How Vermeer and his Generation Stole the Thunder of the Golden Age

Gary Schwartz
On the 27th of June in the year 1988, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Ruud Lubbers, returned home from a conference in Hannover at which important steps were taken toward European economic integration. In a press conference he said that economic union had been brought a step closer to realization, but that he was worried about the repercussions this might have for the cultural sphere. Lubbers feared that far going European integration would lead to a situation in which Europeans would end up watching American series on Japanese televisions. His message was picked up by a shrewd Dutch academic, the late Douwe Fokkema, who mobilised this “culture scare” to obtain funding from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and set up the largest research project in the humanities that had ever been seen in our country. The name of the project was Dutch Culture in a European Perspective and it put some 60 researchers to work on the task of demonstrating the great value of our national culture.¹

The project leaders chose four years as “benchmarks” or ijkpunten: 1650, 1800, 1900 and 1950. For each of these years, they selected a number of cultural activities that had flourished in the Netherlands at that particular time and appointed a group of researchers to produce surveys of current scholarship on each topic. While fellow participants were called upon to convince the world of the
importance of figures like the Dordrecht writer Otto van Eck of *ijkpunt* 1800, the anarchist Bernard Damme of 1900 or the painter Constant Nieuwenhuis of 1950, I was lucky to be the researcher responsible for the visual arts in 1650, with names like Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Jan Steen to flaunt. This institutional commission turned into a private project for which I have been gathering material over the years.

The researchers who were assigned other realms from the same benchmark year took a broad approach and examined developments *around* the middle of the seventeenth century. In contrast, I preferred to stick rigorously to the year 1650, as if 1651 were yet to come. The resulting view is revealing and surprising, as we shall see.

The metaphorical phrase in my title speaks of Vermeer stealing the thunder of the Golden Age. “Thunder?” you may well ask, “Did that period not see a historical flowering of the tranquil arts of peace?” The Dutchman of legend is a trader at the bourse or a merchant in the marketplace, living in a home with a shop on the ground floor, a warehouse in the attic and, in between, a floor or two of domestic quarters where piety and family feeling reigned. The art of the Golden Age followed suit, as no one less than Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) concluded. In the paintings the Dutch made and collected, he wrote, they enjoyed for a second time “the cleanliness of their cities, houses and furnishings, their domestic tranquillity, their riches, the respectable attire of their women and children, the splendour of their political town celebrations, the daring of their seamen, the fame of their trade and their ships, which sail the ocean the world over.”

As I hope to show, this image of the Dutch Golden Age, created in the nineteenth century and still prevalent in art history and popular culture, is profoundly flawed.  
- It is riddled with misconceptions concerning art in the Dutch seventeenth century;  
- it creates sharply drawn national distinctions where only marginal differences existed;  
- it ignores the visual art and social history that contradicts its premises;  
- and it favours in irresponsible measure idiosyncratic images from the second half of the century.

Let us take these points one by one.

*Misconceptions concerning the nature of art.* Hegel implicitly assumes that Dutch painting is an accurate record of society, civilisation and nature, that what you see
is what there was. In each phrase, he equates the images in paintings with a corresponding reality. This was far from being the case. Dutch artists were not reporters; they were makers of pictures, pictures that had to answer to demands other than truth to life. Elements from life around them are, of course, present in their work, but composition, choice of subjects and the details are determined more by artistic tradition than by an urge to describe or map reality as it was. It would be a mistake to think that we have left this fond fancy behind us. In a 2012 issue of the journal *Holland*, Heidi de Mare stresses this point in near despair, ending with the call “to take our leave of the long nineteenth century,” which as she sees it has not only lasted through the twentieth but has even penetrated the twenty-first century.

An influential recent study that perpetuates Hegel’s misconception is Witold Rybczynski’s *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. The iconic painting by Emanuel de Witte that was used on the cover to epitomise the concept of home is a complete visual fiction, as the Leiden art historian Willemijn Fock has shown in her investigation of material culture in the Golden Age. Marble tile floors in sleeping spaces were rare to the point of non-existence in Holland, and rooms in enfilade as in the painting did not exist at all in bourgeois interiors.³
Philips Koninck (1619-88), *An Extensive Landscape with a Road by a River*, ca. 1655. London, National Gallery. “… a splendidly undulating mass of clouds whose bases rise and sink gracefully, if impossibly.” Rob van der Waal, *Typical Dutch sky, Above the Haringvliet*, 2012. “All clouds form at a uniform level because of more or less uniform temperature.”4
Evidence to disprove these fallacious representations is not easy to obtain and requires archive research into inventories, which not everyone can perform. An elegant demonstration of the fictional visual representation of a phenomenon that we can see with our own eyes and has not changed since the seventeenth century was provided by John Walsh in his study of clouds in Dutch landscape painting. With the help of a meteorologist he showed that the usual types of Dutch weather were never painted by Dutch artists, and that the skies they did paint were distorted. “This distortion was not unusual but routine in sky painting, even among artists with the greatest reputations as realists.”5 The same principle applies to all the kinds of painting to which Hegel refers. No more than Greek statues show us what Mediterranean men and women looked like in the nude in the time of Phidias do Dutch paintings represent the reality of an age that was far from golden for many people in the Netherlands.6

**Strongly defined national essences.** The assignment of a set of unique and essential characteristics to the various art centres of Europe is little more than a historiographical by-product of the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century. The specifics of national character were mutable. At the turn of the nineteenth century, when the Netherlands underwent an identity crisis as it melded from one state form to another, provisionally to be united in 1815 with the former Spanish or Habsburg Netherlands into a Kingdom of the Netherlands, the essential quality of Dutch art was sought in its historical love of the fatherland. During the brief period when the former antagonist – the southern Netherlands – was united with the north, a Flemish nationalist like Jan Frans Willems united them retroactively as well, claiming that truth and naturalness was the common goal of southern as well as northern Netherlandish art.7 To Hegel, Dutch art was the perfect expression of bourgeois Protestantism, in Germany as well as the northern Netherlands, and the first step toward the end of history. In the 1860s, the Frenchman Willem Thoré-Bürger identified an anti-establishment revolutionary spirit at the heart of Dutchness. This complaisant variability in itself shows that we are dealing more with projection than analysis. Of course there are differences between one European artistic school and the next but they are for the most part gradual differences, with more similarities than contrasts.

**Ignoring evidence that contradicts one’s premises.** A recurrent theme in nineteenth-century criticism of Dutch art, the echoes of which sound to our own day, is that Dutch artists who show obvious interest in foreign art thereby disavow their Dutchness. In his chapter on landscape painting, Thoré-Bürger writes, “let us start by getting rid of the pseudo-Italians.” True Dutch masters, he wrote, “the
good patriots, were true to the skies of their native clime.” We have already seen what “truth to the sky” was worth. This principle fed into a self-serving definition of Dutchness that not only derides scores of native artists – Thoré-Bürger names Cornelis Poelenburgh, Bartholomeus Breenbergh, Adam Pynacker and Johannes Lingelbach – but condemns them in moral terms as traitors to their heritage. My own standpoint is that any artist of Dutch birth or allegiance belongs just as much to the Dutch school as Thoré-Bürger’s *vrais Hollandais*. A history of Dutch art that awards to some artists an exclusive claim to Dutchness and denies it to other artists of the same description stacks the deck, skewing our understanding not only of Dutch art as a whole, but even the art of *les vrais Hollandais*.  

In 1998 the Prinsenhof Museum in Delft held a commemorative exhibition devoted to Dutch military paintings made during the Eighty Years War. In his introduction to the catalogue, Michel van Maarseveen opens with an eloquent passage by no one less than Johan Huizinga, who wrote in his book on Dutch culture in the seventeenth century:
Few of our important paintings portray feats of arms on land, the conquest of cities, the battle of Nieuwpoort (1600), or other great encounters. This is for a number of reasons. The eye of our great masters looked for better subjects than unpaintable sieges or bogus compositions and confused battle scenes. True, Wouwerman or Meulener have given us canvases of cavalry engagements, but they did not paint as clearly and truly as we expect of Dutch masters.\(^9\)

Van Maarseveen could only say that the great historian was wrong. Dutch art is full of good paintings of military subjects; only no one was looking at them or studying them. When a given painter depicted war scenes in addition to pacific subjects, the former were largely ignored. A striking example from the early seventeenth century is the Haarlem-Hague-Amsterdam artist Esaias van de Velde.

**Esaias van de Velde, *Cottage Beside a Frozen River*, 1629. Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

This charming painting from 1629, a year before the artist’s death at the age of 43, was donated in 2009 to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Carter who, over the course of the years, built a distinguished collection of what George Abrams, the foremost collector of Dutch drawings in the United States, calls “Dutch Dutch” art. This penchant is reflected in the title of an
exhibition at which highlights from their collection were displayed in 1981: *A Mirror of Nature*. This title gives perfect expression to Huizinga’s distinction between observed and invented compositions, of which only the former were worthy of the efforts of a *vrai Hollandais*, a true Dutch artist.

![Image](image.png)

Esaias van de Velde, *Night Skirmish with Cottage in Flames*, 1623. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

That means that a painting like *The Night Skirmish* in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum by the very same artist falls outside the favoured definition of Dutch art, although it seems safe to say that it was more highly valued in its time than the landscape.

*Privileging, in irresponsible measure, the second half of the century.* The deformation to which the rest of this paper is dedicated is that Hegel, and many others after him, embraced an image of the Golden Age formed by genres that did not develop or even come into being until after the end of the Eighty Years War in 1648. At the time itself, the shape and character of Dutch art looked extremely different. No artist in the country could have been unaware that the two big projects of the age were
magnificent buildings with elaborate allegorical and historical decorations in paint and sculpture. In The Hague, the widow of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik, Amalia van Solms, was building a monumental dome in memory of her late husband: the Oranjezaal, the Hall of the House of Orange. The Hall was built on Italian models and designed as part of an intricate programme of immense sophistication. In a recent study, Margriet van Eikema Hommes shows that the decorative scheme is wedded to the architecture and especially the lighting in a fashion that can only be compared to the great ceiling paintings and lanterns of the churches of Rome.

The Hague, Huis ten Bosch, Oranjezaal (Hall of the House of Orange), after restoration 1998-2001
The lantern of the Oranjezaal seen from below, with a portrait of Amalia van Solms as widow in the cupola

The unifying conceit behind the programme was to present Frederik Hendrik as a conveyor of divine light to mankind. The artists who were chosen to execute the painted decorations were masters from the southern as well as the northern Netherlands. This reunified an integral Netherlandish school that could not have existed during the Eighty Years War, but which was the fond dream of art lovers in all parts of the Low Countries. In Amsterdam, major patronage was going to another pan-Netherlandish project with its roots in Italy: the Town Hall on Dam Square. The reference of this building, dubbed the eighth wonder of the world, was Roman antiquity. For the painted and sculptural adornment, a similar team of Dutch and Flemish artists was put to work as for Huis ten Bosch in The Hague.
Nothing could be more illustrative of the scale of values predominant in Dutch art before the time of Vermeer than these two projects. We should thank our lucky stars that they have survived largely intact through the ages. They epitomise what I call the thunder of the Golden Age. A proud and wealthy society and a court with a hotline to the Lord above and successor to the imperial might of Rome, showing all of Europe how things should be done. This is a far cry indeed from the Dutch school characterised as being specifically Dutch by the American art historian Svetlana Alpers in her book *The Art of Describing* (1984). The features of art in the Netherlands that she deals with are certainly real, but to my mind it is mistaken to claim that they are essentially Dutch, to the exclusion of Dutch art that is less descriptive than Alpers likes.

And now it is time to show you how that “thunder” was stolen in later centuries by the makers of small paintings who were hardly noticed by their contemporaries. How the Great Netherlandish School of palatial and monumental art was largely displaced and superseded by domesticated niche products. How the Amsterdam Town Hall now draws 200,000 visitors in a good year while Vermeer’s *Girl with a*
Pearl Earring can attract as many in a few weeks. To show you what was at stake, consider these two paintings from the year 1650.

In line with the approach of the Oranjezaal, the Amsterdam artist Adriaen van Nieulandt painted an image of peace in allegorical form. On the right the deceased Stadholder Frederik Hendrik rides the gilded triumphal chariot of Concordia into a composition in which Peace is acted out by personifications of virtues and vices, countries, provinces and rivers, gods and goddesses. His armed son, Willem II, receives the Peace Prize from the hands of Divine Peace. The allegory applies high leverage to its subject, elevating historical circumstances to celestial proportions.
In the same year, two years after the end of the Eighty Years War, peace was pictured in a descriptive mode in this countryside scene by Anthonie van der Croos (1606/07-1662/63). Linen lies spread out on the grass, old defenceless peasants enjoy a leisurely chat and a peddler is not afraid to walk on his own into a forest with his goods on his back. This is the kind of scene that would bring tears to the eyes of the relieved citizens of a country that had been engaged in a long war.

There is no question but that most present-day art lovers – I do not exclude myself – would value the landscape by van der Croos higher than van Nieulandt’s allegory. In the New Rijksmuseum, the allegory is not even on display. But, equally, there is little question that ambitious allegories like that of Adriaen van Nieulandt, who enjoyed honourable, high-paying commissions from the cities and courts of the Netherlands and Denmark, were far more prestigious and more highly appreciated than the work of the humble Hague craftsman Anthonie van der Croos. One indication of this is that the frame of the van Nieulandt is a work of art in itself, a piece of gilt wood sculpture with a fancy calligraphic caption related to the subject of the painting:
De Goddelijcke vre, van Boven Neer Gestegen
Begaeft het Vrije Lant Met aller hande zegen.
(Divine Peace, descended from on high
Endows the free nation with blessings of all kinds.)

Placing the genres of allegory and landscape in historical perspective, we learn to our surprise that in 1600 there was no such thing as Dutch landscape painting except as a background to history painting or allegory. There were drawings and prints, mainly by immigrant artists from the southern Netherlands, but it was not until the 1610s that Esaias van de Velde began to paint independent landscapes. By the second half of the century, landscape was the largest genre in Dutch painting, and was being painted more in the northern Netherlands than anywhere else in Europe. Allegory is far older, but the number of painted allegories from the second part of the seventeenth century was halved in comparison to the first part. The tastes of the long nineteenth century incline more towards the artistic production of the domestic ending rather than the thunderous beginning of the Golden Age. Are we to understand from this, asked the historian Ernst Kossmann, “that Dutch people of the seventeenth century themselves did not understand as well who they were, what they thought and what they desired, as nineteenth-century museum visitors, mainly those from abroad?”

Graph 1. The relative frequency of five kinds of Dutch painting represented in nine major museums. The lines follow, from top to bottom, the order of the legend from left to right. In 1650 landscape takes over from history as the dominant genre.
Those nineteenth-century tourists Kossmann describes did have a point. Artists who, like Adriaen van Nieulandt, took their cues from the major patronage projects of 1650 soon found themselves creating work for which there was a shrinking market. The types of Dutch paintings from between 1610 and 1700, on display in nine major museums, illustrate that the number of still life, genre and especially landscape paintings increased while history and portrait paintings decreased.

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Table 1. Mean prices of Dutch paintings from Amsterdam probate inventories, taken from table compiled by Ad van der Woude on the basis of a database built by Michael Montias.

These developments had economic consequences that were terribly unfortunate for the artists of 1650. The value of the newly popular kinds of art was barely half that of history and allegory.
At the same time, collectors began to develop a taste for older art at the expense of contemporary masters. In the 1630s, nearly 70% of all paintings in Amsterdam collections were by living masters, by the 1680s this figure had dropped to 14%.
Piling injury on injury, the fashion of decorating houses with paintings was on the decline among the wealthy. This is visible in the furnishing of two dolls’ houses in the Rijksmuseum. In one by Petronella Dunois from 1676, Dutch easel paintings still play a prominent role as decoration while in Petronella Oortman’s fabulous dolls’ house of 1686-90, the paintings have been displaced by more costly items like murals, mirrors, cabinets, silver candelabra, Japanese silk paintings and other items. Petronella Oortman considered it a pity to break the pattern of the zigzag embroidery of her downstairs room with even a single painting. Around 1650 the market for paintings in Holland went into a fall from which it was never to recover. Painting would never again be a lucrative way to make a living in the Netherlands.

Graph 2. Northern Netherlands artists’ birthdates per decade. Compiled on the basis of the Getty Research Institute Union List of Artist Names (ULAN)

This is illustrated by the number of individuals who chose to become artists. In a century when the total percentage of artists in the European population was fairly constant, the northern Netherlands saw a spectacular rise in numbers up to around 1650 as the generation born in the 1620s matured, but thereafter an even more spectacular dive.

This mid-century transformation had a far reaching impact not only on artists’ careers but also on the shape of art production. If historians demilitarised
Dutch painting, so did the artists of the post-1648 period. As Peter Sutton observed in his book on Pieter de Hooch, the domestic interior was a rarity in Dutch painting before 1650. The image of woman as mother and housewife was virtually non-existent. Katy Kist has shown that until 1650 the great majority of female figures in Dutch genre paintings were barmaids, prostitutes, demimondaines, camp followers and other roles associated with anything but domesticity.

On the right is one of de Hooch’s Hegelian nursing mothers, of about 1659, the Pieter de Hooch we know and love; on the left is the kind of painting he was making up until then. This distinction applies in large measure to all images of life indoors. Domesticity does not displace dissipation until after mid-century.

In one fascinating but futile move, de Hooch tried to get the best of both worlds and more. He placed an elegant household group making music, typical of the post-1650 period, in a classical interior derived from a gallery in the Amsterdam Town Hall. To ratchet their status up a notch, de Hooch adorned the lunette with
nothing less august than Raphael's *School of Athens*. But there was no use trying to elevate genre painting to such heights. Enfilade interiors and marble floors were about as high as it could get. Had he thought about the matter in these terms, Johan Huizinga would have had to admit that Dutch artists did not just create bogus compositions in battle scenes. The compositions of few landscapes, fewer still lifes and no genre paintings at all were *not* bogus.
The early career of Johannes Vermeer, in mid-century, was rooted in the classical tradition. Like Pieter de Hooch, he started off on a track leading to oblivion. His first surviving painting was a conventional subject from classical mythology, *Diana and her Nymphs resting at the Hunt*, from about 1653. The pull of Vermeer’s later work is, however, so powerful that the Mauritshuis, where the painting hangs, cannot keep itself from moving it forward into the orbit of the artist’s better-known genre paintings. “This youthful work is rather different from Vermeer’s later paintings. This was his period of biblical and mythological representations; he was not yet depicting scenes of everyday life. Even so, this picture displays
similarities to his later work, including the subdued, dreamy atmosphere and the rather granular texture of the fabric."

However, Vermeer was no more capable than we are of seeing into the future. As can only be expected, he was drawing on existing models, such as a painting by Jacob van Loo of the same subject painted five years earlier.

The same can be said of another early painting by Vermeer, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, from about 1655, which betrays a certain similarity to paintings of this subject by the Antwerp painter Erasmus Quellinus and also bears a strong resemblance to Christ in a painting by the Florentine artist Giovanni Bilivelti or Biliverti (1585-1644).
Giovanni Biliverti, *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca. 1648, entire and in a reversed detail, compared to Vermeer’s *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, ca. 1653, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.
Interestingly, Bilivelti was the son of the goldsmith Giacomo Giovanni Bilivelti, who was born in Delft as Jacob Jansz Bijlevelt (1550-1603) and became a court jeweller to the Medici and the curator of the art collection of Ferdinando I de’Medici. His son Jan Jacobsz Bijlevelt was born in Florence and enjoyed a distinguished Italian career in painting as Giovanni Bilivelti. The resemblance between the Christ by Jan Vermeer of Delft and that of Jan Jacobsz Bijlevelt could be more than a coincidence. Perhaps Giovanni had family in Delft with a copy of his painting. However this may be, the fact that Bijlevelt transformed into Bilivelti serves to deflate nationalistic definitions of artistic identity.


Even after he changed tack and converted to painting scenes from life, Vermeer did not immediately catch on to what was happening. In 1656 he painted the kind of brothel scene that Pieter de Hooch was abandoning in favour of mothers and children. He took a step closer in 1657 with his *Sleeping Maid* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But this painting, too, retains a retardataire moralism. In a sale in 1696, it was described as depicting “a drunken, sleeping maid,” indicating that it was viewed as a warning against bad behaviour.
Only with his painting *Woman Reading a Letter* from about 1658 in Dresden did Vermeer strike the tone that would later – much later, not until the second half of the nineteenth century – make him famous. One of the great attractions of his art, seldom acknowledged in writings on Vermeer, is that male admirers of his glamorous women are absent or seen from the back, and that there are never any children around. The only children in paintings by Vermeer, himself a father of Maria, Elisabeth, Cornelia, Aleydis, Beatrix, Johannes, Geertruyd, Franciscus, Catharina, Ignatius and a last child whose name we do not know, are two youngsters crouched under a bench in his notably unglamorous painting, *Street in Delft*. 

Johannes Vermeer, *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window*, ca. 1658. Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister
What happened in the nineteenth century is that a selection of Dutch paintings came to be considered a true-to-life reflection of burgher culture in the Republic.
and this was seized on by the Dutch to shape our national self-image. Outside Holland these paintings were assigned an even more elevated function. In the aesthetic philosophy of Hegel they came to stand for the triumph of bourgeois Protestantism. To the French they came to represent an ideal of equality and simplicity to which they paid lavish lip service while breathing a sigh of relief that this was, alas, unattainable for France. Americans collected Dutch paintings in which they saw evidence of the same republicanism and low-church piety that they professed. By the late nineteenth century everybody in Europe and America had too large a stake in the Dutchness of Dutch art for it to go away of its own accord. This view was tied into the stereotype of the Netherlands as a Calvinist nation, in denial of the fact that the largest single denomination in the Republic remained Roman Catholicism. Of the Big Four among Dutch artists – Rembrandt, Vermeer, Frans Hals and Jan Steen – the latter three were more Catholic than Calvinist.

And so the generation of Vermeer, two centuries on, with its flattering self-image of Calvinist Dutchness, displaced the Europeanizing art of the first half of the century, with its Catholic overtones and imperial pretensions. It also displaced the contemporaneous heirs of that tradition, like the slick court artist Adriaen van der Werff and the classicist Gerard de Lairesse, who set the tone in 1700.

This paper began with a reference to the threatened position of the Netherlands in the new European concert of nations. Alas, it cannot be said that the NWO project *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*, despite being published in English as well as Dutch, has shored up our international status. Perhaps more importantly, it has made no noticeable impact within the country itself. It has failed to convince the Dutch that their culture is a European culture that cannot be factored out of its European context. As things stand, Vermeer’s enigmatic, child-free ladies, and especially – with thanks to Tracy Chevalier and Scarlett Johansson – his *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, define the Dutch Golden Age to the world at large. The forceful international Netherlands of the first half of the seventeenth century has been dislodged and displaced by Vermeer’s inner-looking soft power. This feeds into a self-image that allows the Dutch to think of our culture and country as being more autonomous than we really are, less interwoven with the rest of Europe. The art-historical fallacy I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper contributes toward a deep and sometimes pernicious misunderstanding of the position of the Netherlands in the world.

Ceterum censeo – furthermore, I consider that NIAS should remain in Wassenaar.
Endnotes


2 G.W.F. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge, Berlin (Aufbau-Verlag) 1955, p. 803: “Diese sinnige, kunstbegabte Völkerschaft ... will in ihren Bildern noch einmal in allen möglichen Situationen die Reinlichkeit ihrer Städte, Häuser, Hausgeräte, ihren häuslichen Frieden, ihren Reichtum, den ehrbaren Putz ihrer Weiber und Kinder, den Glanz ihrer politischen Stadtfeste, die Kühnheit ihre Seemänner, den Ruhm ihres Handels und ihrer Schiffe genießen, die durch die ganze Welt des Ozeans hinfahren.” Although Hegel tempers this judgement by praising picture-making and artistic technique as values in themselves, it is his identification of Dutch character in art that made and continues to make the most impression.


5 Walsh, op. cit. (note 4), p. 100.


8 Since this is an honest difference of scholarly opinion, I see no reason to be coy about identifying the colleagues with whom I disagree. They are not straw men, but important art historians with whom more people agree than who agree with me: Svetlana Alpers, Rudi Fuchs and Christopher Brown.


10 Jonathan Bikker et al., *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*, vol. 1: *Artists Born between 1570 and 1600*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum and Nieuw Amsterdam) and Hartford (Yale University Press) 2007, pp. 296-97.


15 Peter Sutton, Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition, Oxford (Phaidon) 1980, p. 45: “The fact is not yet sufficiently appreciated that domestic genre was only a minor strand in Dutch painting in the first half of the century.”
17 This lovely theory I should perhaps have kept to myself. According to a mail of May 2014 from Gerlinde Gruber of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, to whom I am grateful for a good image of the painting, her colleague who is responsible for Italian painting, Gudrun Swoboda, now attributes the painting to Matteo Rosselli (1578-1651).
About the Author

Gary Schwartz studied art history at New York University and Johns Hopkins University between 1956 and 1965. In 1965 he was granted a Kress Fellowship to the Netherlands, where he stayed. He has been active as a translator, editor and publisher; scholar, teacher, lecturer and writer; and as the founding director of CODART, an international network organisation for museum curators of Dutch and Flemish art. Among his publications are standard works on Rembrandt and Pieter Saenredam, as well as more than 400 articles in scholarly journals, the press and his Internet column, the Schwartzlist.

Schwartz's scholarship is guided by the conviction that art is not an autonomous realm, but that it is embedded in the societies in which it comes into being and is subsequently taken up. He defines his field as the historical study of art.

He is a former fellow of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities as well as NIAS, a Regents Lecturer at UCLA and Leventritt Lecturer at Harvard University. Schwartz bears the triennial Prince Bernhard Culture Fund Prize for the Humanities, the highest distinction of its kind in the Netherlands.
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