

## FLEMISH ART THEORY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 17TH CENTURY — AN INVESTIGATION OF AN UNEXPLOITED SOURCE

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*The Golden Cabinet Of The Noble And Liberal Art Of Painting* was written in Flemish shortly before 1661 by the Antwerp rederijker, Cornelius de Bie. In this article it is discussed for the first time in the context of its position in the history of Netherlandish art theory. The tract follows more or less traditional lines concerning theory about Imitation and Art Education as well as in the application of art theoretical jargon in assessing paintings. It contributes, however, in its extension of the notion of *ut pictura poesis* to the art of architecture. Its greatest contribution is made in its recognition and upgrading of various genres of painting previously regarded as inferior.

*Die Gulden Cabinet Vande Edele Vrij Schilderconst* is kort voor 1661 geskryf deur die Antwerpse rederijker, Cornelius de Bie. In hierdie artikel word dit vir die eerste keer bespreek in die konteks van die Nederlandse kunsteorie. Die teorie oor Imitasie en Kunsopleiding, en die toepassing van aanvaarde kunsteoretiese terme in die evaluering van skilderye volg die tradisionele argumente na. Die boek lewer 'n bydrae deur die uitbreiding van die gedagte van *ut pictura poesis* tot die argitektuur. Die grootste bydrae word gelewer deur die erkenning en verheffing van verskeie skildergenres wat voorheen beskou is as van 'n laer rang.

*Het Gulden Cabinet Vande Edele Vrij schilderconst*<sup>1</sup> by Cornelius de Bie was published in 1661 at a crucial period in the history of Flanders, shortly after the conclusion of the Peace of the Pyrenees, when the place of the arts was being reassessed there. The book is divided into three parts, each preceded by prefaces and an introduction, as well as the usual laudatory passages in honour of the publication. The subject matter of the first two parts consists of (1) the lives of the past artists and (2) those of painters still living. The last section concerns the lives of engravers, sculptors and architects, living and dead, but also includes those painters omitted from the first two parts. The work is both a chronological and systematic treatise. The chronological sequence is interspersed with observations on art. It has never been studied as a reflection of attitudes towards art and the artistic situation in the Netherlands during the second half of the 17th century. Apart from the informative Introduction by G. Lemmens to the facsimile edition, no study of this work exists. From the 19th century onwards the book has merely been regarded as an encomium of mediocre literary standard, having been studied as a purely literary creation or as a straightforward biographical lexicon<sup>2</sup>. It was no doubt intended to be a literary creation and the disorganised verbosity and honeyed panegyric of De Bie certainly falls short of any obvious literary merit. But if the work is rejected as an art historical source on the grounds of its

apparent lack of objectivity, its significance and intention may be misjudged. Two more recent publications by Hessel Miedema, a translation and commentary on *Karel van Mander's: Den grond der edel vry schilderconst*, in two volumes (1973), and *Kunst, kunstenaar en kunstwerk bij Karel van Mander; een analyse van zijn Levensbeschrijvingen* (1981), have made available new material in the light of which the *Cabinet* merits renewed consideration. This article will attempt to explore what *The Golden Cabinet* reveals more generally about the art of the period.

De Bie's tract has to be considered in the context of its position in the history of Netherlandish art theory, between 1603/4 when Van Mander's *Het Schilderboeck* is published, and 1668/70 when "classicism" first manifests itself in Dutch art literature<sup>3</sup>. The origins of art theory can be identified in rhetoric. Renaissance rhetoric being primarily a systematic study of verbal stylishness based on the models and manuals of the classical rhetoricians, categorised artistic experience<sup>4</sup>. The beginnings of "classicism" in art theory is characterised by an increased influence of rhetorical and poetic concepts, when the association of the visual arts and rhetoric is more consistently and systematically worked out<sup>5</sup>. There are decidedly elements of "academicism" in Van Mander<sup>6</sup>, yet art is not as consistently theorised as in "classical" art theory. The contents of De Bie's work arranges itself in clusters of

themes characteristic of Renaissance art theory. The main thrust of the work is provided by the fashionable quotation from Horace, *ut pictura poesis*, which has been elevated to a dogma during the Renaissance. This agitation for the acceptance of painting as a liberal art, engenders corresponding nuances in theories about imitation (*mimesis*), the usefulness of art (instruction), the controversy about the order of precedence of the arts (*paragone*), about education (comprising *natura*, *ars*, *exercitatio* or talent, discipline and practise), and about the genres. Although De Bie's work is intended to make a contribution to the improvement of the social status of the artist when the academies are being founded, his art theory is not defined by the ideals to be associated with the academies<sup>7</sup>.

## UT PICTURA POESIS

### Mimesis

*Mimesis* is a rhetorical term applied to the visual arts. The comparison between painting and poetry was traditionally based on the fact that both arts are imitative<sup>8</sup>. The concept of "ars imitatur naturum" originally derived from Aristotle and was applied to the visual arts when it began to aspire to a position among the liberal arts devising its own laws. From Alberti onwards, the "nature" of art is as important as nature itself<sup>9</sup>. Art following nature implies that the structure of art should be according to nature. Van Mander emphasised the similarity between art and the structure of the cosmos. He also stressed the need "... to work a great deal from life, and, as well, from the imagination, in order to learn to understand all the principles of art"<sup>10</sup>.

De Bie believed that nature itself is perfect beauty without blemish, "... sonder blanketsel van flateringhe verciert" (66), and points the way to artistic perfection. However, De Bie goes further. He believed that the imitation of nature in art causes pleasure to the spectator, whether it is beauty or ugliness which is portrayed (570). This concept from Aristotle was formulated clearly by Dürer<sup>11</sup>. De Bie adopts it within a Christian, and specifically Catholic context. For him nature itself is the perfect creation of God. After the fall into sin, human understanding of nature was obscured, although nature itself remained untainted. Nature must be rediscovered through effort and industry of the benighted mind. The inclination to do so ("neersticheyt") is a gift by God's grace. Therefore the imitation of nature signifies God's power (66 & 431). In Reformation

theology, in contrast, nature is tainted by sin, and redemption of the mind is not a "bonum superadditum". A painter who revealed God's power through the close imitation of nature, according to De Bie is Jan Both. The sense of the poem written in honour of him is: "When we perceive the power of nature in the green growth of the earth, daily nourished by the grace of God, we are reminded of the origin of life. Jan Both painted this with such talent ("geesticheyt") that the heart of the observer of his work is inspired with virtue" (156). The use of the work "geesticheyt" is significant here. Since nature operates through hidden powers, talent or "gheest" is necessary to recognise the sound characteristics of the visible world<sup>12</sup>.

Justification for the customary use of the live model in contemporary academies was sought in its "origin", Adam, the first and perfect piece of sculpture created by God (567-69). The true essence of painting is illusion and the greatest achievement of the artist is verisimilitude. Daniel Seghers is exalted for his ability to create flowers so true to life that live bees would want to settle on it. "Life seems to dwell in his art" (215)<sup>13</sup>. Otto van Veen (41) is given as another example of a painter who excels in art, because nature is his guide. This indiscriminate imitation of nature is attacked by Netherlandish "classicist" art theorists for the first time a mere eight years after the publication of the *Cabinet*. To them the fundamental aim of art is the depiction of ideal beauty, not pleasure and utility<sup>14</sup>.

### Instruction

Since the Renaissance the liberal art of painting, analogous to poetry, is considered to be useful for its instructive function and for the fame it engenders. De Bie's emphasis on the commemorative and instructive function of historical paintings and portraiture, and on the power of devotional paintings to arouse and edify the faithful, are to be understood, not only in the context of *ut pictura poesis*, but also against the background of traditional arguments used in the iconoclastic controversies. These arguments resound right through the 17th century<sup>15</sup>. The aim of historical paintings is to strengthen the memory (243). Portraiture commemorates the virtues of the sitters (243). These notions have their origin in the Gregorian concept of paintings as *libri idiotarum*<sup>16</sup>. However, De Bie also quotes the well-known Ovidian phrase to substantiate it: "The memory of virtue is extended by poetry" (524). Painting can attain the same moral ends to which

poetry aspires. It should attract by its pleasing form and instruct by its content (359). Art is “not merely produced to please human sight and the sensual appetite, but for its utility and profit” (272). This is based on the Horatian “*miscuit utile dulci*” (*Ars Poetica*, line 343)<sup>17</sup>.

Painting has great affective power and can seduce man (567-569) or arouse devotion. This is based on the traditional Thomistic argument of “*ad excitandam devotionem*” put to use during the Reformation<sup>18</sup>. Yet Horace had also stressed that the effects of images are far more powerful and immediate than words<sup>19</sup>. De Bie’s laudatory poem in honour of, e.g., Geeraert Seghers celebrates the power of his devotional paintings to move many observers to tears. His works would inspire devotion in spectators for many years to come (96).

De Bie’s vehement defence of ecclesiastical images is not isolated in 17th century Flanders. By the 17th century the habit of meditating with the aid of images was well formed<sup>20</sup>. De Bie states that the devil himself, in the knowledge of the power of painting to benefit the Christian soul and move it to repentance, had summoned the iconoclasts, and caused “hypocritical” heretics to deny God’s omnipotence by rejecting miraculous images (268, 272 & 273).

## PARAGONE

### Painting

The gradual acceptance of the visual arts as a genuine intellectual pursuit in Italy during the 16th century precipitated the controversy about the order of precedence of the arts. The emancipation of the arts was not socially accepted in the 17th century Netherlands when attempts at instituting academies met with opposition. The *paragone* went on while the system of the visual arts as we know it today was being established.

A change in attitude towards drawing characterised the beginnings of what is regarded as “classical” art theory. Willem Goeree in his *Inleydinge Tot de Al-gemeene Teycken-Konst (Introduction to the Art of Drawing)* of 1668 described theoretically based drawing, the incarnation of the idea, as superior to painting, for the first time in Dutch literature. His description of an education in drawing was similar to that in later academism. In the pre-classical art theory of Van Mander drawing precedes painting, yet colour is the “soul” of painting<sup>21</sup>. De Bie shared Van Mander’s concept of drawing, yet his lack of emphasis on colour, in contrast to Van Mander, points the way to the classical emphasis on drawing. To De Bie (26 & 150)

painting (*pictura*, personified as *Pictura*) consists of drawing (soul) and paint (body). Drawing in the sense of the Tuscan-Roman “*disegno*”, is the foundation of all imitation, “. . . de siel . . . van Pictuer/Den grond-steen van den gheest, oft afbelt van Natuer” (450). Sometimes the term *pictura* is interchanged with drawing, as when *pictura* is described as the basis of beauty and perfection of all the “*arti del disegno*”, including building, measuring, wrought iron work, sculpting, carpentering, weaving, embroidery (148), and of all human skills including the art of warfare and the building of fortifications (478). Drawing is “. . . the foster mother of all noble skills, serviceable in war as well as peace” (570). The arts include mechanical and liberal arts alike, in the 17th century. De Bie describes the origin of *Pictura* as the origin of drawing: “It so happened that *pictura* acquired her essence and nature from a mere shadow. When the shepherd Philocles saw a shadow of his sheep in the sand in the sunlight, he diligently copied it. Through this action Drawing (being the soul of painting, whereas paint is the body) was born” (23). In contrast to Van Mander, De Bie reveals equal respect for engraving and painting. For him engraving is not in need of colour or paint, because its power lies in the nobility of drawing (457)<sup>22</sup>.

### Sculpture

The notion of *ut pictura poesis* was extended to sculpture. If painting was parallel to poetry, sculpture was comparable to rhetoric (503). Leonardo had classified sculpture as a manual art. In his Dialogue between Painting and Sculpture (467), De Bie drew on the arguments of Philips Angel in favour of painting. Angel’s *paragone* was a quotation from Cats<sup>23</sup>. Leonardo’s main theses in favour of painting were reflected<sup>24</sup>. De Bie’s counter arguments in favour of sculpture were less convincing, and throughout the rest of the book his preference for painting is evident. He at large came to the conclusion that: “. . . the noble work of a painter surpasses that of the sculptor” (22).

### Architecture

De Bie tried to extend the notion of *ut pictura poesis* to architecture, by loosely comparing it to the dramatic arts (458). Leonardo did not even include architecture in his comparison of poetry, music and sculpture to the art of painting in his *Paragone*<sup>25</sup>. The contemporary understanding of the system of the visual arts was reflected in the description of 1663 of the arts to be taught at the academy in Antwerp, as “. . . painting,

engraving, sculpture and those depending on it"<sup>26</sup>. Contemporary architects often started their careers as painters<sup>27</sup>. De Bie argued that architecture was based on painting, because the character and contours of architecture, and the light employed, derived from painting (525). He furthermore tried to elevate its status by associating it with the sciences. Its basis in geometry defined it as an intellectual activity and a liberal art (567 & 574). The profession was referred to as "engineer-architect"<sup>28</sup>. For De Bie architecture included the construction of bridges and its quality is measured by stability and durability (e.g., 416 & 458). Apart from this he celebrated the beauty of architectural sculpture rather than architecture itself (458). The "grondt" (basis or definition) of architecture, ". . . dese konst van grooten naem en vremden aert" (458) was denied to De Bie. However, the gradual development in the distinctive definitions of architecture and sculpture was reflected in the change of nuance of the word "metselrij". For Van Mander it could also refer to architectural sculpture. For De Bie it meant architecture alone.

Although the visual arts had been theoretically proven to be liberal and noble, this remained contradicted socially. Artists' aspirations to a better social position often take the form of demonstrating the esteem in which their profession is held by both the temporal and spiritual powers. A common element in Renaissance biographies on artists is a reminder of how much more the achievements of artists were valued in Antiquity<sup>29</sup>. Painting is believed to have been taught only to free-born youths during Antiquity, because it constituted the first step in the education in the liberal arts. This is an often quoted, but wrongly understood motif from Pliny: "The Romans formerly let only nobles practise the art of painting, and did not classify it among the crafts, skills and mechanical arts" (De Bie: 23)<sup>30</sup>. Stress has always been placed in the biography of artists from Antiquity onwards on the relationship between the artist and lay and religious leaders. De Bie quotes the well known instances of the relationship between Alexander and Apelles (54 & 55), and of Emperor Maximilian I holding Dürer's ladder as examples of the favour shown to artists by royalty. From the lives of e.g., Gillis Mostaert (74-89) and Adriaen Brouwer (91-94) he shows that artists have a quick wit in their dealings with the lay nobility. As virtuosi, the artists are considered to have superior insight into everyday life and to be suitable company for the social leaders of their time<sup>31</sup>. Such social success enhanced their reputation. Almost the only information quoted about e.g. Jan van Hoeck is his privilege of access to

the Pope's rare collection, his *regalia*, in Rome and the honours bestowed on him by successive Emperors (143). Otto van Veen's fame was enhanced by the praise bestowed on him by courtiers (42). The nobility of art is enhanced by the payments given to the artist; often he received material rewards or personal honours instead of merely financial recompense. The contemporary David Teniers II was described as being held in esteem by sovereigns of several countries. The king of Spain reserved a gallery for works by Teniers. The queen of Sweden rewarded him with a golden chain and a medal containing her portrait. For Teniers' collection of prints reproducing the rare Italian work in Archduke Leopold's collection, he received another golden chain and medal. Count Fon Soldani honoured him by sending him to England to buy Italian works there, and he was rewarded with a golden chain. Don Juan of Austria, furthermore more, had honoured Teniers, by often asking him to instruct him in painting<sup>32</sup>. More well-mannered and educated artists of the future academies would be in the position to share the status, until now enjoyed by court painters only.

In this way De Bie used traditional themes and contemporary examples to consider the social position of the artists. Evidence of a quest for social advancement in the Netherlands in the 17th century exists. The gentry and mercantile classes appear to have been aspiring to social respectability<sup>33</sup>. De Bie's audience would be particularly susceptible for his reasoning.

## THE GENRES

Van Mander's reference to "kunstdelen" or constituent parts of the art of painting in which the artist can specialise, is based on the *genera elocutionis* in rhetoric. The history painter combined most of these parts in one work and was the greatest or most "universal" painter<sup>34</sup>. The classification of various categories of specialisation in painting was initiated by "classicist" art theorists. De Bisschop's distinction (1669) between beauty and life constituted a beginning in the formation of the concept "genre". Samuel van Hoogstraeten (1678) elaborated on this and distinguished a hierarchy of three categories of subjects, i.e. paintings of lowly soldiers and ruins, small cabinet pieces representing fish, birds, and humans and lastly "poetische historien". Van Hoogstraeten explicitly compared these three orders with the Aristotelian distinction of the three natures of the soul (vegetative, sensible and intelligible), but

referred also to the three "genera dicendi" in rhetoric. Even in the last quarter of the 17th century no clear concept of "genre" had been formed<sup>35</sup>. However, specialisation increased in the course of the century. Many new independent subjects for paintings came into vogue<sup>36</sup>. This is reflected in the *Cabinet*.

De Bie in 1661 is the first Flemish author, and one of the very first Netherlandish authors to use a term approximating to the term "still-life". He speaks of "stilstaende dingen" (419) and "stilstaende werck" (273) to distinguish this genre from works painted after live models<sup>37</sup>. For Van Mander the imitation of immobile objects was merely a step in the programme of education of a young artist before painting moving natural objects<sup>38</sup>. De Bie does not appear to have shared Van Mander's low estimate of still-life painting. He referred to its nobility — "heel stilstaende werck" (529) — and emphasised the utility and pleasure to be derived from still-lives; they could be "heel sin-rijk" (full of meaning or instructive) and a pleasant intellectual or moral exercise: "... men can de verstant met vreught op slijpen" (529).

Part II of the *Cabinet*, praising the lives of the contemporary masters, differed from Part I in that descriptive captions are included for many contemporary artists identifying their special talents, e.g., "fruyt-schilder" (217), "blom-schilder" (295), painter of "bancket" (226), or "balleten en bancketten" (159). Phrases in the poems describe different kinds of still-lives, e.g., Alexander Adriaensen paints "stilstaende werck", ... especially fish and such subjects" (273) or "he painted fish and fruit with striking verisimilitude — who would not celebrate such talent" (62). Flower painting became especially fashionable in the second half of the 17th century. De Bie demonstrated his recognition thereof as an independent genre by devoting the first poem in Part II to a long biographical sketch of the flower painter Daniel Seghers, with its emphasis on the nobility the painter attained through his genre. His paintings are described as hanging in imperial collections and Seghers as having many special gifts bestowed upon him by the nobility and royalty. Paintings of flowers also have moral significance; perishable flowers remind the viewer of the transitory nature of life. De Bie found this moral appealing and repeated it in the poem on the flower painter Jan Phillip van Thielen (344). The dignity of this genre is once more emphasised in the long poem devoted to the life of De Heem: "... the flowers, silver objects and silk drapery, yes the landscapes, fish, meat and fruit are more valuable than gold, because the fruit is imbued with the nobility and power of art" (216-217). This is in accordance with the view

of flowers evidenced in the emblem literature from Cats to Poirter, as well as in much of the engraved material produced since the turning of the century.

Emmens has pointed out that poets did not show interest in non-academic genres like landscapes and interiors in the first half of the 17th century<sup>39</sup>. To them, as to Van Mander, "history painting" was the highest genre. "History painting" included the portrayal of scenes from the Bible, legend and mythology. Its major characteristic was the inclusion of human figures. "History" consisted of "significant human actions" according to the well-known Aristotelian definition. For Alberti this was the chief business of a painter. Van Mander regarded these subjects as "groots", a term reminding of the rhetorical concept *genus grande* (the sublime)<sup>40</sup>. However, no hierarchy of genres exists for De Bie. Describing the different specialities of the brothers Backerel — "... one had the talent to portray landscapes, and the other the character of humans", he concludes, "... yet the works by both are still famous and provide instructive examples to the youth" (108). The small works of Francois Snyers are as dignified as large paintings including human figures: "One artist has the talent to paint small figures and the other to paint large representations of nature, the third of landscapes, the fourth of fruit and the fifth of animals (60).

Until Van Mander's time landscape was not regarded as an independent genre, but rather as background for portraits or historical paintings<sup>41</sup>. However, the gradual evolution to independence can already be discerned in his writings. De Bie celebrates landscape painting as a self-sufficient genre and does not grade it below scenes of significant human actions. Separate captions qualify contemporary painters in Part II as "landschap-schilder" (e.g. 98 & 461). Casper de Wit's landscapes prove the nobility of the genre, "... schoon haer edelheyt wordt somtijts eens bestreden" (394), "... even though its nobility has sometimes been disputed".

In Van Mander's estimation the status of marine scenes was low. This prejudice might derive from the legend in Pliny concerning Protogenes' "small" beginning as a painter of ships<sup>42</sup>. In the *Cabinet*, however, Jan Peeters is awarded the distinctive title of "zeeschilder" and in the engraving of his portrait he proudly displays a sketch of a ship to signify his particular *métier* (354).

Van Mander mentions the buildings in paintings only as component parts of larger scenes. City scenes and ground plans are discussed as independent scenes in their

own right only as functional topographical paintings displaying strategic information for the benefit of governors<sup>43</sup>. The basis for town views as independent subjects lay in topographical drawings and cartographers' drawings. The town view proper, according to Stecher, did not appear before 1650 and the 1660's was the high period of Dutch cityscapes. Town views then developed as an independent subject much later than all the other specialities characteristic of the 17th century<sup>44</sup>. In a poem devoted to the popular subject of town views and ruins, as painted by Willem van Nieulandt (64), De Bie concentrated on the buildings and structures only. Verhaeght is celebrated for his paintings of "landschap en ruïen . . . metselrij en netten architect" (48).

Only a few years after the publication of the *Cabinet* classicist art theorists would attack lowly and picturesque subjects such as ruins and ordinary soldiers<sup>45</sup>. De Bie on the other hand praised the activities naturalistically portrayed e.g. by the conversation piece painter Christoffel Jacob van der Laenen: paintings of ". . . delightful pastimes agreeably and beautifully painted [scenes of] wooing, drunkenness, tomfoolery, jumping, singing and dancing, of convicts and beggars, villains on galleys and such bustle and more drollery" (169).

De Bie justified and promoted the new developments in the art of painting in his tract.

## EDUCATION

Leonardo's argument that painting was not a mechanical art<sup>46</sup> should be seen in the context of the growing feeling that painting should and could be recognised as a legitimate intellectual pursuit. The painter produced that which dwelt in his imagination, just as the pen illustrated what is in the mind of the poet. For De Bie "ingenium" or "gheest" was a gift from God. It is the cause of assiduousness ("neersticheyt") to portray images of the mind concretely in pursuit of praise and immortal fame. If an artist relied on natural talent alone and did not combine it with sedulous exercise, his fame would not last (see 49, 202-207 & 503). The ability to attain perfection in artistic imitation is not an inherent human quality. "Science or knowledge which lies enclosed in the mind, is disclosed by assiduousness and care" (510). The rules and lessons of painting providing the key to perfection, were hidden. In order to grasp these secrets, the artist had a platonic-erotic relationship with painting (207)<sup>47</sup>. Painting voluntarily revealed her mystery only to those who were sufficiently inspired

and persistent (228)<sup>48</sup>. The production of art was a self-rewarding activity enriching and ennobling those who whole-heartedly devoted themselves to it (228)<sup>49</sup>. This vigorous practise engendered knowledge which the artist transmitted through good judgement ("verstant en sin", 146).

The previous masters of painting each had a peculiar secret (217ff). "Const-secreten" were transmitted by tradition (494). The copying of earlier masters was imperative. Natural talent should be guided by tradition and enriched by the mysteries discovered by previous masters<sup>50</sup>. De Bie accepted all these views of Van Mander. For Van Mander "ingenium" or "gheest" was a gift installed by Nature<sup>51</sup>. In the Renaissance the artist was sometimes compared to God<sup>52</sup>. Dürer believed that artists were held in respect by the nobility and royalty, because they had divine talent<sup>53</sup>. De Bie upbraided self-righteous artists who did not recognise the true God as the origin of their abilities; and he re-interpreted all the above ideas of Van Mander later on in the *Cabinet* in Catholic terms. This synthetic re-interpretation caused contradictions, e.g., he accepted Van Mander's view that "ingenium" was "inborn and installed in the mind by the well-disposed planets" (449), but also contradicted the view: ". . . talent is not inborn by nature, but a gift by the special grace of God" (436).

Only a few years after De Bie, classicist art theorists would claim that the laws or secrets of nature had been discovered once and for all. "Mere exercise" was criticised<sup>54</sup>. The artist should learn less through practise (*exercitatio*) and be taught more in theory (*doctrina*). Natural talent becomes less important<sup>55</sup>. The threefold concept of *natura*, *ars*, *exercitatio* or natural talent, doctrine and exercise, is Aristotelian and via the Stoics became an important element in Roman rhetoric especially in Cicero and Quintilian<sup>56</sup>. For Van Mander and De Bie the emphasis remained on inborn talent and exercise<sup>57</sup>. De Bie believed it is better ". . . when the painter is inclined by nature and not forced through teaching to learn art" (159), and furthermore that ". . . through exercise, the inciting 'ingenium' can produce a great deal of exceptional and rare art" (60). The educational system in the visual arts in the Netherlands had never been reformed drastically since the Middle Ages. The academies were themselves developments of the guild system rather than entirely new phenomena, as they were in France<sup>58</sup>. It is not surprising that De Bie accepts most of Van Mander's views on education without demur.

De Bie's standards for the erudition of the painter derived from those put forward by Philips Angel. Angel's description of the ideal

painter was based on the image of the ideal antique orator<sup>59</sup>. The term “orator” was also used to describe the early humanists<sup>60</sup>. For De Bie the artist should have knowledge about history, poetry, mathematics, anatomy, perspective, light and colour (46). Knowledge should be complemented by experience. An artist’s insight into historical events enhanced the pleasure to be derived by the admirer of his paintings, according to both Angel and De Bie (De Bie: 359ff & Angel: 47). They do not project the image of the increasingly erudite painter that classicist writers were later to present. In the context of the academies a new idea of art evolved which implied a steadily growing encyclopaedic program; the artist had to be a learned person who knew how to behave<sup>61</sup>. De Bie’s art theory does not reveal academic aims, although it is his aim to promote the new social status of the artist in the academies.

The distinction *inventi, ordonnanti* and *coloreren* was an art historical adaptation of the stages of the orators’ working process namely *inventio, dispositio* and *elocutio*<sup>62</sup>. De Bie’s distinction of invention (selection or choice) and execution (the arrangement of parts), is implicit, e.g. in the description of a good engraver who “. . . should be adorned and gifted with ingenuity of thought, and also with superfluous talent of expression and execution on a copper plate, of what he has in mind” (528)<sup>63</sup>. In the poems mentioning the artists’ products, they were praised for excellence in either or both of these aspects of the creative process. Art becomes more theorised by classicist writers. This distinction is elaborated and more rules applied in the education and execution of art<sup>64</sup>.

De Bie encouraged the artist to travel and the painter merited special praise for visiting Italy, especially Rome in order to gain training and experience (e.g.: 140). For De Bie this experience largely meant the influence of contemporary Italian masters, men who owed their leadership of the art world to their long antique heritage (443). However, antique models did not occupy the important place allotted to them a few years later by Jan de Bisschop<sup>65</sup>. For De Bie, as for Lucas de Heere, present masters can even exceed the artist of Antiquity: “Yet our Netherlandish painters, like Rubens, Van Dyck, Michiel Coxi, Floris and others have brought the liberal art of painting to greater perfection and more complete life than the antique painters, through their extraordinary manner and ingenious inventions” (178)<sup>66</sup>. The travelling artist was rather to benefit from experience in Italian techniques and judicious borrowing from contemporary masters. The official taste on the international art

market in the 17th century was Italian<sup>67</sup>. De Bie accepted this in spite of his chauvinism in promoting Netherlandish art.

## TASTE

During the 17th century “art criticism” never took the form of systematic aesthetic analysis of individual works. Paintings were assessed according to the extent to which they conformed to the recognised conventions of production and to their utility as a vehicle for moral instruction. Criticism thus consisted of applied theory<sup>68</sup>. The rhetorical distinction of “*inventio*”, “*dispositio*” and “*elocutio*” underlay the art historical distinction “*inventi*”, “*ordonnanti*” and “*coloreren*”<sup>69</sup>. De Bie used the common art theoretical jargon<sup>70</sup> of the 17th century to qualify the artists’ treatment of these various elements in the creative process. His assessment of inventiveness, talents in composition, the treatment of colour and light, the manner in applying paint, the speed and virtuosity in execution and the meticulousness in the final trimming of paintings, however, sometimes revealed sensitivity and personal understanding of the works discussed.

Rubens is especially celebrated for his inventiveness and Jacob Jordaens rather for his talent in the arrangement of parts or composition (“*ordonnanti*”)<sup>71</sup>. In general De Bie prefers looseness of brush in applying paint; he likes the “*losse manier*” more than the “*nette manier*”. Already Horace had distinguished two manners in painting, i.e. smooth (“*nette*”) and loose or rough (“*losse*”). Van Mander had recommended the easier “*nette*” manner, but Angel reversed this preference and praised Gerrit Dou’s “curious looseness” of technique, although he had added a word of warning. De Bie’s contemporary Jan Vos revealed a preference for looseness of brush too<sup>72</sup>. For De Bie painting was defined as “. . . some blended and juxtaposed colours, very naturalistically divided on canvas or on a plate” (528)<sup>73</sup>. De Bie generalised about the techniques of the painters and various verbs evoke the painters’ characteristic styles in applying colour. Verhaeght lessened the intensity of light by the addition of colour, thereby skilfully creating an effect of atmospheric perspective (48)<sup>74</sup>. Casper de Crayer applied thin layers of paint by swaying movements of the brush, beautifully melting colours into each other<sup>75</sup>. Nude figures were lusciously treated in blended paints by Nicolaes de Helt Stocade (312)<sup>76</sup>. By a blending of colours, Claude Lorraine captured the golden early morning sunlight breaking through the morning mist (265)<sup>77</sup>. Pictorial effects achieved in the

landscape engravings of Peeter de Jode II were praised in similar terms (510)<sup>78</sup>. The bold portrait images of Dirick van Delen accentuated with small loose brushstrokes are to De Bie's taste (282)<sup>79</sup>. Classicist art theorists somewhat later would prefer a more inhibited smooth style to the spontaneity celebrated by De Bie. Houbraken and Van Sandrart would praise the "stijwe gladdicheyt" in the work of Geeraert Honthorst<sup>80</sup>. De Bie rather concentrated on Honthorst's talent in the technique of shading<sup>81</sup>. His preference for a loose, bold style may have been guided by the popularity of the Rubensian style. One of the criteria for artistic quality in the 17th century was resemblance and work of lesser known painters are often meritoriously compared to the works of acclaimed masters. Public taste in Flanders was greatly influenced by the powerful and loose Rubensian manner in painting<sup>82</sup>. Erasmus Quellinus's firm, but loose technique, is e.g. compared to that of Rubens and Van Dyck in order to testify to its quality<sup>83</sup>. Similarly Rubens is meritoriously compared to Italian masters like Titian as Italy was still the leader of taste on the international art market<sup>84</sup>.

De Bie appreciated firmness in drawing. This is in accordance with contemporarily changing views about drawing (see under *Paragone*). "Nettichey" and "suyverhey", the opposite of "rouhey" and "lossicheyt"<sup>85</sup> is the effect of meticulous care. Neatness in technique and steadiness in drawing were especially celebrated aspects of engraving<sup>86</sup>.

Another means of evaluating paintings in the 17th century was to assess their utility in conveying instruction. Those subjects about which could be moralised were preferred in laudatory poetry<sup>87</sup>. De Bie praised still-life and landscape painting by stressing its moral significance. With Philips Angel he praised strict adherence to the text and insight into narrative content. Rembrandt's *Samson's Wedding* served as their example<sup>88</sup>. This ability is included in the term "inverteren". Since Alberti "inverteren" in historical paintings implied not that new themes should be devised, but that new means of portraying well-known allegories, myths, legends and episodes in history be invented<sup>89</sup>.

Popularity is a norm for artistic quality, because the 17th century artist paints for praise and profit. He has to please his clients rather than indulge in self-expression<sup>90</sup>. The preferences of those magnificent patrons who employed artists, such as Rubens and Teniers, like courtiers, were invoked as a standard of quality. The creation of academies took place in a courtly atmosphere<sup>91</sup>. However, De Bie also showed reverence to the judgement of middle-class connoisseurs

by constantly invoking them as authorities (e.g.: 179) when evaluating works. The rich middle-class which developed in the Netherlands later in the 17th century, bought relatively more art than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, and their taste played a great role on the art market<sup>92</sup>. During Van Mander's time, judgement of paintings was almost exclusively passed by professional artists<sup>93</sup>. With the creation of academies, and the emphasis on rules of artistic production in classicist art theory, however, the opinions of the connoisseur were taken more seriously<sup>94</sup>. De Bie promoted the authority of the connoisseur also by describing Antonie van Leyen as the ideal maecenas. Van Leyen was a man of sound moral principles, intelligent and informed. He understood the significance of art and invested his wealth in promoting the arts. A wise collector, he had good judgement in buying and commissioning, and acumen in identifying the manner of painting of various artists (193ff)<sup>95</sup>. His discriminating insights were a worthy guide to public taste. Although De Bie did not reveal the preferences characteristic of "classicist" taste, he promoted the increased social emancipation of the artist and the connoisseur typical of the rise of classicism and academism.

De Bie's tract reflected no substantial change of attitude in art theory since the beginning of the century and "classicist" theories were still to make their mark. However, uncertainty and change in, e.g., the typical qualities defining the art of architecture and its position among the other arts in the system of the arts as we accept it today, was evident. De Bie also reflected the prevailing recognition of new genres and developments in the art of painting.

## NOTES

- 1 *Het Gulden Cabinet vande edele vry Schilderconst* by Cornelius de Bie, Soest, Davaco Publishers, 1971. This is a facsimile edition of the original, published in Antwerp, 1661.
- 2 The earliest written literary critique of *The Cabinet* known to us, is that by J.F. Willems, 1840: 268-297, which stresses De Bie's mediocrity. De Bie did not enjoy wide recognition as a poet during his own lifetime, and the *Cabinet* never underwent a second edition. See Lemmens, 1971: 2, note 6.
- 3 "Classicism" in art theory is here conveniently employed as a blanket term covering those ideals associated with the foundation of the academies. For Emmens' definition see Emmens, 1964: especially chapter II, and Emmens, 1981 (II), especially p.10.
- 4 See Baxandall, 1971, Lee, 1940: 197-269 and Spencer, 1957: 26-44.
- 5 Franciscus Junius deliberately applied, for the first time in 1641, poetic and rhetorical ideas to art theory. Samuel van Hoogstraeten around 1668 naively assimilated passages from Junius and expressed his view that Van Mander is good at educating the talent



- or spirit (*ingenium*), but inadequate at teaching doctrine (*disciplina*). See Emmens, 1964: 100 & 106.
- 6 Emmens, 1981, especially p.10. See also Miedema, 1973, Introduction.
  - 7 This distinction is not drawn by Faith Dreher when she uses the *Cabinet* to prove the promotion of "academic theories" during the second half of the 17th century. See Dreher, 1978: 686.
  - 8 Lee, 1940: 9-16.
  - 9 Miedema, 1973: 307, 308, 437, 438.
  - 10 Reznicek, 1963 (II): 247-53. Van Mander values poetic use of the imagination more highly than a slavish dependence on the model. At the turn of the century there is a shift of emphasis and a turning towards nature. For Van Mander creating from the imagination, and realism were two ways of creating art. Leonardo had encouraged the artist to give free play to his imagination, yet what he invents should always have the most exact foundation and justification in nature. See Reznicek, 1963 (II): 52, and Blunt, 1962: 37ff. See also Lee, 1962: 9-16. For Van Mander, see Miedema, 1981: 9. Imitation and verisimilitude is a *topos* in Lampsonius, see Becker, 1973: 45-61.
  - 11 Emmens, 1964: 129. Dürer's view that imitation in itself is pleasurable, is phrased thus: "Dann es ist eine grosze Kunst, welcher in groben bäurischen Dingen ein rechten Gwalt und kunst kann anzeigen". See also: Blumenberg, 1957: 266-283, Tatarkiewicz, 1973/4: 225-230, Flasch: 265-306, Sörbom, 1966: 12ff. Warners, 1956: 289-295; 1957: 82-88 & 193-201.
  - 12 "Gheest" is best translated with the Latin "ingenium". The Greek concept for genius, denoted the power in nature which provided the soul with the gifts of nature, on its descending journey through the heavenly spheres before its birth. "Gheest" is one of these gifts, and an imperative for success in art. Van Mander uses the term similarly. See Miedema, 1981: 123, and Miedema, 1973: 341, 335 especially.
  - 13 Verisimilitude has been a *topos* in literature on art since Antiquity. Animals being deceived into regarding paintings as reality is a recurring motif in Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XXXV, 65, 66, 95, 121). De Bie even repeats one of these anecdotes of Zeuxis' painting of the grape vine, replacing the character of Zeuxis with the contemporary de Heem (218). See Kris and Kurz, 1934: 69ff.
  - 14 Jan de Bisschop, *Paradigmata*, 1669: "Want het is claerlijk een verkeertheit van oordeel te gelooven dat 't geen in 't leven voor 't gesicht is afsienelijk ende konst en uytgebeeld sy goet en behaghelelijk". For him the previous masters lacked judgement in the selection of beauty from nature for imitation in art. This judgement in selection should be guided by sculptural models from Antiquity. Realism is objectionable. See Emmens, 1964: 58-60. De Bisschop is the first Netherlandish writer on art to reveal the classicist influence of the writings of Franciscus Junius of 1637 (Latin original) and 1641 (Dutch translation).
  - 15 Freedberg, 1971: 229-245 and Freedberg, 1982: 133-153. See also Emmens, 1981: p.27.
  - 16 Freedberg, 1971: 229-245.
  - 17 See Miedema, 1981: p.215.
  - 18 Freedberg, 1971: 233.
  - 19 Freedberg, 1971: 234 and 1982: 133-153.
  - 20 Freedberg, 1981: 115-150, 123-134; 1976: 40ff. See also examples quoted by Emmens of Camphuysen (1620) and of De Bie's contemporary and acquaintance, Jan Vos, using traditional arguments from the iconoclastic period, Emmens, 1981: 27. See Stirn, 1977 and Moxey, 1977.
  - 21 Emmens, 1964: 117. See also Lee, 1940: 261ff.
  - 22 For Van Mander painting is "... den alder bequamsten middel om de Nature in allen deelen met uytbeeldinghe ten aldergheljksten na te comen" and he does not hide his preference for it above engraving. See Miedema, 1981: 112. See Bächtmann, 1982: 53ff.
  - 23 Emmens, 1964: 117.
  - 24 Blunt, 1962: 27-28. Painting is more successfully illusionist than three dimensional sculpture, etc., Angel, 1969: 3-26.
  - 25 Kristeller, 1951: 496-527.
  - 26 Van den Branden, 1883: 1156-1160.
  - 27 Meyer, 1955: IV, e.g. W. Coebergher and Jacques Francart.
  - 28 As above.
  - 29 Kris and Kurz, 1934: 101ff; Wittkower, 1963: 31, 38. See also Emmens, 1981: 7ff. For the true position of the Antique painter see Schweitzer, 1963, and 1925: 28-132.
  - 30 Constantyn Huygens quoted the same motif earlier in the century. It reflects the sentiments of Dolce's *Arentino*. See Emmens, 1981 (I): 18 and Blunt, 1962: 49. "Schilderconst . . . voormaels by de oude Romeyen van niemandt en mocht als van Edel Persoonen geoeffent worden, die onder de slafachtige ambachten, handwerckery oft onvrije consten niet en mocht gerekent sijn" (De Bie: 23).
  - 31 Kris and Kurz, 1934: 150. This is a common *topos* in Renaissance biography of artists. See also Wittkower, 1963: 31-38.
  - 32 David Teniers at this time campaigns for a patent of nobility through which he would be granted a hereditary mark of distinction and status above that of an ordinary bourgeoisie. In his request he boasts of his position as court painter and freely refers to his father David Teniers I, as a "painter" or "master painter". See Kahr, 1975: 225-246, and Dreher, 1978: 682-705.
  - 33 Dreher, 1975: 685 and Hauser, 1962: 191-208.
  - 34 Miedema, 1981: 34, 35.
  - 35 Emmens, 1964: 119ff. See also Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 167.
  - 36 Martin, 1951: 9-34.
  - 37 Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 97.
  - 38 Vorenkamp, 1933: 9. An example from Van Mander quoted by Vorenkamp is from the life of Van Miereveld. This method of teaching according to Vorenkamp accounts for the many existing anonymous still-lives of the period.
  - 39 Emmens, 1981: 28.
  - 40 Lee, 1940: 197 and Miedema, 1981: 203.
  - 41 Miedema, 1981: 239-240 and Miedema, 1973: 535-558. Miedema does not regard the fact that Van Mander devoted a chapter to landscape painting in his *Grondt* as proof that he saw it as an independent genre. Even pure landscape paintings produced during the 16th century appear to have formed an iconographic programme or included small figures and scenes. Furthermore, authors regarded them as of minor importance. Contrary to Gombrich, Miedema believes that it was literature rather than art theory which contributed to the development of landscape painting as a separate genre during the 17th century. See Gombrich, 1966: 107-121.
  - 42 Miedema, 1981: 232, 37.
  - 43 This function of the genre is suggested by Alberti. See Miedema, 1981: 241, 242.
  - 44 *Opkoms en Bloei van het Noordnederlandse Stadsgezicht in de 17e eeuw*. 1977: 76, 28, 9, 190.
  - 45 See note 14 quoting Jan de Bisschop. See also Emmens, 1964: 199.
  - 46 Blunt, 1962: 34.
  - 47 "*Pictura* is like a mistress who is exceptionally beautiful and has many lovers contending to enjoy her perfection. She does not impart her gifts to lethargic and sluggish aspirants, but presents it to those who spare no pains and labour to grasp her with their minds" (207).
  - 48 "The noble art of painting is like a beautiful young girl who is very jealous of her lovers. He who does not pursue her assiduously, will not obtain her, and he who had pledged his troth to her, without actively loving her, loses. Yet to those who love and remain

- faithful, she voluntarily surrenders herself so that her gifts may be enjoyed" (228).
- 49 "*Pictura* . . . becomes the bride of the art-loving mind who, like a bridegroom endeavours to enjoy her virtues and hidden skills, and persists with love" (228).
- 50 Angel had discussed in detail how good judgement should guide the artist in borrowing from previous masters, invoking Van Mander as an authority. An example from De Bie is his statement about Rubens: "How wonderfully he could invent a treasury from which diligent students can benefit" (58).
- 51 Miedema, 1981: 1-79. See note 12.
- 52 See Panofsky, 1968: 125.
- 53 Emmens, 1964: 129.
- 54 Art should be learnt according to set practise. De Lairese stressed that the mind should dwell on theory while exercising: "Derhalwe moeten onze gedachten, terwyl wy ergens aan bezig sijn, gedurig op de Theorie spelen". (Emmens, 1964: 138-143.)
- 55 Emmens, 1964: 140.
- 56 Ellenius, 1960: See also note 72.
- 57 For Van Mander art is a skill to be learnt by talented artists in practise; he believed ". . . dat men al doende leert". See Emmens, 1964: 138-143.
- 58 Pevsner, 1940: 60.
- 59 Angel mentions several characteristics including knowledge of perspective (43), proportion (38), anatomy (51), colours (54), history (44), mathematics (51), apart from good judgement in imitation (36), imaginative power (38), chastity, discipline and integrity (57), etc. See facsimile edition, Philips Angel, *Lof der Schilder-Konst*, Utrecht, Davaco Publishers, 1969.
- 60 The syllabi of the humanists included grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and usually ethics, studied in the best classical authors. Their central skills and common pre-occupations were rhetorical. See Baxandall, 1971: 1-4. See also Lee, 1940: 235-242.
- 61 Emmens, 1964: 30ff and also Emmens, 1981 (II): 156.
- 62 The beginnings of this application in art history can be traced to the Renaissance humanists. Bartolomeo Fazio, pupil of Guarino, historian and secretary of Alfonso V of Naples, wrote a short book *De viris illustribus* in 1456 about painters and sculptors. He was one of the first humanists to borrow the divisions from the art of literature. For him both painting and poetry involve "inventio" and "dispositio" and by implication he offered some equivalent for "elocutio" in "expressio" or the painting of countenance, interior feelings and emotions. Alberti's treatise *De Pictura* was written twenty years before Fazio's treatise in which he is interested in developing a method and gives the term "compositio" a new exact sense. See Baxandall, 1971: 101ff and 121ff. See also Lee, 1940: 197ff.
- 63 The engraver: ". . . behoort verciert en begaeft te sijn met de scherpsinnicheyt in 't bedencken [invention] wat hy op de copere plaedt sal uytwercken ('ordonnantie'), oock met de overvloedicheyt in't uytdrucken . . ." (528).
- 64 Becker, 1973: 47-48 and Emmens, 1964: 115.
- 65 Emmens, 1964: 54ff.
- 66 "Soo ist nochtans dat onse Nederlantsche schilders, als Rubbens, van Dijck, Michiel Coxi, Floris en meer andere door hun wonder maenieren, ende gheestige inventien: de vrije schilderconst tot meerdere perfectie, ende volcomender leven hebben ghebrocht, als oude Antique schilders hebben ghedoen" (178).
- 67 Emmens, 1981 (II): 158.
- 68 Martin, 1908: 727-753.
- 69 See note 62.
- 70 Lydia de Pauw-de Veen has defined the meanings of common 17th century art historical terms in two publications, 1957 and 1969.
- 71 For Rubens see quote in note 50. Jordaens is said to be "heel ordonnantie-rijck" (238).
- 72 Emmens, 1981 (II): 5-9.
- 73 ". . . een deel ghemengde en gheschockierde verven die op doeck oft plaedt seer natuerlijck verdeylt sijn" (528) See Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 269ff. "Geschockierd" derives from "schikking".
- 74 "Hoe fraey dat jeder stuck verzoet is in 't verschiet" (48). See *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, Knuttel, 1920, Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 187 and Miedema, 1981: 139, 142, 152. "Fraey" refers to skill ("bekwaam, knap, voortreffelik").
- 75 "Want al het ghen' hy doet is liefelijck ghedommelt/ seer swierich soet en mals, verdreven en geschommelt" (244) "Dommeln" and "verdreven" mean melting into each other, and "schommeln" refers to a movement of the brush when applying usually transparent layers of paint. See references in note 74. Miedema, 1981: 150, 187.
- 76 "In sijn figueren vast, seer mals en poeselachtich" (312). The word "poeselachtich" refers to blending of paints specifically with reference to nudes and is similar to the Italian concept "Morbido". See Miedema, 1981: 159-160, 164.
- 77 "Ghelijck mens s'morgens vroegh den nevel siet verdwijnen, soo haest het gulden licht der son begint te schijnen" (265). His technique was described as full of "gheesticheyt en dommelende cracht" (265).
- 78 "Seer net en dommelachtich" (510).
- 79 "Seer rou en cloeck, vlijtich ghetoeft en wel ghestelt" (282). For the meaning of "toetsen", see Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 290ff.
- 80 Emmens, 1981 (II): 11.
- 81 "Soo gheestich is sijn const ghediept en uyt ghehoocht" (164). See Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 269ff. "Hoochen" and "diepen" refer to shading. See also Miedema, 1981: 158-188.
- 82 Martin, 1908: 746 and Pauw-de Veen, 1969: 34.
- 83 ". . . vast in de teekeningh, en deftich in 't versieren . . . die oock met pinceel ontdeekt soo wesentlijck, soo los als oyt ghedaen heeft Rubbens oft van Dijck" (260). More examples of De Bie's taste for the loose manner are: "Heel mals in't schilderen, seer los en poeselachtich" of Abraham van Diepenbeeck (300), of Jacques D'Artois (300) and Carel Emmanuel Biset (578).
- 84 Emmens, 1981 (II): 158.
- 85 Miedema, 1981: 147, 149.
- 86 p.520: "net en suyver", p.509: "net en swirich suyver, krachtich en manirich", p.507: "net en vast", p.496: "nette suyverheyt".
- 87 Martin, 1908: 731, 738-744.
- 88 De Bie quotes directly from Angel, 1969: 47. See De Bie: 290.
- 89 Lee, 1940: 197ff.
- 90 See De Bie: 99 e.g., and Miedema, 1981: 43.
- 91 Emmens, 1981 (II): 158.
- 92 Pevsner, 1940: 133, 139 and Hauser, 1962: 199ff.
- 93 Emmens, 1964: 108, note 201.
- 94 Ellenius, 1960: 71ff.
- 95 Van Leyen's collection is illustrated in a painting by G. Coques in the Mauritzhuis in The Hague. See S. Septh-Holterhoff, 1957: 174-181. See Lemmens, 1971: 6. In subsequent references to Van Leyen in biographical dictionaries, his reputation is however based on the respect shown to him by De Bie and little other information is given.

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