer, the great connoisseur of early Netherlandish painting, about Jheronimus Bosch (c. 1450-1516).² He was praising Bosch's unorthodoxy, his originality. In the past few years the [Bosch Research and Conservation Project](#) (BRCP) has been carrying out intensive research on Bosch's work, with a special emphasis on the genesis of his paintings. Partly with the aid of systematic infrared photography and reflectography and standardized macrophotography it has been demonstrated that Bosch was indeed the 'molding inventor' that Friedländer saw in him. He was a tinkerer, a painter who thinks on the panel, coming up with new ideas and implementing them during the working process. With Bosch there is often a lot going on beneath the painted surface.

Modern imaging techniques have expanded the range of the connoisseur's research apparatus, with the result that the group of paintings that Friedländer attributed to Bosch in 1927 (and in the English edition of 1969) has been drastically modified (and reduced). All the science and technology, though, does not alter the fact that it can be said without reservation that connoisseurship has played a part in every single attribution to Bosch as matters stand today.

None of the known works by Bosch can securely be traced back to his workshop. The world of archival records (of which there are quite a few relating to Bosch) and that of his paintings are largely separate. Connoisseurship in Bosch studies is therefore vitally important. That also means that we are always on thin ice when speaking of Bosch, for connoisseurship is based on the connoisseur's eye combined with his ability to communicate what he sees. So it is more a question of a gut feeling than hard science.

Dendrochronology has proved to be a valuable player in the attribution game, and in several cases it has corrected a connoisseur's mistaken eye. However, dendrochronology can only reject paintings, and then only if they are on oak or another wood for which there are chronologies. Examples in the Bosch oeuvre are *The Marriage at Cana* (Rotterdam, [Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen](#)) and *The Crowning with Thorns* (Madrid, [Patrimonio Nacional](#)).³

In the case of *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*, which is on poplar, no 'easy' judgment can be arrived at by counting annual rings.⁴ The painting, which is signed 'Jheronimus bosch', shows man's sinful behavior reflected in the eye of the Lord. And written in the iris of that eye is the saying 'Cave cave dominus videt', 'Beware, beware, the Lord sees'. Conceptually the scene fits perfectly within the cultural context of the city of Den Bosch.⁵ On top of that, the picture has a royal provenance, for it is said that it was in the very room in the Escorial where Philip II breathed his last on 13 September 1598.⁶ So it also fits perfectly in a story about Philip's devotion. In this case the provenance makes the painting more important, and in its turn the painting makes the owner's devotion all the stronger.

Around 1560 the Spanish humanist Felipe de Guevara described the painting in a famous passage of his *Comentarios de la pintura*. 'However, it is only fair to report that among those imitators of Hieronymus Bosch there is one who was his pupil and who, either out of reverence for his master or in order to increase the value of his own works, signed them with the name of Bosch rather than his own. In spite of this fact his paintings are very praiseworthy, and whoever owns them ought to esteem them highly; for in his allegorical and moralizing subjects he followed the spirit of his master, and in their execution he was even more meticulous and patient than Bosch and did not deviate from the lively and fresh qualities and the coloring of his teacher.

An example of this kind of painting is a table in the possession of Your Majesty, on which are painted in a circle the Seven Capital Sins in figures and examples; and while this is admirable in its entirety, it is especially the allegory of Envy which in my opinion is so excellent and ingenious and in its meaning so well expressed that it can vie with the works of Aristides, the inventor of such paintings which the Greeks call *Ethike* - meaning in our tongue as much as pictures which have as their subject the habits and passions of the soul of man.'⁷ The way in which this passage is phrased has suggested to some that De

Guevara is describing the picture as an example of the work of a Bosch pupil who signed it Jheronimus Bosch out of respect and reverence

for his master. However, there is a difference of opinion about the precise interpretation of the passage, which is also cited as an argument for an attribution to the master himself.

If connoisseurs had no doubt about its authorship, this picture would definitely be one of the benchmarks in the oeuvre. However, many experts believe that it is not by Bosch,⁸ and the BRCP agrees.

It is a pity, then, that this painting cannot yet be included in the program of the BRCP, which has been endeavouring since 2010 to document all the paintings attributed to Bosch with macrophotography in visible light and the infrared, among other aids. It would be very interesting to learn more, and in greater detail, about the similarities and differences in the rendering of the figures of Death, for instance, in the so-called *Tabletop* and *The Death of the Miser* in the [National Gallery of Art](#), Washington (figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4), for comparisons of that kind lend greater weight to discussions about attributions.

For the time being, the rather awkward handling of the figures in *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (however charming they may be) suggests that this is a product of Bosch's shop or the work of a follower. At present it is hard to detect Bosch's hand in it, that is to say a hand that is demonstrably, in the sense of visibly, comparable to that in other paintings that are attributed to him.

That is different, for example, with a work like *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and the drawing of *The Tree Man* in the [Prado](#) and the [Albertina](#) respectively. Google collaborated with the Prado to make a very high resolution photograph of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which it put online through Google Earth. That makes it possible to zoom in so close that painter's hand becomes visible. The same can now be done with the Vienna drawing through the BRCP documentation. Although it is a work of art in the different medium of pen and ink on paper, as against oil paint on panel, and on a different scale (the drawn tree man is roughly 13 cm high, whereas his counterpart in the painted detail is 62 cm high), the way in which both are made is very similar (figs. 5, 6 and 7). A connoisseur would see the same hand in both.

These and many other comparisons can be made with the online digital infrastructure that the BRCP is building with support from The Getty Foundation and other bodies,

which will go live in early 2016.⁹ Connoisseurship can only flourish where comparisons can be made. The larger the number of possible comparisons the larger the number of potential arguments that can be advanced on the basis of those comparisons.

Giovanni Morelli, the famous nineteenth-century connoisseur, illustrated his arguments for distinguishing between hands with outline drawings of the way different artists painted details like ears (fig. 8). The criticism of his method notwithstanding, his idea of gaining a keener insight through comparison is still valuable.

If we now imitate Morelli and put a number of ears from paintings in the Bosch group side by side, one immediately spots the differences and similarities (fig. 9).

It is a small but illuminating illustration of the value of high-quality, standardized photography and macrophotography for the study of paintings, for it enables comparisons to be made on a level that cannot be achieved with a single-shot photograph.

This becomes all the clearer if one examines a drawing in a private collection (fig. 10). The sheet, a *Hell Landscape*, was auctioned in 2003 and has never yet been seen in public.¹⁰ The BRCP was allowed to examine the drawing so as to document it in the standardized way that the project applies to the rest of Bosch's oeuvre. The drawing was first published at length by [Fritz Koreny](#) in his catalogue of the drawings,¹¹ and according to him it is a drawing by an assistant of the Master of the Bruges Last Judgment. He suspects that it was drawn around 1520, that is to say after Bosch's death. The attribution of the sheet to an artist working at a later date after Boschian models follows from Koreny's conviction that the drawing is in the nature of a pastiche. Elements in it recur in paintings, drawings and underdrawings of the Bosch group, and according

to him that is precisely where they were taken from. In other words, they were not prepared by the master himself on this sketchbook sheet or developed any further.

That the latter can be done is evident from the above comparison between *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and *The Tree Man*. The drawing cannot be regarded as a preliminary study for the detail in the painting. It is too

autonomous for that. Whether it was made before or after the picture is impossible to say for certain. The most logical idea, perhaps, is that it is an autonomized rendering of one of Bosch's most successful inventions, in other words a drawing made at a later date and in the presence of the painting.

The Hell Landscape is sketchier than *The Tree Man*. It is not so much a reworked and finished composition but more an assemblage of scenes and forms that recall hell. In our view it testifies far more to a searching draftsman than to

a copying one. In a detail at lower left, a group of unfortunates are lying and sitting on the blade of a knife (fig 11.). A copyist would have interrupted the outline of the blade at the positions occupied by the figures. The same applies to the odd figure seated on the bipedal barrel at bottom right, with the outline of the barrel continuing through the hindquarters of the helmeted birdman monster (fig. 12).

The way the draftsman renders the arrow in the monster's beak is almost identical to the way the draftsman of a monster does in a drawing in the [Kupferstichkabinett](#), Berlin (fig. 13). The same applies to the manner of hatching the leg sticking out of the barrel, compared once again to the Berlin monster. The strange way in which the toes of the seated monster are attached to its left foot matches the depiction of the foot of one of the two old women in a drawing in Rotterdam. In our view, these similar details betray the hand of an inventor draftsman and not of a copyist.

Comparisons between drawings and paintings are also valid in this case. Compare the depiction of one of the birds perched on a pole at top right in the drawing with the way a small bird was painted on one of the outer wings of Bosch's *Temptation of St Anthony Triptych* in the [NMAA](#), Lisbon. Several comparisons with *The Garden of Earthly Delights* are also possible. Once again it is a matter of details like Morelli's ears and the odd way those details have been given shape by the painter-draftsman's use of pen and brush. The peculiarly long arms and hands of the figures in the background of the right wing of the Garden are very similar to those in the drawing (fig. 14). These and other comparisons make it clear that the *Hell Landscape* drawing must be attributed to Bosch and not to a copyist.

But not everyone will be won over by this attribution to Bosch. What the Bosch Research and Conservation Project is going to offer, in addition to the conventional printed publications, is a very extensive and highly advanced digital infrastructure with which the above comparisons can very simply be checked, modified and above all supplemented. This represents a major advance in the study of Bosch's art. What is so elegant about this infrastructure is that no part of it is specific to Bosch. That makes the BRCP a project that deserves to be imitated. And it is here that good, consistent, standardized macrophotography comes into its own.

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Notes

¹ The author is coordinator of the Bosch Research and Conservation Project (BRCP) and joint curator of the exhibition Jheronimus Bosch - Visions of Genius, which will be on show in Het Noordbrabants Museum in 's-Hertogenbosch from 13 February to 8 May 2016. The BRCP research is a team project, the other members of which are Jos Koldeweij, Ron Spronk, Luuk Hoogstede, Robert G. Erdmann, Rik Klein Gotink, Hanneke Nap and Daan Veldhuizen. The ideas put forward in this article are presented in amplified form in Matthijs IJssink, Jos Koldeweij, Ron Spronk, Luuk Hoogstede, Robert G. Erdmann, Rik Klein Gotink, Hanneke Nap and Daan Veldhuizen, Jheronimus Bosch, Painter and Draughtsman. Catalogue Raisonné, Brussels (Mercatorfonds) 2016.

² Max J. Friedländer, *Die altniederländische Malerei, V: Geertgen van Haarlem und Hieronymus Bosch*, Berlin 1927, p. 123.

³ Peter Klein, 'Dendrochronological Analysis of Works by Hieronymus Bosch and His Followers', in

Koldeweyj/Vermet/Van Kooij, *Hieronymus Bosch. New Insights Into His Life and Work*, Rotterdam 2001, resp. pp. 129, 128.

⁴ Carmen Garrido en Roger Van Schoute, *Bosch at the Museo del Prado. Technical Study*, Madrid 2001, pp. 77-95.

⁵ Dionysius Carthusianus was made prior of the Sinte Sophie monastery in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1466. His *Speculum conversionis peccatorum* (Mirror of the Conversion of Sinners), and even more so his edition of *Cordiale quattuor novissimorum* (English translation: *Cordyal of the Four Last and Final Things*, Westminster [William Caxton] 1479) are important sources for the painting. Both can be cited in support of the thesis that it was painted by someone in Bosch's circle.

⁶ Ponz 1788, pp. 41-44

⁷ Wolfgang Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art 1400-1600: Sources and Documents*, Evanston 1999, p. 20.

⁸ Fritz Koreny, *Hieronymus Bosch: die Zeichnungen: Werkstatt und Nachfolge bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts: catalogue raisonne?*, Turnhout 2012, p. 110.

⁹ The website is being designed and built for the BRCP by Robert G. Erdmann. The address is boschproject.org, which is currently hosting a pilot version to demonstrate, among other things, the viewers that Erdmann developed for the BRCP.

¹⁰ Sotheby's, New York, Old Master Drawings, 21 January 2003, lot 20.

¹¹ Fritz Koreny, *Hieronymus Bosch: die Zeichnungen: Werkstatt und Nachfolge bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts: catalogue raisonne?*, Turnhout 2012, nr. 13, pp. 218-220.

FRIENDS

Interview with Elsbeth van Tets

In 1934 the Rijksmuseum received a unique gift: a dollhouse that was most probably completed around 1676. It is not known who made the house, along with all its furniture and twenty dolls, but we do know who it was made for: Petronella Dunois (1650–1695), a wealthy orphan who lived with her sister in Amsterdam. In 1677 she took the dollhouse with her as a dowry when she married. Now, over 350 years later, the dollhouse has been incorporated into the permanent exhibition of the Rijksmuseum. Every visitor can view all the details of the eight rooms – including a peat storage attic, a room for mother and baby, a reception room, a dining room, and a kitchen. And of course each room has the appropriate furniture, paintings, pottery, tiles, linen, and silverware. The dollhouse even contains a pincushion with the initials *PD*.

The monumental yet intimate canal house which is the residence of Elsbeth van Tets no longer has either a peat storage attic nor a room for mother and baby. In other respects, however, its interior immediately brings to mind Petronella Dunois's dollhouse. Once you have climbed the narrow flight of steps leading to the entrance, you find yourself in an eclectic, fairytale world that is crammed with sketches, paintings, life-sized bronze statues of dogs, stuffed birds in little cages, and, in the kitchen, copper saucepans that gleam against Delft blue tiles. This is the home of

someone with a great love of old art in all its facets. And if you have read the credit line accompanying the dollhouse in the Rijksmuseum, you will know that this love of art is woven into the fabric of her family: the dollhouse was donated to the museum by Mrs A.S.M. van Tienhoven-Hacke, who was Elsbeth van Tets's great-grandmother.

Unlike her great-grandmother, however, Elsbeth van Tets pursued a career marked by dedication to a wide range of cultural institutions, both in Europe and elsewhere. For many years she worked at Sotheby's. She also sat on the Supervisory Board of the Mauritshuis and the board of the Rembrandt Society. In her supervisory capacity at the Mauritshuis, she was closely involved in the museum's recent renovation. Elsbeth van Tets currently sits on the board of Museum Van Loon and the board of advisers of the Rembrandt Society.

Your great-grandmother owned a dollhouse from the Golden Age. A love of art must have been part of your upbringing.

Yes, it was. My father was a keen collector, especially of works on paper, and as a child I helped him by cutting out passe-partouts for prints in his collection. In our home, everything was 'old'. My brother is also a collector, so you might say that we are a family of collectors.

It was this interest that made me decide to study at the Inchtald School of Design and Decorative Arts in London. Besides my general interest in art history, I was particularly fascinated by the place of artworks and the decorative arts in the interior. With my interest in old drawings and my knowledge of the Dutch language, I was able to get an internship straight after graduating, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where I worked on the catalogue of Old Master Drawings. After I had conducted a few substantive commissions for Sotheby's – one of which involved research on the Dance of Death by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), the auction house asked me to set up a branch in Amsterdam.

And there you made the acquaintance of a remarkable neighbor.

I certainly did, and this was enormously important to my career. Sotheby's offices were located at Rokin 98, which meant that I became the upstairs neighbor of the art dealer Lodewijk Houthakker (1926–2008), who was also a collector of drawings. We soon became friends. We shared an interest in drawings, and Houthakker was a wonderful mentor, who helped me to deepen my knowledge of old drawings. More than that, he communicated to me his passion for design sketches, from plans for buildings and interiors to preliminary drawings for ceiling paintings.

Did you carry on working in the area of drawings?

No, not at all. After I had set up the branch of Sotheby's in Amsterdam, I returned to Sotheby's in London, and then I left for Sotheby's New York. I worked there for almost ten years, from 1975 to 1984, in the silver department.

The Mauritshuis was undergoing renovation at that time, and when part of its collection was displayed at the National Gallery in Washington in 1982, I was asked to set up the American Friends of the Mauritshuis. I was very happy to do so, and this was the beginning of a strong and enduring relationship with the Mauritshuis. In 1984 I returned to the Netherlands with my family.

Closer to the Mauritshuis.

We were certainly closer to the Mauritshuis, although we settled in Amsterdam rather than The Hague. Having spent ten years living in the middle of Manhattan, I was consumed by the idea of living in Amsterdam, a city whose beauty is addictive, and one that has more Old Masters than any other.

I started up a shop that customers could visit by appointment, where I sold antiques and organized exhibitions. In addition, having been a board member of the American Friends of the Mauritshuis, it was an obvious next step to become active in the Friends of the Mauritshuis foundation. At least, for me personally it seemed the obvious thing to do. My friends thought it an odd pursuit, since museums were regarded as rather stuffy places in those days, not much fun to visit. But I completely disagreed. I loved museums, and in every visit I would discover something new that I wanted to share with other people. So I decided to follow the American example and set up a volunteer organization for the Mauritshuis.

After working in the Friends foundation, I was appointed to the Supervisory Board of the Mauritshuis, to which I belonged from 2005 to 2013. I was also a board member of the Rembrandt Society until last year, and I've been a board member of the Museum Van Loon since 1985. In these roles, I was able to apply many of my ideas about the "culture of giving" that I acquired in the United States. For instance, in the Rembrandt Society I helped to set up the *Gildemeesters*, a growing group of patrons who give the Society financial support.

A great deal has changed in the museum world since your return to the Netherlands.

Yes, there have been changes on two fronts. First, museums have long since ceased to be seen as stuffy places. On the contrary, they have become 'places to be', partly thanks to the new, successful image projected by the Rijksmuseum and the fantastic renovation of the Mauritshuis. Second, the culture of giving has changed enormously in the Netherlands. Friends of museums – organized as foundations – have become professionalized, as a result of which sponsors feel more involved in the museum sector. The Johan Maurits Compagnie foundation that was set up at the Mauritshuis is a good example.

In your supervisory capacity at the Mauritshuis, you were closely involved in the recent renovation. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

The Mauritshuis itself shouldered the risks involved in the project, which meant that the Supervisory Board shared responsibility for it. A strict policy was pursued: whenever funds were insufficient and the budget was in danger of going into the red, plans would be scrapped. And we did indeed have to make some cost-cutting decisions along the way. In the end, the renovation stayed within the budget and within the planned schedule, thanks to the capable dual directorship of Emilie Gordenker and Victor Moussault.

Could you tell us more about your ideas concerning the culture of giving?

I tried to get people enthusiastic about giving during their lifetime. I consider it important that donors are aware of *who* they are giving to and *why*. Of course you can always leave a bequest, but if you use your available funds to support cultural institutions while you're still alive, you can also have a say in deciding what the money will be used for. I myself find that really inspiring – you get so much out of it! It was this philosophy of cooperation that led me and my husband to set up the Decorative Art Fund (DAF) in 2013, in partnership with the Rijksmuseum.

Could you say a little more about that?

My husband, Rijnhard, served as treasurer for the Rijksmuseum Fund for eight years, and he wanted to support the Rijksmuseum. In consultation with Reinier Baarsen, Head of the Department of Sculpture and Applied Arts of the Rijksmuseum, we set up the DAF. This fund made it possible for the Rijksmuseum to purchase design sketches dating from the 16th to 19th centuries. So I like to call them the 'Lodewijk Houthakker drawings'. The DAF does not owe its existence solely to our financial support – and that's why it does not bear our name – but also that of others; we work hard on generating enthusiasm among other donors. For instance, once a year we organize a thematic evening at the Rijksmuseum,

with a lecture or a presentation of acquisitions, and our passion often encourages those invited to contribute to the fund. We are closely involved in the Rijksmuseum's choices when it is considering acquisitions, and that too is very inspiring. Sometimes I myself draw the museum's attention to drawings that I think would be interesting for the collection. The DAF is an excellent example of donors giving during their lifetime: the curator's expertise, combined with my enthusiasm and network, has by now enabled the Rijksmuseum to purchase 385 drawings. In addition, 23 drawings have been gifted to the Rijksmuseum through the DAF.

Where do you place the accents in your own collection?

I don't place any accents at all! I've always collected in an extremely eclectic way, as you can see in our house.

It is true, however, that I have always focused on old art. Unlike curators, who collect in depth, I'm a generalist. Partly, of course, that's because I spent so many years working at an auction house, where you learn to take a broad view. I buy paintings, drawings, bronze sculptures, and all sorts of other objects I find beautiful – and now my house is full! My purchases are often extremely personal, even intimate, and I have a special attachment to each piece. A good example of this is the portrait of twin boys (*Portrait of Two Young Boys Dressed up as Knights*; 1668) by the Antwerp artist Johanna or Jeanne Vergouwen (1630–1714). Jeanne Vergouwen is a fairly obscure artist, and only a few of her works are known. I first saw the painting in Hoorn, at the home of John de Visser, another passionate collector, when I myself was expecting twins, and immediately fell in love with it. Unfortunately the painting was not for sale at the time. But when it came up for auction at Christie's in 2008, I was luckily able to buy it, and now it hangs in a place of honor in my home.

In 2012 you became a CODART Patron. What made you decide to take this step?

I had heard of CODART through the Mauritshuis and through some of my friends. It is a wonderful institution, and I'm happy to support it. As a generalist with a passion for Old Masters, it struck me as an interesting prospect to make contact with an international group of museum curators, with their specialist knowledge. So I'm very much looking forward to the forthcoming study trip to the Midwest, together with a number of other CODART collectors and curators. Most of the collections that we will be visiting there are unknown to me. I'm particularly looking forward to our visit to Oberlin, since the museum possesses a number of drawings that originate from the collection of Lodewijk Houthakker.

Thank you very much for giving this interview.

Elsbeth van Tets has been a patron of CODART since 2012.

CODART ACTIVITIES

CODART study trip to the Midwest

Katharina Bechler

The one-week study trip took us from Detroit to Chicago. It was brilliantly organised: we visited the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#), the [Toledo Museum of Art](#), the [Allen Memorial Art Museum](#) Oberlin including the Weltzheimer / Johnson House by Frank Lloyd Wright, the [Cleveland Museum of Art](#), the [Dayton Art Institute](#), the [Taft Museum of Art](#) (Cincinnati), the [Cincinnati Art Museum](#), the [Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago](#). While in Detroit, we also saw three impressive private collections. Some participants took advantage of the optional program that included both an exclusive preview of the exhibition *Class Distinctions: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer* in the [Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Boston under the guidance of [Ronni Baer](#) and a private visit to the Maida and George Abrams collection of drawings.

The group was made up of curators and directors of museums in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Finland and the US, a curator of the [Netherlands Institute for Art History](#) (RKD) and patrons of CODART, including above all collectors and art dealers from Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the US. The range of nationalities and professions within the group gave rise to exciting and inspiring conversations and viewpoints on art works and museums.

The art of the Netherlands was the main focal point in all the museums. The Midwest region does not generally come into the “must-see” category in terms of art history, yet it includes a number of world-class museums as well as smaller museums with interesting collections. [George Keyes](#), former curator for European art at the Detroit Art Institute, prepared the programme. Keyes, recently retired from his former position, accompanied us on the tour, introduced us to the highlights and gave us significant insights into the history of the individual museums’ collections. He also explained how they relate to the history of companies in Detroit, Cincinnati and Indianapolis and the entrepreneurial families – Ford, Lily and Taft –, who are directly linked to the collections from which the museums evolved. The CODART group was welcomed to every museum by the curators, who without exception prepared one or more 'behind the scenes' visits. They had also encouraged

the study trip participants to submit any personal requests beforehand, enabling many participants to study particular works of art for exhibitions, loans, or research.

We were particularly impressed by the restoration studios in Detroit, Cincinnati and Indianapolis, which are excellently equipped, and the degree to which the museums are focused on visitors. Top-quality extensions and new acquisitions are carried out in the US thanks to the support of donors. In this land of museums supported by private foundations, state and city museums are the exceptions.

In the Detroit Institute of Arts we were impressed by the way a museum carefully modelled on the [Bode Museum](#) in Berlin had been established on the American continent; this second museum still closely resembles its model in the cultural and historical presentation of its collection: paintings,

sculpture and decorative arts from a single region and era are presented as a whole; for example, medieval South German art or the art of 15th- and 16th-century Florence. This was achieved by the German-born art historian Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner (Karlsruhe 1880 –New York 1958), who is known in the US as William R. Valentiner. He was a pupil of Cornelis Hofstede de Groot and assistant to Wilhelm von Bode at the then Kaiser Friedrich Museum, later the Bode Museum in Berlin.

The Institute of Arts was previously owned by the city but has recently been privatised. It is now run by a body in which the museum is a co-partner: it is a beacon in the bankrupt, dilapidated city of which large swathes are unpopulated. Fortunately, the museum is now supported by a range of friends’ associations which promote a range of different genres of art and types of collection. We had the

great privilege of being welcomed by the recently appointed director [Salvador Salort-Pons](#), curator [Yao-Fen You](#), chair of

the Board of Directors Gene Gargaro and chair of the European Paintings Council Ruth Rattner. The museum permitted us access to the conservation rooms, which gave us the chance to study *The Wedding Dance* by Pieter Bruegel I under the best possible conditions.

Other highlights of the journey included the museums in Toledo, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Chicago; we were fascinated by the outstanding quality and superb presentation of their collections. But the smaller museums also had interesting works of art to offer. In Dayton and Oberlin, some Dutch and Flemish treasures were prepared for study purposes by [Aimee Marcereau DeGalan](#) (Dayton) and [Andria Derstine](#) and [Andaleeb Banta](#) (Oberlin).

In Toledo, the group was treated to a very good introduction by [Larry Nichols](#), who also prepared a special view of the *Salamanca Triptych* by Jan Gossaert and the *Morrison Triptych*.

The Cleveland Museum of Art was officially founded in 1916. The basis of the collection was formed by donations from collectors from the 1880s onwards, including the donation by James Jackson Jarves to his wife Delia Holden. One of the founder members, John L. Severance, collected European paintings. The impressive collection of painting from the Low Countries includes works of outstanding quality by Peter Paul Rubens, Frans Hals, Abraham Bloemaert, Govert Flinck, Salomon van Ruysdael, Maarten van Heemskerck, Melchior d' Hondcoeter and others. Half of the museum's collection is devoted to works on paper, so the museum curators Dr Heather Lemonedes, Curator of Drawings and Dr Jane Glaubinger, Curator of Prints, put together a large group of the most important works in the art study room for CODART's visit.

Today, the grand architecture of this museum comprises three structures: the original neoclassical building (1913-1916), comparable with the [Kunsthalle](#) in Hamburg; the first extension (1958) by Hayes & Ruth (Cleveland) and finally the elegant wing by Marcel Breuer (1971). In 1983 one addition was added to the west side of the complex by the Cleveland firm Dalton, van Dijk, Johnson, & Partners. The latest construction includes an east and west wing designed by Rafael Vinoly for gallery, storage and office space. The buildings are arranged to enclose a covered courtyard as large as a sports ground; together they form a living museum with a range of functions: the elegant, spacious galleries, depots, education, communication and catering.

The curators of the Cincinnati Art Museum, Julie Aronson and Kristin Spangenberg, gave us access to the Print Room and Serena Urry, chief conservator, showed a work by Isaak Soreau in the Conservation Room. This museum, elegantly situated on a hill, was influenced by two collectors and personalities, Mary Emory and Mary Hanna. They were both inspired by Charles Taft and his wife's collecting activities. Their collection is housed in a 19th-century mansion where we heard an introduction by director of collections Lynne Ambrosini. The fine collection was already fully inventoried in 1931 and includes artists from the Barbizon and Hague Schools, outstanding portraits from Britain and Dutch paintings that were among Taft's earliest acquisitions. The paintings and sculptures are displayed in exquisitely decorated saloons which are both elegant and comfortable.

In Indianapolis, we were received by curator Marty Krause and his colleagues. The museum, which was founded in 1883, is one of the ten oldest and ten largest general art museums in the US. Together with [Rebecca Long](#), former associate curator, we visited the recently reinstalled collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings.

The Art Institute of Chicago was our final destination and the highlight of the trip. In the Prints and Drawings rooms (here in Chicago as elsewhere) the group was shown the very finest works of art, including some by Rembrandt van Rijn and impressive works by anonymous artists, the idea and aim being that we could contribute expert advice to the attribution of these works. The permanent exhibition contains fabulous works, for example still lifes by Pieter Claesz., Frans Sniijders and Adriaen van der Spelt. Thanks to our hosts [Martha Wolff](#), [Victoria Sancho Lobis](#) and Rebecca Long, we had the great privilege of visiting the museum before opening hours.

The farewell dinner, offered by the Netherlands Consulate General and the Flemish Representative, was attended by the Dutch Consul in Chicago, Klaas van der Tempel. It formed a splendid finale to our journey.

To sum up: we were able to study the excellent (in most cases) quality of Dutch and Flemish art and its presentation, to admire the extremely professional travel organisation and to enjoy American hospitality – in Detroit, the director and his

family greeted us with hospitality at their home. To the surprise of the group, catering was provided from a typical

American food truck. The visit enabled us to put works from our museums into a larger context, giving us new insights concerning works in the collections that we are responsible for. The trip also allowed us to network with museum colleagues about the possibilities of future collaborations, exhibitions, or potential loans. All in all, it was an inspirational and enriching study trip in every way.

We would like to express our warmest gratitude to the CODART team, George Keyes from Detroit, and particularly the CODART patrons. Last but not least, our profound thanks go to all the directors and curators of the museums in the Midwest that were included in this itinerary. They opened many doors for us and made this trip extremely worthwhile.

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