

Review
Elizabeth Sutton (ed):
Women artists and patrons in the Netherlands, 1500-1700
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The past decades witnessed a welcome reassessment of women's creative agency in early modern Europe. Dictionaries of women artists and writers, studies on women's arts and authorship, as well as recent exhibitions devoted to the works of female artists such as Clara Peeters and Michaelina Wautier have made an invaluable contribution to the exploration of the terra incognita of early modern female artistry. Current scholarship increasingly challenges traditional historiography and its male-dominated canons, and *Women artists and patrons in the Netherlands, 1500-1700* seamlessly fits this trend by presenting a collection of essays on important and often underestimated Netherlandish female artists and patrons from the 16th through 17th century. It addresses their prominence in their own time as well as their subsequent historiographical neglect. It also proposes a next step in the study of female artists and art history more generally.

In the introductory essay, editor Elizabeth Sutton outlines the volume's ambitions. In order to properly value the contribution(s) of early modern women artists to Western art history, this essay insists, scholars need to move beyond the conventional, male-centered historiography and take long-regarded "inferior" female artistic activities such as needlework, paper cutting, and (reproductive) prints into consideration. According to Sutton, scholars also have to use feminist theory and explicitly acknowledge and embrace the political and topical dimension of their subject. She encourages scholars to draw parallels between the often-undervalued practices of female artists in the past on the one hand and current-day issues of gender inequality on the other. In her words, "the networks and mechanisms employed by women artists and patrons in the early modern period leveraged to their advantage are systems of mutuality that we would do well to underscore and reproduce today as counter model to the hierarchies of capitalism and academe" (18).

The following six essays highlight the creative agency of early modern women painters, patrons, and printmakers, unraveling the (sometimes ambiguous) visual mechanisms they employed. The first two essays deal with female painters. Céline Talon's chapter focuses on the representation strategies of the young and aspiring Antwerp-born female painter Catharina van Hemessen (1528-1588), who, in 1548, made one of the first self-portraits of a painter at work. Talon convincingly argues that Van Hemessen intentionally composed her – on first sight rather conservative – self-portrait as a multilayered, artistic self-advertisement showcasing her ambitions and qualities. By including subtle yet significant references and details, Van Hemessen showed that she was aware of contemporary innovations and artistic discussions. In her contribution, Nicole Elizabeth Cook explores the art works of the renowned Dutch painters Judith Leyster (1609-1660) and Gesina ter Borch (1633-1690) to determine the particular appeal of the night among early modern female artists. Placing their works

in a rich literary context, Cook argues that Leyster's and Ter Borch's nocturnal-themed art not only echoed the period's broader turn to the light (which becomes, for example, apparent from their explorations of artificial light), but also reflected the particular advantages of the night for women artists. Nightfall freed them from their daily labors and thus gave them time for their creative practices.

The next two essays explore how both visual and textual portraits contributed to the reputation of noblewomen and female art patrons. Saskia Beranek's essay presents a new interpretation of the layout of Huis ten Bosch, the royal palace in The Hague. She persuasively argues that architect Pieter Post designed both the building and the gardens as a dynamic built portrait of Amalia van Solms (1602-1675), wife of the late Prince of Orange, Frederick Henry. While the palace celebrates the lost prince, it also promotes and prolongs the social position of the widow-princess. Through iconographical associations with the ancient Greek queen Artemisia and the personification of the Dutch garden maid, the building emphasizes her role as the guardian of the young Dutch Republic. Lindsay Ann Reid's contribution analyzes how Richard Lovelace's seldom-remarked poem "Princess Löysa Drawing" (1649) paints a flattering portrait of the talented Louise Hollandine (1622-1709), daughter of Frederick V of the Palatinate and king of Bohemia and Elizabeth Stuart, comparing the princess to Ovid's Arachne. By contrasting this image with the princess's works and several other sources, Reid raises the fundamental question whether or not we can interpret a discursive character, such as the one presented in Lovelace's poem, as a true image of an identifiable historical woman.

The last two essays of the volume focus on female printmakers and print publishers. Concentrating on the works of Magdalena de Passe (c. 1600-1638), Amy Frederick calls for a reevaluation of reproductive printmaking with a focus on gender. She argues that De Passe's work as a reproductive printmaker as well as her contribution to the workshop of her father has been neglected because of both her gender and the focus on the individual creative genius in art historiography. Frederick presents an alternative interpretation, claiming that De Passe's signed reproductive prints could also be regarded as self-effacing triumphs of her skills and ingenuity as an emulator, thereby contributing to the family brand as well as her own identity as engraver. Finally, Arthur DiFuria's article returns to the question of historiography by examining the legacies of print publishers Mayken Verhulst (1518-1599) and Volcxken Diericx (c. 1525-1600). Whereas traditional art historical scholarship has generally designated their contribution to the business of printmaking as adjunct to the endeavors of their famous husbands – Pieter Coecke van Aelst and Hieronymus Cocks, respectively – DiFuria opts for a more individual evaluation of their entrepreneurial creativity in order to challenge traditional historiography.

The essays in this volume convincingly highlight women artists' valuable contribution to their field and, in doing so challenge the traditional bias in art historical research. With the noteworthy exception of Cook's essay, they do not, however, answer the volume's ambition to construct a dialogue between gender-related societal issues in the past and those in the present. The absence of broader reflections at the end of the volume on the implications of Sutton's thought-provoking suggestions as outlined in the introduction may be viewed as a missed opportunity, in particular when it comes to her promising suggestions of actively involving students in the process. Nevertheless, aside from that the volume is exactly what it promises to be: an example of the new and promising scholarship on the importance of early modern female artists.

About the reviewer

Lieke van Deinsen is a postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven (Belgium). She conducts research on the visual and textual representations of female authorship and intellectual authority in the early modern Low Countries. In 2017 she completed her Ph.D. at Radboud University (Nijmegen, Netherlands) on processes of literary canon formation, resulting in the publication of *Litteraire erflaters: Canonvorming in tijden van culturele crisis* (Verloren, 2017). In her capacity as Johan Huizinga Fellow of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, she wrote *The Panpoëticon Batavûm: The portrait of the author as a celebrity* (Rijksmuseum, 2016).