



Netherlandisch Immigrant Painters in Naples (1575-1654). Aert Mytens, Louis Finson, Abraham Vinck, Hendrick De Somer and Matthias Stom
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SUMMARY

The aim of this research is to chart and analyze the process of artistic and social integration of five painters from the Netherlands who settled in Naples: Aert Mytens, Louis Finson, Abraham Vinck, Hendrick De Somer and Matthias Stom. The mobility of artists is an important factor in the development of art. Early modern artists were remarkably mobile. Some of them settled in a new city for a considerable amount of time or even remained there for the rest of their career. The necessity to integrate and define a position within the new artistic and social context was much more pressing for these artists than for the many artists who returned to their home country after a relatively brief (study) sojourn. Depending on the available visual and documentary material – which differs greatly from artist to artist - I define different forms of social and professional interaction with compatriots and Neapolitans; I analyze their artistic production in Naples, the way in which they positioned themselves as artists in the Neapolitan art scene and the role played by local professional and religious institutions in their integration process.

Naples was the second-largest city of Europe, a multicultural metropolis and capital of the Spanish Viceroyalty. During the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Neapolitan art market expanded rapidly because of the ecclesiastical building activity and the increased presence of the nobility from the provinces in the capital. Netherlandish painters initially profited from the shortage of local painters to meet this augmented demand by painting altarpieces and gallery paintings in particular genres such as landscape painting and portraiture. From the early-seventeenth century onwards, competition of local painters increased, while the number of Netherlandish painters decreased – also because of the ameliorated circumstances in the Netherlands due to the diminished unrest and rapid economic growth. These specific Neapolitan dynamics played a role in the integration process of the five Netherlandish painters, changing the options available to them.

In the first chapter, I discuss the life and career of Aert Mytens from Brussels. The Neapolitan career of this painter during the last quarter of the sixteenth century serves as an introduction to issues that immigrant painters had to tackle. The biographical account of Mytens' career by his contemporary Carel van Mander provides us with an exceptional insight into the perception of his integration process from the period itself. The young Mytens became part of the community of first-generation Netherlanders in Naples and trained with another Netherlandish immigrant, Cornelis Smet. The immigrant community facilitated his social and professional integration. However, Mytens appears to have had some difficulty in reaching local patrons. He started with commissions from the most remote corners of the Viceroyalty before emerging professionally in the capital itself. Initially, he painted traditional altarpieces, in particular a number of paintings of the *Virgin of the Rosary* – a couple of which have been identified. Only towards the end of his career,

he developed into an ambitious artist who incorporated the latest artistic developments into his work, the *Mocking of Christ* being the finest example.

In the second chapter, I address how Abraham Vinck and Louis Finson each related in entirely different ways to the latest developments in Neapolitan painting, in particular by specializing in artistic genres other than history painting and to the prominence of the Lombard master Caravaggio. Both Vinck and Finson arrived in Naples at a more advanced phase of their career; in contrast to Mytens, they had already developed their artistic skills. Like Mytens, Abraham Vinck integrated in the Netherlandish community and started a family. His decision to specialize as a portraitist for the Neapolitan elite proved effective, as he could benefit from the increased demand of the Neapolitan elite for portraits. Together with Louis Finson, he ran a workshop as well as an art dealing business. Finson mainly produced history paintings – many of which he signed and dated - both for Naples and for export. A part of his Neapolitan oeuvre is rooted in late-Mannerist style, but like many Neapolitan painters he was deeply interested in the innovations that Caravaggio introduced. He became a renowned copyist after this master's work, used motifs borrowed from Caravaggio's paintings in his own work and bought and sold his paintings. I argue that Finson saw the possibilities of marketing Caravaggio's fame, explicitly positioning himself as a Caravaggio expert. Moreover, his activity as a copyist of several of Caravaggio's paintings offers insight into the notion of how social rules could advance as well as frustrate the career of an immigrant painter.

In the third chapter, I discuss the long Neapolitan career (1622-1654) of Hendrick De Somer from Lokeren (or Lochristi). In the decade that passed between Finson's departure (1612) and De Somer's arrival (1622), the situation in Naples had changed. Although the community of Netherlandish painters was now too small to provide De Somer with a social safety net or help him initiate his career and while the number of local painters had increased exponentially, I argue that De Somer's integration was more successful than that of the other artists discussed, in the sense that, both artistically and socially, he became even more Neapolitan than Netherlandish. He was welcomed at a very young age by an unidentified family member in Naples, both of which factors likely facilitated his integration. It is a remarkable feature of De Somer's artistic integration that his entire artistic training took place in Naples. Soon after his arrival, he gained access to the workshop of the pivotal figure of Neapolitan painting at the time, Jusepe de Ribera. He reaped the fruits of his connection with Ribera for the rest of his career. At the same time, like many of his Neapolitan colleagues, he responded to the growing taste for Roman-Bolognese art in Naples. His work, which I analyzed by means of his signed paintings and the information in Neapolitan inventories, shows no trace of his Northern origins. My discovery of documents on his marriage to a Neapolitan woman and the baptism of their children, indicate that his social integration was just as successful. The archival research that I conducted also points to the fact that he counted several Neapolitans amongst his friends and collaborated with local artists. At the same time, he stayed in contact with his compatriots. In his role as *Kirchmeister* of the German-Flemish

brotherhood in Naples, he was the perfect mediator between Northerners and Neapolitans.

In the fourth chapter, on the Neapolitan career of Matthias Stom, we encounter yet another type of immigrant artist. There is a lot of uncertainty about Stom's origin and formation as well as the subsequent development of his career. It is however clear that he never resided long in one specific place. Within less than two decades, he was active in Rome, Naples, Sicily, Venice and Lombardy. My discovery of some payments and an accusation filed against him at the ecclesiastical court not only proves his physical presence in Naples, but also sheds light on the social and professional issues that he dealt with in the city. As the accusation was filed by his pupil, Mattheus De Roggiero, we now have evidence that he did not work alone in Naples. On the other hand, Stom was involved with social outsiders like English and Dutch sailors, arguably an indication that he did not (attempt to) integrate socially. At the same time, this lack of integration apparently did not frustrate his career: Neapolitan inventories indicate that he was popular amongst collectors in Naples. My cautious hypothesis is that he might have acquired this popularity thanks to the support of the rich Antwerp merchant Gaspard de Roomer. From an analysis of Stom's Neapolitan oeuvre, which I identified on the basis of inventories and descriptions in city guides, it appears that Stom was appreciated by Neapolitans for his characteristic paintings of candlelight scenes with half figures. I also argue that Neapolitans credited him with the introduction of this type of painting to him. Stom's documented paintings show no sign of interest in Neapolitan art but rather are a characteristic combination of elements from the oeuvres of Gerrit van Honthorst and Peter Paul Rubens. Likely Stom left Naples after the novelty of his work had worn out, having been unable or unwilling to adapt.

In the Conclusion, I attempt to bring together shared characteristics of the artistic and social integration of the five artists in Naples, discussing the dynamics of the Netherlandish community, the role of institutions and religion and what nationality possibly meant for their artistic integration. Although I have no conclusive evidence on the religious conviction of the five artists, the accusation against Stom evinces that the Neapolitan Curia kept close watch on the behavior of foreigners. The way Netherlandish painters could employ their nationality and foreignness to position themselves artistically is a complex issue. I suggest that technique, subject matter and style could possibly be seen as typically Netherlandish. In addition, the fact that they came from outside Naples made them just as, or even more attractive to Neapolitans. In a way, their foreignness allowed them to bring the artistic innovation that the growing Neapolitan art market was craving for in this period, although this does not apply to De Somer.

This research demonstrates that many types of immigrant painters existed, all with different options and objectives, dependent of their artistic and social background and the dynamics of the Neapolitan art market. I hope to have shown that the identification of these types and an awareness of the immigrant status can help scholars to better understand the oeuvre and career choices of artists abroad.