

least planned, particularly around the shared date of 1661. There are some unfamiliar and stunning pictures in this exhibition, notably the aged *Madonna of Sorrows* (1661, no. 14; Epinal) or the half-length *Christ* (ca. 1657-61; no. 15; Glens Falls, Hyde Coll., whose repaired mutilation is well covered in the catalogue).

What this moving and attractive, if compact, exhibition achieves is to remind the viewer—particularly around the newly cleaned Amsterdam *Self-Portrait as Apostle Paul*—how powerfully Rembrandt managed to combine the pious with the personalized. We might never be able to answer the question definitively of whether (or not) he ever envisioned a cycle of Christ and the apostles (why paint the Virgin for Holland?), albeit never completed as planned. But we can clearly see how a gifted portrait painter could re-imagine spiritual heroes as lifelike presences—just as he also painted two similar large canvases, three-quarter length against dark backgrounds, of two Jewish leaders at critical moments in their lives during this same period in his own life: *Moses with the Tablets of the Law* (1659) and *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* (both in Berlin). Thus there still remain larger questions about Rembrandt, religion, and the role(s) of such “pious portraits.”

John Michael Montias. *Art at Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002. 336 pp. \$39.00. Review by HUBERT MEEUS, UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP.

As early as 1608 specialized auctions of works of art were held in Amsterdam. But there is nearly no comment on auctions in contemporary writings, neither are there contemporary representations of art auctions. The only available sources are the Notebooks of auction records conducted by the Orphan Chamber of Amsterdam dating from 1597 to 1638. These Notebooks offer unique material because apart from the description of objects sold and the prices they mention the names of all the buyers that did not pay cash. Montias has analyzed the contents of the Orphan Chamber Notebooks in a database, and in the first part of his book he tries to complete that material with prosopographical research on all persons mentioned in the notebooks. He identified 2,048 buyers who bought about 13,000 lots of art objects in 524 sales. Some were professionals, art and print dealers, painters

and sculptors, while others were ordinary collectors, and a few of them were art lovers. Along with the owners of the goods sold they form the core of Montias's study. Departing from these lists, Montias tries to reconstruct social economic and cultural networks in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

The first part of the book describes how the Orphan Chamber disposed of the estates of deceased residents who had left heirs of minor age. Montias explains how the auctions were organized and conducted. He tries to answer questions about minimum prices, expenses incurred by the auctioneer, and printed catalogues and collusion among buyers to keep prices down or up.

The Notebooks supply us with sets of names of collectors beyond the scope of any other source; moreover, they are a unique record of the prices that were actually paid for works of art. Montias has tried to retrieve owners and buyers in the archives to determine their wealth, which was more closely reflected in the highest prices they paid at the auctions than in the numbers of lots they bought, and even their religious beliefs. He attempts to reconstruct auctions as a social activity by delving into the family, guild, and business links among buyers. Of the works of art sold he inventorizes the subjects, the artists to which they were attributed, and their prices. In the beginning, Amsterdam auctions were still essentially a local phenomenon. Later on, immigrants from the Southern Netherlands played a dominant role in the gradual ascent of Orphan Chamber Sales from a local neighborhood phenomenon to a major Amsterdam institution.

The detailed prosopographical research helps to get an understanding of the workings of the art market. Montias really tried to consider all possible combinations based on his material. He traces the tutor over the orphans. He compares the contents of the Orphan Chamber Notebooks with a sample of notarial inventories. He even looks at the relationships with speculators in "tulip bulbs."

Montias has made a statistical analysis of the content of the sales. Only three to five percent of the estates of inhabitants leaving minor heirs were put up at auction. Although his sample only covers 18% of the sales, the value of the art works they contain exceeded 95 percent of the value of art works sold in those years. The statistical handling of his data is not very convincing because of the very heterogeneous character of his material and the information that is often lacking. He has traced the age, occupation, and geographic

origin of the buyers, but his information is so disparate that one can doubt regarding the usefulness of a statistical handling. Often, Montias himself relativizes the value of his figures. After all, most collectors bought the greater part of the works of art in their collections from art dealers, the artists themselves, or from private transactions.

In part two, Montias tries to situate “selected buyers” in a social and economic framework. He sketches the careers of the most prominent art dealers and tries to determine the relationship between buyers and major artists. The author also looks at dealers related to Rembrandt as well as to Rubens, and he situates them in the cultural life of Amsterdam. Anecdotal evidence—for example, about Hans Le Thoor, who did not succeed in selling paintings to the king of Denmark, or about Johannes de Renialme, the privileged dealer of Rembrandt’s paintings—throws some light on their mentalities.

By looking at the relationships between families and friends, Montias tries to construct clusters of private buyers. These chapters contain a lot of genealogical information, which is often so detailed that it is hard to follow when one does not know the person spoken about. For these chapters, Montias has done an enormous amount of archival research, paying attention to every detail that might hint to a link between those in any way involved with the auctions. He is frequently seduced to draw relations between persons with the same name although that can be very deceiving, since there are a lot of people with identical names in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. The numerous lists of names of often virtually unknown persons do not make the book more readable.

Montias’s book resembles seventeenth-century Amsterdam. It contains a wealth of information, often very detailed, very heterogeneous, challenging but sometimes also a bit confusing, and at the same time very difficult to get a complete view of. The title promises a synthesis, which the book does not offer. Reading this book constantly gives the feeling that one is going through notes to a book that still has to be written. The twenty-seven page index of names typifies the book as a work of reference rather than as a general survey.