

Painterly virtuosity of execution is also the subject of two more studies. Maria-Isabel Pousão-Smith discusses the commonly understood tension between fineness of execution (*nettigheid*) and bravura ease (*sprezzatura*). Using careful reading of van Hoogstraten as well as Philips Angel and Junius as evidence, she argues instead that the Dutch did not prize painterly looseness of brushwork as dexterity but rather esteemed refinements and variety by *fijnmalers*, especially Dou. By contrast, Christopher Atkins considers Frans Hals's virtuoso "rough" brushwork, particularly in his later works, as asserting his mastery through method. Since even contemporaries compared Hals to Titian in his preparatory directness, appreciation of his painterly qualities is not anachronistic.

Kate Bomford considers Rubens's self-representations among his friends as epitomes of the virtue of friendship itself, making learned humanist connections between friendship and virtue. Once more Justus Lipsius occupies center stage as role model, as the learned artist practices the proverb that "love begets art." In the final essay of the volume, Michael Zell sensitively situates Rembrandt's countryside landscapes in relation to the practice of several amateur artists (Jan de Bisschop, Constantijn Huygens the Younger) in seventeenth-century Holland. This practice parallels the vogue for outdoor paintings by gentlemen in England and reminds us about Rembrandt's social aspirations as well as his informal, non-commercial practice of landscape artistry.

While no annual, even with a guiding theme, ever presumes to pull papers together like a coordinated conference, this volume manages to bring most of the changes called forth by Woodall's stimulating and provocative topic. If they sometimes stray into various shadings of the terms "virtue" and "virtuosity," such emphases are due to the rich range of meanings implied by the subject(s) and the ambitions of both artists and patrons.

Albert Blankert. *Selected Writings on Dutch Paintings: Rembrandt, Van Beke, Vermeer and Others*. Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2004. 352 pp. + 302 illus. \$90.00. Review by MIYA TOKUMITSU, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Reading Albert Blankert's *Selected Writings on Dutch Painting: Rembrandt, Van Beke, Vermeer and Others*, one gets the sense that it was a rich experience for Blankert to revisit not only the essays spanning his thirty-year career but also the

problems he tackled in them. It is a rich experience for his readers, too. The essays selected for this book cover a wide range of painters and art-historical topics mostly relating but not exclusive to seventeenth-century Netherlands. They range from introductions to major exhibition catalogues (“Gods, Saints and Heroes: Dutch History Painting”) to three-page pieces attempting to reattribute a single painting (“A Rediscovered *Annunciation of the Shepherds* by Pieter van Laer”), each powerful on its own merits and integral to the book as a whole. Despite the breadth of topics and scope of the essays, the book itself has a clear purpose and direction; so much so that it is hard to consider that the essays were written over decades, as opposed to years. The essays amount to an appreciation and endorsement of the careful viewing of Dutch painting. As for the paintings themselves, Blankert presents his readers with old favorites and also introduces some more obscure works. It is a pleasure to have his essays as a guide for both.

The book opens with a seemingly highly specific essay on the practices of the father and son, Caspar and Constantyn Netscher. These portraitists placed the faces of their clients onto bodies with preconceived poses in preconceived settings. Blankert notes that these paintings had been disparaged as lazy, even as signals of the decline of Dutch painting. These paintings, it was once thought, were poorly executed since the insert method would not fit the sitter with a personalized body or background. Blankert, however, points out that the insert method in fact gave precedence to the painter’s invention, which is precisely what is at work in these previously maligned backgrounds, whereas the painter could not, of course, invent the sitter’s face. In this short essay, what Blankert really does, in addition to illuminating a specific portrait-painting practice, is reorient his reader’s notion of originality. If one shifts his point of view only slightly, one gains a new understanding not only of a specific painter’s methods but of one’s his own preconceptions when looking at painting. It is the graduation from being a passive spectator to an active one.

It seems that Blankert has a special love for such brief, esoteric writings, which comes through in his introduction to the first issue of the journal, *Mercury*, a publication devoted to collecting articles by amateurs and scholars alike that are either too short or too isolated for other scholarly journals. This desire to reach out to several audiences also comes through in *Selected Writings*. Blankert’s book holds insights and arguments helpful to experienced scholars and amateurs, a skill probably honed acutely during his decades of organizing

museum exhibitions. Everyone's eye can become more critical; everyone's self-awareness when regarding art can become more nuanced and precise. Blankert encourages these tendencies in all of his readers no matter what their previous exposure to Dutch painting or painting in general.

Such a compilation of essays spanning thirty years has the potential to seem unfocused, a "cabinet of curiosities" rather than a focused work with a clear point of view. This is not so of Blankert's work. Although Blankert addresses a myriad of themes and ideas, several major points of focus emerge. First, Blankert clearly enjoys introducing or reintroducing little-known Dutch painters such as Daniel van Beke and Caspar Netscher and giving them their due. He rightly points out that too many of these masters remain the interests of only a small number of scholars and connoisseurs, and sometimes are ignored altogether. He does not merely lament their obscurity, however, but adds to the understanding of these men and their *œuvres*. For instance, in his essay on van Beke, Blankert not only discusses the artist's work but reconstructs his social milieu comprising eclectic group of Dutch painters, poets, and musicians.

This is not to say that Blankert shies away from tackling the more august figures of Rembrandt and Vermeer. These essays, too, follow Blankert's preferred format of the compact, one could even say tidy, statement. In his essay on a particularly enigmatic Rembrandt self-portrait of the artist laughing, Blankert argues that the painting was cut down from a larger work depicting the artist painting an old woman from life. Blankert concludes that the original painting was intended as Rembrandt's response to his critics who asserted that he did not transcend the earthly beauty of the human figure in his art in the manner of Zeuxis, the legendary ancient painter. In response to this critique, Rembrandt created the above picture, a reference to another Zeuxis anecdote: that of the Greek painter laughing while painting an old woman. In doing so, Rembrandt not only confronted his critics but also undermined their argument by showing another side of Zeuxis himself. Blankert addresses all this as well as previous interpretations of the painting in a mere thirteen pages, including the images.

The acknowledgement, appreciation, and exploration of previous interpretations and scholarship of Dutch paintings is a preoccupation of Blankert's that emerges in many of these essays. Blankert does not merely cite previous research but ponders how scholars came to their various conclusions and

tracks the changing interpretations of Dutch artwork. As an extension of his historiography, Blankert also includes “Addenda 2003” sections following many of the essays to acknowledge more recent scholarship on the issues they cover. These additions are not only helpful but done in the spirit of scholarly camaraderie that pervades the book.

Another of Blankert’s “causes” is bringing to light the almost airy use of artificial labels such as “genre painting” and “history painting” by scholars and amateurs alike. Although this problem is attacked head on in two of the essays, it returns in many others in the book, revealing Blankert’s unwavering attention to intellectual clarity. Blankert does not call for the banishment of such terms but wants those who look at paintings to be thoughtful in using them. He wants connoisseurs to have a clear set of parameters in mind when they categorize a painting in such a way. In one essay, “What Is Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting? A Definition and Its Limitations,” he defines the term genre painting as it will apply to the essay and indeed to the rest of the book. The purpose of such an essay is to prompt one to come away from it asking, “What really do I mean when I call something a history [or genre, etc.] painting?” It is an important question to ponder both in front of a painting and alone. Blankert maintains such precision in defining his terms and, as the title of the above essay indicates, acknowledging their flaws. Thus, each time Blankert confronts us with the phrases “history painting” or “genre painting” we take notice. Noticing and questioning these terms and categorizations are practices that will be well-served when reading other art historical literature.

Throughout the book it becomes clear that what Blankert really wants is to encourage his readers to look carefully at Dutch paintings. If we have somehow missed the point, Blankert quite literally insists that his readers do at least one exercise in careful looking. Towards the end of the book, in an essay, “A Controversial Still Life” originally published in 1993, Blankert presents his readers with illustrations of a painting by Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Flowers in a Wooden Tub*, and two copies after it. The three illustrations are unlabeled, and it is up to the reader to discern which of the three is the original Brueghel and which of the copies is of better quality. The answers are buried later in the book. If, during this process of careful looking, we question previously held conceptions of originality, categorization, or one particular painter’s *oeuvre*, so much the better.