



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Painting as Blur: Landscapes in Paintings of the Dutch Interior

Author(s): Amy Powell

Source: *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2010), pp. 145-166

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40856512>

Accessed: 01-05-2020 13:04 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/40856512?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Oxford Art Journal*

Painting as Blur: Landscapes in Paintings of the Dutch Interior

Amy Powell

1. 'l'inénarrable compromission des oeuvres manipulables'. Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Studio' (1971), repr. *Museums by Artists* (Art Metropole: Toronto, 1983), p. 54.

2. 'de konst, sedert de Beeltstorming in de voorgaende eeuw, in Holland niet geheel vernietigt is, schoon ons de beste loopbaenen, naementlijk de kerken, daer door geslooten zijn, en de meeste Schilders zich dieshalven tot geringe zaeken, jae zelfs tot beuzelingen te schilderen, geheelijk begeeven'. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Fransois van Hoogstraeten: Rotterdam, 1678), p. 257. This account of the state of painting in Holland comes at the very end of a chapter devoted to the history of painting's birth, repeated deaths (at the hands of iconoclasts, barbarians, and incompetents), and repeated risings phoenix-like from the ashes. Both Manuth and Benedict suggest that we take Van Hoogstraten's assessment of the situation with a grain of salt since the semi-clandestine Catholic congregations of the northern Netherlands continued to commission church paintings. Volker Manuth, 'Denomination and Iconography: The Choice of Subject Matter in the Biblical Painting of the Rembrandt Circle', *Simiolus*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1993–1994, p. 239; Philip Benedict, 'Calvinism as a Culture? Preliminary Remarks on Calvinism and the Visual Arts', in Paul Corby Finney (ed.), *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition* (W.B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), p. 38.

In his essay 'Function of the Studio' (1971), Daniel Buren calls the installation of the work of art in the museum an 'unspeakable compromise' – the 'unspeakable compromise of the portable work'.¹ The only thing worse for the work of art, according to Buren, is to remain in the studio, where it will go unseen by all but a few. On the most basic level, the problem with the museum for Buren is its difference from the space in which the work was made – a difference only thinly veiled by the alleged neutrality of the museum's white walls. For Buren, the creation of the site-specific work is the only way the artist can avoid having to choose between the alienation of the museum and the oblivion of the studio; it is the only way, in short, to escape the bind of the portable object. What follows is a look back at the early modern history of the portable objects Buren has in mind, namely, easel paintings, the making of which had become by 1970 too compromised in the eyes of conceptual artists like Buren to be sustained.

With the abrupt curtailment of church patronage in the Dutch Republic around 1600, artists turned to producing paintings to sell on the open market. These paintings were considerably more mobile than the site-specific church art they replaced. The easel painting's lack of a fixed place worried some Dutch writers, in whose work a proto-enlightenment discourse asserting and defending the autonomy of the transportable work of art takes shape. In marked contrast to that conservative discourse, those *paintings* of the period that meditate on the nature of the easel painting tend to celebrate its heteronomy – its subjection to laws not its own, both the laws of exhibition and the laws of other paintings. In their pictorial reflections on the heteronomy of the easel painting, I will try to show here, these self-reflexive paintings of the seventeenth century anticipate the unravelling of the discourse of aesthetic autonomy in late modernity. In these early modern paintings, one finds the terms of the twentieth-century crisis of the easel painting already spelled out. Which is to say that, from very early on in its development, the easel painting was already busy pursuing its own negation.

Minor Things – Easel Paintings

In his 1678 treatise on painting, Samuel van Hoogstraten reflects on the wave of iconoclastic events that spread like wildfire through the Netherlands in 1566 and on the plight of painting in their wake: 'Art in Holland has not been entirely destroyed since the Iconoclasm of the previous century, even though the best outlets, namely the churches, have been closed to us and most painters have therefore given themselves over entirely to painting minor things, even trifles [*beuzelingen*]'.² The minor things to which Van Hoogstraten refers are those easel paintings – still lifes, landscapes, and genre scenes – that had become

the bread and butter of painterly production since the image wars of the sixteenth century. That Van Hoogstraten would here judge this entire category of paintings to be mere trifles or insignificant nonsense [*beuzelingen*] is surprising, given his own production of just this kind of work. It is doubly surprising when one considers that, of all his paintings, it was his still lifes depicting the relatively insignificant objects of everyday life (combs, gloves, playing cards) that seem to have earned him the greatest recognition.

Van Hoogstraten's disparaging remark becomes less perplexing when one recognises that the object of his criticism is the place – or, really, the placelessness – of post-iconoclastic painting rather than its content, as emphatically trifling as that content often was. For Van Hoogstraten, the difference between the old painting and the new is first and foremost one of context. The old painting had a context, the church, while the new has either no particular context or too many to name. Van Hoogstraten regrets this lack of a fixed context not only in his discussion of iconoclasm but also when he expresses the wish that the ceiling frescos of Carl Fabritius had been painted in a 'durable royal edifice or a church' rather than in private homes, where they are subject to the vicissitudes of human habitation.⁴ Beyond the walls of enduring palaces and churches, according to Van Hoogstraten, the work of art – particularly the eminently displaceable easel painting – is prone to fall into insignificance. Van Hoogstraten's treatise on painting is a defence against such an eventuality. As such, the treatise plays its part in that process of defining the autonomy of the work of art – a process that will come to fruition in the aesthetic theory of the eighteenth century.

Around the same time that Van Hoogstraten complained that iconoclasm had reduced his contemporaries to painting trifles for no place in particular, Cornelis Gijsbrechts made his *Easel with Still Life*, a trompe l'oeil construction that also addresses the placelessness of the easel painting, albeit in decidedly less nostalgic terms (Fig. 1). If at the hands of the iconoclasts of 1566, the embedded, seemingly permanent, non-transferable ecclesiastical work vanished or – perhaps stranger still – was pried loose from the context to which it had seemed forever wed, what rushed in to take its place were mostly paintings small enough to be supported by the three-legged wooden structure that Gijsbrechts makes the subject of his painting. It is only around 1600 that the Dutch word *ezel*, meaning donkey, begins to appear in written sources used in the secondary sense of a stand for supporting paintings.⁵ By mid-century, English and German had adopted this use of the Dutch word as well, and the easel painting was well on its way to becoming the quintessential modern work of art.⁶

This was, of course, long after painters had begun to use easels to make independent panels to be sold on the open market.⁷ But notable and perhaps even new to easel painting in the Netherlands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the fluidity and scale of its market, fed as that market was by the frequent turnover of private collections.⁸ In a process that Ernst Gombrich famously dubbed the 'domestication' of easel painting, the homes of wealthy burghers rather than palaces, churches, or other (semi-)public buildings became the primary venue for works of art.⁹ Bankruptcy, which the merchants who owned paintings were particularly prone to, and plague, from which no one was safe, guaranteed the frequent dissolution of the relatively small estates of the burgher class.¹⁰ It was not uncommon, in these conditions, for paintings to be resold within only a few years of their original purchase.¹¹ This meant that the transportability and transferability of the easel painting – in themselves no longer new – were,

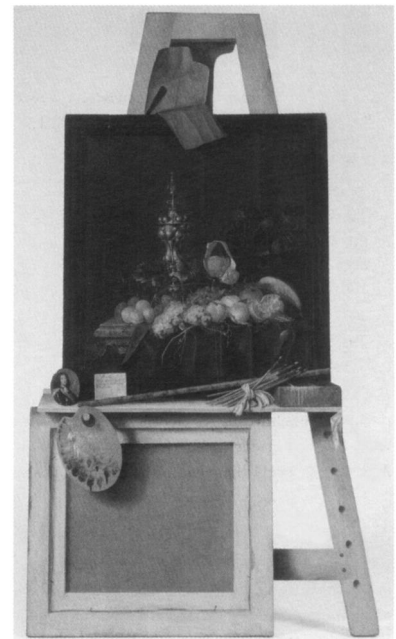


Fig. 1. Cornelis Gijsbrechts, *Easel with Still Life*, c. 1670, oil on panel, 226 × 123 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. (Photo: © SMK Foto.)

3. On the importance of still life to Van Hoogstraten's reputation, see Arnold Houbraken's biography of Samuel van Hoogstraten, published in 1719, which is reprinted in Michiel Roscam Abbing, *De schilder & schrijver Samuel van Hoogstraten 1627–1678: Eigentijdse bronnen & oeuvre van gesigneerde schilderijen* (Primevera: Leiden, 1993), pp. 18–19. For a discussion, see Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995), pp. 9, 54.

4. 'maer't is te bejammern dat zijn werken niet ergens in een vast Koninklijk gebouw of Kerke geplaeft zijn'. Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, p. 274.

5. There is no mention of this usage in Eelco Verwijs and Jacob Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek* (M. Nijhoff: 's-Gravenhage, 1885), vol. 2, p. 733. Van der Sijs gives the earliest date for *schilder-ezel* as 1654: Nicoline van der Sijs, *Chronologisch woordenboek: de ouderdom en herkomst van onze woorden en betekenissen* (L.J. Veen: Amsterdam, 2002), p. 939, see also p. 48. But there are earlier occurrences, for example, Van Mander uses the word 'Esel' in the sense of easel in Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck*, facsimile of the first edition, Haarlem, 1604 (Davaco Publishers: Utrecht, 1969), fol. 77v. And H.L. Spiegel uses *schilder-ezel* in his *Hert-spiegel* of 1614. See H.L. Spiegel, *Hert-spiegel; uitgegeven naar het*

hs., met inleiding, commentar en aantekeningen door F. Veenstra (Verloren: Hilversum, 1992), p. 21.

6. 'Both Engl. "easel" and German [Easel] in this sense derive from Dutch ezel and reflect the supremacy of Dutch painting in the 17th c.' Keith Spalding, *A Historical Dictionary of German Figurative Usage* (B. Blackwell: Oxford, 1952–2000), vol. 2, p. 698. See also Werner Besch, Oskar Reichmann, and Stefan Sonderegger, *Sprachgeschichte: Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung* (W. de Gruyter: Berlin; New York, 1984), vol. 1, p. 926. Wilhelm Müller, Georg Friedrich Benecke, and Friedrich Zarncke, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch: Mit Benutzung des Nachlasses von Georg Friedrich Benecke* (S. Hirzel: Stuttgart, 1990), vol. 1, p. 447. The year 1634 is the date of the earliest citation given in the entry for 'Easel' in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989).

7. Damisch links the birth of easel painting to the development of capitalism. Hubert Damisch, 'The Trickery of the Picture', in Peter Weibel and Christian Meyer (ed.), *Das Bild nach dem letzten Bild= The Picture After the Last Picture* (Galerie Metropol im Verlag der Buchhandlung W. König: Vienna, 1991), p. 80. For a helpful comparison of various European art markets from 1450 to 1750, see Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, 'The History of Art Markets', in Victor A. Ginsburgh and David Throsby (eds), *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture* (Elsevier, North-Holland: Amsterdam; Boston, 2006), pp. 69–122. De Marchi and Van Miegroet suggest that the scale of the market for easel paintings in the Netherlands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was unprecedented and unparalleled. See pp. 70, 84–5, 109. On the scale of production, see Maarten Prak, 'Guilds and the Development of the Art Market During the Dutch Golden Age', *Simiolus*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, 2003, p. 238.

8. Montias argues that the situation in Holland was different in this regard from England and France, where land remained the basis of wealth and paintings often remained ensconced in country estates for generations. John Michael Montias, *Art at Auction in 17th-century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 104–5.

9. Gombrich abstains from giving this shift a precise date; however, he does give examples, which begin around 1500. E. H. Gombrich, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication* (Phaidon: London, 1999), pp. 108, 121.

10. Montias, *Art at Auction*, pp. 104–5.

11. See John Michael Montias, 'Quantitative Methods in the Analysis of 17th Century

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *actualised* on an unprecedented scale, a whole class of professionals having emerged whose livelihood derived from the sale and the resale of paintings.¹²

Although some painters sold their work directly out of the studio or at exhibitions arranged by the guild, many relied on this emerging class of professional dealers to sell their work instead.¹³ Some dealers sold finely crafted paintings for high prices, while others employed 'stables' of artists to churn out cheap paintings for a daily wage.¹⁴ In addition to dealers, lotteries provided painters with an outlet for their work. Held for private gain or to fund charitable undertakings, lotteries became something of a mania in the Netherlands of the 1620s and 1630s. Paintings along with other prizes like porcelain and linens were put on display before the lottery, affording painters rare exhibition time as well as guaranteed sales.¹⁵ When it came to the resale of paintings, several different institutions, including the Orphan Chamber, auctioned off the estates of the deceased, liquidating personal effects such as clothing, furniture, kitchen utensils, and paintings so that the proceeds could be divided among heirs.¹⁶ Among the most frequent buyers at these auctions were second-hand dealers, many of whom were women. Second-hand dealers tended to buy up the lower end of the market and to dispose of their wares quickly at meagre prices. Illiterate and relatively poor, these dealers facilitated the acquisition of paintings – as trifling as they may have been – by even modest households.¹⁷

But Gijsbrechts did not make his *Easel with Still Life* for the open market, and it was not destined to fall into the hands of a second-hand dealer. The small oval portrait resting against the still life depicts King Christian V of Denmark. That portrait along with the artist's card beside it, maulstick, brushes, paintbox, palette, and the reversed canvas below are all illusions painted on an oak plank cut to resemble the silhouette of an easel. Gijsbrechts, who was probably born in Flanders, made this overwrought trompe l'oeil while working as a court painter in Lutheran Denmark.¹⁸ The *Easel with Still Life* joined an expanding royal collection that was in the process of being relocated to grander quarters during Gijsbrechts' years in Copenhagen.¹⁹ The royal inventories record its presence in a chamber of that collection reserved for paintings known as 'perspectives'.²⁰

Among the other items found in the Danish perspective chamber were two peep boxes, one representing the interior of a Reformed church purged of its images, the other the interior of a Catholic church decorated with statues and altarpieces.²¹ On the exterior of the cabinet housing the Protestant church – just below the peephole – coins, a coral necklace, and a quill spill out of trompe l'oeil drawers, as if the riches formerly adorning that church were now emptied into other containers.²² With its overflowing drawers, this unusual pair of peep boxes depicts the dramatic material consequences of iconoclasm and links that iconoclasm to early modern collecting. Indeed, encyclopaedic collections of natural and manufactured curiosities like the Danish collection began to take shape in the sixteenth century, just as the objects purged from Protestant churches were making their way into private hands and civic institutions.²³ Many early modern collections, including the Royal collection in Denmark, reflected this redistribution, containing, along with a lot of other things, the spoils of secularisation.²⁴

Predicated on the mobility of its objects, the deracinating collections of early modern Europe became contexts unto themselves – contexts for which painters like Gijsbrechts made their so-called cabinet pictures. Made for a particular person, King Christian V, and for a particular chamber within his



Fig. 2. Frans Francken the Younger, *Collector's Cabinet*, c. 1617, oil on panel, 76.5 × 119.1 cm. The Royal Collection, London. (Photo: The Royal Collection © 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.)

collection, Gijsbrechts' *Easel with Still Life* is as site-specific as any portable painting could hope to be. But, its own site-specificity notwithstanding, Gijsbrechts' trompe l'oeil takes as its subject the conditions of circulation and exchange that characterised the early modern art market as well as the conditions of systematic decontextualisation that prevailed in early modern collections, where the relics of a discredited church mingled with 'idols' from far away lands and with objects of aesthetic and scientific contemplation.

To understand how Gijsbrechts' *Still Life* addresses the heterogeneity of early modern markets and collections as well as their origins in iconoclasm, it is useful to look at one of those paintings of collections that were made in Antwerp – where Gijsbrechts' activity as a painter was first recorded – in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Antwerp experienced two waves of iconoclasm, the first in 1566 and the second in 1581. Although by 1585, the city had fallen back into the hands of the Spanish monarchy and had been restored to Catholicism, the memory of iconoclasm was preserved well into the seventeenth century in paintings like Frans Francken the Younger's *Collector's Cabinet* (Fig. 2). To the right, a window opens onto a courtyard in which donkey-headed figures dressed in sixteenth-century attire smash paintings, palettes, sculptures, musical instruments, and books. Behind them, an archway opens onto a scene of an army storming a building. Most modern commentators have interpreted scenes of iconoclasm like this one inserted into collection paintings as a foil for the larger scene. And indeed

Dutch Inventories', in Victor Ginsburgh and Pierre-Michel Menger (eds), *Economics of the Arts: Selected Essays* (Elsevier: Amsterdam; New York, 1996), pp. 9–15. Falkenburg also comments on the often short time between purchase and sale of paintings in Reindert Leonard Falkenburg, 'Onweer bij Jan van Goyen. Artistieke wedjiver en de markt voor het Hollandse landschap in de 17de eeuw', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 48, 1998, p. 131.

12. The number of people who registered as art dealers with the Guild of Saint Luke grew significantly in the Netherlands during the first half of the seventeenth century. See John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982), pp. 62–3; John Michael Montias, 'Art Dealers in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands', *Simiolus*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1988, p. 245. On the flourishing of art dealers in Antwerp during the second half of the sixteenth century, see Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Brepols: Turnhout, Belgium, 2003), pp. 62–78.

13. On the various ways painters sold their wares, see Michael North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age: A Social History of Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Painting*, trans. by Catherine Hill (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997), pp. 87–98.

14. Montias, who calls the latter 'supply-augmenting' dealers, offers somewhat conflicting views on how common they were. Montias, *Art Dealers*, pp. 245–6, 252; John Michael Montias, 'The Sovereign Consumer: The Adaptation of the Works of Art to Demand in the Netherlands in the Early Modern Period', in Ton Bevers (ed.), *Artists–Dealers–Consumers: On the Social World of Art* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1994), p. 70.

15. On lotteries, see Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 197–202; North, *Art and Commerce*, pp. 88–9. There were precedents for the lotteries in the sixteenth century. See Lorne Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 118, 1976, p. 195.

16. On auctions, see Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 202–6; Montias, *Art at Auction*, p. 11; Marchi and Miegroet, *The History of Art Markets*, pp. 104–8. On lotteries and auctions, see Neil de Marchi, 'The Role of Dutch Auctions and Lotteries in Shaping the Art Market(s) of 17th Century Holland', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, vol. 28, 1995, pp. 203–21; Marion Elisabeth Wilhelmina Goossens, 'Schilders en de markt, Haarlem 1605–1635' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Leiden, 2001), pp. 238–52.

17. On second-hand dealers, see Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 204–5; Astrid Waltmans, 'Kunstverkoopsters in de Nederlanden, circa 1600–1800: Verslag van een speurtocht', in Els Kloek, Catherine Peters Sengers, and Esther Tobé (eds), *Vrouwen en kunst in de Republiek: Een overzicht* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998), pp. 97–105; Montias, *Art at Auction*, pp. 43–5, 108.

18. Olaf Koester, *Illusions: Gijsbrechts, Royal Master of Deception* (Statens Museum for Kunst: Copenhagen), p. 16.

19. On the history of the Danish Royal Collection, see H.D. Schelpeleers, 'Natural Philosophers and Princely Collectors: Worm, Paludanus and the Gottorp and Copenhagen Collections', in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (eds), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1985), pp. 121–7; Bente Gundestrup, 'From the Royal *Kunstkammer* to the Modern Museums of Copenhagen', in Impey and MacGregor (eds), *The Origins of Museums*, pp. 128–34.

our own peaceful ocular enjoyment of the objects in the foreground stands in telling opposition to the violence in the background.

But the logic of this opposition can be turned another way. For, the scene of iconoclasm also figures a point of origin, the condition of possibility for the kind of collection that Francken pictures and to which his own paintings belonged. It is because of iconoclastic riots that altarpieces and liturgical objects made their way into secular spaces. And, in the northern Netherlands and elsewhere, it is because of a decline in church patronage that artists came to rely so heavily on an open market that encouraged the production of small, portable paintings. In Francken's cabinet, a visual analogy figures the foundational status and ongoing relevance of iconoclasm to the early modern collection. The mountain landscape at the top and the painting of Jerome in the wilderness below it together fill the centre of the composition, reproducing the mannerist colour scheme of the landscape in which the iconoclastic events take place. The destruction pictured to the right thereby finds a visual analogue in the heart of the collection, while the encroaching blankness of the sky hanging over the scene of image breaking finds its double in the strangely scrubbed pages of the sketchbook open on the table. Instead of pitting aesthetic enjoyment over and against destruction, Francken's painting implies that that enjoyment originates in and remains indebted to the negating gesture.

Like Francken's scene of iconoclasm, the reversed canvas in Gijsbrechts' *Easel with Still Life* recalls the iconoclasm of the previous century, metaphorically re-enacting it by lowering the painting and turning it away. Turning a blank face towards the viewer, the reversed canvas recalls the origin of easel painting in the negation of the image. But it goes further than that; it also addresses the lasting effects of the sixteenth-century storming of the churches. For, the reversed canvas emblematises the placelessness of the easel painting – the placelessness that Van Hoogstraten associates with the loss of church patronage. Pitting the front of one painting against the back of another, Gijsbrechts shows us that what a painting looks like depends on how it is displayed and where we find ourselves standing in relation to it. Because the easel painting lacks a fixed place, its viewing conditions are unpredictable and in some cases – for instance, when the painting is turned 180° away from us – entirely unfavourable. Although church art can be viewed from many different angles, it tends to remain anchored in its place. While church art is no less determined by its conditions of display than is the independent panel, the relative stability of the ecclesiastical context limits the degree to which one experiences the mutability of the paintings within its walls.

To see a painting from behind is to be confronted with the contingency of its appearance. Gijsbrechts' reversed canvas exposes the heteronomy of the easel painting – the picture that is portable, exchangeable, and disposable and, in all of this, subject to every imaginable contingency of context and viewing. Unlike Van Hoogstraten, who implies that the new easel painting is ill served by its placelessness and that, under more stable conditions, its immutable truth might be glimpsed, Gijsbrechts' reversal of the painting acknowledges that there is no 'true' angle on the painting, no position from which we can see it in its essence. What is absent, then, from Gijsbrechts' *Easel with Still Life* is not just the fixed and stable context for painting provided by the church – that ennobling context Van Hoogstraten finds himself missing – but also the relatively stable object that such a context gives rise to.

It was Victor Stoichita who first really seized on the reversed canvas as a motif and poetics in seventeenth-century painting, most notably in Gijsbrechts' work, where it appears in ensembles like the *Easel with Still Life*

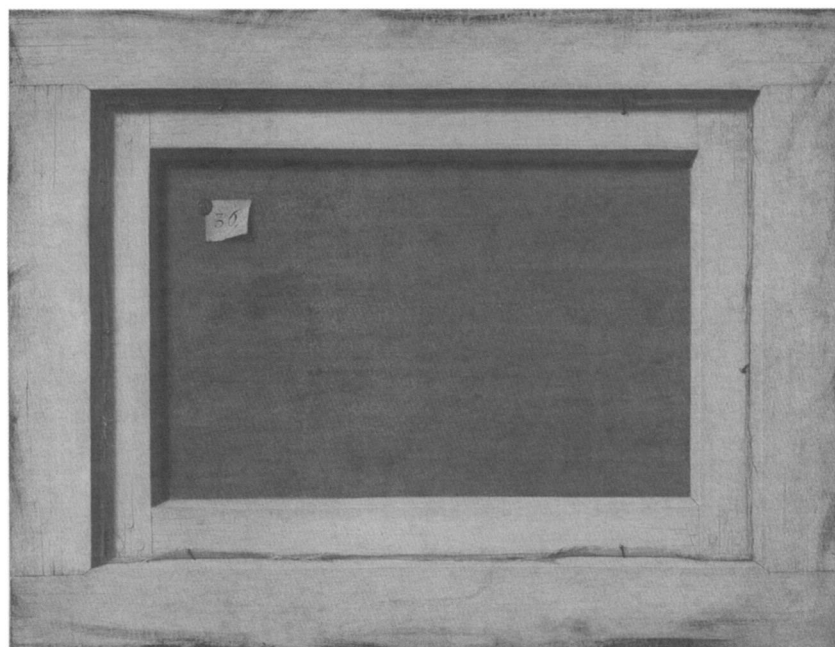


Fig. 3. Cornelis Gijsbrechts, *Reversed Canvas*, c. 1670, oil on canvas, 66.4 × 87 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. (Photo: © SMK Foto.)

and once as a subject in its own right (Fig. 3).²⁵ Although we are looking at the front of the painting, the fiction once again is that we see the back of a canvas that has been sealed with grey paint, tacked onto a stretcher, and set into a frame. In the upper left corner, a small square of paper, an inventory tag with the number thirty-six, has begun to peel away from the red wax that fixes it to the painting. Tagged as one in a series of objects of its kind, the reversed canvas – the painting that looks like every other – is emblematic of the painting that is interchangeable, whether it is made for the open market or for the collection of a king. The inventory tag may count the paintings in a royal collection or the paintings produced for the open market in a dealer's 'stable' or those sold by the dozen on the auction block. But, whatever the case may be, the number thirty-six tells us that – contrary to expectation – the blankness exposed by the iconoclastic gesture of turning the painting around is anything but empty. The inventory tag attests to the seemingly empty painting's pregnancy with that whole class of objects Van Hoogstraten understood to have taken the place of paintings made for the (once) enduring edifice of the church.

But the multiplicity represented by the inventory tag cuts still deeper. It speaks not only to the painting's interchangeability but also to its heteronomy. The number thirty-six calls to mind not only the many objects for which this one might be exchanged but also the many homes in which this painting might hang and the many angles in those homes from which it might be seen or be, for that matter, not seen.²⁶ If seventeenth-century Dutch easel paintings often seem to believe in their own autonomy, if they seem in their matter-of-factness to suggest that they are just what they are, regardless of what takes place around them, and if theorists like Van Hoogstraten were beginning to put words to that myth, Gijsbrechts' reversed canvases tell us something different. Long before the crisis of easel painting

20. The painting is first recorded in the 1673–1674 inventory of the Royal Dutch *Kunstkammer*. This is a year or two after Gijsbrechts is believed to have left Denmark. Koester, *Illusions*, pp. 40–1, 84–5.

21. Liedtke sees the pair as a polemic against the Catholic Church. Walter A. Liedtke, 'Faith in Perspective: The Dutch Church Interior', *Connoisseur*, vol. 193, 1976, p. 131.

22. The exterior of the box depicting the Catholic Church has fragments of painting that may also have been a *trompe l'oeil*. See Susan Koslow, 'De wonderlijke Perspectyfkas: An Aspect of Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting', *Oud Holland*, vol. 82, 1967, p. 49.

23. Karel van Mander's *Het Schilder-boeck* of 1604 provides ample indirect evidence of altarpieces removed to private or civic collections. For a summary of this evidence, see David Freedberg, 'Art and Iconoclasm, 1525–1580: The Case of the Northern Netherlands', in W. Th. Kloek, W. Halsema-Kubes, and R. J. Baarsen (eds), *Art Before the Iconoclasm: Northern Netherlandish Art, 1525–1580* (Rijksmuseum: Amsterdam, 1986), pp. 76–8.

24. On the heterogeneity of the Danish collection and its inclusion of Catholic artefacts, see Bente Gundestrup, *Det kongelige danske Kunstkammer 1737= The Royal Danish Kunstkammer 1737* (Nationalmuseet; A. Busck: Copenhagen, 1991), vol. 1, p. xiii, as well as the many catalogue entries.

25. Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. by Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge

University Press: New York; Cambridge, 1997), pp. 268–79.

26. For a discussion of the inventory tag, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, p. 277.

27. A reversed canvas appears, most famously, in Rembrandt's Boston painting of an artist in the studio. For a discussion of it, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, pp. 238–40.

in the twentieth century, Gijsbrechts made abundantly clear that he did not expect his paintings to transcend the contingent circumstances of their exhibition. Even before the autonomy of the bourgeois work of art was fully theorised by Enlightenment aesthetics, the interiority of that work had been violently (iconoclastically) turned inside out to reveal a blankness – a blankness replete with other paintings and with the mutability of the work itself. With none of the nostalgia that colours Van Hoogstraten's tale of the demise of painting in post-iconoclastic Holland, Gijsbrechts points to the heteronomy of what was already in his own day well on its way to being mythologised as the 'autonomous' work of art.

Although Gijsbrechts' *trompe l'oeil* canvases are exceptional, the use of the reversed canvas as a figure for the heteronomy of the easel painting was, I would suggest, an established trope. Dutch and Flemish painters of the seventeenth century used the reversed canvas as a figure for the vagaries of display and viewing to which their paintings would inevitably be subjected.²⁷ While paintings of the artist's studio made in this period generally show the painter at work or at least posing in front of a canvas underway, Pieter Codde's is a view into the disposal and acquisition of paintings – a view that emphasises the impact of those transactions on the paintings themselves (Fig. 4). Codde shows us a reversed canvas still rigged to a frame supported by an easel. He also shows us the reverse of a finished and heavily framed painting in the hands of the man seated on the left and a painting in a similar frame scrutinised by the man standing behind him – a scrutiny we cannot share since the painting appears to us as nothing but a blur. Codde shows us a painting hanging over the doorway that allows us to identify this painter as a maker of landscapes and a painting propped against the easel at the lower right, set at an angle oblique enough to make it only minimally decipherable for us – although what there is *to* decipher in this painting, beyond one very



Fig. 4. Pieter Codde, *Art Lovers in the Studio of a Painter*, c. 1630, oil on panel, 38.3 × 49.3 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. (Photo: Courtesy Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.)



Fig. 5. Pieter Codde, *Merry Company*, c. 1633, oil on panel, 33 × 41 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. (Photo: © Städel Museum – ARTOTHEK.)

lonely bird, I am not sure. Finally, below that is a heap of drawings whose contents are folded out of view. In short, Codde turns this landscape painter's wares every which way, suggesting that in the process of being sold his paintings lose something of their integrity. What looks to one man like a charming landscape worth the twenty guilders demanded for it may strike the next as nothing but a blur.

This contingency, Codde tells us with his *Merry Company*, continues to determine the painting once it has been acquired (Fig. 5). The sole object decorating the walls of the room, the oversized painting would compete with the musicians for our attention if it did not harmonise with them so well. Lit from the upper left and painted mostly in white, grey, and sandy flesh tones, the musicians lean and look in various different directions, the men's hats ending in sharp little points. Lit from the upper left and painted in the same sandy colours, the decaying vegetation in the landscape likewise leans in various different directions and ends in sharp little points, as if the landscape painting had somehow magically adapted itself to the attitudes of its viewers. Thin on iconography (a brewing storm at most), the landscape would have little to recommend itself as a moralising allegory if not for its funny way of resembling the merry company of musicians, who are of course happily oblivious to their inevitable disappearance.²⁸ Without the merry company, there would be nothing and no one to miss on those blustery dunes. With them, plant and mineral decay take on all the pathos of human expiration. The landscape's legibility as a vanitas image – its moralising message, if you will – depends entirely on the shapes and attitudes of the people before it, so much so that it might be said to be in and of itself rather empty or rather like the painting seen from behind: any old painting for any odd occasion.²⁹

28. Beaujean argues that Codde includes a landscape in the style of Jan van Goyen to demonstrate his own competence as a landscape painter in the latest mode. Dieter Beaujean, *Bilder in Bildern: Studien zur niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (VDG: Weimar, 2001), p. 90.

29. On the problem of context in the interpretation of Dutch paintings, see Lawrence Otto Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric, and Interpretation* (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 1989), pp. 10–12.

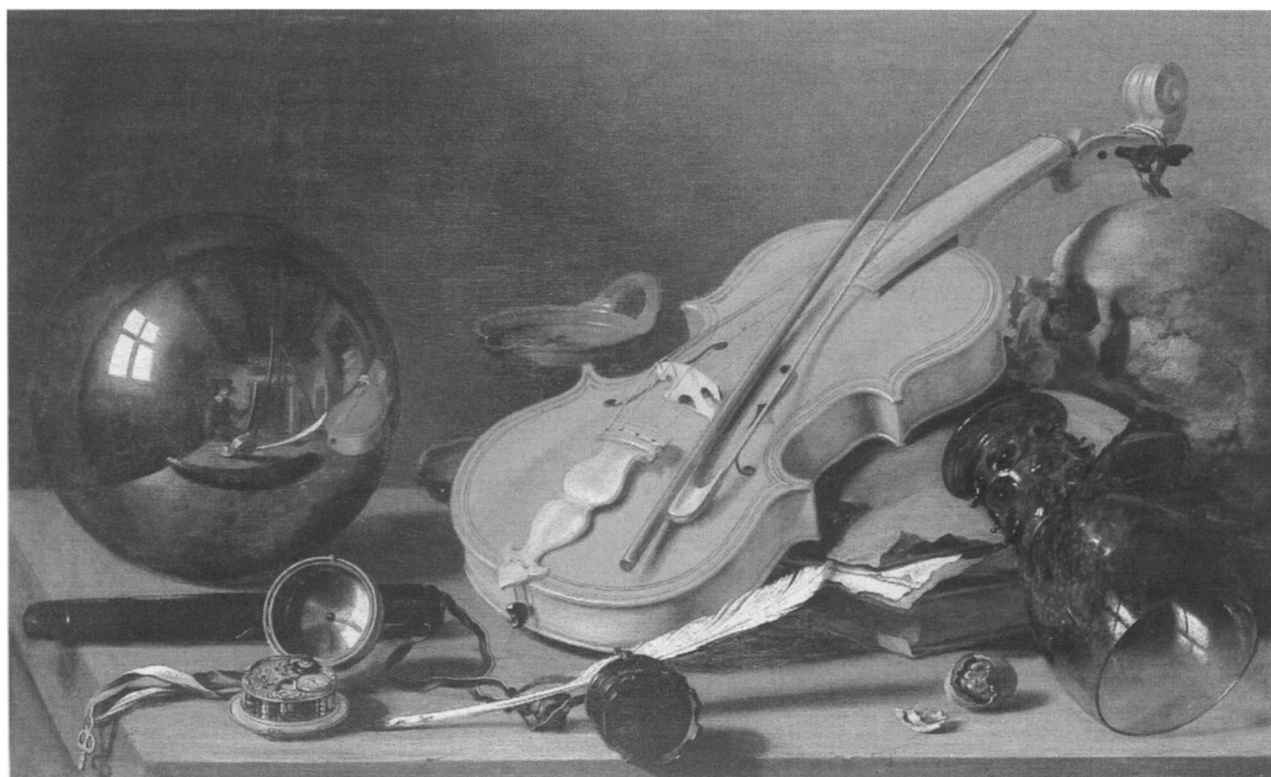


Fig. 6. Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas Still Life with Violin and Glass Ball*, c. 1628, oil on panel, 36 × 59 cm. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. (Photo: Courtesy of Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.)

30. For a discussion of the reversed canvas in Claesz's painting, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, pp. 223–6.

31. On the use of a skull as a vanitas motif on the back of sixteenth-century German and Netherlandish portraits and diptychs, see Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. by Christina Hedström and Gerald Taylor (T. Yoseloff: New York, 1956), pp. 14–16; Ingvar Bergström, 'De Gheyn as a *Vanitas* Painter', *Oud Holland*, vol. 85, no. 3, 1970, p. 155.

32. On the vanitas motif of the skull as anti-painting, transplanted from the reverse to the obverse of the painting, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, pp. 20–9; Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2005), pp. 141–2.

33. Royal collections, in contrast, were more regularly inventoried. On the occasions for drawing up inventories, see John Michael Montias, 'Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam: An Analysis of Subjects and Attributions', in David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (eds), *Art in History, History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture* (Getty Center for

The potential of the easel painting to be transferred to a new context tends to become a reality upon the death of its owner. This is the moment when the painting is lowered from the wall, and its verso comes into view. Because of the association between the reverse of the canvas and the mortality of its owner, the painting seen from behind can function as a *memento mori*, as it does in Pieter Claesz's *Vanitas Still Life* (Fig. 6). On the left, a glass ball reflects the side of the objects on the table that we would not otherwise see: the far side of the violin, quill, black case, and timepiece. Behind these things, deep in the murkiness of that reflection is the back of the canvas on which these objects are portrayed, the very canvas whose front we are now looking at, beyond that the painter and his source of light.³⁰ On the reverse of renaissance portraits, one sometimes finds a vanitas image of a skull.³¹ Here, by contrast, the skull sits on the table in plain view, still a vanitas symbol but without the quality of something that sneaks up on you. Here, it is the blank face of the reversed canvas that is the lurking emblem of death, the deathly anonymity that the painting not-so-secretly harbours on its other side.³²

Almost all our knowledge about the ownership of easel paintings in the seventeenth-century Netherlands comes from information gathered upon death or in anticipation of death in probate inventories.³³ As far as those inventories are concerned, one painting is pretty much like the next and one painting's front is pretty much like its back.³⁴ That is to say, in the inventories of all but the wealthiest seventeenth-century Dutch collectors, paintings are usually listed without reference even to subject matter –

simply as 'a panel', 'a painting', 'two paintings with ebony frames', as if the notary were looking at them from behind.³⁵ Sometimes minimal indications of genre are given, such as 'a portrait', 'a landscape', or 'a pot of flowers', but attributions to specific artists are very rare.³⁶ 'Work by the dozen [*dosijn werk*]' is the expression used to designate paintings of especially poor quality.³⁷ And many of these inventoried paintings were indeed sold by the dozen, i.e., in lots on the auction block.

When the grim reaper arrived and the notary along with him, paintings were turned around to reveal a face as anonymous as any skull. It was this reversal – literal and metaphorical – that made them ready to be transferred to their next owner. But like the lurking face of death, the exchangeability and interchangeability that made them capable of being transferred in this way were always already there to be recognised by anyone who wished to do so. In a drawing of an artist's cellar by Andries Both, it is hard to say whether we are looking at untouched canvases or finished paintings that are ready to be sold or resold (Fig. 7). In either case, the artist seems particularly concerned to show us the uniformity of these wares. Canvases are grouped according to size and aligned with the floorboards, which are as nicely spaced as the beams of the ceiling. Part of what made the art market so fluid in the seventeenth-century Netherlands was the standardisation of its goods.³⁸ At the lower end of the market, differences among paintings were about as important as differences among potatoes, and paintings were routinely used as a form of currency to settle accounts with innkeepers or to pay for services and goods.³⁹

Produced and sold by the dozen, paintings were also owned by the dozen. Reporting on the Dutch way of life in 1652, the Englishman Owen Felltham wrote: 'Their houses, especially in their Cities, are the best eye-beauties of their Country. . . . Their lining is yet more rich than their out-side; not in

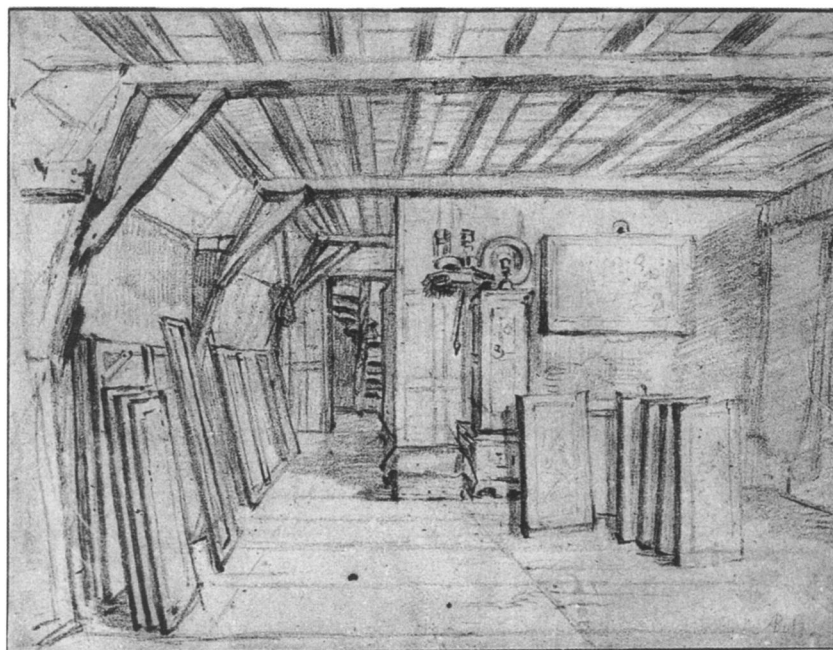


Fig. 7. Andries Both, *Cellar with Canvases*, c. 1624–1640, drawing, 15.6 × 20.2 cm. The British Museum, London. (Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.)

the History of Art and the Humanities: Santa Monica, CA, 1991), p. 333; John Michael Montias, 'Artists Named in Amsterdam Inventories, 1607–80', *Simiolus*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2004–2005, p. 324.

34. For examples of inventories, see Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Waanders: Zwolle, 2000), pp. 138–67.

35. John Michael Montias, 'How Notaries and Other Scribes Recorded Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Sales and Inventories', *Simiolus*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, 2003, pp. 217–35; Montias, *Artists Named*, pp. 322–47.

36. Montias, 'Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam', pp. 333–4. Attributions became somewhat more common in the 1640s and 1650s. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 227.

37. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 237.

38. On the use of prices to designate sizes or formats of paintings (this was rarely done in inventories except those deriving from panel or frame makers and merchants), see Josua Bruyn, 'Een onderzoek naar 17de-eeuwse schilderijformaten, voornamelijk in Noord-Nederland', *Oud Holland*, vol. 93, no. 2, 1979, p. 102; Jørgen Wadum, 'The Antwerp Brand on Paintings on Panel', in Erma Hermens (ed.), *Looking Through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research* (De Prom: Baarn, 1998), pp. 179–82.

39. It was Floerke who made the comparison between paintings and potatoes. Hanns Floerke, *Studien zur niederländischen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte: die Formen des Kunsthandels, das Atelier und die Sammler in den Niederlanden vom 15.-18. Jahrhundert* (G. Müller: Munich, 1905). 'Paintings were relatively liquid valuables at the time', writes Montias, 'perhaps because standards of quality were fairly uniform among large groups of people'. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 205–6. For examples of paintings bartered for services and goods, see Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 194–6; North, *Art and Commerce*, p. 92. On paintings used as currency, see Floerke, *Studien zur niederländischen Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte*, pp. 30–7.

40. Owen Felltham, *A brief character of the Low-Countries*. . . (Printed for Henry Seile: London, 1652), pp. 19–20. Similar observations are made by Peter Mundy, John Evelyn and Jean Nicolas de Parival. See Sir Richard Carnac Temple (ed.), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608–1667* (Printed for the Hakluyt Society: Cambridge, UK, 1907–1936), vol. 4, p. 70; John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by Esmond Samuel de Beer (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1959), pp. 23–4; Jean Nicolas de Parival, *Les délices de la Hollande*. . . (Pierre Didier: Leiden, 1662), p. 25. Van Hoogstraten himself describes walls overtaken by paintings. Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, p. 237.

hangings, but pictures, which even the poorest are there furnisht with. Not a cobbler but has his toys for ornament'.⁴⁰ By mid-century, a very broad spectrum of Dutch society owned an unprecedented number of paintings.⁴¹ Inventories from the city of Delft suggest that, on average, a household possessed ten paintings in the 1610s and twenty in the 1670s. In that same time, the average household in Amsterdam seems to have gone from owning twenty-five to owning forty paintings.⁴² 'In mid-seventeenth-century Delft', John Michael Montias reckons, 'perhaps two-thirds of the population, estimated at twenty-eight to thirty thousand inhabitants, lived in households possessing paintings. All in all, as many as forty to fifty thousand paintings hung in the city's four thousand-odd houses at that time'.⁴³

What all the thousands of paintings hanging in seventeenth-century Dutch homes looked like would be difficult to say if one had only the evidence provided by inventories to rely on. It would be equally difficult to say based on the scant evidence offered by Gerrit Ter Borch's *Woman Washing Her Hands* since the paintings hanging in this room are a bit far away and in a rather dark corner, or so the fiction of the painting would have us believe (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Gerard ter Borch, *Woman Washing Her Hands*, c. 1655, oil on panel, 53 × 43 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. (Photo: © SKD.)



Fig. 9. Allan McCollum, *Surrogate Paintings*, 1980–1981, acrylic on wood and museum board. Installation site: Paine Webber corporate waiting area, New York City, 1981. (Photo: Mary Ellen Latella, Courtesy of Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.)



Fig. 10. Allan McCollum, *Surrogates on Location*, photographs from magazines, film, and television, 1982–1989. (Photo: Courtesy of Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.)

But fictions are just that, and ter Borch was, of course, entirely free to make up a scenario in which we could see clearly what is depicted in those lavishly framed black squares. It seems that at least one is a portrait. I would hazard a guess even that it is a portrait of a man, but more would be difficult to say.

Surrogate Paintings

In 1978, Allan McCollum began making a series of objects he called *Surrogate Paintings*. Produced and installed in multiples, the first surrogates were made of wood and acrylic paint. By 1982, McCollum was casting the surrogates in plaster from rubber moulds so that the image, mat, and frame would be seen as an integral whole, what he has called a ‘standard sign-for-a-painting’.⁴⁴ Although each *Plaster Surrogate* is a unique, hand-painted, dated, and signed object, McCollum installs them in groups that are sometimes large enough to fill entire walls or galleries.⁴⁵ He describes the effect of these installations: ‘The surrogates, via their reduced attributes and their relentless sameness, started working to render the gallery into a quasi-theatrical space which seemed to “stand for” a gallery; and by extension, this rendered me into a sort of caricature of an artist, and the viewers became performers, and so forth’.⁴⁶ In his 1981 installation in a Paine Webber office, the surrogates make the scene over into a caricature of the corporate waiting area (Fig. 9).

This theatricality has prompted one interviewer to say, ‘The surrogates are clearly “fake paintings,” imitations of paintings. I’m curious as to whether you have contempt for painting’.⁴⁷ But the surrogates are no more or less fake than any other paintings, according to McCollum’s logic:

Well, to begin with, I don’t think that it’s only my surrogates which are imitations of paintings—all paintings are imitations of paintings in some way, aren’t they? With each one reflecting every other one? No, I don’t think I have contempt for painting; that would be like having contempt for culture. Paintings are everywhere you look; they’re all over the place—like cars, or buildings.⁴⁸

For McCollum, a painting can *only* ever be a stand-in for itself. Not only does each painting aspire to be like every other painting; each painting must aspire even to be itself; a painting is this self-aspiring effect.

As if to demonstrate the ubiquity of paintings standing in for themselves, McCollum began around 1985 to find ready-made surrogates in film and

41. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, p. 13. For speculation on the number of paintings bought and sold in the Netherlands and who owned them (including farmers), see Ad van der Woude, ‘The Volume and Value of Paintings in Holland at the Time of the Dutch Republic’, in Freedberg and De Vries (eds), *Art in History*, pp. 285–329; Prak, ‘Guilds and the Development of the Art Market’, pp. 236–51. On relatively poor people owning paintings, see Marten Jan Bok, ‘The Rise of Amsterdam as a Cultural Centre: The Market for Paintings, 1580–680’, in Patrick Karl O’Brien (ed.), *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; New York, 2001), p. 190. Montias qualifies these generalisations: ‘Most poor households—the houses of the apprentices and the journeymen who made up a majority of the population’s wage earners—possessed few if any paintings’. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 269. ‘The great majority of the paintings that hung on the walls of Delft citizens were copies and other “work-by-the dozen” that cost two gulden or less’. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 327.

42. North, *Art and Commerce*, p. 108. North is here summarising data compiled by Montias in Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, table 8.3, p. 242; Montias, ‘Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam’, table 3, p. 352.

43. Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 220.

44. On the shift to plaster, see *Inside the Studio: Two Decades of Talks with Artists in New York*, ed. by Judith Olch Richards (Independent Curators International (ICI): New York, 2004), p. 96.

45. On the uniqueness of each surrogate, see Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. by Alexander Alberro (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2005), p. 30.

46. D.A. Robbins, ‘An Interview with Allan McCollum’, *Arts Magazine*, vol. 40, October



Fig. 12. Pieter de Hooch, *The Linen Cabinet*, c. 1663, oil on canvas, 70 × 75.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. (Photo: Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.)



Fig. 13. Gerard ter Borch, *Curiosity*, c. 1660, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 62.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

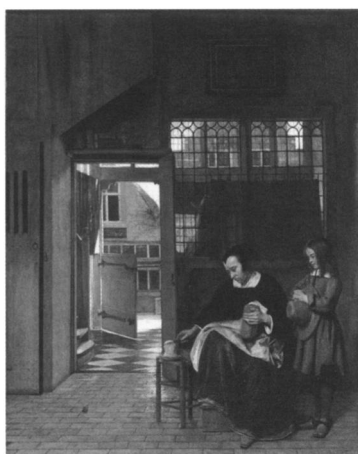


Fig. 14. Pieter de Hooch, *A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter for a Boy*, c. 1660–1663, oil on canvas, 68.3 × 53 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. (Photo: Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.)

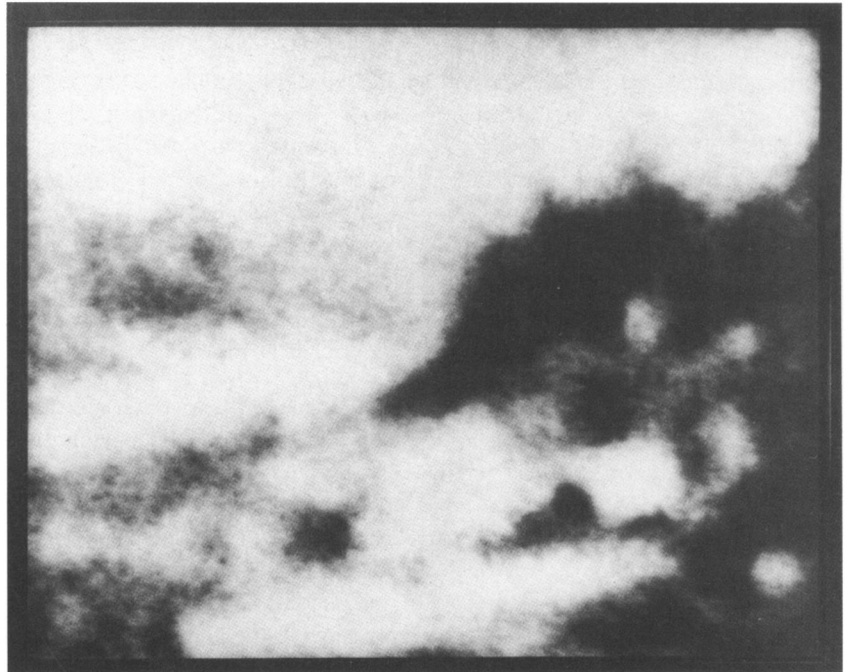


Fig. 11. Allan McCollum, *Perpetual Photo No. 126B*, 1982–1986, silver gelatin print, 109.2 × 134.6 cm. (Photo: Courtesy of Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.)

television stills, which he developed into a series called *Surrogates on Location* (Fig. 10): 'I was surprised to see how often images which looked exactly like my surrogates appeared in the backgrounds of television dramas, old movies, and so forth. I started taking these pictures as a kind of facetious "proof" . . . A fictitious *provenance*, as one friend put it'.⁴⁹ Proof that paintings function perfectly well as paintings even when – or especially when – that is all they do. Paintings caught in the act of being tokens. The shiny black surfaces of these tokens-of-themselves reflect not only other paintings but also the whole system of objects and people that frame them: 'I wanted to show that all artworks, everywhere, are just a kind of prop – a prop which has meaning only in relation to the action which takes place around it'.⁵⁰

When McCollum began to isolate and enlarge the *Surrogates on Location* for a series called *Perpetual Photos*, he pushed his forensic irony a step further (Fig. 11): 'Sometimes I'll find a picture that has a tiny framed picture on the wall in the background, and the image within that frame is indecipherable, just a blur. When I enlarge these little meaningless smudges up to life-size – the size of a picture we might hang in our own home – there's nothing there, just the ghost of an artwork, the ghost of content'.⁵¹ McCollum's investigative process never uncovers anything more, of course, than the absence (or the ghost) of the picture it was ostensibly meant to reveal.

Paintings within paintings of Dutch interiors are sometimes legible enough for iconographers to work out the interplay between their content and that of the scene in which they appear. Insofar as those interpretations carry the weight of the commonplace and the cliché, they are reasonably convincing, if not rather limited in scope, as are most moralising interpretations of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. Other paintings within painting of Dutch interiors are placed at a distance great enough (Fig. 12), at an angle oblique enough (Fig. 13), or in lighting conditions poor enough (Fig. 14) to be only

minimally legible. Scholars have said little about these paintings within paintings probably because they are so good at acting like McCollum's surrogates, their representational content subordinated to their generic outlines. They are too good at being stage props, in other words, to have solicited much scholarly attention.⁵² But it is precisely their reticence that makes them, to my mind, so helpful in understanding what the many thousands of paintings hanging in seventeenth-century Dutch homes meant to their original viewers in their original contexts. Paintings of domestic interiors are not documentary evidence, of course; they do not tell us how Dutch homes and the paintings in them really looked. But they can tell us something about what painters of the domestic interior and perhaps others saw in those paintings and what it is they want us to see – which is often very little.⁵³

About making the surrogates, McCollum has said: 'my perception was that if a painting were reduced far enough, down to its basic *identity* as a painting, the painting would become so self-referential that it would have nowhere to go except to implode and refer back to its position in a system of other kinds of objects that aren't paintings'.⁵⁴ Inventories and dollhouses suggest that paintings in Dutch homes were subsumed into larger decorative systems.⁵⁵ They were hung in accordance with surrounding objects, centred over doorways or mantelpieces and in symmetrical or otherwise pleasing relationships with one another. Achieving this sort of symmetry was made easier by increasing standardisation in the manufacture and commercial provision of canvases and frames.⁵⁶ Evidence that certain rooms were reserved for certain kinds of paintings, kitchens filled with still lifes and market scenes or that sort of thing is scarce. Instead, religious paintings, landscapes, family portraits, still lifes, and so on intermingled.⁵⁷ Paintings also tended to be hung high, so high sometimes that it was probably hard to make out their subject matter.⁵⁸ The size and shape of a painting and its role in a larger decorative system trumped content, it seems, as far as its hanging was concerned.⁵⁹

While painters of the domestic interior often exercised precisely this sort of disregard for content, displaying paintings within their own paintings in less than perfect viewing conditions, most *theorists* of painting (and painters in the guise of theorists) sought to counteract this indifference by establishing guidelines for the proper display of art. When it comes to the hanging of paintings, Gérard de Lairese, a Dutch painter and theorist with a preference for classical French painting, finds indifference to setting offensive and insists that the 'property' of pictures

lies in their Application to meet Places; and they cannot be displaced without hurting, nay undoing Naturalness. . . . I say then, that it's not sufficient for a Painter to design Work for Apartments at random, and introduce therein what Fancies he pleases, or best understands; for, he ought to consider, whether it agree with the Place, and be proper there; . . . First, Let him consider whether the Owner be a Prince, Lord, Magistrate, or Merchant. / Secondly, Whether the Building be publick, as a Town-house, Church, Palace, &c. or private, as for a Merchant or Citizen. / Lastly, Whether it be a Hall, Chamber, Parlor, Kitchen, or the like.⁶⁰

The kind of site- and owner-specificity demanded by De Lairese was, needless to say, the exception when it came to paintings sold on the open market and in lotteries and then sometimes repeatedly resold at auction. Even painters who worked on commission for wealthy patrons probably rarely saw their work displayed precisely as they had intended it to be. Bringing out the underlying concern in De Lairese's comments, the English historian Sir William

1985, p. 41. On the theatricality of the surrogates, see also 'Allan McCollum Interviewed by Thomas Lawson', in *Allan McCollum* (A.R.T.: Los Angeles, 1996), p. 2.

47. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 40.

48. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 40.

49. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 44.

50. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 44.

51. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 44.

52. On paintings within paintings, see Wolfgang Stechow, 'Landscape Paintings in Dutch Seventeenth Century Interiors', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 11, 1960, p. 166; André Chastel, *Fables, formes, figures* (Flammarion: Paris, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 75–98; Pierre Georget and Anne-Marie Lecoq, *La peinture dans la peinture* (Le Musée: Dijon, 1983); Beaujean, *Bilder in Bildern*; Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2002), pp. 87–97.

53. Stechow has suggested that, in the case of landscape painting, this may be something of a paragone between genres: 'a tendency on the part of the painters of interiors to think of landscapes as something individually less important, something more generally decorative than genre paintings'. Stechow, 'Landscape Paintings in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Interiors', p. 166.

54. 'Allan McCollum Interviewed by Thomas Lawson', p. 3.

55. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, p. 13. On the pairing of paintings not originally intended to be paired, see Falkenburg, *Onweer bij Jan van Goyen*, pp. 133–4.

56. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, p. 125.

57. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, pp. 40–50.

58. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, pp. 112, 115.

59. Loughman and Montias, *Public and Private Spaces*, pp. 30–50, 131.

60. Gérard de Lairese, *The Art of Painting. . .*, trans. by John Frederick Fritsch (Printed for the author: London, 1738), p. 394. For the original, see Gérard de Lairese, *Groot schilderboek. . .* (DAVAO: Utrecht, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 71–2.

61. William Sanderson, *Graphice. The Use of The Pen and Pencil: Or, The Most Excellent Art of Painting: in Two Parts* (Printed for Robert Crofts: London, 1658), p. 26. Compare Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (1624), facsimile reprint (Theatrum Orbis Terrarum: Amsterdam/Da Capo: New York, 1970), p. 98.

62. De Lairese, *The Art of Painting*, p. 361; De Lairese, *Groot Schilderboek*, vol. 2, p. 26. For similar concerns, see De Lairese, *Groot Schilderboek*, vol. 1, p. 316; P.J.J. van Thiel, 'De Grebbers regels van de Kunst', *Oud Holland*, vol. 80, 1965, pp. 126–31; Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture*, pp. 98–9; Sanderson, *Graphice*, p. 26.

63. De Lairese, *The Art of Painting*, p. 361; De Lairese, *Groot Schilderboek*, vol. 2, p. 26.

64. De Lairese, *The Art of Painting*, p. 292; see also p. 397. De Lairese, *Groot Schilderboek*, vol. 1, p. 375; see also vol. 2, p. 75.

65. See Eric J. Sluiter, 'Jan van Goyen als marktlieder, virtuoos en vernieuwer', in Christiaan Vogelaar (ed.), *Jan van Goyen* (Waanders: Zwolle, 1996), pp. 47–8.

66. For a very interesting exhibition of Janssens' painting, see León Krempel, *Camera Elinga: Pieter Janssens beëgnet Jeff Wall* (Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie: Frankfurt am Main, 2002).

Sanderson associates clutter and, by implication, insensitivity to context and company with the market. Sanderson cautions owners 'spare your purse and pains, not to Clutter the Room with too many *Pieces*, unless in *Galleries* and *Repositories*, as rarities of severall Artizans intermingled; otherwise it becomes only a *Painters-Shop*, for choice of sale'.⁶¹

Not only was De Lairese concerned with where paintings were to be hung but also their proper lighting, the correct distance for viewing them, and the effective placement of their horizon lines: 'Hence it follows, that *low Horizons, or Points of Sight, are the best* and most natural in a Portrait, and will most deceive the Senses, if the Light and Distance, with respect to the Place where the Picture is to be set, be well observed'.⁶² But fast on the heels of this categorical recommendation, De Lairese confesses that the frequency with which portraits change context puts all rules for painting them in doubt:

But as Portraits are moveable, how natural and like soever they be, and well handled, if they hang not in proper Places, they will not have a good Effect: Hence, the Mischief attending them, is, that, by continually changing their Places, they cannot always be painted to a certain Height and Distance, and consequently baffle our Rule: A Difficulty which the greatest Masters must struggle with, and this Branch of the Art is liable to.⁶³

While the painter cannot know where his portrait will hang, the person hanging the painting knows where the painting's horizon falls. De Lairese insists that this be taken into account when it comes to decorating the space above the fireplace: 'I order a Figure-piece [a history or genre painting] over the Chimney; because 'tis the principal Place of the Room; for, what Business can a Landskip have *there*, the *Horizon* whereof ought to be *without, nay much lower than the Picture?* Wherefore in so *principal a Place nothing would be seen but Sky*'.⁶⁴ De Lairese does not address the many Dutch landscape paintings, including the one decorating the chimney in Gabriel Metsu's *The Visit to the Nursery*, that show pretty much nothing but sky, regardless of where they hang (Fig. 15). Paintings intentionally left empty do not seem to have interested this theorist, whose taste in landscapes tended more towards Poussin.

While theorists like De Lairese lamented the ways in which paintings were subject to viewing conditions that had little to do with their authors' intentions, painters of interiors seem to have taken an active interest in the distorting effects of less than ideal display. And while theorists sought to counteract the heteronomy of the transportable easel painting by making recommendations for its proper design and hanging – as if there were an essential truth to the painting in need of protection – painters celebrated that heteronomy by subjecting the paintings within their paintings to distance, darkness, obliquity, and reversal. Some landscapes, most famously Jan van Goyen's, were already blank enough that only a small measure of these distorting effects was needed to render their iconography secondary to their generic outlines and to their role in the institution of domestic life. Commonly referred to as 'little grey paintings [*grauwtjes*]' because of their lack of colour and evenness of tone, landscapes like these invited subordination to their surroundings, their understatement facilitating the obfuscation to which painters of the interior subjected them.⁶⁵

In Pieter Janssens Elinga's *Interior with Painter, Reading Woman and Sweeping Woman*, the subordination of paintings to their surroundings is expressed through a series of analogies.⁶⁶ Here, as in many paintings of the Dutch interior, paintings share the wall space with mirrors that are framed and hung only slightly differently from those paintings (Fig. 16). That a good

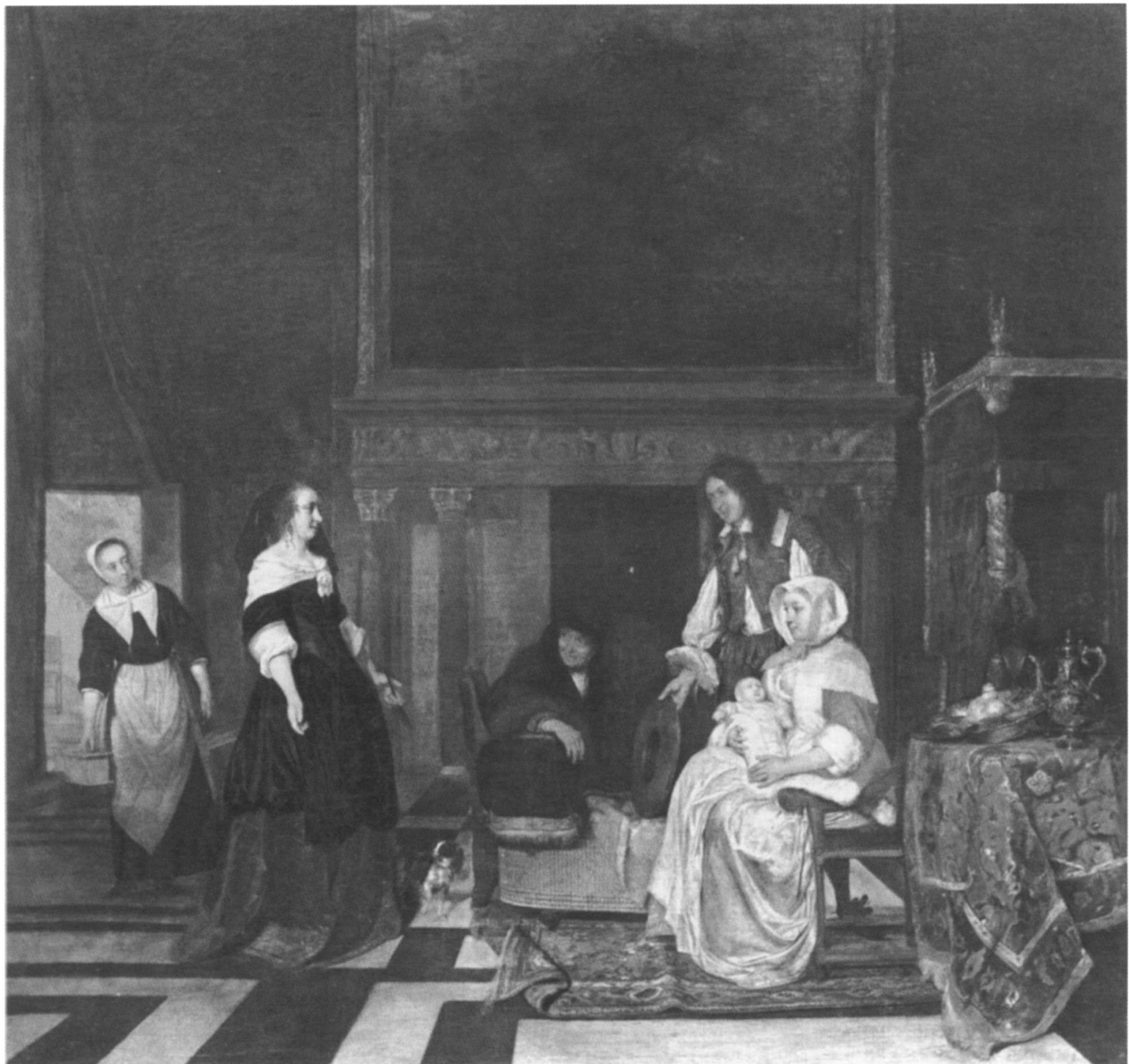


Fig. 15. Gabriel Metsu, *The Visit to the Nursery*, 1661, oil on canvas, 77.5 × 81.3 cm. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.)

painting is like a mirror was a cliché of the period, repeated by Van Hoogstraten among others: ‘a perfect painting is like a mirror of nature, which makes things that are not appear to be’.⁶⁷ Exquisitely sensitive to what stands before it, the mirror reflects its context and its viewers, however, even as they change. As if to emphasise the mirror’s uncensored and ongoing reflection of just what happens to be there, Pieter Janssens Elinga has his gilt-framed mirror reflect nothing more and nothing less than an empty patch of expensively tiled floor. Janssens’s mirror is but one of several figures for the art of painting to be found in this interior. The light pouring in through the windows is apparently bright enough to reflect off the side wall and cast a shadow image of the empty chair standing in the corner onto the rear wall. Crisp where it

67. ‘een volmaekte Schildery is als een spiegel van de Natuer, die de dingen, die niet en zijn, doet schijnen te zijn’. Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, p. 25.



Fig. 16. Pieter Janssens Elinga, *Interior with Painter, Reading Woman and Sweeping Woman*, c. 1665–1670, oil on canvas, 83.7 × 100 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. (Photo: © Blauel/Gnamm – ARTOTHEK.)

68. In her discussion of Samuel van Hoogstraten's London perspective box, Brusati describes similar topoi. Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, p. 178.

is closest to the chair and soft to the point of disappearing at its farthest remove, that shadow alludes to another topos of mimetic painting – Pliny and Quintilian's stories of painting's origins in the tracing of a man's shadow. Then there are the leaded glass windows shuttered on the bottom but open at top to a view of sky and trees. These windows are similar in composition to the landscape paintings hanging on either side of them. That Janssens is drawing an analogy here between painting and window is suggested by the frequency of this trope in Dutch and Flemish genre paintings, where playful comparisons of real and fictional openings onto the external world abound.

The walls of Janssens' interior are decorated, then, with three familiar figures for the art of mimetic painting – mirror, shadow, and window – each of which faithfully engages something beyond its frame.⁶⁸ In their dimness and obliquity, the heteronomous landscapes and seascapes that comprise the bulk of this household collection likewise depend upon what surrounds them for their legibility – by which I mean not the land and sea they represent but rather the furniture and other paintings with which they share the domestic space. While the paintings may not literally reflect their context the way the mirror does, the process of deciphering their ghostly forms requires no less an engagement with the extra-pictorial than does the process of reading the reflection in the mirror, the shadow on the wall, or the scene through the window. It is only because we find these framed rectangles in this place that we can translate their blurry shapes into the familiar forms of landscape paintings. Objects in a series, decorative elements, and props in the drama of everyday life, these framed rectangles are a function of the spaces they appear in.

The painting that is a faceless blank or a barely legible blur redirects the viewer's attention towards its physical frame, its institutional frame, and the social interactions taking place around it. In Pieter Saenredam's

St. Laurenskerk, Alkmaar, that frame is an altar, that institution a church, and that social interaction a lonely prayer (Fig. 17). The altarpiece is an anomaly in an otherwise whitewashed church, either a fiction included in the painting to please a Catholic patron or a real structure built in the church as a concession to Catholic residents of the city.⁶⁹ Whether fact or fiction, the baroque altarpiece is depicted as a cipher, a nearly empty blue rectangle, whose content depends upon the ecclesiastical context for its legibility. Although the altar stands directly beside a clear glass window in the most brightly illuminated corner of the chapel, the crucifix is faint, whittled down to the bare minimum of what is necessary for our recognition of it, what might be called a standard sign-for-an-icon. Instrumental to our recognition of this icon is the activity of the man kneeling before it, hands joined in prayer and, of course, the building that houses it.⁷⁰

In Saenredam's painting, the obscurity of the object of worship throws into high relief the institution that frames it, which is exactly what we need to pay attention to, if we are to resolve its faint shapes into something recognisable. As if he were reading the lessons of the easel painting – including his own – back onto the church art that it replaced, Saenredam discovers that even the painting with a fixed and enduring place is still subject to the vagaries of human desire and perception. Unlike Van Hoogstraten, who holds up the church as the lost utopia of contextual stability, Saenredam suggests that, even in the church, the image is a cipher whose value is only as enduring as the people who pray to it.

'Paysage faufif'

McCollum's *Surrogate Paintings* make something visible in seventeenth-century paintings of the Dutch interior that has often been overlooked, namely, the blankness of the paintings that decorate their walls. The *Surrogates* help the eye see where paintings within paintings of the Dutch interior do not supplement the meaning of the paintings in which they appear but rather open an aperture, a hole within the fabric of the fiction, through which one glimpses all the other paintings with which this one might be exchanged. The grainy ghostly abstraction of the *Perpetual Photos* likewise helps the eye see what there is *not* to see in the paintings hanging in Dutch interiors. Those 'meaningless smudges' are the faceless faces of paintings deflecting attention away from themselves and onto whatever and whomever happens to be near them.⁷¹ The surrogate paintings and perpetual photos in seventeenth-century Dutch interiors are evidence that the 'autonomy' of the easel painting was discovered long before its crisis in the twentieth century to be a kind of fiction, a fiction belied by the allegedly singular object's embeddedness in a series of objects with which it is more or less interchangeable and belied again by the failure of the independent object to remain intact as it moves from one context to another.⁷² The surrogate paintings and perpetual photos in seventeenth-century Dutch interiors are evidence that just as the myth of aesthetic autonomy was beginning to take shape, painters took it upon themselves to picture its undoing.

But the juxtaposition of McCollum's work and seventeenth-century genre paintings cuts both ways. For, the effaced landscapes within Dutch interiors teach the eye, in turn, that there is indeed something (rather than nothing) to see in McCollum's *Perpetual Photos*. The juxtaposition reveals the way in which McCollum's strange process of taking the 'tiny framed picture on the wall' and blowing it up to life-size turns all paintings into what I would like to call landscapes.⁷³ Odd as it is, McCollum's process only slightly

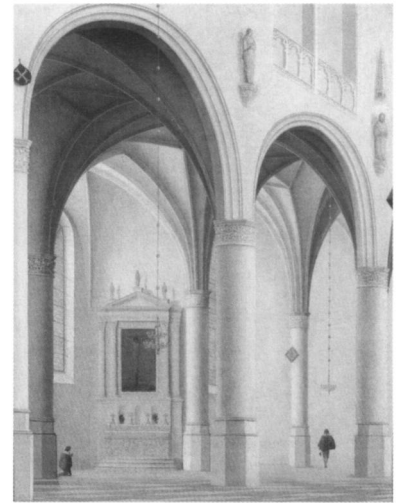


Fig. 17. Pieter Saenredam, *St. Laurenskerk, Alkmaar*, 1635, oil on panel, 45 × 36 cm. Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht. (Photo: Courtesy of Museum Catherijneconvent, Utrecht.)

69. Schwartz and Bok argue that the large baroque altarpiece pictured here could not have been in the Church of St. Laurens in Alkmaar when Saenredam made this painting in 1635 or, for that matter, at any other time during the seventeenth century and that its inclusion here indicates a Catholic patron. Gary Schwartz and Marten Jan Bok, *Pieter Saenredam: The Painter and his Time* (Abbeville: New York, 1990), p. 105.

70. For a discussion of Saenredam's 'negating' pictorial devices, see Thomas Hensel, 'Bilderstürmende Bilder: Hendrick van Steenwijck des Älteren "Cathedral von Antwerpen"', *Im Blickfeld, Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle*, vol. 3, 1998, p. 35.

71. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 44.

72. For Stoichita, Gijsbrechts stands at the beginning of the era of art in the modern sense of the term. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, p. 279.

73. Robbins, *An Interview*, p. 44. Fraser describes this process in terms of alienation. Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, p. 32.

74. Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise*, trans. by David Britt (Rizzoli: New York, 1989), p. 282. See also T.J. Demos, 'Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement', *Grey Room*, vol. 8, 2002, pp. 26–8.

75. On reproduction and the *Boîte-en-valise*, see David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910–1941* (MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 1998), pp. 188–93.

76. On the *Perpetual Photo's* perversion of uniqueness, see Lynne Cooke, 'Allan McCollum: The Art of Duplicitous Ingemination', in *Allan McCollum* (Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum: Eindhoven, 1989), p. 16.

77. 'Allan McCollum Interviewed by Gray Watson', *Artscribe*, Dec/Jan 1985/86, p. 66.

modifies the day-to-day workings of mechanical reproduction. Under normal conditions, the photographically reproduced work of art is decontextualised and more often than not miniaturised, but this miniaturisation is provisional, a compression of sorts to be undone once the reproduction has done its work of transporting the original elsewhere. For, the reproduced object will be restored to life (size) in the imagination of the beholder of the photograph. We enact this enlargement automatically, unconsciously.

In making the *Perpetual Photos*, McCollum departs from this entirely familiar process only insofar as he uses a machine rather than the human imagination to reconstitute the mechanically reproduced and reduced painting. Made flabby by this process, each of McCollum's reconstituted originals seems to be not a still life, portrait, or history painting but rather a landscape – a world. What they really are, of course, are perpetually open ciphers onto whose blurry contours we project our own world. I am calling McCollum's *Perpetual Photos* landscapes, then, for two reasons. First, because so many of them literally resemble landscapes; and second, because they all invite the viewer to see his or her own world unfolding in their blurry shapes. The fact that each and every painting McCollum catches hanging on the wall in the background yields a perpetual photo would seem to suggest that every painting has an inner landscape, so to speak.

McCollum's identification of painting with a landscape conjured by the projective fantasy of the viewer finds a precedent of sorts in Duchamp's *Paysage fautif* or *Faulty Landscape*, as it has been translated (Fig. 18). Each of the twenty boxes in Duchamp's first edition of the *Boîte-en-Valise* (a portable museum of the artist's oeuvre) contains sixty-nine miniaturised reproductions of Duchamp's works – *Fountain*, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, *Nude Descending a Stair Case*, etc. – and one original. The original in box XII/XX 'for Maria' is a landscape painting. The one full-scale object in the ensemble, the *Paysage fautif* is affixed to the inside of the lid of the suitcase. Not so long ago, the liquid stain spreading across the centre of the satin-backed Astralon field was discovered to be seminal fluid: landscape as stain, as the whorls and splotches of a faulty emission, as projective fantasy.⁷⁴ Although Duchamp placed this 'original' over and against the miniaturised reproductions contained in the box, there is nothing less likely to bear a signature and title – as does the *Faulty Landscape* – than the ejaculate that misses its reproductive mark. The only seminal, original, properly authored object in Maria's *Box-in-a-Valise* is, ironically, the object seemingly least capable of attesting to its paternity.⁷⁵

Many of McCollum's *Perpetual Photos* bear a morphological resemblance to Duchamp's *Paysage fautif*. And all of the *Perpetual Photos* participate in the ironic originality of Duchamp's landscape.⁷⁶ The irony of the originality of the perpetual photo lies in the fact that, although it is a unique object – which carries McCollum's photograph of the source image along with the negative of the enlarged image attached to its reverse – it is nonetheless a copy of a copy of a copy (a photograph of a reproduction seen on television): 'there's some indecipherable image in the frame. What I do with these is to blow up the little image and re-frame it, so that in a sense I am making for myself the little picture I saw on someone's wall in a TV show. I do entire exhibits of these "recuperated" pictures, but I never know what any of the original images were'.⁷⁷ McCollum makes a show of recuperating this lost originality in order to travesty it, in his deadpan sort of way. For, despite the fact that the *Perpetual Photos* are unique objects, there is nothing less selfsame than their grainy and evocative forms, nothing less true to a fixed and unchanging origin than these landscapes onto which we are invited to



Fig. 18. Marcel Duchamp, *Paysage fatif*, 1946, seminal fluid on Astralon backed with black satin, 21 × 16.5 cm, from *The Box in a Valise*, no. XII/XX. The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama. (Photo: Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama.)

endlessly project our own fantasies, nothing less capable of attesting to their paternity.

Centuries before the Institutional Critique of the twentieth century, seventeenth-century painters unmasked the mutability of the easel painting, countering a burgeoning myth of the autonomy of the portable painting without trying to protect the easel painting (as the theorists did) from the degradations and dirty emissions of its heterogeneous viewers. This exposure of the easel painting's heteronomy undermined the hierarchy that elevates what gets painted over what does not and exposed the symbolic violence involved in the easel painting's privileging of what it frames. Moreover, by celebrating the blurring that paintings suffer when they are seen in conditions for which they were not made, painters of the Dutch interior also countered De Lairese's conservative preference for the kind of site-specific painting that only the very wealthy could afford.

The scene of masked figures breaking objects in Francken's collector's cabinet locates the origin of modern collecting in a moment of iconoclasm. Gijsbrechts'



Fig. 19. Pieter de Hooch, *The Bedroom*, c. 1658–1660, oil on canvas, 51 × 60 cm. Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington. (Photo: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.)

78. Robbins, 'An Interview', p. 40.

reversed canvases do the same. Easel painting begins in a historical moment of image destruction and retains that destruction right through its history and into its denouement in the twentieth century. But, if Francken and Gijsbrechts discover the origin of easel painting in an act of erasure, it is an erasure of a peculiarly generative kind, in the wake of which paintings proliferate. In the case of Francken's collection, that would be the many easel paintings hanging on the wall. In the case of Gijsbrechts' reversed canvas, that would be the thirty-five plus paintings that make up the rest of the collection, inventory, or auction lot to which this one belongs – this one with its inventory tag standing in for all the others, as if to say along with McCollum, 'all paintings are imitations of paintings in some way, aren't they? With each one reflecting every other one?'⁷⁸

In the case of Pieter de Hooch's *The Bedroom*, that proliferation would be all the other landscapes with which the 'perpetual photo' hanging over the doorway might be exchanged, including that rectangular bit of landscape visible through a complex series of overlapping doors and windows (Fig. 19). This 'real' landscape, with its dark vegetal mass on the left giving way to a luminous sky on the right, is the painted landscape's uncanny double, evidence of its essential dependence on what surrounds it – but not in the familiar sense we associate with mimetic painting. Aligned with the doorway below it, the little square of framed nothingness finds its missing content beyond the confines of its frame, its blurry contours coming into focus by virtue of their resemblance to those of what is pictured through the window. De Hooch's redundant window-painting does nothing so much as give onto the world around it, picturing the way paintings hand back to their viewers exactly what they already know.

It is the transposability of the easel painting – thematised by de Hooch no less than McCollum – and the extension of that transposability by reproductive photography that makes the anachronistic work I have done here possible if not, in some sense, inevitable. The portable work is bound to be compared to those works from other times and places that it comes into contact with. Such comparisons are a function of what I have been calling the placelessness of the easel painting and what Buren more eloquently calls ‘the unspeakable compromise of the portable work’. Of course, for Buren, this compromise and the comparisons it fosters are precisely what need to be overcome. Comparisons of seemingly unrelated works of art are among the things that Buren’s site-specific practices are intended to prevent. Insofar as the museum promotes such comparison by bringing together heterogeneous objects under the idealist rubric of ‘art’, the museum is, for Buren, the great falsifier: ‘In the case of a confrontation of works by different artists the Museum imposes an amalgam of unrelated things...forc[ing] into comparison things which are often incomparable’.⁷⁹

Although my comparisons have indeed brought together things that are – in an important sense – incomparable, I would nonetheless insist that they are appropriate to the transposable objects they compare. They are also revealing. They reveal that the easel painting’s compromise cuts even deeper than its subjection to the alienating space of the museum. Long before it ever leaves the studio, that little framed rectangle has already forsaken itself. Being at bottom a landscape blurry enough to support our (faulty) projections, it never was and never will be simply what it is. Seventeenth-century painters of the Dutch interior seem to have not only recognised this fact but fully enjoyed its pictorial consequences.

I would like to thank Hanneke Grootenboer and the other members of the Oxford Art Journal editorial board for their insightful comments. Work on this article began at the Getty Research Center in 2006–2007. I am grateful for the Institutional support provided by the Getty and for my conversations with the scholars and staff who were there that year.

79. Daniel Buren, ‘Function of the Museum’ (1970), repr. Bronson and Gale (eds), *Museums by Artists*, p. 59. It is against this kind of circulation that most post-studio practices are directed. See Andrea Fraser, ‘Procedural Matters: Andrea Fraser on the Art of Michael Asher’, *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 10, 2008, p. 379.