

### Reviewing *Vermeer and the masters of genre painting*: a response\*

In *Simiolus*, vol. 39, nr. 4, Peter Hecht reviewed *Vermeer and the masters of genre painting: inspiration and rivalry*, a catalogue with essays accompanying the spectacular exhibition of the same title held in Paris, Dublin and Washington.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, Hecht's book review misrepresented the content of the catalogue and the concept of this pioneering exhibition of genre painting, which he acknowledged was "certainly one of the most ambitious ever made."<sup>2</sup> As a contributor to the book and a member of the exhibition's scholarly advisory committee, I feel compelled to respond and to dispute some misunderstandings.

Though one would expect a reviewer's critical comment on the catalogue, which consists of seven substantial essays and twenty-two short texts about groups of two to six paintings, Hecht's assessment proved to be mainly a critique of the exhibition's concept and hardly a review of the catalogue itself.<sup>3</sup> For example, the longest and most innovative essay, "Collective style and personal manner" by Melanie Gifford and Lisha Deming Glinsman, was not addressed at all. Hecht only mentions that it focuses on "questions of materials and technique,"<sup>4</sup> as if it were the obligatory technical article that figures in every exhibition catalogue nowadays. This essay is, however, a truly groundbreaking study in technical art history. A comparative examination of 105 paintings by 12 different painters of high-end genre paintings, it is the most wide-ranging technical investigation to date. It offers several entirely new insights into both the strategies typical of these painters in their use of certain refined techniques and materials, and into the personal manners they developed, comparing their methods of depicting the same motifs, such as oriental carpets, shimmering velvet jackets and gleaming satin skirts. The research by Gifford and Deming Glinsman provided evidence that artists were spurred to new levels of wit and technical prowess by studying their competitors' innovations, and it demonstrated that these paint-

ers responded to each other's work while establishing their own distinctive manners.<sup>5</sup> Thus, through technical research, the authors succeeded in underpinning many of the arguments about the artistic relations at the center of this exhibition. This fundamental conclusion was apparently lost on the reviewer. The same happened to an important article that "tells us about the art market." This is the only remark about Piet Bakker's essay "Painters of and for the elite: relationships, prices and familiarity with each other's work," which is crucial for substantiating many aspects of the exhibition's claims.

Instead, Hecht complains about the absence of certain topics in the catalogue. He finds fault with the fact that no provenance is supplied and that no attention is paid to the history of the paintings' reception, for example.<sup>6</sup> It will be clear to anyone who has seen the exhibition that both — albeit conventional topics for catalogues — are relatively insignificant in the context of this show, apart from information about the first owners, which is extensively discussed if such material is known.<sup>7</sup> The history of reception has no bearing on the exhibition's theme, except for the reception of the paintings during the lifetime of the group of artists concerned. This kind of reception — how artists, art dealers and connoisseurs responded to those paintings (admittedly, for the greater part hypothetical) — is of pivotal importance for most of the essays.

Finally, the condescending tone with which the reviewer remarks upon the number of appendices providing insight into the raw data mobilized for the exhibition is quite inappropriate. Hecht's remark "it is clear, for the better or worse, that the computer has here done its work," reveals that he obviously does not recognize the importance of publishing such data.<sup>8</sup>

As for Hecht's critique of the show's concept, the misrepresentation begins with the observation that the exhibition "is a bit of a hybrid" because "it is also a Vermeer exhibition."<sup>9</sup> The exhibition was certainly not meant as such, nor does it come close to approaching a "Vermeer exhibition." Not even the "Fore-

\* I am grateful to H. Perry Chapman, Jacquelyn N. Coutré, Jasper Hillegers and Elmer Kolfin for their thoughtful comments on this essay.

1 A.E. Waiboer *et al.*, exhib. cat. *Vermeer and the masters of genre painting: inspiration and rivalry*. Dublin (National Gallery of Ireland), Washington (National Gallery of Art) & Paris (Musée du Louvre) 2017. The title of the French edition is A.E. Waiboer *et al.*, *Vermeer et les maîtres de la peinture de genre*.

2 P. Hecht (book review), "Adriaan E. Waiboer *et al.*, exhib. cat. *Vermeer and the masters of genre painting*," *Simiolus* 39 (2017), pp. 420–26, esp. p. 421.

3 The book contains essays by Adriaan E. Waiboer, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., Eric Jan Sluijter, Marjorie E. Wieseman, E. Melanie Gifford and Lisha Deming Glinsman, Piet Bakker and Blaise Ducos. The catalogue entries were written by Adriaan E. Waiboer, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., Eric Jan Sluijter, Marjorie E. Wieseman, Quentin Buvelot, Eddy Schavemaker and Blaise Ducos.

4 Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 426.

5 Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 65 and 83.

6 Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 426. He also regrets that there is no elucidation of why iconographic interpretation plays no role in this catalogue (though it is not entirely absent, as he suggests), and that it lacks a discussion of Lairesse's approach to genre painting. Indeed, these might have been valuable additions.

7 The more recent provenance is of no importance here and can easily be found in museum catalogues and monographs, as all the paintings under consideration are well known.

8 A website has been developed in conjunction with the exhibition: [www.connectvermeer.org](http://www.connectvermeer.org), which presents data not included in the catalogue and serves as an interactive research platform on Dutch genre painters active in the period 1650–75 (not mentioned by the reviewer).

9 Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 421.

word” by the directors of the three museums suggests that; it states clearly in the first two sentences: “Genre paintings of the Dutch Golden Age have been the subject of many exhibitions, a number of which have celebrated the achievements of individual masters, including Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Gabriel Metsu, Frans van Mieris, Jan Steen and Johannes Vermeer. *Vermeer and the masters of genre painting: inspiration and rivalry*, however, differs in that it seeks to establish the relationships that existed among these and several other, outstanding Dutch genre painters active in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. It also examines how the masters drew inspiration from one another’s works, borrowing, emulating and surpassing paintings by their peers, together achieving the extraordinary richness and refinement that characterizes Dutch genre painting.”<sup>10</sup> We all understand that an exhibition, which contains many works by Vermeer because of its theme, has to have his name in its title for reasons of promotion. Communication departments and the media may have hyped Vermeer in particular,<sup>11</sup> but as Hecht astutely observes “*Ter Borch and the masters of Genre Painting* would have come closer to the mark.” The brilliance of Adriaan Waiboer’s concept was to enable a large audience to view a group of beloved paintings of the highest quality – the darlings of the public in every museum – from an entirely new perspective that took recent art-historical insights as the point of departure. Waiboer himself has contributed significantly to these developments through his monumental study on Gabriël Metsu.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of the exhibition is stated very clearly throughout the catalogue, and it appears quite prominently in the subtitle, *Inspiration and rivalry* (this subtitle was omitted in Hecht’s review). In his summary of the exhibition’s aims in the first paragraph of the review (“to show how certain more or less popular themes and motifs were developed in an ongoing competition between a small group of well-informed artistic rivals”), however, Hecht finds it necessary to add coquettishly “if I understand it correctly.”<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that he understood it correctly.

After discussing a catalogue entry that he selected to serve as an example, he concludes that “the pleasure of the seventeenth-century connoisseur is being reduced to the kind of academic hide-and-seek described above,” and that the painter’s creative act is interpreted “a bit too much as an early variant



1 Gerard ter Borch, *Two women making music, with a page*, c. 1657. Oil on panel, 47 × 44 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre

of *copy and paste*.”<sup>14</sup> Naturally, this is contrary to what the catalogue and exhibition sought to convey; by using such dismissive language he seems willfully to trivialize the exhibition’s theme. This example, an entry by the present author on “Musical duos,” which discusses two paintings by ter Borch, one by van Mieris and one by Steen (all of which are reproduced in Hecht’s review), offers an excellent case to demonstrate both the objective of the exhibition and Hecht’s misrepresentation of it (figs. 1–4).<sup>15</sup>

In his exploration of this entry, Hecht doubts whether van Mieris studied ter Borch’s *Two women making music* and adopted the young page in his masterful *Duet* (figs. 1 and 3).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he “certainly [does] not believe” that van Mieris inserted the lady from ter Borch’s *Young woman at her toilet* (fig. 2). I find it hard to believe, however, that someone familiar with the oeuvres of seventeenth-century genre painters thinks otherwise. It cannot be a coincidence that van Mieris also

were reproduced on pp. 424–25, figs. 5–8.

<sup>16</sup> Hecht, op. cit. (note 1), p. 424. Strangely, he writes about the subject of *The duet* (as a corrective?): “a man and a woman not making music but considering what to play.” The man is, however, definitely playing the lute, while the woman is turning the page and playing with her left hand in the way a keyboard player does. This gave van Mieris the opportunity to suggest movement, to depict the woman’s two hands and to have a lively ‘moving’ light on the edge of the music book.

<sup>10</sup> Waiboer *et al.*, op. cit. (note 1), p. xi.

<sup>11</sup> This occurred in Paris (where the museum elected to drop the subtitle of the exhibition). This resulted in huge crowds of visitors that the museum could not handle properly.

<sup>12</sup> A.E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, life and work: a catalogue raisonné*, New Haven & London 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Hecht, op. cit. (note 2), p. 421.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>15</sup> Waiboer *et al.*, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 128–34. In Hecht’s review they



2 Gerard ter Borch, *Young woman at her toilet with a maid*, c. 1650–51. Oil on panel, 47.6 × 34.6 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan



3 Frans van Mieris the Elder, *The duet*, 1658. Oil on panel, 31.6 × 24.9 cm. Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

painted a similar page entering a room from the right with a glass of lemonade on a tray in a scene of a music-making duo. No other painting prior to these works by ter Borch and van Mieris is known that includes the same motif.<sup>17</sup> To assume that van Mieris, trying his hand for the first time at such an elegant scene of elite leisure, would have come up with the same idea independently from ter Borch is absurd.<sup>18</sup> Van Mieris could have added a third person in the background in countless different

ways, but he chose to do it in clear dialogue with ter Borch.<sup>19</sup>

As is pointed out in the entry, not only the woman in van Mieris's *The duet* but also the velvet-upholstered chair in the right foreground obviously demonstrates the artist's thorough knowledge of ter Borch's *Young woman at her toilet with a maid*.<sup>20</sup> Or should we imagine that, by accident, both artists had such a chair positioned obliquely to the scene with the model that they were drawing in their studios?<sup>21</sup> The woman herself, about

17 Naturally, pages had been depicted before, especially by painters of merry companies, such as Esaias van de Velde, Dirck Hals, Pieter Codde and Anthonie Palamedesz. In the works of these artists, those boys are represented mostly pouring wine or busying themselves near a wine cooler or a buffet. In two garden parties by Esaias van de Velde one finds a page carrying a tray; see G.S. Keyes, *Esaias van den Velde 1587–1630*, Doornspijk 1984, cat. nrs. 65 and 66, figs. 135, 139. In those works, however, the page was an inconspicuous motif that ter Borch picked up and transformed into a more important actor.

18 Otto Naumann had already referred to ter Borch's painting when discussing van Mieris's *Duet*, see O. Naumann, *Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–1681)*, 2 vols. Doornspijk 1981, vol. 1, pp. 52–54.

19 One encounters the same peculiar misunderstanding in Christopher Brown's review of the exhibition in *The Burlington Magazine* 159

(2017), pp. 931–32, esp. p. 932. Doubting that these painters responded to each other's work, Brown writes "After all, as a gentleman enters a room and removes his hat to bow to a lady, how many possible poses could there be?" This raises the simple question of why one should paint a gentleman entering a room and bowing to a lady while removing his hat in the first place. The answer is: because ter Borch had done this — nobody had done so earlier. Secondly, there are hundreds of ways of depicting a man entering a room and greeting a lady! Brown is referring to Waiboer *et al.*, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 160–61.

20 Waiboer *et al.*, op. cit. (note 1), p. 128.

21 Repeating motifs from other painters — such as women in certain poses and actions — does not exclude the possibility that painters also studied models placed in such poses. Hecht, op. cit. (note 2), p. 423, is right that more attention should have been paid to this aspect of pro-





4 Jan Steen, *Young woman playing a harpsichord to a young man*, 1659. Oil on panel, 42.3 × 33 cm. London, The National Gallery

whom Hecht “fail[s] to see what they have in common... and think[s] that virtually everything is different,” is without any doubt van Mieris’s direct response to ter Borch, as is obvious from her posture, her dress and her position in relation to the chair and the secondary figure. At this moment in time, 1658, not only had van Mieris never before painted such graceful, richly dressed ladies, but also new in his oeuvre was the ter Borchian subject of a brilliantly rendered satin-clad woman as the alluring focus of a wealthy interior with few figures.

The sinuous posture of ter Borch’s woman in this painting — pelvis pushed forward, back pronouncedly arched and neck inclined forward — was entirely new in genre painting of the early 1650s. Very conspicuously and deliberately, ter Borch reinstalled grace (*grazia*, *bevalligheid*) as a central feature,<sup>22</sup> an

ducing these paintings. In this case, van Mieris may also have studied a chair placed in this position, but he did so because he was consciously responding to ter Borch’s example.

<sup>22</sup> See my essay “Emulative imitation among high-life genre painters,” in Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 44–45.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 45 and note 58. We know of one drawing by Gerard ter Borch (the Younger) after Goltzius and several by Moses ter Borch.

element that an earlier generation had banished from painting in the Netherlands in favor of an uncompromising naturalness. For this pose, ter Borch harked back to his intimate knowledge of prints by Hendrik Goltzius, notably those representing *Visus*, the female personification of Sight holding a mirror. Prints by and after Goltzius were study material for ter Borch when he trained in his father’s studio.<sup>23</sup> A few years later, the same sinuous pose appears in this work by Frans van Mieris. As the catalogue entry describes, van Mieris “exaggerated the stylized posture of the standing lady even more and elongated her proportions to underline her refined gracefulness. To accentuate the sinuous outline of the woman’s body, he placed her against the geometrical pattern of the horizontal and vertical lines of the black frame in the brightly lit background.... It must have been van Mieris’s intention to challenge connoisseurs to compare his manner of creating illusion with that of ter Borch, and to evoke amazement about the suggestion of light playing with great liveliness across all surfaces, painted in a breathtaking technique without visible brushstrokes. By doing something different and new with ter Borch’s innovations, he emphasized the artistic competition with the older master.”<sup>24</sup> Is this a description in which the connoisseur’s viewing pleasure is reduced to a mere “academic hide-and-seek”? It is the difference between the two artists that is underlined here, to demonstrate how van Mieris brilliantly, and very consciously, transformed ter Borch’s compositions. Van Mieris’s colleagues, many of whom must have been familiar with his small panel, recognized at once the possibilities of the young woman playing a keyboard instrument, a motif through which van Mieris had enriched the repertoire of high-life genre painting.<sup>25</sup> The first to react was his friend Jan Steen (fig. 4).

Hecht agrees that Jan Steen indeed responded to van Mieris’s *The duet*, and continues: “But Steen being Steen, he reacted to his colleague’s invention with irony.... Steen evidently used van Mieris’s painting as a formal point of departure, but while playing with its form he translated its subject into something rather more amusing, something that could make its (male) audience grin.... I think its sense of humour is what a collector is likely to have enjoyed most — rather than puzzling over it with friends to find out what exactly its painter had ‘adopted’ and ‘inserted’ from which specific source,” after which follows the reviewer’s remark on interpreting the creative act too much as *copy and paste*. Thus, Hecht implies that the catalogue entry

Gerard ter Borch the Elder’s drawings had strong Mannerist characteristics; he clearly had his children work after inventions by Goltzius and Bloemaert.

<sup>24</sup> See Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47 and also p. 129. Van Mieris knew this motif well from prints of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.



5 Gerrit Dou, *Woman at the clavichord*, c. 1665. Oil on panel, 37.7 × 29.8 cm. London, Dulwich Picture Gallery

overlooked what he sees as the essence of Steen's painting, the humor. Contrary to this suggestion, however, is the fact that the text on this painting emphasizes precisely this, while also pointing out that Steen, like van Mieris, was well-acquainted with ter Borch's *Two women making music*. It describes that Steen reshaped similar motifs into something entirely his own.<sup>26</sup> "Steen was well aware... that in order to compete with van Mieris he had to summon his greatest strength: liveliness of expression and humorous wit. His delightfully timid girl makes van Mieris's lady look overly sophisticated and artificial. Her concentrated and entirely natural pose immediately recall ter Borch's singing woman. She too is placed against a large tapestry covering the wall, which, for these painters and their audi-

<sup>26</sup> The catalogue entry goes on to discuss paintings by Metsu and Caspar Netscher, both of whom follow up on the challenge that ter Borch, van Mieris and Steen had posed. There can be no doubt that they knew the ter Borch paintings as well as van Mieris's *Duet*. In addition, at least Metsu also knew Steen's painting; see Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 130–34.

<sup>27</sup> It is mentioned in *ibid.*, p. 286, note 8, that this is, in fact, an actual instrument, an example of which is still in the Germanisches Landesmuseum in Nuremberg (Andreas Rückers the Younger, dated 1654).



6 Johannes Vermeer, *Woman seated at a virginal*, c. 1671–74. Oil on canvas, 51.5 × 45.5 cm. London, The National Gallery, Salting Bequest

ence, signaled an aristocratic interior. The young man casually leans on the harpsichord, while a page approaches carrying an enormous theorbo-lute, to be used by the suitor to prove that he can harmonize with her. The lid of the instrument is inscribed with large capitals: *Acta virum probant* (Actions prove the man)."<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere in the catalogue it is described how Gerrit Dou, in turn, responded to these motifs developed by Leiden artists from a younger generation, demonstrating how he was able to integrate them into his own highly successful signature format and manner, and how Vermeer contended with both van Mieris and Dou when he took up the subject of the woman at a keyboard instrument in two late paintings.<sup>28</sup> His *Young woman seated at the virginal* (fig. 6) for example, undeniably refers to Dou's *Woman at the clavichord* (fig. 5). In these works both paint-

Perhaps the patron for whom Steen painted the picture owned this instrument, which makes the humor even more poignant. The other inscription on the instrument ("Soli Deo Gloria") was not "overlooked," *pace* Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 424. In a catalogue entry in which five paintings are discussed in a very restricted number of words, and in which the iconography of the paintings is not the main focus, one has to make choices about what to discuss.

<sup>28</sup> Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 47–48. See also pp. 135–39, Marjorie E. Wieseman on "Inviting duets."

ers displayed the vastly different techniques with which they rendered the world around them. They emphasized their individual characteristics in figure types, arrangement, lighting, ways of suggesting space and manner of painting, thus creating a “dissimilar similarity” (to invoke Franciscus Junius’s statement on emulation).<sup>29</sup>

Regarding Vermeer, Hecht “could not help but wonder why Vermeer would have been interested in such a painting by Dou at all, unless he wanted to know what to avoid.”<sup>30</sup> This is precisely the point: the best way to demonstrate that he could create a convincing illusion with entirely different means was to deliberately use the same subject and motifs. Dou was, after all, the most highly paid master of his day — for this reason alone Vermeer would have been very interested in his work and eager to show off what he could do with the same material. When a connoisseur like Balthasar de Monconys visits Delft, sees a painting by Vermeer of a single figure and is scandalized by the outrageous price, and sees the next day in Leiden a painting in Dou’s studio, also showing a single figure and of exactly the same price, he would have compared these exceptionally precious objects in his mind’s eye. He would have admired the entirely different ways in which these two artists were able to create a stunning effect of reality. Hecht finds it “still... important to analyze how Vermeer transformed what he observed and saw — in life and art — into that particular reality which we still recognize as his,” again implying that this is lacking in the catalogue.<sup>31</sup> This is, however, exactly what the authors have done throughout the essays and entries.<sup>32</sup> In the entry on the two paintings mentioned above, Marjorie E. Wieseman highlighted the similarities and then remarked: “...and yet the two paintings could not be more different. While Dou’s painting relies on precise brushwork, pseudo-photographic realism and theatrical presentation to engage the viewer and convince him of the verisimilitude of the image, Vermeer’s realism is radically different in nature and effect. It is not so much concrete

detail that convinces us of the verisimilitude of this scene, but the universality achieved through the suppression of any detail — whether painterly or narrative — that might otherwise attach the image to a specific situation or event outside our realm of experience... his subjective handling of visual effects teases the viewer with the illusory reality of a dream, preventing absolute identification of the details.”<sup>33</sup>

Hecht finds that the “to my mind rather mechanical way in which artistic rivalry is defined... also makes the originality of a contribution like Vermeer’s very hard to understand.”<sup>34</sup> He seems to feel that the theme of the exhibition undermines, or calls into question, the originality of the artists. Taking a modern notion of originality for granted, he appears unwilling to accept that among this specific group of highly ambitious painters seventeenth-century concepts of innovation, invention and originality were frequently played out through emulative imitation.<sup>35</sup> The catalogue and the exhibition proved that comparing Vermeer’s works to paintings with similar themes and motifs by his peers offers us an unsurpassed opportunity to clarify the originality of Vermeer’s contribution and to give it all the more relief. Vermeer’s distinctive position is foregrounded by analyzing how, through emulative imitation (about which there is nothing “mechanical”) he “transformed what he observed and saw,” including motifs he appropriated from his most famous and most highly remunerated colleagues, to create “that particular reality that we still recognize as his.”<sup>36</sup>

Hecht regrets that the most original subjects by Metsu, van Mieris, de Hooch, Netscher and Ochterveld are not included. Indeed, not all genre painters took part in this competitive dialogue and the ones who did also experimented with new or special subjects. This exhibition, however, aimed to show how and why the most aspiring and most highly paid masters who produced high-life genre paintings in the third quarter of the century so often repeated the same themes and motifs as their

<sup>29</sup> Junius’s statement on emulation is discussed earlier in my essay, Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 43–44. This passage only occurs in the Dutch translation of Junius’s *Painting of the ancients*, which is twice as long as the Latin one and significantly longer than the English version. Thijs Weststeijn has recently shown that Junius, secretary to one of the greatest collectors and connoisseurs of his time, included many passages that must have been based on discussions among connoisseurs. Interestingly, the young ter Borch was in the studio of his uncle Robert van Voerst in London during the time that Junius was working on this translation. Van Voerst was also in the service of Arundel, a friend of Junius, and was involved in the publication of the Dutch translation; see T. Weststeijn, *Art and antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain: the vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591–1677)*, Leiden & Boston 2015, ch. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 421, refers here to Blaise Ducos’s discussion of the lacemakers by Vermeer and Dou in his “Interlacings” entry in Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 197, but he could as well have

referred to the ladies at a keyboard instrument. In this case we know that both Dou’s *Lacemaker* and his *Woman at the clavichord* were easily accessible in Joan de Bye’s collection, which was on view in a house in Leiden’s Breestraat.

<sup>31</sup> Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 423.

<sup>32</sup> See Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 33–34 (Wheelock’s essay); pp. 47–48 (Sluijter’s essay); pp. 74–77 and 81–83 (Gifford and Deming Glinzman’s essay); pp. 115–21 (Waiboer’s entry); p. 124 (Wheelock’s entry); p. 134 (Sluijter’s entry); pp. 139–40 (Wieseman’s entry); pp. 140–44 (Waiboer’s entry); p. 151 (Wheelock’s entry); p. 197 (Ducos’s entry); p. 230 (Schavemaker’s entry). They all emphasize what distinguishes Vermeer’s work from that of his peers.

<sup>33</sup> Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 139; on these paintings see also pp. 47–48.

<sup>34</sup> Hecht, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 424.

<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to Perry Chapman for her comments on this matter.

<sup>36</sup> See above, note 31.

colleagues.<sup>37</sup> This remarkable repetitiousness went together with an extremely high quality, which could only come into being through rivalry among a small group of painters vis-à-vis a group of very knowledgeable connoisseurs.<sup>38</sup> The latter were challenged to scrutinize how, by depicting the same subjects, these artists created illusion in different ways — different not only in painting technique but also in the construction of space through light, shade, color and tone; in placing figures in space; in movement and proportions; in narrative wit (and also the wit

and inventiveness with which they respond to each other); in liveliness and humor; and in expression of the passions. And that is exactly what I saw the present-day public doing in the exhibition, especially in Dublin, where the beautiful hanging, the configuration of space and the regulation of the number of visitors in the show gave them every opportunity to do so.<sup>39</sup>

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37 True emulative imitation was a privilege reserved only for the most ambitious and talented artists, otherwise it would result in taking bits and pieces and “combining them unartfully and infelicitously,” as Junius warned, see Waiboer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 43–44. The repetitious play with themes and motifs could result in rather boring paintings in the hands of the less talented, as, for example, in works by Ochtervelt. He is certainly a more accomplished artist when he is developing new themes. Hecht also expresses concern that Godfried Schalcken was entirely omitted. Schalcken, however, is of the next generation and did not try to emulate the great masters of the previous one. Rather, he worked according to the usual method of mixing motifs

from artists preceding him, thus endeavoring to develop new themes. He simply does not belong in this company.

38 See also Angela Ho’s excellent book, which tackles the same subject: A. Ho, *Creating distinction in Dutch genre painting: repetition and invention*, Amsterdam 2017.

39 Naturally, this also depended on the hanging of the paintings, which was not ideal in Paris. It did not help that a few paintings had been added that did not fit the concept (such as Vermeer’s *Allegory of faith*), nor that the sequences within the different groups of paintings did not always illuminate the relations. In Dublin, the visitor was able to enjoy the exhibition in its finest version.