# Parrhasius and the art of display
## The illusionistic curtain in seventeenth-century Dutch painting

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Beginning in the 1640s, a new motif appeared in Dutch painting that would persist in a variety of ways for the rest of the century: the addition of an illusionistically painted curtain over the nominal painted surface of the image.[1] These painted curtains almost always mimic the scale, construction, and appearance of actual curtains that were used to cover paintings at the time. By appropriating a contemporary component of display for artistic practice, artists charged (and blurred) the distinction between the object and its site of display in ways that are highly valuable for exploring the shifting dialogue between illusion and reality in Dutch painting.

Rembrandt's *Holy Family* in Kassel, signed and dated 1646, is the earliest dated Dutch painting to bear the motif (fig. 1).[2] It depicts Mary sitting by a fire with the infant Jesus while Joseph chops wood in the shadows to the right – a domestic scene without direct scriptural correspondence, but one showing them taking shelter in a ramshackle structure, perhaps on the flight into Egypt. Unfortunately, the panel has been cut down, though a drawn copy on vellum attributed to Nicolaes Maes probably gives a reliable sense of its original appearance (fig. 2).[3] Only in the copy do we see how elaborate and conspicuous the painted gilt frame stands in relation to the curtain and rod attached to it, and the degree to which this display paraphernalia as a whole somewhat detracts our attention away from the subject matter. Rembrandt clearly made a painting of a *painting*. The contrast between the elaborateness of the frame and the humbleness of the scene it contains is striking. By incorporating a contemporary component of display into the painted field, Rembrandt offered additional rhetorical possibilities to his invention that any actual frame would necessarily obviate.

It has long been recognized that illusionistic curtains must be understood in relation to a famous contest held between the ancient Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Several ancient sources mention the competition, with the fullest version coming down to us from Pliny the Elder's *Natural history*.[4] This work was widely available in a number of editions and translations throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5] As Pliny relates:

> [Parrhasius], it is recorded, entered into a competition with Zeuxis, who produced a picture of grapes so successfully represented that birds flew up to the stage-buildings [in the theater, where the pictures were hung during the contest] whereupon Parrhasius himself

Detail fig. 4

**Rembrandt van Rijn,** *The Holy Family with a curtain,* **1646,** oil on panel, 46,8 x 68,4 cm, Kassel, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (photo: MHK, Arno Hensmanns)

produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn and the picture displayed; and when he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honor he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.[6]

Nearly every writer or theorist in the seventeenth century who wrote significantly on the subject of painting told and retold this tale along with others that glorified the role of painting in antiquity and the legendary talent of its artists. It is no surprise that Rembrandt knew the tale of the contest between the two masters. More surprising is the style he chose to employ, since he downplayed a strict sense of fine-detail illusionism by using dry, brushy strokes for the curtain itself. Moreover, he set the curtain frozen in motion, as if being brushed aside by an invisible hand. These features set the work apart from the other paintings with illusionistic curtains by Gerrit Dou and the Delft architectural painters that followed in the years shortly thereafter who strove for greater fine-detail illusionism.

In this regard, the frequent application of the term *trompe l'oeil* to paintings with the curtain motif proves problematic. First of all, art-critical use of the term began only around 1800.[7] Furthermore, 'fooling the eye' in the seventeenth century bore important conceptual differences to the current sense of the term, a topic that this essay will further address.

The term 'Parrhasian curtain', found occasionally in relation to these paintings, is also problematic. Artists both before and after Rembrandt painted curtains at the edge of the picture plane without ignorance of the association viewers might make to the famous contest. A Parrhasian curtain is any curtain that specifically references the ancient competition in order to promote the art of painting. An 'illusionistic curtain' (the usage preferred here) is Parrhasian by nature but painted around an image in such as way that its scale, appearance, and separation from the picture plane clearly promote the idea that it shares the viewer's space, rather than the space within the image.

The purpose of this study is to consider the interplay between real and illusionistic curtains in Dutch painting in the years the motif first emerged (1646-1658) and to address some of the interpretive challenges that arise when the subject matter, especially when religious in nature, frustrates any straightforward reading of the illusionistic curtain as simply a reference to the ancient competition. It will also introduce some new

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**Nicolaes Maes (attr.),** *The Holy Family with a curtain*, **c. 1646-1650,** bodycolor on vellum, 22,4 x 28 cm, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

literary sources related to the legend of Zeuxis and Parrhasius that broaden our understanding of its reception and demonstrate that the competition had permeated far deeper into everyday culture than previously thought. It was not, therefore, a strictly art-theoretical topos. The illusionistic curtain motif drew upon one of the most widely appreciated legends about ancient artists – one in which the display of a work of art played a central role – to comment in a variety of ways about religious revelation, theatrical practices, and the verification of sight, as well as the status of painters and painting.

## Curtains and collections

Illusionistic curtains were close analogs of actual curtains that often covered paintings at the time. Actual curtains functioned to protect paintings, valuable objects that owners would want to keep free from the deleterious effects of light and dust, smoke, accidental scratches, and so forth. A curtain that covered a painting also neutralized the image and allowed it to be viewed under controlled circumstances, which enhanced the dramatic impact on its uncovering. Early in the seventeenth century we begin to find the first consistent visual evidence that collectors regularly used curtains to cover a number of their paintings. This is seen especially well in the *kunstkamer* paintings of artists such as Frans Franken II (1581-1642) and Willem van Haecht (1593-1637), who specialized in the genre (fig. 3).[8] Our hope of gaining knowledge about display practices in these works needs to be tempered by the fact that they invariably show all curtains fully or nearly fully drawn aside. The artists' purpose was not to document display practices but rather to reveal the paintings' subjects in order to generate complete visual compendia of the art on display, whether the collections were real or imaginary. Furthermore, it is often assumed that *kunstkamer* paintings, a genre that emerged in early seventeenth-century Antwerp, reflected a growing practice of covering paintings with curtains. This is not necessarily true. Archival mentions of curtains in inventories are sparse (and have yet to be gathered fully), but there are enough to suggest that some sort of covering was a regular component of artwork display by the early sixteenth century. The 1530 inventory of the significant collection of paintings in Mechelen belonging to Margaret of Austria (1480-1530) took care to note those works that were *not* covered ('sans couverte ne feuillet').[9] There is also mention of painting curtains in the inventory of Philip of Burgundy (1465-1524), the bishop of Utrecht, whose belongings included, for example, 'a great panel of a naked woman with an arrow in her hand called Cupido covered with a blue and yellow curtain'.[10]

In the seventeenth century, again judging from inventories, the curtains for covering paintings were often made of silk and tended to be green, although red and blue are also found.[11] None of these original curtains have apparently survived. In a few cases, such as the group portraits found in the Burgerweeshuis of Naarden, the frames retain their original curtain rod hardware, revealing an eye-and-hook system that allowed the rod to swing outward for quick and easy removal of the

curtain *in toto* (a system reproduced in exacting detail in paintings with illusionistic curtains).[12]

There are a handful of contemporary accounts from the seventeenth century demonstrating that the appeal of covering a painting with a curtain could have extended beyond considerations merely practical (protection of the object) or image enhancing (the dramatic reveal). In a letter from 1648, Poussin writes to Paul Fréart de Chantelou: 'The intention of covering your paintings is excellent, and to make them visible one by one will mean we do not grow tired, for seeing them all at the same time fills the senses too much at once'.[13] Chantelou took this advice to heart when he showed Poussin's *Seven sacraments* to Bernini in 1655, uncovering them one at a time, leading Bernini to compare the experience to a beautiful sermon.[14]

Curtain coverings calibrated display at a time when interiors became increasingly calibrated spaces.[15] Curtains, far more than frames or even hanging location, had developed a history of mediating response in a number of ways. Erotic works are another example of this. Just as Philip of Burgundy kept his Cupido under a curtain, Giulio Mancini (in his manuscript from c. 1620) recommended keeping erotic works in inner chambers and covered in order to regulate who views them as much as when to view them.[16] We occasionally find an erotic work partially covered

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**Willem van Haecht,** *Apelles painting Campaspe,* **c. 1630,** oil on panel, 105 x 148,7 cm, The Hague, Mauritshuis

with a curtain in the backgrounds of Dutch paintings, such as the Venus and Cupid hanging on the wall in *Interior with a woman knitting* by Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684).[17]

In the United Provinces, a fascinating (and the only) account of an encounter with a painting covered with a curtain comes from Contantijn Huygens, who recorded his experience of viewing Rubens's *Head of Medusa* when the cover was removed. It was an experience he did not find altogether pleasant:

> The face of the extraordinarily beautiful woman still retains its grace, but at the same time evokes horror through death just having occurred and through the wreath of hideous serpents. The combination is executed with such subtlety that the beholder is at once shocked by the sudden confrontation – because normally the painting is covered – and moved by the truth to life and beauty with which the cruel subject is depicted.[18]

For Huygens, the sudden sight of the combination of comely beauty with skin-crawling horror shocked and stilled him: an appropriate response given the mythical powers of the personage herself. In this case the experience of cover removal from a painting was atypical. We assume that curtain removal more often prompted relatively benign and synesthetic effects, such as the sensate liquidity, chill, motion, and sound suggested by the seascape partially unveiled by the maid in *Woman reading a letter* by Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667), one of the only seventeenth-century Dutch paintings to depict a curtain in the process of removal (fig. 4).[19]

There appear to be no surviving accounts of a confrontation with an illusionistically painted curtain in the seventeenth century, save one, apparently overlooked until now, recorded by Samuel Pepys in his diary in 1660. Pepys was touring the Netherlands and went to purchase some pictures one day in The Hague, where he saw 'a sort of painting done upon woollen cloth, drawn as if there was a curtain over it, which was very pleasant, but dear'.[20] We can at least conclude that the painting was more expensive than most, since Pepys both admired it and found it outside the reach of his pocket. The fact that it was on cloth rather than canvas suggests that this was perhaps a means of enhancing its illusory capacity. Sadly, Pepys provides us with no description of the subject matter itself – if there was any. If indeed just a painting of a curtain, it might have been an attempt to literally reproduce a 'curtain of Parrhasius', although no such examples survive.

We rarely see curtains completely or even nearly completely covering paintings in the backgrounds of other paintings. Their subject matter is usually revealed. A few rare exceptions are found in the paintings of Dirck Hals (1591-1656), who occasionally covered a background painting in near entirety in some of his merry companies (fig. 5). In these works, Hals leaves only the barest hint that a painting hides beneath – the closest approximation in Dutch art of a painted curtain in the true manner of Parrhasius, although whether he consciously sought that association or was remaining faithful to actual display practices, or both, is unclear.

**4**
**Gabriel Metsu, *Woman reading a letter*, c. 1664-1666,** oil on panel, 52,2 x 40,2 cm, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland

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**Dirck Hals,** *Merry company,* **c. 1620-1630,**
oil on panel, 43,8 x 56,5 cm, sale London
(Phillips), 12 November 2001 (photo: Photo
Collection RKD – Netherlands institute for
art history, The Hague)

Certainly the amorous nature of such merry companies seems to suggest an erotic potential for the painting behind the curtain and that covered flesh (for both painting and persons) can soon enough become uncovered, perhaps when the time is right.

The anticipatory capacities of curtains had long been in use outside of the visual arts as well. In theater, a scene might begin behind a curtain, with only sound effects and voices reaching the audience until the curtain is raised. Advances in stage technology in the seventeenth century led to increasing concern over the speed that the curtain could be lifted or pulled aside, with a swiftness that might seem instantaneous to some.[21] In the Netherlands curtains were also used during Joyous Entries to cover the actors of a *tableau vivant*, waiting to be revealed as the ruler passed by, as recorded in the account of Philip the Good's entry into Ghent in 1458.[22] This process of covering and uncovering has deeper roots in liturgical practices, such as the screening of the altar with a curtain through much of the Middle Ages.[23] Curtains were just one means through which the Church practiced *revelatio*. An especially venerated Madonna might be brought out and paraded through the streets in a time of need.[24] Likewise, altarpieces would be kept closed

except during services or on certain feast days. The very process of opening the doors or leaves of a diptych or triptych (later terms, since these were only called 'paintings with doors' in contemporary documents) embodied the act of revelation in the physical process of their unfastening.[25]

The regular religious practice of uncovering accounts to some degree for the appearance of curtains at the very boundaries – although just within them – of certain Renaissance paintings. Among the most famous examples are Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and, in Netherlandish painting, Hugo van der Goes's *Adoration of the shepherds* in Berlin (fig. 6).[26] The painted Evangelists lifting the curtain at the edge of Van der Goes's work parallel the actor Evangelists moving the stage curtains during the Joyous Entry into Ghent (where the artist also resided), an example in which theater practice seems to have informed painting.[27]

## Rembrandt and Dou

Returning to Rembrandt's *Holy Family*, the convergence of these histories of liturgy and theater becomes further complicated with the use of an illusionistic curtain to frame the scene, especially since the device is used for the depiction of Biblical figures. A number of scriptural sources for the curtain betoken the veil (*velum*) of ignorance. These play on the theme of revelation, specifically the New Law replacing the Old as expressed in the basic medieval formula: 'Vetus testamentum velatum, novum testamentum revelatum' (What the Old Testament conceals, the New Testament reveals).[28] In Mark 15:37-38, for example, the veil of the temple tears completely in two at the moment Christ breathes his last breath. And in 2 Corinthians 3:14: '…the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away'. For a scene such as Van der Goes's *Adoration of the shepherds*, which announces the coming of the new covenant, the proclamation value of

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**Hugo van der Goes,** *Adoration of the shepherds*, **c. 1480-1482,** oil on panel, 99,9 x 248,6 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz (photo: Volker-H. Schneider)

the curtain as an announcement of the appearance of the New Law seems clear enough. Rembrandt's image, however, is not a Nativity but something more prosaic, a domestic scene of the Holy Family. Rembrandt innovated not just in the form of the curtain motif, by bringing it outside the picture plane, but also in the motif's narrative application.

A previous explanation for the use of the curtain motif in Rembrandt's *Holy Family* remains compelling since it bears no relation to the scriptural iconography of Adoration or Nativity scenes. It is found in Calvin's *Commentaries*:

> A veil [*velum*] of marriage was thus presented to the eyes of the world, that He whom the crowd reckoned to be Joseph's son might be recognized by the faithful as the Son of God.... Yet we may see how God kept His Son almost in obscurity, until the time of full revelation came: then, as it were, He put Him out onto a stage where He would be seen by all.[29]

This veiling hid the divine nature of the Christ Child, which was especially important during the family's flight into Egypt. Also note that Calvin's wording puts Christ onto a stage (*theatrum*) at the moment of revelation, an image that correlates to the traditional use of a curtain as a stage device.

A more straightforward exegetical correspondence is found between vision and revelation in the *Christ at Emmaus* in Copenhagen, dated 1648, a painting with a long and contested history of attribution to Rembrandt but now considered most likely the work of an unnamed pupil (fig. 7).[30] The disciples recognize their traveling companion as the resurrected Christ only at the moment he breaks bread with them that evening ('their eyes were opened, and they recognized him'; Luke 24:31). Christ then vanished from their sight a moment later. A previously discovered visual precedent for the use of the curtain with an Emmaus subject is a print by Simon van de Passe dated 1614 after a painting by the relatively obscure Utrecht painter Herman van Vollenhoven (fig. 8).[31] In the print, the curtains still limn the picture plane without standing outside of it in a fully illusionistic manner, as with Van der Goes's *Adoration*. Both show a curtain rod but not a painted frame, and neither uses other devices to suggest that the curtain shares the viewers' space. The curtains thus stand at an intermediary boundary between the viewer positioned directly in front of the scene and the moment of the revelation of Christ's divinity depicted within. The Latin inscription reads:

> From deepest darkness our spirits had been oppressed and stiffened and warped in their unknowing because God had not yet, by the breath of the heavenly winds, driven away the clouds lying over our minds; that [uncovering] signifies Christ, who in the breaking of the bread, graciously opened the minds of his followers.[32]

While the left side of the curtain is tied up, the right side appears moved 'by the breath of the heavenly winds', just as the curtains in Rembrandt's

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**Pupil of Rembrandt van Rijn,** *The supper at Emmaus,* **1648,** oil on canvas, 89,5 x 111,5 cm, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst



**8**

**Simon van de Passe, after Herman van Vollenhoven,** *The supper at Emmaus,* **1614,** engraving on paper, 23,7 x 27,7 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet

*Holy Family* do most visibly. An artistic conception of divine force might well account for the non-static nature of these curtains, similar to the gentle motion expressed both visually and textually in the print.

What remains to be seen is how these theologically infused illusionistic curtains also benefitted by drawing upon the legend of Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Static curtains became the norm in paintings of illusionistic curtains that followed, and virtually none of these paintings depict Biblical figures or fall into any category of history painting. The earliest secular application of an illusionistic curtain is probably the one seen in Gerrit Dou's well-known *Smoker* (fig. 9).[33] Dou's image is significant since the subject matter relates to the art of painting itself. There is an easel in the dim background, and the figure's status as a painter is clear enough. Philips Angel, who a few years before praised the victory of Parrhasius as the highest point in the development of painting, singled out Dou's paintings in particular as the apex of artistic achievement. Illusionism in the strictest sense may not have been the goal here, either, since Dou's lighting scheme intentionally unifies the image.[34]



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**Gerrit Dou,** *Painter with book and pipe* **(***The smoker***), c. 1650,** oil on panel, 48 x 37 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

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Herman van Vollenhoven, *The painter in his studio*, 1612, oil on canvas, 87,8 x 111 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Unlike most other paintings with illusionistic curtains, *The smoker* does not possess two distinct sources of light for the curtain and the painting it purports to cover, thereby blending both into a single paint surface that reads non-illusionistically at first glance. Also curious is the artificial way in which the stone niche extends to one side to allow a visual resting place for the curtain that would otherwise need to be drawn further back from the central subject.[35]

It appears that Rembrandt and Dou both employed illusionistic curtains outside of the nominal picture plane in manners not completely illusory but in each case toward a seemingly different end. This contrast in subject matter as it relates to the curtain is also found in the paintings by Herman van Vollenhoven from the previous generation. Van Vollenhoven not only painted *Christ at Emmaus* with curtains that served as a possible model for the *Emmaus* in Copenhagen, but in 1612 he also depicted a painter in a stone niche with an easel, almost certainly a self-portrait, with a curtain that runs just inside the picture plane (fig. 10).[36] This completely secular image bears no *revelatio* possibilities in a Christological sense. In the context of the artist at work, the curtain attains a more obviously

Parrhasian character. Van Vollenhoven appears to have self-consciously used a Parrhasian curtain in two very different contexts, the same contrast offered by Rembrandt's and Dou's paintings. Furthermore, it seems likely that Rembrandt and Dou were aware of each other's work in the 1640s, long after Dou had left Rembrandt's studio. The panels are close enough in date that we might reasonably postulate a sense of artistic rivalry in their contrasting uses of the motif.[37]

Rembrandt's and Dou innovated by bringing the curtain outside of the picture plane, but both actually drew upon a previous tradition developed in the opening decades of the seventeenth century of using the curtain in a sense that self-consciously welcomed an association with the anecdote about the ancient Greek artists. It makes sense that the legend of the artistic competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius was not newly or suddenly popular in the 1640s when Rembrandt and Dou painted their works. By the time Van Vollenhoven painted his curtains in the 1610s, it was already one of the better-known stories about artists found both inside and outside the literature on art, and one, furthermore, that carried a range of didactic possibilities.

**The competition as art-theoretical topos**

To begin with the art theorists, the tale features prominently in nearly every major seventeenth-century Dutch treatise on painting. Karel van Mander recounts it in full in his *Leven der oude antijcke doorluchtighe schilders* (Lives of the illustrious antique painters), which appeared as the first section of *Het schilder-boeck* (The book of painting) in 1604.[38] Van Mander clearly took the anecdote directly from Pliny, adding a remark about the gallant civility of Zeuxis in graciously admitting defeat. In 1642 Philips Angel recounted the story once again in his *Lof der schilder-konst* (In praise of painting) in order to forward a developmental narrative of ancient painting.[39] According to Angel, the art of painting began with simple outlines, then monochrome works, and so forth, until we reach Apollodorus, the discoverer of beauty, then Zeuxis, who fooled birds, and finally Parrhasius, 'who excelled him as the sun outdoes the moon in radiance and brightness'. Parrhasius's deception of Zeuxis was the pinnacle of artistic achievement. 'It was thus that our art ascended, step by step, and was held in greater esteem than other arts by many of the great and wise men of the world'.[40] For Angel, the competition marked an endpoint in the early evolution of painting, since Parrhasius had produced a work that could fool human eyes – and not just any eyes, but those of a fellow master. Note that it marked the superiority of painting over the other arts, as well.

For Samuel van Hoogstraten, more than any other writer, the victory of Parrhasius represented a profound theoretical foundation for the art of painting. In his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst, anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Introduction to the academy of painting, or the visible world) of 1678, he uses the competition to justify the notion that deception of the human eye is the most important goal of the painter.[41] Among other things, it demonstrates a true understanding of nature. An

artist must unlock the secrets of representation, and therefore the secrets of nature itself, in order to produce a painting that deceives the eye. Painting thus requires the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and the end result is a painting that deceives:

> The Art of Painting is a science [*wetenschap*] for representing all the ideas or notions that visible nature in its entirety can produce, and for deceiving the eye with outline and color. It is perfect when it reaches the end stated by the praiseworthy Parrhasius:
>> Now, I say, the end of our art has been found
>> But this unconquerable end confines me
>> Because further I cannot go. Thus every person has
>> Something about which to complain,
>> Or something that does not go according to wish.
> He must certainly have thought he reached this end when he deceived the valiant Zeuxis.[42]

This passage comes early in *Inleyding*, right before Van Hoogstraten's famous statement that a perfect painting is a 'mirror of nature', affirming the central position of this antique source for his ultimate artistic ideal.

### The competition in literary culture

Previously unmentioned in relation to illusionistic curtains is that the legend of the artistic competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius was not confined to treatises on painting. In the Dutch-language literature, the story appears at least as early as 1568, when Marcus van Vaernewyck retold it in *Den spieghel der nederlandscher audtheyt*.[43] More significantly, an emblem based on the competition stemming from Antwerp in the late sixteenth century would enjoy a long afterlife in the seventeenth century. It appeared first with Latin verses by Laurens van Haecht as *Microcosmos*, or *Parvus mundus* (Little world), in 1579 and shortly thereafter in a Dutch translation by Jan Moerman (*De cleyn werelt*, 1584) with the same plates.[44] The accompanying engraving has no certain designer nor engraver, but it probably represents the earliest literal depiction of the competition, at least in Northern European art (fig. 11).[45] Each of the 74 verses accompanies a plate related to a legend from classical antiquity, and the final story (among others related specifically to painting) is the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius.

The book went through a number of editions. Claes Jansz. Visscher republished it in Amsterdam in 1608, retaining the Dutch verses by Moerman.[46] Shortly thereafter, the Amsterdam publisher Dirck Pietersz. must have acquired the plates from Visscher, since he published his own version in 1613, but this time with new verses from Joost van den Vondel. The work was newly titled *Den gulden winckel der konstlievende Nederlanders* (The golden shop of art-loving Netherlanders).[47] Vondel's re-versified variant was widely available in the United Provinces, reprinted and reissued several times throughout the seventeenth century, often with

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**Artist unknown,** *The competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius,* engraving, 8,5 x 11,8 cm, Joost van den Vondel, *Den gulden winckel der konstlievende Nederlanders* (Amsterdam, Dirck Pietersz., 1613) (photo: author)

recut plates that hew closely to the originals.[48] Vondel did not modify the substance of Van Haecht's and Moerman's verses so much as refashion the wording to his liking. Vondel's text reads:

The painter Zeuxis very artfully and with understanding
Painted a child with a bunch of grapes in his hand,
To which birds flew gladly and with hunger,
But upon coming down they were deceived.
Regarding this event Parrhasius cast an insult:
If the child (he said) had been painted more lifelike
The birds would not have dared to pick at the grapes,
Since they in general are afraid of people.
And Zeuxis went presently (out of impulse)
Up to a pleated curtain hanging on the wall
Which was so baffling, so lifelike and unassuming!
That as he came close he realized he had been tricked.
Thus Parrhasius had with a clever eye
Fooled his master who had only deceived birds.[49]

The verse for the competition takes liberties with Pliny's text, since it begins with an anecdote that should actually follow the competition. After his defeat by Parrhasius, according to Pliny, Zeuxis attempted another painting of grapes, but this time depicting a boy holding them. Yet birds had flown down once again to peck at the grapes, leading Zeuxis to conclude that he had failed to paint the boy convincingly enough, otherwise the birds would have feared his presence and not dared to fly up to the painting.[50] The hapless Zeuxis in the emblem book version does not graciously admit defeat (as he does in Pliny's telling) when he realizes that Parrhasius had painted the curtain, nor does he express self-criticism at having failed to paint the boy more convincingly. Instead of a respectful competition between two worthy masters, the text exacerbates the defeat of Zeuxis by removing his virtuous reflections upon lessons learned.

Around the same time the emblem book first appeared, Haarlem-based humanist and printmaker Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert also uses the legend of Zeuxis and Parrhasius in a book that would have a long afterlife, his *Zedekunst, dat is, wellevenskunste* (Ethics, or the art of living well), first published in 1586 and reprinted many times.[51] This is not a book of moral philosophy addressed to fellow humanists but rather a vernacular publication geared toward a popular audience and couched in everyday terms. Coornhert specifically avoids any scriptural sources in order to keep his discussion as ecumenical as possible, and therefore resorts to a number of classical authorities to embellish his work instead.[52]

The competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius features in the *Zedekunst* in the section 'Of knowledge and knowing', which treats the various manners in which one obtains knowledge, critical for making good choices – and, by extension – important for leading a virtuous life:

> Parrhasius had painted a curtain so masterfully that Zeuxis, also a painter, imagined it to be an actual curtain. Parrhasius had wanted him to try to pull aside the curtain to see the painting (that he had hid behind it). The supposition that a painting was behind the curtain is fallacious. Likewise, a well-spoken person can artfully paint a lie with real-seeming words [*waarschijnende woorden*] that most people imagine it to be the truth.[53]

Coornhert uses the anecdote to illustrate an epistemological problem. Appearances, just like certain forms of knowledge, can be deceptive. A well-clad gentleman might not be rich, and a well-spoken person might not be truthful. Knowledge based on experience is the most desirable type, but proper knowledge requires investigation. The mistake of Zeuxis was to assume that a painting was behind the curtain before he even saw it.[54]

It is possible that Rembrandt found Coornhert's use of the Zeuxis and Parrhasius competition a relevant means of reflecting on the verification of knowledge directly through the senses when he appropriated (and reinvented) the illusionistic curtain motif in a Christological context.

Whereas belief can be verified, faith cannot. Rembrandt did not design his curtain to fool the eye but rather to emblematize the idea of illusion. It does no good to attempt to verify the reality of the curtain any more than to verify an article of faith.

In the case of Dou, the oft-quoted statement that the poet Dirk Tradenius once called him the 'Dutch Parrhasius' seems to have particular relevance to *The Smoker*, since the curtain welcomes such an allusion. Tradenius, however, invoked the Greek competition in relation to one of Dou's peasant kitchens (presumably without an illusionistic curtain), about which he said, 'If Zeuxis saw this banquet, he would be deceived yet again'.[55] Writers engaged in the description of artworks at the time were well aware of the legend and gladly invoked the name of Parrhasius (and other famous Greek painters) as a means of flattering the artist under discussion while demonstrating their own classical learning. Constantijn Huygens, for example, had already compared Rembrandt with Parrhasius much earlier (c. 1629) long before the illusionistic curtain motif appeared in Dutch art:

> I maintain: no Protogenes, Apelles or Parrhasius, has ever arisen to such a level, or could, if allowed to return to earth, ever match what is brought together in this one person – a boy, a Hollander, a miller who still has no beard – and what in his full ability he has already demonstrated. Surprise overtakes me as I say this. Bravo, Rembrandt![56]

The recurrent theme in these comparisons is not just the matching but also the surpassing of these legendary Greek masters. Furthermore, a distinction developed between the two artists. Whereas Zeuxis and Parrhasius both appear as respected masters in ancient sources, Dutch writers tended to emphasize the latter over the former. The emblem book and other contemporary sources likely played a role in this phenomenon.

A misreading of the legend by Lomazzo is instructive in this regard. He assumed that Parrhasius had later added the curtain to the same panel on which Zeuxis painted the grapes, and that it was this curtain that fooled Zeuxis.[57] Thus both artists had worked on the same panel. Among Dutch paintings bearing an illusionistic curtain, one of the most unusual in terms of subject matter is *Still-life with flowers and a curtain* painted jointly by Adriaen van der Spelt and Frans van Mieris (fig. 12).[58] Artistic collaboration of this nature was of course not unusual at the time. Two artists might even enter into competition with two other artists, such as the case of Roelandt Savery and Cornelis van Haarlem painting their own *Paradise* in response to the joint effort of Jan Brueghel and Rubens.[59] Van der Spelt, who painted the flowers, and Van Mieris, the curtain, assumed the roles of Zeuxis and Parrhasius to create a painting that sought to surpass their efforts by reproducing the collaborative competition. In this case, the artists acted as equally respected masters for their performance on the same panel. Despite the appealing nature of such a product, very few still-lifes bear illusionistic curtains.[60] Moreover, as far as we know, no other painting bearing illusionistic curtains resulted from an artistic collaboration.

12

**Adriaen van der Spelt & Frans van Mieris,**
*Still-life with flowers and a curtain*, 1658,
oil on panel, 46,5 x 63,9 cm, Chicago, Art
Institute of Chicago

## The Delft architectural painters

The best-known and most frequently found use of the illusionistic curtain motif in the 1650s comes from the hands of the Delft architectural painters, of whom Gerard Houckgeest (c. 1600-1661), Emanuel de Witte (c. 1617-1692), and Hendrick van Vliet (c. 1611-1675) are the most notable. Churches within Delft, such as the Oude Kerk and Nieuwe Kerk, frequently served as their subject matter.[61] Houckgeest may have led the way in introducing the curtain motif in 1651 with his *Interior of the Oude Kerk, Delft, with the pulpit of 1548* (fig. 13).[62] The curtain in this work stands unobtrusively to one side, and while the rod casts a shadow on the picture plane, and the scale of the display elements clearly differs from the interior space of the church, the overall effect is relatively subtle. His straight-hanging static curtain and arched 'window' bear similarity to Dou's *Smoker*. De Witte took a strikingly different approach to the illusionistic curtain in his *Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk, Delft, with the tomb of William the Silent* (fig. 14).[63] His curtain boldly dominates the upper portion of the image, showily demonstrating the paint handling of the draped fabric as well as hiding a good portion of the architectural features of the subject matter beneath the curtain. As with all illusionistic curtains in Dutch painting, De Witte's curtain is scaled to the world of the viewer,

**13**

**Gerard Houckgeest,** *Interior of the Oude Kerk, Delft, with the pulpit of 1548*, **1651 or 1654,** oil on wood, 49 x 41 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
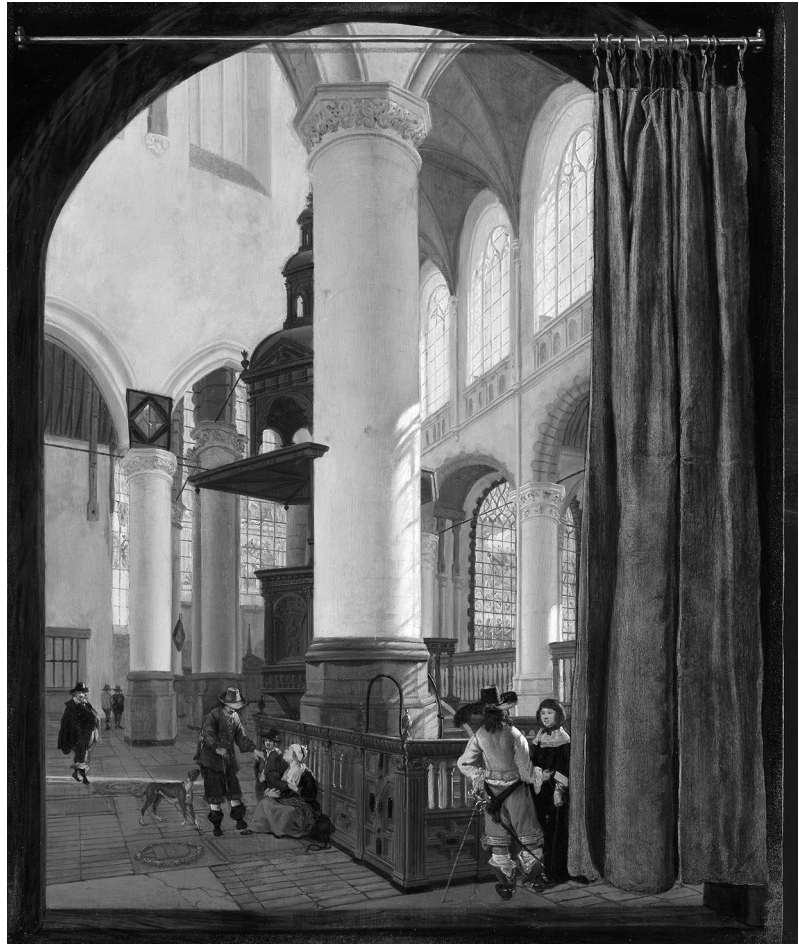


completely at odds with the interior view it covers and even casting a strong shadow on the 'surface' of the painting beneath it. One curious aspect of De Witte's curtain, also found in some other Delft architectural paintings, is that we do not see the entire curtain or its means of hanging. Presumably, it is tucked into the rod above, rather than being lifted by an invisible hand.[64]

The departure of the curtain's edges from the field of view does mean that it breaks the illusion, a distinction that illustrates a basic problem with the term *trompe l'oeil* when applied to these works. To take a case in point, when Van Hoogstraten had an audience with Ferdinand III in Vienna, he attempted to impress the emperor with three paintings: a portrait of a nobleman, a Christ crowned with thorns, and a still-life painting. The latter succeeded in fully earning the emperor's admiration:

> [He] looked at it for a long time and, finding himself still deceived, he said, 'This is the first painter who has deceived me'. And he went on to say that as a punishment for that deception he should not get the picture back, for the Emperor wished to keep and cherish it forever.[65]

Ferdinand awarded Van Hoogstraten a gold chain for his efforts, the ultimate distinction for an artist at the time, and the event would mark a high point of his career. The deceit of which the emperor speaks, however, is of a wholly different nature. *Trompe l'oeil* often depends on the element of surprise, or the lack of expectation of viewing a crafted simulacrum. The emperor, on the other hand, was well aware that he was going to view a painting even before he began to assess its quality, and his 'deception' therefore was a willful and sustained apprehension of its illusory qualities.[66]

The desire to render an illusionistic curtain in its entirety compels a painter by necessity to add a painted rod. This, in turn, requires a painted support (a frame) on which to hang it. Houckgeest's painting contains these elements, as so many other paintings do, and has the potential to fool the viewer into thinking that a real curtain hangs in front of it. To seventeenth-century eyes, however, both Houckgeest's and De Witte's iterations would be valued for their highly deceitful nature, regardless of whether one or both fulfills modern criteria of a *trompe l'oeil*.[67]



**14**

Emanuel de Witte, *Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk, Delft, with the tomb of William the Silent*, 1653, oil on wood, 82,3 x 65 cm, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Given that so many of the Delft architectural painters' subjects are churches, and that the illusionistic curtain had a powerful value as a revelation motif in works from the previous decade such as Rembrandt's *Holy Family* and (his or his pupil's) *Christ at Emmaus*, it might be tempting to apply a similar *revelatio* formula to the Delft works as well. There is no denying that any church painting had the potential to convey a spiritual sensibility to the viewer.[68] There are some serious problems, however, with pushing too forcefully on a thesis that links the illusionistic curtains by the Delft architectural painters to the religious spaces they cover. One is the lack of distinctly narrative or scriptural subject matter (which one finds in the works of Rembrandt and his followers), since these curtains cover religious spaces rather than religious scenes. Another is the apparent lack of distinction between church interiors that bear a curtain and those that do not. Many, for example, show the tomb of William the Silent, or that of Piet Hein, or the image might depict a sermon in progress, gravediggers at work, or none of these things; but these variations occur equally between those bearing a curtain and those lacking one. There is also evidence that certain church interior paintings were commissioned or purchased specifically to commemorate a particular tomb and its hero.[69] Furthermore, the illusionistic curtain was not strictly used for church interiors, since other large-scale interior spaces, ones clearly not religious in nature, also bear the motif.[70] Finally, a study that looked at their presence in contemporary inventories found that they are most commonly referred to as 'perspectives' (which we can take to mean perspectively-constructed views) rather than by the name of the church or tomb.[71] Their presence occurs foremost in inventories of known connoisseurs and esteemed collectors, suggesting that these owners primarily appreciated them for their artistic merit and perspectival effects. Since the primary artistic aim of church interior paintings was to visually open up a large-scale architectural space within the smaller-scale confines of the image field, the curtain motif functioned to enhance this effect by providing a dramatic illusory boundary into a dramatic illusory space. It is certainly possible that the Delft architectural painters consciously strove for a dual use of the motif (as Van Vollenhoven apparently did) as both an indication of religious revelation and a mark of artistic prowess.[72] Foremost, however, they appear to promote the visual power of painting through their association with Parrhasian perfection.

For Delft architectural painters, the use of the illusionistic curtain actively invites comparison with the ideal of art espoused by Parrhasius. Relevant in this regard, Van Mander cites Parrhasius's bombastic poem – in which he claims that 'the end of our art has been found... because further I cannot go' – in his life of Hans Vredeman de Vries, the acknowledged master of perspective.[73] Vredeman de Vries's 1604 treatise *Perspective* likely served as an important manual for Delft architectural painters. In his life of the master, Van Mander relates tales of illusionistic paintings by him and his son that fooled illustrious personages such as William the Silent and Emperor Rudolf II. For Van Mander, Parrhasius's boasting serves as a warning for what happens when one exalts an artist too highly (for such praise 'frequently puts so much wind into their sails'),

but for readers interested in the art of perspective, such as the Delft architectural painters, the invocation of the achievements of Parrhasius was apropos. Vredeman de Vries achieved the 'end of art' through his perspectival feats of illusionism just as Parrhasius did with his curtain. Architectural painters were more likely to encounter the legend of Parrhasius, his bombastic poem, and all that it implied in terms of the perfection of painting through reading Van Mander's life of Vredeman de Vries than through any other source before Van Hoogstraten's 1678 *Inleyding*. The French master of perspective Jean-François Niceron also recounts the competition of Zeuxis and Parrhasius in the preface of his 1638 book *La perspective curieuse*, to promote the importance of studying perspective as a means of perfecting the art of painting through convincing illusionism.[74] The works of the Delft architectural painters relentlessly advocate for the art of painting through their perspectival construction of space and, on occasion, by using an illusionistic curtain to additionally comment on their paintings' highly deceptive nature.[75]

By specifically using the curtain as a motif for illusionistic display, Dutch artists sought to achieve something more than the manufacture of reality or seeming-reality. Illusionistic curtains invite a comparison with the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius not only through the introduction of the motif itself but also through the conditions of display. Unlike painted cut-outs or fictive corridors, which were also popular at the time, these paintings operate under the expected viewing of art in the first place. Hiding elements of the painting with a curtain replicates the curiosity of Zeuxis within us. The cleverness of the motif is that it does not merely act as a referent to the ancient painters, as is often stated, but that in some measure it reproduces the circumstances of display of the ancient competition itself. We are fooled (or 'fooled') by a painting that we already know is a painting.

### Notes

1 Reuterswärd 1956 provided the first overview of the illusionistic curtain motif and in many ways is still the broadest study, although it does not benefit from our greatly improved understanding of seventeenth-century Dutch art theory in recent decades. The subject was taken up again briefly in cat. Worcester 1979, 9-11; Stoichita 1997, 57-63; and Hollander 2002, 69-76. Important considerations regarding Rembrandt's use of the motif, as will be discussed further below, can be found in Kemp 1986; Moffitt 1989; Gaskell 2002; and Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), no. V6. A significant study of illusionistic curtains in church interior paintings by Delft artists is Heuer 1997; and an attempt to bridge the gap between Rembrandt and the Delft painters' use of the motif is Michalski 2002. Relevant literature regarding illusionistic curtains in individual paintings (often found in exhibition or collection catalogues) will

be cited in turn below. I have been unable to access the unpublished MA thesis by Ilse Rottach ('Bild und Vorhang in der Holländischen Interieurmalerei der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts', Munich 1989).

2 Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), no. V6. Van de Wetering notes that team members were divided on the authenticity of the painting (given the 'overall unstable quality'), with the final attribution expressed as 'Rembrandt or pupil'. However, the innovative and, for the time, *sui generis* nature of the curtain motif is actually one of the factors used to argue *for* an attribution to Rembrandt. See idem., 396.

3 Sumowski 1979-1992, vol. 8, no. 1791. Sumowski notes that vellum support indicates that it was probably intended as an autonomous work. Two other related drawings (one attributed to Philips Koninck and the other to an unnamed member of Rembrandt's workshop) focus

on parts of the image that do not reveal the curtain and frame motif. Van de Wetering in the *Corpus* notes that based on the Maes drawing in Oxford, one might reasonably speculate that the tonal values in the painting were once lighter than at present; see Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), no. V6 (especially pp. 389, 397 & 402).

4 For a collation of antique sources that mention Zeuxis and Parrhasius, see Gschwantler 1975 and Reinach 1921. For thoughts on their legacy in Western art generally, see Bann 1989 (especially ch. 1) and Gilbert 1993.

5 Several editions of Pliny's works appeared in Dutch translation in the seventeenth century, including those by Jan Jansz. (Arnhem 1610 & 1617), Pieter Jansz. van Campen (Hoorn c. 1628), Hendrik Laurentsz. (Amsterdam c. 1635 & 1644), and Joost Hartgers (Amsterdam 1644).

6 Book 35, chapters 65-66. Translation by H. Rackham in the Loeb edition: Pliny &

Rackham 1952, vol. 9, 308-311. The original reads: 'Aequales eius et aemuli fuere Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus, Parrhasius. descendisse hic in certamen cum Zeuxide traditur et, cum ille detulisset uvas pictas tanto successu, ut in scaenam aves advolarent, ipse detulisse linteum pictum ita veritate repraesentata, ut Zeuxis alitum iudicio tumens flagitaret tandem remoto linteo ostendi picturam atque intellecto errore concederet palmam ingenuo pudore, quoniam ipse volucres fefellisset, Parrhasius autem se artificem'.

7   Wheelock 2002, 78. The earliest known use of the term was in relation to a painting by Louis-Léopold Boilly.

8   Speth-Holterhoff 1957.

9   See Kemp 1998, 191, with further references.

10   Sterk 1980, 227.

11   The most complete listing of inventory references to picture frame curtains is found in cat. Amsterdam 1984, no. 92; but see also Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), no. V6 (note 15). Inventory takers often listed the color of the curtain.

12   For examples of surviving curtain hardware attachments on seventeenth-century Dutch frames, see cat. Amsterdam 1984, no. 92, which describes three examples in the collection of the Burgerweehuis in Naarden. All three paintings depict regents of the Burgerweeshuis and are dated 1644, 1663, and 1695. Only the latter maintains an intact rod as well as the other related attachments to the frame. The authors also note that the design of the attachment hardware could vary somewhat, although it appears that the goal was usually to allow for easy removal of the curtain or the curtain and rod as a whole.

13   Poussin 1968, 384; cited in Stoichita 1997, 290n52 and Hénin 2010, 259. The translation is taken from Hénin.

14   Hénin 2010, 258.

15   Feigenbaum 2014, 1-2. Display, as Feigenbaum usefully defines it (in relation to Roman baroque palaces), is 'a way of organizing attention'.

16   Mancini 1956, vol. 1, 146. Mancini also preferred a curtain that could be raised and lowered, since he felt a side-to-side curtain harmed the effect, although the former does not seem to be found in Dutch images of paintings with curtains.

17   Sutton 1980, no. 103.

18   The passage and English translation is taken from Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), 404n17.

19   Another example, although entirely different in nature, is *Self-portrait* by Cornelis Bisschop in the Dordrechts Museum, in which the artist assumes the roles of both Zeuxis (in removing the curtain) and Parrhasius (in having painted the curtain in the first place).

20   Pepys 1893, entry for 19 May 1660.

21   Hénin 2010, 253-254. Hénin's study looks at curtain use in seventeenth-century theater, especially French and German, in relation to painting and discusses what she calls the 'reciprocity' of the two arts (rather than one primarily influencing the other).

22   Bussels 2010, 240.

23   Eberlein 1979.

24   See especially Trexler 1973, discussing the case of Florence.

25   For the conceptual aspect of opening altarpieces, see especially Rimmele 2010 and Jacobs 2012.

26   For the curtain in Raphael's work, see Sigel 1977, and especially Eberlein 1983 (with a thorough summary of previous literature). For the curtain motif in Hugo van der Goes's painting, see Panofsky 1953, 337; Moffitt 1986; and Dhanens 1998, 146-147. For considerations of this painting in relation to Rembrandt's *Holy Family*, see Kemp 1986 and Moffitt 1989.

27   Bussels 2010, 240.

28   Panofsky 1953, vol. 1, 337.

29   Moffitt 1989, 180-181. Moffitt first suggested that Calvin's use of the veil analogy might be applicable to Rembrandt's *Holy Family* but operated under the erroneous assumption that Rembrandt was a member of the Reformed Church.

30   Van de Wetering 2011 (*Corpus*, vol. 5), no. V15.

31   First noted by Kemp 1986, 66-67, with a mistaken attribution to Crispijn van de Passe. For the print, see Hollstein *et al.* 1949-2010, vol. 16, no. 1 (Simon de Passe). The original painting by Van Vollenhoven is in the Musée des beaux-arts, Besançon. The print reverses the painting but is otherwise entirely faithful. For the Van Vollenhoven painting in Besançon, see De Margerie 1998, 192-193, and Pinette & Soulier-François 1992, 56-57, who erroneously date the painting c. 1620, despite the *terminus ante quem* of 1614. For documents on the life of the elusive Van Vollenhoven, see Bok 1988, 140-141.

32   The translation is taken from Moffitt 1989, 184. For a German translation of the Latin inscription, see Kemp 1986, 67.

33   Traditionally dated c. 1645-1650 on stylistic grounds, we cannot rule out the possibility that it predates Rembrandt's Kassel panel, although most scholars tend to lean toward the later date. For some of the extensive literature on this painting, see especially Hunnewell 1983, 99-106; cat. Leiden 1988, no. 9; cat. Amsterdam 1989, no. 5; Baer 1990, no. 44; cat. Washington etc. 2000, no. 16; cat. Washington 2002, no. 8; Gaskell 2002; and Ho 2015.

34   As remarked by Sluijter 2000, 257-258.

35   Washington 2002, no. 8, crediting Anna Tummers for the observation.

36   For the Van Vollenhoven *Self-portrait*, see Bikker *et al.* 2007, no. 318.

37   As suggested by Gaskell 2002, who is inclined to see Rembrandt borrowing the motif from Dou rather than the other way around. Gaskell prefers a date of c. 1645 for Dou's *Smoker*, thus giving it slight precedence over Rembrandt's 1646 panel.

38   Van Mander 1603, fol. 67v.

39   Angel 1996, 235 (original 1642 pagination, 12-13).

40   Sluijter 2000, 209-210 (19-20 in the original 1993 Dutch edition).

41   For Van Hoogstraten on deception and his art-theoretical aims generally, see especially the studies by Brusati 1995, Weststeijn 2008, and Blanc 2008.

42   Van Hoogstraten 1678, 24-25. Translation my own. The original reads: 'De Schilderkonst is een wetenschap, om alle ideen, ofte denkbeelden, die de gansche zichtbaere natuer kan geven, te verbeelden, en met omtrek en verwe het oog te bedriegen. Zy is volmaekt, wanneerze het eynde, daer Parrasius van roemde, bereikt, die aldus opgaf: Nu, zeg ik, is het eynd van onze konst gevonden, / Maer 't onverwinlÿk eynd my houd als vast gebonden, / Dat ik niet verder mach; dus heeft een yder mensch / 't Geen hy te klagen heeft, of 't geen niet gaet na wensch. Maer dit eind heeft hy hem gewis ingebeet gevonden te hebben, toen hy den moedigen Zeuxis bedroog'. See also Brusati 1995, 158.

43   Van Vaernewyck 1568, fol. cxxi: 'Maar Parrhasious schilderde en cortyne ofte cleet over een tafereel dewelcke Seuxis hem verabuserende meynde te schuven oft af te doene om Parrhasius constighe schilderye onder het cleet te ziene so hy waende: daeromme sprack Parrhasius dat meerder conste was menschen verschalken / in zeer constighe menschen als Seuxis was dan voghelen'. Cited in Dhanens 1998, 146-147.

44   Van Haecht 1579; Van Haecht 1584. For the

*editio princips* and other Latin editions, see Landwehr 1988, nos. 263-266. For editions with Moerman's Dutch translation, see Landwehr 1988, nos. 563-564.

45 The plates in this series were previously attributed to Crispijn van den Broeck, as per Hollstein *et al.* 1949-2010, vol. 9 (G. de Jode), nos. 210-280, but this is no longer accepted. See now Mielke 2011 (*The new Hollstein*, Crispijn van den Broeck), vol. 2, no. R8 (rejected). Seven preparatory drawings for the series survive in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, although not the one illustrating Zeuxis and Parrhasius. For the drawings, see Mielke 1975, 37-38 (who credits them to Jan Snellinck); and Boon 1978, nos. 96-102 ('formerly attributed to Crispijn van den Broeck').

46 Landwehr 1988, no. 564.

47 For editions with Vondel's verses, see Landwehr 1988, nos. 876-885. The text and images are reprinted in Vondel 1927-1940, vol. 1, 265-426. This work represents Vondel's first appearance in print as a poet, although there is no focused study on the publication to date. For this work in relation to Vondel's oeuvre, see Calis 2008, 81-82, and Bloemendal & Korsten 2012, 54, 319.

48 For all Dutch editions of the book, see Landwehr 1988, nos. 563-564 (Moerman), 876-885 (Vondel). For French editions, see idem., nos. 249, 557-558.

49 Vondel 1613, no. 78. The translation is my own. The original reads:
'Den Schilder Zeuxis heeft zeer kunstigh met verstand
Een Kind met eenen tros gemaelt in zijne hand,
Waer naer de Vogelen al graegh en hongrigh vlogen,
Maer komende daer aen zoo waren zy bedrogen.
Waerom Parrhasius hier over heeft gesmaelt:
Indien 't Kind (zeyde hy) waer levende afgemaelt
De Vog'len hadden naer de druyf niet dorven picken,
Dewijl zy in 't gemeen voor Menschen zich verschricke:
En gingh zoo al terstond (uyt dryven der natuur)
Een ploeyige gordijn betrecken op den muur,
Die zoo getroffen was! zoo levendigh en milde!
Dat Zeuxis als hy quam die zelfs oplichten wilde:

Aldus Parrhasius had met een listigh oogh Verschalckt zijn Meester die de Vogelen bedroogh'.

50 Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, book XXXV, 66: 'It is said that Zeuxis also subsequently painted a Child Carrying Grapes, and when birds flew to the fruit with the same frankness as before he strode up to the picture in anger with it and said, "I have painted the grapes better than the child, for if I had made a success of that as well, the birds would inevitably have been afraid of it."' Translation by H. Rackham in Pliny & Rackham 1952.

51 Coornhert 1982. Contemporary editions include those of Barent Adryaenssz. (Amsterdam 1596), Jasper Tournay (Gouda 1612), and Jacob Aertsz. Colom (Amsterdam 1630). The *Zedekunst* was often reprinted as part of Coornhert's collected works (*Wercken*) in the seventeenth century.

52 Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1991, 58-60, and Mooij & Mooij-Valk 2009, 161. The latter suggest that it is still somewhat puzzling that scriptural references are nowhere to be found in the *Zedekunst*, since Coornhert took the Bible to be infallible (though not the only means of guidance), and a Christian ethos nevertheless pervades the work. For a study of the classical elements in the *Zedekunst*, although it does not mention Coornhert's use of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, see Van der Meer 1934.

53 Coornhert 1982, 124 (book 2, chapter 5, section 10). Translation my own. The original reads:
'Parrhasius een gordijn so meesterlijck hadde gheschildert dat Zeuxis / oock een schilder / wanende tselve een waarachtigh voorhangsel te wesen / Parrhasium hadt dat hy 't gordijn opschuyven wilde ende hem de schilderije (die hy daar achter waande te schuylen) wilde laten sien. Dit toestemmen dat daar schilderije achter was / is waan. So konnen de welsprekende luyden een logen met waarschijnende woorden so kunstelijck beschilderen / dat de meeste luyden de selve wanen waarheydt te wesen'.

54 For a study that uses the *Zedekunst* to draw a connection between sixteenth-century Antwerp painters (particularly Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer) and the moral value of illusionistic deceit in the visual arts, see Weissert 2011, 64-65. Weissert also mentions that Erasmus had earlier used painted imitation marble to

warn against the deceptive nature of appearance; idem., 63-64. Coornhert may have taken the moral aspect of the competition from Erasmus, who repeated the legend of Zeuxis and Parrhasius in his *Parabolae* (though not in his *Adagia*), a book that appeared in several Latin editions in the sixteenth century.

55 Traudenius 1662, 17. First cited by Martin 1901, 60. See also cat. Leiden 1988, 21 and no. 9.

56 Huygens 1994, 86. Translation my own, based on the Dutch of Heesakkers (from the original Latin). Huygens further invoked the name of Parrhasius in relation to how his eldest son, Constantijn, showed himself to be 'such a Parrhasius' in his artistic studies; see Huygens 2003, vol. 1, 146-147. Rembrandt was later deemed Parrhasius by Willem van Nijmegen, who actually labeled one of Rembrandt's self-portraits with the name of the Greek painter in a *trompe l'oeil* painting of his own; see Tummers 2011, 429-441.

57 Lomazzo 1585, vol. 3, 1: 'Et è istoria nóta a ciascuno di Zeusi che dipinse verti grappi d'uva tanto naturali, che nella piazza del teatro vi volarono gli uccelli per beccargli; è ch'egli medesimo restò poi ingannato del velo, che sopra que'grappi havea dipinto Parrhasio'. Cited by Hénin 2010, 257.

58 For this painting, see especially cat. The Hague & Washington 2005, no. 16; and cat. Washington 2002, no. 10. The painting came to light only after Otto Naumann published his Van Mieris catalogue raisonné. Eric Jan Sluijter convincingly identified it as the same painting mentioned in a 1667 inventory as a still-life by Van der Spelt with a curtain by Van Mieris; see cat. Leiden 1988, 27.

59 See Honig 2004 for this collaborative competition.

60 Another still-life painting with an illusionistic curtain is by Johannes Hannot, *Still-life with lobster* (New England, private collection).

61 For the Delft architectural painters, see Liedtke 2000 (especially ch. 3), Liedtke 1982, Wheelock 1977 (especially ch. 6), and Manke 1963. Significant exhibitions with Delft architectural paintings include cat. Rotterdam 1991 and cat. New York & London 2001. For a recent study that contends with the many interpretive challenges these paintings offer, see Vanhaelen 2012. For many years the standard study and catalogue of architectural painting in the Netherlands

was Jantzen 1979 (first published 1910), but this has been supplanted by Maillet 2012, which greatly expands Jantzen's catalogue. The only focused study to date on the illusionistic curtain motif in Delft architectural painting is Heuer 1997.

62   For this painting, see cat. New York & London 2001, no. 40; Liedtke 2000, 119; and cat. Rotterdam 1991, no. 32. There has been some dispute as to whether the nearly illegible last digit of the date is a 1 or a 4, but Liedtke asserts that under microscopic analysis it is best read as a strongly barbed 1. At stake is which of the Delft architectural painters might receive credit for introducing the illusionistic curtain motif.

63   For this painting, see cat. New York & London 2001, no. 93; cat. Rotterdam 1991, no. 34; and cat. Los Angeles etc. 1981, no. 28.

64   The curtain can be seen tucked into the rod in other Delft architectural paintings, for example, Van Vliet's *Interior of the Oude Kerk in Delft* in a New York private collection (see cat. New York & London 2001, no. 81) and Houckgeest's *Interior of St. Gertrudis in Bergen op Zoom* in Copenhagen (see cat. Washington 2002, no. 9; cat. Copenhagen 1999, no. 46; and cat. Rotterdam 1991, no. 33).

65   Houbraken 1718-1721, vol. 2, 157-158. Translation in Brusati 1995, 54.

66   Furthermore, as Grootenboer points out, it is not just the expectation of the beholder that creates illusion in art (Gombrich's definition) but the expectation that 'something will be revealed', a pre-condition for viewing paintings, then as now. See Grootenboer 2005, 50-51.

67   Brusati 1999, 56. As Brusati aptly puts it, 'the aim of these pictorial deceptions is not to efface all evidence of their fabrication but rather to make their consummate artifice visible'.

68   For a review of this evidence, see Heuer 1997 and Ruurs 1991.

69   There is evidence for specific commissions, though sparse. For a painting by Van Vliet that gives prominence to the gravestone of Adriaan Teding van Berkhout in the Nieuwe Kerk, Delft, and was commissioned by a family member, see Giltaij 1991, 16. The many depictions of the tomb of William the Silent have occasioned speculation that some of these might indeed have been commissioned; discussed, for example, by Liedtke 2000, 81-87; Ruurs 1991, 43; and Wheelock 1977, 235-242. Another commission is mentioned by Houbraken in his life of De Witte, a painting by the artist of the tomb of Michiel de Ruyter in the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam: 'Dit stuck was hem door Jonker Engel de Ruiter voor een goede somme geld aanbesteed, maar die stierf eer het gelevert was'; in Houbraken 1718-1721, vol. 1, 283.

70   For example, Pieter de Hooch's *Council Chamber of the Burgomasters* (Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza), for which see Sutton 1980, no. 66; Gaskell 1990, no. 62; and London & Hartford 1998, no. 31. Another painting by De Hooch with an illusionistic curtain is *A couple with musicians in a hall* (Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst), for which see Sutton 1980, no. 65. One by Jan Steen is his well-known *Life of man* (The Hague, Mauritshuis).

71   Montias 1991, with additional evidence supplied by Giltaij 1991, 8-9.

72   Although perhaps outside the bounds of this essay, one painting by De Witte worth mentioning is his *Interior of the Oude Kerk, Delft* (London, Wallace Collection), since we know that in the eighteenth century it bore ebony wings much like an altarpiece when it was in the collection of Cornelis Ploos van Amstel (1726-1798). This is attested visually by a drawing of

his collection *in situ* by George van der Mijn (Paris, Fondation Custodia) and a painting by Jacob Maurer (Petworth, Petworth House), and from the auction catalogue of his collection, which states that the wings had paintings of fruit on them. It seems likely, however, that the wings primarily served to protect what was then the most valuable painting in the collection rather than any revelatory or performative purpose in the mode of a historicizing triptych. The wings may have also been added at a later date. See Laurentius *et al.* 1980, 104-110.

73   Van Mander 1994-1999, vol. 1, 320-321 (original foliation, 265v). As Miedema notes in his commentary (vol. 5, 46-47), the source of Parrhasius's bombastic poem and other details about his imprudent behavior came from Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* XII 543c-544a. Since Van Mander could not read Greek, his intermediate source remains unclear. The verse by Parrhasius about the 'end of art' in Van Mander's life of Vredeman de Vries likely served as the direct source for Van Hoogstraten's repetition of it (1678, 25) right before his statement that a perfect painting is like a mirror of nature. Van Hoogstraten records it verbatim with only slightly modified spelling.

74   Niceron 1638, unpaginated 'Preface'. Cited in relation to Van Hoogstraten by Blanc 2008, 268-269.

75   For a comparable situation in Dutch still-life painting, see Grootenboer 2005, 51, where the important point is made that illusionistic elements in still-life paintings served to enhance the rhetorical effect of the genre that arguably suffered the most status anxiety. While church interior paintings, or *perspectieven*, were likely held in greater esteem, they nevertheless remained on a lower rung than history pieces.

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**Detail** fig. 13