

PROGRAM HNA Conference 2022

Thursday 2 June 2022, Amsterdam

Late morning (11:00-12:30)

GENDER AND DISABILITY

Breaking Conventions and Crafting Identity: The Multifaceted Relationship Between Women and Art in the Low Countries

SESSION ORGANIZERS

Samantha Chang, University of Toronto

Catherine Powell, University of Texas at Austin | Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society

Lauryn Smith, Case Western Reserve University | Cleveland Museum of Art

This session explores the less commonly portrayed—and much less discussed—representation of women as artists and agents of cultural and artistic change. Recent exhibitions and publications raise and address the participation of mostly ‘exceptional’ women artists and aristocratic and noblewomen in the creation and patronage of art. Notwithstanding these works, however, the field continues to be dominated by a history of men and centres upon patriarchal analyses and methodologies. Instead of reflecting on the exceptional, what can we gather on the paradigmatic women of the Low Countries? In this session, we critically examine the role of gender and gender identity in creating and curating art in the broadest sense. How did this multifaceted relationship play out in the development and portrayal of women’s identity and their self-actualization? How did women construct their identities via commissioning artists and collecting objects, both independently and as a joint venture with their spouses? Can new approaches to patronage further nuance the concept of conjugal patronage? In what ways did women artists subvert societal norms? Our panel seeks to formulate approaches that further discussions of the role of gender within artistic pursuits.

SPEAKERS

Andrea Pearson, American University, Washington, DC

Negotiating Gender in the Ghent Altarpiece

The Ghent Altarpiece is undeniably gendered. Such protocols are immediately evident in the exterior view. There, Jan van Eyck aligned female donor Elisabeth Borluut with the

conventionally less favored, sinister side of the composition (in relation to the enthroned figures on the interior), and male donor Joos Vijd with the honorific dexter side, an arrangement that elevated Vijd relationally. Yet to be recognized, however, are other, more subtle ways in which van Eyck's approach to figuration supports gender differences between wife and husband, including subtle distinctions in positions, gestures, and tonalities. As with the dexter/sinister alignment, these choices advance a normative marital hierarchy that asserts primacy for Vijd while comparatively marginalizing Borluut through visual and conceptual binaries. They do so even as the imagery unifies the two individuals by suggesting privileged status and salvation for both through the altarpiece's eucharistic iconography and its sitting on an altar: these features imply the couple's access to the host, the perceived source of redemption.

New observations made possible by the recent cleaning of the exterior panels further complicate van Eyck's gendered choices in representation. In particular, the removal of oxidized varnish has revealed previously obscured approaches to color and contrast that connect Borluut far more directly than Vijd to the Annunciate Virgin, archangel Gabriel, and prophets and sibyls portrayed above. Among the implications of these choices, I argue, is that van Eyck defined Borluut as an adherent to normalized ideals for femininity encapsulated by the Virgin, including humility and marital chastity, that were advanced as exemplary for lay women in devotional and conduct literature. However, Borluut's proximity to the holy figures claims for her a degree of spiritual access, understanding, and agency that associates her with another archetypal expectation for lay women: to preside over and advance domestic piety. By this time, female spiritual authority had become a point of contention in certain theological circles. I propose that van Eyck mediated these tensions for the altarpiece's various audiences by embedding Borluut's agency within the defined marital hierarchy described above, which ultimately brought it under her husband's oversight. The image thereby transacted female spiritual authority via masculinization while asserting archetypal masculinity for Vijd as head-of-household. This elevated status would have appealed to Vijd's aspiration for upward mobility, a concern that has been demonstrated. Ultimately, the basic gendered protocols of the work became normalized in large-scale commissions: they appear in images by the next generation of artists, if modified in response to specific circumstances. Such emulation suggests that these typologies were considered effective in sustaining the dominant socioreligious order in which gender-sensitive, visually-skilled patrons and viewers were deeply invested.

As the first dedicated investigation of gender in the canonical Ghent Altarpiece, this study restores the neglected Elisabeth Borluut and the Borluut-Vijd marriage to positions of consequence; analyzes gendered visuality within previously unrecognized negotiations of agency and authority in the imagery; and demonstrates Jan van Eyck as an innovatory and influential genderist.

Elizabeth Rice Mattison, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College *The Sculptress: Carving Women in the Early Modern Low Countries*.

Sculpture has long been considered a masculine art form. In his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*, Giorgio Vasari singled out Prosperzia de' Rossi, contrasting her femininity with the masculinity of her sculpting practice. He was astonished that her 'little hands, so tender and so white', could perform 'manual labours, braving the roughness of marble and the unkindly chisels'. Even in contemporary scholarship, female artists have been considered primarily for their work in 'feminine' materials like wax or silk, rather than wood or stone.

The wives, widows, sisters, and mothers of sculptors have long formed footnotes in the study of northern European sculpture. The work of these women in managing workshops, administering finances, and forming alliances through marriage has been acknowledged as part of the familial business of art in the early modern period. Yet, the role of women as sculptors in their own right has been overlooked. The famous Brussels-based family of sculptors, the Bormans, included four generations of fathers, sons, and daughters: at her death in 1545, Jan II Borman's daughter Maria was described as a sculptress (*beeldsnyderesse*). Anna Coxcie (1547–1595), the daughter of the renowned painter Michael Coxcie, was a documented sculptor in Mechelen. This paper examines the place that women carved for themselves as sculptors in the early modern Netherlands. I argue that female sculptors held positions of agency beyond the 'workshop wife', and succeed in crafting individual artistic identities.

This paper focuses primarily on the career of Maria Faydherbe (1587–after 1633), a sculptor in Mechelen who specialized in religious statuary. Unusually, she signed many of her works, and as many as twenty statues, of all scales, can be attributed to her, in both stone and wood. A legal suit brought before the Mechelen aldermen in 1633 sheds light on Maria's career and self-definition through her art. In the dispute, Maria claimed she owed no debt to the guild (*niet schuldich*), whereas her male compatriots were mere 'dozen workers' (*dozijnewerckers*). Incensed that a woman would boast of her prowess, the men proposed a sculpting duel, in which Maria's slandered colleagues could prove their merit. At stake was Maria's claim of superiority over the male sculptors of Mechelen. Her insult of 'dozen workers' suggested the men's lack of innovation and mass production. In contrast, Maria's signed works experiment with more dramatic styles, incorporating sweeping drapery and emotional expression distinct from other Mechelen sculptures. Although the outcome of the duel—if it ever took place—remains unknown, Maria Faydherbe's documented career and surviving works demonstrate her ability to craft a space for herself as a sculptor. In the crowded artistic landscape, women could forge a place for themselves, as independent and skillful sculptresses.

Lieke van Deinsen, KU Leuven | VU University, Amsterdam

A Face of One's Own? Visualising Learned Women in the Early Modern Low Countries

In the course of the early modern period, portraits of the learned became an increasingly important element of scholarly identity constructions. From the sixteenth century onwards, humanists included portraits of themselves in their letters to their peers as part of the formality of opening a correspondence, the portrait serving as the face-to-face introduction to a (distant) colleague whom they were unlikely ever to meet in person. After the 1660s, supported by changing printmaking technologies, portrait frontispieces became almost de rigueur in any new intellectual book published and the demand for portraits of the learned and literate—both to be included in books and sold separately—increased significantly. This presented the growing number of learned women—who articulated a growing awareness of their public image and an increased interest in actively modelling it—with a challenge: if publicly speaking and publishing were already considered as challenges to the prescriptive definition of modest female behavior, printing a picture of one's person for purchase seemed all the more scandalous. At the same time, however, new emancipatory conceptualisation of the female body and mind gave rise to the hesitant acceptance of women as knowledgeable individuals in their own right.

To investigate the historical efforts of women to represent and embody intellectual authority, this paper will examine how printed images of early modern female intellectuals were constructed, distributed and received with regard to intellectual authority. As such, it builds on recent socio-cultural studies of portraiture and explores the hypothesis that these portraits contributed to the image of female scholarly identity by forming visual repertoires, constructing identities of learned women with a shared and recognisable physiognomy and iconographical program. In particular, I will focus on the visual images of three exemplary female figures actively participating in the Republic of Letters: Anna Maria van Schurman, Margaret Cavendish and Maria Sibylla Merian. I will show how their (self) portraits—both visually and (inter)textually—united their undeniable femininity with their aspired intellectual authority in one image and, as such, challenged the persistent gender hierarchy in the early modern intellectual field.

Catherine Powell, University of Texas at Austin | Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society

Choosing to be Agnes Block: Art in the Service of Self-Definition and Self-Representation

The life of Amsterdammer Agnes Block illustrates the critical role personal agency played in becoming known as an expert not only in the emerging science of botany, but also in the art of the science, against all contemporary gender expectations. Agnes Block (1629–1704) was the niece of famed poet Joost van den Vondel; she belonged to the wealthy and respected Block, Rutgers, de Wolff, and de Flines families in Amsterdam. She married twice, each time

to successful textile merchants with leading roles in the Mennonite church and community. She was the step-mother to three children, godmother to three young women who bore her name, and grandmother to at least twelve grandchildren. This was a full and respectable (and respected) life: but this is not how SHE wanted to be known and remembered.

Block's passion was Vijverhof, the country estate she bought and developed. This is where she grew flower and plant specimens from all over the world, including the pineapple that cemented her fame. This is also where the art she commissioned from Hermann Henstenburgh, Johannes Bronkhorst, Alida Withoos, Johanna Herolt, Maria Sibylla Merian, and Jan Weenix (amongst many others) has its genesis. Block devoted enormous amounts of money and time to becoming Flora Batava, a passionate and knowledgeable botanist and collector. This is how she chose to be known and remembered.

This paper focuses on Block's actions of self-definition and self-representation with respect to three bodies of artworks in particular. The first is Block's Bloemenboek, a collection of botanical watercolours commissioned from the best and best-known artists of the time to immortalize her prized garden, most likely assembled after 1674. The second is a family portrait by Jan Weenix (c. 1684), which features Block, her second husband Sybrand de Flines, and two children in front of Vijverhof. The last is a commemorative medal of Block as Flora Batava by Jan Boskam (1700), which was produced in several exemplars in silver and bronze and, according to the travel diary of the German polymath Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, in gold. The paper argues that all three works (or groups of works) are undeniably about Block and her interests in botany and in collecting. The perspective for Block's self-definition and self-representation, however, varies: the Bloemenboek is arguably about Block's expertise vis-à-vis the specimens, while the portrait places Block's pursuits in the visual context of her family. The medal stands at the other end of the spectrum as a material manifestation of Block's persona as a woman and individual. Drawing from archival sources and contemporary treatises, this paper explores the arc of Block's self-definition and self-representation through art and proposes a highly personal understanding of these works: they are about choosing to be Agnes Block.

Indeterminacy in Netherlandish Visual Arts and Culture (1400-1800)

SESSION ORGANIZERS

GEMCA – Group for Early Modern Cultural Analysis, UCLouvain

Ralph Dekoninck

Ingrid Falque

Caroline Heering

The art of the Netherlands in the early modern period is full of works whose meaning is not revealed at first glance, or whose interpretations by art historians have revealed all the ambiguity. Just think of Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait, Quinten Massys' Money Changer and his Wife or Johannes Vermeer's Art of Painting to name only a few famous examples which have been deciphered by scholars in turn from a moralizing, allegorical, spiritual or profane perspective. All the interpretations that have been forged on these works are but one reflection of the way ambiguity is cultivated in all registers of early modern Netherlandish visual culture. Double images, illusionism, visual games, framing devices, plays between different levels of reality, the indeterminacy of pictorial spaces, emblematic and rebus are other key components of this taste for ambivalence.

In this session, we would like to invite papers that will explore early modern Netherlandish visual arts and culture in the light of the concept of "indeterminacy", understood as "the character of something undefined, unestablished, not precisely outlined" (Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images. Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, 2002, 13), and its variations of ambiguity (the character of what is open to several interpretations) and ambivalence (the character of what has two opposing components). These concepts can be applied to different, yet intimately related, registers:

- that of the images themselves and their internal functioning: i.e. their iconography, composition, formal language which can be read in different ways);
- that of the experience and use of images at the time of their reception: how do we define and understand the relationship between these images and their producers, patrons and beholders, depending notably on where and how they were gazed and used (private or public spaces, in an intimate or distant relation...)?;
- and finally that of the interpretative layers that have been superimposed up to the present day by art historians: it is sufficient to think of the many debates that the paintings mentioned above have provoked in the course of time.

Considering artworks through the prism of indeterminacy will enable us to unlock the potentialities of images without confining them to single interpretations or compartmentalize them in specific genres, that are side-effect of traditional iconographical approach. Instead, it will allow us to grasp the polysemy and richness of the images. On a more general level, this approach will also allow to reconsider the relationships between form and meaning, but also between genres or between the profane and the sacred, and therefore invite us to consider the process of indeterminacy as a participant in the power of artworks.

SESSION 2

“Ambiguous Images”

SESSION CHAIR

Ingrid Falque

RESPONDENT

Michel Weemans, ENSA Bourges

SPEAKERS

Lieke Smits, Leiden University

Playing with Meaning: Fluid Encounters in Games of Make-Believe

The notion of ‘play’ as an important part of culture, forwarded by Huizinga in his groundbreaking *Homo ludens*, has recently regained popularity in the study of medieval culture. Mary Carruthers speaks of the “ludic play space” of medieval art, not separate from but integrated with ordinary life, allowing for knowledge to be gained through sensory engagement with objects. Decker has explored Geertgen tot Sint Jans’ Holy Kinship as inviting meditative play. This notion of perceiving and engaging with medieval art as an act of play implies that fixed meanings were not intended; the act of free association was a goal in and of itself. In this paper I will further the understanding of playful interactions with art and indeterminacy of meaning by taking into account the intertwined traditions of bridal mysticism and spiritual role-play.

In medieval exegesis, the Song of Songs was regarded as a kind of puzzle. Augustine declared the Song’s obscure comparisons were like a meditation game. This complex puzzle had the effect of bringing the soul delight. As Bernard of Clairvaux expressed in his Sermons on the Song of Songs: What is hidden is most desirable. One frequent manner of ‘disguising’ in the Song of Songs involves various roles that the bridegroom takes on and that are, in the commentary tradition, ascribed to Christ. As Bernard of Clairvaux enumerates: You must already have noticed how often he changes his countenance in the course of this love-song, how he delights in transforming himself from one charming guise to another in the beloved’s presence: at one moment like a bashful bridegroom ... at another coming along like a physician ... Sometimes, too, he joins up as a traveller with the bride and the maidens who accompany her on the road ... At another time he comes to meet them as a wealthy father of a family ... or again like a magnificent and powerful king. This ‘spiritual role-play’, in which the devotee is encouraged to relate to Christ in various roles, influenced the perception of artworks. Images and objects used in playful interactions gained meaning by becoming conversation partners and props in games of make-believe. Christ inhabited

all roles at once, and in devotional texts they often overlap and run into each other. This fluidity was, I argue, also projected onto images of Christ in his various guises. These interactions, often taking place in the imagination, have left little traces. In order to explore the fluid meanings created through role-play, I focus on images from the late medieval Low Countries that are accompanied by or can be connected to texts. Examples are a diptych in Museum Catharijneconvent showing a portrait of Christ accompanied by the Lentulus Letter (a description of Jesus' countenance), which can be linked to his role of beloved, and images of Christ as healer that are connected to devotional texts on spiritual health.

Alexander Marr, University of Cambridge

Landscape, Anthropomorphism and the Erotics of Ambiguity in Niklaus Manuel and Urs Graf

This paper will explore the ways in which the Swiss mercenary artists Niklaus Manuel (c. 1484-1530) and Urs Graf (c. 1485-1528) treated ambiguity in their graphic works. It will be focused on a series of drawings of Alpine landscape capricci, which render form and subject purposely ambiguous through a variety of compositional means, especially the incorporation of anthropomorphic motifs. Informed especially by the latent anthropomorphism of Albrecht Dürer's early engravings, the style and subjects of which both artists consciously emulated, the drawings are bound up with Manuel and Graf's fascination with violence and the eroticized female figure. In these images, it will be argued, ambiguity serves as a means to grapple artistically with a misogynistic fear of female power, expressed as brutality—both actual and aesthetic—towards the female body.

PAPER ARTS

Media of Exchange: Drawings and the Transmission of Ideas

SESSION ORGANIZERS

Talitha Maria G. Schepers, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Erin Travers, Chapman University, Orange | Getty Foundation, Los Angeles

Much attention has been given to the discussion of prints as mobile images that disseminated ideas across geographic, economic, religious, and linguistic borders. This emphasis on prints' multiplication and spread overlooks the important contributions of drawings to cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exchanges. This panel investigates the vital role of drawings in the transmission of ideas, both within and beyond the early modern Low Countries, and their function as active agents to build networks, document encounters, and facilitate knowledge production. We seek to address questions that explore how and why drawings served as unique objects for the transmission of ideas in the early modern period: How did drawings act as points of contact between people, places, and objects? How were

different media, for example, chalk, pen and ink, washes, or metalpoint, used for distinct purposes or merged to make new creations? Finally, in what capacities did drawings function differently from other media?

We invite papers that consider the unique material and technical qualities of drawings that positioned this medium as a vehicle for intellectual, educational, cultural, and professional transfer and contact. Sketchbooks, for instance, provided the ideal medium for travelling artists to capture ideas, copy down designs or document their surroundings. Meanwhile, travelling artists, merchants and diplomats alike would leave their pictorial marks in the alba amicorum of those they visited abroad. Drawings also enabled knowledge to move between disciplines. For instance, Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), in his art-theoretical treatise, advises his readers to make copies after his anatomical prints in order to quickly learn the shape and names of the muscles and bones, while medical practitioners made drawings when studying after a cadaver or documenting their patients' maladies. Another fascinating example is how Rudolf II (1552-1612), in addition to collecting prints, commissioned albums of drawings from the artist Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1601), who incorporated natural specimens into his watercolour and gouache images. Finally, this session encourages speakers to consider how drawings provided a platform to express encounters and new ideas for non-professional draughtsmen. Think, for instance, of costume albums produced in the Ottoman Empire by Netherlandish travellers and merchants who were less technically experienced, such as Lambert Wijts (active 1572-1573).

Participants are invited to explore artistic exchanges across geopolitical, cultural and disciplinary divides. Contributions from other disciplines, such as the history of science, digital art history, and conservation are also welcome.

SPEAKERS

Olenka Horbatsch, British Museum, London

Drawing for Gold: Design Drawings in Northern Europe

Drawings were vital tools for goldsmiths in early modern Europe: sumptuous vessels, weapons, decorative objects and objects for personal adornment were designed, elaborated, and recorded on paper. It is perhaps ironic that designs on paper survive in large numbers from the sixteenth century, whereas the gold objects do not. As such, design drawings have been valued for their utilitarian function, and they have been traditionally understood as documents of lost objects. Design drawings however, are very rarely straightforward records of production – they reveal initial thoughts, changes, and refinements. Carefully chosen media, such as wash and coloured inks, were used to simulate materials and techniques of objects in the round, and this phenomenon merits further attention. Such drawings were important for transmitting knowledge within and beyond the workshop, and as such they were copied, adapted, used and reused in the production of

gold work. Methods of transfer and transmission were therefore integral to workshop practice. Drawings were copied free hand or otherwise transferred via offset, incision or tracing, and rubbings from objects were taken to preserve or document the design. Design drawings for gold work therefore represent an important intersection between idea and production and between art and craft.

In this paper, I take a new, critical approach to the category of design drawings for gold work made in the Low Countries and the German-speaking lands during the sixteenth century. I consider how design drawings were active agents in the transmission of the antique style of ornament. My case studies range from designs by Hans Holbein the Younger for the Tudor court to an anonymous jeweller's sketchbook with recipes and rubbings interspersed with drawings. I will examine the aesthetic, intellectual and intermedial aspects of design drawings, together with their use-value and afterlife in the goldsmith's workshop and the collector's cabinet.

Susan Maxwell, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Netherlandish Drawings in the Alba Amicorum of a German Art Agent around 1600

Works on paper served distinctive roles in the culture of collecting that flourished in southern Germany at the turn of the seventeenth century. The travelogues and alba amicorum of the Augsburg art agent Philip Hainhofer give us a rare glimpse into his personal views on the value of drawings as well as their place in princely patronage practices. Hainhofer, something of an itinerant diplomat, assembled no less than four albums, two of which he took on his many journeys around Europe, not only to gather entries, but also to display the breadth of his contacts to the courts that he visited. Drawings figure prominently in his correspondence and served a central role in populating his alba amicorum. Many of the pictorial entries were executed in watercolors commissioned by local artists, but there are a number of important drawings that were collected rather than commissioned, revealing Hainhofer's evaluation of their quality as singular objects.

Hainhofer's albums contain drawings ranging from an architectural drawing purported to be by Jan van Eyck, to contemporaneous artists who were working at various courts during the time of his travels. Unlike prints, the unique quality of the drawing made it a possession eagerly pursued by discerning princely collectors who sought to possess drawings as a matter of prestige while artists were able to convey to their patrons early modern theories and ideas about the value of drawing through the medium itself. In addition to Hainhofer's travelogues and albums, his correspondence with the reigning Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria and the duke's father, Wilhelm V, provide direct evidence of how drawings not only functioned as a means of conveying important aspects of the collection, but also how they were valued as objects of art in and of themselves. This paper will use Hainhofer's correspondence and evidence from his albums to propose that collecting drawings in the

early seventeenth century followed a similar trajectory to the concept of the universal collection as a means of possessing a variety of styles, modes, and famous names.

Rachel Weiss, University of California, Los Angeles

Drawing Things Together: Jan Hackaert and the Alpine Laboratory

Quietly nestled among the formidable array of printed maps and topographical views in the Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem is an astonishing series of Alpine landscapes. Drawn in pen and grey wash by the Amsterdam artist Jan Hackaert between 1653 and 1656, the landscapes are pasted into the voluminous pages of the atlas, which is zealously preserved at the Austrian National Library as a UNESCO Memory of the World heritage object. The vaunted and exclusive monument in which the drawings reside confers an air of stoicism that belies the dynamic ways in which the drawings were produced, circulated, and instrumentalized in the seventeenth century as vectors of orographic knowledge formation. Seldom discussed in art historical literature and virtually absent from Anglophone scholarship, Hackaert's mountainous landscapes constellate a riveting history of scientific commission, creative collaboration, experimental pedagogy, and visual epistemology. This paper probes the drawings' history through the specific valences of the medium in which they were produced. I argue that—unlike paintings, which are inclined to idealize, and prints, which can perpetuate a certain uniformity of thought—drawings instantiate cognitive plasticity. Hackaert's drawings in particular seize on the medium's unique epistemological offerings in their pictorial innovation, forensic description of Alpine terrain, and stimulus for the discourse on mountains.

In the Shadow of the Pand and Beurs: Religious Art and the Early Modern Market **SESSION ORGANIZER**

Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, Missouri State University

In the early modern era the region of the Low Countries was one of the centers of a number of shifts in economic life and practice in Europe. The period saw the expansion of the middle class and increasing urbanization, a shift from the manorial system and the commons to enclosure and agrarian capitalism, the development of modern banking, changes in the system of markets including the availability of year-round markets, and, in time, the mechanization of production, development of stock exchanges, mercantilism, and public companies such as the Muscovy Company and British and Dutch East India Companies.

This session aims to revisit the effects of this changing economic environment on religious art in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and to highlight new insights into the relationship between economic life and the arts, especially religious art. Topics might include the effects of new patterns of patronage; adaptations in the iconography and style of religious art in response to the new developments in the marketplace and economic

systems; deployment of religious imagery in service of promoting economic systems or individual entities; changes in practices relating to corporate chapels or corporate participation in festival/procession traditions; new perspectives on the shifts in genre; patterns of artistic commission, competition, and rivalry; reflections and representations of the products of new trade and exchange patterns; changes in devotional portraiture related to these new models; new or altered contexts for the sites/display of art.

SPEAKERS

John R. Decker, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn

It Takes a Village to Nurture a Church

Nearly a quarter century ago, Mecheleer published the *Rekeningen van de Kerkfabriek van de Sint-Leonarduskerk van Zoutleeuw (1405, 1452-1599)*. The publication transcribes nearly 150 years of accounting records and provides scholars with a resource for understanding the *Sint-Leonarduskerk* in its socio-economic context. In addition to recording the purchase of expensive items like panel paintings and statues, the accounts also bring to light the myriad quotidian transactions that undergirded the day-to-day operation of the church and its land holdings. These include entries for hanging bells in the bell tower, sewing curtains and altar cloths, cleaning the organ, and the production of souvenirs for sale to pilgrims. With one or two exceptions, however, little appears to have been done with this trove of information after its publication. In this paper, I discuss a digital humanities project I have undertaken using the records in Mecheleer's publication as my point of reference. In particular, I am building a database using the records for the period 1405, 1452-1506.

The *Sint-Leonarduskerk* employed local and non-local tradespeople, some on a regular basis, to produce the items and carry out the short and long-term work needed to build and maintain the church's fabric. Not only were there efforts in Zoutleeuw, but also in neighboring towns where the church held property. In other words, the entries for these years paint a picture in which the church was a central node in a dynamic web of relationships between vendors, workers, church officials, the community, and nearby towns. My project acknowledges the efforts of master craftspeople but primarily attends to the contributions of those normally overlooked in histories of art. In doing so, I hope to provide a more nuanced view of the ever evolving role of a community in building and maintaining its church over time.

Barbara Kaminska, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville

Between Disability and Metaphor: Images of Blindness in Early Modern Collections

In the famous *Allegory of Sight* by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens (1617-18), the title personification contemplates a landscape painting with Christ healing a blind man,

and another landscape, with the parable of the blind, is propped against the wall. We see both of these themes repeated in other *Kunstkamer* images, testifying to their popularity among wealthy – but not necessarily noble – collectors. This presentation aims to analyze socioreligious functions of images of the blind in private collections of newly wealthy, aspirational, non-aristocratic owners in mercantile centers of the early modern Netherlands. In contrast to what has frequently been proposed, inventories clearly show that images based on the biblical narratives of miraculous healing of the blind were not displayed in hospices (*gasthuizen*), but, rather, in private houses. Thus, the appeal of this theme is a part of the larger shift towards discursive and open-ended religious imagery in domestic spaces, associated with merchants, bankers, and other non-noble members of the elite. However, as in Brueghel's and Rubens's *Allegory*, the interest in the stories of miraculous healing of the blind overlapped with the increasing popularity of the parable of the blind, of whose Pieter Bruegel the Elder's last painting is the best known example. Although the parable of the blind has typically been interpreted as a metaphor of spiritual ignorance and hubris, its iconography in the Netherlands registers a myriad of negative stereotypes about blind beggars, alongside their exclusion from the society. The parable of the blind strengthened the privileged status of owners of those paintings, whose wealth has traditionally been attributed to industriousness, entrepreneurship, and honesty – virtues juxtaposed with the idleness and deceit of blind mendicants in much of contemporary social discourse. While paintings of the healing of the blind argued for a charitable, compassionate treatment of the impaired, images of blind leading the blind served to encourage protocapitalist virtues of their owners. The growing popularity of these two themes in the later sixteenth century is thus directly related to the economic shifts in the Netherlands, and the introduction of religious imagery into domestic setting as a locus of reflection on how to create a successful urban community.

Dendrochronology, a Discipline in Flux

SESSION ORGANIZERS

Ron Spronk, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada | Radboud University, Nijmegen

Jørgen Wadum, Nivaagaard Collection, Niva^o | independent researcher

Historians of Netherlandish Art have used findings from dendrochronology for well over half a century. By determining the felling date of the tree from which the wood for a painting or sculpture was made, the earliest possible date for the creation of the object can be established. Over the years, art historians have used this *terminus post quem* routinely in matters of attribution for example, and the identification of the wood species can be highly important in the study of provenance. But dendrochronology is a complex, interdisciplinary

science, and its theoretical foundations and applied techniques are not always fully understood.

This session aims to highlight recent developments within the discipline, and its implications for art history. The sharing of data between dendrochronologists, including the actual measurements of tree ring sequences, is now more widely accepted, for example, which is illustrated by the new Dendro4Art website hosted and developed by the RKD and CATS (<https://dendro4art.org/>). This will allow for much more efficient datamining in the future, and for increased reliabilities of the data. Moreover, it appears that too much time has been allowed for correction for the period between the felling of the tree and the usage of its wood, i.e. for transportation, seasoning, panel production and artistic creation. Information from cultural historical studies (written sources, inscriptions, and the like) often indicate that trees were usually used relatively quickly after felling. Semi-products made of fresh logs in the Baltic countries could be ready for transportation from the forest down the river to the nearest Baltic harbor. There the timber was re-loaded from raft to ship, and transported to the West. Therefore, timber from trees felled in winter could be found as wainscot and planks at the lumber-yards in the Low Countries just after a few months.

This session will consist of presentations by dendrochronologists Aoife Daly and Ian Tyers, followed by a panel discussion with art historians about the increased reliability of the outcomes of dendrochronological examinations of art works.

Workshop at the Artis Library (max. 15 participants):

The Discovery of Nature, with Hans Mulder, Artis Library

In the sixteenth century an increasing number of studies appeared in which animals and plants were described and depicted after life. In the following centuries research into the natural world deepened and the art to capture its miracles came close to perfection. During this presentation and workshop in Artis Library you will have the opportunity to see and discuss some of the most beautiful examples of the representation of nature, as discovered and observed by artists and scientists.

This workshop will be led by Hans Mulder (1961), who is keeper of Artis Library, and curator for natural history at the Library of the University of Amsterdam. He teaches and publishes on natural history and the history of the book. Mulder co-edited the facsimile of Maria Sybilla Merian's *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* (2016) and wrote *De ontdekking van de natuur* ("*The Discovery of Nature*", 2021), for which publication he received recently the prestigious Jan Wolkersprijs for the best book on nature in the Netherlands.