Eric J. Sluijter

**Didactic and Disguised Meanings?**

*Several Seventeenth-Century Texts on Painting and the Iconological Approach to Netherlandish Dutch Paintings of This Period*

Judging from numerous recent publications, the debate concerning the nature of seventeenth-century Dutch painting — especially genre painting — is still raging. In recent years countless investigations have focused on the meaning and function of this art within its historical context. Little agreement has been reached, however, regarding the goals pursued by Dutch painters and the perception of their works by contemporary audiences. In a recent summary Jan Bialostocki listed three possible answers: In 1876 Eugène Fromentin asserted that the painter had no other motivation than a purely artistic need to depict reality; a hundred years later iconologists, of whom E. de Jongh may be considered the most important, have suggested that the intention of these artists was "tot lering en vermaak" (to instruct and delight); Svetlana Alpers has offered another solution, suggesting that the aim of Dutch painters was to increase the visual knowledge of reality.

The iconological method of explaining seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting — which has been enthusiastically employed since the 1960s, particularly by Dutch art historians — has been the most successful. Its results have significantly enriched our knowledge of Dutch genre art. Generally speaking, this method, which has also been somewhat imprecisely typified as "emblematic interpretation," attempts "to decipher layers of meaning and literary allusions hidden in paintings and to relate the significance of genre painting to the classical concept of docere et delectare (to teach and delight)." As a result, a non-narrative art, which for the most part appears to be devoid of any relationship to textual references, has nevertheless been joined to texts. This has led to such far-reaching conclusions as the following: "The joyful, often coarse domestic and tavern scenes have been con-
Art and Reality

vincingly established as instructive lessons, warning against sin, recalling death, challenging the viewer to lead a God-fearing life.7

These new insights have been translated into literature intended for a broad, nonspecialized public—educational brochures, exhibition wall texts, newspaper articles, and a recent survey of Dutch art. Such materials lead one to believe that a general consensus exists concerning seventeenth-century audiences’ perception of this art.8 Furthermore, in contrast to what Josua Bruyn believed in 1968,7 guides leading tours in Dutch museums extensively, and almost exclusively, inform visitors about the hidden meanings, disguised symbols, and moralizing messages contained in genre pieces, still lifes, and even landscapes. Viewers are told what a painting “really means.” Its “message,” disguised by the painting’s realistic appearance, usually contains an easily formulated warning and an edifying lesson.9

One must ask, however, whether a number of notions that have become familiar due to the success of iconological investigations (e.g., ideas regarding didactic function and the disguising of meaning) are fully justified and whether arguments in their favor are sufficiently valid. It is not my intention to analyze or elaborate on the criticisms that have been leveled at the iconological method as applied to Dutch art.10 I merely want to take this opportunity to question several notions that have taken hold in wider circles. I will do so by using the same type of material that iconologists have so often employed to defend their arguments, namely, seventeenth-century texts. It should be emphatically stated that the important insights and results yielded by this iconological research are by no means to be dismissed; on the contrary, it is precisely these results that allow one to question whether the frameworks in which they have been placed are adequate or whether they require revision.

One of the well-known obstacles for the iconologist attempting to comprehend the aims and aspirations of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter, as well as the attitude of the artist’s public, is the scarcity of contemporary literature shedding light on the matter. Given the period on which I wish to concentrate, circa 1650–1670 (qualitatively and especially quantitatively, the period of Dutch painting’s greatest development), the only substantial text about painting is Philips Angel’s little treatise Lof der schilder-const (In Praise of Painting), published in 1642. This was the text of a lecture given to the community of painters in Leiden on Saint Luke’s Day in 1641.11 One might expect that this speech by an average painter, which was presented to an audience consisting primarily of landscape, still life, and genre painters12 and was intended to underscore the dignity of their shared profession, would have played an important role in attempting to trace the ideas of seventeenth-century Dutch artists. It has not yet, however, been sufficiently considered within the framework of art-historical literature. A closer look at Angel’s treatise may help us to grasp some of the concepts considered significant enough at the time to be formulated for that group of painters.

First, however, I would like to consider briefly Jacob Catz’s account (cited by Angel) of the painter and the poet who fought for the hand of Rhodope. It serves as a useful point of departure since it reveals much about the image of the painter and the art of painting.13 The passage, which is taken from “De beschryving van de op-komste van Rhodopis” (“Description of the Rise of Rhodope”)—the most extensive story in Catz’s Trouw-boeck (Wedding Ring) of 1657—relates how a poet and a painter, together with a military officer, a counselor, a merchant, and an embroiderer, vie for the hand of the lovely Rhodope. In order to impress her, each suitor gives a detailed description of the dignity of his profession.

S. F. Witstein has demonstrated that the seventeenth-century reader of Catz’s story would indeed have recognized in the poet’s plea the contemporary image of “the poet” and that his role as philosopher of morals would have been entirely familiar.14 In contrast to the other suitors, the poet presents himself as engaged with higher matters; he determines ethical principles and provides instruction regarding virtues and passions. This description is in agreement with the intellectual and moral duties traditionally identified with the art of poetry. The Horatian dictum “Omne est actum qui miscuit utile dulci” (“He who unites the useful with the pleasant is praised”) is central to this ideology.15 Furthermore, the poet gives a sample of his emblematic faculties when he perceives a “deep geheim” (profound secret) in the conduct of a flea that jumps onto him from Rhodope. Finally, he assures her that her name will live forever should she marry him.16

In contrast, the painter mentions no high intentions or lofty principles in describing his art,17 although his narrative begins with the traditional comparison between painters and poets. The painter creates mute poetry, while the poet makes paintings that speak; both art forms serve “de weerael tot vermaeken” (to amuse the world) and ease the mind. It should be noted that even in this account of shared intentions, the painter does not breach the lofty goals stressed by the poet. The painter believes that his art ranks

176

177
higher than poetry for the following reason: the poet, he says mockingly,
earns praise, laurels, and eternal fame with his mind and its "hooghe vliucht"
(lofty concerns), but he can neither make a living nor support a wife and
children. The painter, on the other hand, can earn money with his art.

De waerde Schilder-Kunst verdient al grooter lof,
Wist boven haer vermaech soo komter voordeel off,
Ich wisse machich gely, ich maecht groote stucken,
Ooch wett ich op de Plaet de Versten wyt to drucken:
Hier drijf ich handel medd, en sym met groot ghaften,
En dat's een dienstich werck voor huys en huynghuizen.18

(The worthy art of painting deserves the highest praise.
Since, besides the pleasure it brings, it produces gain.
I earn a lot of money, I paint great works,
And also I know how to portray monarchs in print.
With this I conduct trade, free and with great profit,
And that is useful for home and family.)

The painter relates that he has recently been paid handsomely by a mon-
arch who also presented him with a gold chain. In contrast, his friend the
poet received only a laurel wreath and a coat of arms from the same mon-
arch for a poem "enkel goet en van een hooghe toon" (full of noble spirit
and lofty thoughts). The painter is thus led to remark:

Maer waarom langh verhaelt? Ich kan te samen voegen
Dat w, dat al het volck, dat Prinsen kan vernoegen,
En dat oock houwien mijn voordeel geven kan.19

(But why dwell any longer on this? I can invent things
that can entertain you, princes, and all other people,
And which in addition give me profit.)

A little later the painter also compares himself with the merchant and
assures Rhodope: Soo ghy een Goedman lyft, Ich kan oock handel drijven,
En kan noch door de Konst mijn naecken heer stijven.20 (Should you love a
merchant, well, I can also conduct trade, And can swell my purse through

Art and Reality

Didactic and Discussed Meanings?

art.) Furthermore, the painter claims to be a better tradesman than the mer-
chant because he produces his own merchandise. His art will never desert
him, while a merchant would go bankrupt if, for example, his merchandise
were to be lost in a shipwreck.

As an alternative to the poet's promise that he can make Rhodope's name
eternal, the painter claims that he can capture "d'eerlich Beel van uue
jonghe daghen" (the beautiful image of your youth) and preserve it for suc-
ceding generations, so that for a thousand years all will be able to admire
her. Thus, through his art she will live eternally. The warrior's suit is par-
ried by the argument that the painter can depict everything; he can even
show Rhodope battles, if she wishes to experience them without risk. Should
she find the counselor attractive because he frequently works in courtly cir-
cles, she must bear in mind that princes have honored painters for aeons.21

Cats starkly contrasts the painter with the poet in various ways. The
painter derives his dignity not from the pursuit of lofty goals but from the
production of superior merchandise, which brings him profit, and from the
appreciation, largely financial in nature, that powerful patrons bestow
on him.22 The aim of his art is to delight and "vernoegen" (entertain), to
represent what people wish to see, and, finally, to fix transient physical
beauty, thus vanishing time.23

Cats's description of the painter as a respected craftsman who produces
superior products (a rather unfavorable image from the standpoint of the
liberal arts) must have been entirely acceptable to his contemporaries —
even to painters. Angel repeats this characterization in extenso when lauding
the dignity of his profession, and he ranks the painter above the poet. After
devoting more than three of the fifty-eight pages of his treatise to quoting
Cats, Angel concludes: "Set daer, door een Poet sels de Schilder-Konst boven
de Poety gestelt?" (See there, a poet himself has placed the art of painting
above poetry!)

Furthermore, Angel gives no indication that the lofty, didactic aims of
poetry are equally applicable to painting; he makes no mention of teach-
ing and edification, deeper wisdom, or other intellectual pretensions. In
this respect, the idea of ut pictura poetis (like painting, like poetry) seems
to play no role for Angel. He appears equally unconcerned that existing
humanistic art theory was predominantly based on the rules of poetics and
rhetoric, although he gratefully makes use of Karel van Mander when it suits
him. Angel must also have been aware of Franciscus Juitius's De schilder-
When Angel finally discusses in detail the requirements that the artist must meet and the qualities that he must possess to be worthy of the title of painter, he divides the various components of this art into specific categories. A few of these can, with some effort, be traced to such traditional theoretical notions as *judicium*, *ingenium*, *disjeno*, and *decorum*. Angel’s characteristically simplified descriptions of these concepts, however, have little to do with the more learned connotations used in humanistic art theory.²⁹ His first requirement, “recht oordeel” (right judgment), only consists of a warning that one should not borrow indiscriminately from the compositions of others. Next, he advises a “geheewe Teycken-hant” (steady hand for drawing): one should make no mistakes in draftsmanship. He gives the drawing of a “tromie” (head) as an example and points out that one eye is often not aligned properly with the other, the ears are too small, the nose too short or too long, etc.³⁰ “Vloeyende ende eygenhendiche by een vougheende gheest” (capacity for combining things in a fluid and natural manner) refers to the painter’s ability to imagine many different subjects and compose them according to their nature in order to produce an “senghenen beuvelijken baxter” (pleasantly attractive splendor). Furthermore, what has been represented must be completely comprehensible to the observer.³¹ “Kennis van Hystorien” (knowledge of history) means that in order to portray correctly “Gedichtliche, Poetische en Hydrosche Historien” (religious, poetic, and mythological histories), an artist must carefully read the stories to be represented and accurately render the information that they contain. The concept of “hooge nagedachten” (lofty reflections) or “verre en eygenhendiche nagedachten” (profound and natural reflections) means that what has been read must be thoroughly considered, so that everything depicted is consistent with what is described in the narrative — even aspects not specifically related in it. Once again, the observer must be able to discern clearly what is taking place.³² Angel says nothing about expressing the deeper meanings contained in these stories, nor does he emphasize the expression of emotions as a means of appealing to the viewer’s feelings.

Angel constantly stresses the need to imitate visible things precisely, so that they appear “almost real.” Light and shadow must be distributed in such a way that even objects that seem virtually inimitable with brush and paint “seer eyghendich schijven” (appear like the thing itself). Furthermore, the “uwerenminghe van eyghen natuuryliche dinghen” (observation of the actual natural things) ensures that the artist carefully observes optical effects.
and reproduces them faithfully. Given that "zy na-booster van 't leven sijn" (we are imitators of life), Angel states that no effort should be spared if it means that one "de natuurlijke dingen daer mede nader by komt" (comes nearer to natural things). In support of this, he cites examples of specific features that painters should closely observe: "Bataafse-Schilders" (battle painters) and "Historisch-schilders" (history painters) should study the effect of a wheel turning; "Zee-Schilders" (marine painters), the smoke trailing from a cannon shot; "Landschap-schilders" (landscape painters), the reflections in water; and the painters of the "Corteguarden" (guardrooms), the effect of a fuse glowing as it is swung around.24

Angel speaks of anatomy in terms of the precise observation of limbs and muscles and their movement without mentioning correct proportions or ideal beauty.25 He also mentions the careful rendering of texture — a seemingly typical requirement at this time — distinguishing among fabrics such as velvet, wool, and satin.26 Most noteworthy in this discussion of working carefully after nature is a passage concerning the relationship between "natuurlijke na-bootinge" (imitation of nature) and "handelinghe" (manner of painting). In this passage Angel maintains that a painting by the best master should be recognizable not by any particular manner of painting but rather "zyt de ongenoemde overeenkommende die het met het leven heeft" (by the exceptional resemblance it bears to life). He states that the highest praise one can receive is that "men moet te voeren van die by-kominge nae 't leven gehoort en had" (one had never before heard of such close renderings after life).27 As a final point, Angel advises "natichet" (neatness, i.e., a careful, smooth, and finely detailed manner of painting) that must, however, be coupled with a certain "louchet" (looseness) to prevent lapsing into a "stijve nette onaardigheyt" (stiff and tidy unpleasantness); the "noot gheneogh ghepreuen" (never sufficiently praised) Gerrit Dou is cited here as an example. Should this prove too much for the painter, he continues, it would be better to apply a "soet, wacker, sooteleyend Pencel" (louder, lively, smoothly flowing brush), or the artist's results will be greeted by ridicule rather than praise.28 Finally, of course, pleasant behavior, virtue, and diligence — the latter is particularly emphasized — are necessary to attain the highest honor and fame.29

In discussing these requirements, Angel's constant emphasis on the need to appeal to the observer's eye is indeed remarkable. The "aardighéercierende Bijzeldichheyt" (abundance that pleasantly embellishes, i.e.,

the representation of a variety of subjects in a painting) is particularly necessary because of the

opwoekende toegheneghenhout, die men daer door in de gemoederen van de Konst-beminders vuscher maacht... zoo datse met een wensch-begheerte, het oogh der Liefhebberen tot haar dinghen veroorsenen en dat daer door de Stucken haar te beter van de handtgaen.

...rousing affection this kindles in the art lover's mind... so that they [the paintings] delight the eyes of art lovers and fill them with desire; and through this the painter will sell his paintings all the better.)

Furthermore, rendering texture skillfully is "op t aengenaemstte voor yders ooge" (the most appealing to everyone's eyes). Through the "schijn uytgehen-
lijke brachte (oue noem ech het)" (appearance-simulating power [as I phrase it]), which is achieved through a proper distribution of light and shadow, one will "het ghezichtte der Konst-beminders oversveldighen en in nemen" (overwhelm the sight of art lovers and captivate them). The meticulous observation and rendering of optical effects must "niet min behaerlijck, als natuurlijk zijn in de gemoederen der Konst-beminders, en ook een meerder beheer-lust tot de Konst verohecen" (be no less pleasant than natural in the minds of art lovers and must also arouse more desire for art), while a true-to-life palette of colors "onze Konst in 't ooge van de Konst-beminnende Liefhebbers en wel-gheeven dour hebben" (makes art appealing in the eyes of art lovers). Angel's dedication of his "Schilders Konst-Lof-spraak" (encomium to painting) to Johan Overbeek is meant to express his gratitude for having been given the opportunity to see the latter's art collection, where he was able "te versadighen de last van mijn neuspiegirige ooghen" (to slake the desire of my inquisitive eyes) on the "menschte van die uytneemende aerdigheden" (multitude of excellent niceties). Once again, not a word is spared for painting's edifying function. On the contrary, its appeal and delight to the eye are emphasized at length.

Finally, there is no conscious hierarchy to be discerned for the various genres in Angel's treatise.34 As mentioned earlier, when he wants to clarify an aspect in his discussion of the requirements that a good painter must fulfill, he presents a "dronke" (head) as an example in his passage on drawing. Elsewhere, he cites with equal ease the work of painters of battlefields,
Art and Reality

history pieces, seascapes, landscapes, and guardroom scenes. Angel apparently considered these various subjects to be specialties, which they were at the time. He does require that painters of history pieces carefully read narrative texts in order to faithfully represent them in a clear, correct, and suitable manner; he then discusses representations of various biblical and mythological subjects extensively. Yet he does not view the painting of history pieces as the painter's highest goal. His admiration for Dou, who at the time painted primarily interior scenes and portraits, is no less than that he expresses for Rembrandt or Jan Lievens. It is these three painters—not coincidentally all from Leiden—who receive his greatest praise.

Although Angel's treatise, like any other seventeenth-century treatise, does not give much information about a painter's choice of subject matter and content, I have reviewed both Cats and Angel at some length in an attempt to delineate what would have been the important points of discussion for a Leiden painter around 1640, when the status of the painter and his art were at stake. (It should be noted in passing that Angel undoubtedly saw himself as being fairly learned and was, most likely, above average in this regard.) In the first place, emphasis was placed on painting as a distinguished and respectable craft, not on the painter's intellectual aspirations. Angel's audience probably included painters such as Dou; David Bailly (portraits and still lifes); Pieter van Steenwijck (still lifes); Pieter Dubordieu (portraits); Quiryn van Slingelandt, Louis Elsevier, and Maerten Frans van der Hulst (landscapes); Jan van de Stolle (battle scenes); Cornelis Stooter (seascapes); Johannes van Staveren, Abraham de Pape, and Adriaen van Gaensebreek (genre painters and followers of Dou), all of whom presumably listened with approval.

Angel only broaches literary aspects of content when discussing the clear rendering of a narrative text. Indeed, no mention is made of a "noble, didactic purpose of the art of painting." Furthermore, despite the fact that Van Mander was an important source, links with humanistic art theory can only be detected with some effort. As mentioned earlier, Angel had no interest in Junius except for De Brune's preface and the names of a few classical painters and writers on art, which he borrowed from the text.

In fact, it is difficult to find anything in texts on the art of painting from this period that would indicate that didacticism was an important aim. We cannot assume that the lack of writing on this subject resulted from the fact that it was considered self-evident. This is highly implausible if only because literary-theoretical discourses and innumerable prefaces to literary works, reiterated time and time again the Horatian ideology utile dulci (uniting the useful with the pleasant), the edifying function, the deeper wisdom packaged in an amusing form. Assuming that the notion of ut pictura poesis was deeply rooted, it would be natural to address these issues, especially if one wanted to say something about the dignity of an art that, more than literature, can give rise to substantial misunderstandings about such moralizing intent. Moreover, this art could be censured by critics as being "schouber oogh feniin" (venom for the eyes) precisely because of its amusing, appealing, and sensual appearance. The fact that these issues were not addressed should, at the very least, give us cause for thought.

Art historians have put forward analogical arguments defending the principles of didacticism and disguise as points of departure for the interpretation of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings (particularly genre paintings), frequently considering these principles as the essence of the meaning of these paintings. These arguments originate from a stretching of ut pictura poesis, which has led to an oversimplified equation of the functions and aims of poetry and painting. The passages cited as examples of "belering en verhulling" (didacticism and disguise) are taken from Roemer Visscher's preface to Sinnepeppen, Cats's prefaces to Proteus and Spiegel vanden orden en nieuwen tijden, Bredero's preface to Geenig liedboekchen, etc. Thus, commonplace terms taken from emblem literature in particular have been projected onto painting, despite their entirely different nature, context, function, tradition, and pictorial themes. As stated above, one searches in vain in texts about painting for clichés concerning the hard outer shell and the sweet kernel within, edification through amusement, and the display of vices as a warning and an exhortation to virtue. These notions are, however, endlessly repeated in emblem books and innumerable prefaces to other types of literature, including songbooks, comedies, and adaptations of mythological material.

When, occasionally, arguments are drawn from texts that are directly related to painting, they prove inadequate. The often cited poem by Samuel van Hoogstraten about "huyerck dat bedeeltelyk iets verklarets" (accessories that explain something covertly), for example, has been used to justify the idea of deep, hidden meanings secreted within genre painting. However, Van Hoogstraten's words are specifically directed at historical scenes with
single figures (personifications, for example) in which the "accessories" (such as particular attributes) unobtrusively make clear that which is actually represented. This passage explains nothing about genre paintings; moreover, van Hoogstraten does not speak about hidden meanings but rather about clarifying the representation in order for "de toestanders haer beeld te doen kennen" (the observers to comprehend the image).9

Adriaen van de Venne's verses about "inne-cunt" (emblematic art) in his Zevende prent vecht. Ofsch schyn-lycker form another case in point.9 In my view, these verses exclusively concern images accompanied by texts, such as emblems, and not painting in general. The first half of the poem speaks of painting as a source of joy. It captures beauty, arouses desire, and entices the eyes; it can record and visualize all that exists. A number of the significant aspects of painting frequently encountered in texts are treated in this section of the poem. Van de Venne, who was also a poet and an illustrator of emblem literature, then proceeds to discuss the sister arts of painting and poetry, noting that the latter can express "hooghe en diepe dinghen" (high and deep things). He demonstrates how the two arts can be combined and how their different characteristics complement each other. This leads Van de Venne to "inne-cunt"—almost certainly meaning the combination of image and text— which he finds so admirable because the mind is "zoo sin-rijk meegedeelt" (so significantly informed) by it.90 Van de Venne does say that, among other things, painting can represent virtue and vice as well as human flaws, but this is the closest he comes to a didactic approach.91

Karel van Mander wrote his Schilder-boeck within the context of a literary-humanistic circle; it was written at a time when painting in general and the art market were on the verge of entirely new developments: history painting still dominated, specialization in the various genres had yet to develop, and the production and collecting of paintings had by no means attained the quantitative leaps that were to become noticeable several decades later. Surprisingly, Van Mander's text does not explicitly mention a didactic function or deeper meaning of painting in either the Groondt (a pretentious poetic work that makes extensive use of intellectual metaphors and exempla) or the Levens.92 When Van Mander mentions paintings in the Levens, he says remarkably little about their subject matter and nothing about their content or literary aspects. He is almost exclusively interested in outward appearance.93 The common assertion that Van Mander saw didacticism as the most important function of painting is not convincing.94

Considering that seventeenth-century authors, as stated above, found it important to elaborate continually on this function in their discussions of poetry, emblem literature, etc. (Van Mander makes extensive use of such ideas elsewhere, for example, in his introduction to Wijzegghen op den Metamorfosea [Explanation of the Metamorphoses]),69 it seems all the more remarkable that he does not address it.

It is impossible to sustain the idea that the didactic goal of painting is repeatedly underscored in the aforementioned literature.95 Equally untenable is the assertion that in this art literature the aspect of people gazing at the physical appearance of paintings while remaining unaware of their hidden meaning was lamented.96 In short, based on these sources, one has to ask whether such didactic principles had an important place in the minds of the majority of Dutch painters of this time and whether their audiences considered moralizing an important function of the paintings. By no means do I wish to argue that didactic-moralizing intentions are never present in paintings but rather that it appears incorrect to use such notions as the basis for interpretation.

A continually recurring notion encountered in texts pertaining to the art of painting or to individual paintings is that a painting imitating nature possesses the power to render everything, to capture beauty, to entice and seduce the eye, to arrest earthly transience, and thereby to "conquer" nature.98 Furthermore, the fascination with imitation is often manifest, as is the play with appearance and being and the "deception" of the eye.99 This is expressed in many variations, and it should come as no surprise that extremely successful painters such as Gerrit Dou and Frans van Mieris were frequently compared to Zeuxis and Parrhasius.90

Van Hoogstraten summarized such ideas wonderfully in the beginning of his chapter "Van het oogmerk der schilderkonst; wat er is, en te weeg brengt" (On the Aim of the Art of Painting: What It Is and What It Brings About): "De Schilderkonst is een wetenschap, om alle ideen, ofte denkbœelden, die de geheele dichtbaere natuur kan geven, te verbeelden: en met ontkerk en veruwe het oog te bedrijven" (Painting is a science that can represent all the ideas or concepts offered by all of visible nature and which deceives the eye with contours and paint). After again referring to Parrhasius and Zeuxis, Van Hoogstraten continues with the frequently quoted statement: "Wet een volmaakte Schildery is als een spiegel van de Natuur, die de dingen, die
Art and Reality

niet en zijn, doet schijnen te zijn, en op een gevoelige vermakelijke en grizijke wijze bedreigt" (Because a perfect painting is like a mirror of nature, making things which do not exist appear to exist, and which deceives in an acceptably amusing and honorable manner). He goes on to mention the fact that poets made a connection between the origin of painting and Narcissus and, without actually saying so, evokes associations with vain and transient beauty (which Narcissus could not preserve, but which painting can); these associations are also implied by the mirror metaphor. This may serve as a nice description for a great deal of Dutch painting of this period: the rendering of pleasant and amusing images, which, like a reflection, appear deceptively real. "As if [looking] in a mirror," the viewer is confronted by the associations evoked by what is reflected (with all the connotations of self-knowledge, beauty, vanity, and transience related to the mirror metaphor.) Didactic lessons as such are not obviously implied but are not excluded. In my opinion, however, we can discount the idea that meanings were intentionally hidden or disguised.

It should be pointed out that the often-cited qualities of semblance and "deception" of the eye could also be perceived as dubious, and they are frequently mentioned in the context of negative opinions about painting. Both the positive and negative views of the enticement of the eye through appealing and deceptive appearances are recurring topoi. These were all the more powerful because it was written time and again that the eye, and thus the sense of sight, aroused sensual feelings and lust. Naturally, these are often old topoi derived from classical texts, but the way in which they are continually repeated seems no less significant. Following the footsteps of Johannes Everts, Geesteranus, Dirk Rafaëls, Camphuysen, himself once a painter, even goes so far as to denounce the art of painting as being a "verleidende-ster van ‘t gezicht dat zich overstoot op ‘t sterfelijk" (seductress of sight, spellbound by all that is transient). His opinions, though extreme and formulated from an orthodox religious standpoint, are revealing in their vehemence. He even says that paintings have no use or purpose and contain nothing worth learning, but are merely: "Een vleeyen’d ogen bedroch, t’ welch naacht taenschouwen geeft, Hoe dat hy in ’t hart die ’t maect en die het heef" (A seductive deceit of the eye, that shows us openly what the real disposition is of those who make and possess them). Shortly before, Camphuysen had stated:

Didactic and Disguised Meanings?

1. Goen d’ogen seyt en leyt bevat den innen seyt
En d’öyle hechten beheerst het uytse genoot.
So komt het dat gy (‘t wijf ‘t gezicht zich laat bedriegen,
En ‘t hert verwondert staat door ‘t schoons schilderijen)
Soo als gy alle geem in schildery aen-aanh.
Alsoe ook in der daet geem doen en hebben soot.
Dus knicht d’innighe laat door schildery zijn voetel.
En onderg vaart gieelt door ‘t otte breuys wytbroedel.)

(What the eyes behold gives the senses sweet satisfaction
And the illusive image will reign over the mind.
In this way [while the eyes are deceived,
And the heart is astonished by the beautiful lies of painting].
One wants to do and to have
Everything which one beholds in a painting.
Thus desire is fed by painting,
And vice is generated by these foolish contrivings of the painter’s brain.)

Not surprisingly, seemingly contradictory impulses can be detected in a society wherein a certain segment showed an incredible avidity for paintings. (Who today has between 100 and 150 paintings in his or her house? In the second and third quarter of the seventeenth century, a substantial number of Leiden inventories, for example, can be found with such high numbers.) Yet the same society also displayed an ambivalent attitude toward the image and the sense of sight; hence, it is understandable that preoccupations with pleasure, seduction, earthly beauty, and transience are so often inseparably linked in paintings and directly expressed in both subject and style. In this regard, the innumerable genre pieces in which love, youth, virtue, and vice play an important role — usually with a young woman as the focus — come to mind. Also evoked are the almost always idyllic, amorous mythological and pastoral scenes, as well as many still lifes and landscapes. A certain "moral" is definitely present, and moralizations are often readily accessible for application within specific contexts. However, this does not mean that such paintings were generally intended as warnings or didactic-moralizing messages disguised by a realistic mom-en-enacht (mask). It seems more likely that thoughts and attitudes about nature and human endeavors were visualized and represented in paintings in an immediately recognizable way.
Associations were given direction through selective choice of subject matter, motifs, and related conventions for the representation of daily life. The subjects and motifs depicted in non-narrative paintings transmitted meaning to the viewer through adaptation to or deviation from pictorial conventions; through stereotypes recognizable to the public for whom they were intended; and through the visualization of simple, accessible metaphors. The viewer or buyer could make these connotations more specific by interpreting them in terms of his own intellectual, social, and religious background.

Few seventeenth-century viewers would have expected to be edified by the visually appealing images of vice, pleasurable pastimes, and amorous or erotically tinged scenes that were so frequently found in Dutch paintings of the time. That moralizations—which might be formulated to justify such paintings—could be seen as merely verbal additions with no essential bearing on the representation was stated by Camphuysen as follows:

Nochans 't heeft mae (uagt gy) zijn nat. Men kan 't wytsleggen.
En leven naen en daet al 't saem doen zien, door neggen.
Meer (och!) wat wytsleg en wat lof kan waelyt staen,
By toonkui die 't gemaat fuyt wyen aert beschaem? 79

(Yet it still has its use [you say]. One can explain [the image].
One can reveal all of life, name and deed in word,
But [oh!] what explanation and what praise can safely withstand.
The things displayed which by their very nature shame the mind?)

Perhaps the somewhat titillating tension between sensual pleasure and “dangerous” seduction was one of the factors determining the appeal of many subjects. 80

The iconological method was initially developed for interpreting fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art, which was often closely related to textual sources; this art frequently originated within the context of programmatic commissions and was intended for a specific place. Such a method has been applied with insufficient adaptation to an art that, to a large degree, lacks these specific aspects. As has been shown, its use has been justified by placing great emphasis on the idea of ut pictoris poesis, which stems from humanistic art theory, and by transferring literary principles to the art of painting, supported with arguments primarily drawn from emblem literature.

Furthermore, one gets the impression that the goal of iconography, namely bringing to the surface and “deciphering” significant elements no longer obvious to the modern observer, has been confused with the existence of disguised or hidden meanings. 8 It also seems that the means used for this type of deciphering—specifically with regard to emblems—are equated with the painter's own sources, and this has frequently given rise to overly specific interpretations. 9 In addition, interpretations involving such a use of emblematic and literary-theoretical sources have often projected an extremely unlikely intellectual load and erudition onto the painter, his paintings, and his public. 10

The limitations that this approach can place on interpretation also result from the separation between form and content and, related to this, the curious distinction between meaning and meaninglessness. 11 Searching for the meaning—usually in fairly isolated interpretations that do not consider an entire thematic group with its conventions and deviations—has only aggravated the problem. In my opinion, because of the separation between form and content, late medieval and sixteenth-century concepts have been all too easily transferred to the seventeenth century without taking into account the tremendous changes that occurred in the outward appearance of paintings and the context in which they functioned. 12 In so doing, the radical seventeenth-century developments in form and subject matter, the production and trade of paintings, and the differentiation of the art-purchasing public, which filled its houses with numerous paintings, have been underestimated. These factors must have had far-reaching consequences for the way in which the seventeenth-century consumer perceived paintings.

People at the time were aware that something special was happening with their “own” art, produced by the “Verciersels van ons Vaderlandt” (the embellishments of our fatherland). In 1649 Constantijn Huygens wrote that his Dutch compatriots had progressed further than anyone in their ability to render all sorts of shapes and poses of people and animals and the appearances of trees, rivers, mountains, and other elements of the landscape. 13 In 1698 Van Hoogstraten, in the course of admonishing rulers of the republic to buy more art to present as gifts abroad, stated that “de Schilderkonst in onze staet, als in een nieuwe Grieken, in 't best van haar bloeiën is” (the art of painting in our own land, as in a new Greece, is at the
height of her glory). He continued to say that therefore the art of painting, "den Vaderlande eygen, als een onhooyledige mijne, parev vreyer, en edeleste greeve, dagelijck veel rijke juweelen van habbistukken kan willeveren" (as befits our fatherland, like an invaluable quarry, a pearl fishery, or mine of precious stones, can daily produce many rich jewels of cabinet painting).

The loving attention with which such paintings were produced and with which the visible was rendered is not merely a modern projection. Not only the paintings themselves make this apparent but also the following lines by Van Hoogstraten. As the primary requirement of the painter, he cites: "Dat hy niet alleen schijne de konst te beminnen, maar dat hy in der daet, in de aerdicheden der bevallijche natuur uit te beelden, verlieft it" (That he not only appears to adore art, but that he in fact is in love with representing the pleasurabilities of beautiful nature). Numerous questions concerning the reasons for the great profusion as well as the strict selectivity of those lovingly rendered "aerdicheden der bevallijche natuur" (pleasurabilities of beautiful nature), the associations they aroused, as well as the relationship between style, choice of subject matter and the public, have not as yet been satisfactorily answered. While the iconological approach has indicated many fruitful directions, its limitations should be kept in mind.

**Notes**

This is a translation of an article that originally appeared under the title "Beloning en verwijding" Enkele zeventiende-eeuwse teksten over de schilderkunst en de iconologische benadering van Noord- Nederlandse schilderijen uit die periode." in De zeventiende eeuw 4 (1981).


2. Bialostocki (see note 1), 545. See also, "Études de Nomenclature et de symboles dans l'art des Pays-Bas: Une contribution à l'étude des symboles." Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft 47 (1982): 449.

3. Alpers, 1987 (see note 1), 249-254, "Appendix: On the Emblematic Interpretation of Dutch Art," and the harsh review by E. de Jongh on the use of this terminology, which suggests that this manner of interpretation is entirely based on the use of emblems (see note 1), 39. See also Jesuit Benedict, "Fruit and Fertility: Fruit Symbolism in Netherlandish Portraiture of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Simiolus 27 (1988): 125-126, esp. n. 2, where a good, corrective explanation is given about the methodological use and abuse of emblems. It cannot be denied that the term applies in that many principles that are apropos the function and meaning of emblems were seen as valid for the interpretation of painting.


5. Joanna Bruyns, "Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Paintings," in Sutton (see note 1), 42.
Art and Reality

For instance, with regard to the interpretation of works of art, Bob Haak's monumental survey The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984) relies solely on E. de Jongh's iconological approach (see especially the chapter "Realism and Symbolism"). This was also the case earlier, though with varying degrees of insistence, in much more concise surveys by R. H. Fuchs and Madlyn Miller Kahr. A few educational guides from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, may be mentioned as illustrative but are by no means exceptional. With regard to newspaper articles, those by P. Milder and R. van Gelder are typical; from this viewpoint, they criticized the large "genre" exhibitions in Philadelphia, London, and Berlin of 1984 (see "De kunsthistorische mistwaring over de Gouden Eeuw", De Volkskrant, 26 June 1984, section 4, and "Hoe amuurt was Nederland", NRC/Handelsblad, 25 June 1984, Cultural Supplement, 6).

7. Joris Bruyn, Geschiedschrijving als parabel (Lecture given on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the University of Amsterdam, 8 April 1982), p. 2: "De meer van wonder blootstrijkt, op zorgvuldig bereidelde commentaren waarop grijpen hun iteranten, ouders hun kinderen en allereerste arbeiders hun koffers en laarzen tot op de hechteur der vergierige" (the more or less florid commentaries based on "empathy", with which to this day gesture evoke their tourists, parents their children, and writers their readers.) This "empathy" appears to have vanished in the past few years, at least with regard to Dutch genre pieces.

8. The success may be partially explained by the fact that since the beginning De Jongh introduced his approach in an appealing form intended for a broader public: see E. de Jongh, Zien en winnaardest in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw (Amsterdam: Stichting Openbaar Kunstenhuis Openbaar Kunstenhuis in Vlaanderen, 1975); E. de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw", in Palen voor Schone Kunsten, Rembrandt en zijn tijd, exh. cat. (Brussels: La Connaissance, Europealia, 1973); and E. de Jongh, Tot leven en vermaak: Beeldenpark van Hollandse grovevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1974). According to an education department employee in a Dutch museum, polls reveal that the public currently prefers information on symbolism and "hidden meanings". Typical of this approach was the slide show based on Bruyn's article (see note 5) in the catalog for the 1986 landscape exhibition at the Rijksmuseum. Bruyn's view was the most theoretical and speculative, and — given the nature of the exhibition — the least appropriate. It was, however, certainly the easiest to put into words, so now moralizing messages and hidden symbolism have also been provided for landscape.

It is significant that De Jongh, in his criticism of Alpers (see note 5), expressed fear that her vision would have wide appeal, because it would provide a "unified field theory" wherein diverse phenomena would be seen in express one and the same mentality: something for which we seem to have a deep-seated need. Ironically, De Jongh's approach, which also has Hegelian roots — in this context, see E. H. Gombrich, In Search of Cultural History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 104 - Didactic and Disguised Meanings?

Univ. Press, 1961), on Panhellenic iconology — appears to have had precisely the effect he feared. He used appealing generalizations about the mentality, such as "the tendency to moralize" that is "all encompassing" and "the strong preference for disguising, veiling, for allegorizing and ambiguity" (De Jongh, 1974 [see note 8], 144).

9. For the most severe criticism see the introduction and appendix to Alpers, 1982 (see note 8); several points had been formulated earlier in Forstmann Alpers, "Taking Pictures Seriously: A Reply to Haak Miedema," Simiolus 13 (1978/1979): 49–50. In its introduction to Alpers, 1982 (see note 8) is also very outspoken. Countless critical modes ranging from the temperate to the abusive can be found among the publications mentioned in note 8.

10. Phillips Angel, Lof der schilder-konst (Leiden: Willem Christian, 1987). As the printer notes, it is "een Schat ende voorvoorspel...van het somberste werk dat by eenen Anthoes hieraus" (a sketch and a draft...of the forthcoming work now with the author); unfortunately, no more than this "sketch" was ever published.

11. Virtually no works by Angel (c. 1650–1704) are known, except for a few engravings (except for the exception of Rembrandt (see L. J. Bol, "Phillips Angel van Middelburg en Philips Angel van Leiden," Oud Holland 41 [1975]: 3–11). Angel gave his lecture at a time when Leiden painters were busy — and Angel was directly involved — gaining permission to establish a guild to protect them economically and probably also to be recognized as a group with an important socioeconomic status in Leiden society (see Eric J. Sluijsen, "Schilders van 't dierlijk, subtile ende curieuse dingen": Leiden schilders in contemporarne bronnen" in Sluijsen et al., Leiden schilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Franz van Mieris de Jonge, 809–900, exh. cat. [Zweve: Uitgeverij Waanders, 1980]), 93–94). Angel's emphasis on the status and dignity of the painter's craft appears to be related to this attempt. The lecture probably appeared at the same time as the city governor's promise to establish several measures for the economic protection of Leiden painters. In the list compiled in 1644 it was not yet an official guild, Angel figures as hoogmaan (dean). It may be assumed that the painters who signed this list were approximately the same who attended Angel's lecture on Saint Luke's Day (the names of several of these painters are mentioned in the next note); the complete list of the painters and art dealers was published in D. O. Oomen et al., Archief voor de Nederlandse kunstengenootschappen (Rotterdam, 1888–1895), I: 271–275.

12. Jan A. Emmens, the first to sketch an overview of art theory in the Netherlands in Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst (Utrecht: Haitjema, Dekker & Gubbels, 1988), quoted Angel only very summarily and lumped him together with Van Mander. On this, see Haak Miedema's criticism in Oud Holland 84 (1968): 249–50; and idem, "Phillips Angel's Lof der schinder-konst", Proef (December 1978): 17–25. In the latter article, Miedema gave a concise analysis of Angel's pamphlets, primarily contrasting it with Van Mander's Grondwet; unfortunately, he does not elaborate further. Despite the fact that Angel's treatise is mentioned
Art and Reality

fairly often, it has not received the place it deserves because it does not fit in with the development of "academic" art theory traceable from Van Mander to Van Hoogstraten and De Lairesse. This is the case, for instance, in B. Brunninkmeyer-De Rool's chapter on art theory in Haak (see note 6), 60-70. S. Chapman discusses Angel's tract with some thoroughness especially with regard to its title print, in "A Holandische Picture: Observations on the Title Page of Phillips Angel's Of der schilder-kennt," Simiolus 16 (1986): 233-48.


12. Winstein (see note 11), 65.

13. Ibid., 67-69.


15. For the plan of the painter see Cats, 172a (see note 12), 21. 106; it is also cited in full in Angel (see note 16), 37-39. The quotations in my text are taken from Angel.

16. Angel (see note 16), 37-38.

17. Ibid., 38-39.

18. Ibid., 39.

19. Ibid., 40.

20. Ibid., 41.

21. Ibid., 42-43.

22. For the relationship between ser (honor) and gens (profit), see Emmens (see note 2a), 270, 174, and 178. In contrast to Italian art theoreticians, who (following contemporary literary theory) ranked honor much higher than profit, Van Mander placed "meur en genein" on a par. Moreover, he concluded that one should avoid "Dichkomst Rectoria" (rhetorical poetry) because, in contrast to painting, it did not put "mez in de Keukens" (kitchen) on a par. Of course for Junius, profit as a goal was nothing less than despicable; but Van Hoogstraten, like Van Mander, equated it with honor (and the love of art). It is noteworthy that Huygens, after questioning whether painting was still as respected as it had been in Flinie's time and noting that the patternage of distinguished persons, or the practice of painting by distinguished persons, was sufficient to save this respect wrote in his autobiography: "Dit hout heeft te onvoldoende voorgeleerd (als een inmistrust onder dit woord het profit van steedsheven) vreest verstarrt." (It has always provided immense advantage (that is, if one takes the word to mean the profit from materialistic gain). See De jangel van Constantijn Huyghe's door hem zelf beoverden, trans. A. H. R (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker, 1703), 69. See also note 25, on the financial advantage of painting.

23. It is striking that the only lines by Cats that might suggest a certain didactic purpose (the first sentences spoken by the painter) are the only ones that Angel does not quote: "Wid arn, ik lust het volk haer eynen sat ende zachen, en leggen voor het eyn haer onbekend sichten."

Didactic and Disguised Meanings?

(Well now, I will let the people discover their own filth, and present their unknown traits for all to see. In other words, the painter can present human faults to the observer.

24. See Emmens, 1973 (see note 2a), 89-93; and Francisca Junius, De schilder-kennt der oude (Middelburg, 1843). The Dutch translation appeared in the same year as Angel's lecture; the first Latin edition dates from 1587. For the derivations from Jan de Knip, see note 18. The learned work of the philologist Junius, in which texts from antiquity were grouped together based on a rhetorical categorization, was influential on art-theoretical writings later in the century but does not clarify the thought harbored by Dutch painters at that time (Emmens [see note 12], 67f.). On Junius, see also Allan Kelm, De Arte Pungendi: Latin Art Literature in Seventeenth-Century Sweden and Its International Background, Uppsala, 1965; 55-56.

25. See Emmens, 1976 (see note 11), 18.

26. Angel (see note 16), 12-15. Angel probably derived this story, originating in Flinie, from Van Mander's "Het leven der oude antilijke doortuchtige schilder." In Het schilder-boek (Haarlem, 1669-1664), bk. 6:8r; presumably this text has been generally known and would have appealed to Dutch painters (see note 20). Angel selected several examples of antique artists from Van Mander but arranged them in his own sequence. After the Zeuxis-Parrhasius story he comments: "Dus u een kunst uang trap tot trap op ghekmommen." (Thus our art has risen, step by step).

27. Angel (see note 16), 25. This was Spiering Silvervrou, the emissary of Christina of Sweden; see Stiirfer (see note 2a), 66 and 67. For the discussion with prices in the seventeenth-century with regard to the work of Hans and Van Mieris, see ibid., 67-68.

28. Angel (see note 16), 14-16. This discourse, based on a passage from De Bruyne's pledge to Junius's book, echoes the ongoing (especially in Italy) "paragone debate." See Peter Hecb, "The Paragone Debate: Ten Illustrations and a Comment," Simiolus 14 (1981): 135-38. Following the example of De Bruyne, Angel turns the traditional accusation that the art of painting is merely "schijn zonder recht" (semblance without being) into a positive argument: the tangible, three-dimensional object of sculpture is not a merit of the art of imitating nature but a phenomenon of nature itself, and not the related line of reasoning in a letter by Galileo cited in Hecb, 135). Therefore follow Angel's most important arguments, namely a summation of all the things that sculpture cannot represent. The most significant addition he offers in comparison to De Bruyne are the various metals (gold, silver, copper, tin, and lead); this reflects the increasing emphasis placed during this time on the individual properties of various materials, a point to which Angel returns later.

29. Emmens, 1975 (see note 2a), 29-30. It is a pity that Emmens treats this so summarily; he primarily mentions the theoretical origins of Angel's categorization, without making it clear that Angel's interpretations (in my opinion) have very little to do with them. Angel's require-
Didactic and Disguised Meanings?

46. This was already stated by Miedema, 1976 (see note 123, 32) "een opmerkelijke verwijzing aan hierarchische van voorstellingen" (a remarkable disregard of a hierarchy of images).

47. Because the vocabulary previously used for writing about painting applied primarily to narrative, or history, painting, it is remarkable that Angel had no problem citing various non-narrative representations when he wished to clarify matters not solely applicable to history painting. It is noteworthy that Raupp hardly cites Angel in his forced literary-theoretical "Graafelijke Bevestiging" (hierarchy of genres) founded from later art literature that is, according to him, applicable to seventeenth-century painting. When he does briefly refer to Angel, he convey the latter's point of view incorrectly in order to suit his theory (Raupp see note 4, 411). Aside from the fact that he makes it seems as though Angel spoke primarily about the problems of history painting, decorum, and "Affectkunstwerken" (painting of emotions), it is incorrect to propose that Angel links "realistische Natuurwendinge" (realistic rendering of nature) to genre pieces in particular (the "vrije schilderijen"). As stated before, Angel cites history painting as well as all the other specialties. It is significant that Angel mentions these various specialties in the same breath and that he applies his emphasis on imitating nature to all of them equally.

48. On the basis of this, the recent assumption that history painting was generally considered to be the highest goal of painting during this period seems to rest on somewhat shaky ground (even Van Hoolst's remained quite ambivalent about this several decades later). Incidentally, I do not mean to imply that this view was not held by a number of Dutch painters who concentrated intensively on history painting and who were often engaged in a direct dialogue with Italian art; "academic" aspirations can certainly be discerned in this period as well (see Henzel Miedema, "Kunstschilders, gilde en academie: Over het probleem van de emanci-patie van de kunstenaars in de Nederlandsche Nederlanden van de 16de en 17de eeuw" Oud Holland 119 (1985): 19-25). Since the exhibition Gods, Saints and Heroes — in which so many aspects of Dutch history painting were rightly rescued from obscurity — there has been a tendency to exaggerate the proportion of history paintings in Dutch art production (for example, Blathwayt (see note 3), 425). Interest in history paintings during this period was quite minimal. In Leiden, for example, there were hardly any history painters active around mid-century, and even in extremely rich Leiden collections of this period, the percentage of history paintings is very small, and these are often sixteenth-century pieces. It is also incorrect to propose, as it done quite often nowadays, that history paintings were generally the most expensive. Among the most expensive paintings of the seventeenth century were depictions of maidservants, fashionably dressed young women, drinkers, etc. by painters such as Dou and Van Mieris.

49. Significantly, in the same year that Angel gave his lecture — the year in which the Leiden painters established their own guild (see note 11) — Jan Oosters published the second edition of his Beschryvinge der Stadt Leyden, to which he added several pages about Leiden painters. In
Art and Reality

doing so, he appears to have consciously striven to create a respectable Leiden painting tradi-
tion. See also Shuijert (see note 18), 15 and 30.

48. It is probable, for example, that Don and his equally successful pupil Frans van Mieris —
painters who gained exceptional fame and international fame and to whom Angel’s ideas
would appear to be particularly applicable — considered themselves without reservation as
craftsmen (albeit of an extremely high level). Both came from a milieu in which the craft was
already carried out on a high socioeconomic level (see Shuijert [see note 18], 48–93). For the
relationship between craft, guild, and “academic” ambitions, see Miedema (see note 46), 1–29.

49. Thus, in my view, it is not at all evident that Angel had “seen colligere, tradendi tradend
hepatica waardering voor de literatuur, inhoudelijke aspecten van de invensie” (an exclusively tradi-
tionally determined appreciation for literary aspects of invention), as Miedema wrote in 1973
(see note 12), 30.

50. Chapman (see note 13), 146. In my view, Chapman’s opinion that this was the goal of
Angel’s book is indefensible, as it is the idea that “its keeping with humanist art theory he ranks
history painting highest,” 295. It seems equally incorrect to say that “Angel glorifying the art
of painting as an intellectual activity” and that “[he] draws heavily on classical authors and
Italian art theory.” Elsewhere through Van Mander, and, to a lesser extent, Junius,” 294. On the
contrary, it seems characteristic that Angel shows little interest in or understanding of all of
this. Chapman wrongfully perceives Angel as an erudite individual who, to some extent, popu-
larized Van Mander. In addition, the title print (the subject of Chapman’s article), though clever,
it is less erudite than the assumes. Depictions of Athena/Marsyas on a pediment within an enclosed
garden were a type of title already used in Leiden (the Athena Statue) see, for example,
Hesiod’s edition of Johannes Secundus, Hugenotische literatuur (Leiden, 1667). This type
was combined with Marsyas as pictured in the title page of Maresio (Chapman [see note 13],
fig. 3).

51. Angel includes a list of names of authors (mostly from antiquity) who wrote about painting
in order to demonstrate the dignity of this art. He extracts some names from Junius as well as
from Van Mander (Miedema, 1973 [see note 13], 38). More interesting than the names that
he includes are those that he omits: aside from Junius himself, one searches in vain for impor-
tant Italian writers such as Leo Battista Alberti and Giorgio Vasari (only Leonardo is men-
tioned), let alone more recent Italian writers such as Gian Paolo Lomazzo and Giovanni Battista
Arnesani. Jan Otters, however does appear on the list (see note 47).

52. Nor, for example, does Huygens speak of it in his lengthy account in which he makes
no secret of his admiration for many aspects of Dutch painting (Huygens [see note 21], 64–67).
Neither is it mentioned in De Bruyn’s prefacing to Junius (see note 45), where the dignity of paint-
ing is emphasized using a variety of arguments. The name can be said of the laudatory poems
on painting collected in Thomas Asseltijn, Broederschap der schilderkunst (Amsterdam, 1663).

Didactic and Disguised Meanings?

53. Dick Ralatals: Campiysen, “De enige gunstigdom der schilderkunst,” a translation
in verse of Johannes Evertz, Geeratarzus’s “Ode nederlands” (circa 1700) in Stichtelyk ryzen
(Amsterdam: J. Golem, 1657), 238–19. This is discussed further in note 75.

54. This is most clearly seen in recent publications by Bruyn. For example, Bruyn (see
note 75); see also Een gouden eeuw als erfstuk: Afsehenscollege (Amsterdam: Kunsthistorisch
Instituut der Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1968), farewell lecture held at September 1975; idem,
“Miniaturistische docuim exemplaar” en Allegorie als Komponente des sog. Gemäldebildes,
in Bock and Gauklergs (see note 1), 31–33; and idem in Sutton (see note 5). The quotation cited
at the beginning of this article (see note 5) is quite characteristic.

55. See for example De Jongh, 1976 (see note 8), 5–22; idem, 1977 (see note 8), 144–61;
1976, 1976 (see note 8), 30, 35, 27–28; Bruyn, 1968 (see note 54), 12; idem in Bock and Gauklergs
(see note 1), 39–42; Raupp (see note 4), 41; Hask (see note 6), 73–74. In equating the literary
theory of comedy with a theoretical framework for genre painting, Raupp even goes so far as
to assert that when “vern·kunstig” (meaning) is mentioned in art literature, “beloved” (edi-
ifying) is really meant (Raupp [see note 4], 47). Again, it seems significant that in seventeenth-
century texts on painting there is frequently mention of the use (“vern·kunstig”) and never
of the other (“beloved”), while in statements about comic poetry, the authors continually refer
to both aspects.

56. Bruyn is the most outspoken in equating the principles of emblem literature with paint-
ing, for example:

Wet Gats hier definere is het embleem van tinnveld... maar de definitie gaat zonder meer
op het schijnpaar realistisch bedoeld bedoel dat de schilderkunst betaal en delicate
wat wij gekaage hebben echter te zoeken.

(What Gats defines here is the emblem of tinnveld... but the definition goes without
merely on the schijnpaar realistisch bedoeld bedoel that the schilderkunst betaal en delicate
what we geschaade hebben echter te zoeken.)

See Bruyn, 1976 (see note 54), 12. Differences in form, context, function, and tradition are not
considered. Prints with morality inscriptions are also, of course, eagerly cited and equated
with the meaning of the image (and even considered a “guarantee” for 16), see Bruyn in Bock
and Gauklergs (see note 1), 39. I shall not elaborate here on the fact that one must be very
careful in using prints bearing inscriptions because, after all, they fulfill a very different func-
tion than paintings. Moreover, an inscription does not necessarily inform us about the meaning
of an image; the inventiveness of the poet, who relies on his own tradition, serves as accom-
paniment to the "elegant" of the pictorial image. See, for example, the excellent article by
Art and Reality

E. McGrath in Vekman and Hofstra (see note 1) 79-80. A commercialism is seldom expressed in poems about paintings; see K. Portman, "Geschreven met de linkerhand? Lettermen tegenover schilderkunst in de gouwe sarsen," in Historische letterkunde, ed. M. Spies (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1974), 107. In no way do I mean to suggest that emblematic literature and prints with inscriptions cannot be extremely important tools for the interpretation of paintings (see also note 8).

57. Samuel van Hoogstraten, Inleiding tot de hoge schoole der schilderkonst (Rotterdam: F. van Hoogstraten, 1699), 55-59. See De Jongh, 1970 (see note 8), 20, 162 (see note 9), 546; idem, 1971 (see note 8), 371 and Haak (see note 65), 75.

58. De Lairesse describes the same idea in greater detail when he says that for clarity it may be necessary to include symbols that represent, for instance, dissimulation, perfidy, or deceit in the form of "beelden, beesten, of Hieroglifie figuren" (statutes, animals, or hieroglyphic figures), "om alle dwistheden en twijfelliceheden weg te ruimen" (to remove all obscurity and doubts). See Gerard de Lairesse, Groot schilderboek (Amsterdam: Hendrick Desbordes, 1735), 1: 76. The chapter in Van Hoogstraten entitled "Van de bysoegelyken ende poëtische uitvindingen" deals entirely with historical representations.


"Warom wert Item-con, soo ijder mogen vagen, elkyst boexen onder const soo hooghe voor-gedogen? Rekk alg om dat den groot daer soendering in speel; Men tsint geen dergelijken; soo on-miijck woe gedeselt.

(One might ask why it is that emblematic art is held in higher esteem than other arts? I say, it is because the mind plays a singular role therein; one finds nothing like it, communicated so ingeniously.)"

60. See also Portman (see note 58), 106: "een plakiet voor het samengaan van de metaur-funstien in de vergane Item-const" (= a plea for the union of the Inner arts in the so-called art of emblematic representation). It seems to me characteristic that here, too, whenever Van de Venne speaks about poetry, terms such as an "elevated mind," "learned," "high and deep thoughts," and "edification" appear repeatedly.

61. See note 25 (the same thought expressed by Cats).

62. Even more remarkable than the words "De seer vormschliche en vernaeh-bevend edel Schilderkonst" (the amusing and ingenious noble art of painting) with which Van Mander opens the preface to his Grondli -- which seem to imply mineure en deel deelt (the union of the useful with the pleasant) -- have been cited as proof that "het levende en onderhoudende doe van de kunst" (the edifying and entertaining goal of art) was stressed repeatedly (De Jongh, 1976) [see note 8], 40 -- in the fact that he does not discuss this any further. That Van Mander published his artist's biographies "tot nut en vermaech van de Schilders en Const bewinders" (for the benefit and amusement of painters and art lovers), a phrase also cited by De Jongh in the above mentioned argument, says nothing about an edifying goal of painting. The fact that only such snarling quotations could be brought forward in support of this argument speaks volumes.


64. Hassel Mardema, Kunst,鸳鸯i, and kunstwerck bij Karel van Mander [Alphen aan den Rijn: Canalleto, 1971], 125-127. See also Shuurman (see note 63), 315-16, where it is argued that this must be viewed as an independent commentary on the Metamorphoses fitting entirely within a specific literary tradition.

65. De Jongh, 1976 (see note 8), 17; see note 60.

66. Rappo (see note 4), 406. Rappo speaks of art literature but he cites the familiar topics of the bitter pill and the sweet nectar, etc., from works totally unrelated to this literature. (On this repeated tops, but in relation to commentaries on the Metamorphoses, see Shuurman [see note 63], 314).

67. See also, for example, Van de Venne (see note 59), 59-60. Following De Brun's example, Angeli (see note 20), 25, states that everything is transcendent except God, but "no komen de Schilderijen eenige honderden jaren duurten, het welke gemaakt is" (paintings can last several hundred years, which is enough). The motif of capturing transient matters and vanishing time occurs very frequently in names (just one example, De Bai says of Van Mieris's art that it is "De zo oor naa verouwer, en trent des grijven tyd" [challenges nature and defies gray time]): see Cornelis de Bie, Het gouden cabinet van de edel en edy schilder-const (Antwerp, 1656), 94. This motif is common, especially in poems on visual images. The theme of vanishing time is central to Jan van Wij's poem "Strijt tussen de doods en natur, of eere der schilderkonst," in Alle de gedichten (Amsterdam, 1770), 1: 199-200. It is to be hoped that more literary studies will appear, like those by Portman, which deal with various poems on visual images (see, for example, K. Portman, "Vondels gedicht 'Op een Italiaensche schilderij van Sumner,'" in G. van Kempen et al., 'T onderzoek leert: Studies over middeleeuwsche en 17de-eeuwse literatuur ter nagedachtenis van Prof. Dr. L. Renz (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aco, 1981), 97-108. These studies are of great importance for a better understanding of the perception of painting in this period because they can clarify what is traditional and what is special in these poems and in the approach of the poet.

68. On the painting as a "deel" of the eye see, for example, Camphuysen (note 75) and Van Hoogstraten (note 79). Jan de Bracius the Younger elaborates on this subject in his Alle volпочige werken (Hartlingen, 1695), 317.
Art and Reality

Dech her bedeckh u een geschoold en onschuldig bedregh, want aan dingen, die niet en zijn, zich zo te vergaper, als iets ware, en daar zoo van geleid he verdien, dat my on ademen, zonder schade, dien maken daet zijn; hoe kan dat tot de verkiating onzer gemoeders niet dienstigh wees? Zeker, het verschilt yemand buite maat, wanneer by door een naliche gieikens der dingen werdt bedregh.

[Yet its deceit is enjoyable and harmless, for to gape at things which do not exist as though they actually do exist and to be influenced by them to such an extent that we — of our own accord — without harm make believe they exist; how can that serve to give us pleasure? Certainly it must give one great joy when one is deceived by a false likeness of things.]

See also note 70.

70. Dirk Trautden's poem on the work of Dou — who was dubbed "de Hollandsche Parnassius" (the Dutch Parnassius) — incorporates many of the elements cited: "Zeg Zeeuw dit bown, by seurd al voor bedregh: Hier het geen verf, maar groot en leven op 't paneel" (If Zeeland were to see this banquet, he would be deceived once again [Here it is not paint lying on the panel but spirit and life].) See Rijksbundel, bound with the Tyd-schrift (Amsterdam, 1894), 17.

W. van Heemskerck's poem praising Van Mieris advises: "Let hoe Pencel en Verf met 't leven d'ont om schilderij. En Zeeuw mogt geen zien: Zij maakten 't weidse en streken van de wereld van 't leven deel" (Notice how brush and paint contend with life as in battle. If Parnassius and Zeeland were to see this, they would cause their competition, and, indeed, would vie to office [Van Mieris] the laurel wreath). This was an inscription which appears below A Bloemaert's engraving after Van Mieris's self-portrait; it is also cited by Arnold Houbraken.

De groote schouwburgh der Nederlandsche konstchikders en schildersnaam (Amsterdam: Arnold Houbraken, 1718-1722; The Hague: J. Swart, C. Bouquet & M. Guillard, 1753; 3 vols.). The painted curtains which appear to hang in front of paintings by, for example, Leiden "schilderkinders" such as Dou, Van Gassenbeek, De Pijp, and Van Mieris undoubtedly allude to this anecdote (see for example Sluijter et al. [see note 61], figs. 21 and 22; and cat. nos. 9, 19).

71. Van Haagheste (see note 57), 19-25.

72. He probably borrowed this from Van Mander (see note 85); ibd. 6, who, however, quotes it within a different context.

73. For this, and, in my view, the related fascination with mirrors and reflections in Dutch art of the period, see Eric J. Sluijter, "Zijn volmaakte schilderij als een spiegel van de natuur": Spiegel en spiegelsbeeld in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de 17de eeuw," in Oog in oog met de spiegel, ed. N. J. Brederoo et al. (Amsterdam: Arnhem Uitgevers, 1980), 169-69.

74. This is discussed extensively in Sluijter (see note 63), 270-77. These thoughts concern-

Didactic and Disguised Meanings

ing the eye, when linked to paintings, were primarily applied to the much criticized representation of nodes, but in less explicit form that same attitude could be applied to other kinds of paintings and certainly to the scenes of amourous amusement and allure that dominated genre painting. In several verses devoted to the image of a beloved, Van de Venne employed the idea of the powers of the eye and painting; he ends with the beautiful line: "De oog is met werkelijk, / geenen is niet versnoven. / zoo lang men met de oos tot en zoetsche commented!" (The eye is never satisfied, desire is never sated. As long as one remains involved with art and [nearly] love, see note 65, 66. Such Petrarchan thoughts seem important for the interpretation of innumerable genre pieces in which a young woman is in the center of attention, usually in an amorous situation that implies seduction (a seduction that is often directed at the observer).

75. Dirk Rafaels. Camphuysen (see note 59), 214. Furthermore, in an earlier poem included in this collection, Camphuysen speaks about the "prevende Kam, van maals Malery, Het noediel van guve hout en feuiche antwer" (spotted art of foolish painting, The food of evil lust and villainous idleness) (ibid., 4).

76. Ibid., 225.

77. See also Lawrence O. Goodrich, "Conversation, Realism, and the Interpretation of Dutch and Flemish Tempt Painting," Sozios 15 (1980), 146. He arrives at such a formulation on the basis of his study of engravings. His working method is based on a thorough investigation of the range of subjects and motifs within a particular theme and the conventions occurring therein. This seems an extremely fruitful point of departure for a more balanced interpretation of meaning. I strove for a similar method with regard to mythological themes (see note 68), esp. 3 and 8.

78. As has already been noted, we are concerned here with art that was sold on a large scale by art dealers and thus had to cater to a broad, primarily anonymous public. The buyer created the context for the work based on his own background. For this reason alone, it is futile to search for the meaning of a painting. Rather, a whole range of possible thoughts and associations that relate to a particular theme and manner of representation should be considered (see also Sluijter [see note 65], 8 and 89-91).

79. Camphuysen (see note 59), 214. Undoubtedly, Camphuysen was referring primarily to biblical and mythical scenes containing erotic allusions, but the manner in which he distinguishes between the effect of the image and the verbal addition is significant, nevertheless.

80. On the choice and representation of mythological subjects in the Northern Netherlands, see Sluijter (see note 65), 5 and 8, particularly chap. 5. In this respect, Schama's interpretations also offer much food for thought, see Simon Schama, Overschouwen en onthullen: De Nederlandse cultuur in de gouden eeuw (original English ed., New York: Knopf, 1971; Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 1978), esp. chaps. 5 and 6. It is noteworthy that when interpreting paintings, Schama uses the traditional iconographical method as a point of departure but often arrives at strongly divergent interpretations on the basis of his own approach.
Art and Reality


82. See Redele (see note 31), 93-94. His theory that there are virtually no genuine pieces in which an emblem constitutes a direct source for the representation seems correct. A distanced image has come into being precisely because several examples have been emphatically and successfully brought toward even in the case of a showpiece such as Don’s The Quackhaar [see p. 75 of this volume]. I do not think that emblems in any way constitute a source for the painting; nor were they of direct importance to contemporary observers for the interpretation of the work. In this respect, Redele’s correction of the symbolism of the branch of grapes is illuminating. See also Shapley (see note 95), 255 and n. 1, where the over-specific interpretations of the branch of grapes are also pointed out. This is not intended to deny the importance of emblems as aids to interpretation but to emphasize that they must be used primarily to trace possible associations for specific motifs.

83. On the projection of an undue theoretical load, see Jochen Becker’s excellent review (Oud Holland 80 [1977]: 28-38) of Hans-Joachim Raupp, Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellung in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984), a study which bases interpretations almost entirely on art-historical concepts.

84. The clearest expression of this is found in De Jongh, 257 (see note 86), the title “Realisme en schijnrealisme” already indicates this shift, and on this basis De Jongh can consider “waar symboliek opbouwt en ‘lege’ vorm begint” (where symbolism ends and ‘empty’ form begins) and whether “een schilder senu een meer beeldende dan hij laat zien” (a painter perhaps meant nothing more than he represented). The same ideas have been expressed more recently in Bruyn (see note 70); idem 1986 (see note 54); idem in Sutton (see note 53); idem in Bock and Gantgren (see note 1). As an alternative to his viewpoint on meaning, Bruyn sees only an implied meaninglessness “Realiteit... als Soferheid” (“Realism... as soferheid”) in an essay “‘Natuurlijke’ en ‘symbolische’ vormen” (257 [1986]), and interprets the representation of quotidian matters as “een bijna in Holland aanwezige onmacht” (an evidently accepted standard in Holland) to which conventional symbolism had to be adapted (Bruyn, 1986 [see note 54], 71). See also note 55.

85. Once again, this is expressed most prominently in the above-mentioned articles by Bruyn. He even goes so far as to state that the seventeenth century reality does not offer anything new, or if it does, “het moet zijn de ondiepere verhouding van deze vormen gegeven in de afbeelding van de allengangen omvorming en een ondiep symbolische vertaling van de thematiek” (see note 1).