

*HOW NETHERLANDISH PAINTINGS CAME TO PARIS **

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INTRODUCTION

There was a substantial presence of Northern and Southern Netherlandish paintings in Paris during the sixteenth, seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In eighteenth-century Paris sales catalogues these paintings are usually referred to as belonging to the *Ecole Flamande*, irrespective of whether they were produced in one of the major production centers in the South, such as Antwerp or originated from one of the cities in the Dutch Republic, such as Haarlem, Leiden, Amsterdam or Utrecht.¹ Here we will use “Netherlandish” to denote paintings that were produced both in the Southern Netherlands (Flanders, Brabant) and in the Dutch Republic.

These paintings found their way onto the Paris market in one of three ways. Some arrived via Antwerp artists, artist-dealers or specialized international traders operating with counterparts in Paris. Some were imported by Parisian dealers buying low, especially in Amsterdam, in the hope of reselling profitably at auction in Paris. And some, particularly in the eighteenth century, came from prominent French collections and were recycled by dealer-auctioneers in Paris.²

We shall start with a general statement about the export of paintings made in Antwerp, where the seventeenth century saw many more paintings made than were demanded locally. This overproduction persisted for decades and fed exports to Paris as just one among many outlets that included Central Europe, Spain and The Americas.

Over time, the exports from Antwerp to Paris, with active promotion by Paris-based dealers and dealer-auctioneers, elicited and re-shaped buyer preferences in favor of Southern Netherlandish paintings, and this extended to selected artists from the Dutch Republic, so that by the mid-eighteenth century paintings of particular sorts from both sources quite often outperformed all others at Paris auctions.³ By the mid-eighteenth century existing paintings, many of them from the previous century, were associated with new buyer-imposed – that is,

¹ Patrick Michel, “French Collectors and the Taste for Flemish Painting during the Eighteenth Century,” in Dries Lyna, Filip Vermeylen & Hans Vlieghe (eds.), *Art Auctions and Dealers. The Dissemination of Netherlandish Art during the Ancien Régime* (Turnhout: Brepols, Publishers, 2009), pp. 127-137.

² Patrick Michel, *Le Commerce du tableau à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion: Villeneuve d’Asq, 2007).

³ Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Transforming the Paris Art Market, 1718-1750” in: Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet (eds.), *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Early Modern Europe 1450-1750*, 2006, pp. 391-410 (Chapter 19).

perceived – characteristics, irrespective of whether or not these were intended by the makers.

Parisian dealers at this point (and somewhat earlier) were drawn more particularly to Amsterdam auctions, where, following a severe economic crisis, which hit in 1672 and precipitated a downturn that lasted at least till 1730, older paintings became available at attractive prices. This gave rise to relatively risk-free arbitrage gains for dealers able to buy in the north to re-sell in Paris.

1. SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EXPORTS FROM ANTWERP'S SURPLUS PRODUCTION

Antwerp's annual production capability in paintings far exceeded new local demand for paintings and probably had done so since the early sixteenth century. Ordinarily, the emergence of such a surplus would lead to lower prices and would signal to painters that perhaps they should leave the profession, or emigrate. Some artists moved, but in the main the excess of paintings was dealt with by self-conscious and vigorous efforts to market abroad.⁴ Among the artists who moved were Frans de Momper (cat. no. XX), who worked in the Dutch Republic and Jan Siberechts (cat. no. XX), who moved to England in the 1670s, following the example of many of his Dutch colleagues after 1672. Of those – the great majority – who continued to operate from Antwerp, many were continuously prospecting in foreign markets or attending yearly fairs, sometimes as a member of a team. In the case of what appear to have been, in the seventeenth century, near-annual forays to Lille and neighboring cities, novel and rule-bending tactics were employed to gain and hold market share.⁵ It is difficult to estimate just how large Antwerp's export surplus might have been, but one seventeenth-century trader alone (Willem Forchondt) exported 410 paintings and drawings per year over a twenty-seven year period, and the overall annual surplus might have been as high as 3,000 to 5,000 paintings per year in the middle decades of that century. But the active exporting of Antwerp and Mechelen (Malines) paintings to Paris began much earlier.

⁴ Neil De Marchi & Hans J. Van Miegroet, "History of Art Markets," in: Victor Ginsburgh and David Throsby (eds.), *Handbook on the Economics of Art and Culture*, Elsevier Science, Amsterdam-London-Tokyo, 2006, pp. 69-122 (Chapter 3).

⁵ See De Marchi and Van Miegroet, "Antwerp Dealers' Invasions of the Seventeenth-Century Lille Market," in Dries Lyna, Filip Vermeylen and Hans Vlieghe (eds), *Art Auctions and Dealers. The Dissemination of Netherlandish Art during the Ancien Régime* ((Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 43-58 (chapter 3).

Among the first traders to engage in such shipments was Mechelen-based Anthonis de Palermo. He is reported by the compiler of the first biographical dictionary of Netherlandish painters Karel Van Mander, to have made good profits selling paintings by Jacob De Backer in Paris, where that artist's works "sold very well."⁶ De Palermo, who in 1545 moved to Antwerp, became part of a high profile network of Antwerp art traders. The network included the artist and trader Pieter Goetkindt (taught by Palermo and married to Palermo's daughter Catharina). Pieter Goetkindt was one of the teachers of Jan I Brueghel. His own sons, Pieter II and Antoine, later ran a lucrative paintings-importing business (among other interests) in Paris under the name of Bonenfant. In the 1620s Antoine introduced a cousin, Chrisostomo van Immerseel, to the selling of paintings in Seville, a connection subsequently exploited also by Jan II Brueghel, another relative of Van Immerseel. But to stay with De Palermo, his immediate network was extended in another direction by the marriage of Catharina's sister, Lucretia, to Victor Wolfvoet (1612-1652), a painter-dealer in Antwerp. In his last years Wolfvoet painted on commission for Matthijs Musson who, with his second wife, Maria Fourmenois, traded paintings to Paris from the early 1650s, shipping chiefly, though not exclusively, to the Antwerp-trained flower painter and, after his emigration, prominent Parisian dealer Jean-Michel Picart (1600-1682).

Such links which, as illustrated, quickly become many-tentacled, are typical of the early trade in paintings from Antwerp to Paris (and elsewhere), though that trade also co-existed, since the late sixteenth-century, with annual trips by artists and dealers to the fair of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where, until the 1620s, an important group of Flemish merchants dominated the long-term holding of leases to stalls.⁷

To focus for a moment on Picart and Musson-Fourmenois, a good deal is known of the businesses of both from a cache of letters in Antwerp exchanged between them. Picart's orders and his comments on the quality and saleability of paintings of varied subjects and their execution by various named artists in Antwerp reveals a great deal about the preferences of Parisian buyers in the quarter-century 1650 to 1675.

⁶ Karel Van Mander, *Schilderboek*, 1604, fols. 231v-232r. Leen Huet, "Jacob de Backer," in *Fiamminghi a Roma. 1508-1608. Kunstenaars uit de Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik te Rome tijdens de Renaissance*, Brussels, 24 February-21 May, 1995, pp. 68-69.

⁷ Mickaël Szanto, "Libertas artibus restituta. La foire Saint-Germain et le commerce des tableaux, des frères Goetkindt à Jean Valdor (1600-1660)," in *Economia e arte, Secc. XIII-XVIII* (Atti della Trentatreesima Settimana di Studi, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", Prato, 2001), Prato, 2002, pp. 149-185.

Picart's orders yield a small vocabulary of mixed French and Flemish words used to describe paintings. Common examples are "naïf," "curious" (meticulous, carefully wrought), "puur" (referring to unmixed pigments), "schoon" (beautiful) or "vrai" (beautiful, though also true), "net" (clean/polished), "plaisant", "sterk" (forceful) and "wtgemact" (finished). Such designations of course are somewhat general. Moreover, they were bundled in different combinations at different times. But clearly these were characteristics that needed to be present in Netherlandish paintings if they were to appeal to Picart's buyers, who included royals, high clergy, and aristocrats as well as persons of more modest status. Certain characteristics became less or more important, some were dropped, others added. Sometimes, perhaps reflecting buyer independence, properties were newly attributed to old works. For the most part, however, Picart employed this vocabulary of characteristics when commissioning new work or referring to specific living artists and the subjects for which they were known. When this is the case we have the means to translate from a verbal description to its visual counterpart; and if not to a specific painting, at least to types. And in such cases we can point with confidence, if only in an illustrative way, to the properties of Netherlandish paintings that appealed in Paris.⁸

To give a concrete example, Picart in 1656 inquired of Musson, who had a large number of Antwerp painters working for him, including David III Ryckaert (exh. cat. nos. XXXX), whether he could find him "some curious things...of Brueghel [meaning Jan I or possibly Jan II], landscapes with many figures."⁹ Here the main desired property of the paintings was that they be curiously made. But cognate components: the explicit link to Brueghel; the specification that the paintings be landscapes; the requirement that they be peopled with many figures, collectively mean that we can be sure that they refer to a type that was well known. The paintings were to be small, wider than high, on panel or copper plate, narrative or allegorical as to subject type, and replete with tiny human actors.

⁸ Our approach resembles Michael Baxandall's attempts to give definition to "the period eye" of fifteenth-century Florentine viewers or late medieval purchasers of south German carved and painted altarpieces. See his *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London, 1980, and *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2^e ed. rev. (Oxford and New York, 1980). Important differences are that our materials are closer in time to us, as interpreters, and that we find contemporary connections made to specific sorts of painting and to the work of particular artists. Uncertainty concerning usage is thereby considerably reduced.

⁹ Jean Denucé, *Na Peter Pauwel Rubens. Documenten uit de kunsthandel te Antwerpen in de XVIIe eeuw van Matthijs Musson. Bronnen voor de geschiedenis van de Vlaamse kunst, V* (Antwerp 1949), p. 161.



Fig. 1. Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Flower Garland with the Virgin*

(medaillon by P. P. Rubens).

Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 1764

Musson and Fourmenois repeatedly sent originals by David II Teniers (fig. 4) and copies thereof to Picart, but he insisted on largish canvasses with lots of figures (“grootachtig met veul figuerkens...”), and not much copied, since cheap, small copies of this artist’s paintings were being “hawked” around the

streets of Paris.¹⁰ Throughout the seventeenth century, new types of derivative paintings by and after Teniers, flower pieces by Jan II or Jan Peter Brueghel, peasant scenes by David III Ryckaert, and many others, appeared on the Paris market. Sometimes quintessential Antwerp prototypes, such as Jan I Brueghel’s religious flower *guirlandes* (Fig. 1).¹¹ These were also appropriated and transformed into a secular French idiom, as was the case with Nicolas Robert and Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay (Figs. 2-3).

¹⁰ Denucé, pp. 65, 277-78, doc. 324.

¹¹ Ute Kleinmann, “Blumen, Kränze und Girlanden: Zur Entstehung und Gestaltung eines Antwerpener Bildtypus,” in: *Pieter Breughel der Jüngere - Jan Brueghel der Ältere. Flämische Malerei um 1600. Tradition und Fortschritt* (Kulturstiftung Ruhr Essen, Luca Verlag, Lingen 1997), pp. 54-66; the origins of Jan Brueghel’s flower garland are discussed by David Freedberg, “The origins and rise of the Flemish Madonnas in Flower Garlands,” *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 32 (1981), pp. 115-150.



Fig. 2. Nicolas Robert, *La guirlande de Julie*, Paris, Département des manuscrits, NAF 19735, fol. 2.



Fig. 3. Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay, *Flower garland with portrait of Hélène Lambert de Thorigny* (portrait by Nicolas de Largillière). Honolulu, Academy of Arts.

This French adaptation has its own history, worth noting briefly. In 1641 Charles de Sainte-Maure, Duke of Montausier (1610-1690) undertook to produce a vellum manuscript comprising sixty-two poems dedicated to his love, Lucine-Julie Rambouillet. Montausier enlisted the help of the most fashionable poets of the day, among them Chapelain, Ménage, Tallemant des Réaux, and Georges de Scudéry. The text was calligraphed by Nicolas Jarry, while Nicolas Robert produced a splendid emulation of a Brueghel garland surrounding the title (Fig. X). Robert also painted illuminations of individual flowers expressing Julie's charms. Montausier presented the volume, *La Guirlande de Julie*, on May 22, 1641, with success for his suit.¹²

Later, in Paris, the garland was adapted yet again. Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay (1653-1715), *peintre ordinaire du Roi*, transformed Jan I Brueghel's

¹² The manuscript's location is Paris, Département des manuscrits, NAF 19735. The episode and the *Guirlande* are discussed in Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 90 and 211, citing Irène Frain, *La Guirlande de Julie* (Paris, 1991). See also Marie-Thérèse Gousset, *La Guirlande de Julie*, in Marie-Hélène Tesnière and Prosser Gifford (eds), *Creating French Culture. Treasures from the Bibliothèque nationale de France* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 224-26, no. 93.

prototypical *Madonna with Flower Garland* into a flower garland-cum-portrait (Fig. 3). In this instance, the painting was a collaboration – like its prototype – here between Blin de Fontenay (flowers) and Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746) (portrait) – though the product itself was novel.¹³

Throughout the eighteenth century, we see all kinds of novel appropriations and transformations of Netherlandish characteristics into French painting, a domestication of the many Netherlandish paintings available on the Paris resale market. The so-called *Rejouissantes Flamandes* or *Noces de Village* by David Teniers (fig. 4) and highly finished paintings by Gerrit Dou are just two types that underwent domestication.¹⁴



Fig. 4. David II Teniers, *Nôce de Village* (as mentioned in the sales catalogues of Gersaint) or *Réjouissantes Flamandes* (as mentioned in the reproductive prints after Teniers by Le Bas), St. Petersburg, Hermitage, Inv. no. 593.

¹³ Another example of such collaboration, in a similar garland-portrait, is that in Caen, the portrait in this instance painted by the young Antoine Coppel. Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. No. 29, oil on canvas, 164 x 132 cm. See Michel Faré, *Le Grand siècle de la nature morte. Le XVII^e siècle* (Freiburg, 1974), p. 332. There is a further *Madonna in a flower Garland* in the same museum, inv. No. 122, oil on panel, 83.2 x 61.5 cm, this one a collaboration between Brueghel students Daniel Seghers and Frans Ykens.

¹⁴ This among many other of our topics is addressed in detail by Patrick Michel, "French Collectors and the Taste for Flemish Painting," pp. 127-137.

2. EDUCATING WOULD-BE COLLECTORS AND BUYERS IN PARIS: THE DEALER-AUCTIONEER GERSAINT

Paris became a more active auction market in the first half the eighteenth century, and was soon the primary center of European art auctions. The extensive importation of Netherlandish paintings was just part of this development, but an intriguing one.¹⁵ If the seventeenth century was the era of the trader in paintings, in many variants, the eighteenth was the century of the auction and the dealer-auctioneer.¹⁶ Innovative dealer-auctioneers such as Edme-François Gersaint carefully packaged Netherlandish paintings in a way that was completely novel.¹⁷



Fig. 5. David III Ryckaert, *Paysant Scene (Looting) with "many figures" and on a "large format"* Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Gersaint's promotional strategy can be extracted from his auction catalogues, of which six are known, covering the period 1744 to 1750. These catalogues, including several prefaces or supplementary instructional material, are discursive and set out in a very precise manner the characteristics in paintings of artists whom he chose to promote, allowing him to compare comparable bundles

¹⁵ De Marchi & Van Miegroet, "History of Art Markets," pp. 107-112, 114, Table A.1.

¹⁶ Neil De Marchi, Matt Raiff & Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Dealer-Dealer Pricing in the Mid-Seventeenth-Century Antwerp to Paris Art Trade," in: Michael North and David Ormrod (eds.), *The European Art Market 1400-1800*, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 113-30; Neil De Marchi & Hans J. Van Miegroet, "The Rise of Dealer-Auctioneers. Information and Transparency in a Market for Netherlandish Paintings," in Koen Jonckheere and Anna Tummers (eds.), *Art Market and connoisseurship in the Dutch Golden Age*, Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 149-174.

¹⁷ For a very detailed overview of Gersaint's life and business practices, see Guillaume Glorieux, *A l'Enseigne de Gersaint. Edme-François Gersaint, Marchand d'art sur le pont Notre-Dame (1694-1750)* (Seyssel, 2002).

of pleasure-yielding characteristics across several artists. This, in turn enabled him to make the extraordinary argument, unique for the time, that, whereas a particular artist may be in such demand that his work is virtually unobtainable and anyway his prices out of reach – think Claude Lorrain – amateurs might derive equal pleasure *per livre* from paintings by several artists. Two things are essential here. First, Gersaint had in mind only paintings displaying more or less comparable pleasure-yielding characteristics, such that paintings within a “family” cluster might be considered by a would-be collector as alternatives. Second, the novice must put aside connoisseurial concerns such as attribution or aesthetic assessment in terms of pre-determined categories together comprising paintingness (example: those represented in Roger de Piles’s “balance” of painters). Instead, his or her first concern should be affect: what pleasure does this or that painting convey?

We have illustrated elsewhere that Netherlandish landscape painters, such as Jan Both (1615-1652), Nicolaes Berchem (1620-83), and Cornelis van Poelenburgh (1586-1667) were imported to Paris in the first half of the eighteenth century as substitutes for the paintings of Lorrain. A very similar re-bundling affected the demand for paintings by David Teniers (fig. 4; exh. cat. no. XXX) and David III Ryckaert (fig. 5; exh. cat. no. XXX). Earlier, recall, Picart had requested works by these artists to meet Parisian preferences for “curious things”: landscapes with many figures,” and “large peasant scenes with many figures.” But, to repeat, in the early-to-mid-eighteenth century what was promoted by Gersaint to novice collectors was “families” of paintings containing roughly comparable clusters of pleasure-yielding characteristics.

This promotional strategy of Gersaint’s may not have differed greatly from that of Picart – though it was certainly more explicitly rationalized – but in one respect the nature of the export business in Netherlandish paintings to Paris was very different in the seventeenth century from that of the eighteenth. In the seventeenth century Antwerp traders controlled the making, packing and shipment of new paintings largely in response to orders received from Paris (and from Spain, or Prague, among other places). In the eighteenth century, by contrast, it was a matter of dealers such as Gersaint and Lebrun buying up existing Netherlandish paintings, principally on the resale market in Amsterdam, most of them by artists who were deceased and whose paintings were being recycled from the collections of owners suffering under the long-sustained economic downturn after 1672. Thus, whereas Picart and his colleagues bought predominantly “contemporary” artists and steered the production, via their Antwerp suppliers, to meet Paris demand, Gersaint and Lebrun bought up “old masters”, which,

precisely because they were Netherlandish old master paintings, could not be adapted physically to what was wanted on the Paris market, but could be marketed as embodying characteristics that Parisian buyers had already indicated they found attractive. The strategy was thus one of projecting onto these old masters new sets of characteristics that had gained currency among Parisian buyers, not implausibly yet – again – quite independently of authorial intent.

What this suggests is that certain Netherlandish paintings were sought after, not because of their national characteristics or “Netherlandishness,” but because of their capacity to allow Parisian viewers to assign to the paintings their own, variant characteristics. Dealers such as Gersaint very self-consciously helped buyers to recognize and appreciate this novelty potential in Netherlandish paintings. He also labeled elements of it using evocative terminology. “Vapeur de l’air”, for example, he used of Italianate landscapes by Lorrain, with full sun, but masked behind a foreground of shimmering, heated midday air. The same magical atmosphere, he then insisted, could be had in paintings by Berchem, Both and Poelenburgh (fig. 6), although the palette of the latter was more redolent of a northern atmosphere and his figures were more classical and/or gallant than resting peasants.¹⁸

We might note that Gersaint’s approach has enabled modern researchers interested in art markets to identify preferences among viewers/buyers of paintings in a manner more apt than in traditional art historical studies of taste, where cost is not brought into the account.



Fig. 6. Cornelis Van Poelenburgh, *Nymph and Shepherd in a landscape* (with in the middle and background the “vapeur de l’air,” a characteristic some Parisian buyers associated with Lorrain). Ca. 1630

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts

¹⁸ De Marchi and Van Miegroet 2006, 404-406, graph 12.

From the Netherlands Gersaint also imported two new marketing tools: the public auction with viewing days, and the sales catalogue.¹⁹ His auctions were advertised in the *Mercure de France* and were conducted at a leisurely pace, with pre-sale viewing and actual sales spread over days, even weeks. This in effect extended the viewing, enabling potential buyers to compare their private valuations of upcoming lots with those of others with whom they socialized, and to order their own preferences more clearly in terms of pleasure per unit cost.²⁰

3. ARBITRAGE BETWEEN AMSTERDAM AND PARIS

The cross-border operations of many Parisian dealers in the eighteenth century included particularly arbitrage buying. Arbitrage meant that they were buying paintings “low” in Amsterdam (and lesser Netherlandish auction centers) with a prospect of selling “high” or higher in Paris.²¹ The price difference was not certain – a gain could not be guaranteed on individual paintings – but it was a general condition of the two markets. At the Amsterdam end prices were relatively low due to the aftermath of the crisis that struck in 1672.

In 1672 the Amsterdam stock market crashed and, while the main stock, that of the Dutch East India Company, recovered quickly, Amsterdam became a de facto clearing-house for old master paintings for decades to come. There was a massive run on the banks in 1672 and for weeks the Amsterdam (commodities) Exchange was in the grip of panic.²² This crash came as the Dutch capitulated to an invading French force that devastated the eastern provinces of the Republic, and following a deliberate but costly flooding of the land to the west to halt the invasion. In the aftermath, the prices of luxury commodities, including paintings,

¹⁹ McClellan, p. 445. He also produced 6 catalogues between 1736 and 1748, intended both as permanent reference works and curiosities in their own right

²⁰ The sales results of the auctions held by Edmé-François Gersaint in the 1740s have been analyzed by Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Recycling Netherlandish paintings on the Paris market in the early eighteenth century,” in Sophie Raux (ed.), *Collectionner dans les Flandres et la France du Nord aux XVIIIe siècle* (l’Université Charles de Gaulle-Lille 3, 2002), pp. 251-287.

²¹ The term “arbitrage” is borrowed from the financial economics literature where, however, it refers to trades that profit by exploiting price differences, on different markets. Arbitrage in this sense is a result of market inefficiencies and eliminates price differences. In our situation price differences between Amsterdam and Paris persisted because of structural problems not market inefficiencies. Also see, Rohit Rahi & Jean-Pierre Zigrand, *Arbitrage Networks*, Department of Finance and Financial Markets Group, London School of Economics, London, 2010, pp. 1-38, stable URL: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1430560>.

²² Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in the World Trade 1585-1740* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1990), p. 293.

fell so low that painters could no longer produce profitably. For living artists this was disastrous. Even without the economic contraction, they would have had trouble surviving, since the durability of paintings made during the boom decades of the 1640s and 1650s meant that the market for new work was compressed anyway.²³ The added drop in demand during the sustained economic contraction after 1672 caused many to leave the profession or move abroad, often enough to London.

It is helpful to have in mind some statistics suggesting the weight under which the economy of the Republic struggled. In Amsterdam excise taxes on consumption goods were raised by 10 per cent in 1683 and, between 1671 and 1678 Holland levied a discretionary wealth tax twenty times, amounting cumulatively to 14 per cent of the assessed values of movable and immovable property, including houses, land financial assets and objects of value, among them paintings.²⁴ As economic historian Jan de Vries and agricultural historian Ad van der Woude put it, “the Republic hitherto so resourceful in gathering the fiscal means to defend itself and its interests, was plunged into a fiscal nightmare...”²⁵

By 1690 the overall tax burden had doubled and, partly as a result, commodities prices fell and remained low. When prices for real commodities and financial assets fell, and with them interest rates and rents (even rents along the fashionable Herengracht in Amsterdam), merchants, financiers and art collectors, found themselves in difficulties and having to sell movable possessions for whatever they might bring. Paintings were not only movables but non-essentials and were offered in large numbers.²⁶

This is the background to the existence of the relatively low prices in the secondary market for paintings in Amsterdam that constitutes one half of the preconditions for successful arbitrage. The other half was that certain buyers in Paris, including persons of the highest social standing, had developed a preference for certain types of Netherlandish paintings in the seventeenth century, and their acquired preference was ripe for re-interpretation in the way outlined above and which would (and did) attract new collectors.

²³ Marten Jan Bok, “The rise of Amsterdam as a cultural centre: the market for paintings, 1580-1680,” in: Patrick O’Brien, Derek Keene, Marjolein ‘t Hart and Herman van der Wee (eds.), *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe. Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), pp. 207-209.

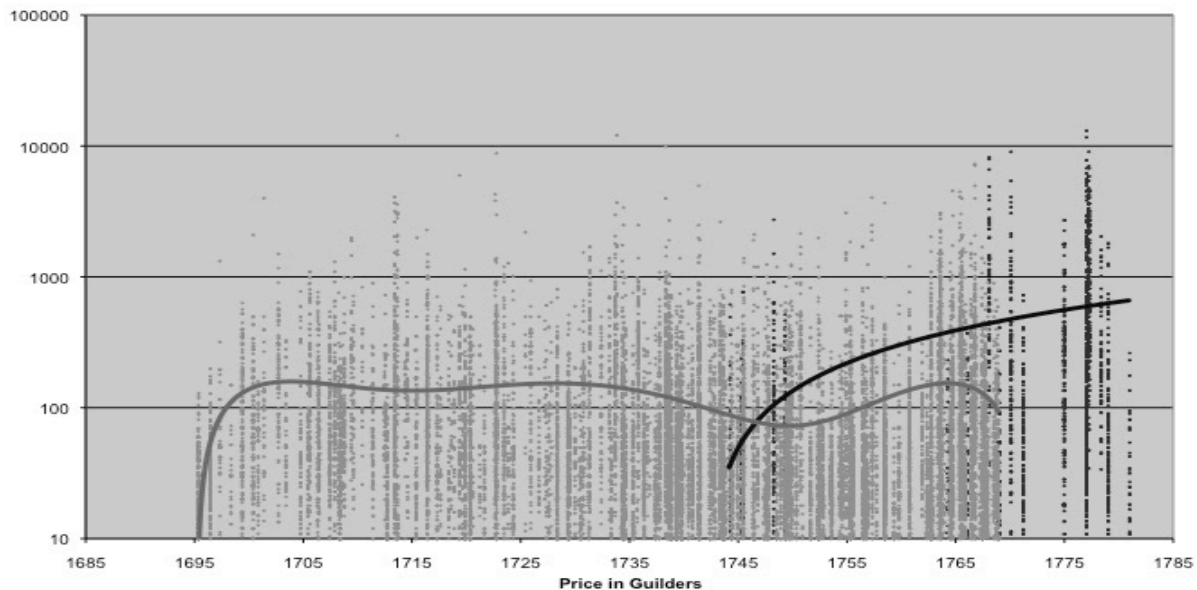
²⁴ Jan de Vries, *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy 1500-1815* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997), pp. 102-103.

²⁵ De Vries, *First Economy*, pp. 109-117.

²⁶ On the fall of real estate prices in de Amsterdam Herengracht, see Piet M.A. Eichholz, “A long run House Price Index: The Herengracht Index, 1628-1973,” *Real Estate Economics* 25 (1997), pp. 175-192.

The two halves are shown together in Chart 1. This shows (in grey) an average of prices, auction by auction, in Amsterdam and some other northern cities, 1696-1800, together with (in black) average prices for Gersaint's auctions, 1744-1750, plus a selection of later sales organized by Remy and by the Lebruns, father and son (1755-1785). Across some 22,251 transactions, prices in Amsterdam remained fairly constant for several decades after 1672, whereas they rose, though at a decreasing rate, in Paris for much of the eighteenth century. This difference in average prices captures the opportunity in principle for arbitrage to occur; as noted already, there could be no guarantee that a price difference would appear for individual paintings, but the general promise evidently came true often enough to keep the Parisian dealer-auctioneers coming back again and again. To clarify Chart 1 somewhat further, each dot represents a transaction and each vertical dotted line represents the distribution of prices in one sale. The heavy gray and black lines are lines of best fit through all the prices registered at auction.²⁷

Chart 1. *Logarithmically normalized graph with sales results for paintings in auction markets in Amsterdam (grey) and Paris (black), with trend curves of average sales results for each (N= 22. 251).*



Source: Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelven pryzen. Uitgegeven door Gerard Hoet, (Pieter Gerard van Baalen: The Hague, 1752); sales Gersaint 1744-1750, Remy & Lebrun 1755-1785; data collected and visualized by Elliott HAUSER, Kiril ZUGANOV, Sandra VAN GINHOVEN & Hillary Coe SMITH. The data are in DALMI™ DATABASE, Duke 2012, which is supervised by Sandra VAN GINHOVEN and Hilary Coe SMITH, who also have produced the present graph and trend-lines.

²⁷ True arbitrage requires that there is no market risk involved and for Gersaint buying paintings in Amsterdam was an almost risk free profit opportunity at minimal cost (transportation from Amsterdam to Paris, storage, costs mounting auction).

This visualization provides us for the first time with a clear empirical context for the observations made about the deliberate promotional behavior of Parisian dealer-auctioneers in the mid-eighteenth century. The two diverging lines picture the necessary, if not sufficient conditions for the significant flow of paintings between the Netherlands and France in the eighteenth century and to which we have drawn attention.

4. RECYCLING AND REPRODUCING NETHERLANDISH PAINTINGS IN PARIS

The Paris market in the eighteenth century, we have stressed, was fed with paintings from the Netherlands, which now included seventeenth century works recycled from late seventeenth-century French collections as well as all those bought in the Low Countries for resale in Paris. But contemporary French artists also played a role. They faced a choice, either to conform to the codified visual traditions of the Académie or to compete with the many old Netherlandish masters that were continuously being fed into the market. Among those opting for the latter, some actually produced “new” old Netherlandish masters. One of the more successful who opted for this alternative was Jean-Baptiste Chardin, whose everyday life subjects and still lifes capture well what Picart could sell to important late-seventeenth collectors. They also favor the novice wanting to be pleased. Perhaps not by coincidence Chardin was one of Gersaint’s protégés. Another who produced “new old” Netherlandish paintings, though later in the century, was Marguerite Gérard (Fig. 7). She formed part of a “Dutch revival” (the so-called *Goût Hollandais*), visually reformulating seventeenth-century *fijnschilders* such as Gerard Terborgh and Gabriel Metsu to attract contemporary, Parisian buyers already conditioned to the pleasing characteristics of this particular sub-genre of Netherlandish paintings.²⁸

²⁸ Carol S. Eliel, “Genre Painting During the Revolution and the *Goût Hollandais*,” in Alan Wintermute (ed.), *1789: French Art during the Revolution* (Colnaghi: New York, 1989), pp.48-61.



Fig. 7. Marguerite Gérard, *Bad News (La Mauvaise Nouvelle)*, with visual characteristics reminiscent of Dutch *Fijnschilders* such as Terborgh and Gabriel Metsu (1804). Paris, Musée du Louvr

A significant further contributor to the vibrancy of the Paris market was the print. On the occasion of the sale of the collection of the Duc de Choiseul in 1771, for example, art dealer-auctioneer Pierre-François Basan had an engraved *Recueil* made after the duke's paintings (fig. 8).²⁹ As in this instance, engravings were consciously used to prime the market and enhance the value of the original paintings put up for sale. This strategy was so successful that it was adopted in the nineteenth century by Goupil & Cie. Indeed, they used it so extensively that their painting business actually became a by-product of their print production and distribution.³⁰ The use of prints to test and expand an artist's market generally was not new. Dürer and Rubens used it as a matter of course. But the manner in which it was exploited in eighteenth-century Paris, to spread visual information at relatively low cost and, especially, to enhance the value of the paintings behind the prints was new. Gersaint first tried the tactic in 1733,

²⁹ Pierre-François Basan, *Recueil d'estampes gravées d'après les tableaux du cabinet de Monseigneur le Duc de Choiseul* (Paris: Basan, 1771). Also see Michel, "French Collectors and the Taste for Flemish Painting," plate 131. The sale resulted in a gross revenue of 443,174 livres, mentioned by Michel, *Le commerce du tableau à Paris*, p. 274.

³⁰ Goupil actually acquired the reproduction rights of particular star paintings, offered engravings after these paintings for sale, before actually trading in the paintings themselves. See especially *Gérôme & Goupil: art et entreprise* (Bordeaux, Musée Goupil, 12 October 2000-14 January 2001; New York, Dahesh Museum of Art, 6 February - 4 May 2001).

when he sold engravings of paintings he had brought back from the Netherlands to test the market before he embarked on selling paintings large scale, as he did in the 1740s.³¹ And of Le Bas it is known that he drew on the existing value of paintings in prominent collections to elevate the market price of prints from engravings he produced of paintings by Teniers and selected other Netherlandish masters, many of them in prominent collections. Two periods in the eighteenth century, 1746-1751 and 1758- 1771, saw a particularly high volume of engravings after Netherlandish seventeenth-century paintings, notably those by Teniers,

Wouwermans, Dou, Rubens, Berchem and Van Dyck.³² These happen also to be periods when we observe a sharp increase in in price of Netherlandish old master paintings on the Paris market.³³



Fig. 8. Balthasar Anton Dunker after Gerrit Dou, *Rustic interior with a Kitchen maid chopping onions of the same size as the actual painting in the Recueil d'estampes gravées d'après les tableaux du cabinet de Monseigneur le Duc de Choiseul*. Paris, 1771. London, British Museum, Reg. no. 1861.1109.63

³¹ *Catalogue des Dessins, Estampes et Planches qui ont été apportés d'Hollande et de Flandres, par les sieurs Gersaint et Jourdan, ... et don't la vente doit se faire ... Lundy 23 Novembre 1733 et jours suivants à deux heures de releoir, chez ledit sieur Gersaint pont Notre Dame* (manuscript).

³² Michel, "French Collectors and the Taste for Flemish Painting," p. 130, also quoting Vivian Lee Atwater, *A Catalogue and Analysis of Eighteenth-century French Prints after Netherlandish Baroque Painting* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1988).

³³ Michel, *Le commerce du tableau à Paris*, p. 273.

CONCLUSION

We have focused on what might seem to the observer like a steady and progressive, if selective process of adoption and transformation of Netherlandish paintings by French buyers and artists, from the late sixteenth century through the eighteenth. But awareness, transformation and acceptance into French art were stages in which key roles were played by Antwerp- and later Paris-based international traders in paintings. Such traders held a dominant position in the annual fair of Saint Germain, and when that era closed in the late 1620s certain resident dealers re-established the connection.

Here the relationship between Picart and Musson-Fourmenois is exemplary and perhaps deserves its own exhibition. Via Picart, the work of selected Flemish painters entered prominent French collections. These paintings were re-cycled onto the Paris auction market in the eighteenth century, but again certain partly through the mediation of certain Paris-based dealer-auctioneers and traders in paintings. Of these the first and perhaps the most innovative, was Gersaint who showed novice collectors how to think about Netherlandish paintings as “family” clusters of pleasure-yielding characteristics. This enabled him to recommend that such imports as acceptable even if they had not been previously considered or even known.

Thus there occurred, in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, in Paris, a recycling of Netherlandish paintings that had already entered French collections decades earlier, only with somewhat fresh characteristics attributed to them in keeping with evolving buyer preferences. There were also French artists who adopted the style of selected seventeenth-century Netherlandish painters, creating “new old masters.” And French traders added to the sheer volume of Netherlandish paintings available, by arbitraging between Amsterdam and Paris, buying “low” in the expectation of being able to sell higher. As part of this mix, engravers were engaged and prints sold to spread information about and enhance the value of original Netherlandish paintings prior to their being auctioned in Paris.

The connections between Netherlandish paintings and the Paris secondary market is thus one of multiple threads and episodes, all creative, whether artistic or commercial. Our story is basically about ways in which novelty and variety were fitted to economic circumstances while enhancing the pleasure of buyers in Paris.

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