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Author(s): Eric Jan Sluijter
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Rembrandt and the Rules of Art Revisited

Eric Jan Sluijter

Since Jan Emmens's influential book Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst, *it has been generally taken for granted that classicist art theory took hold in the Netherlands after c. 1670 and that, as a consequence, the criticism of Rembrandt's art came into being only after Rembrandt's death. For example, Emmens was convinced that Joachim von Sandrart, in his 1675 biography of Rembrandt, showed little knowledge about Rembrandt and his work of the 1630s and '40s and only repeated the popular clichés of the new classicism that had developed in Italy and France. He maintained that the words Von Sandrart put into Rembrandt's mouth would have been impossible in the Netherlands in 1637–45 (the period Von Sandrart lived in Amsterdam), because classicist criticism did not yet exist.*

In this essay I argue that such criticism did not stem from theoretical ideas developed only in the later 17th century, but was rooted in debates that had already been going on for a long time, debates in which Rembrandt must have taken a deliberate and conspicuous stand. Von Sandrart, whose ideas and style represented an alternative in the Amsterdam of the late '30s and early '40s, described with amazing precision how Rembrandt put concepts of a 'coloring' and 'from life' ideology into use in his works of this period. This ideology, to which Rembrandt adhered, was already quite fiercely contested in the late '20s and '30s.

Since the publication of Jan Emmens's influential book *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* (Rembrandt and the rules of art), it has been generally taken for granted that the criticism of Rembrandt's art – which was seen as issuing from a purely classicist standpoint – came into being only after Rembrandt's death.[1] The main argument was that classicist art theory took hold in Netherlandish art literature after c. 1670. For instance, Emmens was convinced that Joachim von Sandrart, who lived and worked in Amsterdam between 1637 and 1645, had little knowledge about Rembrandt and his work of the 1630s and '40s. He maintained that instead of giving reliable information, Von Sandrart repeated in his *Teutsche Academie* (1675) the popular clichés of the new classicism that had developed in Italy and France. According to Emmens, the anti-classical remarks that Joachim von Sandrart put into Rembrandt's mouth – and which he saw as deriving from such sources as Bellori's and Malvasia's criticism of Caravaggio or Du Fresnoy's notions about the ignorant painter – would have been impossible in the Netherlands in the period 1637–45, since such classicist criticism did not yet exist.[2] Emmens's argument was so convincing that scholars no longer asked themselves whether Von Sandrart's criticism might possibly reflect long-standing controversies. This is all the more remarkable because an alternative style in history painting, which already existed when Rembrandt started his career, has been given close attention lately and has, paradoxically, been labeled "Dutch classicism."[3] The differences in style between these "classicists" and Rembrandt and his followers were, however, only discussed in twentieth-century "Wölfflinian" terms of style, without taking into account how Rembrandt and his contemporaries would have thought and talked about such stylistic distinctions. Emmens's views, on the contrary, were exclusively based on theoretical writings about art; from his book one gets the impression that artistic ideologies exist only if they were written down in hefty theoretical treatises. However, the works of art themselves can tell us other things if we relate them to debates that must have been raging in many European art centers, among them Amsterdam.

In my view, the criticism voiced by Arnold Houbraken, Andries Pels, Jan de Bisschop, Von Sandrart, and others was rooted in diverging opinions that were being hotly discussed in Rembrandt's lifetime. The notions which Emmens considered plainly anti-classical remarks that were put into Rembrandt's mouth by Von Sandrart, must have been burning issues in the 1630s and '40s, issues on which Rembrandt took a conspicuous stand. I am convinced that Von Sandrart's comments on Rembrandt's art reflect discussions in the Amsterdam studios during the period in which he lived in this city. A highly ambitious and competitive personality like Von Sandrart, fresh from Rome when he settled in Amsterdam, might have fueled such debates in the late '30s and '40s.

Characteristic of the view that has taken hold among art historians since the late 1960s is Josua Bruyn's discussion of Rembrandt's notorious etching of *A Nude Woman Seated on a Mound* of c. 1631 (fig. 1) – the same etching that undoubtedly triggered Andries Pels's well-known diatribe that Rembrandt did not choose to depict a Greek Venus, because he was contemptuous of all rules of anatomy and proportion and simply rendered whatever he saw before his eyes.[4] It also must have provoked Houbraken's assessment that Rembrandt's nudes were disgusting

1 A significant exception is Chapman 1990; see esp. pp. 132–137.

2 Emmens 1967, pp. 80–86 (English summary, pp. 269–270). Van de Wetering 1997, pp. 269–270, rightly observed that Von Sandrart's words of praise may have reflected opinions he had held much earlier; at the same time Van de Wetering held on to the notion that Von Sandrart's critique of Rembrandt must have been based on classicist ideas developed much later. In publications of 2006 he has become much more critical of Emmens's approach (Van de Wetering 2006, pp. 73–74, 84 and Van Eikema Hommes and Van de Wetering 2006, pp. 174–78; see below, notes 14 and 27).

3 Blankert 1999 and earlier: Blankert et al. 1980, pp. 182–235.

4 Pels 1681, also quoted by Houbraken 1718–21, I, p. 286. See Sluijter 2006, p. 196, 219, 314.

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1 Rembrandt, *A Nude Woman Seated on a Mound*, c. 1631, etching 177 × 160 mm

because he did not select the most beautiful in nature, "stating as his fundamental principle that one should only imitate nature; everything done otherwise he found suspect."[5]

Bruyn however, turned fiercely against the notion that this nude was in some way rebellious, or could even be considered as deviating from accepted standards in Rembrandt's own time. He maintained that the *Nude Woman Seated on a Mound* "must be seen in connection with, for instance, Annibale Carracci's print of *Susanna and the Elders* … The lady would seem, therefore, to be of quite impeccable classical origin, classical in the sense that Annibale's reputation at this moment of history certainly amounted to classical authority."[6] According to Bruyn, only because of "the degree of realistic veracity with which the particulars of the body, the folds of the skin and the light-effect have been rendered" was this nude erroneously called anti-classical. Bruyn stated that such criteria were irrelevant because they lead us to judge Rembrandt's work with a notion of the "classical" that was determined by ideas and styles developed only in the course of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bruyn maintained that "Rembrandt, far from rebellious, consciously emulated a classical prototype (Annibale's etching) as well as nature – in complete conformity with the most orthodox theoretical rules. These he interpreted, however, in a rather peculiar way by allowing naturalistic observation to play a much greater part than any Italian artist, steeped in a figurative tradition entirely unknown in the north of Europe, would have done."

Bruyn was certainly right in pointing out Rembrandt's "classical" model; he could have referred to an even more classical example, Raphael's *Roxana* (well known from a print by Caraglio), which must have been in Rembrandt's mind when devising this nude (fig. 2). But the rest of his argument is rather amazing. The "peculiar way" by which Rembrandt allowed "naturalistic observation to play a much greater part than any Italian artist" seems like some mysteriously external and unconscious Northern force to which Rembrandt unwittingly succumbed. However, precisely the fact that Rembrandt took a "classical" example as his point of departure makes clear how much he deviated from current conventions. Rembrandt had the compositions of these well-known engravings right before his eyes (or stored in his memory), and he consciously chose to do something completely different. That the Italians were "steeped in a figurative tradition entirely unknown in the north of Europe" is just as surprising. Not only had many Northern

5 Houbraken, I, p. 262; see Sluijter 2006, pp. 171–172.

6 Bruyn 1970, pp. 28–29.

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artists and connoisseurs been to Italy, but numerous prints after Italian masters – and certainly those after Raphael and by the Carracci brothers – were avidly studied as part of the training of an ambitious history painter. Even more important is the fact that two generations of successful Northern artists had represented nude figures in a highly stylized, "Italianate" manner in great numbers of prints and paintings.

The generations from Frans Floris and Anthonie Blocklandt to Hendrick Goltzius, Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem and Abraham Bloemaert – artists who had turned to Italian examples as well as to classical antiquity – had dominated the field for more than half a century. The numerous engravings of nudes by and after Goltzius, Cornelis Cornelisz., and Bloemaert would have been the images that every Dutch connoisseur envisioned when considering or discussing representations of the nude female body. Moreover, Cornelis Cornelisz. was still producing a type of "classical" nude in the first years of Rembrandt's career,[7] as was Adriaen van Nieulandt, who followed Cornelis's type. Van Nieulandt lived and worked right across the street from Uylenburgh's studio where Rembrandt settled in the early 1630s and was, as far as we know, the only Amsterdam artist who regularly painted female nudes around this time (fig. 3).[8] The renowned Bloemaert was also still rendering highly stylized nudes. His type of nude was published as exemplary in De Passe's *'t Light der teken en schilder konst* of 1643.[9] Painters and printmakers of the younger generation who had turned towards a more naturalistic idiom seldom depicted female nudes. In the rare cases that they did, artists like Lastman, Van den Valckert and Buytewech indeed "allowed more naturalistic observation," but they certainly did not deviate as drastically as Rembrandt from the conventions that would have been considered normative by most connoisseurs.[10]

The changes towards a self-conscious and determined "from life" ideology among many artists that spread throughout Europe in the first decades of the century and that became especially powerful in the Northern Netherlands elicited fierce reactions all over Europe, including Holland. About three years before Rembrandt produced his etching, in 1628, Jacques de Ville made this clear in a pamphlet with the long title: *Dialogue concerning architecture and painting. Also serving as a warning to all craftsmen and lovers of this art: that they should not gape at the manner of painting only, but should look further*. In this peculiar little treatise, which was never seriously examined, De Ville railed against an approach to art he found reprehensible.[11] The manner of the Caravaggists was clearly his target, but his criticism also applies to Rembrandt's work.[12] He characterized this hated style in the negative terms that would recur time and again. We find the fiercely expressed reproach that nowadays – and this is 1628 – many artists (and connoisseurs) are ignorant of the fundamentals of perspective, proportion, anatomy, symmetry, proper posture, beauty, and drawing. Their art has no foundation because these artists merely work closely from life (*vlak naar het leven*); they are only interested in acquiring a particular manner (*handeling*) and employment of colors (*verwen handelen*) – in which, he has to concede, they were indeed better than any artist had ever been. This is, he fumes, what presently receives the most attention and for which connoisseurs are willing to pay a lot of money.[13]

These were arguments that anybody who had visited Rome in the first decades of the century could have picked up from discussions there. And they are, in fact, not essentially different from what Von Sandrart would write 50 years later in a much more refined and sophisticated vocabulary. A fierce criticism of artists who did not heed the rules or

2 Jacopo Caraglio after Raphael, *Roxana and Alexander* (detail), c. 1535, engraving 223 × 308 mm

foundations of art is not an invention of the later classicist critique; we find it in the 1620s and 30s with, to name some widely diverging treatises from this period, Baglione in Rome, Carducho in Spain or De Ville in Holland. The targets of such criticism were those artists who, indeed, were of the opinion that one always should have nature directly before ones eyes and that everything not done from life was just "child's play or trifle", as was the polemical standpoint of Caravaggio that Van Mander was the first to record in 1604 and which was then an exciting piece of

7 For examples, see Van Thiel 1999, figs. 280–286, 291–309, 311–315, 320, 327, 329–333, 342, 347.

8 For examples, see Sluijter 2000, figs. 60, 70, 124, 173, 174, 226. His type of nude remained the same during the 1620s, '30s, '40s and '50s.

9 See De Passe ed. 1973.

10 For examples, see Sluijter 2006, figs. 66, 102, 103, 175, 177, 242, 333, 336.

11 De Ville 1628. The pamphlet contains a dialogue between an architect-painter, a carpenter and a 'bad painter'. It advocates primarily that a good painter must also be an architect and a painter of correct architectural perspectives. However, the vehement remarks on painters who are considered unfit (but successful) makes it particularly interesting for us.

12 Bad paintings that are nonetheless successful are described as, for instance, having "no more than one, two or three figures, grouped together and painted closely from life with stopped light, in order to see a lot of brown" (De Ville 1628, p. 7).

13 De Ville 1628, esp. p. 7, 9, 11–12, 14. For a more extensive discussion of this pamphlet, see: Sluijter 2006, pp. 209–211

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3 Adriaen van Nieulandt, *Venus en Adonis*, 1627, oil on panel 107 × 160 cm, Whereabouts unknown

news about this new star in Rome. Much later Van Mander's words about Caravaggio were quoted by Houbraken in his biography of Rembrandt, and he added that this was also Rembrandt's ideology – and I think there is no reason to doubt this. It was not so much a later classicist construction to describe Rembrandt in terms of the critique on Caravaggio; it was the artist himself who must have adhered to notions first voiced polemically by Caravaggio and written down by Van Mander. [14] Such artists would have thought that "observation of natural things as they really look" had to be depicted unconditionally, including "seeking to render nature which is so abundant in its ever-changing diversity," to quote phrases of Philip Angel (1642).[15] This line of thought was supplemented with the controversial notion that the ancients were by no means normative because they had been far surpassed by modern artists. This notion we see, for instance, clearly represented in Constantijn Huygens's strong opinions on painting as well as on rhetoric of c. 1630, when he appeared to be a fervent admirer of the young Rembrandt.[16] This meant that, for such artists, the visual examples of antiquity were not the norm to emulate,[17] but the examples of the modern artists who were perceived as having surpassed the ancients, like Raphael and the Carracci, or Titian and Rubens.

Rembrandt could not have publicized his position more clearly than with this etching of a female nude (and the related etching of a nude *Diana* from about the same time). In the preface of his anatomy book for artists, published in 1634, Jacob van der Gracht chastised both the artists who only thought it necessary to study antique statues, as well as those of the opposite camp who thought it sufficient to paint "only from life as it appears to them".[18] Van der Gracht characterizes the latter as depicting no more than "the garment of the human body, which is the skin."[19] This observation is remarkably apt where it concerns Rembrandt's nudes that were etched only a few years earlier and in which Rembrandt concentrated on rendering with the etching needle a lifelike suggestion of real, soft and rippling flesh. More than for any other artist before, it was his deliberate purpose to create in painting or etching without concession bodies that were "done with real and natural fleshiness [*eyghentlijck en natuerlijck vleeschachtich ghedaen*]", only by "following life itself straightforwardly, without applying any (rules of) art to attain beauty in the torso or legs," as Titian's manner of depicting

14 A first version of this view was published in Sluijter 2001, pp. 41–43; later it was extensively elaborated upon in Sluijter 2006, ch. VII, esp. pp. 197–212. See also Van Eikema Hommes and Van de Wetering 2006, who wrote in the same year brilliantly on many similar issues from a more technical perspective (see below note 27). Naturally, the "from life" ideology should not be taken too literally. For instance, the *Nude Woman on a Mound* was, in my opinion, not drawn after a life model (see Sluijter 2006, pp. 274–278 and pp. 319–327).

15 Angel 1642, "eyghentlijckheyt van de natuerlijcke dinghen" (p. 42) and "soeckende de Natuyre die so overvloeyende in veranderlickheyt is" (p. 54).

16 See Sluijter 2006, pp. 100–105 on Huygens and pp. 108–109 on Jan Vos's attitude towards antiquity.

17 See, for instance, Muller 1982 on Rubens, and Sluijter 2006, pp. 95–97, 110–111 (Rubens-Rembrandt) and 210 (De Ville 1628, p. 16: "we cannot improve upon the ancient masters, but we can imitate them").

18 Van der Gracht 1634, p. 2. This is an anatomy book composed expressly for artists. I am indebted to Cécile Tainturier for bringing this passage to my attention. See Sluijter 2006, p. 211.

19 Ibidem: "… het kleet van 't menschelick lichaem, 't welck het vel is."

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4 Joachim von Sandrart, *Nausicaa and Her Companions Surprised by Odysseus,* 1639, oil on canvas 139 × 105 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

a nude had been described by Vasari and Van Mander.[20] Although these nudes were, in my opinion, not literally drawn "from life" after models posing completely nude, [21] it was Rembrandt's endeavor to suggest that what the beholder sees is exactly what he had before his eyes – to bring the women depicted close to the beholder's world of experience and to powerfully involve him.

Von Sandrart's criticism of Rembrandt's art is entirely understandable and quite precise if we consider it within the situation in which both artists found themselves between 1637 and 1645. It is important to realize that Von Sandrart's text approaches Rembrandt through the eyes of a highly ambitious rival who vied for the attention of the same elite group of patrons and collectors in Amsterdam,[22] and who would have paid close attention to what Rembrandt – the then most famous painter in Amsterdam – was doing. But just as importantly, he looked at Rembrandt from the perspective of a painter who had just returned from Rome. As such, he was well informed about the latest developments in the art world of that city, where he had directed the production of the impressive series of engravings after Vincenzo Giustiniani's collection of antiquities at a time when the antique example had been gaining a firm foothold in Rome as a paradigm of proportion and movement.[23] The presence in Amsterdam of a prominent personality like Von Sandrart no doubt gave these ongoing discussions on diverging manners of painting a more consciously "classicist" tone.

As a painter, Von Sandrart represented an alternative to Rembrandt. Von Sandrart's colors are bright, his illumination uniform, and his contours cleanly drawn, delineating ideal and graceful forms. A work by Joachim von Sandrart, made as an overmantel for a beautiful chimney designed by Philip Vingboons in the house of Johan Huydecoper and painted around 1642, shows the huge gap that separates these two painters (fig. 4). Just as Rembrandt had done so often, Von Sandrart emulated a composition by Pieter Lastman. However, from that starting point he went into the opposite direction. Von Sandrart's Odysseus, despite his miserable state, kneels in a tasteful pose before Nausicaa who is portrayed in elegant *contrapposto*. Her companions calmly observe the scene; their poses exude *grazia* and *leggiadrìa,* essential elements for all artists who adhered to academic ideals, especially when depicting women.[24] The vivid and narrative expressiveness of Lastman's figures has disappeared. The women's deadpan faces, smooth skin, firm flesh, perfect proportions, and colorful shining draperies – all painted with bright hues and precise contours – show that the way in which Von Sandrart competed with Lastman could not be in starker contrast with the manner in which Rembrandt did the same. Compare, for example, Rem-

20 Van Mander 1604, *Leven*, fol. 175v. This is a description of a St. Sebastian by Titian: "een naeckt beeldt, ghedaen nae t'leven, sonder datmen siet, datter met eenige Const is ghesocht de schoonheyt in corpus oft beenen, dan recht henen ghevolght het enckel leven, soo eyghentlijck en natuerlijck vleeschachtich is het ghedaen, is niet teghenstaende voor seer schoon werck ghehouden."

21 See Sluijter 2006, pp. 274 – 278 and 319 – 327.

22 For Von Sandrart's immediate success with Amsterdam's social and cultural elite, see Porteman 1987, ch. 1 and Dickey 2004, ch. 4, for his biography, see Klemm 1986.

23 The *Galleria Giustiniana* was finished in 1635. In that period Poussin, Duquesnoy and Pietro Testa had become Giustiniani's new protégé's.

24 On "grazia" and "leggiadrìa" (both loveliness and elegance), see Fermor 1993.

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5 Rembrandt, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1636, oil on panel 47.4 × 38.6 cm, The Hague, Mauritshuis

brandt's *Susanna* (fig. 5), which was based on a composition by this master as well.

Rembrandt's *Susanna* demonstrates clearly that he aspired to surpass all others by an unconditional adherence to the suggestion of lifelikeness in figures, movement and expression of emotion with the purpose to elicit a strong empathy in the viewer. The little painting demonstrates in optima forma what Rembrandt himself meant with "the most natural (e)motion [*die meeste ende natuereelste beweechlijckheyt*]"; we see a "single immediate (e)motion [*oogenblikkige beweeging*], which expresses in essence what occurs in a story … So that the work unequivocally [*eenstemmich*] involves the viewer as if he were one of the bystanders."[25] It seems that, when using such terms, Samuel van Hoogstraten, whom I quoted here, is echoing his master as he discusses the depiction of emotions.[26] We also see a brilliant "breaking of colors in such a way as to look like flesh", and we may notice how the "… deepest darknesses [are] surrounded by brighter darks, so that they may cause the power [*kracht*] of the light to stand out all the more forcefully." The last two quotes are also from Van Hoogstraten and again he seems to employ a terminology already used by his master. The first is from a passage where Van Hoogstraten discusses the depiction of nudes through coloring and the second occurs in a paragraph where he talks about the use of light and dark. In both cases he mentions Rembrandt as being a great master in these fields.[27] From life, emotionally involving the viewer, virtually real flesh, and a powerful effect in coming forward and receding (power, *kracht*, always seems to be used in the context of spatial illusionism and as connected to *houding*); these are all related concepts to which Rembrandt was committed and for which he was especially celebrated.

In a painting as the *Susanna* we can also recognize virtually every aspect of Von Sandrart's description of Rembrandt's art.[28] Von Sandrart emphasized that Rembrandt flouted "our rules of art, such as those of anatomy and human proportions, or perspective and the usefulness of antique statues, and the drawings of Raphael …" and that Rembrandt would have claimed that "one should imitate nature alone and not bind oneself to any other rules."[29] We hear the polemical tone about only working from life as in Van Mander's account of Caravaggio's words and in the Italian debates in the first decades of the century.[30] As a matter of fact, we find this notion of binding oneself to no rules but only following nature and one's own innate talents also strongly expressed by, for example, Rembrandt's early admirer Constantijn Huygens, when he writes about the art of rhetoric, and later by the playwright and Rembrandt-supporter Jan Vos when he defends his tragedies against the Aristotelian type of tragedy.[31] The "rules" Rembrandt flouted according to Von Sandrart, were the same rules – concerning anatomy, proportions, perspective, drawing and the example of the antique and the great Italian masters of the Renaissance as opposed to only working from life – to which Jacques de Ville had been referring.

Von Sandrart also maintained that Rembrandt just followed his own judgment and that only the effect achieved was of prime importance. Rembrandt did not bother with cleanly drawn outlines; he was only concerned with "the unification of the overall harmony [*die Zusammenhaltung der universal-Harmonia*]" through light, dark and coloring. Rembrandt not only knew how "to render the simplicity of nature impressively, but also to make it beautiful through a natural power of his coloring and the suggestion of standing out in space [*natürlichen Kräften in Coloriten und starken erheben*]." Rembrandt highlighted only "what he considered the most important part [*dem fürnehmsten Ort seines Intents*]", around which light and shadow were artfully bound together (including carefully balanced shadows), so that the light in the shadows faded away [*wieche*] with great judiciousness, making the colors truly glowing (*ganz glüend*). Von Sandrart's remark that Rembrandt excelled in rendering human skin and hair, thus closely approaching life, is perfectly in keeping with this description of his coloristic talents. In fact, all these terms are related to terminologies that, since Vasari's critique of Titian, served to indicate painters adhering to the coloring and "from life" ideology, which would have been discussed with fervor in Dutch studios of the 1620s, '30s and '40s. Von Sandrart describes with quite amazing precision the way Rembrandt put such concepts into use and created an art that deliberately competed

25 Van Hoogstraten 1678, p. 116.

26 For Van Hoogstraten on the expression of emotions, see Weststeijn 2005a, pp. 153–154 and 2005b, pp. 116–119 and Sluijter 2006, pp. 104–106.

27 Van Hoogstraten 1678, p. 227 and 306 (see Sluijter 2006, pp. 214–215 and Van de Wetering 1997, p. 252). In the same year that I elaborated on Von Sandrart's and Van Hogstraten's descriptions of Rembrandt's technique (Sluijter 2006, pp. 212–219), Van Eikema Hommes and Van de Wetering did this too in a wonderful essay: Van Eikema Hommes and Van de Wetering 2006, pp. 174–178 (see also note 14 above).

28 For a more extensive discussion of Von Sandrart's comments, see Sluijter 2006, pp. 212–219. See also Eikema Hommes and Van de Wetering 2006, pp. 174–178.

29 Von Sandrart 1675 (ed. 1925), pp. 202–203 (Slive 1953, p. 208).

30 See Sluijter 2006, pp. 200–208.

31 For a discussion of Huygens and Vos, see Sluijter 2006, pp. 100–109.

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6 Rembrandt, *Danaë,* 1636, oil on canvas 185 × 203 cm, St. Petersburg, Hermitage (before destruction in 1985 and the subsequent restoration)

with "all the graceful beauty that has been produced through the ages", as Huygens had noted when describing the pitiful hideousness of Rembrandt's Judas.[32]

This debate was already clearly outlined by Vasari when writing about his visit with Michelangelo to Titian's studio, during which the latter was working on a *Danaë*, an account which was *in extenso* repeated by Van Mander.[33] In this passage the distinction between two methods of working, which came to be known as *colorito* and *disegno*, was for the first time emphatically stated, and it is obvious that Van Mander understood this as a fierce controversy between adherents of the Venetian and the Roman/Tuscan manner.[34] Most of the terms that would be employed for decades to come were already present in Vasari's account of Michelangelo's disparaging words: on the one hand, studying closely from life which resulted in lifelikeness and naturalness, and on the other no proper drawing, no study after the most antique or modern examples and no proper grace through knowledge of the rules of art.[35]

It seems almost like a manifesto that Rembrandt's first life-size nude, a *tour de force* in reflections of light, in which he displayed as in no other painting his capacities in depicting lifelike flesh, was a painting of *Danaë* (fig. 6).[36] When Rembrandt presented *his* solution of this theme, he wholeheartedly sided with Titian, of whom Van Mander, following Vasari, had written that he strove to make everything appear more tender and with greater three-dimensionality [*poeseliger en meer verhevender – più morbidezza e maggiore rilievo*], painting "his things from life without drawing, seeing to it that he represented with colors everything he saw in life, be it hard or soft."[37] It is precisely a painting like this that shows to such good effect that, to quote again Von Sandrart's acute comments, "Rembrandt was capable of breaking the colors [shifting the tonal values, the same term Van Hoogstraten used] according to their own character with great ingenuity and artfulness, and was thus able to render the true properties of nature in a lifelike way and to portray it as harmoniously as in real life."[38]

Rembrandt was challenged in a rival style by Jacob van Loo, who must have painted his *Efigenia Spied upon by Cimone* in competition with Rembrandt (fig. 7), before an audience of connoisseurs from the Amsterdam elite who knew about such discussions and who were interested in large, ambitious paintings that referred to examples and debates in Italian art. By adopting some elements of the pose Van Loo deliberately made recognizable that he was competing with Rembrandt in an alternative style. The body is drawn with clear contours and modeled

32 Worp 1891, p. 126; Sluijter 2006, pp. 100–103.

33 Van Mander 1604, *Leven*, 176v.

34 See Sluijter 2006, p. 201.

35 See Sluijter 2006, pp. 200–204; see also Golahny, 1987, ch. VII and Sluijter 2001, pp. 40–41.

36 About Rembrandt's approach of this subject, see Sluijter 2006, ch. VIII.

37 Van Mander 1604, *Leven*, 174v. To be precise, Vasari described this in the life of Titian as a characteristic of Giorgione that Titian followed; Van Mander omitted the name of Giorgione and thus attributed these innovations completely to Titian (see Golahny 1987, pp. 33–35).

38 Von Sandrart 1675 (ed. 1925), p. 203 (Slive 1953, p. 209). See also Sluijter 2006, p. 214, Van de Wetering 1997, pp. 255–257.

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7 Jacob van Loo, *Efigenia spied upon by Cimone*, c. 1640–50, oil on canvas 175×214 cm, The Hague, Art dealer Hoogsteder

with a rather uniform lighting. Its smooth surface displays no brushstrokes, and its compact forms betray no accidental distortions.

It seems to be telling that Jacob van Loo opted for a subject with contrasting connotations. It emerges from many texts that images of Danaë came to be seen as *the* prototype of a portrayal which aimed at sensual arousal of the viewer because of the anecdote from antiquity about a particularly arousing painting of Danaë, which was often mentioned since St. Augustine quoted it several times as proof of the power of images to affect the senses.[39] Thus, it is no coincidence that some of the most sensuous nudes ever painted were the *Danaë*'s by Correggio, Titian, and Rembrandt, all of them striving to elicit strong feelings of sensual enjoyment and erotic involvement.

Boccaccio's story of Efigenia, on the contrary, centers around the notion that a coarse, uneducated man who, after gazing at the ravishing beauty of the sleeping Efigenia, changed from a dumb country bumpkin into an expert of beauty, a sharp-witted thinker and a skilled musician, horseman, and warrior. The obvious moral of the story is that the love for beauty edifies, as is underlined in all the translations and adaptations of this story.[40] It seems no coincidence that Jacob van Loo, competing with the then-dominant style of Rembrandt, chose a story that underscores the ability of beauty to edify the intellect rather than to arouse the senses. This was quite a witty thing to do if he wanted to make a statement with this painting, using a style based on line and selection of the beautiful in nature (a method always associated with intellectual appeal), rather than striving for the most lifelike expressiveness by means of color, light, and shade (continually discussed as appealing primarily to the senses). Van Loo's nude is definitely far less sensuous than Rembrandt's *Danaë*, not only because Rembrandt was a much better painter, but also because Van Loo's manner of painting was not meant to involve the viewer's senses and emotions as Rembrandt's does.

The presence of Von Sandrart, a prominent personality who loved to show off his Italian experiences as well as his relations with the Amsterdam elite, might have worked as a catalyst in the Amsterdam of c. 1640, lending more prestige to a style long present – a style in which a linear clarity of forms, idealization, and the rules of proportion, anatomy, and perspective were of prime importance. It must have been fascinating for the Amsterdam connoisseurs to see and discuss the completely different means by which painters like Rembrandt and his followers on the one hand, and Von Sandrart and Van Loo on the other, succeeded in reaching their goals.

39 See Sluijter 1999, pp. 14–15.

40 See Sluijter and Spaans 2001, pp. 76–79.

Credits

Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet: 1. – Author: 2, 3. – Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum: 4. – The Hague, Mauritshuis: 5. – St. Petersburg, Hermitage 6. – The Hague, Art dealer Hoogsteder: 7.

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