OBJECTS OF DESIRE: CASE STUDIES IN THE PRODUCTION AND
CONSUMPTION OF EROTIC IMAGES IN THE DUTCH GOLDEN AGE

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Objects of Desire: Case Studies in the Production and Consumption of Erotic Images in the Dutch Golden Age

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This dissertation is an investigation into the place and purpose of eroticism in seventeenth-century Dutch art. Sexualized iconography was certainly not uncommon in this period; much of it has become familiar fare to modern scholars and viewers. What is significantly less understood, though no less frequent in occurrence, are images that are erotic in and of themselves. It is my thesis that there exists a larger body of erotic visual material than has been heretofore acknowledged. Drawing attention to the existence of imagery concerned encouraging a direct erotic response facilitates a reconstruction of the place of erotic imagery in seventeenth-century Holland. This study analyzes the material in an effort to create a new context for the reception of these cultural artifacts and works to highlight how canonical prejudices have encouraged scholars and viewers to see these objects as peripheral to the artistic product of the Dutch Golden Age.

Questions concerned with audience, market pressures, artistic aspirations, the relationship between a theme and its form and meaning are addressed through close readings of nine primary case studies. The subjects of these examples are drawn from
almost every category, ranging from genre subjects to pastoral themes. This diversity is suggestive of a higher threshold of tolerance for suggestive imagery than was previously assumed for this culture. As each chapter demonstrates, these nine examples are but a fraction of images that privilege a visual rather than a thematic or didactic eroticism. The intent of works such as Bartholomeus van der Helst’s *Female Nude with Drapery* or Jan Gerritsz van Bronchorst’s *Sleeping Nymph and a Shepherd* is remarkably clear. By analyzing these astonishing works and establishing appropriate backdrops against which their eroticism is highlighted, this dissertation foregrounds material that has too often been mischaracterized in the study of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Focusing on how these objects mean as a way to understand what they mean serves to broaden the field of Dutch art historical studies and reinsert these images into a more holistic and international picture of European Baroque art.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A Matter of Experience: Sensuality in Dutch Art of the Golden Age

The term “erotic” is a descriptor frequently applied to works of art produced by artists such as Titian or Rubens. However the suggestion that there is anything erotic about seventeenth-century Dutch art is surprising to many and seems to run counter to the image of the primarily Protestant Dutchman, whose concerns were rather domestic and pedestrian.¹ Certainly the staid and sober faces which stare out at us from myriad portraits produced during the period reveal very little of a collective personality that appreciated all aspects of the sensory human experience. However, when one is confronted with an image such as Jacob van Loo’s *Amorous Couple*, c. 1650-60 (Figure 5.2) or Bartholomeus van der Helst’s *Female Nude with Drapery*, of 1658 (Figure 3.1) it is difficult to deny that erotic experience should be considered one of the artists’ main objectives.

Although bared bosoms, telling gestures, and knowing glances abound in seventeenth-century Dutch art, a discussion of eroticism as it pertains to this category of

¹ This attitude has its roots in the cultural climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when “Victorian” sensibilities were easily offended. Efforts to redress the anxieties these kinds of images produced for the modern viewer often involved a literal “redressing” of the images themselves. We are aware of several well-known examples in which seemingly distasteful imagery was reworked to suit a more prudish audience. Two examples in which the offending gestures and body parts were obscured are Jacob Duck’s *Sleeping Woman* (c. 1650’s) and Jan Steen’s *A Woman at Her Toilet* (Rijksmuseum, c. 1659-60). For a discussion of the modifications made to Duck’s work, and an image of the painting prior to its cleaning, see Peter Sutton, ed. *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984) p. 192-93, fig. 1. See also Ann Jensen Adams, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Private Collections* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1988). For a discussion of the overpainting of Jan Steen’s Rijksmuseum picture, see Wouter Kloek, *Jan Steen (1626-1679)*. (Zwolle: Waanders, 2005) p. 79 and fig. 81.
art is under-emphasized in the scholarship. When sexual images or themes are addressed by scholars, the discussions often relegate the sensuousness of the depiction to a secondary matter, highlighting instead some other aspect of the work which the sexuality is believed to serve. Sexual references abound in Dutch imagery and range from those found in the earliest tavern scenes of Hendrick Pot and Jacob Duck to those seen in images of elegant couples cavorting in luxurious interiors painted at the end of the century by artists such as Caspar Netscher and Eglon van der Neer. They are easily catalogued and have been so organized by researchers of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Scholars have tended, in this way, to prioritize the artworks’ theatricality, iconographic significance, or, perhaps most pronounced in the literature, the artworks’ function as a moralizing or value-bestowing narrative. When the sexuality is addressed head-on it is often embedded within a more intellectualized approach that tends to link the obvious seductiveness of the image to other pre-conceived projects of the artist. The rarity of an “eroticism for eroticism’s sake” approach within the scholarship on Dutch art is reinforced by the way scholars of erotic art within the Western canon in general have

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3 Examples of these specific approaches will be addressed below.
overlooked the Dutch contribution. Despite the inclusion of works created in other cultures that contain similar themes or visual motifs, the Dutch objects have not been considered relevant to a discussion of eroticism in art.

My thesis will look at this previously neglected and undervalued aspect of Dutch art through an investigation of specific objects, the key point of which seems to be their ability to elicit sensuous experience. I will argue that the quantity and diversity of images that foreground this eroticism suggest its centrality to the audience. Rather than being produced in the margins of culture, secreted away and shown the light of day only to satisfy the libidinous pleasures of lecherous outcasts, this art was prized and fulfilled a particular desire in the market. The preponderance of erotic motifs in the art produced during Holland’s Golden Age would at first appear to contradict certain assumptions about the strict and sober nature of Dutch culture. However, digging deeper into the layers of life during this era, one finds that there was a strong interest in the earthly desires of the human body. The purpose of this dissertation is not to say that these aspects of daily life were approached completely without anxiety, but is instead intended to open up a space in which it is easier to understand why, how, and for whom these images were made.

It is essential to define how the word erotic is used in this study. I consider erotic images to be those whose primary effect is to arouse a sensual experience in the viewer through predominantly visual means. By focusing on the primacy of the sensual, I wish to distinguish my analysis from the emphasis that much Dutch scholarship has placed on

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moralizing, iconographic, and other approaches to sexual themes in Dutch art. In foregrounding the visual aspect of eroticism, I hope to consider these works apart from those whose sexual interpretations and intentions are initiated through more conceptual and associative responses, such as erotic metaphors and symbols, references to “naughty” stories or jokes of the time, etc. The erotic thread that this study seeks to explore therefore evokes an initial, automatic, and visceral response that does not need to be transformed via the mental faculties of the viewer. This arousal is directly linked to the privileging of the sexualized body and the sensual experience and can be achieved through thematic or stylistic means. The signs of the erotic in the art under consideration in this study are to be found in both the subjects represented as well as the artistic treatment of these subjects. We can understand the erotic in terms that are both cultural and artistic; and as art is a product of a particular culture, the second is both intimately and inseparably connected to the first.

Although eroticism is seen throughout the course of the development of Northern Netherlandish art from the late sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries, I have chosen to focus on objects produced between 1640-1690 – a period known for

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5 Of course, this presumes a male viewer but I think that given the time and culture with which we are dealing the assumption is not problematic. Scholars have posited some theories regarding how women would have viewed certain images (see, for example, the work of Alison McNeil Kettering, Elizabeth Honig, and Magrit Thøfner). Unfortunately, our ability to reconstruct a picture is hampered by the patriarchal emphasis of Dutch culture. Women just did not have the voice that we would like to read or hear in an effort to sustain viable conclusions about what they would have thought upon viewing an erotic image of someone of their sex.

6 See for example, Nanette Salomon’s understanding and use of the term “sexual iconography” throughout her essay “Early Netherlandish Boordeltjes”. Also Ian Moulton’s application and definition of erotic as it pertains to early modern pornographic writing in Ian Moulton Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
remarkable stylistic and thematic shifts in Dutch art.\textsuperscript{7} This moment coincides with the
flourishing of a new form of sensuality in Dutch art, one in which stylistic breaks with
the preceding mannerist style parallel the spread of eroticism beyond the subjects of
history paintings. New images that celebrate pure visual eroticism emerge.

Simultaneously, this particular interval in the history of the Dutch Republic represents a
pinnacle of artistic achievement supported by a prosperous and confident state.

Populated with an abundance of artistic genius as well as a sophisticated and financially
stable buying public, the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Leiden provide
readymade geographic parameters for the works of art under consideration here.

When one’s eyes are open to the eroticism characteristic of Dutch art, the
significant number of objects whose surfaces are alive with arousal and passion becomes
apparent. However, this study is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of
eroticism in all of Dutch art. Instead, it will explore the visual and cultural apparatuses of
eroticism through a detailed and focused analysis of images that are organized around
four major subject groups: toilet scenes, fantasy portraits, the finding of Moses, and the
pastoral. Each chapter addresses one of these narrative themes. Demonstrating how
pervasive this sensual current was in Dutch art, the themes discussed in this study come
from all categories of image-making including genre, history, and portraiture.

There are many non-sexualized treatments of the subject groups addressed in this
dissertation. The themes themselves do not necessarily recommend or require an erotic
treatment and, indeed, there are many Dutch examples of toilet scenes, historiated

\textsuperscript{7} For comparative purposes and in order to reconstruct a fuller picture of the development
of the themes, excursions outside of these parameters to discuss works produced before
and after will be discussed where appropriate.
portraits, or the Finding of Moses that are not in the least erotic. Indeed, the range of representational strategies seen when surveying these subjects as a whole demonstrates that artists could very easily opt to create a picture with more modest intentions. However, the case studies that I have selected depict an eroticism where it is neither automatic nor expected; demonstrating that the eroticism was not necessarily linked to, nor limited by, specific themes or subject matter. Sexual references in Dutch art are, of course, not limited to these themes but can be found in many different categories of subject. Images of prostitutes and procuresses, such as those produced in the second quarter of the century, almost always contain sexual details. However, this sexuality is expected as the themes themselves dictate its inclusion. By choosing the alternative themes outlined above, I hope to demonstrate that eroticism in Dutch art was often cultivated for its own sake.

Within each theme, I have selected specific representative images that serve as the primary examples around which a discussion of the erotic in art of the Dutch Golden Age circulates. While startling in the visual frankness of its sensuality, each image is embedded within a well-established pictorial or thematic format. Through sustained and detailed visual analyses, I will dissect the ways in which these images were made to look erotic as well as intended to elicit an erotic interpretation. My aim is also to validate the presence of eroticism in these works through direct reference to a cultural climate that allowed and promoted this kind of imagery. An equally significant intention is to demonstrate how this eroticism fits into the larger more international picture of eroticism in art as well as to highlight what makes it distinctly Dutch.
In order to meet these objectives, I approach the examination of the objects that form the core group discussed in this study with several questions in mind. What makes this image erotic, both visually and culturally? How is eroticism constructed or understood in these objects? In other words, what are the visual mechanics and cultural implications of this eroticism? What does the presence of eroticism and a new understanding of its place within the culture do for our understanding of both seventeenth-century Dutch art and culture? How have previous attempts to explain this eroticism, if any exist, fallen short? What is distinctly Dutch about this imagery? How does it differ from the acknowledged eroticism of art produced in different stylistic periods and historical moments? How might it be the same? By focusing on these questions, it is my intention to return to Dutch art an appreciation of the sensual and the erotic that will help to reconstruct a fuller picture of Dutch culture and its attitudes towards art and eroticism.

Given that numerous works depicting the same theme were produced, it seems necessary to justify my selection of these particular examples. To begin, each one of these objects represents a stunning and visually evocative representation of its subject. Created by some of the era’s most talented and successful practitioners, such as Ferdinand Bol, Bartholomeus van der Helst, Jacob van Loo, and Ceasar van Everdingen, their beauty and aesthetic value are readily apparent. In addition, the eroticism of each of these works possesses a clarity that enables us to deconstruct the visual mechanics and cultural references which both the artist and the seventeenth-century viewer employed to infuse these objects with erotic appeal.
The images also share certain visual characteristics as a means of cultivating an erotic effect. All include a certain manipulation of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed to heighten a sense of voyeurism as well as participation by the observer. The use of illusionistic effects engenders a sense of realism to draw the viewer into the scene. Drapery and its ability to conceal or reveal is another motif that runs through these works. Analyzing these and other visual mechanics of the objects under consideration, one begins to see the repetition of artistic strategies that characterize some of the conventions of erotic representation during the period.

As one of the objectives of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the eroticism seen in seventeenth-century Dutch art fits into the larger picture of eroticism in art, I have chosen some subjects that are decidedly Dutch, such as the domestic toilet scenes, as well as others which can easily be situated within broader artistic traditions, such as the sleeping nymph. These groups allow us to analyze how both the subject and the style of the eroticism of Dutch art qualify it for inclusion in larger studies of the category of erotic art. When analyzed individually, each group allows for a generalized discussion of the mechanics of eroticism visible on the surfaces of these Dutch paintings, while also providing for a unique and focused discussion of a specific aspect of eroticism as it is found in Dutch art.

The second chapter introduces us to the scene of the woman at her toilet. It addresses how the eroticization of a domestic scene or activity appealed to market tastes and influences and exposed a particularly Dutch sensibility. The theme of a young woman privately caring for her appearance was an extremely popular genre subject. Although artists working in other cultures and at other times saw the allure of the theme,
it was the Dutch who championed its charm by creating hundreds of examples. The representations break down into two compositional formats: the half-length and the full-length.

One of the most strikingly erotic examples of the half-length variety is the *Young Woman Combing her Hair* by Cesar Boetius van Everdingen (Figure 2.1). The startling immediacy of the image as well as the frankness of the presentation make this one of the most erotically charged images produced in this genre. Drawing upon artistic and cultural strategies for heightening the eroticism of the subject and its visual representation, van Everdingen's image proves a valuable starting point for a discussion of half-length toilet scenes as a viable category of eroticism in seventeenth-century Dutch art. As the introduction to the study of eroticism in Dutch art, this is the perfect image to demonstrate how an artist can eroticize the imaged body, the gaze of the viewer, and the subject itself.

The full-length version of the woman at her toilet provides a great opportunity to see how the painter Godfried Schalcken was able to draw upon visual references borrowed from other subjects, such as the toilet of Venus, and infuse it with characteristics appreciated by a Dutch audience (Figure 2.2). It also introduces the idea of the voyeur and his accomplice. With conscious decisions, the artist has increased the immediacy of the piece, allowing a contemporary viewer to see a “real” woman instead of an “imagined” one. The question then raised is how does this create or enhance an erotic effect?

The third chapter deals with a subject category that was the bread and butter for many artists of the period: the portrait, more specifically, the fantasy portrait. The
purpose of this chapter is to analyze the eroticism of this type of portrait, to discuss what this eroticism contributes to our understanding of the sitter as well as the commissioner of the portrait, and, ultimately, to demonstrate the positive place occupied by the sexualized body in seventeenth-century Dutch culture. Concentrating on the visual evidence provided by the works themselves as well as the research of historians and sociologists who have studied the history of sexuality, this chapter attempts to answer two questions: what makes the bodies in these portraits erotic and what is the meaning and purpose of this eroticization?

Portraits have the ability to communicate volumes about their subjects allowing the patron and artist to construct how the sitter is perceived by the viewer. As such, these semi-public images of private people can tell us much about what was socially acceptable with regards to the projection of one's image. A prime example is the portrait of an unknown woman by Bartholomeus van der Helst (Figure 3.1). One of the most distinct aspects of this portrait is that the subject is not presented within a narrative framework that justifies or legitimizes the palpable eroticism. There are no accompanying attributes such as a bow and quiver of arrows to suggest Diana or a little Cupid, which might indicate Venus. Instead the viewer is presented with the brightly lit head and torso of a starkly nude woman who coyly looks out at the viewer. Van der Helst has skillfully manipulated the illusionistic potential of his hyper-realistic style to create an interaction between the sitter and the viewer that is infused with erotic sparks. Jacob van Loo, an artist well-known for his predilection for depicting young and nubile female nudes, also created a full-scale portrait of a woman standing naked before the viewer. Emphasizing
the ever so slightly more modest characteristics of this woman, van Loo worked to suggest the intimacies shared by the subject and her patron.

The fourth chapter offers another means of illustrating the pervasiveness of the Dutch taste for the erotic through an investigation of one specific subject: the finding of Moses. Here is a startling instance in which Dutch artists populated an image with erotic bodies that contribute nothing to, and indeed are out of place, in the ostensible narrative. Dutch artists produced numerous eroticized interpretations of the finding of the infant Moses, populated with beautiful female forms cavorting among the reeds of the Nile. Among them, the example by Ferdinand Bol stands out for the sheer invisibility of the prophetic babe who is ostensibly the painting’s subject (Figure 4.3). The viewer’s eye must travel across the entire lower half of the painting, admiring all the available flesh along the way before it gets to the baby hidden among the river grasses. Although he is primary to the narrative, Moses is certainly a secondary character when compared to the luxurious forms of the naked maidens who spiral across the bottom of the canvas and accumulate in the lower right corner. This painting is an excellent example of how eroticism came to be prized in its own right. The sexually charged arrangement of the female nudes does not contribute to the narrative structure of the subject but instead becomes a subject itself; a subject more primary to the picture than the biblical episode it is purported to represent.

The final chapter focuses on pastoral imagery, specifically on the oft-repeated themes of the satyr spying upon the sleeping nymph and the shepherd couple caught in an intimate embrace. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how these erotic narratives eventually give way to, and allow for, images in which the narrative
framework is no longer present and the viewer is instead confronted with an image of pure sensuality. The ideas suggested in the chapter on history painting, in which an eroticism that is superfluous permeates images depicting a biblical episode, can be seen to inform an eroticism that is both a means and an end. Privileging the erotic experience above all else, these pastoral paintings illustrate the thesis that erotic pictures were an important component of the artistic output of the Dutch Golden Age.

In a painting depicting a sleeping nymph spied upon by a young satyr, Jan Gerritsz van Bronckhorst exploits the voyeuristic relationship between the viewer and the viewed through his expert manipulation of the Dutch fascination with realism and illusionism in art (Figure 5.1). Much like in the image by van Everdingen discussed in the first chapter (Figure 2.1), the artist here heightens the erotic effect through his exploitation of standard artistic tools. The manner in which van Bronckhorst creates the body, applying pigment in feathery strokes that imitate the nymph’s soft and supple flesh heighten the illusion that if one were to reach out and touch her, one’s fingertips would meet with skin and not canvas. Pushing against the picture plane, the figure dominates the composition and spills out of the painted space. A series of interconnected diagonals creates a sense of depth and increases the suggestion of the corporeality of the figure herself. Presented with this body, which is vulnerable to the colonizing and exploitative gaze of the male viewer, one cannot help but understand this image as one which was meant to be enjoyed erotically.

Perhaps one of the most arresting examples included in this study, an image of a pair of lovers, attributed to Jacob van Loo, presents the viewer with an image of pure sensuousness (Figure 5.2). Oblivious to the presence of the viewer and placed in an
ambiguous setting devoid of any identifying features, a nude man and woman exchange intimate caresses while gazing tenderly into one another’s eyes. The artist has deliberately obfuscated any narrative structure in an effort to concentrate the viewer’s attention and desire on the couple represented. The timelessness of their interaction, without thematic anchoring in traditional representations of the loves of the gods, for example, brings this couple into the present. The treatment of the bodies themselves especially that of the woman, reflects the Dutch tendency to avoid over-idealization in an effort to emphasize the reality effect and locate the couple in our time and our space. The narrow focusing of the viewer’s attention on the couple only, accomplished by stripping away any narrative trappings, is achieved by manipulating the compositional arrangement. The figures themselves fill the pictorial space. Turning toward each other, the bodies are contained within a pyramidal framework which draws attention towards the center of the composition and also upwards to their faces held close to one another. The gestures echo each other as he touches her chin while she reaches for his lap.

This study employs several different methodologies and interpretive strategies in approaching the visual mechanics and the cultural underpinnings of eroticism in seventeenth-century Dutch art. My own art historical practices, and thus the principal methodological tactics used in this dissertation, are those associated with formalism and contextuality. The images themselves are at the center of my study and my approach to each reinforces their connections to the key questions of how we see this eroticism and how we understand it. While the search for context creates a picture (or series of possible pictures) for the reception of these objects, a theoretical analysis assists us in understanding the mechanics of the culture/context itself. The necessity of grappling
with material as unruly as issues of sexuality and desire and the relationships between people and images has compelled me to make use of certain theoretical approaches.

Through an examination of the visual mechanics of the objects under consideration, we will begin to see the repetition of particular artistic strategies that characterize some of the conventionalities of erotic representation, as mentioned above. These encompass the treatment of the nude, the eroticization of the gaze, and the manipulation of the participation of the viewer. Scrutinizing how artists have constructed their images also entails an investigation into particular visual references that might have influenced the process. A comparative approach that looks to how other cultures dealt with these issues will obviously be a part of this effort. To this end, I intend to look at a broad range of material.

Highlighting the immediacy of Dutch erotic art over an emphasis on intellectualized or iconographic approaches is not to say that there is not an associative element that contributes to the sensual visual experience. Put another way, every culture, including that of the Dutch during the seventeenth century, has certain images or literary connotations that ring true to it as erotic and as distinct from those shared by other cultures and times. Specific iconographic references under consideration here include the significance of domestic interiors, associations made when looking at nymphs or bathers, portrait strategies, and the like.

Looking to understand the culture in which these images were created and appreciated widens the picture and deepens our understanding of the images and their role and function. Situating them within a context will necessitate reference to such pertinent issues as: censorship and the limits of representation; attitudes towards sex and
the body; relations between the sexes; the distinction between public and private behaviors; and reactions to intimate relationships. Recovering these attitudes and ideas through primary sources and the work of other scholars who have made these fields their specialty will be an important factor in discussing the importance of the images under consideration here.

A number of theoretical approaches can help delineate the visual mechanics by which the works of art at hand operate on the viewer, as well as the cultural and historical contexts that engendered them. Feminist studies can provide an understanding of how the works satisfied or played to the structure of the male gaze and a predominantly male clientele. One can also ponder the reaction of the female viewer and the difference of vision between male and female audiences who encountered the works in homes or other multi-gendered spaces. Reception theory can shed some light on the creation of artistic experience through the relation of the image to the viewers’ lived experience (or lack thereof). Purely Marxist approaches offer specific insight into the ways works of art fitted into the Dutch marketplace, while more conceptual studies that draw on Marxist and psychoanalytical insights may suggest ways in which the economics or market-structures of the time affect the object-subject dynamic at the core of sexual and visual experience.

Several fields of specialized study have informed and influenced my analysis of eroticism in seventeenth-century Dutch art and culture. My discussion of the topic as a whole as well as my investigation into the specific objects included in this dissertation, are framed by the larger issues which have developed out of research into such topics as art and the body; eroticism in art; and the history of sex. Reviewing the literature
relevant to each one of these topics helps to demonstrate the ways in which previous discussions of art and eroticism in the Netherlands, to the extent one can find them, have been misguided. The purpose of this section is not to review the entire field or survey all of the literature. Instead, I highlight some of the primary approaches to the appropriate material with reference to the most relevant ideas through a discussion of the most important research.

Situating my own ideas of eroticism in Dutch art within a larger intellectual discourse also necessitates a review of how the issues have been addressed in the scholarship on the art of alternate cultures and artistic styles. While the Dutch experience has been explored as part of the broad history of sex, as will be discussed in greater detail below, my contention is that discussion of the situation in the Northern Netherlands has been narrow in the case of art and the body, and underemphasized if not absent from studies of eroticism in art. Because of this, my own study also relies on the research into eroticism in art as applied to the art and culture of Renaissance Italy, and other Early Modern cultures, as well as the modern experience.

At the very core of this study is the representation of the human figure, primarily the female nude. The human form has always been a primary subject of art and while the basic form has not changed, the representation itself certainly has. Specific representational modes, inclusions and exclusions, style, and presentation all have significance. The visual approach to understanding the presentation of the body is one that is focused almost exclusively on the mechanics of how the body is represented, with a concentration on issues of style and development in the visual arts. Kenneth Clark offers perhaps the most visual, “taste” oriented approach – an approach that appears
somewhat dated to current scholars. Others, while still concentrating on the visual aspect of the work, manage to interweave an appreciation of historical and psychological context while still maintaining the primacy of the visual and artistic experience of the work.

A second approach to the material is one that seeks to situate a particular representation of a body within a larger historical or cultural context that explains why the representation was made to look the way it does. Mary Rogers, for example, analyzes historical documents and writings to understand contemporaneous conceptions of women’s beauty in order to explain why portraits represented women in particular ways. Rona Goffen in *Titian’s Women* discusses period attitudes towards women, dividing the chapters of her work into the particular identities that would define a woman during that age.

A third tactic for understanding the questions raised by this group of images is to be found in any number of approaches that generally are informed by a particular theory,

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often politicized, about the workings of human psychology and society, and which
approach the work of art as evidence that supports or enriches such theory. Feminist
thinking generally dominates theoretical writings on visual representations of the body.¹²

Ideas about the imaging of the body first introduced by historians of the art of
other periods and cultures have recently begun to shape the understanding of the
representation of the body in Dutch art. The delayed appearance of these discussions in
the Netherlandish context is perhaps a result of early methods of understanding Dutch art
that focused almost exclusively on the details of the paintings and much less so on the
significance of the figures portrayed in the paintings. Recent studies into the represented
body in Netherlandish art have served as a slight corrective to this earlier neglect. The
essays collected in the 2007-2008 volume of Nederlands Kunsthistorische Jaarboek all
deal with how bodies are depicted in Northern European art and what this imaging might
tell us about the significance of corporeal experience and embodiment.¹³ Three of these
studies address the nude.¹⁴ Karolien De Clippel’s analysis, concerned with Rubens’

¹² Nanette Salomon exemplifies an approach that seeks to discover in the work of art
produced by male artists evidence of both an oppressive sexualization of women by a
male-dominated society as well as that society’s own subconscious knowledge and fear
of the indeterminacy of the categories that it has imposed on women. Salomon, “The
Venus Pudica: uncovering art history's 'hidden agendas' and pernicious pedigrees." In
(London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 69-87. See also the works by Lynda Nead, Linda
Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, Mary Garrard, etc.
¹³ Ann-Sophie Lehmann and Herman Roodenburg, eds. Body and Embodiment in
¹⁴ Stephanie Schrader, “Gossaert’s Neptune and Amphitrite and the Body of the Patron,”
Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 58 (2007-2008) p. 40-57; Ann-Sophie Lehmann,
“Fleshing out the Body: The ‘colours of the naked’ in Workshop Practice and Art
and Karolien De Clippel, “Defining Beauty: Rubens’ Female Nudes,” Nederlands
nudes, offers an interesting analysis of the artist’s fame as a painter of beautiful, fleshy, naked women. However, she only briefly mentions that the erotic appeal of these bodies was what enticed patrons such as Frederick Hendrick to collect Rubens’ paintings with such enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{15}

As with studies of the representation of the body in other periods, the primary subject under consideration in many analyses of Dutch art is the female nude. Several studies have been dedicated to this topic. Rembrandt is an artist whose striking representations of the female nude capture the viewer’s imagination and as such is often the topic of studies devoted to the nude in Dutch art.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Elizabeth Schott’s dissertation is dedicated to the single-figure nude in Rembrandt’s art.\textsuperscript{17} While beneficial in collecting all of the instances of this theme in the artist’s oeuvre, Schott’s work falls short in terms of any cohesive analysis of them. Although claiming to use Rembrandt’s images of nudes to make broad statements about their presence, importance, and significance in Dutch art of the period, Schott fails to do so. Sluijter’s recent book, a collection of new and republished but reworked scholarship, is entirely devoted to the nude in the art of Rembrandt. His discussion of specific paintings is punctuated by essays in which he approaches issues of the nude in Dutch art in general and the ways

\textsuperscript{15} De Clippel, “Defining Beauty,” p. 112.
\textsuperscript{16} In her book on women in Rembrandt’s art, Gilboa also includes a chapter on the nude (and the naked) figure. Anat Gilboa, \textit{Images of the Feminine in Rembrandt’s Work} (Delft: Eburon Publishers, 2003).
\textsuperscript{17} Elizabeth Schott, "Representing the Body in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands: Rembrandt's Nudes Reconsidered" (Ph. D. diss., History of Art, University of California, Berkeley, 2000).
this might inform an understanding of the nude in images by other Dutch artists. In 2001, an exhibition that focused on Rembrandt’s images of women made several efforts to analyze the artist’s nudes. Eric Jan Sluijter’s essay on Rembrandt’s nudes seeks to address the unique aesthetic approach the artist took when painting this subject. Comparing specific examples of Rembrandt’s work with representations of the same subjects by other artists, Sluijter argues that Rembrandt’s enterprise had less to do with achieving ideal, classicized beauty (let alone eroticism) and more to do with efforts to express a certain life-likeness or verisimilitude.

Alison McNeil Kettering, in her essay on Ter Borch’s images of women, argues that the artist’s focus on the rich satin garments of his figures substitutes for the creative focus on nudity that might have arisen in other artistic eras. She attributes this focus to Dutch artistic proclivities as well as considerations of ideal Petrarchan beauty that she believes were prevalent in the Netherlands at the time.

Other work that addresses the imaged body is centered on the individual figure as a signifier. Herman Roodenburg’s extensive work in the field of Dutch portraiture reveals that analyzing how the body is imaged – gestures, stance, clothing, actions and

19 In addition to the essay by Sluijter, discussed below, the catalog also contains an essay by Volker Manuth that reviews primary source documents that deal with the issue of the female nude and the reputation of the models who sat for artists. Volker Manuth, “As stark naked as one could possibly be painted…”: the reputation of the nude female model in the age of Rembrandt,” in *Rembrandt's Women*, Julia Lloyd Williams, ed. (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 2001): 4-53.
interactions – contributes to the way the image communicates physiological, social, and cultural messages. Roodenburg provides important insights into what we can learn about the sitter and the society through a focus on the decorum, stance, and other signals present in the image. However, despite his work elsewhere on “naughty” joke books and lewdness, he pays scant if any attention to sexuality or nudity when addressing the visual arts.

Related to notions about how an imaged body communicates cultural messages is the theory that bodies both reflect and help further certain social ideologies. Predominantly feminist scholars using this approach often understand images of the female body as symptomatic of a social construct considered to be pathological, negative, or oppressive in some way. Much of Nanette Salomon’s work revolves around how imaged bodies communicate deeply rooted beliefs about gender roles and identities, sexual economies, and the social construction of desire.

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23 For his work on the joke book, which includes an analysis of the role of the dirty joke, see note 63.

All of the approaches referenced above provide useful insights into the means by which Dutch artists portrayed the body and the cultural significance of their efforts. However, none focus on the eroticism of the image *per se*, or on the dynamics by which eroticism is conjured through the relationship of the viewer and the subject gazed upon. While the potential for, and contemporary interest in, erotic expression has been a neglected subject in the history of Dutch art, the sexual iconography of certain images, particularly genre subjects, has not. This dissertation approaches sexual iconography and erotic effect as two differing artistic endeavors. The former represents an intellectualized approach mediated by a focus on the cumulative effect of the details of a painting. The emphasis is on the hidden message unlocked by an allegorical reading. If anything, a focus on sexual iconography tends to distance the viewer/scholar from the immediacy of an erotic experience itself. As such, I would argue that it offers only one, potentially skewed, vision of the Dutch artistic experience.

So much of our understanding of the sexual aspects of Dutch art is a legacy of early attempts to situate an analysis of the objects within an intellectual enterprise that moved beyond basic connoisseurship issues. Eddy de Jongh initiated these efforts...
through his development of an interpretive strategy that drew primarily on literary
sources to interpret detailed parts of various Dutch artworks in order to uncover their
meanings as a whole. Deploying this method on a large scale for the first time, de Jongh
and his colleagues organized a groundbreaking exhibition in 1976 entitled “Tot Lering en
Vermaak” (To Instruct and Delight).\textsuperscript{26} The essays and object entries in the
accompanying catalog laid out the principle mechanics of the method and put them into
practice. The most frequently alluded to symbols were those that had some linkage to
sexual themes. As Lyckle de Vries commented “Approximately one-third of the works in
the exhibition … had to do with love or eroticism.”\textsuperscript{27} De Jongh explained the presence of
all of these titillating bits by suggesting that a contemporary viewer, when confronted
with a scene of bawdy play or intimate gesturing, would understand that this was
behavior he was to avoid; this was, in essence, an artfully conceived lesson in what \textit{not} to
do. In the end, this analysis pays more attention to the “instruct” than it does to the
“delight.”

For quite some time, the iconographic method was the prevailing tool for the
interpretation of sexual imagery in Dutch art. However, the strategy can be insidious in
the extent to which it attempts to fit all sexual imagery within the procrustean bed of
moralistic symbolism. Traditional moralizing interpretations leave little room for an
analysis that addresses the culture’s positive reactions to representations of sensual desire

\textsuperscript{26} Eddy de Jongh, et. al., \textit{Tot lering en vermaak: betekenissen van Hollandse
genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw} (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976).
\textsuperscript{27} Lyckle de Vries, “The Changing Face of Realism,” in \textit{Art in History/History in Art},
David Freedberg, ed. (Santa Monica: The Getty Museum, 1991): 238, n. 20. See also
Eddy de Jongh, “A bird’s eye view of erotica,” in \textit{Questions of Meaning: Theme and
and pleasure. The seductiveness of a method that invites the scholar/viewer to decipher a meaning that is embedded in the “seemingly real” details of quaint interiors has caused the general art-loving public to embrace this method.\textsuperscript{28} Once this method became entrenched, it was very quickly abused. As Wayne Franits has noted, too often scholars rush to find sexual references and innuendos in the most mundane details even if the image as a whole cannot sustain such an interpretation. This overly enthusiastic attitude that every bird or cat or open shoe must represent a laxity of morals is surely a result of the meeting of two entertaining enterprises – the hunt for symbolic meaning and the pursuit of the naughty bits.\textsuperscript{29}

Employing such an interpretive strategy diffuses the erotic potential of these works and clearly does not apply to the imagery included in this study, which unabashedly celebrates sensual forms and erotic playfulness without admonishment. The recalcitrance of this method as applied to erotic images is a primary result of the awkward manner in which a more positive interpretation of these objects uncomfortably chafes against our preexisting conceptions of this culture’s prudish morés. We are unable to accept the notion that the moralizing gloss scholars have superimposed on these paintings may merely be a twentieth-century whitewash. We prefer our Dutch burghers to behave like bankers not boors.

\textsuperscript{28} Exhibition catalogs and the wall texts in many museums in Europe, America, and Asia continue to reference the layered symbolic associations of many Dutch paintings. One of the more recent culprits was the exhibition Satire en Vermaak: Het genrestuk in de tijd van Frans Hals, which was held in 2003 at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. Pieter Biesboer and Martina Sitt, eds. \textit{Satire en Vermaak: Schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw, Het genrestuk van Frans Hals en zijn tijdgenoten 1610-1670}. (Zwolle: Waanders, 2003).

Fortunately for the study of sexual iconography, historians of Dutch art have, in more recent decades, initiated investigations that provide a fuller picture of how this imagery functioned in Dutch culture. Although these studies do not look at eroticism on its own, they do present a corrective to the negative analyses of the moralizing method. Images of prostitutes are common in Netherlandish painting and have as a result been the focus of significant scholarly attention. Ann Jensen Adams seeks to understand representations of erotic themes, particularly prostitution, within a rigorous historical evaluation of actual period approaches to prostitution and the evolution of a market economy in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. An alternative, but not quite satisfactory, discussion of images of prostitutes can be found in the work of Sacha Fegan who attempts to make connections between the image of the prostitute and the realities of prostitution and its practitioners. A more successful attempt to compare the imaged prostitute with the historical record of them is to be found in the work of social historian Lotte van de Pol. Making use of substantial archival evidence, van de Pol compares the images of brothel scenes and other sites of sexual exchange with the historical records of

the time; her goal is to understand the extent to which the artworks represent a true, as opposed to imaginary or idealized depiction of their scene. Elizabeth Honig studies representations of market scenes and their female protagonists to deduce psycho-social links between the forces of capitalism and those of sexual desire.\textsuperscript{33} Nanette Salomon analyzes these images of sexualized female bodies from a theoretical perspective.\textsuperscript{34} As noted above, she tends to view all representations of woman as cultural artifacts through which one can unearth what she believes to have been the generally restrictive and oppressive positions occupied by woman during the period under study. Like Adams, she particularly concentrates on prostitution and aspects of “sexual exchange” in order to situate the position of women within the economic order of the day. Although her material is primarily sexually charged imagery, Salomon addresses neither the visual mechanics nor the real-world desirous response of viewers to the artworks and their depictions.

Eric Jan Sluijter is perhaps the only scholar to have acknowledged the artistic intentionality of Dutch eroticism.\textsuperscript{35} Discussing images of the female nude, or those that evoke a sexual response from the viewer, Sluijter generally focuses on ways in which

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\item \textsuperscript{33} Elizabeth Honig, "Desire and Domestic Economy," \textit{Art Bulletin} 83, no. 2 (June 2001) pp. 294-315.
\item \textsuperscript{34} For examples of Salomon’s feminist approach to explaining the sexualized female body, primarily as it appears in genre painting see \textit{Shifting Priorities}, pp. 63-74.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
portrayals of desire and seduction echo the desire found at the core of the experience of visual art. In that sense, unlike the Marxist, feminist, and iconographic approaches noted above, Sluijter does not make the experience of the work of art subservient to an historical condition or to a symbolized meaning that is external to the work itself. Nonetheless, Sluijter, too, does not fully accept the erotic experience in its own right in that he tends to link such experience to an artistic intention designed to sell the painting.

Because eroticism for its own sake is under-studied in scholarly literature on Dutch art, one must turn to other studies in order to build a framework with which to understand the visual and thematic mechanics of such eroticism. Studies of erotic art and of eroticism in art are numerous, but only on very rare and predictable occasions do they address art produced in the Northern Netherlands during the seventeenth century.36 Nevertheless, the methods and approaches used to study this category of artistic production prove to be valuable interpretive tools.

There are several surveys of erotic art from antiquity to the present day. Perhaps the first, and at a glance the most comprehensive, is the catalog published by Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhousen which was meant to accompany an exhibition they organized in 1968 entitled First International Exhibition of Erotic Art.37 As mentioned at the start of this introduction, Edward Lucie-Smith has undertaken a diachronic study of the subject of erotic art and has published several picture books on the subject.38 Lacking any

36 The works of Rembrandt are those which are most often included and are The Ledikant, Monk in a Cornfield, and The Flute Player. These are the most sexually explicit works of his oeuvre.
38 For references, see note 4 above.
intellectual framework or analysis, these sources are valuable in helping to assess, through the type of images collected in each, what the general public would consider “erotic.”

While most of the early publications are merely titillating picture books, with little attention paid to the cultural significance of these objects, recent decades have seen a rise in the number of publications that focus on eroticism in art. Although rather dated at this point, Eugene Burt’s work, *Erotic Art: An Annotated Bibliography*, reveals that in the late 1970’s scholars began to take a more serious look at eroticism and art. 39 Within the last few years, general and specific studies dealing with art and the erotic have been published. 40 Among them is Bette Talvacchia’s in-depth examination of *I Modi*. 41 Talvacchia attempts to reconstruct the series from the remaining bits and pieces as well as extant copies. Of greater consequence for my own interests are her efforts to situate the appreciation of erotic experience more fully and positively within a specific Renaissance culture. A recent exhibition of images of love in the Renaissance contained a section dedicated to the representation of profane love. 42 The objects featured, as well as the accompanying commentaries, demonstrate how a study of the erotic in art can focus on its positive, playful, and productive role in the culture.

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How a work is made to look erotic, and how this eroticism is received and understood by the culture are intimately connected to period-specific attitudes towards sex and the body. In order to understand what would register as “erotic” to a seventeenth-century audience, we must explore specific contemporary circumstances and their insights into issues of sexual behavior and the culture’s attitudes towards the sexualized body. In the context of academic inquiry into the history of sex, one should bear in mind that there is a distinct difference between histories of sex and histories of sexuality. The former is linked to specific practices and principles, moral systems and ideologies, the latter deals more exclusively with issues of identity and self-definition. For the purposes of my study, I am less concerned with sexuality as an identity than I am with the practices of sex and the attitudes towards it during the particular period of the seventeenth-century in the Dutch Republic.

The idea that the study of the history of human sexuality is an independent and valid course of academic and intellectual inquiry developed in the late 1960’s and has therefore only been in place for a generation. With the hindsight of several decades, the field has now reached a point in its development where scholars can look back and survey what has been accomplished, what methods have been used to analyze the subject, and what areas are still left to be pursued more fully. As Vern Bullough, one of the earliest and most prolific scholars of the subject, noted, the fact that there is now an

43 The two are certainly inextricably linked (sexuality can often be defined by how and with whom one has sex). However, there are primary differences between the two as one relates to identity and the other to a physical practice. In the scholarly literature it is often very difficult to discern a distinction between the two. Much of the scholarship dealing with the history of homosexuality is particularly problematic in this regard (see Jeffery Weeks’ work, for example). The distinction is much clearer in work that takes a less theoretical approach.
academic journal devoted to the subject (*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, published by the University of Texas Press), academic societies devoted to the subject, and many undergraduate and graduate courses of study of the subject, all demonstrate that it is no longer a marginal topic.

Most likely because of its biological imperative, the sexual behavior of human beings has been a subject of investigation and inquiry for thousands of years. Early philosophers and scientists such as Aristotle (384BC-322BC) and Galen (129-200AD), as well as church fathers from Augustine (354-430) to the theologians of the Middle Ages, had much to say on the subject. The pursuit of understanding and purification was always concerned with contemporary sexual practice and primarily viewed sexuality, as Gert Hekma has noted, “as a natural phenomenon that is constant over time and place.”

Such a belief serves a purpose as it simplifies and makes possible the process of naming as “normal” sexual life which is biologically justified and morally sanctioned. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, researchers working in Europe, primarily Germany and France, began to develop a field known as sexology. Scholars such as Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) applied early scientific and psychological principles to the study of sexual behavior. However, much of their work dealt with issues of “variant” sexuality with regards to their own contemporary situations.

While these efforts initiated the slow-moving process of the acceptability of the study of sexual practice, their focus was on contemporary issues and not a history of sex, per se.

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These early “researchers” devoted all of their energies to formulating a model of sex and sexuality for prescriptive purposes. It was not until historians, anthropologists, and sociologists began debating the objectivity of scholars that the changeability of sex was acknowledged. The notion that sex has a history and that human sexual practices and attitudes are, in large part, culturally determined finally entered academic circles in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. At this time, Vern Bullough took great risks when he began to explore the circumstances of medieval sexuality.46 His approach, and the approach employed by many others following his initial foray into the field, is characterized by a use of primary source material to reconstruct some of the situations and particularities of the sexual history of specific cultures. This very practical method has proven useful and subsequently a great deal of work has been done to recover the attitudes of other moments in the history of sexuality – from ancient cultures to Victorian ones.47

In 1976 Michel Foucault published the first part of his groundbreaking work, *The History of Sexuality*.48 In his work, we can trace the roots of the theoretical inquiry into historical sexual practices and identities. As Jacqueline Murray commented:

“…Foucault challenged historians to examine sexual activity in its historical context, especially those who study the period he identified as central in the development of contemporary sexual attitudes: the long

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46 As noted by Jacqueline Murray, striking out on such an unconventional research path jeopardized his academic career and intellectual credibility.


centuries stretching between the decline of antiquity and the beginning of the modern world."\(^{49}\)

Theoretical approaches to this material strive to uncover the ideologies behind the basic mechanisms of sexuality and sexual behavior. Although much of this theoretical work is speculative, scholars of the history of sex owe a great deal to these bold efforts and in many instances these agendas are still informing contemporary scholarship in the field.

Initially, research into the history of sex and sexualities was undertaken by scholars with highly politicized agendas who were attempting to uncover the histories of marginalized practices and people. Two of the most influential areas of study were in the sexual behaviors and identities of homosexuals and women. Thanks to the early work done in this field, scholars are now more able to pursue their research although not without a bit of eyebrow raising, as Talvacchia mentioned in the introduction to her study of *I Modi*.\(^{50}\)

Investigations into the sexual attitudes and practices of the citizenry of the Dutch Republic during its Golden Age are plentiful. Sociologists and historians of Dutch culture have done a great deal of work uncovering the structures of sex and sexuality during the Netherlands in the Early Modern period.\(^{51}\) Perhaps because of an easier and more accessible relationship with the primary source materials, Dutch scholars in

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\(^{50}\) In the introduction to her book, Talvacchia relates the manner in which she was treated at one museum. Once it became clear that she was requesting materials relating to erotica, she was relocated from a main table in the reading room to one at the very back. Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, pp. ix-x.

\(^{51}\) There are numerous studies of homosexuality in the Netherlands. However, my own study is concerned only with the heterosexual experience and as such will not reference the work that has been done on homosexuality.
particular have contributed a great deal to our understanding of the overall picture of the history of sex as it was practiced and understood in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{52}

The existence of an appetite for erotic subjects in art is suggested by larger cultural indicators of the period such as broadminded attitudes towards sex, a general tolerance of prostitution, and the relatively open market for pornographic literature, among other things. Topics such as courtship and marriage practices, ideas about marital and extramarital sexual relationships, official and unofficial attitudes towards the body and its functions and display, as well as issues of civility and decorum are all relevant when attempting to establish the widespread presence of eroticism in the visual arts. What follows is a survey of the most relevant ideas and scholarship concerning these particular topics.

Supported by primary source materials such as diaries and travel journals, social historians have asserted that the comparatively liberal sexual attitudes of the citizens of the Dutch Republic were noticed and recorded by foreign visitors to the Northern Netherlands. This material offers descriptions of the free and flirtatious behavior of courting couples. The interactions between men and women at this particular stage of human development produced a great deal of commentary both from seventeenth-century authors as well as modern ones. Scholars such as Christopher Vandenbroeke have been focusing on this particular phase of development in the youth culture of the Netherlands.

\textsuperscript{52} Gert Hekma and Herman Roodenburg, eds. \textit{Soete Minne Helsche Boosheit: Seksuele Voorstellingen in Nederland 1300-1850}. (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988). This is a collection of essays by some of the most prolific researchers into early modern sexual practices in the Netherlands. A work such as Herman Roodenburg, "The Autobiography of Isabella de Moerloose. Sex, Childrearing and Popular Belief in Seventeenth Century Holland," \textit{Journal of Social History} 18.4 (1985): 517-40 illustrates how useful primary source material can be when attempting to uncover the ideas which circulated around the issue of sex.

A shift in the conception of sex is one result of the Protestant re-evaluation of the relationships between men and women. While the Dutch Republic was home to practitioners of many religions, including Catholicism and Judaism, Calvinism was the foundation upon which bourgeois morals lay. Calvinism readjusted the place marriage occupied in the structure of religious life. Whereas Catholicism privileged celibacy and service to God over the married state, Calvinism regarded marriage as advantageous for the building of a strong community. In the Protestant conception, Eve was Adam’s companion and helpmate, their union setting the example for the proper Christian relationship between husband and wife. It was within this framework that the Dutch conceived of physical attraction, and compatibility had a place.\footnote{See Mariët Westermann, \textit{Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt} (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001): 47-56.} Like courtship, the married state has been a topic that has received a great deal of attention and several studies focus on the state of marriage and the relationship between husband and wife.\footnote{Donald Haks, \textit{Huwelijk en Gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de Eeuw} (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982); Kent, en Versint, Eer Datje Mint; Vrijen en Trouwen 1500-1800, Exh. Cat., edited by P. van Boheemen (et al) (Marialust: Historisch Museum, 1989). Manon van der Heijden, \textit{Huwelijk in Holland; Stedekijke Rechtspraak en Kirkelijke Tucht 1550-1700} (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1998); Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks. \textit{Christianity and sexuality in the early modern world: regulating desire, reforming practice.} (London:}
As much, if not more, has been written about extra-marital, illicit relationships as has been about married life. Prostitution is one of the most thoroughly studied aspects of sexuality in the Netherlands. During the Early Modern era, the country was (in)famous for its red light districts. Indeed, the Dutch even published “guidebooks” to the leading red light districts. The popularity of the form and content of Crispin van de Passe’s *Le Miroir des Plus Belles Courtisannes de ce Temps* of 1631 and the anonymously authored *Het Amsterdamsch Hoerdom* of 1681 sustained numerous reissues throughout the century.57 Van de Pol has conducted the most methodical studies of prostitution in the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.58 Research into rape and other sex-crimes, although limited, has been initiated by such scholars as Manon van der Heijden.59 Such behavior is rarely depicted in art but reviewing the evidence of how people behaved with regards to these circumstances helps elucidate why sensuality naturally flowed into visual imagery.60

57 By 1710, van de Passe’s little book had gone through six editions and been published in several languages.
58 See *Het Amsterdams Hoerdom*; *Beeld en Werkelijkheid Van de Prostitutie in de Zeventiende Eeuw,*; and "Seksualiteit Tussen Middleeuwen en Moderne Tijd".

60 An exception to this is an unusual and puzzling painting by Christiaen van...
The period under consideration in my study coincides with the emergence of certain economically-driven class structures. Corresponding social identities began to be communicated through custom, image, and behavior. Scholars have noted that attitudes towards the body, its functions and representation, are a distinct component of this process. In reference to this particular phenomenon, Norbert Elias coined the phrase the “civilizing process” and turned specifically to the emergence of behavioral manuals covering comportment, decorum, and even the regulation of bodily functions to demonstrate the institutionalization of this civilizing phenomenon.61 Because an erotic response is a form of bodily function, it is important to understand how this response might have functioned within attitudes of civility and proper decorum.62

Historians have drawn on other rich period resources to understand the contemporary public and private attitudes toward the body, including sexual relationships. Letters, diaries,63 plays (both performed and those circulated in text-form only),64 album amicorum, and “scientific” texts all contribute to this rich understanding:

64 Rudolf Dekker, Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age (New York, 2001) and Rudolf Dekker and Herman Roodenburg, “Humor in de zeventiende eeuw. Opvoeding,
of sexuality. Despite this ample literature on attitudes toward sensuality and eroticism during the period, it is the rare instance in which art historians draw on this source material or refer to the era’s sexuality in discussions of its visual production.

I have selected very specific themes to be the focus of each chapter of this project: toilet scenes, historiated portraits, images depicting the Finding of Moses, and pastoral scenes. My goal is to analyze the themes that are the subjects of each chapter in terms of the larger issues of art and the body; eroticism in art; and the history of sex. But first, a brief review of how these themes have already been treated in scholarship on Dutch art is necessary.

Despite its popularity as a genre subject in paintings produced in the mid to late seventeenth century, the image of a woman at her toilet has yet to be the focus of a sustained and thorough investigation. Such a lacuna in the scholarship is particularly

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66 A more detailed review of the history of the themes themselves, as well as how they have been approached by scholars, will be given in the appropriate chapters.
67 Such is not the case with regards to this subject as produced by other cultures. See for example the catalog accompanying a comprehensive exhibition Le Bain et Le Miroir, which includes numerous Northern European examples from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well as a few from Antwerp produced in the early part of the seventeenth century. Lacking, however, is any example from the Dutch Golden Age. For more on this catalog see Chapter Two.

The most in-depth analysis of the theme of the toilet scene is that which Donald Posner undertook when studying Watteau’s A Lady at Her Toilet (c. 1716-17). Donald Posner, Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet. (London: Allen Lane, 1973). (see especially Chapter Five: “The Lady as a Woman of Pleasure” which discusses the image in relation to the Everdingen painting I discuss in Chapter Two.) For two very thorough discussions of another eighteenth-century work see Elise Goodman-Soellner, “Boucher’s Madame de
surprising given the conventionality in form and narrative.\(^68\) Even the most recently published study of genre painting does not investigate the subject in great depth as a subject in its own right.\(^69\) Nothing resembling a detailed scholarly analysis of the artistic and thematic development of this subject in Dutch art exists.\(^70\)

The only way to gain access to a general understanding of this subject is through a review of specific, well-known examples of the theme. Brief discussions are to be found in object essays and descriptions in monographs and exhibition catalog.\(^71\) Without exception, these limited analyses of toilet scenes all focus on the game of uncovering the

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\(^{68}\) Recently, an entire exhibition and accompanying catalog was dedicated to a similar subject, that of women writing letters in Dutch art. Peter C. Sutton, et al. *Love Letters: Dutch Paintings of Letter Themes in the Age of Vermeer.* (Dublin and Greenwich, CT: National Gallery of Ireland and the Bruce Museum, 2003-04).

\(^{69}\) Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting.*

\(^{70}\) An exception to this is the early essay by Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann in *Art News.* However, very much a product of its time, the essay is essentially a catalog entry as it provides a thorough visual analysis of the work and associates it with other paintings within the artist’s œuvre. Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, “Terborch’s Lady at Her Toilet,” *Art News* LXIV (December 1965): 38-41.

symbolic meaning of each minor detail in an effort to demonstrate that rather than a
beautifully wrought domestic scene, the image is really about is a message of vanity,
moral transgression, or transience.\textsuperscript{72} Missing from these discussions is any
comprehensive examination of the theme that might address why some artists chose to
portray a modestly dressed young woman while others depicted their subject nude or
partially nude.

An exception to this might be the work of Eric Jan Sluijter whose discussions of
images and iconography often contribute to his thesis that subject and technique worked
in a complementary manner to “seduce” the viewer.\textsuperscript{73} In addition to his essay on
\textit{fijnschilders} and their manipulation of seductive themes, Sluijter talks specifically about
toilet scenes in a study included in the \textit{Oog in Oog met de Spiegel} collection.

\textsuperscript{72} Perhaps this is a result of the work of Eddy de Jongh, who analyzed a painting by Jan
Miense Molenaer which depicts a young woman’s toilet being attended to by her. De
Jongh’s thesis was that all of the details in this painting (a young boy blowing bubbles, a
map on the wall above the young woman’s head, a monkey playing with a shoe, and a
skull resting on the floor) represented a conflation of the allegorical image of Lady World
and the genre scene of the young woman attended to by a maid. The article is very
convincing. However, the applicability of such an interpretive strategy to all images of
young women at their toilet, even those lacking such obvious symbols, is untenable.

\textsuperscript{73} Eric Jan Sluijter, “‘Een volmaakte schidery is al seen spiegel van de natuer’: Spiegel en
spiegelbeeld in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw,” in Nico
also Sluijter “Emulating Sensual Beauty: Representations of Danaë from Gossaert to
Rembrandt,” \textit{Simiolus} 27 (1999), pp. 4-45; ‘Schilders van "cleyne, subtile ende curieuse
dingen." Leidse fijnschilders in contemporaine bronnen', in: E.J. Sluijter, M. Enklaar & P.
Nieuwenhuizen (eds), \textit{Leidse fijnschilders. Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de
The situation is rather different with regards to the historiated or “fancy dress” portrait which has been the focus of a few studies.\textsuperscript{74} The first comprehensive study of this type of portrait is a German dissertation written by Rose Wishnevsky who catalogued over two hundred examples.\textsuperscript{75} Since this first effort, art historians have investigated historiated portraits through several different lenses.\textsuperscript{76} Much of the work has remained focused on establishing the identities of the sitters and the mechanics of the patronage.

Marieke de Winkel and Diana de Marly, both art historians specializing in costume, have pursued alternative approaches. De Winkel, a specialist in seventeenth-century Dutch costume, has written extensively on the intricacies and intimacies of dress in portraiture, particularly that of Rembrandt, an artist who reveled in the use of fancy

\textsuperscript{74} The quantity of literature on seventeenth-century Dutch portraiture in general is almost as astounding as the quantity of portraits themselves. I restrict the following discussion to material relating specifically to portraits in which the sitters are costumed in clothing that is not contemporaneous with the portrait itself.


\textsuperscript{76} S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, “Enkele portretten ‘à la antique’ door Rembrandt, Bol, Flinck en Backer,” \textit{Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis} 32:1 (1980): 2-9; Rudi Ekkart "A Portrait Historié with Venus, Paris, and Cupid: Ferdinand Bol and the Patronage of The Spiegel Family." \textit{Simiolus} 29 (2002): 14-41. Joanna Woodall, “Status Symbols: Role and Rank in Seventeenth-century Netherlandish Portraiture,” \textit{Dutch Crossing, A Journal of the Low Countries} 42 (Autumn, 1990): 34-68; Eddy de Jongh, \textit{Portretten van Echt en Trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van zeventiende eeuw.} (Zwolle: Waanders, 1986); David Smith, \textit{Masks of Wedlock: Seventeenth-Century Marriage Portraiture.} (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1982). This category of portraiture has attracted the interest of scholars working in other fields, namely costume historians. This can be a problematic enterprise, however, as the imaginary costumes in these portraits, while grounded in aspects of contemporary dress, are in most cases flights of fancy with very little relationship to the clothing worn by the sitter in his or her everyday life.
and fantastical clothing. Although not a specialist in Dutch art, de Marly has also
explored the topic of costume in portraits produced in or by Netherlandish artists during
the seventeenth century, making keen observations about the potential inspirations for the
unusual garb. While these studies focus on the type and meaning of the dress donned
by certain sitters, they have very little to say when confronted with images in which the
state of undress seems to be the most important factor.

The numerous historiated portraits that depict the sitter, primarily female, in some
state of déshabillé have not elicited much commentary. Rudi Ekkart, an art historian who
specializes in Dutch portraiture, studied a painting by Ferdinand Bol that portrays the
Spiegel family in the guise of Venus, Paris, and Cupid. The majority of this study is
given over to answering the specific questions of who is depicted and how they came to
commission the artist. The reasons why these well-to-do burghers would have
encouraged, or even perhaps suggested, such a risqué representation of themselves is
barely addressed.

Much like the situation concerning the scholarship on Dutch toilet scenes, the
imagery of the biblical episode of the finding of Moses has yet to be the focus of a
scholarly project. Instead, as with the toilet scenes, the analysis is reduced to the snippets
available in monographs and exhibition catalogs. Detailed visual analyses and

77 Marieke de Winkel. Fashion and Fancy Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt’s
Paintings. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); “Fashion or fancy? Some
interpretations of the dress of Rembrandt’s women re-evaluated,” in Julia Lloyd
55-63; and “The Interpretation of Dress in Vermeer’s Painting,” in Vermeer. Studies in
78 Diana de Marly, “The Establishment of Roman Dress in Seventeenth-Century
connoisseurship questions predominate. Such a lack of attention to the thematic and stylistic development of the subject as a whole is surprising given how popular both visual and literary representations of this episode were in the Netherlands at this time. A brief analysis of the theme can be found in the exhibition catalog which accompanied the show “Im Lichte Rembrandts: Das Alte Testament im Goldenen Zeitalter der niederländischen Kunst.” According to the author, the theme of the daughter of Pharaoh finding Moses has a long history. The peculiar emergence of eroticized treatments of this theme in Dutch art has never been commented upon.

A scholarly interest, or any interest at all for that matter, in Dutch pastoral imagery has really only developed within the last three decades. When Allison McNeil Kettering worked on the topic for her doctoral thesis in the 1970’s, she was one of the first to demonstrate any sustained concern for the subject. The root of this neglect lies in the fact that it was initially thought these images just did not look Dutch. The words

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82 Such was also the case with another category of art, Dutch classicism. This, too, was neglected for its apparent “un-Dutchness.” As Albert Blankert comment in the catalog to the first monumental exhibition on the subject:: “We wish to draw attention to a trend in seventeenth-century Dutch painting which has hitherto been known only superficially or marginally to insiders…” Blankert, *Dutch Classicism.* p. 13.
Golden Age of Dutch art generally conjure up images of formal portraits, domestic genre scenes, sumptuous still lifes, or evocative landscapes. Images of shepherds and shepherdesses seemed more appropriately situated in the Italian tradition.

Since Kettering’s initial foray into the subject, the pastoral has been the focus of numerous studies and one large exhibition. Often, the category has been associated with images of lovers. The scholarship dealing with pastoral imagery has therefore come closest to discussing the erotic and its role in the creation and appreciation of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Articles such as Kettering’s on Rembrandt’s sexually charged Flute Player, or H. Rodney Nevitt’s study of hidden lovers in Rembrandt’s Three Trees address the sexually charged narratives being represented. However, these studies still do not delve into images of express sensuality, such as those that will be the subject here.

An academic focus on uncovering and explaining the intricacies of the symbolic language at play in these images has been helpful in raising our awareness of the presence of sexual imagery in Dutch painting. However, so many of these analyses focus too closely on the emblematic interpretations of specific details and often lose sight of the

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However, the literary form of the pastoral and its popularity in the Netherlands during this time have quite a lengthy history in scholarship on the literary arts. For an extensive bibliography that demonstrates how far back the roots of this particular investigation go see Kettering. See also M.A. Schenkved, Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt: Themes and Ideas. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991).

larger picture.\textsuperscript{85} Not only can such a singular focus lead to a misunderstanding of the overall thematic objective of the image, but it can also neglect a more comprehensive view of the erotic implications and intent of a particular image.\textsuperscript{86} What remains missing in the landscape of studies of sexual imagery in Dutch genre painting is a reading of these objects that is more holistic in its approach. Such an approach would force us to reconsider the entire image as well as the cultural milieu in which it was produced. An attempt to put this approach into practice is what unfolds on the following pages.

\textsuperscript{85} A perfect example of this misreading of the sexual symbolism of a genre painting can be found in Mary Frances Duranti’s interpretation of two images produced by Pieter de Hooch. For a discussion of Duranti’s interpretation and the ways in which it is entirely incorrect, see Franits, “Wily Women?” p. 301.

\textsuperscript{86} As Franits observed in an article devoted to a re-evaluation of sexual imagery in genre painting: “The resulting interpretations are far too often anachronistic and have only served to distort our understanding of some Dutch paintings by myopically reducing them to illustrations of sexual arousal and pleasure or to billboards of moral condemnation.” Franits, “Wily Women?” p. 301.
CHAPTER TWO

Eroticizing the Everyday: Desire and Domesticity in Toilet scenes

For a study devoted to uncovering the mechanics of eroticism in Dutch art, the subject of a young woman at her toilet is in many ways an inviting place to begin. Of the myriad subjects that constitute the category of genre imagery, the toilet scene most readily lends itself to an investigation of the erotic. These images afford a peek into the private lives of women and allow male spectators to view a very personal activity rarely undertaken in their presence.\(^1\) As a result the subject itself is bound up with issues of exposure, voyeurism, accessibility and display, and the playful tension between that which is concealed and that which is revealed – all of which are key to understanding the erotic effect they produce. The immediacy of a young woman interrupted while combing her hair or the intimacy of another grooming herself while seated in a fertile and luscious landscape are two eroticized iterations of the theme as painted by Caesar van Everdingen and Godfried Schalcken respectively. Combining representational associations borrowed from images of Venus with portrayals of “real” Dutch women, these artists created paintings that reveal a new erotic idiom which balances the ideal beauty of classical art with the naturalism inherent in native styles. In Young Woman Combing Her Hair (figure 2.1), van Everdingen presents the audience with a public

\(^1\) The erotic potential and implications of the theme are readily apparent in many images. See, for instance, several examples illustrated in Isabelle Bardiès-Fronty, Michèle Bimbenet-Privat, Philippe Walter. *Le bain et le miroir : soins du corps et cosmétiques de l'antiquité à la Renaissance.* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), cat 13 (after, Artus Wolffort, *Women at the bath*, Antwerp, c. 1620); cat 10 (Virgil Solis after Aldegrever, *Bain des anabaptists*, engraving, c. 1540); cat 23 (Master GK after Luca Penni, *Women at the Bath Spied upon by a Satyr*, engraving, c. 1550).
viewing of a very personal moment.² A similar type of access, achieved through very
different means, is conjured by Godfried Schalcken’s Young Woman with a Mirror
Seated under a Canopy in a Landscape (figure 2.2).³

Toilet scenes were a popular subject within the quintessentially Dutch category of
genre imagery. Genre paintings frequently contain obvious and direct representations of
sexual play and suggestiveness and as a result have received the most attention in any
discussion of eroticism in Dutch art, as discussed in the previous chapter. The academic
focus on uncovering and explaining the intricacies of the symbolic language at play in
genre paintings fails to consider images such as those by van Everdingen or Schalcken.
Lacking the bawdy and boisterous theatricality of other sexual subjects, the erotic toilet
scene needs to be understood in terms of the erotic rather than the salacious in order to be
recognized and valued for what it is.

The purpose of this chapter is to correct the limited appreciation of the eroticism
of genre imagery as a whole through an analysis of its manifestation in the specific theme
of the woman at her toilet. Shifting the discussion away from a point-by-point analysis of
prurient details focuses instead on uncovering a fuller picture of an eroticism that is quite
often literally laid bare on the surface of these paintings. This chapter will investigate

² Caeser van Everdingen, Young Woman Combing her Hair, c. 1650. Oil on panel, 70.5 x
plate 21.
³ Godfried Schalcken, Young Woman with a Mirror Seated under a Canopy in a
Landscape, c. 1690 oil on panel. London, Private Collection. Sold London (Sotheby’s)
1996. The work is not included in Thierry Beherman’s monograph on the artist, the only
modern catalog of the artist’s work. Thierry Beherman Godfried Schalcken (Paris:
Maeght, 1988). The catalog for the Sotheby’s sale at which this painting was sold, notes
that Fred Meijer of the Riksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie confirmed the
attribution to Schalcken and also proposed its date of c. 1690.
both the visual formulation of this eroticism as well as the implications generated by its broader cultural contexts and principles through a concentrated investigation of the two paintings mentioned above: Cesear van Everdingen’s *Young Woman Combing Her Hair* and Godfried Schalcken’s *Young Woman with a Mirror Seated under a Canopy in a Landscape*.

This investigation of the visual constructions and thematic narratives of these two images will demonstrate how the treatment and handling of elements such as space, compositional organization, effects of lighting, color, and figural type contributes to an overall erotic effect. In addition, the narrative components of these images also play a considerable role in enhancing the overall erotic impression of these images. One of the most remarkable conclusions to be made is that much of the erotic workings of these images directly correlates to the significant relationship between that which is revealed and that which is concealed. It is the tension between these binaries, as it applies to both the visual as well as the narrative structures of the image, that holds the viewer’s attention hostage long enough to generate the erotic response.

The eroticism to be found in the specific examples under consideration in this chapter shares many characteristics with that seen in other distinct categories of subject matter, such as portraiture and history painting, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. However, it also retains a distinct character that differentiates it. In particular, a focus on the domestic realm and real experiences signals a relationship with other non-erotic toilet scenes. Efforts to answer the questions of how these images were made to look erotic and how this eroticism was understood by the viewer will allow the discussion of eroticism in genre painting to move beyond the reductive treatments such image have
received in the past. Ultimately, an understanding of the place, purpose, and importance of eroticism for Dutch art of this period will begin to expand.

As with each successive case study presented in this thesis, the selected subject itself is one that draws readymade associations between intimacy, desire, eroticism, and the visual arts. The toilet scene serves as a nexus for several issues that will be threaded throughout this study. Among them, the relationship between design and intent with regards to eroticism and visual imagery; issues of the shift in sexual imagery from the bawdy and burlesque theatricality of the images produced in the first half of the century to the sophisticated and intricate representations produced in the period after 1650.

This chapter begins with a review of the theme of the toilet scene as it developed from its earliest incarnations. The long roots of the subject in both the visual and the literary arts will be noted, with particular attention paid to those moments in its history that carry significance for further discussion of the motif’s erotic representation by Dutch painters. Turning then to the specific examples chosen to illustrate how Dutch artists manipulated the eroticism of the subject, the focus will become an analysis of the ways in which painters such as van Everdingen and Schalcken consciously constructed their images and selected or rejected relevant details. Comparison with similar images created by Dutch artists as well as those produced by practitioners from other cultures, yield important observations on the nature of Dutch eroticism and its place within a larger international context. Finally, the chapter will address broader ideas that have a particular resonance for the eroticized toilet scene, specifically, and inform the understanding of eroticism’s relationship to genre images as a whole.
From an iconographic standpoint, the toilet scene encompasses a diverse assortment of pictorial motifs that depict a woman engaged in some activity, the ostensible purpose of which is to care for her outward appearance. These activities range from dressing to combing one’s hair, from putting on an earring to gazing in a looking glass. The woman might be engaged in these activities alone or assisted by servants, primarily female but occasionally male. Each one of these occupations is, in itself rather mundane. Yet in the hands of the most talented artists these simple scenes transcend the everyday. The toilet scene’s depiction of the quotidian events of daily life firmly roots the theme in the genre tradition and its focus on a quotidian task links this particular subject to the issue of domesticity.

The subject of a woman at her toilet is not limited to the art of the Dutch Golden Age but instead has long roots in the history of art. The motif captured the imagination of artists in some form or another in virtually all eras of art-making from ancient Greece to nineteenth-century France. The theme possesses a long and distinguished tradition that, by the seventeenth century, was familiar enough to Dutch audiences to be exploited by native artists. The erotic associations of the subject of the toilet scene are to be found throughout the development of the theme. The following discussion does not pretend to be an exhaustive review of all of the imagery that precedes the paintings produced by the Dutch in the seventeenth-century but instead introduces some key moments in the history

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4 Although there are, as yet, no comprehensive studies of the theme, several scholars have undertaken a study of the toilet scene at specific historical moments. The closest survey of the theme, and an introduction to its erotic implications, can be found in two chapters of Arte e Erotismo “Specchio delle mie brame” (pp. 191-211) and “Bellezze al bagno” (pp. 213-231).

5 By this I mean all of the visual and thematic associations that the images and their reception generated.
of the theme with particular relevance to aspects that were picked up by Dutch artists. Through understanding, or at least being aware of, these associations, a fuller picture of what these images signified and how they themselves continued to generate meaning can be reconstructed.

In the West, the scene of the woman at her toilet may have its roots in some of the earliest representations of the female nude in the ancient world. For centuries, artists had occupied themselves and their audiences with images of the idealized male while the female nude remained a topic unconsidered. The practice for male athletes to compete in the nude provided a ready-made subject for the depiction of the male nude. However, there was no corresponding subject that justified the representation of a woman without her clothes on. Despite a later start, the theme of the woman at her bath eventually became widespread. In the earliest representations, beginning approximately in the sixth century BCE, women were shown at their bath washing themselves and caring for their appearance in various ways. Although these images were not entirely uncommon, it was the Knidian Aphrodite that appears to have propelled this representation into the popular consciousness of the period (Figure 2.3).

6 See, for example, the black-figure vase from the sixth-century as illustrated on page 73 in Clark 1956. In that example the women are shown showering themselves at the public baths. Standing under the showers and scrubbing various parts of their body, the figures are completely nude and their draperies have been thrown over the sides of the shower stalls.

The eroticism of the toilet scene as a theme can be traced to these images of idealized nudes at their bath. From its beginnings the subject was discussed in erotic terms in the literature on art. Writing in the first century, CE, Pliny recounted the now infamous episode of the man who hid himself in the shrine of Aphrodite of Knidos overnight and became so enflamed with lust for the statue that he left a stain on its unblemished surface. Much of the eroticism generated by the image of the goddess at her bath derives from two key concepts that have relevance for the eroticism of the later Dutch examples of woman caring for their appearance. The first revolves around the notion of the voyeur – an outsider gaining access to a private ritual. The second is linked to the first and concerns the creation of an image that is so naturalistic as to “fool” the viewer into believing it is real flesh and blood. As will become clear in the following discussion, the Dutch eschewed, at least partially, the ideal beauty that was embodied in such images as the Knidian Aphrodite. They worked, instead, to develop a model of beauty closer to their own aesthetic and one that would appeal to contemporary audiences.

While the subject did not disappear during the medieval period, it did undergo some dramatic transformations both visually and thematically. The eroticism that had been one of the chief assets of the early images of bath-taking and toilet-making, became its greatest liability. Instead of being celebrated as an icon of beauty and a representation of ideal femininity, the image of the woman at her toilet became freighted with moralistic

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and negative associations. This new approach to the image of the woman caring for her appearance can be seen as a direct reflection of the injection into the Christian consciousness of religious attitudes towards the human body and its natural functions. No longer celebrated as the epitome of sensual beauty the body became for the medieval artist a symbolic map that expressed the frailty of this human vessel.

Beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, these shifts in meaning and tone produced attendant shifts in how and why a toilet scene was represented. Gone were the life-size representations of the female nude engaged in some private moment stepping out of the bathing water or arranging her hair. Very rarely were women depicted at their bath and when they were it was most often within the safely moralizing biblical tales of David and Bathsheba or Susanna and the Elders. These subjects allowed the artist to communicate the negative effects of the senses and their lustful attraction to the frail and dangerous female body. The observation of a seductive and off-limits female nude

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10 For an interesting discussion of the means by which certain concepts relating to the *Venus Anadyomene* remained present during the Middle Ages, see W. S. Heckscher, “The Anadyomene in the Medieval Tradition,” in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 7 (1956) 1-38.

11 For the history of this subject see Susan Dackerman’s dissertation on the image of Susanna and the Elders in Flemish prints. As background, she includes a very detailed survey of the subject before the period under consideration in her study. Susan Dackerman, "The Danger of Visual Seduction: Netherlandish Prints of Susanna and the Elders," diss., Art History, Bryn Mawr College, 1995.
eventually led to downfall and possible destruction. The fickle and misleading nature of
the senses, especially the sense of sight, was a favorite subject of moralists.12

It is also during this era that the image of a woman at the toilet was no longer that
of a nude bather but instead was often reduced to that of a woman in front of a mirror or
holding a hand mirror as seen in the image of the Whore of Babylon from the Apocalypse
Tapestry (Figure 2.4).13 This new attribute, which was to stand in for an entire range of
activities, was to shape the future development of the scene of the woman at her toilet.
The woman with a mirror became the new shorthand for a range of allegorical subjects
including the sense of Sight and the sin of Vanity (Figure 2.5).14 These allegorical
associations were carried into subsequent iterations of the woman with the mirror,
including some of those produced in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century that will
be discussed below.

During the Italian Renaissance, particularly throughout the first half of the
sixteenth century, the scene of the woman at her toilet enjoyed a resurgence infused with
the positive and erotic associations that were inherent in the ancient images. Essentially,
a confluence of interest in the classical images of goddesses and nymphs at their bath as
well as the continuing tradition of portraying vanity as a woman with a mirror made this

12 This linkage to the frailty of sight or the ability of sight to lead one astray is something
which is hinted at in the later art produced by the Dutch for it is the temptation of ones
eyes that the artist seems to be striving for, the ability to arouse not through intellectual
play but through the visual stimulus of the image itself.
Whore in the illustrated Apocalypse Cycles, *Journal of Medieval History*, 23, Issue 3,
14 For a discussion of the image and implications of Lady World see Wolfgang Stammler,
*Frau Welt. Eine mittelalterliche Allegorie* (Freiburg: Freiburger Universitätsreden, 1959)
and also B. Hinz, “Venus – Luxuria – Frau Welt vom Wunschbild zum Albtraum zur
possible. Embracing the classical celebration of the human form gave impetus to paintings such as Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus* of c.1510 (Figure 5.3) and Titian’s *Venus Anadyomene* of c.1525. These images demonstrate an emphasis on the nude and idealized female body. Missing is any association with the frailty of the body and the dangers of visual seduction present in medieval examples. Coexisting with these images of mythological figures are those that revive the medieval associations of Vanity with mirrors. For example the image of *Vanity* painted by Titian in 1515 shows a woman facing the viewer and demonstratively gesturing towards the mirror, which contains a reflection of all the worldly goods whose worth or substance is merely ephemeral (Figure 2.6). Although the female figure still wears garments, which are intended to appear timeless, the other allegorical trappings of medieval images of Vanity are missing. This shedding of overt symbolic associations indicates another step towards increasing the genre-like qualities of this theme.

Although artists all over Italy were captivated by the subject of the woman at her toilet, Venetian artists appear to have been some of the first in that country to focus on the theme and were certainly the ones who would eventually transform it into the specific erotic idiom that had a great influence on the toilet scenes produced in later centuries by artists all over Europe. Certainly the early affinity for images of reclining nudes paved

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16 Titian, *Vanity*, c.1515. Oil on canvas, 97 x 81 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

17 It is interesting to note that the objects reflected would appear to be occupying the space in which the viewer is standing. Such an illusionistic ploy must surely have been intended to suggest that those worldly goods existed in this earthly realm and not in the ideal world of image-making. See W. M. Zucker, “Reflections on Reflections,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1962) pp. 239-50.
the way for an interest in the representation of half-length ones. And in this format, scenes of women at their toilet found a natural (re)entrance into the artistic imagination of the Renaissance.

Giovanni Bellini’s beautiful Young Woman at Her Toilette of 1515 is, perhaps, one of the earliest Renaissance examples of the toilet scene (Figure 2.7). Through an evocation of the beautiful goddess, Bellini has, in effect served as the bridge between ancient ideas regarding the eroticized female nude and Renaissance (and later) representations of women attending to their appearance before a mirror. A partially nude woman, covered only minimally by a rose-colored wrap, sits in an interior space. Holding a small mirror in one hand, she arranges the snood in her hair. The composition is typical of its era with rational and organized horizontal bands of space. The figure, already teetering on the edge of the picture plane is pushed forward even further still by the blank wall behind her. The viewer cannot help but notice the soft curves of her warm body. The intricate patterns on the fabric of her headdress and that which covers the bench contrast with the plain expanses of painted flesh, highlighting and celebrating the nude female form. The image also affords us a view of a landscape through the window behind her. This link to the natural world reiterates the Petrarchan

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19 As Goffen notes, this headdress was a “fashionable Venetian reticella.” Goffen “Bellini’s Nude with Mirror,” 186. She also discusses the idea that Bellini was one of the first to depict a mirror in Italian painting as they were “rarely depicted in Italian painting until the late fifteenth century.” Goffen “Bellini’s Nude with Mirror.” 198 n.24.
connections between women and nature that were so influential during this period and also links this image to the theme of Venus reclining in a landscape.

Titian was, of course, one of the great masters of the half-length format. His *Woman with a Mirror*, painted just a few years after Bellini’s, demonstrates how the subject continued to evolve (Figure 2.8). This is a figure that is, in many ways, beyond the reach of the viewer. She is already attended by a male figure. Access to her is physically blocked by the wooden ledge that separates her space from the space of the viewer. Her gaze, although turned towards the mirror seems distant. And, ultimately, her ideal, albeit sensuous, beauty suggests an otherworldliness that is not compatible with a quotidian sexuality.

Giulio Romano’s rendition of 1523-24 is striking in its dissimilarity to the Venetian type (Figure 2.9). Romano’s figure is much more animated and the composition more cluttered. The unfortunate results are that the viewer’s attention is thus more difficult to capture. The figure, seated facing towards the left, twists awkwardly in space to address the viewer. Simultaneously, she lifts the diaphanous shift from her right shoulder while holding it under her breasts. The treatment of the nude is more awkward than when handled by Bellini or Titian. The features of the face are more specific and suggest that perhaps the woman is intended to be a specific individual. The influence of Raphael’s (?) *La Fornarina* is quite obvious.

An intriguing and somewhat anachronistic moment in the history of the toilet scene is to be found in the last quarter of the sixteenth century in France. During this

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period, a group of images were produced that take as their subject the woman at (and sometimes in) her bath. Although they were popular, these images were never copied in print form and thus did not generate a wide circle of influence. However, conceptually they share much with the toilet scenes produced in the subsequent decades, most particularly that alluring invitation to look.22

The images appear in two different formats, featuring either one main figure or two (Figures 2.10 and 2.11).23 The single-figured format shares the most with later iterations of the toilet scene. In the single figured images, the woman is always seated behind a cloth-covered dressing table. Placed upon this table are small boxes of jewels, flowers, expensive combs, and other accoutrement of the toilette. Resting her right arm on a pillow she turns in a delicate pose, just short of facing frontally. This barely perceptible twist of the torso emphasizes the graceful gestures of her hands as she fondles both the jewels in the box before her and the beautiful pearls she wears around her neck. To the sitter’s left is an ornate mirror whose base is comprised of a nude male and female. Often, the primary subject is attended to by a servant who stands near her or

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22 These images are also related to the imagery of courtesans that circulated around Europe at this time. For more information on this see Chapter 3, (pp. 90-93) of this study.

23 Anonymous, *Lady at Her Toilette*, 1585-95, oil on canvas. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts; Anonymous, *Gabrielle d’Éstrées and her sister in the bath*, c. 1595, oil on wood. Paris, Louvre Although I have illustrated only two examples of this type of image, they do constitute a significant group and can be found in various iterations during the last decades of the sixteenth century in France. Anonymous, *Lady at Her Toilette*, c. 1560-65, oil on panel, Musée de Bâle; Workshop of François Clouet (?), *Lady at her Toilette*, third quarter of the sixteenth century, Oil on panel. Worcester, Museum of Art; Anonymous, *Women Bathing*, fourth quarter of the sixteenth century, oil on panel. Florence, Uffizi Gallery; Anonymous, *Gabrielle d’Estrées and the Duchess de Villars*, oil on canvas. Montpellier, Société Archéologique.
fusses about in the background. Henri Zerner has discussed the obvious interplay between portraiture and genre that seems to take place in these images.24

Very little is known of these images – only one has a solid attribution to Clouet – and any suggestion as to the sitter, Diane de Poitiers or Gabrielle d’Estrées being the most common, are tentative at best.25 The images’ adherence to portrait-like formats, including the three-quarter length view, the position of the torso in space, and the direct gaze of the sitters, has led most scholars to suggest that these are portraits even though efforts to identify the specific sitters have proven impossible.

These unusual bath scenes provide an interesting counterpoint to the images of violence that were present in the imagery produced at the court of Fontainebleau. Many scholars of the French Renaissance have observed the culture’s strange and disturbing obsession with images, both verbal and visual, of violence against women.26 Scenes of

24 Zerner, Renaissance Art in France: The Invention of Classicism (Paris: Flammarion, 2003) p. 205. See also the discussion by Rebecca Zorach in Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) pp. 120-26. Central to Zorach’s analysis is the erotic component of these images as well as the tension that exists between the quotidian domestic tasks of motherhood and the more esoteric associations of fecundity and womanhood. She also discusses the “ambivalence associated with the secrets of women’s private spaces (and, by another anatomical/topographical analogy, their private parts)” as it pertains to the space of the bath.

25 François Clouet, Lady in Her Bath, c. 1571, oil on panel. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art The version which is in Dijon was the subject of a monographic exhibition. See La Dame à sa toilette (Dijon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1988). Despite the arresting nature of these images, the riddle they present has yet to entice scholars to expend much energy on them. Zerner seems to have come closest to trying to say something substantive in the few pages he devotes to them in his survey of French Renaissance Art. Zerner, Renaissance Art in France, pp. 204-25. See also Le Bain et Le Miroir, pp. 276-77 and 302.

26 Both historians and art historians who have worked on issues of women in the court of Fontainbleau have attempted to puzzle out reasons for this phenomenon. As has been suggested recently, the position and power of a few exceptional women may have necessitated some sort of reassessment of the male/female relationship. See the work of
rape and sexual abuse are plentiful on the walls of Fontainebleau itself and in the prints that were produced after these decorations. In striking contrast, it appears that these images, with their focus on the simple beauty of the female form, celebrate the feminine. In these images, the private activity of bathing and dressing is made into a spectacle; the choreographed gestures evoke ritual.

Interest in the theme of the woman at her toilet persisted into the seventeenth century, yet with a distinct shift in focus. Both the subject and the style were modified by the post-Tridentine pronouncements on art. Its strictures regarding the depiction of the female nude redirect the subject of the woman at her toilet to that of the goddess Venus, a figure more in keeping with the distancing of the subject from the everyday. The toilet of Venus, and most specifically Venus before a mirror, captured the imagination of contemporary artists and their patrons particularly in Italy, France, and Flanders. Despite hailing from diverse countries and cultures, these images have much in common. Regardless of respective size, they all project a sense of monumentality through large gestures and complex compositions. In most examples, the toilet-making becomes a ritualized production rather than an intimate and private activity.

Annibale Carracci embraced the theme, creating both large format compositions of the subject of Venus’ Toilet as well as situating the episode within larger landscapes. With an intensely choreographed parade of figures a work such as his *Venus Adorned by the Three Graces* projects an impression quite at odds with the Venetian paintings

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produced in the preceding century (Figure 2.12). The intimacy of a private moment has been exchanged for the grandeur of a public one. Here Venus is at the center of a flurry of activity as the Graces, assisted by a clutch of putti, comb the goddess’ hair, select appropriate jewelry, and hold aloft an ebony-framed mirror.

Peter Paul Rubens also took up the themes of both Venus and the common woman at their toilet and is perhaps the most direct link between what was produced in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century and what was produced elsewhere in Europe at the same time. Very much influenced by the Venetians, Rubens produced paintings of Venus at her Toilet, exemplified by a work such that currently in Vienna (Figure 2.13). Rubens has seductively juxtaposed the reflection of Venus’ face, which stares directly at the viewer as a sly smile crosses her lips, with the sensuous flesh of her back. The transparent white cloth that covers but one buttock, tantalizingly draws attention to that part of the composition. In another painting, now thought to be either a work finished by a follower of the master or copy after him, a young woman in contemporary finery admires her reflection in a small mirror held in her right hand (Figure 2.14). Outfitted in a costume that reflects contemporary tastes rather than antique fantasies, she is situated very much in the viewer’s own time and place.

27 Annibale Carracci, Venus Adorned by the Graces, 1590-95. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 133 x 170.5 cm. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art.
28 Peter Paul Rubens, The Toilet of Venus c. 1615. Oil on panel, 124 x 98 cm. Vienna, Collection of the Prince of Lichtenstein.
Although the subject of the woman at her toilet was popular in the art of many cultures and was rendered in a variety of styles, it appears to have been the Dutch who solidified the theme’s connections with genre imagery and turned it into a veritable sub-specialty within the category of genre itself. These artists were able to put their own distinct mark on it by creating images that were more specific and reflective of contemporary situations. These artists often increased the temporal and geographic specificity, focused on unidealized beauty and lent to their imagery an air of the domestic and earthy.

The eroticized versions that are the focus of this chapter form only a part of the overall body of images reproducing the theme that were produced by Dutch artists. Works such as *Young Woman at Her Toilet*, painted by Gerard ter Borch in the 1650’s (Figure 2.15), or the *Lady at Her Toilet* painted by Gerrit Dou in 1667 (Figure 2.16) typify a subject that became increasingly popular in the Northern Netherlands during the second half of the seventeenth century. These exquisitely wrought images, the surfaces of which shimmer with color, depict richly clad young women seated before mirrors arranging curls or placing a pearl earring. In both paintings, the protagonists are accompanied by women whose more modest and sober dress mark them as a lady’s maid. Through the use of color, light, and well-conceived compositions, the artists have made the seated woman and her toilet the focus of the painting. In ter Borch’s work, the strong

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diagonal that runs from the face of the standing maid through the seated figure ends at the mirror, leads the viewer’s attention directly to the hands at the center of the painting. A similar gesture is seen in Dou’s later painting, again located at the center of the composition and emphasized by its placement along a diagonal. The impression made by these images is one of calm, domestic activity; quiet hands occupied by a simple task.

The theme of the toilet scene, as with much of Dutch art, is surprisingly conventional and uniform, both thematically and stylistically. These examples by Dou and ter Borch illustrate many of the characteristics that are repeated over and over in these images. Without fail the leading ladies of these images are attractive young women from a distinctively wealthy socio-economic class. Their natural beauty needs little of the modifications they undertake in arranging and adorning themselves. They sit or stand in a luxurious interior, the perfect image of themselves reflected on the glittering surface of the mirrors set before them. Each image evokes quiet contemplation. The visual formula varies little as well; falling into two distinct compositional formats – half-length and full-length, both of which will be discussed in this study.

Although the motif of a female figure attending to her physical appearance was not new to the Dutch visual vocabulary, it was not until mid-century that it became a subject in and of itself. Prior to the 1650’s, the image of the woman at her toilet in the art

31 The development of Dutch painting through the course of the seventeenth century can be understood as a progression from one set of pictorial and thematic conventions to another. The conventionality of Dutch art has been noted by many scholars in recent decades and pervades almost every category of image making. For an introduction to the idea of the conventionality of Dutch art as it is applicable to genre painting see Wayne Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 13-1. Eric Jan Sluijter’s comments on the conventionality of genre paintings produced by the Leiden fijnschilders are to be found in Eric Jan Sluijter, *Leidse Fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630-1760* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1998): 19-23.
of the Northern Netherlands was to be found in history painting and allegorical imagery linked either to allegorical subjects such as Vanity, the sense of Sight, and Lady World or to historical subjects such as Venus and Bathsheba. Early Dutch Mannerists, such as Hendrick Goltzius working in Haarlem during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, created images of intriguing beauty which were rich and intricate but had little to do with what was to be produced in the second half of the century. For example, Nicolaes Clock’s 1596 engraving of Visus after Hendrick Goltzius is remarkably different from what was to follow. A serpentine figure holds a mirror and is accompanied by the eagle with a blazing sun behind, both of which are attributes that clearly mark her as a representation of the sense of Sight.32 Representations of the Toilet of Venus also bear but a fleeting resemblance to that which followed. The remarkable differences between these images and the works produced later in the century are both stylistic and iconographic.33

The subject of a young woman attending to her personal appearance initially entered the realm of genre imagery when the allegorical themes to which women with mirrors were attached began to take on a more domestic and contemporary character.34

32 For a detailed review of this image and some which preceded it, see Eric Jan Sluijter, “Venus, Visus and Pictura,” in Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000): 90-100; Figure 72
33 The subject of the Toilet of Venus continued to be produced during the course of the seventeenth century. Some stunning examples were produced by artists who also worked with the theme’s counterpart in genre painting. See, for instance, the works of Godfried Schalcken and Jacob van Loo.
34 The idea that allegorical imagery, especially the series of the senses, developed towards a more “genre-like” character was first introduced in a 1943 essay written by Hans Kauffmann and then later picked up with specific application to the work of Goltzius by Ilya Veldman but neither author exhaustively investigates the phenomenon nor do they specifically address the obvious eroticism inherent in the imagery. See Hans Kauffmann, “Die Fünfsinne in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts,” in
The Senses no longer featured nude women and various attributes combining to embody a symbolic concept but focused instead on real women. Goltzius, ever the inventor, was perhaps one of the first to refashion his allegories in the guise of contemporary figures. In a Saenredam print after Goltzius of c. 1596, the eagle has been replaced by a cat. A lecherous suitor holds up the mirror for the young woman with one hand while deftly using the other the caress her amply exposed décolletage (Figure 2.17). The protagonists are now an elegantly dressed contemporary couple seated in woodland grove. Nor did the figures of Vanity and Lady World continue to be positioned in unnamed landscapes but were now located in plausible interiors. For example, the Lady World painted by Jan Miense Molenaer in 1633 is a distant cousin to the figures imaged by medieval artists (Figure 2.18). Only the incongruous details of the skull as footstool and the chained monkey give any suggestion that this is something other than an image of a beautiful young woman being groomed. As Eddy de Jongh clearly demonstrated, in this image the theme of Lady World has been completely integrated into a logical visual system which has more in common with the reality of the viewer than it does with the old allegorical trappings from which the subject derived. The lines between allegory and genre have been blurred and the way has been paved for the woman at her toilet to become a genre subject in its own right.

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The popularity of these scenes exploded in the second half of the century as genre imagery moved away from the rustic interiors and depictions of peasant life that had taken center stage during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Refinement of execution developed hand in hand with the refinement of the subject and soon the activities such as tavern games, caring for farm animals, and other lowly occupations which had earlier captured the imagination of artists gave way to the more gracious and sophisticated activities of the wealthy burgher and regent classes. As the interiors became more refined, and as the persons represented became those of increasing prosperity, the toilet scene came into its own as a popular domestic theme.

Depictions of this subject are to be found in the art produced and collected in the major artistic centers of the second half of the century: Amsterdam, Leiden, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht. Ter Borch and Gabriel Metsu produced stunning examples of women at their toilet (Figures 2.19 through 2.22). While lingering associations with the concepts

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37 Analysis of contemporary inventories undertaken by John Michael Montias and John Loughman suggests the trajectory of interest in genre paintings. However, their research does not break the data down by subject or theme and thus one cannot tell exactly how many toilet scenes were produced. The large number of extant examples suggests how popular they were. John Loughman and John Michael Montias. *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses.* Vol. III, Studies in Netherlandish Art and Cultural History. (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000).

38 Probable causes for this marked shift in both subject and execution are the subject of much debate. Although a variety of factors are most likely responsible, one of the soundest explanations is that the period of relative peace which existed after the signing of the Treaty of Munster in 1648 contributed to a concomitant period of prosperity for the middle class.

39 As Franits has noted, the centers of wealth and also of artistic endeavor shifted in the second half of the seventeenth century away from Haarlem and Utrecht and towards the major port cities, primarily those of the Province of Holland. See Franits, *Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting*, pp. 1-8.

40 The recent monographic exhibitions of these artists, and their accompanying catalogs, make clear how important this subject is in their oeuvres. Frans van Meiris painted at
of Vanity, Sight, and Lady World might be evoked by these paintings, their primary function is to delight the eye of the beholder, spark his curiosity, and entice him to contemplate the talents of their creators. The shimmering silks and carefully crafted interiors are a far cry from the rough and rustic surroundings popular in genre painting before mid-century.

The subject matter merged so well with several of the artistic objectives of the day. The subject was a favorite of many artists working in Leiden, especially Dou and Frans van Mieris.\(^{41}\) Called *fijnschilders* because of their adherence to a style of painting that promoted very fine brushstrokes and mirror-like surfaces, these painters delighted in the interplay between material and physical desire. Like ter Borch, Frans van Mieris returned to the subject many times, producing numerous variations on the theme (Figures 2.23 and 2.24).\(^{42}\) Reiterating the conventionality of representations of this theme, these compositions all portray women of the same social class, each quietly caring for her appearance in richly decorated rooms.

Artists such as Johannes Vermeer and Rembrandt also discovered that the toilet scene provided opportunities to create compositions that highlighted their respective artistic endeavors and played to their individual strengths. Vermeer’s *Woman with a least six different images relating to this theme. See Quentin Buvelot, *Frans van Mieris 1635-1681* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2005) p.157.


\(^{42}\) Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Young Woman at Her Toilet*, 1667, oil on panel. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Frans van Mieris the Elder, *A Woman Before a Mirror*, c. 1662, oil on panel. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
*Pearl Necklace* demonstrates how the subject of a woman attending to her appearance can become a study in color, light, and space (Figure 2.25). Unlike in the works of Dou and ter Borch discussed above, the action of toilet making in Vermeer’s image is not the central subject. The figure has been pushed to the side and the primary protagonist becomes the whitewashed wall at the back of the composition and the light that plays over its surface.

Rembrandt’s tendency to depict the private and interior aspects of human nature combined with his interest in the many faces of womanhood produced a toilet scene that is distinctly his own (Figure 2.26). In contrast to the elegant and refined figures produced by ter Borch and Metsu, Rembrandt’s *Young Woman with Earrings* possesses coarse features and gestures awkwardly. Her golden bracelets and the pearls in her ears and hair seem to contrast with the more modest dress she wears. Rembrandt’s protagonist is much more real and tangible because of her flaws; less an unattainable beauty than a girl next door playing dress up. Rembrandt has provided the viewer with an image that elevates the everyday to a much higher status; one worthy of pictorial representation. Although quite different in tone and content, these works by Vermeer and Rembrandt exhibit the themes of privacy and interrupted action that epitomize the toilet scene and were exploited by artists who chose to emphasize the erotic connotations of the subject itself.

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44 Rembrandt, *Young Woman with Earrings*, 1657. Oil on canvas. St. Petersburg, The State Museum Hermitage

45 For more on this, see below.
Dutch iterations of the theme of the lady at her toilet can be characterized by their emphasis on quiet and private moments. The conventionality of the images reduces the number of possible variations on the theme. However, as the two case studies that form the primary examples of this chapter indicate, the more modest representations typified by the works discussed above are only part of the picture. The antipodes of the demure maidens painted by the likes of Gerard ter Borch, Caspar Netscher, and Gerrit Dou are found in the examples created by Cesar van Everdingen and Godfried Schalcken and many others. Of the genre subjects which were popular in their day – maids working in kitchens, mothers caring for children, young women occupied with needlework – toilet scenes were among the few to develop both an erotic and a non-erotic version.

There are many Dutch representations of the theme of the lady at her toilet that take advantage of the voyeuristic implications of the theme in order to accentuate its erotic potential. Judging from the numerous examples, many of which will be discussed later in this chapter, erotic versions of toilet scenes were just as popular as their non-erotic counterparts. Indeed, even those artists who painted non-erotic versions of the theme occasionally found cause to represent more erotically charged ones. For example, a work by Jan van Bijlert, painted around the same time as Rembrandt’s Hermitage painting, is entirely different in tone (Figure 2.27). Although both women are inserting a pearl earring, the way in which van Bijlert has opened up the torso of the woman and revealed an ample bosom suggests a greater availability. The artist has worked to emphasize this aspect of the composition, juxtaposing the creamy flesh with the fiery

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46 There are, of course, exceptions; one of which is shown in the painting *The Intruder* by Gabriel Metsu, discussed below.
47 Jan van Bijlert, *Young Woman Before a Mirror*, c. 1650-70, oil on panel. Utrecht, Centraal Museum.
orange of her gown. Unlike the positioning of the hands in Rembrandt’s work, which serve to draw the figure’s attention into herself, the gesture of van Bijlert’s subject is broad and open.

Although drawing from similar sources, the erotic scenes are in so many ways strikingly different from the non-erotic ones. The immediate impression of these images is that they are erotic but it is not readily evident how this effect is achieved. Taking a closer look at the works by van Everdingen and Schalcken that are the primary examples of this chapter will expose the mechanisms used by Dutch artists to create these evocative and provocative images.48 A quiet, intimate mood is of central importance to these paintings. Despite the tremendous differences, visual and thematic, that exist between them, both retain vestiges of what came before. Lingering associations with the art of Rubens and the Venetian models that inspired him permeate them both.49 Yet they also exhibit allegiances to the art of their own time and culture. The emphasis is no longer on the replication of an idealized beauty in the classical mode. Instead, the artists have recast these Venuses in the guise of contemporary figures, despite some contradictory allusions.

Caesar van Everdingen’s Young Woman Combing her Hair (Figure 2.1) challenges with its frank depiction of eroticism. Van Everdingen was a very successful artist in his lifetime. However, despite his significant output and many crucial commissions, including decorations for the Oranjezaal in Huis ten Bosch, he escaped

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48 The developmental trajectory of the erotic toilet scenes follows a similar path both geographically and chronologically. Many artists, Frans van Mieris for example, worked in both formats.

49 As will be discussed in the following chapter, Venetian paintings of courtesans were well-known and influential for Dutch painters.
scholarly notice until the end of the nineteenth century. Van Everdingen worked in his hometown of Alkmaar and also in Haarlem. He is often associated with the group of artists, called the Haarlem Classicists, who worked in that city at mid-century.\textsuperscript{50}

According to the most recent research, much of van Everdingen’s artistic output was produced on commission and for it he was well-compensated.\textsuperscript{51} In addition to being a successful painter of portraits and historical subjects, he often created intriguing genre scenes of which the \textit{Young Woman Combing her Hair} is but one illustration.

Painted in the late 1640’s this most striking and provocative example of the half-length variety of toilet scene is now known only through black and white reproductions.\textsuperscript{52} The panel is rather large and as a result the figure is approximately life-size. A partially naked young woman is captured in an intimate moment as she attends to her appearance. She stands in a shallow space and leans out of what appears to be a window. Turning to her right, she projects outward over the edge of the parapet. Looking intently at something outside and to the right of the picture’s frame that has caught her attention, she combs her hair with her right hand and runs the fingers of her left through the locks by her ear, seemingly unaware that she is being observed.

\textsuperscript{50} Included in this group are artists such as Pieter de Grebber and Solomon de Bray. For quite some time the more academic style of this group of artists was seen as “un-Dutch” but recent revaluations have successfully integrated this stylistic moment into the greater picture of Dutch art. See, for example, the work done by Albert Blankert and others for a monumental exhibition of Dutch Classicism held in Rotterdam and Frankfurt in 1999 and 2000. Albert Blankert, ed. \textit{Dutch Classicism}.


\textsuperscript{52} The picture has a lengthy and well-documented provenance but its whereabouts has been unknown since its purchase at a Parisian sale in 1913. As Janssen notes: “It was sold together with the Steengracht Collection and is probably still in private hands, making it one of the few known works by Van Everdingen that has not found a permanent place in an institution or museum.” Janssen \textit{Caesar van Everdingen}, p. 16.
In addition to being such a remarkable image in and of itself, the painting provides a ready model for analyzing how the artist used the tools available to him, both visual and conceptual, to heighten the erotic effect. The apparently simple and straightforward organization of the composition masks more complicated and sophisticated pictorial and thematic structures. The primary means by which an erotic response to this image is encouraged is through the promotion of an interaction between the viewer and the viewed. This is the thread that ties all of the elements of the image together. Van Everdingen has skillfully marshaled all the elements characteristic of his individual style such as a compressed composition, dramatic lighting effects, and a naturalistic figural type, to create an image that encourages an erotic response in the viewer. While all of these compositional devices are synchronized to increase the figure’s accessibility and availability, it is the thematic issues present in the painting that work to reinforce the erotic potential implicit in this availability. A close analysis of each one of these compositional and narrative elements introduces many of the techniques used by Dutch artists to emphasize the eroticism of the other paintings under investigation in this dissertation.

The arrangement of the composition and the creation of its space are two of the chief effects through which van Everdingen has made this image more erotic than other half-length toilet scenes. It is virtually impossible to divert one’s attention from the partially clothed figure that covers virtually the entire surface. Taking full advantage of the contemporary stylistic tendency towards dynamism and movement, van Everdingen twists the figure in space and stretches her form from the upper left side of the canvas,

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53 Compare van Everdingen’s example to images such as the one by Jan van Bijlert discussed above.
where her elbow is, down to the lower right corner where her other elbow projects out of the frame. Having stripped away any extraneous details that would provide an alternative object upon which the viewer’s gaze could rest, it is virtually impossible to not look at this woman.

The illusionistic space suggested in this composition is remarkably shallow and compressed. Behind the figure, the wall is completely black. To the front, the lower portion of the woman’s body is blocked by some type of sill or ledge. To the left and right she is hemmed-in by the frame of the window. In such a cramped space she is given very little room in which to move. As a result, she is pushed out into the imaginary space in front of the painted panel; the space shared with the viewer. Both her left elbow and the folds of the drapery under her left breast spill over the ledge while her right elbow overlaps the right frame of the window. The cumulative effect is one that threatens to puncture the fictive plane separating the viewer’s space from the illusionistic space of the painting thus destroying the barrier between the viewer and the viewed. Yet it is not that her observer has been provided with a way in but instead that she is provided with a way out. By forcing the figure into the viewer’s space and removing any detail which would enable him to avoid looking at this woman, van Everdingen has increased the sense of the immediacy of the moment and emphasized the figure’s availability for the (presumably male) consumer.\footnote{It is precisely this invocation of a gendered viewer that references ideas about the “male gaze” previously discussed in the introduction to the dissertation. See also Edward Snow, “Theorizing the male gaze: some problems,” \textit{Representations} 25 (1989) pp. 30-41.} The viewer could reach out and touch her, and is indeed encouraged to do so. His proximity to the woman in this painting forces an
interaction and thereby fosters an imagined relationship between the viewer and the viewed.

Much like the compositional arrangement and the development of the illusionistic space, the use of light in this painting is remarkably dramatic and also serves to further the erotic effect. As in many of van Everdingen’s works, the light is bright and the contrast between areas of light and shadow is intense. This serves many purposes. The dark and bright areas are of equal intensity and as such create a composition that is balanced. Also contributing to this balanced and measured use of light is the observation that the percentage of the composition which is brightly lit is comparable to that which is dark. The bright areas of the composition are intense and saturated. These are juxtaposed with areas of deep, dark shadow. Few transitions through a gradation of light to shade exist within the painting. As a result, the edges are crisp and sharp resulting in a strong emphasis on linearity. For example, the upper outline of the figure’s raised right arm is sharply delineated as a result of the stark contrast with the dark void behind it. Despite this emphasis on line, the repetition of curved shapes keeps the figure from looking too stiff. The clarity produced by this light and the emphasis on linear precision heighten the naturalism of the image by giving the figure a greater sense of plasticity and fullness.

55 Although this effect is surely heightened by the black and white photograph, a review of van Everdingen’s oeuvre demonstrates his tendency to evenly juxtapose areas of bright against those of dark, rarely employing middle tones. See, for example, Young Woman Warming her hands over a Brazier, ‘Allegory of Winter,’ Oil on canvas, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Janssen 2002, cat. 21. For an in-depth study of this painting as well as a discussion of its “modern” use of color and light see Albert Blankert, “Dame Winter’ by Caesar van Everdingen” in Albert Blankert, Selected Writings on Dutch Painting: Rembrandt, Van Beke, Vermeer, and Others. (Zwolle: Wannders, 2004) pp.209-26.
The effects created by van Everdingen’s particular use of light are remarkable and function in very specific ways to heighten the eroticism that is inherent in the subject itself. One of the most immediate and apparent is how it works in conjunction with the construction of the composition to project the figure forward. The woman is thrown into high relief because of the stark contrast with the black background. She is pushed into the viewers’ space, forcing him to consider the relationship to her.56

The figural type represented in this image is characteristic of that painted by van Everdingen in the 1640s and 1650s.57 The dominant features are the woman’s soft fleshiness and Rubensian proportions. The rounded forms of her upper torso and arms, as well as her facial features, do not appear to possess a skeletal structure. The dimpled knuckle joints of her left hand, as well as the pudgy fingers on her right as they grip the comb suggest flesh rather than muscle and bone. Despite this lack of an underlying structure, the figure possesses a weighty presence. Her robust proportions are what fill the compositional space and suggest that the surface can barely contain her.

While the visual becomes the primary means by which an erotic response is encouraged in an image such as this, the thematic and associative connections provide an additional counterpoint. Because the barest minimum of details are used to create this scene, the viewer is left wondering more about this woman than the painting is able to answer. There is no suggestion of a background setting that would help to identify a location. There is very little to indicate what time of day this activity is taking place. The

56 The light and composition work similarly in his Pommersfelden picture, discussed below.
57 Her proportions and structure are clearly related to figures such as the Muses painted for the Oranjezaal, the Ariadne in the *Bacchus and Ariadne on Naxos* now in Dresden or the female figures in *Bacchus Enthroned* in the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem. See Huys Janssen 2002; plates 18, 25, and 34.
harsh raking light which illuminates her so brightly suggests neither a natural nor an artificial source.

So many of the specifics of narrative have been omitted, including any detail that would clarify who this woman is. As mentioned above, the sparse setting provides very little information as to her location. Unlike other toilet scenes, which depict a fully realized interior, or at least a glimpse into an interior, this painting encourages the viewer to guess at the locale from which this lovely maiden was spied. In addition to wondering where this moment is taking place, the viewer must speculate about the general identity of the sitter. Who is she? Is she a wealthy young woman? The painting does offer a few hints but even these are so vague as to lead to more speculation than clarification. For instance, the woman is clothed, albeit barely, thus making it less likely that the scene represents a Toilet of Venus. However, her chemise lacks any fine detail such as expensive lace or embroidery. One is still left without any certainty as to her social status or milieu. The large pearl earring that dangles from her ear lobe is yet another ambiguous detail. Venus often wears pearl earrings; an attribute that underlines their mutual association with the sea, but pearls are also frequently worn by contemporary women in Dutch paintings.\footnote{Cathy Santore, “Tools of Venus,” \textit{Renaissance Studies} 11:3 (1997) pp. 197-207} To further complicate the issue, pearls are worn both by respectable housewives and their less wholesome counterparts, well-paid and kept courtesans.\footnote{Eddy de Jongh, “Pearls of Virtue and Pearls of Vice,” \textit{Simiolus} 8 (1975-75) pp. 69-97.} How, then, is one supposed to understand who this person is? The ambiguous identity of the sitter, the non-specific setting, and the suggestion of a contemporary moment are yet more of the components of this painting that allow the viewer to construct his own, potentially erotic, narrative for the image.
Expanding the discussion to include other erotic half-length images demonstrates the effectiveness of many compositional devices employed by van Everdingen. He painted the theme twice, each instance taking full advantage of the erotic potential of the subject. The painting entitled *Woman at Her Toilet* now in Pommersfelden dates from the 1650’s and shows slight variations from the rendering discussed at length above (Figure 2.28). The relationship between these two paintings remains unclear; however, that they are two interpretations with similar erotic intentions is obvious. The differences, although minor, highlight the ways in which small adjustments can produce great shifts in the perception of an image. For example, adjusting the position of the figure so that she stares directly out at the viewer instead of to the side changes the tenor of the interaction. This acknowledgement of the presence of the viewer modifies the tone in such a way that the subtle relationship between the subject and the previously unnoticed observer is made bare. The suggestiveness of the details of the Weill Collection painting has given way to bolder displays. In the Pommersfelden image, the woman’s breasts are both bare. The play between revealing and concealing that was a vital component of the erotic effect is not present here. All is revealed and as such the more titillating aspects of a partially clothed figure are not demonstrated. This brashness and specificity also plays out in the various details of the painting. She is more highly ornamented with pearls in her hair as well as her ears. Holding a small hand mirror she tries to affix a flower to her hair, which is pulled back

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60 Cesar van Everdingen, *Young Woman at Her Toilet*, c. 1650, oil on panel. Pommersfelden, Schloss Weissenstein, Schönborn Collection.

61 The different messages communicated by women who stare directly at the viewer and those who avert their gaze will also be discussed in the following chapter.
and in a more formal style. She wears both a chemise and a silken overdress. Both of which have been pulled down to her waist.

In 1635, Salomon de Braij painted a woman at her toilet which shows a particular affinity to both of Everdingen’s later versions (Figure 2.29). Situated behind some sort of ledge, like that in the Weill Collection painting, a nude woman turns to the left, gripping her hair with one hand and combing the locks with another. Stripped of all detail it is again difficult to assign a particular identity to this figure. Her golden hair and rosy cheeks make her seem fresh and alive.

Many of the devices used by Cesar van Everdingen and others to enhance the erotic effect of the half-length toilet scene are found in the full-length versions as well. An artist known for infusing his works with eroticism is Godfried Schalcken. The toilet scene is one of the subjects to which he returned several times. Working in both the half-length and full-length formats, he was constantly refining and developing strategies to heighten the eroticism. In the tantalizing image *Young Woman with a Mirror Seated under a Canopy in a Landscape*, (Figure 2.2) painted circa 1690, a young woman sits on a low stool under a makeshift canopy in a wild landscape, gazing at her reflection in a mirror held in her right hand. She is richly clad and wears pearls both around her neck and in her hair. In front of her, a low table is covered with a heavy carpet, shimmering satins, and a delicate bit of lace. Scattered on top of the table are the accoutrements of a lady’s toilet case: a comb, a brush, a jewel box, and a container that perhaps contains

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62 Salomon de Braij, *Woman Combing her hair*, oil on panel. Paris Musée du Louvre
63 Young Woman Gazing into a Mirror, c.1650-55, oil on panel. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum and *Woman Before a Mirror*, oil on panel. London, Trafalgar Galleries are two additional examples.
perfume.\textsuperscript{64} Fully absorbed in the task of arranging her curls, she fails to notice that she is being observed both by the viewer and by the man in the bushes in the right background. The landscape in which she sits presents a mixture of elements suggesting both a Dutch \textit{bos}, or woods, and some imaginative Alpine idyll. The small cluster of trees behind the woman and the shrubbery along the right side of the composition are similar to the forest growth seen in images that were intended to depict the pleasure gardens and woods located outside of major cities such as Amsterdam. These spaces were often the scenes of meetings between young men and women seeking privacy for a romantic encounter.\textsuperscript{65}

As in the painting by van Everdingen discussed above, the elements of the visual narrative conspire to heighten the erotic effect. Many of the same artistic tools devices van Everdingen employed to increase the erotic effects of the \textit{Young Woman Combing her Hair}, such as the arrangement of the composition, the placement of the figure, the narrative details of the images, and the manipulation of the illusionistic space, can also be found in Schalcken’s work. Both of these works use these various compositional and narrative devices to encourage a more intimate relationship with the viewer. This relationship then fosters an erotic experience by permitting the viewer to legitimately become a part of the painting.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{64} For an example of a mid-century toilet set produced in the Hague, see Mariet Westermann, \textit{Art and Home}. cat.113 p. 210. As Westermann notes elsewhere in the catalog, toilet items were most frequently acquired piecemeal and thus, unlike the Hague example, do not often form a coherent set, as is the case with the various items in the Schalcken image.

\textsuperscript{65} For a discussion of these locations and their role as romantic meeting places for young couples see H. Rodney Nevitt, \textit{Art and the Culture of Love}.

\textsuperscript{66} Certainly there exist many images that blur the boundary between viewer and viewed but do not suggest an erotic connection between the two.
In general, the full-length format of the subject of the woman at her toilet provides the artist with a greater variety of options for constructing a composition. Despite the relatively small size of this painting, Schalcken was able to create a work that suggests both expansive space and intimate relationships. A strong sense of verticality dominates the composition and is suggested both by the panel’s proportions and by the orientation and emphasis of several of the details. The composition is neatly divided into foreground, middle ground, and background. Each slice of space, while clearly defined, passes smoothly into the adjoining areas to create a unified and coherent impression. The expansive foreground dominates the composition. Although crowded with objects such as the table and canopy, both of which extend outside of the image itself, the female figure takes over the foreground. At the left, the space opens up to reveal a view into the mountains in the background. However, on the way back to these mountains the viewer will catch a glimpse of a well-dressed young man caught in the act of spying on this beauty.

Specific effects of lighting also help to draw the viewer’s attention to pertinent parts of the composition as well as contribute to the melding of real and imaginary/painted space. For example, the light is brightest on the figure in the foreground. The second brightest portion of the composition is the open area at the right through which we catch a glimpse of the voyeur.

The female figure, whose graceful form dominates the foreground of the image, is a typical construction of Schalcken’s artistic imagination. From her blond curls and rosy cheeks to her small nose and rounded shoulders, she is characteristic of a type of figure he repeatedly produced during this period. Solidly placed on the stool, she twists to the
left and stretches out her right leg to form a graceful diagonal spiraling through the center of the composition.

Although a great deal of the eroticism resides in the seductive woman, it is the small figure of the man in the background who solidifies these associations. Firstly, his presence and activity mirrors that of the viewer himself. Unnoticed by the young woman who is fully absorbed in her task, he is permitted to watch her without fear of censure. The voyeuristic nature of this figure, and by extension the viewer, enhances the sense of privacy that Schalcken cultivated through the suggestion of interiority. Despite being out of doors, the woman appears to be in some sort of make-shift interior. The sheltering canopy gives the impression of having just been lifted to reveal her to the viewer. The diminutive size of the spying figure in the background encourages the viewer to get quite close to the surface of the painting, therefore bringing him in closer physical proximity to the woman on display.

This image balances somewhere between fantasy and reality; between an imagined pastoral age and the everyday world. Certain details, such as the finely wrought toilet objects and the carpet on the table, tie her to the present while others like her sandals and costume transcend the specifics of temporality and geography. By suggesting connections with the pastoral image, this work taps into the readymade eroticism of the pastoral concept known to the educated Dutch viewer. However, the objects that tether the figure to a familiar time and place also allow the viewer to imagine a probable interaction with her. She is real and present for him.

67 The pastoral and its erotic implications will be the subject of the final chapter of this dissertation.
As discussed at length, there is a concern whether in the half-length or the full length for the artist to foster a direct relationship between viewer and subject. Both formats strive to achieve a connection with the viewer that initiates an erotic reading. However they accomplish this through very different means that are unique to each format and play up the strengths associated with each. Furthermore, each format also draws on different sources. The half-length paintings can be aligned more closely with images of courtesans that derive from earlier Venetian prototypes, whereas the full-length images draw upon thematic associations with the subjects of the toilet of Venus or the biblical counterpart Bathsheba and Susanna.²⁸

As toilet scenes which are erotic are not limited to those produced by Dutch artists during the seventeenth century it is fruitful to compare the Dutch examples to those of other cultures. Perhaps the most obvious group of images with which to begin a comparison of how the Dutch images partake of larger issues relevant to eroticism while simultaneously creating a new visual idiom are those produced in Italy during the Renaissance. The Dutch works most clearly mirror the intended eroticism of these earlier examples and also, in the case of the half-length versions, borrow heavily from Venetian models. And yet while these two groups of toilet scenes share much, they also contain striking differences that highlight the quite dissimilar cultures that produced and enjoyed them. Clearly in form, content, and tone the Italian images privilege a distance between the viewer and the subject; a distance that, in the Dutch images, is missing (or not prized) and is obviously not the intended effect.

²⁸ See discussion in Chapter Three.
One of the most obvious differences between the Italian and the Dutch treatment of the toilet scene is directly connected to the figures and how they are represented. In the Italian versions, the woman is much more likely to be positioned frontally within the composition in a manner that, although it doesn’t always engage the viewer directly, does, somehow, confront the viewer more. The Dutch models are often turned in such a way that draws the viewer into their space. Twisting to glance in a mirror, they often lean out into the viewer’s space, or at least come close to it. Such dynamic arrangements and the way in which the external and internal spaces fuse are one of the reasons that the Dutch images encourage a more direct interaction with the viewer. The regular, horizontal planes of foreground, middle ground and background, which are typical of the Renaissance compositions, firmly restrict the movement of the figure within the picture and also clearly delineate the space in front of the painting in which the viewer himself stands.

The second obvious difference between the Italian and the Dutch images is the figural type. The facial features of both the Italian and the Dutch models are regular and flawless. However, the standard by which the Italian artists designed their own models is clearly based on notions of ideal beauty influenced by the examples of classical imagery that were being rediscovered at the time. The Italian nudes demonstrate the continued interest in reviving the flawless classicism of the ancients. The Dutch, on the other hand, turned to more contemporary and readily available models for their figures. The women found in many of these paintings, especially the ones by Cesar van Everdingen and Salomon de Braij, have more in common with the dairymaids in the fields than the nymphs near the springs. By depicting figures whose attributes were more in line with
contemporary Dutch notions of beauty, the artists were able to produce images of women who seemed more familiar and attainable to the viewer.

From a thematic standpoint, the differences between the Italian and the Dutch are quite striking. The idealism of the Italian beauties seems to enhance the distance between the viewer and the viewed. The Dutch images seem to tease the viewer with the interplay between that which is concealed and that which is revealed whereas the Italian images are a bit more straightforward. The Italian images and the eroticism they exhibit are mitigated by an intellectual response that is rooted in associations with the great ancients and ideal Petrarchan imagery. The Dutch images, on the other hand, encourage a direct and physical response that does not require foreknowledge of anything. The Dutch images reference, instead, a concept which is much closer to home, literally and figuratively; the concept of domesticity. By eroticizing the familiar and the domestic, Dutch artists created a new idiom that was to change how the toilet scene was conceived and received in subsequent stylistic periods.69

The concept of domesticity, especially as it is represented in the visual arts, has received a great deal of attention, most especially in relation to the imagery produced in the nineteenth century.70 Yet domesticity is something quite integral to the art created in

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69 The works produced by such artists as Boucher and Fragonard are among many examples which embrace the erotic potential of a domestic toilet scene and transform mistresses and other contemporary women into the Venuses of their day. See Chapter 1, note 62.

the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. Indeed, the works of the nineteenth and the eighteenth before those are actually descendents of this Dutch imagery. Domesticity has been a vital subject in the making of art since the beginning but the subjects generated by the notion seem to have come fully into their own in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century.71

The Dutch affinity with the domestic can be linked to their increasing prosperity and the important role of the home and the nuclear family in stabilizing and developing the young nation. The civilizing process that continued to progress and take shape throughout the seventeenth century encouraged the development of privatized spaces and activities that further delineated the private and domestic sphere from the public one.72

While the concept of domesticity can be seen to have influenced portraiture, note the family portraits that depict the entire group working together in a kitchen or playing musical instruments in a representation of familial harmony, history painting (one can cite numerous examples in which the historical or biblical scene appears to be taking place in one’s own backyard or living room – Jan Steen’s Bathsheba is but one example which comes to mind), it is most frequently and convincingly linked to the depictions of everyday activities or genre scenes.

What, then, is specifically meant when one speaks of “domesticity” as it relates to the imagery under consideration in this chapter? Domesticity, on its surface, refers primarily to images of the home and home-making. As concerns the toilet scene, the idea

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72 See especially Franits’ comments in “‘For people of fashion,’” p. 297.
extends a bit more to include many of the other tasks, most of them mundane and
quotidian, that occupy the life of a significant segment of the population – women. Two
important aspects of the notion of domesticity that are relevant to a consideration of
Dutch toilet scenes are those of privacy and intimacy. If images of the domestic were
most often concerned with the lives of women, and the purchasers of these images were
men, it necessarily follows that these scenes of private feminine activity have been put on
display for a male audience. With a focus on the private and intimate worlds of women,
domestic imagery allowed male viewers visual access to areas that often excluded them
physically. By highlighting these aspects of the theme as they pertain to women caring
for their appearance, artists were able to increase a perceived intimacy with the viewer.
Ultimately, the erotic potential of the voyeur is exploited.

The domestic realm is also one that suggests interiority, always physical and at
times also emotional and intellectual. These interiors, specifically comfortable and
homey interior spaces, appear as a setting for countless Dutch subjects. Indeed, the
convincing representation of this interior space was a pursuit dear to the Dutch artist.
Samuel van Hoogstraten, both an art theorist and practitioner, constructed several
perspective boxes that provided the viewer with a sneak peek of the quiet and constructed
interior of the Dutch home.\textsuperscript{73} The representation of interior space and the artists’ abilities
to lure the viewer’s attention into those spaces were highly valued enterprises.\textsuperscript{74} By
elevating and celebrating the domestic realm, the artists of these Dutch toilet scenes have

\textsuperscript{73} For a discussion of the perspective boxes see Celeste Brusati’s work on Samuel van
Hoogstraten. See also the catalog for the recent exhibition \textit{Vermeer and the Delft School}
and Walter Liedtke’s work on architectural painting in the Netherlands.
\textsuperscript{74} See Martha Hollander, \textit{An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-
Century Dutch Art} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
succeeded in transforming the subject from something that takes place in other environments to one that is more familiar.

The erotic potential of the toilet scene lies partially in its associations with intimate tasks performed in private moments. In these scenes, the only persons permitted entrance are those whose presence is deemed necessary; ladies maids and page boys, for example. That the activity of arranging one’s toilet was indeed a private one is suggested by an image painted by Gabriel Metsu around 1666 entitled *The Intruder* (Figure 2.31). In this work, an eager suitor barges in upon his intended thus breaking the hypothetical seal on the space and acting in many ways on behalf of the viewer.

Although there are certainly many connections to be made with the eroticism of the art of other cultures, the images under consideration here are distinctly Dutch. What, then, is it that makes them so? What are the specificities of Dutch eroticism as seen in these genre images? Two familiar and well-worn attributes of Dutch art -- realism and domesticity -- play a specific and determined role in the eroticism of these toilet scenes. For example, the focus on the mundane details of life that become the subject of these images removes the sense of timelessness prevalent in the toilet scenes in other artistic traditions. Rather these details ground Dutch toilet scenes in the daily experience of the viewer. No longer the toilet of a goddess, this is instead the daily routine of any number of real-life women. Although infused with a sense of beauty specific to the Dutch, the bodies portrayed in these images are a far cry from the classicisizing ideal favored during the Italian Renaissance. Rather than the image of a cool and unattainable Renaissance

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75 Gabriel Metsu, *The Intruder*, c.1666, oil on panel. Washington, D.C., National Gallery
76 On the notions of ideal beauty and how they are portrayed in Italian Renaissance art see the work of Elizabeth Cropper, especially her essay "On Beautiful Women."
beauty or the equally removed goddess of Love, the Dutch images reveal the much more attainable body of the real women one encountered on a daily basis. Providing the viewer with an image of a familiar, and in a way more accessible, body heightens the erotic effect. In addition, Dutch artists made the subject their own by putting a distinctly domestic stamp on it. Both thematically and visually there is something distinctly Dutch about toilet scenes.

The thorough investigation of these images yields conclusions that are relevant not only to this core group but also to the larger issues running like a thread throughout the dissertation, connecting the seemingly disparate subjects of genre, portraiture, history, and pastoral. Among the observations that are specific to the toilet scene are the potential for creating a sexualized genre image that is not couched in the bawdy or the burlesque. Instead, the toilet scene demonstrates that artists could take a subject and highlight a quality that was already present in the subject itself.

There is also much that these images reveal that will be seen again and again throughout this study. When analyzing how these images and the eroticism that they communicate are distinctly Dutch, we see that an oft-repeated observation is that they embrace an aesthetic that is less idealized and intellectual than the Italians, for example. The figures are accessible, both visually and intellectually. In all of the examples under discussion here, the male viewer is the privileged viewer. This viewer is encouraged to be a voyeur and to allow himself to be fully drawn into the image, most often unnoticed by the figures who are portrayed. And it is into the shoes of this viewer that one must attempt to step.
CHAPTER THREE
Fancy Undress: Eroticism, Intimacy, and Artistic Aspirations
in Dutch Fantasy Portraits

Standing boldly before the viewer, an alluring young woman with dark hair and
dark eyes draws aside a green silk curtain to display her naked body (Figure 3.1).1
Turning her head to the right and loosening the red ribbon that secures her hair, her gaze
never breaks with that of the viewer. One remains astonished by her state of undress and
captivated by her complete composure. Painted in 1658 by Bartholomeus van der Helst,
one of Amsterdam’s premier portraitists, Female Nude with Drapery is an astonishing
work of illusionistic skill and artistic audacity. Just a few years earlier, Jacob van Loo,
another artist credited with numerous portraits in addition to his history pieces, painted an
image that is similar, albeit a touch more modest (Figure 3.2).2 Van Loo’s Female Nude
of c. 1650-55 also offers up the figure of a young woman displaying her barely clothed
form for all to appreciate and admire. This demure maiden, not as brash as van der
Helst’s model, reveals herself more shyly, with smaller gestures and furtive glances. Yet
the impact is very much the same. Tipping her chin downward, she looks in the direction
of her observer. Her slight smile suggests that she is fairly certain what is going on
outside of the canvas.

The specificity of detail in the faces of the two women depicted in these paintings,
as well as their reliance upon standard portrait conventions then current in the
Netherlands and elsewhere, demand that these be understood as portraits. Although the

1 Bartholomeus van der Helst, Female Nude with Drapery, 1658, oil on canvas, 123 x 96
   cm. Paris, Louvre.
2 Jacob van Loo, A Female Nude, c.1650-55. Oil on canvas. 105 x 80 cm. Paris, Musée
du Louvre.
identities of the sitters have not been firmly established, the assumption that real women
and not idealized composites served as the subject for these works is sustained in the
particulars of each painting. The dimpled chin and distinct mouth of van der Helst’s
beauty set her face apart from the more generic versions often repeated in his history
pieces. Much about the visage of van Loo’s sitter also points to the individuality of the
sitter. Aside from the distinct features of her face, she quite clearly fingers the ruby
pendant hanging from a chain around her neck, signaling its presence and suggesting its
significance. Much like the painted jewels worn by Renaissance brides, this trinket was
rendered so as to be recognizable. One must hypothesize that the necklace suggested a
relationship between the model and the commissioner. Surely their status as portraits
cannot be questioned. But what one sees is less a portrait of a specific individual and
more a portrait of the nude figure.

The purposes of this chapter are manifold but related. The analysis of the case
studies and the circumstances surrounding them will demonstrate that these images were
highly desirable and indeed quite permissible. They were meant to be read as portraits
and meant to be seen as erotic. The eroticism, far from contradicting their role as portraits
is in reality aided by it. Describing the context in which these paintings were made and
analyzing them with an eye unclouded by moralizing interpretations, reveals that they
were intended to comment, with a distinctly Dutch accent, upon an elevated role for both
the painter and his patron. As will be shown, this surprising conflation of portraiture and
eroticism calls to mind ancient ideas regarding the relationship between feminine beauty
and the art of painting itself.
The affinity of these two paintings with contemporary portraiture has not gone unnoticed. When describing these works most scholars comment upon how portrait-like they are. In the detailed catalog entry on van der Helst’s *Nude with Drapery* Jacques Foucart makes frequent reference to the similarities between this image and the portraits painted by the artist at the same time.3 Judith van Gent, a scholar currently compiling an updated monograph on van der Helst, also notes the portrait-like qualities of the painting.4 In his essay discussing the role of the model for artists of the Golden Age, Eric Jan Sluijter claims that both the van der Helst and the van Loo works are indeed portraits.5

In spite of this acknowledgement, scholars have struggled to fully understand these paintings, for although the women reveal their physical selves with remarkably little hesitation, they refuse to disclose who they are or what they are supposed to represent. Absent is any detail meant to suggest that either of them is intended to personify Venus or Diana. The interior setting makes certain that we do not confuse them for a Susanna or Bathsheba. What seems most vexing is the reconciliation of the portrait-like specificity with the naked eroticism of these images. They are too erotic to be considered proper portraits, but are too portrait-like to suggest that they are meant to

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3 Jacques Foucart, *Nouvelles acquisitions du Département des Peintures (1983-1986)* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communications, 1987) 81-84; see especially page 82. Foucart’s catalog entry discusses this painting in relation to other portraits produced by Van der Helst at the same time.
4 Judith van Gent is in the process of publishing a monograph on the artist and has also commented upon the portrait-like qualities of this image. Interestingly, while drawing attention to these qualities, she does not include this painting in the portraiture section of her website.
be something else. Ill-equipped to find a comfortable place for these types of images, scholars have instead chosen to see them as likenesses of women of ill-repute.\(^6\)

Supported by other visual and cultural evidence, this thesis does bear some weight. Portraits of prostitutes were not unheard of at the time. Contemporary descriptions of brothels in the Netherlands do mention a practice by which the client selected a prospective paramour from a series of portraits on display in the public spaces.\(^7\) The title page to Crispin van de Passe the Younger’s little volume, *Le miroir des plus belles courtisannes de ce temps*, first published in 1631 and subject to numerous reprints over the course of a century, illustrates just such a practice (Figure 3.3).\(^8\) Here one of two young men in the common room of this establishment is presented a portrait for inspection while the other makes his selection from a row of portraits hanging on the wall. The power of these images to inspire the client is demonstrated in an engraving for Pieter Baardt’s *Deugden-Spoor, in de On-Deughden des Werelts affgelbeeldt* of 1634. Unable to contain his excitement at the prospect, he reaches his right hand into his trousers in anticipation of his encounter with the subject of the portrait he is being shown.\(^9\) Galleries of harlots were also discussed in contemporary diaries and travel

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\(^6\) Manuth, “‘As stark naked as one could possibly be painted…’” Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*. P. 324; Ann Jensen Adams *Public Faces and Private Identities*, pp. 2-4. Adams does not refer specifically to the images by Van der Helst and Van Loo but instead comments upon works by Frans Hals and Gerrit van Honthorst which share many visual and conceptual traits with the images under consideration here.

\(^7\) Discussion of this practice is frequently mentioned in literature on both the art and the culture of the time. For the most recent mention of this practice, see Adams, *Public Faces and Private Identities*, pp. 6-8. See also van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams Hoerdom*. p. 318. Van de Pol discusses that it is also to be found in jokes circulating at the same time.


\(^9\) For an illustration of this image see Elmer Kolfin, “Portretten van liefde en lust.” Portretten en portretteren in illustraties uit Noord- en Zuidnederlandse boekjes over liefde
accounts. Jean François Regnard, for example, recorded such a practice in 1681 and noted its singularity in the European context.\textsuperscript{10}

Prostitutes and brothels were a popular subject in the Netherlands in both the visual and the literary arts, as discussed in the introduction to this study.\textsuperscript{11} Developing out of sixteenth-century representations of the Prodigal Son in the company of whores and gamblers, these images frequently illustrated the raucous goings on in bawdy houses. Emphasis on theatricality and comedic affect did much to remove these images from the world in which their viewers circulated. In the early decades of the century, a particular penchant for depictions of harlots eventually led to a new development in the imagery in which the strumpets were singled out and portrayed in half-length images. Centered in Utrecht, this modification was initiated by a group of artists employing stylistic qualities gleaned from the Italian followers of Caravaggio.\textsuperscript{12} Dressed in outlandish costumes that reveal ample décolletage and coiffed with exotic feathers, these figures codified a specific pictorial tradition for the imaging of loose women that was to remain influential

\textsuperscript{10} This passage in Regnard’s \textit{Voyage en Flandre, en Hollande, en Danemarck et en Suède} is discussed in Seymour Slive \textit{Frans Hals}, vol.1 (London: Phaidon, 1970) p.92.
\textsuperscript{12} Despite his interest in portraying characters from the society’s underbelly, prostitutes and their ilk never really enter his repertoire. Instead, it was his followers who found the subject quite rich.
for several decades. The comedic and theatrical tone of these works is exemplified by Gerrit van Honthorst’s *Smiling Girl, a Courtesan, Holding an Obscene Image* of 1625 (figure 3.4). With feathers in her hair and a revealing décolletage, the young woman is clearly marked as a prostitute. The medallion painting she points to only underscores the point. Inscribed underneath the bared bottom of this little erotic figure is a lewd inscription which translates as “Who knows my ass/from the rear.” The similarity between the buttocks of the nude figure and the exposed cleavage of the woman is certainly remarkable.

Comparison with these images of prostitutes as well as the “portraits” of them shown in the prints discussed above does very little to explain the appearance of the paintings by van der Helst and van Loo. The erotic potential of the subject is entirely defused by the farcical presentation seen in the Utrecht images. Indeed their intent seems to be antithetical to that suggested by van der Helst and van Loo’s works. Instead of using naturalism and illusionism to affect a sense of intimacy and encourage a visceral response, Honthorst’s girl and her associates seen in other paintings produced at the time laugh at the viewer and assert their control over him. Furthermore, the “portraits” which are shown in Crispijn van de Passe the Younger’s and Pieter Baardt’s representations of

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brothels bear no resemblance to the works under consideration here. The individual representations of well-known international prostitutes that comprise the bulk of De Passe’s *Miroir* are imaged in a manner much more in keeping with traditional portrait types (figure 3.5). 16 Frequently done up in pastoral garb, these working women more closely resemble the fine ladies painted by artists such as Paulus Moreelse, Abraham Bloemaert, or Gerrit van Honthorst. Furthermore, Bartholomeus van der Helst and Jacob van Loo were two of Amsterdam’s most celebrated and sought after artists. Their acceptance of a commission to paint a portrait which would be hung on the wall of a brothel, even one with a golden reputation, seems an unlikely scenario. 17

As a result, scholars have more comfortably concluded that these are portraits of women more in line with the courtesans and hetaera of Venice – a type of well-compensated *inamorata*. 18 Although references to these types of portraits are rare, the connection between these images and notions of the kept-woman seems valid. Despite the candor with which diarists chronicled sexual subjects in their semi-private writings, 

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16 Alison McNeil Kettering discusses these pages and the significance of their dress and pastoral appearance in *Dutch Arcadia*, pp. 297-99
17 It is not my contention that van der Helst and van Loo wouldn’t have painted courtesans at all, just that given the size of these canvases and the artistic bravado expended in their execution, it is improbable that they were intended to take their place on the walls of the brothel. Sluijter comments that Rembrandt himself painted a “courtesan” as evidenced by its mention in an inventory of his effects drawn up in 1656 when the artist declared bankruptcy. See Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia*, p. 54.
18 Many studies of the history of prostitution discuss this particular category of working woman, most of whom were well-educated and accomplished. See, for example, Iwan Boch’s early and incomplete study of the subject, *Die Prostitution*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Lois Marcus, 1912 and 1922). For information pertaining to the Netherlands, see van de Pol, *Het Amsterdamse Hoerdom* pp. 118-21.
there are only a few passing mentions of portraits of mistresses. Volker Manuth noted that in 1710 John Farrington reported seeing the portrait of the mistress of a gentleman from The Hague. Adriaan Beverland, a remarkable and unconventional character, had himself painted in the company of a young woman of ill-repute (figure 3.6). In the grisaille attributed to Ary de Vois, the author and radical thinker is shown relaxing with a pipe while a young woman, barely clothed and with loosened hair, stands beside him and places her hand on a book penned by Beverland himself -- *De Prostibulis Veterum* (Bordelen in de Oudheid). Judging from appearances, she bears little resemblance to the common prostitutes illustrated above. Her evocative *dishabille* and delicate features are more suggestive of a well-kept woman.

As images of mistresses, the paintings by van der Helst and van Loo can claim their place among a group of paintings with a distinguished heritage. The practice of portraying courtesans, whether real or imaginary, dates back to the ancient world. In Renaissance Venice the tradition was revived and embraced. Many of the city’s most

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20 See Manuth, “‘As stark naked as one could possibly be painted…’” p. 53

21 Attributed to Ary de Vois, *Portrait of Johannes van Beverland with a Wanton Woman*, c. 1680. Oil on panel. 35 x 27.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

22 Apparently a print after this portrait was to serve as the title print for this book. For a discussion of the painting see Gary Schwartz, ed. *The Dutch World of Painting* (Maarssen: Uitgeverij G. Schwartz, c.1986) pp. 120-21.

famous artists, Palma Vecchio, Titian, and Tintoretto among them, are said to have been
gifted with such a task. The predilection for works of this sort travelled north, as
suggested by numerous inventories that mention paintings of courtesans. These half-
length representations of nude or partially nude women may also have been influential
for the development of the genre of women at their bath produced at Fontainebleau in the
sixteenth century, which were discussed in the previous chapter. These Italian models
continued to be popular and inspired artists in the Netherlands, as well. An inventory of
Rubens’ own art collection notes that he possessed no fewer than four copies of portraits
of Venetian concubines painted by Titian. His Flora was on display in Amsterdam c.
1640, at which time it was copied in an engraving by Joachim von Sandrart. A drawing
depicting a courtesan after a painting by Paris Bordone further suggests how easily Dutch
artists could have come into contact with the pictorial formulae standard for
representations of women in this class. The drawing was in an Amsterdam collection by
the middle of the seventeenth century. One wonders to what extent the suggested
profession of the women added to the allure of these images as they do appear with
significant regularity. Certainly the astonishing eroticism evoked by van der Helst and
van Loo would be enhanced through an awareness of the sitter’s relationship to the
patron.

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24 See Julius Held “Flora, Goddess and Courtesan,” Millard Meiss, ed. De Artibus
25 For a discussion of these inventories, see Kettering, The Dutch Arcadia, p.145, n.42-
46.
26 Lawner, Lives of the Courtesans, pp. 159-66; Kettering Dutch Arcadia, p. 145, n. 45
28 Jonathan Bikker, Willem Droost (1633-1659): A Rembrandt Pupil in Amsterdam and
Unfortunately for a modern viewer, dismissing these paintings merely as representations of women of loose virtue, as Sluijter and Manuth seem to do, does a disservice to both the creator and the commissioner. There is something in this analysis that reduces the eroticism observable in these two examples. In part, this is a result of the limited role erotic art has played in scholarship of the art of the period. Current ideas about the eroticism of Dutch art, as explained in the introduction to this study, do not completely answer the questions presented by images such as these. An approach that emphasizes either an overly moralizing or intellectualizing framework fails to examine these paintings from all angles.\textsuperscript{29} Certainly images such as these by van der Helst and van Loo have very little, if anything, to do with the communication of a strict moral code. Eric Jan Sluijter often refers to how painters or patrons would find ready justification for the depiction of eroticized subjects in their illustration of a narrative in which the devilish behavior of a lustful character ultimately brought about a tragic end.\textsuperscript{30} However, there is nothing in these paintings to suggest a relationship to a moralizing story or episode. Working within this restrictive conception of eroticism’s place in seventeenth-century Dutch art and culture, any analysis of these paintings, or others like them, generally pigeon-holes them.

\textsuperscript{29} Wayne Franits’ observations on the relationship between genre paintings of the Utrecht Caravaggisti and the moralizing interpretations with which they have been saddled are particularly relevant. As he notes: “The collective pastoral censure of lewd art militates against the long-standing vies that brothel scenes (and, by extension, other subjects) by the Utrecht Caravaggisti primarily served to make Calvinist morals visible.” This rebuttal could also be made in reference to the portraits discussed in this chapter. Wayne Franits, “Emerging from the Shadows,” pp. 114-15.

\textsuperscript{30} For the most recent discussions of this material see Eric Jan Sluijter, “Prestige and Emulation, Eroticism and Morality: Mythology and the Nude in Dutch art of the 16th and 17th century”, in: S. Paarlberg (ed.), Greek Gods and Heroes in the Age of Rubens and Rembrandt, Athene/Dordrecht 2000/2001 (Nationaal Museum/Dordrechts Museum), pp. 35-65 and also his \textit{Rembrandt and the Female Nude}, especially pages 143-163.
The restrictive boundaries of what has been deemed acceptable for Dutch art coupled with the tremendous number of surviving portraits from the Golden Age which portray stolid and colorless personalities force a casual observer to think that these two paintings are something unique and outside of the realm of traditional portrait-like representations. However, when one begins to survey likenesses of women painted at the mid-point of the seventeenth century, a fuller picture emerges in which images such as these, while not abundant, are certainly not as rare as would initially seem. Artists such as Ferdiand Bol, Govaert Flinck, and Willem Droost, to name but a few, produced several paintings of this kind. These paintings as well as those by van der Helst and van Loo bear little resemblance to other images of women of ill-repute – either those produced in Utrecht a few decades earlier or those depicted in books such as van de Passe the Younger’s. They instead draw inspiration from trends then current in the burgeoning field of portraiture.

There is much to uncover in the rich genre of portraiture that has implications for this study of the two paintings by van der Helst and van Loo. The variety of formats, the fluidity of genres, and the democratization of the subject itself are but three topics that resonate with the discussion of the case studies presented in this chapter. Exploring the intricacies (and intimacies) of portrait or portrait-like representations of women in the Dutch Golden Age demonstrates that the eroticism is in keeping with contemporary pictorial strategies. By searching broadly within the field of portraiture and investigating

31 Willem Drost, Young Woman in a Brocade Gown, c. 1654. Oil on canvas. 62.4 x 49.8 cm. London, Wallace Collection; Govert Flinck, Portrait of a Lady and Child as Venus and Cupid, 1648. Oil on canvas. 87 x 71.2 cm. Jerusalem, Collection Israel Museum; Ferdinand Bol, Lady with Pearls in her Hair, c.1653. Oil on canvas. 88 x 77 cm. Stockholm, National Museum. These paintings and their relationship to the case studies of this chapter will be discussed in greater depth below.
its unique features one can sufficiently find a place in which works such as those by van der Helst and van Loo are seen in a more positive and less salacious light.

Given the gallery of faces that stare back at visitors from the walls in rooms dedicated to Dutch art in any of the world’s museums, it comes as no surprise that portraiture played a significant part in the art market of the seventeenth century. Portraiture was a booming business. The sheer quantity of portraits that survive in collections today demonstrates how prolific the portrait painters of the Dutch Golden Age were. And when one considers that these artifacts are but a fraction of what was actually produced during the period, the importance of this category of subject for both the painter and the patron becomes remarkably clear. As Rudi Ekkart surmised: “By even the most conservative estimates, the number of portraits painted in the Dutch Republic during the so-called ‘Golden Age’ runs to the hundreds of thousands.” Data from probate and other inventories suggests that the proportion of portraits in a household in relation to other subjects remained steady throughout the century.33

As another category of images that are often seen as typically Dutch, the portraits produced in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century have recently received a great deal of attention both in the form of comprehensive exhibitions and scholarly studies.34 Interestingly, this was not always the case for the subject. Its presence in the

34 See for example, Adams, Public Faces and Private Identities; Rudi Ekkart, Dutch Portraits from the Seventeenth Century. (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen,
scholarly literature prior to the last several decades is disproportionately small when compared to how significant a representational category it was. As Ekkart has noted, the earliest surveys of Dutch art give but a passing mention to this fertile subject. Perhaps this is a carryover from the disparaging comments of contemporary theorists.

The tension between theory and practice is reflected in the ambivalent attitudes expressed by contemporary Dutch writers on the subject. In the traditional hierarchy of subject matter, portraiture ranked near the bottom because it required less artistic and imaginative invention on the part of the painter. However, as both Ekkart and Adams have demonstrated, portraiture could be considered among the higher artistic achievements in that it chose as its subject the human figure. Its status as a worthy endeavor is reflected in the numerous poems praising particular portraits and often artists who received the greatest accolades were exceedingly talented portaitists. In his biographical entry on the artist Michael van Miereveld, Karl van Mander extols the virtues of the artist’s position as a portrait painter. It is no surprise, then, that artists capitalized on the possibilities to advance some of their own agendas.

Despite the low esteem in which it was sometimes held, many talented and well-known artists felt the pull that portrait painting could have – both for the dissemination of their fame and for the fattening of their wallets. Portraiture was lucrative and one of the

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35 Ekkart and Buvelot, Dutch Portraits, p. 18.
36 Mariët Westermann has discussed the ways in which Jan Steen inserted himself and his family into genre paintings. She notes that the instability of formal categories was often exploited by artists such as Steen and, before him, Frans Hals in an effort to increase their notoriety. See Westermann, "Jan Steen, Frans Hals, and the Edges of Portraiture." Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 46 (1995): 298-331
most stable sources of income for an artist. 37 One reason this was such a profitable enterprise is due to the shifting profile of the patron. What was once the sole purview of the keepers of kingdoms and shepherds of souls could now be attained by the princes of commerce. The rising class of burghers and entrepreneurs clamored to have themselves and their family members immortalized in paint. While portraits were certainly painted in the circles surrounding the court in The Hague, other urban centers, too, demonstrated a growing interest in the genre. Although the portraits of other cultures produced during the seventeenth century do suggest the beginnings of broader and more diverse sponsorship, the democratization of portraiture was truly a Dutch development.38 By democratization, I do not mean to say that every Dutchman from the wealthiest to the poorest had their portraits painted. Surely, it was only the most successful who were afforded such opportunities. However, even this body reflects a more diverse group of patrons than was heretofore possible.

In the Northern Netherlands, portraiture as a distinct category of art had its roots in the images produced in the Southern Netherlands during the mid to late fifteenth century.39 It really was not until the first several decades of the seventeenth century that Dutch portraiture began to come into its own stylistically and ideologically. What began as very stiff and formal transformed as the century progressed into something more relaxed and life-like as pictorial traditions were modified to accommodate different

37 Adams discussed the large number of painters who declared portraiture to be their specialization. Adams Public Faces and Private Identities, pp.12-13. For a detailed discussion of the pricing of portraits, see Adams Public Faces and Private Identities, pp. 12-21.

38 For more on the classes of Dutchmen able to commission likenesses of themselves and their familiars, see Adams Public Faces and Private Identities, pp. 9-14; Ekkart and Buvelot, Dutch Portraits, pp. 49-57.

39 Ekkart and Buvelot, Dutch Portraits, pp.18-22.
patrons. These informal portraits focused on building more intimate relationships with viewers by infusing the sitters with a greater sense of presence and personality. The placid faces and starched collars seen in earlier portraits of Dutch burghers certainly provide no hint of the humanity of the sitter lurking beneath the surface.\textsuperscript{40} One of the great breakthroughs generated by Frans Hals in the early decades of the seventeenth century was the enlivening of one’s impression of the sitter through the introduction of more diverse compositional formulae and a rapid technique.\textsuperscript{41}

What is currently understood to be a portrait is rather limited. As with all of the words use to describe these works, “portrait” has become shorthand for a whole group of images. Charles Ford has demonstrated that contemporary Dutch viewers and patrons would have understood portraits in much more inclusive and subtle ways.\textsuperscript{42} Words such as \textit{konterfeitsel}, \textit{effigie}, \textit{gelijkennis} (likeness) or \textit{beeldt} (“image”) were often used to describe what would now simply be called a portrait. This variety of appropriate apppellations hints at the manner in which contemporary viewers would have distinguished more nuanced sub-categories of representation that would make up the larger field of portraiture. One of the most distinctive features of Dutch portraiture is its reliance upon a fluidity of genres heretofore unseen in art produced in Europe. The

\textsuperscript{40} For more on the notion of \textit{tranquilitas} as it applies to how sitters were envisaged see Ann Jensen Adams, “The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland: The Cultural Functions of \textit{Tranquillitas}.” In \textit{Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered}, edited by Wayne Franits, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) pp. 158-74


conflation of portraiture with genre, history, pastoral and allegorical subjects is often discussed.  

The diversity inherent in this varied terminology reflects the manner in which the larger field of portraiture was comprised of distinct sub-categories, each of which was informed by the other. At least two of these, the *portrait historié* and the *tronie* can be shown to have influenced the production of images such as those by van der Helst and van Loo. Found in these two representational categories is a permissiveness that resonates with the manner in which the nude women of van der Helst and van Loo are imaged. An awareness of this fluidity of genres and pictorial strategies highlights some of the ways in which different categories of portraiture influenced works such as those under consideration here.

It would be difficult to argue that the paintings created by van der Helst and van Loo were intended to be read as anything other than portraits. However, a more nuanced language needs to be employed in an effort to better understand where these two portraits should be situated. For the purposes of this study, the paintings by van der Helst and van Loo will be designated as “fantasy portraits” – a term that has already been employed to describe works of this type. Employing this language allows one to both assert and subvert the pictures’ role as portraits. The rubric is useful for many reasons. Qualifying

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44 See the comments by Görel Cavalli-Björkman, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings II, Dutch Paintings c. 1600-c.1800* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2005) p. 95.
the painting’s portrait-hood, and using the descriptive “fantasy,” suggests that these images cannot be assigned to one category of subject but instead float between them borrowing thematic and representational strategies.

Historiated portraits have much in common with the fantasy portraits created by van der Helst and van Loo. Although used by artists in other cultures, this portrait type, which places the sitter in the role of an historic, mythical, allegorical or literary figure enjoyed a peculiar popularity in the Northern Netherlands. Despite the taste for realism, the tension between recognizable facial features and the props necessary to dress a person in the guise of someone or something else was not an issue for the contemporary Dutch viewer. As Kettering has noted, the incongruity of such images was not bothersome to a contemporary audience. In portraits of this kind the display of female flesh is, at times, shocking and foreign to the modern viewer accustomed to representations of women in stiff veils and starched collars. A typical example is

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45 For the popularity of this portrait form among the Dutch, see Kettering’s comments in Dutch Arcadia, p. 69. A variety of rubrics distinguish the portrait historié. Among them are the terms “role portrait,” and “fancy dress portrait.” Although an interesting subcategory of portraiture, rich in significance and influence for the category of portraiture as a whole, they have not been the subject to a comprehensive scholarly inquiry since Rose Wishnevsky’s 1967 dissertation on the topic, Studien Zum "Portrait Histoire" In Den Niederlanden. Munich: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitait, 1967. Adams dedicates a chapter to the history portrait in her recent study of portraiture in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Adams, Public Faces and Private Identities, pp. 113-210.


47 See for example the comments by Rudi Ekkart in his essay on the portrait historié by Ferdinand Bol depicting Wigbold Slicher and Elisabeth Spiegel in which he claims that it was not “customary in those days to depict a lady of quality half-naked.” Rudi Ekkart,
Paulus Moreelse’s *Portrait of Sophia Hedwig, Countess of Nassau Dietz, with her Three Sons* (Figure 3.7).\(^{48}\) Surrounded by her sons and dressed in exotic costumes – a mix of quasi-oriental and antique garments – Sophia cups her bare breast in a gesture intended to demonstrate that she personifies Charity. The distinct, seventeenth-century dress emerges from the doorway carrying an infant (possibly another of the Countess’ children). This detail, in some ways at odds with what is going on in the foreground, serves as a reminder that Sophia and her sons are just playing dress up. Although divided compositionally, the foreground and background spaces are linked conceptually for it is Sophia’s office of motherhood that allows her to assume the identity of Charity.\(^{49}\)

Another *portrait historié* in which the subject’s state of undress is entirely in keeping with the role she is playing is Govaert Flinck’s *Portrait of a Lady and Child as Venus and Cupid* of 1648 (Figure 3.8).\(^{50}\) The unidentified sitter again draws attention to her breast in a manner quite similar to Moreelse’s Countess. This gesture, suggestive of the fecundity associated with Venus, also draws the viewer’s attention to the bared

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\(^{49}\) For a discussion of the relationship between Charity and motherhood, see de Jongh, *Portretten van Echt en Trouw* p. 312. De Jongh states that the bared breast coupled with the arrangement of her fingers served to reiterate her charitable role as a mother.

shoulder. Having oneself represented in the guise of the goddess of Love was certainly appropriate for intimate marriage portraits.⁵¹ Although little is known about this work, the paintings status as a portrait has never been called into question.

Another modern manifestation of Venus can be found in Adriaen van der Werff’s 1699 *Self-Portrait with the Portrait of his Wife Margaretha van Rees and their Daughter Maria* (Figure 3.9). The artist proudly wears the medal given to him by Johan Wilhem and holds aloft a painting that depicts his wife dressed as Venus in the process of being painted by their young daughter who assumes the role of Cupid. Scantily clad in a loosened chemise and blue drape that is evocatively secured over her bared right breast by a tight band, Margaretha relaxes in her role as Venus. Her warm and creamy flesh contrasts with the cold stone of the sculpture to her right, an obvious reference to painting’s dominance in the age-old debate on the merits of the various arts.⁵² She places a hand lovingly on the shoulder of her daughter, who paints her. Her role as muse and progenitor is firmly established. The portrait becomes a complex statement upon the primacy of painting, the role of the painter’s wife as model/muse, and the elevated status of painting. That van der Werff saw fit to portray his wife in a state of careless dress in a portrait that was surely intended for consumption by individuals outside of his immediate circle implies that few would be shocked.

Suggestions of the intimacies between men and women can frequently be found in the images artists painted of their wives, many of which take the form of portraits

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⁵¹ See Eddy de Jongh *Portretten Van Echt En Trouw* and Sluijter Chapter 5 in *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*.

⁵² The paragone and its relationship to the appearance of eroticism in Dutch art will be discussed in greater depth in the final chapter of this dissertation which deals with the erotics of pastoral.
historié. Bartholomeus van der Helst represented his wife, Anna du Pire, in the guise of Granida in 1660 (Figure 3.10). Holding the shell offered to her by her lover, Daifilo, this Granida most readily reveals her charms. As the above examples demonstrate, bared breasts were certainly not prohibited in portraiture, particularly when an adopted persona was taken into consideration. And yet there is something a great deal more risqué in the plunging neckline of this costume, its references to pastoral dress notwithstanding. As with other works by the artist, color is used to great effect. The warm reds contrast acutely with the cool blues of her satin sleeves and bodice. The crimson of the feathered headdress is mirrored by the red cloak that envelops her and is then picked up again in her lips and the nipple of her right breast, tantalizingly perched on the white linen chemise. The erotic pull of this work is unmistakable and it is in this context that one must consider the relationship of the subject to her painter.

53 Bartholomeus van der Helst, Anna du Pire as Granida, 1660. Oil on canvas, 70 x 58.5 cm. Prague, National Gallery. The sitter remained unidentified for quite some time. The association with the artist’s wife was first made by Rudi Ekkart. This attribution has been called into question by Josua Bruyn in his review of the 1993 exhibition on pastoral painting, “Het Gedroomde Land” Oud Holland 108 (1994), p.146. Bruyn was troubled by the apparent youth of the sitters relative to the appropriate ages of the painter and his wife who would be in their forties by 1660. Additionally, Bruyn called the attribution to van der Helst into question on the basis of perceived stylistic weaknesses and believed placing the painting to the oeuvre of Lodewijk, van der Helst’s son, is more appropriate. Peter van den Brink, the exhibition’s coordinator, also has an alternate suggestion for the identity of the sitter. Kettering refers to personal correspondence with van den Brink in which he hypothesized that the portrait could represent the artist’s daughter. Kettering, “Gender Issues in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Portraiture,” p.158, n.58. Kettering appears to support the identification of the sitter as Anna du Pire, noting that any discrepancy between the actual and the apparent age of the sitter is entirely attributable to its being a role portrait.

54 Discussions of this work as a portrait of Anna du Pire also connect the related pendant of a shepherd (Daifilo) to a self-portrait of the artist himself. The subject is taken from P.C. Hooft’s pastoral play Granida (1615).

The intimacy revealed in these two portraits, particularly that of Anna du Pire, calls to mind the portrait Rubens painted of his young wife, Hélène Fourment in which she stands naked but for the fur and chemise she wraps around herself (figure 3.11).\textsuperscript{56} The circumstances of this painting’s provenance and the surviving documents that relate to it disclose how significant this portrait was to the couple. As Magrit Thofner has discussed, an early will between the artist and his wife indicates that the picture was to be hers.\textsuperscript{57} After Rubens’ death it was to remain in the possession of Hélène and was not to be counted among the assets she received from her husband’s estate. Drawing her arms across herself as if to cover her body, all the while drawing more attention to it, Hélène is imaged as a contemporary incarnation of the Venus Pudica. Recent discussions of this striking portrait have focused on the ways in which the painter has emphasized an intimacy and sensitivity that reflects the private interactions between married couples.\textsuperscript{58} Artists rarely used their wives as recognizable models. Given the attitudes towards women who posed nude, this seems entirely appropriate.\textsuperscript{59} In the cases of Female Nude with Drapery and A Female Nude, all of the narrative detail has been stripped away.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{56} Peter Paul Rubens, \textit{Het Pelsken}, 1630s. Oil on wood. 176 x 83 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.
\textsuperscript{57} Magrit Thofner, "Helena Fourment's \textit{Het Pelsken}." \textit{Art History} 27, no. 1 (2004): 1-33. Thofner’s entire thesis is predicated on the notion that from the beginning this was very much not just a picture of Helena but a picture for Helena.
\textsuperscript{58} See Kristin Lohse Belkin. ""La Belle Hélène' and Her Beauty Aids: A New Look at 'Het Pelsken'"." In \textit{Munuscula Amicorum: Contributions on Rubens and His Colleagues in Honour of Hans Vlieghe}, edited by Katlijne van der Stighelen, 299-310. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006). Belkin focuses her interpretation of the painting on the unusual headdress worn by Hélène.
\textsuperscript{59} See Manuth “‘As stark naked as one could possibly be painted…”’ and Sluijter \textit{Rembrandt and the Female Nude} pp. 311-31.
\textsuperscript{60} Interestingly, Govaert Flinck painted two portraits with virtually identical compositions, albeit in reverse, in which one sitter is accompanied by an owl to evoke associations with the goddess Athena and the other does not. The omission of the key
What remains is a vague suggestion of the influence of the *portrait historié*. The sense of otherness or timelessness is belied by the specificity of the facial features.

The suggestion that this type of careless dress derives from one of the most influential painters of the century should not be overlooked. As Emilie Gordenker noted: “Van Dyck’s innovations in costume left an imprint on European portraiture for the rest of the seventeenth century.” His imaginative undressing of female sitters demonstrated how he could masterfully borrow elements then current in court fashion and strip them of detail to reconstitute them as timeless costumes with romantic overtones. The erotic suggestiveness of his inventions is unmistakable. The effect such (un)dress could have on the viewer was given voice by the Cavalier poets attached to the Caroline court, most particularly Robert Herrick whose “Upon Julia’s Clothes” and “Delight in Disorder” could be read as evocative reactions to paintings by the master.

Initially, van Dyck’s influence was felt in the courtly circles of The Hague. Henrietta Maria brought her daughter to the Netherlands in 1641 and lived with her in The Hague for a year. Documents show that the artist himself stayed in the city before travelling to London in 1632. It was most likely during this stay that he completed the details changes one’s impression entirely. See J.W. von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck* cats. 80 and 390.

61 Emilie Gordenker, *Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) and the Representation of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001) p. 69. Further on she notes that it was in the Northern Netherlands “where the impact of Van Dyck’s English innovations was most striking.” For more on van Dyck’s style see 62 Gordenker discusses this undress most specifically in relation to the loosening of garments and the lack of any boned corseting in the costumes van Dyck created. She applies the term to both male and female sitters.


64 Gordenker *Van Dyck and the Representation of Dress*, p. 70.
portraits of the stadholder, Frederick Hendrick, and his wife, Amalia von Solms. The Dutch court, although relatively diminutive compared to others in Europe at the time, exerted a great deal of outward pressure on the aristocratic aspirations of the upper classes. As a result, the taste for portraits done in a van Dyckian mode increased as the century progressed, eventually spreading beyond the court and into the wealthy urban centers. Artists such as Gerrit van Honthorst, Nicolaes Maes, Caspar Netscher and Adriaen van der Werff, working in The Hague and beyond, embraced the loose fitting undress of van Dyck’s English sitters. Van der Helst’s work, especially his *Anna du Pire as Granida* and *Female Nude with Drapery* demonstrate his stylistic and thematic affinities with the Flemish painter. What appealed to these painters and patrons was the increasingly international character of this mode. The two fantasy portraits under consideration in this chapter show clear affinities to the works by van Dyck. However, in this instance the notion of “undress” has been interpreted quite literally. No matter how loosely clothed one of van Dyck’s beauties was, she would never be portrayed as completely in the nude as van der Helst and van Loo’s models.

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66 See Gordenker, *Van Dyck and the Representation of Dress*, pp. 70-75.
67 This taste for more international (and princely) styles displayed by the Stadholder’s court and the urban upper classes will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
Thus far these fantasy portraits reveal affinities with portraits historiée and the international style of Anthony van Dyck. In many ways they are also very much like another uniquely Dutch sub-category of portraiture, tronies – images that while evocative of portraits are not really proper portraits at all.69 The term tronie, was used during the seventeenth century to indicate an image of a head or face.70 It was first re-applied to this category of paintings, drawings, and prints by Albert Blankert and is, at times, used to suggest a type of character or costume study. Virtually unique to the Netherlands, this type of painting demonstrates certain affinities with the portrait historiée.71 Produced in all types of media, the format could also be varied; ranging from small images of heads to full three-quarter length representations. Although based on a model, these paintings were not intended to be portraits in the sense that portraits are understood today. Often clothed in exotic garments, these figures were most frequently set against a plain background that would further remove them from either a contemporary or an historical

69 For a discussion of the fluid relationships between tronies and portraits proper see Chapters 2 and 3 of Hirschfelder, Tronie und Porträt in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2008).
71 For a discussion of the similarities between portrait historiée and tronies see Yoriko Kobayashi-Sato, “The Portrait and the Tronie As Seen in the Art of Rembrandt,” in Eddy de Jongh, ed. Tokyo: Insho-sha, 1994) pp. 12-13. For the blurring of the boundary between portrait and tronie with regards to Rembrandt’s Woman at an Open Door c. 1656-57 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) see p. 13. Much of Dagmar Hirschfelder’s study on the subject is devoted to disentangling portraits, particularly the portrait historiée, and tronies. That she expends so much energy on this is indicative of how closely linked to two subjects are. Dagmar Hirschfelder, Tronie und Porträt.
narrative. On the whole, the category of tronies was much more permissible than other, more formal portraits. As a result, artists were able to produce exceedingly evocative representations that feature women in various states of undress, boldly engaging the viewer and encouraging his contemplation. Stripping away narrative details encourages the focusing of attention on the supremely wrought beauties that are the result of the painters’ unmatched skill. Intended for sale on the open market, these works were often produced quickly and inexpensively, suggesting a good profit margin for the artist. The frequency with which they were collected by some of the most informed connoisseurs of the time suggests how highly they were valued, conceptually if not monetarily.\footnote{Dagmar Hirschfelder, “Training Piece and Sales Product. On the Functions of the Tronie in Rembrandt’s Workshop,” in Michiel Roscam Abbing, Rembrandt 2006, 2 vols. (Leiden: Foleor Publishers, 2006) pp. 113-36.}

One of the problems of tronies, and particularly those painted by Rembrandt, is that, at times, the features are recognizable. Such is the case with a work that is frequently identified as representing Hendrickje Stoffels (Figure 3.12).\footnote{Rembrandt van Rijn, Hendrickje Stoffels (?), c. 1654-9. Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 83.7 cm. London: National Gallery.} The costume she wears, from the loose open robe to the golden chains that draw the viewer’s attention to the bosom Rembrandt has tantalizingly suggested, indicates that this is not a portrait in the strictest sense. Instead, such a work shares more with Ruben’s aforementioned portrait of his wife. Rembrandt repeated the theme of a woman in fantastical dress in another work that is more easily recognized as a tronie, his A Woman at a Door (Figure 3.13).\footnote{Rembrandt van Rijn, A Woman at an Open Door, c. 1656-7. Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 67 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.}
The erotic potential of the *tronie* is revealed in a work by a pupil of Rembrandt, Willem Droost. The *Young Woman in a Brocade Gown* pushes the boundaries of representation and exemplifies the erotic potential of the subject (Figure 3.14). The direct gaze and open mouth suggest a speaking likeness, hinting at the palpable possibilities of intimate exchange. The plunging neckline of the exotic costume tantalizingly reveals the pink flesh of her left nipple. By dressing her in an gown and headdress that bear little resemblance to something worn by a contemporary Dutch woman, Droost identifies her as “other” but by rendering her face as that of a Dutch maiden he asserts her presence as a real creature standing in front of the viewer.

A painting by Ferdinand Bol that can also be considered a part of this category of representation is his *Lady with Pearls in her Hair* of c. 1653 (Figure 3.15). This particular image shares specific elements with those by van der Helst and van Loo. The woman emerges from behind a brown and green curtain. Her bodice is unfastened and opens to reveal her right breast. She loops her left forefinger through the golden chain around her neck in such a way that it points seductively at her exposed nipple. As with every other image discussed above, she stares directly out at the viewer, both questioning and accepting his presence.

The two paintings that are the focus of this chapter are exceptional, arresting, striking, and defy categorization in many respects. A close and considered analysis of both reveals the care with which the artists addressed issues of illusionism and intimacy. While the physiognomy of these women might reflect that of a particular model, it is

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75 Willem Drost, *Young Woman in a Brocade Gown*, c. 1654. Oil on canvas, 62.4 x 49.8 cm. London, Wallace Collection.
possible that these images were not intended to be portraits of those specific people. The quality of facial specificity apparent in the van der Helst image reflects that which is to be seen in his portraits. This is not the generic rendering of a female face. Several scholars have commented that the woman in van Loo’s painting reflects the features of a model he frequently painted. The painters made conscious choices to reinforce the status of these paintings as portraits. Missing in these images is any detail that could function as an attribute or iconographic clue as to the alter-egos of these women. Neither holds a bow and arrows nor wears the crescent moon of Diana, nor are they accompanied by a mischievous child masquerading as Cupid to suggest their role as Venus. A more detailed look into the paintings themselves will help to clarify this point.

Bartholomeus van der Helst’s *Nude with Drapery* was considered remarkable at least as early as the first decades of the eighteenth century. The painting is mentioned in the travel journal of a German named Uffenbach who saw it in the Rotterdam chambers of an eccentric collector named Engelbrecht. According to Uffenbach, this collector was quite attached to the painting and displayed it prominently, noting its great monetary value.

Originally from Haarlem, van der Helst was settled in Amsterdam by 1636. He was most likely taught by Nicolaes Pickenoy, a successful Amsterdam portraitist whose formal style was quite popular among the upper class of the city. Once working as an independent master, van der Helst quickly dominated the market for portrait commissions among the burghers of Amsterdam, eventually outstripping Amsterdam’s other famous

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77 For example, Manuth notes that the van Loo may very well be a portrait of a model frequently employed by the artist and well-known among those in his circle.
78 Foucart, *Nouvelles acquisitions*, 82.
portraitist, Rembrandt. Known for his monumental portrait style and his ability to artfully arrange sitters in a manner that enlivens the composition, his portraits stand out for their supreme execution and their suggestion of immediacy.\(^79\) The *Nude with Drapery* is no exception and readily holds its own among his other works. What the artist has accomplished in this painting is the unification of the compositional elements, from the definition of space to the arrangement of the figure to the selection of color and light, to produce an image in which directly engages the viewer and challenges him to differentiate between the real and the imaged.

The entire composition is organized so that the figure’s palpable presence is magnified. She dominates the entire space. Although positioned on the central axis, she radiates out from it in all directions, refusing to be contained by the frame. Her form projects outward, so much so that her round belly itself pushes through the picture plane. As in most of van der Helst’s single-figured portraits, the compositional space is shallow and vague. There is very little suggestion of a background beyond that of a dappled grayish brown wall, more shadow than form. Against this, the bright figure of the woman bursts forward and protrudes into the space in front of the picture.

The way in which the figure is arranged is a study in juxtaposition. This enlivens the composition and tantalizingly leads the viewer’s gaze all over the surface of the

\(^79\) In terms of monumentality, his portrait of the Amsterdam Crossbowman’s Guild celebrating the Peace of Münster, known as the *Schuttersmaaltijd* was originally larger than Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* as shown in a print of the painting made in 1779. Approximately the top third of the painting has been removed, and subsequently lost. This monumentality can be seen on a much smaller scale, as well. His well-known portrait of Andries Bicker in the Rijksmuseum exudes so much presence that we almost feel as if we want to give the boy a lecture on over indulging. It is not just the portly stature of this young man that contributes to the sense of being larger than life. The way in which Van der Helst fills the entire surface with the figure and selects a color palette which is eye catching also gives the impression of over lifesize.
composition. In a balanced contrapposto and with seemingly choreographed movement, she turns her face to the left while moving the left/that shoulder forward. The movement of the red ribbon and white chemise draws the eye down, anticipating the fabric falling from her arm as she slips the ribbon out of her hair. Simultaneously, the green curtain draws the focus upwards as we seek to uncover the right side of her head as she frees herself from the drapery’s tangled folds. The three-quarter length format is typical of portraits produced at this time by artists of all calibers.

In this painting, illusionism is one of the most remarkable artistic components involved in increasing the impression that one is gazing upon and indeed interacting with a living image. The frame in which this picture hangs is considered to be original to the work. A fictive ebony frame surrounds the image; forming an arch at the top. By including a gilt edge, the painter draws the viewer’s attention to the presence of this frame. The illusionistic effects are compounded by the green curtain, which the woman draws aside. It spills out over the fictive frame and casts a shadow on the gilt edge right below the figure’s pudenda. The way in which the “curtain” hangs from the upper right suggests that it had covered the entire surface of the painting before the woman stepped forward and disturbed it. As such, it is reminiscent of other trompe l’oeil curtains which can be found on/in paintings produced at this time. The Dutch affinity for feats of illusionism is well-known and the appearance of painted curtains on actual paintings is

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80 Foucart *Nouvelles acquisitions*, p. 81. For a thorough analysis of frames in the Golden Age which includes many examples of frames similar to this one, see Pieter J.J. van Thiel and C.J. de Bruyn Kops, *Framing in the Golden Age: Picture and Fram in 17th-Century Holland*, trans. Andrew P. McCormick (Zwolle: Waanders, 1995).
part of this trickery. Mirroring an actual practice of hanging a real curtain over paintings, the construction also evokes the ancient story of Zeuxis and Parhassius. Such associations were surely meant to suggest that the Dutch artists’ painterly capabilities were on par with those of the great painters of antiquity. As several scholars have shown, real curtains covered paintings for a variety of reasons including the protection of a finely painted surface and the masking of a potentially offensive or startling subject. That the painted image in van der Helst’s composition has come to life and serves to emphasize his skill as a painter and bring the animation of the subject to an entirely new level. As with several of the toilet scenes discussed in the previous chapter, this rupture of the picture plane collapses the distance between the viewer and the viewed, thus increasing the intimacy of the encounter.

The way van der Helst has manipulated light in this painting also heightens this sense of presence. Shown against a dark and indistinct background, the woman’s body is brightly illuminated. The light plays across the surface of the shimmering curtain as it is pushed aside, creating a sense of texture and defining the shape of the hand behind it. Van der Helst also uses light to highlight certain erotic details. Her face is slightly more in shadow than her sensuous body. By creating a shadow just to the side of the nipple on

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81 Much of the discussion of illusionistic curtains has dealt with those produced by the Delft School. This practice, while often employed by those painting calm church interiors was also used by painters of still life and, although infrequently, genre. Vermeer, for example, included a fictional curtain in his Girl Reading a Letter by a Window of c. 1657, now in Dresden.

82 For evidence of the use of real curtains to cover potentially offensive images or to heighten the illusionistic effects of the image itself, see Loughman and Montias, p. 119-125. Paintings themselves often illustrate the practice. See, for example, Gabriel Metsu’s A Woman Reading a Letter, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland.
her left breast, the artist is able to emphasize that it is erect and increase the suggestion of the immediacy of the erotic exchange with the viewer.

The palpable presence of van der Helst’s sensual beauty is reiterated in a more subtle manner in the painting by van Loo. Although van Loo painted many portraits, and indeed proved himself quite capable in this field, he was better known as a painter of histories populated with sumptuous nudes. In the painting under consideration here, he has successfully united both talents and produced an image that appears to be a portrait of one of the sensuous nymphs who populate his representations of Diana. Born in Sluis, he relocated to Amsterdam by the middle of the 1630’s, most likely with an eye to securing some of the great public commissions the city was offering to painters. His style, which often melds a classicizing refinement of paint application with a more naturalistic representation of figures and their actions, was quite popular among the upper class collectors of Amsterdam and The Hague. His name was considered, among a group of other well-established artists, to decorate the Huis ten Bosch, the stadhouder’s pleasure palace near the Hague. In the end, he did not manage to secure such a commission from the court but was very successful in making such a name for himself that important groups such as the regents and regentesses of the Haarlem almshouse hired him to paint their portraits. In Caravaggio-like fashion, he was exiled from the city of Amsterdam for

83 One of Van Loo’s early biographers, Arnold Houbraken, commented in 1718 that he “excelled at painting nudes, and female nudes in particular.” Arnold Houbraken, De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstchilders en schideressen: Waar van ′er vele met hunne beeltenissen ten tooneel verschynen, en hun levensgedreag en konstwreken versushen worden: zynde een vervolg op het Schilderboek van K. v. Mander, Amsterdam 1718-1721, 3 vols.
the murder of a tavern keeper after an argument got out of hand. He relocated to Paris where he continued to work until his death in 1670.  

As with the van der Helst, van Loo’s *A Female Nude* demonstrates a remarkable affinity with the portraits he painted at the time. From the construction of space to the inclusion of a red curtain, this painting easily takes its place among the many true portraits of the period. In van Loo’s work, we witness many of the same artistic concerns demonstrated in the painting by van der Helst. An emphasis on illusionism and naturalism as a means by which the eroticism can be heightened was clearly as much of a concern for van Loo as it was for van der Helst, even if they are achieved through somewhat more subtle means.

The nude figure dominates the composition. She is placed just slightly off-center, her head and hips pushed forward a touch as her torso contracts and removes her from the picture plane. Unlike the van der Helst, she is positioned diagonally in space; shifted to an angle rather than presented frontally. These slight modifications have a startling impact on the painting’s overall impression. The figure is bracketed by the folds of the curtain hanging in the upper left corner and the red drapery that appears to cover the corner of a table in the lower right. Thus locked in, she is able to shift only slightly on her own axis but unable to retreat from the viewer’s consuming gaze. The compositional space is shallow and vague. As with the van der Helst image, drapery and curtains play a very big role in defining the space. However, in keeping with the overall

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84 See Albert Blankert, et al *Dutch Classicism*, p.164. Although W.L. van de Watering has been studying Jacob van Loo for some time, there have been no recent publications relating to the life or art of this talented painter.
mood, the illusionistic effects are much more subtle and the curtains serve a somewhat different purpose.

Despite the boldness of action in displaying her body for all to see, the other elements project a much more modest feeling; ranging from the woman’s demeanor to the subdued color palette. Even the subject’s appearance is more modest. Her hair is tied back with a simple headscarf. The chemise wrapped around her torso is plain compared to the fine linen that is used in van der Helst’s image. It is thicker, defined by a heavier application of paint and also lacks the delicate lace detail. Unlike van der Helst’s nude, this figure has no adornment but for the ruby necklace she fingers. Perhaps this necklace, the most finely rendered aspect of the painting held a particular significance for the viewer. She holds her arms more closely to her body. Her shoulders droop as if she wishes to draw into herself. Her awareness of her own nakedness heightens the erotic appeal and would seem to contradict the suggestion that she is a prostitute, for would not a prostitute be a bit bolder when displaying her professional attributes?

After looking more closely at these fantasy portraits, it is apparent that they tweak and invert traditional portrait modes and formats. In so doing, they challenge the viewer, both then and now, to locate the intent or purpose of the picture in something other than the sitter’s actual identity. Even if the sitter was not immediately identifiable, the status of these pictures as “portraits” was recognized and understood by contemporary viewers. The artists consciously invoked and subverted traditional modes of portrayal to create images that force the viewer to consider their relationship to the subject. The three-quarter-length format was quite popular at this point in the century. It gave the image a greater presence than a bust-length image but also heightened the suggestion of intimacy
and informality that was prized in portraits. Additionally, portraitists increasingly worked to infuse their portraits with greater animation and life-likeness. Given all of this, it is difficult to deny that these are intended to be read as some sort of portrait. And it is precisely their portrayal of an eroticized subject in a portrait-like manner that makes them valuable interlocutors for the status of painting and collecting. The size of these canvases negates their status as private pictures. Surely these nearly life-size paintings required quite a bit of wall space. Perhaps they were hidden behind curtains but surely they were not sequestered in a drawer.85

These images, with their exquisite display of painterly skill were intended to conjure references with the art of the ancients. Perhaps they were meant to identify the artist as the new, modern Apelles and, by extension, signify the patron as the Dutch Alexander by inserting a contemporary Dutch woman into the role of Campaspe. If this is the case, the eroticism of the image is key to its success in conjuring a reference to the ancient myth for it was Campaspe who stirred the desires of Apelles while posing nude; an event that precipitated Alexander’s generous act of gifting his mistress to the painter.

The Renaissance investment in the revival of the art of the Ancients was primarily responsible for the sustained interest in several painters and sculptors revered by classical antiquity. Apelles, Zeuxis, Parhassius, among others, were held up as exemplars of their craft. The stories relating to these artists were recirculated in much of the literature on art

85 Several scholars have remarked that erotic prints and small paintings may very well have been kept in a drawer or folio only to be brought out and admired by their owner and his chosen guests as the need arose. For example see Klaske Muizelaar and Derek Phillips. Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age: Paintings and People in Historical Perspective. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) pp. 109-112 and Chapter 6.
in an effort to illustrate the genius perceived in ancient art and to challenge contemporary practitioners to rise to these standards. In this context, the narratives relating to Apelles as communicated by Pliny in his *Natural History* were frequently invoked. In seeking to illustrate the great achievement of painting, writers drew upon the stories that revealed the outstanding qualities of Apelles’ creations.  

Included among these were his ability to draw a fine and perfect line, his skill in rendering faces, and his concern for life-like renderings. Most admired, though, was his talent for rendering female nudes. Apelles figures prominently in Alberti’s descriptions of ancient paintings in *De Pictura* and he was no less important for artists and theorists in the Netherlands. Sluijter has often pointed out that “a comparison with Apelles was the most common cliché in any praise of a painter or of painting.”

Artists did much to encourage this association and authors complied, often noting the ways in which contemporary Dutch artists even surpassed the Ancients. Constantijn Huygens famously noted that the young Rembrandt exceeded the talents of Protegenes, Apelles, and Parrhasus. Although mostly expressed in literature, the theme did make a few appearances in the visual arts, most notably in compositions by

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Joos van Winghe paintings and Werner van den Valckert’s drawing in which the artists have taken on the role of Apelles.

The erotic inspiration represented in the bodies of these women and the way they are offered to the viewer foregrounds the experiential qualities of eroticism in Dutch art. The startling illusionism of van der Helst’s painting and the sensual presence of van Loo’s both encourage the viewer to interact with the women pictured. These Dutch artists encouraged the label of the New Apelles through their representation of a modern Campaspe. Modern viewers may never know what the “real” and “true” subjects of these paintings are, however, they will continue to respond in the ways that the artists must have intended.
CHAPTER FOUR

Desire and Desirability: History Paintings and the Market for Erotic Images

The case studies presented thus far all demonstrate the surprising degree to which eroticism was present on the surfaces and in the subjects of images produced and enjoyed in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Images that privilege an erotic interpretation were not merely a novelty in the Dutch Golden Age. Nowhere more so was this true than in the category of history painting. Sumptuous nudes play across the canvases, dominating the physical and psychological spaces of these objects. Their presence and predominance are to be expected. Many of the biblical, mythological, and literary episodes that make up the core of subjects for history paintings call for their representation – Susanna at her bath, Diana and her nymphs, Zeus and his numerous dalliances are but a few that readily come to mind. But the particular relish for the representation of the female nude demonstrated by Dutch artists and their audiences is startlingly visible in the numerous examples of history paintings in which the desire to eroticize supersedes the narrative requirements of the specific subject itself.

A particularly striking example of what can be called a superfluous eroticism – an eroticism not directly linked to the narrative – is found in a group of images that illustrate the Finding of Moses. Exemplified by works painted by Christiaen van Couwenbergh (Figures 4.1 and 4.2) and Ferdinand Bol (Figure 4.3), the focus of these images is no longer the dramatic rescue of the helpless infant.¹ Nor can the paintings be seen as a

comment upon the qualities of charity and generosity inherent in the princess’s adoption of the child. But for the small, and oft times hidden, detail of the baby, there is little to distinguish them from representations of Diana and her nymphs bathing. In all three of these examples, sumptuously painted nudes become the subject; pushing aside the baby Moses and relegating him to the role of a visually minor narrative detail. As with the depiction of women at their toilette, discussed in the second chapter of this study, this biblical episode could be illustrated in a variety of ways, some erotic and others not. If not central to the representation of the story, what was the purpose of this eroticism? Artists used the story as an opportunity to display their own artistic strong suits in a manner that appealed to the buying public. The attention both van Couwenbergh and Bol paid to the rendering of female flesh, in all its warm shades and soft textures, reveals their intentions to create images that comment upon the interplay between desirability and desire.

Christiaen van Couwenbergh, *The Finding of Moses*, 1640. Oil on panel. 122.2 x 117 cm. Sold Christie’s Amsterdam, 9 May 2001 (sale 2502 lot 130), Maier-Preusker cat. A5.


Representations of this subject, Diana and her nymphs, were quite popular in the Netherlands during the course of the seventeenth century, particularly because they called for the portrayal of several nudes. Diana surprised by Actaeon and the discovery of Callisto’s pregnancy are two episodes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that often appealed. As Eric Jan Sluijter noted, representations of these scenes were popular even at the beginning of the seventeenth century. See Eric Jan Sluijter, “*Diana Surprised by Actaeon and the Discovery of Callisto’s Pregnancy*,” in *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2006) pp. 165-78. Jacob van Loo, an artist well-known and well-regarded for his ability to depict the female nude in ways that highlight its sensuality, often painted the theme. See the discussion in *Dutch Classicism*, p. 164-167.
The fourth chapter of this examination of the place and purpose of eroticism in Dutch art of the seventeenth century concentrates on the how the sensualization or eroticization of formerly chaste historical narratives served the needs of both the viewer and the artist. It will investigate how the eroticism in Dutch art functions within the unique art market of the Northern Netherlands during the seventeenth century and serves as a meeting point for the desires of the buyer and the intentions of the artist.3

Addressing issues of supply and demand, the tastes of the buying public, as well as artistic aspirations this chapter seeks to explore certain aspects of eroticism in history painting. As mentioned above, the literary sources that form the core of material for the subjects of history painting are filled with episodes that could provide artists with readymade opportunities for creating erotic pictures. An explanation for the addition of an erotic element to history paintings in a form not present in their original narratives must be sought outside of the images themselves.

There exists a tendency to presume that libidinous images are produced on the margins of culture. However, as discussed in the Introduction, this was not the case in seventeenth-century Holland. Dutch painters, illustrators, printmakers, and gold and silversmiths openly produced a large body of visual material that drew on a repertory of standard sexual iconography. Seductive imagery adorns objects created in all types of

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3 Franits discusses this significant relationship between artists and the buying public. As he notes, the taste-making influence of the upper class purchasers should not be overlooked. Ultimately, though, artists, particularly the most successful ones, were responsible for the generation of new subjects and styles. See Franits, “For people of fashion,” pp. 295 and 308. See also Franits, Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting, pp. 1-4.
media ranging from prints to paintings to objects of decorative art. The quantity and quality of this diverse group of objects suggest that artists were reacting to the forces of public demand for such imagery. Responding to this pressure, artists often folded into their representations of standard themes and motifs an emphasis on sensual forms and situations, as evidenced in the case studies of this chapter. Numerous examples show that this eroticism occurred in paintings for which there was no need. Visible in many seventeenth-century Dutch images, this superfluous eroticism provided a view through a very specific lens, one that concentrates on the potential of a display of nude figures to shift the meaning away from the proposed subject. External to the narrative, it does, however, become central to the visual, emotional, and psychological response to the image itself. This appearance of, and frequently absolute concentration on, eroticized bodies in images for which there is no narrative necessity reveals much about the demand for erotic pictures in the Dutch Republic. In many respects, this eroticism can be considered revisionist, for the artists have taken it upon themselves to recast the story and in so doing have rewritten its history.

Although the market forces generated an eroticism that can be seen in all of the subjects discussed in this study, its impact on history painting is most telling because of the genre’s status as the pinnacle of artistic expression. Within contemporary theoretical literature, history painting was considered the medium through which artists would raise

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4 For a discussion of erotic images in domestic settings see Muizelaar and Phillips, *Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age*, which discusses how the erotic image was intended for consumption by small and intimate groups.

5 Alison McNeil Kettering discusses Gerard ter Borch’s substitution of the seductive figure of the female nude for the shimmering silk gowns worn by the female subjects of the majority of his genre pictures. Such a substitution acknowledges the importance of the nude to the viewer’s experience of an erotic picture. See Alison McNeil Kettering, “Ter Borch’s Ladies in Satin.”
the status of their profession and achieve distinction for themselves. Although in practice, artists often relied upon the limning of portraits or the representation of still life and landscape or genre to generate financial success, as evidenced by the diversified oeuvres of many, the dominance of history painting in early modern European art theory was well-established. History painting describes a broad group of subjects ranging from stories of the bible to mythological tales. As Albert Blankert noted, at its most fundamental level, history imagery is taken from stories in books. To those, he also adds paintings that illustrate allegorical figures.

Despite coming to the attention of the general public but a few decades ago, Dutch history painting was an incredibly important component of artistic expression in the Northern Netherlands. In theory, if not always in practice judging from the quantity of works from other genres, history painting was the pinnacle of artistic achievement in the Early Modern period. Artists creating images that illustrated the great narratives of European history, biblical or mythological episodes were thus striving to be recognized as some of the most respectable practitioners of their craft. In addition, history subjects were themselves quite popular and enthusiastically collected by all classes of purchaser. Research into the probate inventories and auction catalogs of some of the largest urban centers of the Northern Netherlands, has demonstrated that history paintings, at certain

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6 For a succinct discussion of what should and what should not be considered a history painting, see Blankert “Introduction” in Albert Blankert, et al. Gods, Saints & Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt. (Washington, DC: The National Gallery of Art, 1980) pp. 18-21. Although referring specifically to images produced by Dutch artists, Blankert’s definition is consistent for history paintings created in other cultures as well.
points in the century, formed a significant percentage of what was to be found in private collections.\(^7\)

The Finding of Moses, with its biblical pedigree, potential for dramatic and emotive display, and ties to the concept of charity made it an ideal narrative for artists and patrons seeking a suitable subject for a history painting. It was to become one of the most frequently represented episodes from the life of the patriarch. The story tells of the earliest event in the life of Moses. The few short passages in Exodus (2:1-10) sketch the story of how Moses’ mother, distraught at the prospect of adhering to the Pharaoh’s ruling that all Hebrews must kill their first-born son, put her own infant in a basket made of bulrushes and set him afloat on the Nile in the hopes that he would be washed to safety.\(^8\) While bathing in the stream, one of the handmaidens accompanying Pharaoh’s daughter spies the basket and instructed by the princess rescues it from the reeds.

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act of charity, the princess decides to raise the child as if he were her own. Recognizing the babe to be her brother, one of the attendants suggests that he be sent to his mother to be nursed, ensuring that Moses is cared for by his own mother before being sent to live in the Pharaoh’s household.

The potential for including nude women is embedded within the story; it does take place on the banks of the Nile and describes the princess as bathing. However, unlike other biblical and mythological scenes of bathing, it does not require it. Numerous Renaissance and Baroque versions produced in all corners of Europe make clear that the essence of the story could readily be communicated without the presence of gratuitous nudity. For artists working in Italy and France, the draw of the subject lay primarily in the dramatic potential of a story involving a surprising discovery. The retelling of the events provided artists with opportunities to represent exotic peoples and locales; to struggle with the communication of a moment of intense drama and discovery; to use a simple moment to impart a moral message; or to evoke the princely splendor of European courts.

Several Italian painters working in the sixteenth century produced paintings that speak to their own talents and desires. The fresco by the workshop of Raphael that depicts The Finding of Moses in the Vatican typifies those works that seek to achieve a narrative clarity in the representation of the biblical story (Figure 4.4). A band of young women in brightly colored garments lines up across the front of the composition. In front of them, bending down on the riverbank, are two others whose outstretched arms

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encircle the basket containing the infant. His position at the edge of the action, and not at its center, is calculated. Nothing distracts the viewer and the focus is clear.

For artists working in Venice, the subject seemed to mingle with an interest in the festive atmosphere of a courtly life. A version painted mid-century by Bonifacio Veronese transforms the story into a sacred *fête galante* (Figure 4.5). Rather than bathing on the banks of a river, Pharaoh’s daughter is here shown in the midst of a large retinue, including festively dressed dwarves, jovial musicians, and wooing lovers. Placed in the center of the composition, clothed in a lush velvet gown, the princess takes a rest from the hunt, which continues behind her. At this moment, one of her attendants shows her the small infant she must have discovered in the river, barely discernable in the left middle ground. This rendering of events is far removed from the actual tale recounted in the Bible. The artist has instead taken liberties that highlight his rendering of beautiful textiles and ability to organize a densely packed composition into tightly interwoven sub-groups.

The regal character of Bonifacio Veronese’s painting can also be seen in several examples painted a few decades later by Paolo Veronese (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Populated by fewer figures, these two compositions still retain a sense of the courtly and the grand through their inclusion of sumptuously dressed handmaidens and liveried

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10 Bonifacio Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1640s. Oil on canvas. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera. See also his representation of the subject in the Pitti Palace, which is similarly populated by small groups of courtly figures playing instruments, gaming, and otherwise entertaining themselves in a manner entirely anachronistic to the biblical narrative. Relegated to the left middle ground, the actual *finding* of the infant is but a small part of the oblong composition.


servants. The Prado painting seems closest to the biblical telling of the tale in that two of
the princess’s attendants are to be seen at the left, playing on the shores of a river. That
the river is more likely one found closer to home than in Egypt is suggested by the curved
bridge and cityscape, which belie the artist’s fondness for local landscapes and
atmosphere. As with the erotic versions painted a century later by their Dutch
counterparts the infant, who is the ostensible subject, is difficult to discern. Often placed
off-center and hidden in the arms of a young woman, as in the Dijon version, the baby
Moses plays second fiddle to the rich garments and elegant gestures of his courtly
deliverers. The men and women surrounding the princess form a graceful serpentine
screen in front of the atmospheric landscape. The viewer’s attention is captured more by
the princely fabrics and costumed dwarves than the tiny infant.

Although still at times recast as vignettes that more closely resemble a gathering
of contemporary young beauties and belie the courtly affiliations of their creators,
depictions of the theme in the seventeenth century appear to more closely mirror the
events related in Exodus. More often, the action takes place at the edge of a river, as
suggested in the story. The attendants have become a smaller group of women who
cluster tightly around the princess. Less often are they accompanied by exotic court
characters. The action that takes place is reduced to that which relates most closely to the
discovery of the basket and the care of the baby.

Orazio Gentileschi, an artist who often repeated themes and compositions, painted
several versions of the subject (figures 4.8 and 4.9). Both done in the early 1630s, the

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del Prado.
canvases in London (formerly at Castle Howard) and Madrid demonstrate how the artist saw in this theme an opportunity to capitalize on its dramatic potential. In the Prado version, the narrative is perfectly clear. The shared focus of the painting is quite obviously the baby safely nestled in the basket and the princess who takes charge of him. The attendants direct their attention to either the baby or the princess; providing the viewer with immediate clues as to what is taking place. Pharaoh’s daughter turns to address a woman, identified as Moses’ mother, appearing to issue orders for the care of the infant. The narrative is retold with a remarkable clarity that is entirely missing from the earlier Venetian examples. Orazio’s alternative (and now considered earlier) version retains the same sense of clarity and purpose. The structure of the composition remains a tightly constructed block of figures that fills the entire canvas. By pushing the group closer to the picture plane, the artist continues to tighten the focus on the gestures and details that communicate the basic elements of the story. In this ex-Howard version, Orazio has done more to increase the sense of drama associated with this moment of discovery. Criss-crossing diagonals formed by bodies and limbs pull the eye towards the center of the composition. Both versions demonstrate the painter’s supreme skill in the meticulous rendering of fabrics painted in deep and saturated hues such as verdant green, rich gold, and shocking magenta. The crisp satins and soft linens perform as surrogates


For a discussion of these two works, see Aidan Weston-Lewis, “Orazio Gentileschi’s Two Versions of *The Finding of Moses* Reassessed,” in Gabriele Finaldi, ed. *Orazio Gentileschi at the Court of Charles I* (Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 1999) pp. 39-52. On the basis of several *pentimenti* that suggest significant alterations to the ex-Howard picture, Weston-Lewis suggests that it was painted before the Madrid version. In the past, documentary evidence of the provenance of the Madrid painting has been used to suggest that it was the original version.
for female flesh and assure that the viewer’s attention is not distracted by the presence of
nude bathers. The bared shoulders and partially exposed torso of the Orazio’s London
painting foreshadow the erotic versions painted by his Dutch counterparts. The courtly
intentions and aspirations of Orazio are clearly written on the surface of these paintings;
both were executed for kings – the London picture for Charles I and the Prado version for
Philip IV. While the Prado canvas suggests a facture more in keeping with Orazio’s
Caravaggesque works, the ex-Howard version shows the remarkable influence of a
courtly and international style. The soft eroticism written on these surfaces speaks to a
sophistication that appealed to the more cosmopolitan audiences.

Narrative directness continued to predominate in the versions painted by artists
working in Italy’s other artistic centers. In a painting attributed to the Neapolitan painter
Antonio del Bellis, a reduced number of figures and more organized composition
communicate the story with relative simplicity (Figure 4.10).13 Displaying the moody
landscape and muddied palette typical of paintings produced in Naples, del Bellis’ work
pares things down to the most basic components. The trunk of a dead tree neatly bisects
the composition. Through a pantomime of quiet gestures, the two small groups of figures
to the right and left act out the story. In the lower right portion, two women kneel on the
banks of the river and rescue the baby from the waters. Although the basket and its
contents are small, blending in color and texture with the areas around them, the artist has
taken great care to draw the viewer’s attention to it through the insertion of a crimson
cloth under the knees of the woman in yellow. In the left half of the composition, the
princess and two attendants quietly discuss what to do with the child.

Clarity and precision are the guiding forces behind Giovanni Francesco Romanelli’s *Finding of Moses* painted in the later half of the 1650’s, while the painter was abroad for his second trip to Paris (Figure 4.11). The baby is positioned in the exact center of the composition. The maidens gather around; their focus directed either toward him or the princess, as they await her instructions. A sense of calm control pervades the work, from the subdued gestures and expressions of the figures to the simplicity of their arrangement. The sculptural figures form a frieze silhouetted against the cool landscape; bringing the action of the painting clearly into the foreground.

Nicolas Poussin’s final rendering of *The Finding of Moses* evokes a similar sense of exactitude; one in which each element of the painting contributes unwaveringly to the clear explication of the story (Figure 4.12). This version, painted in 1651 for his friend Bernardin Reynon, is considered by many to be his finest. The variety of reactions painted on the faces of the maidens suggests Poussin’s fascination with the representation of the passions. Divided into two approximately equal groups, the clusters of women arranged on either side of the princess read as a study in the emotive possibilities of the human face and figure. The group positioned to the left and directly in front of the princess reflects surprise, their agitated state echoed in the busy folds of brightly hued drapery that surround them. To the right, another cluster of young women calmly

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16 The painter appears to have been captivated by the stories associated with the figure of Moses as he is one of his most frequently depicted personalities. Poussin painted at least five works that address the early episodes – three versions of the Finding of Moses and two that depict his exposure on the Nile. See Richard Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin: 1594-1665* (London: Zwemmer, 1995) p. 274-74, cat. 66.
presents the child; their placid profiles suggesting a less frantic response. As with Romanelli’s slightly later version, the frieze of figures organizes the space in a manner that emphasizes compositional and narrative cohesiveness.

The antithesis of these crisply painted and tightly constructed images is, as expected, to be found in the works painted by artists working in and around the circle of Peter Paul Rubens. Although no works by the master depicting the subject remain extant, a loosely executed drawing attributed to him suggests how he would have treated the theme (Figure 4.13). The pyramidal composition differs greatly from the flat, frieze-like arrangements presented by artists such as Poussin and Romanelli, who were working in a much more classicizing style. Despite its architectonic arrangement, the grouping of figures feels more natural and organic. Unlike the examples discussed thus far, Rubens’ conception contains several barely clothed figures, including one who is half-submerged in the waters of the river. As would be expected of an artist so concerned with the depiction of soft, warm flesh Rubens has taken advantage of the suggestion that the princess and her attendants were bathing. However, as much as can be extrapolated from a drawing, it seems that the baby Moses was not to be relegated to a minor role, as he would be in the versions painted by van Couwenbergh and Bol that are the this

chapter’s case studies. Just slightly to the left of the pyramid’s center, Moses is the focal point of the activity that swirls about him.

In a painting clearly informed by Rubens, Cornelis de Vos combined the stately dress found in earlier Venetian examples with figures of Rubensian proportion (Figure 4.14). Exotic details such as the bright parrot and the palace in front of which the group gathers, reminiscent of those used by Rubens, suggest that the scene takes place at a remove. The figures are arranged along a dramatic diagonal with the infant on a little mound in the center. All of the women direct their attention to him. Even the little dog in the foreground appears to be barking at the newcomer. Maternal tenderness is conveyed through the gentle faces and graceful gestures of the princess and her attendants. The result is a painting in which the fundamentals of the biblical episode are rendered with a soft, painterly touch.

Dutch artists, always prolific, showed no less enthusiasm for the subject of the Finding of Moses than their fellow artists working in Italy, France, or Flanders. Their interest in the subject was such that it became one of the most frequently represented scenes from the life of Moses. The figure of the Pharaoh’s daughter, her kindness and

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19 For a discussion of the popularity of the theme for Dutch artists, see Albert Blankert, et al. Dutch Classicism, p.131 note 7. The author refers to the subjects number in the Decimal Index to the Art of the Lowlands (DIAL) which catalogs the great number of images of this subject. See also Marloes Huiskamp, “De uittocht uit Egypte en de verovering van het land” in Het Oude Testament in de Schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw. (Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum, 1991) pp. 56-57.
generosity transformed her into an exemplar appreciated by authors, as well.\(^{20}\) Small figures acting out the story were often inserted into landscapes, such as those painted by Bartholomeus Breenbergh or Cornelis van Poelenbergh. As a subject for larger history paintings, the finding of Moses was fully embraced. A brief review of some examples demonstrates the ways in which the non-erotic versions of the story were imaged by Dutch artists.

Pieter de Grebber’s version of 1634 is a typical example of a version in which the details of the story are clearly communicated (Figure 4.15).\(^ {21}\) Seated on a mound and attended by servants, the princess receives the infant who smiles up at her. Moses is the center of the composition. He and the princess the most brightly illuminated. Her silver-white gown glow, absorbing all of the light and throwing her attendants into shadow. The skillful rendering of fabrics and rich details does not distract from the telling of the tale, as in the Veronese examples, but instead contributes to the overall clarity and precision of the painting.

The detail of the princess’ white satin gown is seen again in a version painted by Abraham van den Tempel (Figure 4.16).\(^ {22}\) The princess, sheltered under an exotic umbrella held by a servant walks towards the two women, one kneeling the other standing, who cradle the infant. The basket that served as his raft to safety is shown in

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\(^{20}\) Marc Antoine Gérard, Dieur de Saint Amant’s poem, “Moysé Sauvé” was particularly popular at this historical moment and was reissued seven times during the years between 1654 and 1700. See Lisa Vergara, “Antiek and Modern in Vermeer’s Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid,” in Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker, eds. Vermeer Studies; Studies in the History of Art 55 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 238.

\(^{21}\) Pieter de Grebber, Finding of Moses, 1634. Oil on canvas. 169.9 x 228.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie.

\(^{22}\) Abraham van den Tempel, The Finding of Moses. Oil on panel. 75.5 x 111 cm. Art market.
the lower right hand corner. Baby Moses, while partially obscured by the woman in the purple gown, is still quite clearly visible. The potential drama of the story is held in-check. Solid and stable forms ground the composition. The viewer’s attention is directed to Moses by the shimmering garments of purple and blue that bracket him.

In 1661, Jan de Braij painted a Finding of Moses that contains several details to suggest that the artist has used the subject to paint a portrait historié (Figure 4.17).23 The features of the princess, dressed in a contemporary gown of blue silk, are less generalized than those of her attendants. Although she looks at and points in the direction of the infant, he is partially in shadow and obscured by the attendant in the lower right corner. The composition is grounded by the large stoneware pot at the center. This unusual iconographic detail has puzzled scholars.24 Joeren Giltraij suggested that this particular painting was something of a demonstration piece, allowing the artist to showcase his ability to render different textures as well as paint faces from a variety of angles and in unusual lighting conditions.25 As with many subjects, the representation of the Finding of Moses provided an artist ample opportunity to display his artistic skill.

Despite the existence of works such as those by Orazio, discussed above, the Dutch appear to have dominated the market for eroticized versions. The female nude,

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23 Jan de Braij, Pharaoh’s daughter with her attendants and Moses in the reed basket, 1661. Oil on canvas. 121 x 164 cm. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. The status of the picture as a portrait is still debated. See Rudi Ekkart Dutch Portraits from the Seventeenth Century. (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1995) pp 63-4, who discusses the image as a portrait of a members of a Haarlem family. For an interpretation that denies the probability of this reading see Blankert, et. al. Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Painting. (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 1999) pp. 280-83.


always a difficult subject to negotiate, proved particularly problematic for Italian artists working within the constraints of Post-Tridentine attitudes towards art.\footnote{The manner in which Dutch artists negotiated this subject will be discussed in greater detail below. Note that Orazio’s more erotic version was for the English court.} As with the more standard, non-erotic representations of the theme, an analysis of the eroticized versions reveals a similar reshuffling of essential narrative details to create a limited assortment of compositions; suggesting that artists were in many ways exploiting formulae which were known to be successful. What is different, however, is the shift in focus from the princess and her interaction with the infant, to the nude bodies that cavort in the foreground.

One of the earliest examples of a Dutch *Finding of Moses* in which the artist has concentrated on the female nude to the virtual erasure of the infant is Moyses van Wtenbrouk’s picture from c. 1625-27 in the Rijksmuseum (Figure 4.18).\footnote{Moyses van Wtenbrouck, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1625-1627. Oil on panel. 73.5 x 99.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. The painting was first discussed in detail by Ulrich Weisner, *Moyses van Uttenbroeck: Studien und kritischer Katalog seiner Gemälde und Zeichnungen*, dissertation, University of Kiel 1963, See also, Ulrich Weisner, “Die Gemälde des Moyses van Uttenbroeck,” *Oud Holland* 79 (1964): 189-228. This is the second version of the subject painted by Wtenbrouck. The first dates from 1623.} A recent catalog entry by Jonathan Bikker notes the “exceptional nature of the Rijksmuseum painting, which does not immediately reveal its true subject matter to the viewer.”\footnote{Jonathan Bikker, Yvette Bruijnen, and Gerdien Wuestman, *Dutch Paintings of the seventeenth century in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: Volume I – Artists born between 1570 and 1600*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) p. 440.} It is only when the viewer notices the surprise of the two women seated on the bank above the nudes that his hunt for the cause of their reaction begins. A red-cheeked, tow-headed infant is barely visible between the two nude bathers in the foreground. The composition, arranged in a sweeping diagonal from the lower right to the upper left, is...
interrupted by the bared bottoms at its center. The line of figures bows forward and then recedes, pushing these figures into the viewer’s space; forcing him to consider their proximity. Van Wtenbrouck’s total concentration on these two women and his desire to suggest their weighty presence in the most palpable way is demonstrated through the care with which he articulated droplets of water running off their backsides and legs. For the artist and the viewer the visual significance of these figures overrides the narrative importance of the tiny baby positioned between them.

The suggestion by Bikker that van Wtenbrouck’s work is an atypical treatment of the theme does not take into account the existence of numerous examples in which the nude bathers usurp the entire picture. Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, a painter who took every opportunity to luxuriate over the nudes present in his history paintings conceived of a *Finding of Moses* in which all but four of the eleven figures are nude (figure 4.19). Painted in 1632, this panel also favors the diagonal organization of figures interrupted in the center by a crouching nude seen from the rear. Although the basket and infant are more clearly discernible in the foreground, the number of sensuous nudes surrounding him shifts the focus, and ultimately the message, of the painting.

A sense of calm pervades another interpretation of the theme, a collaborative effort between Paulus Bor and the landscape painter Cornelis Hendricksz Vroom (Figure 4.20). The influence of the versions painted by de Grebber and van Wtenbroeck has

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30 Paulus Bor and Cornelis Hendricksz Vroom, *The Finding of Moses*. C.1635-38. Oil on canvas. 131.5 x 114.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Jonathan Bikker, Yvette Bruijnen, and Gerdien Wuestman, *Dutch Paintings of the seventeenth century in the*
been noted. A spiral of figures rises up from the water and onto a heavily wooded bank, culminating in the figure of the princess. Looking more like the attendants to a mythological river god, the maidens in the stream are shown with completely bared torsos. Progressing upwards, the garments of the next pair slip slowly to reveal soft and creamy shoulders. At the top of the spiral stands the princess. Dressed in blue with an ornate gold and red shawl, she surveys the activities at her feet. The progression from nude to fully clothed emphasizes the nakedness of the two at the base of the composition.

Sir Peter Lely, today known primarily as a portraitist, returned to the subject several times in his early career. Before relocating to London in the 1640’s and shifting his career aspirations to the painting portraits of the members of the Caroline court, Lely created several notable history paintings. Two interpretations of The Finding of Moses demonstrate his sensitivity to the soft sensuality of the motif of nude bathers and hint at the eroticism that would capture the imagination of some of his compatriots (Figures 4.21 and 4.22). In the Rennes painting, the swirl of figures is organized along

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32 See Jacques Foucart, “Peter Lely, Dutch History Painter,” *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury* 8 (1989): 17-26. See also his discussion of the painting acquired by the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes in “Peter Lely au musée de Valenciennes ou la révélation d'un beau peintre d'histoire hollandaise,” Valentiana 5 (1990): 2-10. The painting within a painting in Vermeer’s *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid* and *The Astronomer* have been likened to works by Lely. See Lisa Vergara, “Antiek and Modern in Vermeer’s Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid,” p. 251 n.10. The presence of this detail suggests that other Dutch artists were familiar with his treatment of the subject, even if this painting does not reflect a specific composition by Lely.

33 Peter Lely, *The Finding of Moses*. Oil on canvas, 54 x 63 cm. Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts.
a sweeping diagonal that begins in sweeps the lower right with a nude bather, her back to the viewer, and ends with another partially nude figure who haphazardly covers herself with a blue drape. His other version demonstrates the tendency to minimize the presence of one of the story’s most important protagonists. Moses is but a small dot, cradled in the arms of the attendant in burgundy. Lely has subordinated the mechanics of the narrative in an effort to display his talents as a history painter who could successfully represent a luscious landscape and render sumptuous nudes. Lely, an artist following in the footsteps of van Dyck, was sure to be attuned to the courtly styles that favored at least a hint of eroticsim.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic common to all eroticized representations of the Finding of Moses is the tension that exists between the true and the ostensible subject of the work. In these examples, artistic sensitivity to the impact of the nude figures and their foregrounding in the composition demonstrates that both the artist and the viewer understood that these sleek bodies and their interaction with the viewer were the real subjects of the work. In effect, each formal element within these images either contributes to or highlights this tension. Within the complicated negotiations between these two issues, artists displayed some of their most provocative and marketable skills. Embedded within this tension, is the appeal that this revisionist picturing of a history subject had for the buyers and viewers of these paintings.

The three paintings that constitute the primary examples of this chapter were all produced in the middle decades of the century. Employing the familiar elements seen in other representations of the story, such as the tightly knit group of female figures, the

Peter Lely, *Finding of Moses*. 1640. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 137.3 cm. Private collection (Sold Christies London 8 June 2006).
inclusion of exotic detail, and the location of the action at the picture’s edge Christiaen van Couwenbergh and Ferdinand Bol succeeded in generating images that emphasize the erotic over the esoteric. Despite stylistic differences, each of these images redirects the viewer’s attention. Exploiting personal artistic talents, both van Couwenbergh and Bol shift the focus from the helpless infant to the sensuous nudes attending him. In artful fashion, the painters have managed to create images that display their respective talents and appeal to the larger public and the singular patron.

Christiaen van Couwenbergh was so taken with the erotic potential of the theme that he painted it twice during the early years of the 1640s. Van Couwenbergh, a multi-talented artist who created genre, history, and portrait images, was very successful in his own day, if not a household name today. Born in Delft in 1604, he began his career there and joined the Guild of St. Luke in 1627. In 1646 he is mentioned in legal documents as being present in The Hague. Commissions from the stadholder’s court and its immediate circle kept him active there until a move to Cologne shortly after his wife’s death in 1653. Despite the lucrative career he made for himself, it appears that this move was precipitated by financial difficulties. He died in Cologne in 1667.

In both style and subject, van Couwenbergh’s early work suggests that he spent some time in Utrecht. Influenced by the Caravaggesque interest in dramatic effects, he

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34 Couwenbergh, quite famous in his own day, was not well-known among modern scholars until J. G. van Gelder worked on the decoration in the Oranjezall at Huis ten Bosch at the end of the 1940’s. Starting with those paintings that bear a monogram CB, van Gelder began to reconstruct an oeuvre for the artist. See Blankert, et. al 1999, pp.156-69. The only monographic study of this artist is the essay by W.C. Maier-Preusker, “Christiaen van Couwenberg (1604-1667). Oeuvre un Wandlungen eines hollandischen Caravaggisten,” Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch 52 (1991) pp. 163-236.

35 Discussing this artist in the encomium about the city of Delft and its treasures, Dirk van Bleijswijck refers to a trip the artist took to Italy. Blankert noted that most believe he
employed this stylistic idiom to create many successful pictures. No stranger to sexualized and erotic imagery, Couwenbergh’s oeuvre is dotted with pictures that express an interest in highlighting the playfully erotic potential of certain subjects.36

Characteristic of the eroticized versions of the Finding of Moses, Christiaen van Couwenbergh’s painting of circa 1640, which hangs in Brussels, foregrounds the nude bather, both figuratively and literally (Figure 4.1). Painted in a style that recalls his exposure to the Utrecht Caravaggisti, and possibly Caravaggio’s Italian followers this work appears to tease the viewer with its juxtaposition of the sumptuously clothed daughter of pharaoh and the nude servant below her.37 Familiarity with the dramatic potential of the style of Caravaggio has allowed van Couwenbergh to create an image that exploits compositional arrangement, spatial construction, light, and color to generate a bold and fresh image. Much about this image can be related to the standard representations of the theme painted during the seventeenth century. A tight cluster of women gathers at the edge of a river. Their attention is singularly focused on the basket, took this trip. However, van Couwenberg’s only modern biographer, W.C. Maier-Preusker, dismisses this claim.

36 This interest was encouraged by early exposure to the Utrecht artists. See a discussion of their choice of subject in Wayne Franits “Emerging from the Shadows: Genre Painting by the Utrecht Caravaggisti and Its Contemporary Reception,” in Joneath Spicer, Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) pp. 114-120.

37 The similarities between this particular image and the version by Orazio Gentileschi, which is now in the Prado, are remarkable. The costuming and hairstyles are quite similar. The gesture of the two figures on the right in which the palm is directed outwards is notable, as is the repetition of the kneeling figure who turns towards the princess and hands up the infant. Indeed the rendering of textiles – the crispness of the white linen undergarments as well as the shimmer of the silk overdresses – speak of shared artistic objectives. There is no documentary evidence that van Couwenbergh spent any time in Italy and even less to suggest that he was familiar with the Italian artist’s work but the similarities between these two representations of the finding of Moses are notable, nonetheless.
which has been rescued by one of the princess’ attendants. The women are shown in rich
garments of shimmering silk and soft linen. As in so many representations of this story,
both erotic and not, the baby plays a very minor role.

However there is just as much about this work that transcends those traditional
representations of the theme, not the least of which is the compositional arrangement,
every element of which focuses the viewer’s gaze on the naked figure in the lower left.
The primary figural group forms a pyramid, the apex of which is the princess herself.
Van Couwenbergh has manipulated the composition so as to divert attention away from
the infant Moses. He is overshadowed by the women who pull him from the water and
bundle him into a white cloth. Gazing downward, the princess’ hand hovers not above
the little baby but instead directs the viewer’s attention to the nude figure in the water.
To the right of the princess is a solid mass of bodies. To the left, a void that helps to
guide one’s gaze down to the bather at the bottom. So much of the compositional
arrangement pulls the viewer’s attention in that direction. Even the gazes of the
secondary group of figures redirect to the lower left corner. The bather acknowledges the
viewer’s presence. She turns to look over her right shoulder as if she felt the eyes upon
her. The erotic significance of such a gesture goes beyond her state of undress. The lewd
expression on the medallion, “Who knows my ass/ From the rear,” held by van
Hontherst’s courtesan in his 1625 painting is entirely appropriate here (Figure 3.4).

The constructed space is compressed and shallow. The figures are pushed right
up against the surface of the picture and fill it almost entirely. There is very little
suggestion of a gradual transition into the distance with a middle-ground that is almost
non-existent. The figures on the left are cramped, jostling one another to get a closer
look at what is happening at the water’s edge. Their gestures are small and tight, as there appears to be very little room to move. They crowd in and bump shoulders, forming a wall of bodies that prohibits the viewer’s gaze from penetrating into the background. In contrast, the lone figure in the lower left corner is surrounded by open space. The viewer can look past her into the far distance although the artist has painted her in such an alluring fashion that one is hesitant to do so.

The figures are rendered in a style typical of the Utrecht Caravaggisti working in that city earlier in the century. They are weighty and monumental; solid, round forms that dominate the composition. Appearing well-fed and well cared for, these women resemble many of the figures van Couwenbergh produced while working in the Caravaggescque style. Van Couwenbergh has clothed these figures so as to emphasize, again, the tension between the clothed and the nude. The silks and linens slip to reveal shoulders and décolletage. The attention he paid to the representation of the shimmering fabrics gathered about substantial waists and draped across the ground highlights the pure nakedness of the lone figure in the water.

Van Couwenbergh made use of the dramatic, as well as the marketable, effects of several different styles during his successful career. However, he maintained a particular affinity for a specific palette throughout. Warm earth tones combine with rich, dark blues and burgundies to play off the creamy peach and pearl tones he sensitively used to

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render soft flesh. His choice of color reveals an affinity with contemporary Flemish painting styles, especially the work of Rubens and his pupils.\(^{39}\)

The manner in which van Couwenbergh has used light to suggest and define form and outline owes much to his early Caravaggesque tendencies. The brightest parts of the composition are the naked bits, most noticeably the shoulder of the kneeling woman and, of course, the figure of the woman in the water. The dramatic contrast between these areas of the composition and those in virtual darkness, the figures behind the princess, pushes the foreground figures closer to the viewer while leaving the others in dark obscurity.

Although native products were always popular with Dutch buyers, many serious collectors looked to diversify their holdings through the acquisition of works created in different styles. Flemish paintings were particularly desirable.\(^{40}\) Keyed to this desire in the market, artists such as van Couwenbergh modified their personal style in an effort to accentuate its affinities with a more international artistic movement. The Christie’s *Finding of Moses* shares some of the basics with the Brussels version, but is in many ways very different. Instead of increasing the drama of the image through composition,

\(^{39}\) See Maier-Preusker’s discussion of van Couwenbergh’s history paintings, “Christiaen van Couwenberg (1604-1667)”. pp. 186-200.

light and spatial arrangement, van Couwenbergh has here toned things down so as to emphasize a soft sensuality.\textsuperscript{41}

Van Couwenbergh was an exceptionally talented and savvy artist. His success relied not only upon his skill as a craftsman but equally, if not more so, on his ability to absorb and react to the vicissitudes of the art market. As much as the Brussels version of the Finding of Moses exploited the dramatic potential of the Caravaggesque style the version sold at Christie’s in 2001 references the softer and more sensuous aspects often found in Flemish painting (Figure 4.2).\textsuperscript{42} The result is an image that luxuriates in the sensuous beauty of the female nude.

The figural group is again arranged in a pyramidal composition but the apex is no longer the princess. Instead her naked body, leaning in to take the baby in her arms forms the right side of the pyramid. In this image, the naked form dominates. The majority of the figures, including the princess, are nude. Only the figure of the older, turbaned woman remains the same. The artist has replaced the one bather in the lower left corner of the Brussels composition with two. Again, the baby is in the lower central portion of the composition, but in this instance he is a bit more visible. The bright white cloth that the old woman holds up behind him throws his figure into relief. And yet the viewer’s attention still remains drawn to the nude women who tend to the infant.

The space in this work is less shallow than that of the Brussels painting and the composition has opened up. As a result, the figures have more room to move and breathe.

\textsuperscript{41} It may be difficult to determine which of these two paintings came first. In his study of the artist’s work, Maier-Preusker dated the Christie’s painting to the mid-1650’s. This was before a signature and date were revealed during a cleaning prior to its sale. The later date is in keeping with the artist’s shift towards a more international style.

\textsuperscript{42} Christiaen van Couwenbergh, \emph{The Finding of Moses}, 1640. Oil on panel. 122.2 x 117 cm. Sold Christie’s Amsterdam, 9 May 2001 (sale 2502 lot 130).
Their gestures seem broader and more demonstrative. Although they appear individually to be less substantial and sculptural than those in the other work, the three nude figures, taken together, seem to present a picture of one figure seen from three angles. The result is an increased sense of the presence and three-dimensionality of the forms.43

Perhaps because they do not dominate the space in quite the same way, the figures in this version appear less monumental. They are softer and rounder than their Brussels counterparts. Delicate features are a result of the style in which they are rendered and the use of more diffuse lighting. With the great expanse of flesh dominating the foreground of the picture, van Couwenbergh takes full advantage of the opportunity to play up his strong suit and highlight the subtle differentiations between flesh tones. Browns, creams, and peach tones dominate.44 The dramatic lighting and stark contrasts have been replaced by a softer more diffuse light that makes skin glow and surfaces shimmer. Using light in this way, the artist was able to demonstrate his ability to suggest the three-dimensionality of the figures with minimal modulation. The reflections on the water draw our attention to the delicately rippling surface and emphasizes his skill in rendering forms as they are seen through the water.45

43 This is reminiscent of a device employed by many Dutch artists in their multi-figured compositions that contain female nudes. See, for example, Lely’s *Nymphs By a Fountain* discussed in the following chapter, where the implications of this type of arrangement for the *paragone* are mentioned.

44 For the importance of rendering flesh in paint see Eric Jan Sluijter, Goltzius, Painting and Flesh; or, Why Goltzius Began to Paint in 1600’ in M. van den Doel et al. (ed.), The Learned Eye. Regarding Art, Theory and The Artist’s Reputation. Essays for Ernst van de Wetering, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005) pp. 158-177

45 A similar detail can be seen in Rembrandt’s *Woman Bathing in a Stream*, although in this case the reflect provides a titillating view of what might be under the woman’s skirts. For more on this painting see Jan Leja, "Rembrandt's *Woman Bathing in a Stream."

_Simiolus_ 24, no. 4 (1996): 320-27 and, Herman Th. Colenbrander "the Waters Are Come in Unto My Soul' (Psalm Lxix.2 David): Rembrandt's *a Woman Bathing in a Stream* in
In both of van Couwenbergh’s *Finding of Moses* paintings every effort is made to increase the desirability of these young women and, in turn, heighten the allure of the painting. The artist has made appeals to the most basic of human emotion and experience. The same can be said for the intention of Ferdinand Bol’s monumental interpretation of the theme (Figure 4.3). Although working under very different circumstances, Bol’s painting was the central part of a private commission, the artist successfully addressed those issues that accentuated his own talents while meeting the needs of his client.

One of Rembrandt’s most successful students, Ferdinand Bol, was born in Dordrecht in 1616. By 1635 he was working as a painter and is mentioned as such in four different legal documents now in the city archives. Although Dordrecht was by no means an artistic backwater, Bol appears to have left the city shortly thereafter to further refine his craft in the studio of Rembrandt. According to Blankert, he was working on a project as one of the master’s assistants by 1640. One of the most successful artists of his generation, Bol participated in the decoration of the new Amsterdam Hall and was frequently sought to execute both public and private commissions. His successful social life – he married quite well – supplemented the fiscal success of his artistic career. In 1673, four years after the death of his first wife, he again married well; this time to a wealthy widow. In the last years of his life, he painted but rarely and seems to have been content to lead the life of a gentleman. He died in Amsterdam in 1680.

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46 The most authoritative study of the artist remains that by Albert Blankert.
Bol’s earliest work as an independent master was heavily influenced by the work of Rembrandt in both style and subject. He concentrated on portraits and history paintings. Eventually Bol developed a more modern idiom, one that he correctly calculated was better suited to some of the major public commissions on offer at that time. In addition to these public assignments, he is credited with developing several private commissions one of which includes the Finding of Moses.47

His monumental depiction of the subject, painted circa 1655, provides yet another example of how artists responded to the desires of their audience and revised the narrative of the story in an effort to exploit the erotic potential of a group of bathers gathered at the water’s edge. Using compositional elements to heighten the drama and create an entirely different impression, Bol overwhelms the viewer. The erotic potential of this work has not gone unnoticed by scholars. Albert Blankert, writing about this work in his monograph on the artist, noted that it “displays striking similarities with the countless representations of Diana and her nymphs bathing in a landscape produced by Dutch artists in the seventeenth century.”48 More at home in a representation of Diana

47 There is a drawing, currently in the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam that depicts the subject. Bol’s figures mimic the arrangement of the young woman lifting the basket from the water as well as Pharaoh’s daughter standing behind her. There is some debate as to by who this sketch was drawn. Some say Bol, some say Rembrandt, some say Bol corrected by Rembrandt. For the most complete bibliography on these varying opinions, see Rembrandt after Three Hundred Years. Blankert attributes the drawing to Bol. If this is the case, as seems most likely, no known work by the master depicting the theme of the Finding of Moses survives.

48 Albert Blankert, Ferdinand Bol, p. 93. Blankert, unaware of the quantity of representations of this subject which do indeed foreground the nude bathers, continues “To take the story of the finding of Moses as the subject for a pastoral scene of such sensuality is exceptional; I know of no other Dutch Finding of Moses in which virtually all the figures are naked, except a work by C. van Poelenburgh (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, cat. 1960, no 389, with ill.) and the Finding of Moses by M. van Wttenroek recently purchased by the Rijksmuseum.” Given the brief review of the quantity of erotic
and her nymphs, these bathers refocus the narrative and shift the viewer’s attention; forcing him to reconsider his relationship to the bodies before him.  

Life-sized figures dominate the foreground of a moody landscape. On the right is a tight cluster of four female figures that includes the princess and her exotic African slave. The left group is composed of two solitary attendants. The groups are bridged by a bather who stretches across the canvas to catch hold of the basket that contains the baby Moses. The action fills the foreground of this image and forces the viewer to concentrate his focus on these figures. The tension between the real and the ostensible subjects is laid out before for the viewer, who searches for the baby but gets distracted by the bathers. Again the figure of the infant in need of rescue is difficult to make out. In this instance, he is located in the lateral center of the composition but is placed so close to the bottom of the canvas, he is quite literally lost among the reeds and cattails that have grown on the riverbank. The viewer’s attention is, instead, captured by the cluster of nude and partially nude female figures who are arranged in a variety of seated and standing positions.

Bol’s artististic skills are as much on display as the female nudes. His talent in depicting a variety of flesh, from the creamy pink and the rich dark brown to the ruddier reddish complexions is in abundant display. Bol also takes the opportunity to showcase his ability to craft the mood of the image through the landscape and the atmospheric effects. A storm appears to be brewing in the sky in the distance. The multiplicity of scenes above, we now know this is not the case and Bol’s image participates in a larger movement.

49 Although the series of paintings was commissioned by a woman, referring to the viewer as male is not entirely anachronistic for she had three sons who were coming of age around the time the works were installed. For more details on the commission, see below.
textures depicted reveals his skill in rendering soft skin and the rough bark of a tree, warm flesh and cool stone, dried leaves and damp moss.

Nude figures often played across the surfaces of paintings in the collections of Dutchmen without causing a stir. Speaking of the Leiden connoisseur Hendrick Bugge van Ring, Eric Jan Sluijter noted: “He had no objections to nudes: he owned ‘a large picture of the sleeping Venus’ by ‘a good Brabant painter,’ and he even owned several paintings of female nudes that apparently lacked an extenuating context, including a small ‘naked woman’ by Van Brekelenkam and ‘a piece with six or seven naked women’ by a member of the Van Someren family of artists.” Representing the nude was often considered the highest expression of a painter’s abilities, in line with Apelles and his

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50 Eric Jan Sluijter "'All Striving to Adorne Their Houses with Costly Pecces:' Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors." In Art & Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt, edited by Mariët Westermann, 103-27. (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001) p. 126. Sluijter also wrote that Bugge owned several paintings by artists who were known for painting seductive nudes: Daniël Vertangen and Moyses van Uytenbroek (whose eroticized version of the Finding of Moses is discussed in this chapter. See Figure 4.18). For more on the appearance of erotic images in inventories see John Loughman and John Michael Montias. Public and Private Spaces, esp. p. 79.

Nevertheless, the era is well-known for its resistance to fleshly abandon. While the prudish Calvinist sensibilities seen on the surface of some citizens belie the salacious desires lying just below, there were those individuals who remained Calvinist to the core. The dangerous powers of sight and the lustful responses this sense might ignite continued to be addressed, as they had during the previous century, but with apparently less success. Art theorists such as Franciscus Junius and Samuel van Hoogstraten, writing at the end of the century when attitudes towards sexual representations became more restrictive, as well as the moralist Johannes van Beverwijk, writing in 1642, condemned the depiction of subjects intended to arouse and suggested that images of nudes be kept from the sight of women. Franciscus Junius, The painting of the ancients, ed. K.Aldrich and P. and R. Fehl, 2 vols (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991); Samuel van Hoogstraten, Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst, Rotterdam, 1678; Jacob Cats, Houwelijk (1625), in Alle de werken, 2 vols, Amsterdam, 1712; Johannes van Beverwijk, Schat der gesontheyt (1642) in Alle de werken, Amsterdam, 1652.
painting of Campaspe as Venus or Zeuxis and his selection of the most appealing attributes of five beautiful women to limn the ideal Helen.\textsuperscript{51}

Nudity and eroticism are certainly not foreign concepts to history painting. For select narratives, biblical, mythological, and otherwise, an erotic tone is completely appropriate and entirely expected. As Eric Jan Sluijter has often discussed, this heightening of the eroticism inherent in a particular subject served a purpose, most often moralizing in nature.\textsuperscript{52} These glosses allowed a viewer to toggle back and forth between the obvious visual eroticism present on the surface of these images and the didactic messages embedded within the subject. The existence of erotic interpretations of the Finding of Moses is, therefore, all the more striking because of the number of alternate history subjects that might have more appropriately been selected to celebrate eroticism. This group of images begs for a more complete investigation into its existence. One is left to assume that the eroticism was its own justification, because it appealed to the tastes of certain viewers and showed off the best talents of certain painters.

The quantity, and quality, of images that focus solely on erotic appeal suggests that there was a specific market for these works. The unusual circumstances of the Dutch art market, singular in Europe at that time, make clear that the tastes of the buying public

\textsuperscript{51} For more on the importance of Apelles in Northern Europe, see Chapter Three of this study.
and the occasional private patron did much to shape both subject and style. The art market in which Dutch artists sold their wares was run on a system of supply and demand. Artists often created their paintings on speculation and as a result were less willing to deviate from established and lucrative subjects or styles. Obviously, this system was not without its consequences for the development of certain artistic themes and styles. The importance of the audience can never be forgotten as artists needed to readily sell their works. They would not have gone out on an artistic limb if there were not preconceived or potential interests in these subjects and styles. The insolvency and financial mishaps of some of the most well-known artists demonstrate the vicissitudes of the market system. However, within the constraints of this system of production, artists were given some leeway to develop in slightly different directions. Artists were concerned with carving out a niche for themselves within a highly competitive and glutted art market.

Art markets are themselves such interesting mechanisms that they have received a great deal of attention in the last few decades. Scholars from fields as diverse as economics to history to art history have begun to dissect these systems of exchange and develop conclusions about larger issues such as taste and its arbiters, product innovation and market forces. What emerges from these studies is a better understanding of the symbiotic relationship between buyer and maker within a complex system of distribution. Both the artist and the public can be seen as participants in the development of style and subject.

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53 The work of John Michael Montias, an economic historian, was instrumental. The bibliography on the subject has grown exponentially in recent decades with several conferences and journal issues dedicated entirely to the subject.
Artists were certain to have their own hand in this and must have worked to stimulate demand.\textsuperscript{54} When one considers the relationship between the subject and the style, the linkage of desire with desirability is abundantly clear. Scholars have already noted these connections between the type of subject that is represented and how the artist represents. Sluijter’s cogent hypothesis that a seductive theme painted in an alluring manner was more likely to inspire the viewer to purchase a picture is entirely applicable to the history paintings discussed in this chapter, as well.\textsuperscript{55} Locating meaning in the interplay between form and theme suggests that by infusing certain paintings with a kind of superfluous eroticism, a buyer would be more inclined to be charmed and thus more readily part with the money to bring it home.

As with so many works of art produced in the Netherlands at this time, it is impossible to trace the exact circumstances of the exchange of the two paintings by Christiaen van Couwenbergh. However, given what is known of his career and working methods educated guesses about their distribution can be made. As a successful and eagerly pursued artist, van Couwenbergh was frequently sought after as a portraitist or for a decorative commission but he also created works to without a specific patron in mind. Of particular significance are the numerous genre paintings he made representing prostitutes, tavern flies, and jolly toppers as well as the erotically charged history

\textsuperscript{54} The artists’ roles in developing new stylistic formulae are discussed by Montias and Sluijter. See John Michael Montias, "Cost and Value in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art." \textit{Art History} 10 (1987): 455-66.

paintings depicting popular subjects such as Venus and Adonis and Diana with her Nymphs.\textsuperscript{56}

Van Couwenbergh’s popularity with the court of Frederick Hendrick would have recommended him to those buyers with aristocratic aspirations. Van Couwenbergh’s chameleon-like style was well suited to courtly tastes. The Brussels painting shows affinities with the works by Orazio and hints at the international styles circulating in the courts of Europe. The Flemish tendencies of the Christie’s painting reveals the artist reacting to other market desires -- the elite’s interest in works from the Southern Netherlands. Taken together, these two versions of the Finding of Moses demonstrate van Couwenbergh’s desire to incorporate the most up to date styles. His recasting of the story as a collection of naked and barely clothed beauties should be considered an extension of this.

The \textit{Finding of Moses} by Ferdinand Bol was acquired in an entirely different manner. The painting was the largest, and most ambitious of a group of five paintings commissioned to decorate a grand room at the back of a grand house located at 6 Nieuwegracht in Utrecht.\textsuperscript{57} In 1657, the house was purchased by a wealthy widow,

\textsuperscript{56} Maier-Preusker, “Christiaen van Couwenberg (1604-1667)” pp. 176-86 and 200-06. Most of the genre paintings, in both style and subject, illustrate the painter’s interest in what was going on in Utrecht beginning in the decades previous. For more on the subjects that interested these artists see Wayne Franits “Emerging from the Shadows: Genre Painting by the Utrecht Caravaggisti and Its Contemporary Reception,” in Joneath Spicer, \textit{Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) pp. 114-120

\textsuperscript{57} The set of five paintings was donated to the Rijksmuseum in 1892. The circumstances of their provenance seemed to have gotten lost in the shuffle. In 1982 Pieter van Thiel, then head of the paintings department at the Rijksmuseum, discovered correspondence in the museum’s files relating to the ensemble’s donation and noting that they were given to the State by the occupant of the house in Utrecht. The correspondence between the then director of the museum and the minister of home affairs notes where the paintings were
Jacoba Lampsins, whose deceased husband had an impressive art collection. Coming from an upper-class background herself, Jacoba continued to build the collection and, as Blankert notes, commissioned Bol to provide the decorations for the back salon of her newly acquired home. Blankert speculates that it was her intention to create an impressive room in which to entertain guests and present her three sons to society.58

A commission such as this one, involving five over life-sized canvases, was a rarity in a private home in the Netherlands at this time.59 A project on this scale was more likely to be done for the home of someone at court. Bol had certainly proven himself capable to execute such an enterprise as evidenced by his recently completed works for the Town Hall in Amsterdam and Huis ten Bosch in The Hague. Unlike these decorative cycles, though, this project seemed to lack thematic cohesiveness, mixing mythological subjects with those from ancient history and the Old Testament. Although, The Finding of Moses and Abraham Receiving the Three Angels suggest hospitality and generosity, the other stories do not. In this context, then, one must also ponder the overt eroticization of the theme. Would Jacoba have specified which themes she wanted depicted and how they were to be illustrated? Would a woman have suggested a located “in a back room” and how they were hung “built into the paneling and covered the walls completely, except for narrow strips of paneling around them.” For a full account of this discovery and an analysis of the group, see Albert Blankert “Ferdinand Bol Transforms a Utrecht Home Into a Palace,” in Selected Writings On Dutch Painting (Zwolle: Waanders, 2004) pp. 226-38.

58 According to Blankert this endeavour paid off as her oldest son married a “fabulously wealthy” daughter of a Utrecht regent who subsequently inherited a marvelous painting collection, most of the works of which were executed by her grandfather, Joachim Wtewael. See Blankert “Ferdinand Bol Transforms a Utrecht Home Into a Palace,” p. 236.

59 The decoration of the room was completed by the inclusion of a Venus and Adonis by Jan van Bijlert painted several decades before the Bols and a small overmantle that hung above the fireplace by Joost Cornelisz. Droochsloot depicting The Pool of Bethesda. Both of these were acquired separately.
representation that was so clearly directed at a male viewer? What, then, was the role of
the patron and her desires in the generation of such an image?

Despite the availability of subjects with readymade reasons for erotic context,
numerous artists chose to infuse subjects with eroticism when none was called for. This
seems to suggest that the eroticism found in many images was not central to the narrative
but indeed served some other purpose. The quantity of images that prioritize extra-
narrative eroticism demonstrates that they were appreciated, if not wildly popular. By
analyzing the eroticism of these works and by looking to the unique opportunities for
exchange available on the Dutch art market at the time, we can begin to see how the
eroticism served the needs of both the buyer and the creator.
Covert Gazes and Intimate Embraces: Eroticism and the Pastoral Tradition

Some of the most provocative pictures produced by seventeenth-century Dutch artists are those that belong to a category of subject called pastoral. Pastoral themes, often focused on beautiful nymphs or amorous shepherds, are in and of themselves concerned with erotic experience. The coy shepherd staring at the sensuous form of a sleeping nymph by Gerrit van Bronchorst (Figure 5.1) and the youthful couple caught in an intimate embrace by Jacob van Loo (Figure 5.2) are two examples in which the artful expression of the erotic potential of the subjects can be clearly observed. In a category full of extremely erotic images van Bronchorst’s *Sleeping Nymph and Shepherd*, painted between 1645-50, is surely one of the most striking.¹ The ostensible subject of the work is a young nymph asleep in an indistinct landscape. Before falling into a deep sleep, she appears to have removed her clothing and thrown the garments over a cairn of rocks to form a makeshift bed. Her slumber remains undisturbed by the presence of a young shepherd who spies on her from behind while making an obscene gesture with his right fist.² However, the subject of the work is as much the palpable eroticism as it is the nymph herself and one need not look too deeply in order to uncover it.³ Jacob van Loo’s


² This gesture, often called “the fig,” is made by sticking one’s thumb through the fingers of a clenched fist. For more on its history, see Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genreprints in the Netherlands 1550-1700*. (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1997) p. 362, cat. 77.

³ As Jeroen Giltaij noted in his entry on this work in the Dutch Classicism catalog, “It was apparently not the artist’s intention to illustrate a theme along the lines of *Venus and
depiction of two lovers absorbed in each other’s company is an honest and tender expression of physical desire. Seated in a makeshift tent situated out of doors, the man and woman reach for one another, drawing close and yielding to each other’s advances. A sense of privacy and intimacy permeates the painting. Stripped of any referential detail that would directly link this pair to a particular narrative, this image obliges the viewer to more closely consider the unmediated relationship between the man and the woman as well as his own relationship to the object itself.

Paintings such as these highlight the ways in which artists sought to ignite a visceral response to erotic imagery through a direct and unfiltered approach. The primary point was not to engage in an intellectual argument but to candidly appeal to resources more basic to human experience. Both works effectively engage the sense of sight and, more importantly, the sense of touch. In very different ways, both encourage the viewer to interact. The result is a pure, unmediated eroticism.

The heightening of a sense of desire and of the incidence of pure eroticism in these works is achieved in two very distinct ways. Van Bronchorst’s image of a sleeping nymph is entirely about the desire to touch. From the proximity of the figure to the surface of the painting to the startling frankness with which she is displayed for the viewer’s pleasure, each element of the composition encourages an erotic response that is grounded in the desire to touch what is presented to the viewer. Van Loo’s work encourages a replication of the intimate exchange which takes place in front of the viewer’s eyes. As the lovers draw closer to one another, so too does the viewer draw closer to the image, absorbed in the exchange.

Adonis or Jupiter and Antiope for instance, but simply to paint a picture with no specific subject in mind.” Albert Blankert, et al. Dutch Classicism, p. 152.
The final chapter of this thesis is devoted to the analysis of eroticism as it is expressed in pastoral imagery. It is in this representational category that one finds most clearly expressions of eroticism for its own sake – an eroticism that might be called a pure eroticism. This eroticism differs in significant ways from that which was addressed in the previous chapters. Unlike that found in genre scenes, portraits, or history paintings, the pure eroticism of the Dutch pastoral has no ulterior motive. The spirit of pastoral, often light-hearted and playful lends itself more freely to this type of pure erotic expression. The results of serving only to solicit the delectation of the viewer are plainly written on and in these objects. The surfaces of the paintings, prints, drawings, and decorative objects that form this category of art are covered with sensual bodies put on display and often engaged in playful lovemaking. The following pages will demonstrate how the eroticism so clearly visible in these images is to be considered a pure eroticism. Through juxtapositions with earlier and contemporary imagery we will see that what these Dutch artists were able to create is a unique expression of eroticism’s fundamental to the visual arts.

As seen in previous chapters, the discussion of the larger issues relating to pastoral art and pure erotic display will reflect a two-pronged approach. A complete picture of how a seventeenth-century audience understood pastoral imagery to reflect a pure eroticism can only be fully comprehended after an investigation of both the visual mechanics and the cultural parameters and influences. Beginning with an in-depth analysis of select examples of pastoral eroticism, we will scrutinize the ways in which the creators of this imagery heightened the erotic potential of their work. Much of what we will see will reinforce what was discovered in earlier chapters and analysis of the visual
mechanics of eroticism. Among the issues addressed in such an analysis will be the relationship of Dutch pastorals to the international tradition which informed it for it is in the illustration of pastoral subjects that Dutch artists came closest to an international style. And yet, true to form, there is much about these images, both thematically and visually, which remains unique to the art of the Northern Netherlands. Borrowing well-established representational modes, these images of nymphs and shepherds still manage to plainly announce their associations with Dutch picture-making. Exploiting Baroque devices when it comes to the compositional arrangement or the use of color and light, the objects under discussion marshal their expressive means to produce images that startle with their boldness and with which one struggles to square with preconceived ideas about Dutch art and the contemporary viewers who collected and admired it.

An in-depth analysis of the relationship of pastoral to issues of eroticism, begins with defining pastoral itself. Because the category is so broad and, at times, seemingly amorphous one must also establish the parameters as they are appropriate to this study. Used to describe the category of literary and visual production, “pastoral” has been applied to such divergent things as Jacopo Sannazaro’s Renaissance pastoral poem, Arcadia and the paintings of Cornelis van Poelenburg. Pastoral as a descriptor is also applied to landscape imagery, particularly that which seeks to illustrate an Arcadian ideal through references to the landscapes and ruins of southern Europe. Pastoral landscape will not be addressed in this chapter as its focus on eroticism and desire is specifically concerned with human interaction and thus most effectively relevant to figural imagery. 4

4 The pastoral landscape was a popular subject with Netherlandish painters, particularly those influenced by current trends in Italian landscape imagery. See, among others, Albert Blankert. Nederlandse 17e Eeuwse Italianiserende Landschapschilders/Dutch
One of the great scholars of pastoral literature, Paul Alpers has commented that
the study of the pastoral mode in the field of literary history and criticism has become
“one of the flourishing light industries.” And yet, there is no consensus on exactly what
the descriptor signifies. Pastoral is the denominator applied to both a literary and a
visual tradition. As Alpers noted in his essay “What is Pastoral,” it is a very difficult
term to pin down. Helen Cooper, writing a few years earlier than Alpers, was of a
different opinion, stating that the “idea of pastoral no longer needs any justification.”
Such confusion has lead to employing the term to circumscribe different categories of
literary production, some more inclusive than others.

If literary historians can be faulted for developing too many and too diverse a
group of definitions for the pastoral, art historians should be taken to task for neglecting
to do so at all. Luba Freedman has pointed out that although “there is quite an extensive
bibliography which deals with the definition of literary pastoral and treats individual

17th Century Italianate Landscape Painters. (Soest: Davaco, 1978); Robert C. Cafritz,
“Netherlandish Reflections of the Venetian Landscape Tradition,” in Places of Delight:
The Pastoral Landscape (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1988) pp. 113-29; Peter
Schatborn, Drawn to Warmth: 17th-Century Dutch Artists in Italy. (Zwolle: Waanders,
2001).
437.
6 Literary historians are no closer to developing a specific definition of the pastoral mode
as expressed in poetry and prose either. See the work of Paul Alpers, especially. Paul
chapter of this book was previously published in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring,
1982), pp. 437-460. See also Terry Gifford, Pastoral (London: Routledge, 2001)
especially Chapter 2, “Constructions of Arcadia.”
A thorough review of many of the scholarly attempts to assign a focused and definitive
meaning to the term pastoral can be found in Luba Freedman’s work on the classical
pastoral in art. Luba Freedman, The Classical Pastoral in the Visual Arts (New York:
Peter Lang, 1989) pp. 16-18, n.2.
7 Helen Cooper, Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer Ltd,
works, no comparable bibliography exists…in relation to the pictorial presentation of the pastoral theme.” Yet art historians feel comfortable using the term, certain that its meaning is obvious. In most instances it is, but a more specific delineation of the parameters of the category would certainly make it a more useful adjective.

The situation becomes even more problematic with regards to the Dutch material which has not been as intensely studied when compared to the pastoral art and literature that was produced in other countries and at other times.9 Paul Huys Janssen notes that:

[T]here exists no exact definitions of the pastoral in art, apart from the stipulation that shepherds play a principal part. As a genre it hovers between history and genre painting, based largely upon the tradition of the first and looking often much like the second.10

The two scholars who have most extensively focused their attention on pastoral imagery in the Northern Netherlands, Peter van der Brink and Alison McNeil Kettering, differ broadly in how they define the term. As the first scholar to address representations of the pastoral, Kettering undertook to circumscribe the category and works of art the phrase is

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9 The vicissitudes of pastoral art in the history of Dutch image-making can be traced, in large part, to our own attitudes towards what does and what does not constitute “Dutch Art of the Golden Age.” As Alison McNeil Kettering astutely observed in her definitive study on the topic:

“The neglect of the subject can be explained primarily by the emphasis in critical writing of our own century on the realistic nature of what have been seen as the dominant Dutch styles, to the exclusion of styles more in tune with foreign artistic movements. Because of its ideal character and aristocratic associations, pastoral has been dismissed as peripheral, or tacitly classes as another manifestation of the influences that eventually led to artistic decline at the end of the century.”


used to describe. To date, her study remains the most authoritative. She defines pastoral quite narrowly and concentrates on figural representations that depict the actions (or inactions as is the case in some examples) of shepherds and shepherdesses. Ten years after the publication of Kettering’s *Dutch Arcadia*, Peter van der Brink organized an exhibition of pastoral art and edited the accompanying catalog, *Het Gedroomde Land*. Van der Brink defines pastoral in much broader terms than Kettering and includes works of art that illustrate the loves of the gods, as well as several works that would be considered pure landscape. The fifth chapter of this dissertation employs a definition that falls somewhere between the two, broadening the scope so as to include representations of nymphs and their lovers. This expansion is justified in that many of the themes, if not the specific actions depicted, are reminiscent of those that occupy the shepherding folk of Kettering’s understanding of the term.

Despite its contemporary critical appraisal as the lowest form of literary expression, the pastoral remained one of the most popular modes well into the eighteenth-

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11 Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia*. This book is an updated version of her dissertation. Kettering also addressed the issue of pastoral in her essay "Rembrandt's *Flute Player.*" 12 Van der Brink, and Jos de Meyere, eds. *Het Gedroomde Land*. For a review of the show and accompanying catalog see Paul Huys Janssen. "Review: *Het Gedroomde Land Pastorale Schilderkunst in De Gouden Eeuw* by Peter Van Der Brink and Jos De Meyere." *Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1095 (1994): 386-87. 13 Given the frequent reference to nymphs as the objects of the lovesick shepherds’ desires as noted in contemporary love songs, pastoral poems and plays, I feel this expansion beyond Kettering’s categorization is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the genre. Indeed, many of the representations presented in this chapter originally carried titles which labeled the figures, now anonymous, as the shepherds and shepherdesses who are the subjects of many pastoral poems and love songs. 14 Many of the literary examples of pastoral, including poems and plays, describe their heroines as nymphs. As Sluijter explains, it was not until later in the seventeenth-century that the term “shepherdess” was applied to the love interests of shepherds. Sluijter, “The Introduction of the Amorous Shepherd’s Idyll in Dutch Prints and Paintings,” in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000) pp. 161-197.
century, enjoying particular moments of vogue during the Early Modern period.\textsuperscript{15} Although the visual depiction of pastoral subjects eventually diverged from the literary narratives, expanding upon them and ultimately including landscape and a type of “fancy dress” portraiture, it is best to begin with a brief review of the genre’s origins.\textsuperscript{16} The earliest expression of the pastoral can be traced to the third century BC with the \textit{Idylls} of the poet Theocritus.\textsuperscript{17} Much better known and more influential were Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues}, written between 44 and 38 BC.\textsuperscript{18} The earliest visual representations of the idyllic spaces and bucolic figures conjured by works such as these are to be found in Hellenistic reliefs which, unlike pastoral poetry, shift the focus to the occupations of the shepherds and goatherds described.\textsuperscript{19} Focusing mostly on the easy-going and relaxed activities of the herders, these representations concern themselves with figures engaged in simple tasks of milking goats, driving flocks, and passively watching over their charges. Early two-dimensional representations are to be found in small scale on Roman gems and focus primarily on the figures with a bit of nature thrown in to stand for the idyllic landscape

\textsuperscript{15} For a discussion of this placement of pastoral in the lower genres see Freedman \textit{The Classical Pastoral}, p. 23-24.
\textsuperscript{16} See Freedman, \textit{The Classical Pastoral}. p. 31-71.
\textsuperscript{17} David Rosand, in his discussion of the Renaissance revival of the pastoral mode, notes: “The poems of Theocritus, set in the hills and groves of his native Sicily, were peopled by shepherds and goatherds, individually named and yet nearly anonymous. Mixing the realms of the real and the ideal, Theocritus created a world fo deeply felt yet artfully controlled passion that is at once distant and accessible.” David Rosand, “Giorgione, Venice, and the Pastoral Vision” in \textit{Places of Delight: The Pastoral Landscape} (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. 1988) p. 26.
\textsuperscript{18} For the influence of Virgil’s work see Annabel Patterson, \textit{Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery}. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
\textsuperscript{19} In the poems, the activities of the shepherds are most often the singing of love songs. However, sound being such a difficult thing to describe visually, the early artists focus on the light activities of milking, grazing and otherwise tending to the flock. Shepherds playing musical instruments, most particularly the flute, are to be found in the pastorals painted by artists in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.
setting in which the shepherds and goatherds reside. Mosaics and wall-paintings provided ready opportunities to illustrate pastoral themes and several examples are to be found in and around Pompeii. As Freedman has discussed, other surfaces often adorned with pastoral imagery are Roman sarcophagi. In these examples, the herdsman is most often removed from the landscape and shown with several of the attributes, which mark him as a rustic figure.  

The contributions of the Medieval period to the pastoral mostly took the form of literary endeavors. The first extensive commentary on Virgil’s *Eclogues* was Medieval - Servius Maurus Honoratus wrote *In tria Virgilii Opera Expositio* in the late fourth century. Medieval pastoral literature was much more concerned with infusing the pastoral idiom with a moral and religious tone. In this respect, it was less influential for Renaissance authors in Italy and France. However, as Cooper has noted, its contributions were quite significant and played a great part in development of the Renaissance pastoral in England if not continental Europe. 

As with much that has its roots in ancient and classical cultures, the pastoral was revived and reinvigorated by a new outlook during the Renaissance. As David Rosand noted:

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20 Freedman, *The Classical Pastoral*, pp.46-49. Interestingly, this reduction to a single figured representation of a herdsman foreshadows a particular representational type favored by the Utrecht artists who are responsible for the revival of an interest in the pastoral in the Northern Netherlands. It is unlikely, however, that the two are at all related. For an extensive discussion of the seventeenth-century Dutch representation of a singular shepherd, see Kettering, *The Dutch Arcadia*, pp. 33-44. As the images I will be addressing in this dissertation are multi-figured and lack much of the specific identifying details Kettering reviews, they will not be addressed in my study.

Throughout the postclassical world the pastoral tradition continued to be a source of poetic inspirations. It found new life in the Renaissance, especially with the publication in the opening years of the sixteenth century of Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*, written in Italian and therefore accessible to a large audience. And the pastoral aesthetic found absolutely new pictorial expression in the painting we have come to associate with the name of Giorgione.\(^\text{22}\)

The initial visual representations of pastoral ideals were to a great extent reliant on contemporary pastoral literature. Italian poets and playwrights of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were extremely prolific.

Dutch authors came to appreciate and produce pastoral prose, poems, and plays rather late in the genre’s development. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, most of continental Europe was enthralled with pastoral literature and its visual equivalents. The Dutch lagged a bit behind in their efforts to contribute.\(^\text{23}\) However, when in the first few decades of the century Dutch poets and playwrights began to compose their own pastoral pieces, they did so with an enthusiasm that matched that of their European predecessors and contemporaries. In addition to this prodigious literary output, the Northern Netherlands also witnessed a surge in the number and significance of images relating to pastoral subjects. As Kettering observed, Dutch literary efforts preceded artistic ones by several decades. Although the first properly native pastoral offering, Theodore Rodenburgh’s play *Trouwen Batavier* was completed in the first few years of the century, it was not until the 1620s that pictorial equivalents were produced.\(^\text{24}\)

Beginning in the 1640s, representations of shepherds and shepherdesses captured the


\(^{23}\) Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia*, pp. 20-21

\(^{24}\) Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia*, pp. 20, 33.
imagination of a broader audience and artists began to generate them in significant numbers.

Representations of shepherds spying on sleeping nymphs and shepherdesses, while often described in Dutch pastoral literature, did not have an established pictorial tradition. Instead, Dutch artists drew inspiration from Renaissance images of sleeping nymphs watched by lascivious satyrs, which were themselves informed by portrayals of sleeping Venuses in the mode of Giorgione’s *Dresden Venus* of c. 1510 (Figure 5.3) and representations of the nymph of the fountain such as that found in Francesco Colonna’s 1499 *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Figure 5.4).\(^{25}\) The erotic tone and intention of the *Dresden Venus* in particular and the sleeping nude in general are not only clear from the images themselves but are also evident in the antique examples that inspired them, namely engraved gems and fountain sculpture.\(^ {26}\) In both of these examples, the vulnerability of the women is amplified/intensified by the opening up of their bodies. Lifting their right arms to cradle their heads and shifting slighting towards the picture plane exposes their naked torsos in a way that makes them more available to the viewer.

That Northern European examples of the reclining nude asleep or partially asleep exist must not be forgotten. Exposure to these types, among them the numerous nymphs

\(^{25}\) Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus (“Dresden Venus”)*, c. 1510, oil on canvas, 108.5 x 175 cm, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister.

of the spring painted by Lucas Cranach (Figure 5.5), must have informed Dutch iterations of the theme. In Cranach’s 1517 painting in Leipzig, the first of several versions he would create, a somnolent Venus reclines on the ground. Heavy-lidded eyes begin to close as she rests her head on her right arm and folds her legs right over left. The Latin inscription carved into the base of the fountain directly above her head warns that her sleep is not to be disturbed.27 This warning directed at the visitor to the fountain, or in this case the viewer of the painting, presupposes a premeditated attempt to reach out and touch these figures.

In the seventeenth-century, the erotic overtones of such sleeping nymph imagery were transformed into bold pornographic statements, particularly in prints, which were easier to circulate and easier to hide.28 The Carracci, both Agostino and Annibale, executed several prints in which a sleeping nymph or Venus is watched by a lascivious satyr. In Agostino’s Nymph and Satyr (Le Satyr ‘Maçon’), the explicit display conveys an entirely different message (Figure 5.6). The artist has left nothing to the imagination. Annibale’s version, which may well represent Jupiter disguised as a satyr, seducing Antiope, was particularly influential for northern artists, such as Goltzius and Rembrandt

27 FONTIS NIMPHA SACRI SOMNVM NE RVMPE QUIESCO, i.e ‘I am the nymph of the sacred spring. Do not disturb my sleep for I am at rest’. Michael Leibmann, “On the Iconography of the Nymph of the Fountain by Lucas Cranach the Elder,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 31 (1968)p. 435 n. 9. This inscription is an abbreviated version of an epigram often found on fountains produced in Italy during the Renaissance. See MacDougall “The Sleeping Nymph,” p. 357.

28 Bette Talvacchia, Taking Positions. pp. 72-84.
Cupid admonishes the viewer to be quiet while Jupiter (or a satyr) focuses on the object of his desire.

Artists of other nationalities addressed the theme in a similarly audacious way. Poussin in particular seems to have embraced the more unseemly qualities that fascinated the Italians. Poussin painted two similar versions of the subject in 1626-27 while still living in Rome (Figure 5.8 and 5.9). In both paintings, the satyr removes the nymph’s drapery in order to give himself, and the viewer, a better view. By pulling the drapery towards himself, one can only assume he covers his own arousal. Such a frank display of sexuality seems unusual for Poussin but suggests that he too was drawn to the possibilities of erotic expression.

Northern European artists also painted their fair share of sleeping nymphs, Venuses, Graces, and the like during the course of the seventeenth century. French, Flemish, and Dutch artists reinvigorated the subject by switching up the protagonists. Francois Blanchard’s seductive *Venus and the Three Graces Surprised by a Mortal*

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Nicolas Poussin, *Venus Surprised by the Satyrs*, c. 1626. Oil on canvas, 77 x 100 cm, Zurich, Kunsthau.


31 Speaking of the London version, Humphrey Wine noted: “…it certainly belongs to Poussin’s early years in Rome – that is c. 1627 – and so around the time when, without the security of regular patronage, the artist would have been likely to defer grander ideas to immediate needs by dashing off some easily saleable erotica.” Humphrey Wine, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Seventeenth Century French Paintings* (London: National Gallery, 2001) p.304.
(Figure 5.10) casts a non-mythological character in the role of the voyeur.\textsuperscript{32} This painting presents the viewer with not one but four sleeping beauties; each shown from a different angle. Sumptuously painted, this work recalls the Venetian examples in both style and spirit.

One of the contributions of Dutch artists to the popularization of the subject is their substitution of the shepherd for the satyr. These shepherds appear with greater frequency in the Dutch works than in those produced by Italian artists. A young love-worn shepherd spying on his beloved is a recurrent theme in much of the pastoral literature written in the first half of the century. In prose, poems, and plays the trope of the shepherd as voyeur is repeatedly trotted out.\textsuperscript{33} In a painting by Dirck van der Lisse, \textit{Sleeping Nymph} (Figure 5.11), painted after 1642, a nymph is shown resting after the hunt. Having laid her bow and quiver to the side, she reclines against an embankment in such a deep sleep that her head lolls to the side and her mouth falls open. In the background two shepherds, as indicated by their dress, approach; one calls the other’s

\textsuperscript{32} Jacques Blanchard, \textit{Venus and the Three Graces Surprised by a Mortal}, c.1631-33, oil on canvas, 170 x 218 cm, Paris, Louvre. See Jacques Thuillier, \textit{Jacques Blanchard: 1600-1638}. (Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1998) pp. 158-60, cat. 42. Blanchard also painted a \textit{Venus and Cupid Surprised by Two Satyrs}, now in Nancy, that shows one satyr behind a tree while the other lifts the drapery from the lap of the sleeping Venus. Unlike in Poussin’s paintings discussed above, it is only the leering satyr who is afforded a better view by the removal of the cloth. See Thuillier, \textit{Jacques Blanchard} pp.106-7, cat. 15.

\textsuperscript{33} The motif of a woman spied upon in her repose occurs frequently in mythological tales: Cimon and Iphigenia, Jupitor and Antiope, provide two examples. It was incorporated into Longus’ second century work \textit{Daphis and Chloe}. In Longus’ work, the hero and heroine are adopted by two shepherds and eventually grow up to this vocation. Many Dutch pastorals include the voyeuristic trope of sleeping shepherdess discovered by wandering shepherd. See for example, \textit{Laura's Droom-Liedt}, from Jan Harmens Krul’s \textit{Eerlycke Tytkorting} of 1633 or \textit{Alcip en Amarillis} in his 1639 \textit{Minne-spiegel ter deughden}. Kettering, \textit{Dutch Arcadia}, pp. 94, 161, n. 50 and 51.
attention to the figure asleep in the grasses.\textsuperscript{34} The angle at which her head rests, prevents the viewer from getting a good look at her face. Without this distraction, he is better able to concentrate his attention on the exposed torso.

Two paintings, one by Jan van Bijlert (Figure 5.12 and the other attributed to Caeser van Everdingen (Figure 5.13) bring the entire composition closer to the viewer.\textsuperscript{35} The proximity of the nude women to the front of the pictorial space foreshadows what is seen in the slightly later work by van Bronchorst. The arrangement of van Everdingen’s figure, with her left arm behind her head and her right wrapped over her midsection, is remarkably similar to that of van Bronchorst. Van Everdingen’s shepherd looks to his right, as does the dog, and points to the reclining figure. His acknowledgment of a viewer outside of the space of the canvas also implicates the viewer’s presence in front of the painting – another outsider looking in. Van Bijlert’s shepherd looks out at the viewer and with his finger to his lips cautions him to be quiet. His left hand creeps towards the woman’s sash suggesting his desire to loosen it and allow the garments to slip from her

\textsuperscript{34} Eric Jan Sluijter discusses the types of garments that would signal its wearer to be a shepherd in “The Introduction of the Amorous Shepherd’s Idyll in Dutch Prints and Paintings,” pp. 161-197.

\textsuperscript{35} Jan van Bijlert, \textit{Shepherd near a Woman Sleeping (Laura’s Lullaby)}, c. 1635-40. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 137.2 cm. Burnley, Gorough Council (Lancashire), Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum. Paul Huys Janssen, \textit{Jan van Bijlert, Catalogue Raisonné}. (Amsterdam: Jan Benjamins, 1998) pp.135-6, cat. 97, pl. 89. Janssen suggests that this painting is a connected to \textit{Laura’s Droom-Liedt}; certainly the poem’s mention of an unlaced bosom is reflected in this image. In Krul’s 1633 book \textit{Eerlycke Tytkorting} The poem was accompanied by a print that shows a bare-breasted sleeping woman approached by a shepherd, identifiable by his staff. In the background a ram mounts a goat. Despite thematic similarities there is very little visual correspondence between the two images.

body. This action repeats that taken by Poussin’s satyrs but without the lecherous grin the lascivious tone has been transformed into one of playful conspiracy.

A work painted by Sir Peter Lely in the early years of the 1650’s, reminiscent of the works that he created before his departure for England, demonstrates several affinities with the van Bronchorst image, despite its representation of more than one sleeping nude nymph (Figure 5.14). In this particular painting, the figure of the shepherd is missing. The viewer is now the sole player in the role of voyeur. As noted by Richard Beresford of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, where this painting currently hangs, there is really no true subject. Instead, Lely used the subject to display the female nude to its greatest extent. Stripping away all the trappings of narrative specificity, Lely has covered his canvas with voluptuous nudes in all manner of poses. They are seen from the front, behind, above and below. Each with an anonymous face, they could easily be read as the same figure endlessly repositioned. What the viewer is able to reconstruct in taking all of these views together, is a sense of the three-dimensional form of the female nude. Could it be that the painter has devised a challenge in the mode of the paragone? In essence, he has created a three-dimensional image, which, like van Bronchorst’s, begs the viewer to touch it. Interestingly, the figure in Lely’s work that is furthest from the viewer is displayed in a position remarkably similar to the figure in van Bronchorst’s, albeit in reverse. It is quite unlikely that the two artists were familiar with each others work in this instance.

36 Sir Peter Lely, Nymphs by a Fountain, c. 1650’s, oil on canvas, 128.9 x 144.8 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery. Lely’s occupation with and interest in nymphs did not end here. He painted another representation of several nymphs, although this time bathing, in a work now at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes. See Jacques Foucart, “Peter Lely, Dutch History Painter,” Mercury 8 (1989) pp. 17-26.
However, what this does suggest is the circulation of an interest in displaying the female nude in such an open, vulnerable, and in many ways inviting pose.

Although Dutch artists often relied on established formats for the representations of shepherds and their company, they also added significant native motifs to the pool of subjects. Such is the case with the subject represented by van Loo. As Sluijter discussed, the visual representation of an amorous shepherd and nymph or shepherdess was a subject first conceived of in the Netherlands by Hendrick Goltzius in his print of *Coridon and Silvia*, created early in the seventeenth century by Jacob Matham (Figure 5.15).38 Having laid aside his staff, Coridon now directs his attention to the lovely young nymph Silvia. These two characters would have been quite familiar to Dutch audiences for the monikers Coridon and Silvia were often employed in pastoral literature.39 Coridon and Silvia lacked a visual tradition, however, and so Goltzius drew upon several *topoi* found in pictures of classical or religious tales and translated a mythological theme into a rustic one.

There was certainly no shortage of representations of mythological and literary lovers for artists such as Goltzius to draw from. The numerous representations of Venus and Adonis or Cupid and Psyche, for example, produced both north and south of the Alps attest to an abiding interest in the theme of lovers set in the beauty of an untamed landscape. Connotations of fecundity and the richness of love could often be conjured as a result of this setting.

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38 Eric Jan Sluijter, “The Introduction of the Amorous Shepherd’s Idyll in Dutch Prints and Paintings,” see pp 161 and 172.
Once the visual tradition was standardized in the North, many artists chose to represent it. Rubens, for example, treated the theme several times in his career. A painting in Munich, *Pastoral Scene (Coridon and Silvia)*, is closest to the arrangement Goltzius imagined (Figure 5.16). Rubens’ own interpretation emphasizes an abandon appropriate for two young lovers out of sight of prying eyes. His shepherd, distinguishable by his staff and bagpipes among other things, reaches for his lover with a passion and energy reminiscent of the appetites of Poussin’s satyrs. The energy of the couple is reinforced through the energizing of the surface of the painting by the artist’s dynamic and painterly style. Rubens has pushed the pair so far to the front of the composition that they risk tumbling out into the viewer’s space in a jumble of tangled limbs.

Pieter Lastman, Rubens’ Amsterdam contemporary and Rembrandt’s early teacher, painted several variations of pastoral lovers. A painting of 1624, now in Poland, shows a young couple seated among the sheep in their care (Figure 5.17). As in the van Loo composition, the young man gently touches his beloved’s chin, lifting her face so that they can more easily gaze into one another’s eyes. She returns the affectionate

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40 For a discussion of the Flemish interest in the theme, see Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia*, p.164, n.16 in which she provides several other notable examples.
42 Bagpipes were also considered sexually suggestive. See E. Winternitz, “Bagpipes for the Lord,” in *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 16 (1958), pp. 276-286.
43 Pieter Lastman, *Pastoral Scene*, 1624. Oil on panel, 53 x 47 cm. Danzig, Muzeum Narodowe w Gdansku.
The touch; softly resting her hand on his forearm. The tenderness of this image is exchanged for playfulness in another one of Lastman’s interpretations of the subject. The landscape dominates his painting of a young pair of lovers resting against a tree (Figure 5.18). In the lower right corner, a young pair teases one another as the shepherdess/nymph attempts to crown her lover with a garland of flowers.44

The *Amorous Couple* by van Loo belongs to a larger group of images popular in the last half of the century. Several artists, returned to this particular pastoral image again and again. Among them are Caspar Netscher and Adriaen van der Werff both of whom returned to the theme several times. In Netscher’s *Shepherd and Shepherdess by a Fountain* of 1681, the painter includes several details that serve to heighten the erotic effect (Figure 5.19).45 Although the shepherd, with the garland in his hair more closely resembles an Arcadian ideal, the more prurient intentions are to be read in the accessories. His flute, carelessly tossed on the ground, points provocatively in the young woman’s direction.46 Behind him rests a goat, that mascot of lascivious behavior. The young woman lies carelessly in his lap, bodice unfastened, and stares blankly out at the viewer without a care to being observed. In a composition showing clear affinities with Netscher’s painting, Adriaen van der Werff ups the ante (Figure 5.20).47 The pair

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44 On garlands in pastoral and related imagery see Sluijter, “Shepherds Idyll,” p.327 n.81
45 Caspar Netscher *Shepherd and Shepherdess by a Fountain*, 1681, oil on canvas, 53.4 x 44.8 cm, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldegaleriesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek
47 Adriaen van der Werff, *Pastoral*, 1694, oil on panel, 37 x 30 cm, Dresden
cuddles together, mimicking the playful antics of the putti on the sculpture behind them. The flute, with all its phallic associations, peeks out from under the drapery on the left while the overturned vessel, with its own anatomical allusions, rests on its side on the ledge to their right. The woman’s bared torso is in stark contrast to the shimmering fabrics of her skirt. Her lover’s hand creeps towards a breast that invites a caress. Unlike Netscher’s nymph, this one stares boldly out of the canvas. Her mouth opens slightly as though she is about to address the viewer and perhaps invite him in.

The number of representations of couples in a landscape, as well as the number of copies after these compositions, indicate a widespread popularity for the motif. Taken together, these representations demonstrate the various ways in which Dutch artists developed the theme in a different direction than the earlier models produced in other cultures. The escapades of lovesick shepherds are woven into the fabric of Dutch pastoral literature. As Kettering noted: “The dominance of love themes in the literature of the Low Countries was such that the 18th-century critic, J. B. Wellekens was compelled to entreat his follow poets to consider the larger themes of the genre.”48 Scholars of the pastoral have acknowledged the erotic potential of this representational category. Literary historians have often drawn attention to the bold relationship between pastoral prose, poems, and theatrical texts and eroticism.49 The eroticism inherent in the pastoral art produced in the Netherlands during the seventeenth-century has also been noted by

48 Kettering, Dutch Arcadia, p. 161, n.54.
the few scholars who have studied this genre. Only rarely, though, is it accorded
prominence in the analysis at hand and never is it discussed purely as its own end and not
as a means to something else. Instead of discussing the eroticism as tangential to other
theses or merely as something interesting to note, this following analysis concentrates on
its centrality to the production and understanding of seventeenth-century Dutch art.50

For many reasons, the pastoral mode with its romantic escapades and carefree
characters is ideally suited to the representation of eroticism. Pastoral imagery often
 appears to have a quality that is both timeless and placeless. Ambiguous outdoor settings
are devoid of the specific details that would suggest temporal specificity. Fantastical
costumes, where there are any costumes at all, fail to suggest a specific time or place.
Inhabiting a world of carefree leisure, the nymphs, shepherds and shepherdesses of these
images populate an idyllic realm removed from the banality of the everyday. In this
place there is greater freedom to express romantic longing and desire. There is

50 For a discussion of eroticism as it pertains to early seventeenth-century Dutch
mythological paintings, see much of the work of Eric Jan Sluijter, including Rembrandt,
Rubens and Classical Mythology: The Case of Andromeda,’ in: C. Van de Velde (ed.),
Classical Mythology in the Netherlands in the Age of Renaissance and Baroque, Louvain,
Paris, Walpole (MA) 2009, pp. 25-66; [with Nicôle Spaans] ‘Door liefde verstandig of
door lust verteerd? Relaties tussen tekst en beeld in voorstellingen van Cimon en
Efigenia’, De Zventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair
perspectief, 17 (2001) 3, pp. 74-106. De 'heydensche fabulen' in de schilderkunst van de
Gouden Eeuw. Verhalen uit de klassieke mythologie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden,
1986]; 'Prestige and Emulation, Eroticism and Morality: Mythology and the Nude in
Dutch art of the 16th and 17th century', in: S. Paarlberg (ed.), Greek Gods and Heroes in
the Age of Rubens and Rembrandt, Athene/Dordrecht 2000/2001 (Nationaal
Museum/Dordrechts Museum), pp. 35-65; 'Emulating Sensual Beauty: Representations of
Danaë from Gossaert to Rembrandt', Simiolus. Netherlands Quarterly for the History of
Art 27 (1999), pp. 4-45. For a somewhat different approach to eroticism in mythological
subjects see István Németh “Playing with Fire: The Questionable Morality of 16th and
17th Century Netherlandish Erotic Paintings and Prints,” in Neerlandica II: Emblematica
et iconographia, Themes in the Painting and Literature of the Low Countries from the
16th to the 18th Centuries (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2003) pp. 63.
something to the “other worldliness” inherent in the pastoral which is permissive of more purely erotic imagery – it is removed from contemporary people and experiences and as a result is out of the reach of contemporary strictures regarding the interaction between the sexes.\textsuperscript{51} Yet at the same time, some Dutch artists in particular attempted to close the gap between the pastoral ideal and contemporary experience by encouraging direct interaction.

Certainly the amorous encounters featured in much pastoral literature of the period provided superb opportunities for artists wishing to illustrate a sensuous interaction between two people or display a female nude in a most provocative fashion. Representations taken from this type of literary work often feature moments of lighthearted love play. Unlike what is to be found in many of the episodes from the Loves of the Gods or other mythological sources in which things end quite badly for the lovers, most pastoral romantic interactions resolve themselves positively for all parties involved.\textsuperscript{52} Pastoral eroticism is not burdened by the tragedies and vicissitudes of its mythological counterpart. Sluijter has discussed the more cheerful aspects of pastoral love scenes in his analysis of Goltzius’ print of \textit{Coridon and Silvia}.\textsuperscript{53} He notes that Kettering also observed this trend and commented: “The Dutch works, on the whole,

\textsuperscript{51} For more on this see Chapter 1, pp. 31-34.
\textsuperscript{52} This of course excludes images such as Guercino’s painting of \textit{The Arcadian Shepherds (Et in Arcadia Ego)} (Galleria Nazionale d’ Arte Antica, Rome) or Poussin’s Louvre version of \textit{Et in Arcadia Ego}, both of which are entirely concerned with human frailty and transience expressed through the presence of Death in Arcadia. See Judith E. Bernstock, “Death in Poussin’s Second \textit{Et in Arcadia Ego},” \textit{Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History} Volume 55, Issue 2, (1986), 54-66 and Erwin Panofsky “\textit{Et in Arigacia Ego}: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition,” in \textit{Meaning and the Visual Arts} (New York: Overlook Press, 1955) pp. 295-320.
share a light and carefree mood and a fresh, uncomplicated view of love. What results is an unfettered display of sensuous figures engaged in a variety of playful and romantic interactions.

With this as a backdrop, an analysis of the two case studies of this chapter yields richer results. These images, each drawn from subjects quite popular at the time, dutifully represent many of the issues germane to the pursuit of a fuller picture of the purely erotic in Dutch art. Through a tight focus on the representation of these subjects, both of which have a long standing in the canon of European art, this section of the dissertation will uncover the ways in which artists infused their imagery with an eroticism produced solely for its own sake and pleasure. the sleeping nymph and the pair of lovers. Interestingly, neither Jan Gerritsz. van Bronchorst nor Jacob van Loo is considered to be primarily a pastoral painter. For the most part, Jan Gerritsz. van Bronchorst was a jack of all trades who appears to have been equally comfortable painting genre and history subjects. Jacob van Loo executed several portraits but appears to have been more interested in the representation of history subjects. As will be discussed below, these seem to have given him great opportunity to populate his compositions with luscious female nudes. However, both van Bronchorst and van Loo executed numerous works that are appropriately categorized as pastoral.

Although both of these examples demonstrate how pastoral imagery can produce a purely erotic image, they do so in two very different ways. Van Bronchorst’s Sleeping Nymph and Shepherd accomplishes it through a startling frankness – everything is foregrounded with very little to distract the viewer. Jacob van Loo’s approach is quite

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distinct from van Bronchorst’s. His image of the couple focuses more on increasing a charming and subtler, if only slightly so, intimacy between the figures of the painting. This image is a bit more lofty – aspiring to the suggestion of a more ideal eroticism.

For such a remarkably erotic, and stunning, image this painting seems to have drawn surprisingly little attention. Beyond the entries for the image in the catalogs to the collection in Braunschweig, this image was only briefly mentioned in a few studies and was never the subject of any lengthy discussion. In many ways, this demonstrates the point the erotic images are often glossed over or neglected entirely since the frankness of van Bronchorst’s intention – to arouse a sense of desire in the viewer – makes this particular image one of the most striking interpretations. As an image of pure erotic display, one might be hard-pressed to find an example more aptly described as such than this. The eroticism is so immediately obvious that one need not dissect the work in an effort to uncover it. It is both literally and figuratively present on the surface of the painting. Van Bronchorst foregrounds the eroticism through his skillful articulation of the tension inherent in erotic desire. Each compositional element, from the placement of the figures to the manipulation of color and light, is designed to heighten the push/pull relationship that exists between the viewer and the image. Tension seems to suggest alertness and vividness, something Bronchorst seems to exploit in an effort to maximize the erotic effects of this painting.

Perhaps the most dramatic use of the erotic potential of this tension is the artist’s idiosyncratic arrangement of the figures across the picture plane. Every element conspires to give the impression that the figure is about to fall into the viewer’s lap. In an uncomfortably compressed space, the figures are pressed up close to the picture plane.
Although there is no suggestion that the painting has been cut down in any way, the composition is cropped in an unusual fashion. The figure of the reclining nymph is cut off mid-thigh. She is awkwardly positioned at a sharp angle and seems dangerously close to slipping off her perch. The entire figural arrangement, in fact, appears to be in danger of sliding off the canvas altogether. This visual device signals to the male viewer that he should ready himself to catch the figure of the nymph before she falls to the floor at his feet. It encourages a sense of touch and a more visceral relationship between the viewer and the subject.

The broad diagonals and dramatic torquing of the female figure lay her out in such a way that should deny allow sleep, but by arranging her thus, the artist has skillfully presented the viewer with a nude female figure exposed and vulnerable. Its downward spiral and the diagonal orientation suggest that the drapery, which barely covers her as it is, is at any moment going to slip through her lax fingers. Unlike the other examples of the theme, such as those by van Bijlert and van Everdingen, this arrangement heightens the anticipation that her entire nude form will be revealed and harkens back to images in which the drapery is in the process of being pulled off.

The figural style of this work is very similar to many other of van Bronchorst’s images of female nudes. He was celebrated for his ability to portray the voluptuousness of the female form and to render it with a sculptural quality that begs comparison with classical models. However, one would be more inclined to suggest that the evocation of plastic volume serves more to encourage the viewer to reach out and touch the warm flesh of the figure so as to distinguish it from cold marble.
The composition is illuminated by a bright spotlight that shines mainly on the figure of the sleeping nymph. The light appears so directed as to be unnatural. It focuses tightly on her face and torso and throws almost everything else into complete shadow making the details of setting and supporting figure less distinct. The backdrop is suggestive of the outdoors with a grey/blue cloudy sky in the upper left corner and a rocky outcropping sparsely covered in vegetation positioned in the upper right portion of the background. But missing are any architectural elements or garden features that might conjure a specific location. A few shadows play across the nymph’s torso and contribute to the sculptural effect of the figure style, mentioned above. However, the scarcity of these shadows suggests that the light streams into the painting from a point directly in front of the canvas. Employing light in this way also serves to link the two spaces – real and imagined – of the viewer and the subject.

Van Bronchorst’s use of color heightens the tension created by this image and calls attention to the immediacy of the moment. Much like his play of light, the coloration of this image is a manipulation of the stark contrasts between areas of extremely warm tones and those of cold ones. The upper portion of the nymph’s torso is dominated by cool peach hues mixed with areas of brighter highlights such as her breasts and upper left arm. Her neck and face are painted a warmer shade of pink, suggestive of cheeks flushed from sleep.

The primarily cooler upper half of the composition is offset by the lower portion, in which her abdomen and upper thighs are realized through the use of warmer colors. As with the rosiness of her cheeks, it seems that the artist intentionally chose to give these parts of her body the impression of warm, soft, touchable skin. The subtle shading
suggests the supple roundness of her belly and the fleshy folds of her thigh creases. Combined with the three-dimensionality of the form, this emphasis on warmer tones contributes to the sense of realism and encourages the viewer to negotiate carefully his own relationship with the figure before him. So much about the way this figure is conceived and executed inspires a physical interaction between the viewer and the viewed. These colors create the image of an infinitely touchable and alluringly alive figure.

The balanced play between warm and cool areas of the composition extends to the drapery upon which the sleeping nymph reclines and with which she barely manages to cover herself. The cloth that blankets the rock underneath her is a bright, cold white, portions of which shimmer in a manner suggestive of silk, taffeta, or other fine fabric. The vivid white fabric holds the viewer’s gaze and serves as a simple backdrop that does not shift the focus away from the prominently displayed torso. Although there is another onlooker, the shepherd in the back, the nymph is displayed for the viewer. It is only by craning his neck uncomfortably that the shepherd is able to feast his eyes on the figure in front of him. The naughty gesture he makes, however, is central to the meaning of the painting. A print by Schalcken that illustrates a man grinning and making the “fig” gesture is accompanied by an inscription observing that “Memories are such a delight.” What this lecherous fellow, and by extension the shepherd in van Bronchorst’s work, are asking the viewer to remember are moments of passionate embrace, moments when flesh met flesh and the longing to touch that is engendered by this image was fulfilled. In

55 For more on this see de Jongh as in note 2 above.
reliving these memories in front of a work so inspiring as this one, the viewer will be that much more inclined to reach out to stroke the sleeping figure.

Although van Bronchorst’s painting participates in a long-standing visual tradition, that of the young nymph sleeping in a landscape, the departures he makes from the representational conventions of the theme are significant. These differences mark van Bronchorst’s intention as one that is more interested in a specific kind of eroticism – the pure eroticism that is the focus of this chapter. Aside from the presence of the shepherd, very little describes this figure as a nymph. She possesses none of the standard attributes, such as hunting implements, which would mark her as a follower of Diana or another character in any one of many literary episodes that chronicle a young sleeping female being spied upon by a male. It is significant that van Bronchorst did not choose to illustrate one of them. As demonstrated in Chapter Four on the Finding of Moses, many artists felt compelled to camouflage what were ostensibly erotic pictures with a scrim of respectability by choosing to illustrate a specific literary or historical episode. The artist has made no effort to erect a façade of respectability by casting his characters in the role of prominent pastoral figures such as Cimon and Iphigeneia or recreating a scene from the ever-ripe Loves of the Gods such as Jupiter and Antiope or Diana and Acteon.56

The final case study of this dissertation involves an image of pure sensual beauty. In an arresting painting, *Amorous Couple*, Jacob van Loo has organized all of the visual elements to create a portrayal of the erotically charged intimacy shared by a pair of

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56 In his book entitled, *The Cheerfulness of Dutch Art*, Oscar Mandel discusses these “façades” in an effort to loosen the stranglehold he felt the iconographic interpretive method had on the study of Dutch art. His final chapter touches upon the nude. Oscar Mandel, *The Cheerfulness of Dutch Art, A Rescue Operation* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1997).
As with the other images previously analyzed in this study, van Loo unified all aspects of the work in a successful effort to draw the viewer into the intimate exchange between these two people. With van Loo, an artist known for selecting and portraying some of the most erotically charged female nudes, the eroticism is most completely on display. As in the van Bronchorst *Sleeping Nymph and Shepherd*, everything is on the surface; inviting an immediate response. Van Loo has removed all of the intellectual trappings in order to concentrate the viewer’s attention on the specific moment depicted. The intimacy of this image is the primary means by which its eroticism is expressed. Everything works in unison to increase the picture’s sense of a quiet and private moment. The key to understanding the eroticism of Jacob van Loo’s work is to peel apart these compositional elements.

Van Loo’s manipulation of the erotic power of intimacy begins with the size of the work itself. The solid figures, dramatic lighting, and architectonic arrangement as well as the reduced palette and concentration of color in discrete areas belie the actual dimensions of the panel itself. The diminutive nature of the panel encourages a closer inspection. In its current display at the Rijksmuseum, it is housed in a small vitrine along with several other small paintings; forming, in some fashion, a little cabinet of paintings. A display like this encourages the modern viewer to lean in close in order to take in all the detail. Such an inclination must have been even greater when one had the possibility of actually touching the work; of holding it in one’s hands and bringing it close to the

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57 This work was previously attributed to Caesar van Everdingen but has been reassigned to the oeuvre of Jacob van Loo by Willem L van de Wettering. Van de Wettering is the only art historian to have worked extensively on the life and career of Jacob van Loo, however his material has yet to be published. See *All the Paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, First supplement: 1976-91* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: 1992) 64 inv. no. A2116.
face. Such a physical interaction with the panel itself must have increased the sense of participation in this exchange. In effect of the viewer’s senses are engaged and receptive to the image in his hands – sight and touch.

Van Loo has artfully structured the composition around the solid pyramid of the two figures. He emphasizes the moment that precedes their intimate embrace by organizing the tangled criss-crossing limbs into the dramatic diagonals that form a pyramid. The backsides of the two figures form the base and their overlapping heads form the apex. Their torsos lean into one another. With his eyes fixed on her lips, he tilts her chin upwards in anticipation of a lover’s kiss. The artist has organized things so that the interaction between the man and the woman is highlighted. The exact center of the painting is the negative space between the two naked bodies, a space that is charged with erotic tension as we anticipate the climax of the embrace. This organizational trick heightens the erotic spark as we anticipate the eventual embrace. The space between these bodies becomes charged with erotic potential. Van Loo’s choice of a three-dimensional pyramid verses a two-dimensional triangle is not without significance. It projects the subjects out into the viewer’s space and continually encourages him to engage in the moment at hand.

The harmonious play between warm and cool tones emphasizes the unity of the figures. The cool marble tones of the nude woman contrast with the warmer rosy flesh of

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58 The gesture, chuckling a woman under the chin, can be seen in other Dutch paintings. Its erotic import is clearly seen in Frans Van Mieris’ The Cloth Shop of 1660. In it a wealthy cavalier tickles the chin of the sales girl while simultaneously fondling the cloth that she proffers. Given that her jacket has fallen open to reveal a peek at her bosom, the suggestion that she, too, can be had for a price hangs palpably in the air. The sense of touch and its luxurious potential is replicated and the viewer is encouraged to touch for himself the rich fabric of the curtain to the left so successfully rendered by the painter. For more on this see Franits, Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting, 125-127.
the young man. However, van Loo achieves a balance by positioning her on top of a warm red velvet drapery and surrounding him with a cool blue cape. As a result, the viewer is able to read the two as a unit composed of complimentary parts that satisfactorily fit together.

In constructing the compositional space of this work, van Loo elected to paint a dark velvet drape across three-quarters of the middle ground. The right quarter of the far background remains unobscured and provides a view of a deep and leafy forest. This partially drawn curtain serves two purposes. First, it encloses the figures, pushing them forward towards the viewer and allowing the his gaze little else to focus on. Secondly, the curtain hints at some semblance of privacy; suggesting, perhaps, a makeshift tent that has been pitched in a pleasure garden. However, that it is not pulled completely across the landscape suggests that this moment is not intended to be a completely private one.

Characteristic of van Loo’s style, which mirrors the more refined style of Dutch art in the second half of the seventeenth century, the figures of this painting are not the rustic types who populated earlier pastoral scenes. This pair of lovers is quite typical of the figure type often portrayed by van Loo, who was able to envision bodies that harmoniously combine elements that are natural with those that are ideal. The result is a figure type that suggests both the idyll of the pastoral and the world of the everyday.

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59 The development of Dutch painting through the course of the seventeenth century can be understood as a progression from one set of pictorial and thematic conventions to another. We can understand the shift in style that occurred mid-century and is reflected in many of the works created by artists working at that moment as a shift from one artistic formula to another. Stylistic changes affected both the subject and the style of the work. A shift towards greater refinement, both thematically and visually, was the result of the overhaul of artistic output during the middle and later years of the century.
There is much in van Loo’s work which reminds us of other subjects. Yet in so many ways, this picture could not be farther from the representations of the loves of the gods that were produced during the Italian Renaissance. These figures and their setting, while suggestive of an otherworldly idyll, are upon closer inspection, firmly grounded in the everyday. What does beg comparison, though, are a few of Rembrandt’s pastorals, particularly his two landscape prints that include pairs of hidden lovers, *The Three Trees* of 1643 and *The Omval* of 1645 (Figure 5.21 and 5.22). Through the inclusion of amorous shepherds and shepherdesses, Rembrandt has signaled that these images represent pastoral landscapes. In *The Three Trees* the pair are hiding in the foliage of the shrubs that cover the embankment in the lower right hand corner of the image (Figure 5.23). Although they are very difficult to make out, Rembrandt has provided some visual clues to aid the viewer in his discovery of them. The couple sits just inside a darkened patch that is itself surrounded by the brighter bit of foliage. This juxtaposition of an area of intense darkness with the bright spot to the left of it helps to draw one’s attention to that corner of the print. Upon discovery, the viewer will notice that the young woman is seated to the man’s left. Their heads lean close and she places her hand, fingers entwined with his, in his lap. After such a treasure hunt, the pair in *The Omval* seems much easier to spot (Figure 5.25). At the base of the dead tree, a young shepherd crowns his lover with a garland of flowers. Here Rembrandt has again exploited the qualities inherent in the medium by juxtaposing areas saturated with ink with those of exposed paper. Rembrandt casts the lovers’ heads in shadow with an area of cross-hatching that begins to their upper left. He describes their laps and the foliage in front of them with few lines

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60 For these prints see Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
leaving the paper to create an impression of the bright sunshine that washes over them. These images, like the paintings by van Bronchorst and van Loo, are designed to activate the senses, as discussed by Rodney Nevitt in his detailed analysis of these two prints.\(^{61}\) As he points out, hunting for the couples becomes a visual game in which the viewer is encouraged to draw closer to the image; to pick it up in his hands and inspect it.\(^{62}\)

An object which resonates in both tone and form with the van Loo Amorous Couple is, curiously, a decorative art object that was produced more than thirty years earlier (Figure 5.25).\(^{63}\) A silver *tazza* produced in 1618 features a couple reaching around the rim kissing, embracing, and attempting to undress one another. Tumbling out from under their embrace is the bared bottom of a child. The bodies of the couple are treated in a characteristically Dutch fashion. Fleshy folds and dimpled skin, facial features that lack a certain delicacy, and an unabashed approach to exposing genitalia, as well as their clothes and hairstyles mark them as contemporary figures.

As both Th. M. Duyvené de Wit-Klinkhamer and J. ter Molen have discussed, Adam van Vianen’s designs are repeatedly reproduced and manipulated in history, genre and still-life paintings. Duyvené de Wit-Klinkhamer cataloged no fewer than fifteen paintings that feature the ewer that he made in 1614 in honor of his brother, Paulus, for

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\(^{61}\) See Nevitt’s earlier chapters for discussion of amorous gardens and the association of outdoor spaces with recreational activities and courtship.

\(^{62}\) Nevitt, “Rembrandt’s Hidden Lovers”

\(^{63}\) Adam van Vianen, silver *tazza* with embracing couple, 1618, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. See Th. M. Duyvené de Wit-Klinkhamer, “Een Vermaarde Zilberen Beker,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 17 (1966): 79-96 and J.R. ter Molen, “Adam van Vianen’s Silverware in Relation to Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,” *Apollo* (1979): 482-89. That Caspar Netscher was familiar with this object is demonstrated by its appearance, or at least that of the bowl, in his 1670 painting *Two Boys Blowing Bubbles* now in London at the National Gallery. See Marjorie Weiseman *Caspar Netscher*, fig. 94, cat
the Amsterdam goldsmith’s guild (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Ter Molen observed that a set of Adam van Vianen’s designs, published posthumously by his son in 1650, provided numerous examples of vessels for painters to copy. Van Vianen’s works were costly and were thus coveted by collectors willing to pay enormous sums. His pieces are found in the inventories of some of the most prestigious private collections of the seventeenth-century, much like the paintings of van Bronchorst and van Loo. Patrons of a more humble budget could request an authorized plate or lead cast. Such a copy appears in the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt’s estate. That an object such as this, which carried such erotic implications and overtones, was more than merely tolerated but was indeed appreciated by a seventeenth-century Dutch audience is evidenced by a variety of factors. While the paintings discussed above implicate the sense of sight, Adam van Vianen’s works go further by allowing the viewer to touch.

Not only do objects such as these illustrate scenes of seduction but they also seduce the beholder; enticing him to touch them, embrace them, and run his hand over their surfaces. Inherent in this desire to touch is the desire to own. As J.W. Fredricks commented: “Prosperity brings with it a desire for luxury, which finds its expression in man’s endeavour to surround himself with objects of beauty.” With the increase in wealth and status came an attendant increase in conspicuous consumption. The precarious negotiations between managing a weighty money bag and living an austere life, as suggested by Calvinist doctrine, are often acknowledged in the scholarship on seventeenth-century Dutch culture.64 However, the point is too often overstated. The

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64 See, for example, Jan de Vries, “Luxury and Calvinism/Luxury and Capitalism: Supply and Demand for Luxury Goods in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic,” Journal of the Walters Art Gallery 57 (1999): 73-85 and Simon Schama, The
readiness of Dutch elite to acquire luxurious and superfluous objects speaks to their willingness to forgive their own transgressions for the sake of a well-appointed interior.\textsuperscript{65}

A discussion of the representation of an intimate moment between lovers would not be complete without reference to Rembrandt’s print of \textit{Ledikant} (Figure 5.26).\textsuperscript{66} This print, in its unapologetic treatment of a couple engaging in intercourse was particularly significant to Rembrandt who reworked it through several states. Through the course of the print’s genesis, Rembrandt make several significant changes; one of which demonstrates an awareness of the impact of the expression on the young woman’s face. From the second to the fourth states, Rembrandt reworked her mouth to emphasize an expression of pleasure and enjoyment. He also opened her eyes, making it clear that she is directly meeting her lover’s gaze.\textsuperscript{67} As has been commented by scholars, the frankness of this presentation and the lack of any gloss seem to make this image all the less erotic for viewers.\textsuperscript{68} Rembrandt’s conception couldn’t be farther from van Loo’s. The tenderness of the gesture as the young man touches his lover’s chin has no correspondence with the print. The difference in compositional arrangement, one takes place out of doors, the other in the “privacy” of a bedroom.

In distinct ways, the paintings by van Bronchorst and van Loo effectively engage the senses of sight, and more importantly, touch. They both encourage the viewer to

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\textsuperscript{65} Franits notes that most of these objects were well beyond the resources of the majority of the Dutch population. These finely executed works were intended for the wealthiest citizens. See Franits, “‘For people of fashion,’” and \textit{Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting}.

\textsuperscript{66} Rembrandt, \textit{Ledikant}, 1646. Etching, burin, and dry point, IV state. 12.5 x 22.4

\textsuperscript{67} This reworking is discussed by Christopher White, \textit{Rembrandt as an etcher}, pp. 186-187.

experience the works through a direct appeal to a visceral response. In so doing, each artist participates indirectly in the debate on the comparative merits of painting and sculpture – the *paragone*. Invoking more than the sense of sight by encouraging the viewer to reach out and touch the image or to remember fondly tender caresses, champions painting’s superiority in eliciting a reaction from the viewer. Such a process suspends the viewer’s act of looking to encourage the experience of touching.

The debate between the arts of painting and sculpture has its roots in Italy in the sixteenth century. Leatrice Mendelsohn observed that although the term *paragone* was not coined until the nineteenth century, the concepts associated with it were generally understood several centuries earlier. Although sculpture was less of a presence in the artistic output of the Dutch Republic, the Dutch demonstrated a marked interest championing the art of painting. Unlike Italy, where the comparison of the arts often took a written form, as in Varchi’s *Due Lezzone*, the North is rather silent. It seems, instead, that the artists allowed their images to argue their point – the supremacy of the art of painting. However, there are a few instances in which Northern writers refer to the Italian debate. For example, Van Mander exhibits an awareness of the literature on the comparative merits of the arts in his life of the Antwerp painter Gillis van Coninxloo, where he notes:

> I have seen dialogues as well as other kinds of writing by two or three different Italian authors in which the two arts of painting are discussed as to which is the most important; and they argue to the advantage of our art that the painter makes everything that the eye of mankind can comprehend visually: the heavens, the sky, divers variations of the weather by which the sun sometimes allows its rays to fall through the clouds onto cities, mountains and valleys, sometimes dark and cloudy, rain, hail, snow; all varieties of green in trees and fields as laughing

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spring spurs on and arouses the birds to song – the which the sculptor cannot possibly do with his stone – with more and other arguments by which they show that painting is a more attractive or important art than sculpture.  

Even the rather untheoretical treatise of Philips Angel, demonstrates a familiarity with the debate between the arts:

The sculptors say, for their part that a painting is sophistic, mere semblance without being, because one cannot find in a painting that which it seems to be. That is not so with the sculptors’ art, which is tangible, even though painters imitate the same things as sculptors do, and with more means, namely forms and colors, whereas the sculptors use forms alone. Nevertheless, painters imitate her more truly and faithfully.

Angel devotes a great deal of effort in explaining why the art of painting is superior to that of sculpture. He takes recourse in the age-old argument that the creation of sculpture is dirty and requires brute force, necessitating early retirement for even the most talented sculptor. Angel’s debt to van Mander is clear in his comments that painting “can be used to depict a rainbow, rain, thunder, lightning, clouds, vapor, light, reflections and ore such things, like the rising of the sun, early morning, the decline of the sun, evening, the moon….”

The manifestations of desire present both on and in these pastoral paintings engage scholars in considerations of the erotic, questions of conspicuous consumption, and issues of artistic intention. The willingness of the Dutch audience to accept and collect such objects speaks to their ability to recognize the relationship between a seductive theme and an artfully conceived work of art. The pure eroticism expressed in

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72 Philips Angel, *Lof der schilderkonst*, 239.
the case studies of this chapter, and others like them, is fundamental to the experience of these paintings. Indeed, it is the experience that is the whole point.
CONCLUSION

Returning to the Surface

The end of a journey often benefits from a return to the beginning and a review of the way travelled. The seductive surfaces of the nine paintings that are the primary case studies of this dissertation are the locus for issues surrounding eroticism’s importance in Dutch art of the Golden Age. This project has used them as starting points for an investigation into the visual and thematic significance of an outlet for a particular erotic expression. Through analyzing the way these images look, how they relate to non-eroticized versions of the same subject, and the circumstances of their production, I hope to have shown that eroticism was neither an anomaly nor an embarrassment. For the painters, this eroticism was an important vehicle through which they were able to communicate personal style and facility; while for patrons, it provided pictures that were on the one hand exceedingly lovely to look at and on the other suggestive of a refinement of taste.

Privileging an initial response redirects our attention to the surfaces of these objects, and others like them. It has not been my intention to undertake an analysis of the sexualization of the images under consideration here through the investigation of a symbolic language. In fact, there is actually very little iconographic baggage to these images. Instead, my goal has been to (re)turn the attention of the modern viewer to the eroticism that is primarily visual rather than intellectual. The interpretation that is here valued foremost has been one that was initiated as a reaction to what is immediately seen on the surface of these sumptuous paintings.
We started at the point of acknowledgement -- recognizing the existence of an eroticism that is separate from both the bawdy sexuality of tavern scenes and the sexually freighted and heavily moralizing details of seemingly innocuous genre images. The appearance of the paintings that are the focus of this dissertation is radically different from the that of boorish tavern scenes, representations of tarted-up harlots, or quiet iterations of domestic life that hide more subversive messages in their details. Both the intentions suggested by the erotic images under consideration here and the manner of their conveyance could not be more divergent from these other examples of the appearance of sexuality in Dutch art of the seventeenth century.

The purpose of this dissertation has not been to rewrite the scholarship surrounding the sexual subjects and eroticized images found in seventeenth-century Dutch art. Instead, I hope to have added another layer to an already complex picture. In a majority of cases, earlier analyses have tended to concentrate on the deciphering of a sexual message presented in a language of visual signs and symbols; explaining what is seen on the surface as a vehicle for the transmission of a moralizing message. Such studies rarely address eroticism as it is seen in works such as those discussed here, concentrating almost exclusively on genre paintings peppered with deceptively realistic details.

The few scholars who have grappled with the erotic, as opposed to the sexual, in Dutch art have tended to seek to tame and diffuse it by linking the eroticism to larger intellectual enterprises. While more concerned with how these paintings look than the iconological approach, the end result is often that the immediate and visceral responses conjured by works such as those discussed in the previous pages are relegated to a
subservient role. At the same time one must be aware that the surfaces of these paintings are not everything. The pitfalls of seeking to explain the significance of Dutch imagery through a singular analysis of facture are obvious. Artists and their audience were more than mere eyes and in the instance of eroticism as it is seen in Dutch art there is, so to speak, more than meets the eye. Therefore, my own ideas, while initiated by what is seen, have also been informed by the more complex structures of what this meant.

In order to proceed I have had to wrestle with firmly held beliefs about the Dutch and the images and ideas that mattered to them. Entrenched ideas about what marks an object or idea as properly “Dutch” have often been a result of our own, and previous generations’, prejudices. The charming domesticity of seventeenth-century Dutch genre imagery influenced the images of the home that were produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were safe visual repositories for notions of an ideal home.

The growing pains experienced as European and American cultures developed from an early modern to a modern society encouraged taking refuge in these seemingly simple and innocuous pictures. Dutch art appears to suggest that everything unruly can be tamed, categorized, or put neatly on a shelf. But these sorts of Dutch images are only a small part of the total picture and, of course, the complexity of this Early Modern society made it much messier than we would like to believe.

To the greater enrichment of our own knowledge of Golden Age art and culture, recent decades have seen fruitful research into categories of images previously neglected because they seemed less “Dutch.” Reconstituting the picture of Dutch art to include more international subjects and styles has shown that the field is deeper and broader than previously understood. Scholarly projects that have addressed pastoral and history
subjects reveal that a complex system of artistic exchange and influence informed the genesis of Dutch pictures and allowed artists to take up universal themes and interpret them in a native idiom. The eroticism discussed in the previous pages should be understood in these more inclusive terms and certainly benefited from the attention paid to these long-neglected subjects.

Continuing to journey towards a normalization of eroticism and a greater understanding of its positive potential, I have reviewed its appearance in several examples relating to important categories of subject: toilet scenes (genre painting), fantasy portraits (portraiture), the Finding of Moses (history painting), and the sleeping nymph and amorous couple (pastoral). Each of the chapters of this study has been structured so as to highlight specific concepts and components that are central to the re-evaluation of eroticism and Dutch art; drawing attention to ideas such as the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, illusionism and the voyeur, and the imaging of the female nude, among others. Each of the case studies has been a stand-in for a larger group. The diversity of subjects covered demonstrates the pervasiveness of the eroticism. Signs of the erotic in these images are found both in the subjects represented as well as in the stylistic treatment of these subjects. Underlying the discussion of these paintings are a few basic questions. Is this desire taboo? Is it culturally dangerous or is it a sort of sanctioned behavior? Having now surveyed the material it seems that a more satisfactory answer is that this is an eroticism that is possible and permissible, and, given the quantity of images that embrace it, seemingly encouraged.

The toilet scenes by van Everdingen and Schalcken introduced us to some of the most basic stylistic tricks that artists of all subjects used to heighten the erotic charge of
their works. Both of these paintings, each in its unique way, work to increase the viewer’s connection with and participation in the scene that unfolds before him. Van Everdingen forces the young woman out into the space. The palpability of her presence is unmistakable. Van der Helst similarly paints an eroticism that refuses to be contained by the frame in his *Female Nude with Drapery*. Schalcken organizes the composition of *Young Woman with a Mirror Seated under a Canopy in a Landscape* in such a way as to isolate the female figure from her surroundings. By creating a pseudo interior space, he is able to invite the viewer into the scene in much the same way he invites the voyeur in the background to approach. In both of these examples, the suggestion of a private moment interrupted is cultivated through illusionistic ploys that were of central importance to a native style.

Deftly negotiating the boundaries between the public body on display and the private erotic response, the portraits discussed in the third chapter provide an opportunity to understand how the sexualized body had a positive place in seventeenth-century Dutch culture. Concentrating on the visual evidence provided by the works themselves, this chapter attempted to answer two questions: what makes the bodies in these portraits erotic and what is the meaning and purpose of this eroticization? Certainly the frank nudity goes quite a long way to emphasize the point that these were erotic pictures. And yet there is much more to these images than just that. Portrait or pin-up, the paintings by van der Helst and van Loo suggest that erotic bodies could very well be appreciated in and of themselves. Borrowing from several different sub-categories of the field of portraiture, these paintings conjured associations that would have strong resonance for
the viewer: the fantasy of the *portrait historié*, the permissibility of the *tronie*, the
courtly romance of van Dyck’s undress.

The singular art market and patronage structure of the Northern Netherlands
encouraged the creation of images that were produced on speculation for an open market.
The void left by the absence of Church and State sponsored commissions was quickly
filled by the prosperous upper classes whose heavy pocketbooks wielded a purchasing
power that guided what subjects were represented and in what styles. Although private
commissions and privileged relationships with specific patrons still existed, the majority
of artists working in the Dutch Republic achieved success and financial security through
the creation of images which would be capable of seducing a ready buyer on the open
market. Artists ran great risks by devoting time and resources to a work that would not
sell. Therefore the number of erotic pictures available today must be regarded as
representing a treatment that corresponded to a demand among the buying public. The
audience that helped to shape the subjects and styles that grace the surfaces of these
paintings should be understood as an elite class of buyers with interests keyed to those
that occupied the stadholder’s court. While the first two groups of case studies are, of
course, concerned with market issues, the topic was more directly addressed in the final
two.

The existence of a significant number of paintings of the Finding of Moses that
concern themselves more with the evocative display of female nudes than the clarity of
storytelling is remarkable. Here we see the merging of two entirely different proclivities:
the interest in the dramatic subject and the fascination with the eroticized representation
of the female nude. Why, when there were so many other biblical tales that embrace the
seductive charms of women, Susanna or Bathsheba for example, did artists select this one? Unlike images of Susanna or Bathsheba, for which their was, at hand, a narrative that could cloak the eroticism in some moralizing gloss, the Finding of Moses had no such excuse. One wonders if this theme was chosen precisely for this reason. Without a story that explicates the negative effects of spying upon a nude woman, the viewer was a bit freer to enjoy the display.

The joy of looking was joined with the pleasure of touching in the two works that illustrate eroticism’s place in the pastoral realm. Both artists created paintings that celebrate the sense of touch. As with the works by van Everdingen and van der Helst, van Bronchorst has pushed the figure of the woman so far to the edge of the painting that she threatens to tumble out. The viewer is in every way encouraged to reach out and touch her sleeping form. His accomplice, the young shepherd gesturing crudely in the back, eggs him on. The act of tenderly touching a lover’s skin is foregrounded in van Loo’s *Amorous Couple*. The small size of the painting draws the viewer closer to its surface. The ability to hold this in one’s hands accentuates its status as a precious object to be enjoyed and admired.

Investigating the eroticism of these paintings draws out larger themes that connect these images to more international styles and concerns. The implications this eroticism had for suggestions of courtly aspiration can be seen in its relationship to what was being produced in other European courts at the time. The particularly Baroque concept of engaging and implicating the physical presence of the viewer, making him a willing participant, connects these Dutch pictures to broader artistic projects. However international some of the themes or their treatment might seem, there is still much about
these examples that reveal the time and place in which they were created. An emphasis on dramatic illusionism, unidealized forms, and contemporary associations mark these as Dutch. The implications of the eroticism, while pertinent for drawing Dutch art of the Golden Age more completely into the larger picture of European art of the seventeenth century, can also be understood in terms that are entirely appropriate for the larger picture of Dutch art and culture.

Although using each case study as a platform for the introduction of specific ideas that circulate around the issue of eroticism, its form and its meaning, I hope to have communicated that these ideas are not only applicable to the case studies themselves but can be applied to all of the examples discussed, as well as those that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. The desire to view art and objects with salacious subjects or provocatively displayed nude or partially nude figures with an eye towards satisfying or arousing one’s sexual desires is common to many cultures. However, our historical bias has colored our understanding of the role of sex and the sexualized body in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century. This theses with its discussion of the circumstances surrounding the production and consumption of erotic images has attempted to facilitate a reevaluation of the preconceived ideas about this primarily Protestant culture’s attitudes towards desire and satisfaction.

The ways in which we engage these works in the practice of art history forces us, at times, to fit everything into a canonical rubric. These artifacts refuse to be corralled in such a way. In any art historical analysis, the reality is that one can only ever arrive at a partially realized sense of how any particular object or group of objects was viewed and understood by a contemporary audience. This is even more so an issue when the analysis
is concerned with such personal and subjective responses as those which involve erotic images. However, in considering the ideas presented in the preceding pages we must put the experience of the paintings themselves ahead of any other intellectual concern.

Equipped with the knowledge that an appetite for the erotic existed in Holland, we can revisit the sexual imagery of these scenes and observe them in a new light. By disentangling these objects from modern perceptions of seventeenth-century Dutch culture, I hope to have expanded the discussion to include a more positive response to the imagery that adorns these surfaces.
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