



Van twee handen geschildert: werkverdeling tussen schilders in de
Nederlanden in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw

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Summary

Painted by two hands: division of labor among painters in the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

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The dissertation "*Painted by two hands*: division of labor among painters in the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" consists of a personal preface, an introduction, six chapters, an epilogue and a bibliography. The accompanying CD-ROM contains two databases (in Microsoft Office Access 2007) that are referred to in the notes to the text of the thesis. A concise 'manual' to these databases has been added, between the epilogue and the bibliography, to enable readers to make use of the compiled data. Earlier versions of chapters IV and VI were published in *The Burlington Magazine* and *Oud Holland* respectively.

Subject

A sizeable percentage of the paintings created in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is attributed to more than one painter. Among art historians, collaboration between painters is therefore accepted as a widespread, diverse phenomenon. Nonetheless, scholarship still focuses predominantly on individual cases and the separation of hands. As a result, paintings made by several artists often receive only peripheral attention. The aim of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of collaboration in its own right, as inherent to the painter's practice of the period.

Problem statement and approach

What were the reasons for painters to engage in collaboration, how did they operate, and what were the contemporary views on collaboration and paintings made by more than one painter? The *introduction* discusses the central questions of the study as well as the context and the method of research. The phenomenon of collaboration deserves acknowledgement as an essential part of the painter's practice of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; to explain why it is necessary, at least in part, to deviate from the customary approach. I have opted to examine collaboration not just in relation to an individual artist, workshop or group, but rather from the broadest possible angle, in a large geographical area - the Netherlands - and over a longer period of time - the sixteenth - and seventeenth centuries.

Databases

The basis of the study is a compilation of information regarding 'two hands' in two separate databases, the one dedicated to paintings attributed to more than one painter, the other to for written sources, e.g. literary texts, inventories and legal documents in which such paintings or specific partnerships are referred to. After all, the collection and interpretation of source material is the preferred method to understand the phenomenon of collaboration in the context of its own time, and to avoid, at least to a degree, modern preconceptions. Initially, I intended to use these two databases also to provide statistics of the kind used in historical information technology, but the data proved to be unsuitable for that purpose. The collected material, however, lends itself well for the formulation of more general insights into the creation of paintings made by more than one painter, elucidating, among other things, the types of painting appropriate to collaboration, and the particular working methods or forms of organisations pertaining to particular types of painting made in collaboration. All chapters rely on the material from these databases.

Chapter I t / VI

Chapter I deals with the contemporary appreciation of collaboration, the reasons that were given for painters to collaborate and the reception of its results. This chapter is based on the general statements on collaboration that can be found in (mainly seventeenth-century) treatises on painting. These statements are supplemented with evidence from written sources in which specific co-productions are

referred to. It transpires that the various forms of collaboration were not uniformly judged: the assessments change from undivided praise to sharp censure. From Lampsonius' biography of Lambert Lombard published in 1565 to Weyermans *Levens-Beschryvingen* of 1729, the texts are discussed chronologically, divided according to different types of collaboration. The first type is that of the purely practical division of labour, in particular within the workshop and for large projects; the second involves a division of labour justified by a differentiation between idea or design on the one hand and execution on the other, based on theoretical notions originating in Italy; the third collaboration as a means to train young painters; the fourth, the participation of several painters of repute to add value to the painting (prestige collaboration); and the fifth the collaborations between artists specializing in different fields of painting.

If it can be assumed that the absence of written comments at the beginning of the sixteenth century, indicates that the collaboration of several painters on one painting was an accepted and common practice, this chapter shows a development over the course of the seventeenth century, towards a rejection of certain forms of collaboration, particularly that between specialized painters. This rejection is based on the contemporary art theoretical concept of '*houding*'. The crucial factor behind the disapproval appears to be a lack of unity in the final result, precisely the kind of unity which is at the core of the seventeenth-century understanding of '*houding*'.

Collaboration is usually explained as motivated by practical, economic reasons - not only in the secondary literature, but also in the contemporary sources. These reasons are explored *chapter II*. Based on the classic teachings of the eighteenth-century Scottish economist Adam Smith, the leading economist Henry Mintzberg offers a generally applicable, practical methodology to consider collaboration in a structured manner. Judging by examples of actual collaboration among painters from sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, division of labour is a better term to describe their working procedures than collaboration. The division of labour and the manner in which the tasks of the various employees are coordinated, in Mintzberg's view, the main factors in the effectiveness of the organisation of any business. The conditions and parameters, formulated by Smith and Mintzberg, are compared to the division of labour among painters in the period under discussion.

Using traditional criteria of classification from economics, the manner in which the work was organised, the relations between the collaborators and the effect on the appearance of the eventual painting are addressed. It emerges that the relations between the economic categories generally referred to as *product*, *process* and *person*, are fairly consistent. As the goal is to study the phenomenon of division of labour in general, individual cases, examples of painters, paintings and resources are used as case studies illustration without aspiring to a chronological overview. The application of insights from modern economic organization theory to the division of labour in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century painter's studio not only helps to clarify the practice in its own right, it also provides an opportunity to achieve a more coherent and unambiguous terminology.

On the basis of the findings from the first two chapters and the data from the databases, four more extensive case studies have been singled out, which each represent a different type of collaboration. These cases are examined with regards to the way the collaboration was organised and the working method that was followed. *Chapters III to VI* discuss the collaboration between specialist painters; putting out work to a subcontractor; *manufacture*, or the making of cheap paintings by the dozen; and prestige collaboration respectively. The format of these chapters varies depending on the available material and the results of the research.

Chapter III deals with the collaboration of specialists: the so-called "*stofferen*", or staffage, in which small figures and livestock were added to a landscape or cityscape by another hand. It transpires that in the historical period under discussion, the phrase "*stofferen*" was used in a broader sense. Using the seventeenth-century Flemish flower painter Daniel Seghers and the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape and figure painter Cornelis van Poelenburch as examples, the manner in which labour was divided between specialists can be shown to have been relatively simple. More importantly, this chapter brings together the different approaches to specialization analysed in the previous two: the

contemporary appreciation and the modern economic perspective. Surprisingly, despite the differences between these approaches, they arrive at the same negative assessment of specialization in combination with division of labour. Modern economic organization theory specifically warns against a lack of coordination when work is distributed between specialists, which is detrimental to the quality of the product. The same hazard is observed by seventeenth-century authors discussing the collaboration of specialized painters: it is unlikely to result in a successful end product.

In *chapter IV*, the genesis of the altarpiece *The Coronation of Mary among the nine choirs of angels*, completed in 1522, by the Bruges painter Albert Cornelis is reconstructed. In the art-historical literature this painting is mainly cited as an early documented example of division of labour. It is one of the few, if not the only surviving painting from the period for which the division of labour was described at the time of production. Two legal documents of January 27, 1520 and April 15, 1522 (ns) recount the disagreements that arose between the donor, the Guild of St. Francis, and the painter. It emerges that Cornelis had subcontracted part of the work to another, unnamed painter. Previous scholars have tended to quote the same few sentences extracted from these documents, yet a close study of the material in its entirety provides ample information about the working method of Cornelis and his associate. These texts not only re-state provisions from the original contract, but also show how far the work had progressed at various stages. Combined with stylistic analysis and research of the under-drawing using infrared reflectography, the analysis allows for an uncommonly precise reconstruction of the division of labour and the sequence in which the work was carried out. Only this combination of different methods of research makes it possible to demonstrate that the coming into being of the *Coronation* is more complicated than could be expected on the basis of the documents alone. An otherwise obscure sentence in the first of the two documents can be used to explain the many discrepancies between the under-drawing and the painted surface. It also becomes clear that it was not so much the participation of a second painter which met with objections from the donor, as hitherto assumed, but the fact that Albert Cornelis had not carried out his commission in accordance with his instructions. In the end, Cornelis had to adjust a painting that had largely been finished, according to the original contract.

This chapter is an edited version of 'The genesis of Albert Cornelis' *Coronation of the Virgin* in Bruges', *Burlington Magazine* vol. CXLII, no. 1172, November 2000, pp. 672-680.

The making of so-called '*dozijnstukken*', cheap paintings of generic themes churned out by painters at the lower end of the market, is the subject of *chapter V*. This practice is often described as mass production, but when it comes to paintings the term *manufacture* is more suitable for this serial, fast and cheap method of production. *Manufacture* is used to designate an industrial process where little or no equipment is used. Different sources testify that the least prosperous painters responsible for this kind of painting did not operate on their own, but worked in the service of art dealers. The surviving records of the seventeenth-century Antwerp trading firms Forchoudt and Musson demonstrate how art dealers systematically applied division of labor when commissioning cheap paintings. Karel van Mander, in the biography of his teacher Pieter Vlerick, describes a far-reaching division of labour among the Malines *tüchlein* painters around the middle of the sixteenth century. It might seem an anachronism, but in Van Mander's description the characteristics of modern assembly line production can be recognized: different collaborators each executing a clearly delineated part of one and the same painting. Unfortunately, this type of painting on canvas is highly perishable, and very few have been preserved. The only corpus to provide an opportunity to examine the described method in practice is that of the works attributed to the so-called group Verbeeck. Although there are unmistakable signs of serial production in these paintings, there is too little comparable material to reach firm conclusions. Moreover, the cohesion of the group Verbeeck derives from an attribution based on the similarity of motifs, which increases the risk of a circular argument.

In the production method discussed in *chapter VI*, collaboration is no longer a means to cut costs or gain time, but a purpose in its own right to increase value. The joining of forces by renowned painters gave a painting added lustre, and turned it into a coveted collector's item. The *Earthly Paradise* by Jan

Brueghel I and Peter Paul Rubens is examined as exemplary of this so called prestige collaboration. Comments by contemporaries show that it was precisely the fact that the painting was a co-production by these two famous masters that made the work into a real showpiece. The composition as a whole, including the figures is grounded in a pictorial tradition that enjoyed popularity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The painting contains information on the way the collaborative creation of this composition was organised. Following its execution step-by-step, from the purchase of the panel to affixing the signature, provides information about the work's progress. What can be deduced from the paint surface of the *Earthly Paradise*, agrees with the working method for paintings in which another painter provided the figures that can be distilled from the journal of Jan Brueghel II. It suggests that Jan Brueghel I must have been the initiator as well as the final vendor of the The Hague *Earthly Paradise*. It is, however, Rubens' masterly contribution that makes this painting into something really extraordinary. His share in the invention of the composition is particularly apparent from the image sources used. In this case, the whole is more than merely the sum of two parts produced by different masters.

This chapter is an edited version of '*In compagnie geordonneert en geschildert, een onderzoek naar de ontstaansgeschiedenis van het Aardse Paradijs van Peter Paul Rubens en Jan Brueghel d.O.*', *Oud Holland* 115 nr. 2, 2001/2002, pp. 111-130.

Epilogue

In the *epilogue* Mintzberg's methodology is used to verify whether the conclusion of *chapter III* - in which the work process is related to the success of the result, the painting - can be applied in reverse: are there types of paintings, or certain styles that lend themselves well to division of labor; or styles where collaboration is not to be expected? Using the workshop practice of Frans Floris and Rembrandt as examples, the methods and styles of painters can be analysed for opportunities to divide the labor as well as the potential benefits of doing so. This can give insight into whether or not division of labour is to be expected. In addition, such an analysis can help with assembling a painter's oeuvre, support arguments for attributions, and clarify the evaluation of the authenticity of a piece. On the basis of research on paintings by two hands it is possible to establish a direct link between style and economic factors, not in terms of the general economic conjuncture where it is often sought, but much 'closer to the workforce', in the organization of labor in the painter's workshop.