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Painting as ‘Reall Performance’ in Rembrandt’s Studio

Thijs Weststeijn

C13

C13.P1

The painter Arnold Houbraken, known especially for his biographies of artists of the Dutch Golden Age (published 1718–21), tells a curious story about Rembrandt.¹ In the early 1650s, a young Silesian artist named Michael Willmann apparently decided, rather than going Italy to further his education, to remain in Amsterdam to hear Rembrandt’s ‘speeches’ (*Redenvoeringen*).² This picture of the master as deliverer of valuable discourses on painting raises a set of questions about Rembrandt in particular and Dutch writings on the visual arts more broadly.

Rembrandt left no treatise or theoretical writings. Traditionally, he has been seen as a rebel without regard for the classics, who used books merely as a support for the poses of his mistress, Hendrickje Stoffels.³ In 1675 Joachim von Sandrart wrote that Rembrandt ‘was only able to read a little Dutch’; he merely painted ‘simple things that one does not have to think much about’.⁴ Rembrandt’s surviving paintings do not bear out this statement, but his few extant letters and inscriptions on drawings, including one in clumsy Latin, do cast doubt on his literacy. Indeed, he may have known stories from the Bible chiefly from sermons or from pious friends, like the poet Jeremias de Decker. Many of his fellow artists were more literate, as active members of Chambers of Rhetoric or possibly, in the case of Jacob van Ruysdael, as a university student.⁵ Painters also lent each other their books: Rembrandt’s first teacher, Jacob van Swanenburg, for example,

¹ This chapter uses three abbreviations: TPA: Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients: De pictura veterum, According to the English Translation (1638)*, *The Painting of the Ancients*, ed. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). SKDO: Franciscus Junius, *De schilder-konst der oude* (Middelburg: Roman, 1641). IHSS: Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilder-konst: anders de zichtbaere werelt* (Rotterdam: Van Hoogstraten, 1678).

² Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburg der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam: Houbraken, 1718–21), vol. 2, p. 233.

³ Gerard Brom, *Schilderkunst en litteratuur in de 16e en 17e eeuw* (Utrecht & Antwerp: Spectrum, 1957), p. 245.

⁴ Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (Nuremberg: Sandrart & Merian, 1675–9) vol. 1, ch. 2, part 3, p. 326.

⁵ Brom, p. 180.

consulted some of the 160 books of his colleague Coenraet van Schilperoot.⁶ Rembrandt’s second master, Pieter Lastman, owned about the same number of volumes—still far behind Rubens’s five hundred books (and Amsterdam patri- cians such as Adriaen Pauw, who owned sixteen thousand volumes).⁷ In any case, books were easy to come by in the most lettered area in Europe; around 1650, half of all European books were printed in Amsterdam. After the ambitious education reforms of 1625, ancient authors were available in simple Dutch editions.⁸ Public libraries, such as the one in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, made them all the more easily accessible.

C13.P2 During his formative years in Leiden, Rembrandt seems to have sought to engage with the Dutch world of humanism. He had enrolled at the university and his early work had not gone unnoticed by his intellectual contemporaries, such as Theodorus Schrevelius, headmaster of Leiden’s Latin school, the poet Constantijn Huygens, who visited his studio, and the antiquarian Petrus Scriverius, who owned two of his paintings.⁹ He was also asked to illustrate books by luminaries such as Jan Six and Menasseh ben Israel. At the same time his studio attracted pupils with literary leanings: Willem Drost was the son of a bookseller; Gerbrand van den Eeckhout became a prolific painter-poet; Heyman Dullaert exchanged the brush for the pen; Samuel van Hoogstraten wrote poetry, drama, and even some of the first Dutch novels.¹⁰ When, around 1700, Gerard de Lairese, who had been an early admirer of Rembrandt’s work, complained that ‘nowadays’ painters no longer knew stories from reading but only through prints, he may have been highlighting a contrast with the first half of the century.¹¹

C13.P3 What, then, might Rembrandt have said in the ‘speeches’ Michael Willman stayed in Amsterdam to hear? What kinds of insights did the master share with his students? In what ways was the studio a place of criticism? This essay aims to reconstruct art criticism in and around Rembrandt’s studio by exploring two texts that overlap in different ways with his circle of pupils and colleagues. The first is Franciscus Junius’s treatise *The Painting of the Ancients*, published in English in 1639 and in Dutch in 1641. This was the most extensive compilation to date of classical sources relevant to the visual arts; according to a contemporary, it should be ‘read again and again by all propagators of the universal arts; aye (because of the enormous benefits that it contains) an alert painter should have it close at

⁶ Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt’s Reading: The Artist’s Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), p. 63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71. ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

⁹ Ernst van de Wetering, ‘Rembrandt’s Beginnings—an Essay’, in *The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt* (Amsterdam: Rembrandthuis, 2001), pp. 22–57 (p. 29).

¹⁰ Thijs Weststeijn, ‘Samuel van Hoogstraten: The First Dutch Novelist?’, in Thijs Weststeijn (ed.), *The Universal Art of Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), Painter, Writer, and Courtier* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 147–68.

¹¹ Gerard de Lairese, *Het groot schilderboek* (Haarlem: Desbordes, 1712), p. 124.

hand at all times'.¹² Early critics of Rembrandt's work, such as Von Sandrart and Huygens, may have met Junius and were well acquainted with his book.¹³ The second is Samuel van Hoogstraten's treatise on painting, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst* (1678). Van Hoogstraten took Junius's text as the main source for his own work; indeed, in 1642, when he arrived in Amsterdam to study with Rembrandt, Junius's book had just been published and was likely a topic of much debate. But in addition to borrowing material from Junius, Van Hoogstraten took a more practical approach, documenting studio activities and discussions among Rembrandt's pupils.¹⁴

C13.P4

Taken together, these two texts, one theoretical and one more pragmatic, help to develop a fuller picture of how art was discussed and practised in and around Rembrandt's studio. Criticism, or what Ernst Gombrich famously called the 'beholder's share', played an essential role in artistic practices and ideas in Rembrandt's circle. As Junius and Van Hoogstraten make clear, artists as well as viewers were encouraged to approach visual artworks as if they were experiencing real events. The viewer's imaginative involvement was thus a constitutive element of the artistic experience. As ancient theories of ekphrasis and emotional involvement were put to painterly practice, the role of the beholder came to be similar to that of critic of drama or poetry, who brings his knowledge and expectation of narrative to bear on works of art.

C13.S1

'Acted before Their Eyes': Franciscus Junius and the Ideal of Presence

C13.P5

In *The Painting of the Ancients*, Franciscus Junius brings together remarks on literature and rhetoric from antiquity in order to reconstruct the ancient theory of the visual arts. Drawing on the ancient analogy between painting and narrative, his goal was 'to collect the rules, which were, so to say, separated from their own corpus and scattered diffusely... and to arrange the pieces to arrive at the contours of true art'.¹⁵ He adapted the ideas, structural principles, and terminology from rhetorical theory to the visual arts, often by simply changing the word 'orator' to 'painter'. In so doing, he stresses the affinities between painting and literature: 'who... will take it upon himself to disparage this work, because by means of slight verbal change, I have applied passages of Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian from oratory and the art of poetry to the visual arts? Surely such a

¹² Willem Goeree, *Inleyding tot de praktyk der algemeene schilderconst* (Amsterdam: Goeree, 1697), p. 56.

¹³ Von Sandrart, vol. 2, ch. 3, p. 345. Huygens owned a copy of Junius's treatise; on a meeting with Junius, see I. Q. van Regteren Altena, *Jacques de Gheyn, Three Generations* (The Hague: Kluwer, 1983), vol. 1, p. 126.

¹⁴ IHSS, pp. 11–12, 95, 181. ¹⁵ TPA, p. 319.

person has little comprehension of the close affinity which joins these arts one to another.’¹⁶

C13.P6

The ancient theorists of rhetoric themselves often compared their art to the visual arts to elucidate their views. But Junius takes their arguments further: to him, painting fulfils the aims of rhetoric better than rhetoric itself. As actions are more eloquent than words, the painter, who does not narrate but shows, will ultimately be more persuasive: ‘the things represented by Painters as if they were as yet adoin before our eyes, are propounded by Orators as done already.’¹⁷ This is a recurring thought in his treatise: the similarities of the visual and the literary arts rest fully on the idea that both kinds of activities are essentially products of the imagination and appeal to their public’s powers of imagination. Junius develops a theory of artistic experience as being transported into a virtual reality, a theory heavily dependent on the writings of Philostratus the Elder, which had not previously been used by art theorists.

C13.P7

From Philostratus, Junius takes the idea that the artists should become present at the imagined narrative. Before putting brush to the canvas, they need to evoke the scene they want to depict in the mind’s eye as a narrative acted out in front of them: ‘they doe first of all passe over every circumstance of the matter in hand, considering it seriously, as if they were present at the doing, or saw it acted before their eyes.’ He concludes that for this form of immersion in another reality, the main point is ‘to have a true feeling of [works of art], rightly to conceive the true images (*verbeeldingen*) of things, and to be mooved with them, as if they were rather true than imagined’.¹⁸

C13.P8

In the context of his notion that the making of a work of art is a ‘becoming present’ in another reality, Junius gives several descriptions of the way in which the painter or writer becomes wholly absorbed in the image he conjures up in his mind’s eye. He dwells on Ovid’s account of Phaethon’s fall from his father’s chariot and states that it is so lifelike because the poet has ‘made himself present’ in the events he describes:

C13.P9

would you not thinke then that the Poet stepping with Phaeton upon the waggon hath noted from the beginning to the end every particular accident . . . neither could he ever have conceived the least shadow of this dangerous enterprise, if he had not been as if it were present with the unfortunate youth.¹⁹

C13.P10

The Dutch edition of Junius’s book is even more specific about his theoretical ideal that painters and writers alike become present in the scenes they portray, stating that the artist should ‘reconstruct the matter with his imagination’ (*door ‘t verbeelden t’achter haelen*) in order to ‘make himself present at the scene, in a

¹⁶ TPA, p. 358.

¹⁷ TPA, p. 50; cf. SKDO, p. 42.

¹⁸ TPA, p. 57; cf. SKDO, p. 50.

¹⁹ TPA, p. 56.

manner of speaking' (*dat hy sich selven aldaer in maniere van spreken, ver-teghenwoordighet hadde*).²⁰ This ideal of *praemeditatio*, involving empathy with the characters and a total evocation of the narrative 'to the mind's eye', is central to what Van Hoogstraten takes from Junius's theory. This evocation entails the internalization of a complete choreography of the characters as if on a stage. Van Hoogstraten advises his pupils: 'Let us now open the princely Theatre... draw the curtain within ourselves, and first depict the historical action in our minds.'²¹ He praises painters who, 'accustoming their thoughts in such a manner', first convey the scenes they want to depict fully to the mind's eye and see them 'as if they were present (*tegenwoordich*), painted in thought-images'.²²

C13.P11

The idea that, in the making of art, the painter makes himself present at the scene he wishes to evoke leads Junius to conclude that the artwork itself fades away in the ultimate artistic experience, and artist and viewers feel as if they are witnesses to the events themselves: 'that wee should not onely goe with our eyes over the severall figures represented in the worke, but [that] we should likewise suffer our mind to enter into a lively consideration of what wee see expressed; not otherwise than *if wee were present, and saw not the counterfeited image but the reall performance of the thing*' (italics mine).²³ Junius explores how an ancient painting of warfare appeals to the viewers' imagination: 'at the mere sight of this scene, their thoughts are stimulated so vigorously that with a little use of their imagination they will see the entire state of the battle before them.'²⁴ In a successful work, the artist will be able to convey his own eyewitness experience to the spectator:

C13.P12

for as the Artificers that doe goe about their workes filled with an imagination of the presence of things, leave in their workes a certaine spirit drawne and derived out of the contemplation of things present; so is it not possible but that same spirit transfused into their workes, should likewise prevaile with the spectatours, working in them the same impression of the presence of things that was in the Artificers themselves.²⁵

C13.P13

Junius's central notion is that the artwork evokes a mental image (his original term, in Greek, is *phantasia*).²⁶ When the art object fades away in the experience of the viewer, he reacts as if he is immersed in a synaesthetic experience in which movement, sound, and even smell are conveyed. Junius repeats an ancient anecdote about the artist Theon who had a trumpet sounded at the unveiling of his painting of a soldier. It illustrates how image and sound could ideally be combined

²⁰ SKDO, p. 49. ²¹ IHSS, p. 178. ²² Ibid. ²³ TPA, p. 300; SKDO, p. 335.

²⁴ '[H]aere gedachten worden dan al wederom op't bloote ghesicht deses tafereels soo krachtighlick gaende ghemaect, datse sich de gantsche gheleghenheyd van sulcken ghevecht door een ghemackelicke verbeeldinge nae 't leven voor stellen.' SKDO, p. 340.

²⁵ TPA, pp. 63–4; SKDO, p. 51. ²⁶ TPA, p. 58n82.

to evoke an even more persuasive virtual reality. Such a synaesthetic ideal of art is central to the approach of Philostratus, who waxes lyrical on a depiction of a garden, asking: ‘Do you notice something of the fragrance of the garden, or are your senses numbed?’ And about an image of horses: ‘They whinny fast, nostrils raised, or do you not hear the painting?’²⁷ Van Hoogstraten repeats Philostratus’ astonishment ‘that art brings forth so much that from the flared nostrils [of these horses], from their pressed-down ears and taut limbs, one perceives their keen desire to flee, even though one knows that they are motionless’.²⁸

C13.P14 This synaesthetic ideal helps to understand reactions to the work of Rembrandt, such as a description by his first biographer, Houbraken, regarding a portrait that was ‘so artfully and forcefully elaborated that . . . the head appeared to protrude from it and speak to the beholders.’²⁹ A similar portrait of a woman was painted such that ‘her eyes appeared to gaze at every viewer’, writes De Lairese: ‘The reason for this is that . . . such images were so profoundly congruent with human forms that they appeared to be not painted but to be made of flesh and blood, aye as moving figures.’³⁰ Alluding to the ideal of the ‘presence’ of the depicted figures, he quotes Junius literally in stating that the work should be made such that the figures ‘come forward with more power, and seem to meet the spectator’s eyes outside the picture plane’.³¹

C13.P15 This notion of ‘reall performance’ that seems to lie at the heart of the ideal of *ut pictura poesis* as formulated in Rembrandt’s day prompts a further analysis of how Junius’s theory may have been put into practice.

C13.S2

Words and Gestures in the Studio

C13.P16

There are several indications that the ideal of mentally ‘making oneself present’ in the painterly narrative was applied in practical ways in Rembrandt’s studio. As the creation of the mental image was compared to the process of stage-directing, and the moment of looking at art was compared to an immersion in a virtual reality,

²⁷ Philostratus, *Eikones* 307.7, 307.30; 345.5; 298.3; 301.27.

²⁸ ‘[D]at de konst zoo veel te weeg brengt, dat men uit [de] . . . rond gefronste neusgaten, uit haere nedergedrukte ooren, en samen gedrongen ledematen een gereede begeerte bespeurt om’t aen’t loopen te stellen, schoon men weet dat ze onbeweeglijk zijn.’ IHSS, p. 167.

²⁹ ‘[K]ragtig uitgewerkt . . . ja het hoofd scheen uit het stuk te steken, en de aanschouwers aan te spreken.’ Houbraken, vol. 1, p. 269.

³⁰ ‘[H]aare oogen ieder aanschouwer scheenen aan en na te zien’; ‘De reden daar van is, dat deze . . . Beeltenissen zodanig doorwrocht en gelykvormig met de menschelyke gedaantens over een kwaamen, dat zy niet als geschilderd, maar vleesch en bloed, ja als beweegende beelden, vertoonden.’ De Lairese, vol. 1, p. 236.

³¹ ‘[M]et meerder kracht mogt uitsteeken, en d’oogen der aanschouwers zelfs ook buiten het tafereel zoude schynen t’ontmoeten.’ Ibid., vol. 2, 158. I prefer to explore Junius’s term ‘reall performance’ above using the term ‘agency’ that has been so popular term in recent historiography; cf. Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Munich and Leiden: De Gruyter, 2015).

painters were advised to read stories during the working process, recite them, and even, for greater empathy with the figures, accompany their words with the appropriate gestures and motions.

C13.P17

As earlier scholarship has pointed out, various drawings made in Rembrandt's studio suggest that attending to narrative was part of his teaching practice. Some represent rarely depicted moments from ancient history that were described and illustrated in books he owned.³² Other drawings of unusual biblical subjects, some with corrections by Rembrandt (such as Constantijn van Renesse's *David and the Prophet Gad*), suggest that the master had his pupils think of new compositions on the basis of texts.³³ These drawings do not immediately reveal how exactly the pursuit of reading was transformed into creative draughtsmanship. Besides pupils being given texts to peruse, it is possible that someone read aloud to them during the working process. Using books in this way may have been in emulation of Rubens who reportedly, while working, 'useth to have some good historian or Poet read to him, which is rare in men of his profession, yet absolutely necessary'.³⁴ For similar reasons, one of Rembrandt's most successful pupils, Govaert Flinck, seems to have invited to his studio 'men of understanding and scholarship in particular, whose speeches he (although he himself was unlettered) liked to hear'.³⁵ It must have been Flinck's workshop where the famous Joost van den Vondel, the Dutch 'Prince of Poets', learned to speak 'as a painter about painting'.³⁶

C13.P18

It is possible that Rembrandt's 'speeches' heard by Michael Willmann should be interpreted in this same light: art lovers such as Huygens, armed with the ancient learning collected by Junius, would join ambitious painters in their civil conversations about art. As Herman Roodenburg has argued, these visits could be events of a performative nature in which the codes of conversation were acted out.³⁷ Codes of civility were laid down in texts such as Van Hoogstraten's *Den eerlyken jongeling* (The Honest Youth, 1631) and Huygens's *Een wijs hoveling* (A Prudent Courtier, 1625). Both authors emphasize training in draughtsmanship to support bookish knowledge. This supports the claim that the ideal studio conversation discussed concrete matters of painting practice using the terms and concepts of ancient scholarship. It is easy to imagine visitors leafing through a text of historical narrative, or through Junius's book, trying to complement the works in Rembrandt's studio with relevant words.

³² Golahny points out, for instance, editions of Flavius Josephus and Livy with woodcuts by Tobias Stimmer. Golahny, pp. 164–80.

³³ Peter Schatborn (ed.), *Bij Rembrandt in de leer* (Amsterdam: Rembrandthuis, 1984), pp. 38–43, 75.

³⁴ Henry Peacham, *Peacham's Compleat Gentleman, 1634* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), p. 110.

³⁵ '[L]uiden van verstand en kennisse, die hy gaarne (schoon hy ongelettert was) hoorde redenvoeren.' Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 23.

³⁶ '[A]ls een schilder van't schilderen spreekt.' Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 54.

³⁷ Herman Roodenburg, 'Visiting Vermeer: Performing Civility', in *In His Milieu: Essays in Memory of John Michael Montias*, ed. Amy Golahny, Mia Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 385–94.

C13.P19 Speech and gestures were central to Van Hoogstraten’s own practice of teaching art, as is revealed by Houbraken who learned the trade in his studio. The biographer writes that Van Hoogstraten’s ‘lessons were always accompanied with examples...his expressions were understandable, and when his sayings were not understood immediately, he was patient to point the matter out with gestures’.³⁸ Reading aloud gave voice to the figures in the students’ drawings:

C13.P20 It so happened that one of his disciples showed him a sketch of a composition (which everyone had to do each week), but had given little attention to the proper movements of the figures and just set them down haphazardly. Soon came the pronouncement, ‘Read the text’. And then the question, ‘Is that supposed to be the figure who is speaking that?’ If the answer was yes, then his reply was usually: ‘Imagine that I am that other Person to whom you must say that and say it to me.’ If the pupil then gave the speech according to the letter of the Text, without expression and with his hands in his pockets, [Van Hoogstraten]...would immediately get up from his place...saying, ‘Now I shall show you how it is done. Pay attention to the gestures, the stance, and the posture of my body as I speak.’³⁹

C13.P21 Drawing narratives was apparently supported by declamation including appropriate diction, facial expression, and gestures. Thus the synaesthetic ideal of ancient art was put into practice in Van Hoogstraten’s teaching, which involved movement and voice—a practice that may have been rooted in Rembrandt’s ‘speeches’ heard by Willmann. There are, in fact, more indications that painters took to heart the ideal of approaching painting as if it were the ‘reall performance of the thing’.

C13.S3

Theatre in the Studio

C13.P22 We may first of all repeat Van Hoogstraten’s metaphor that before starting on a composition, a painter needs to think out the event’s choreography: ‘Let us now open the princely Theatre... draw the curtain within ourselves, and first depict the

³⁸ ‘[Z]yn onderrigtingen gingen altyt met voorbeelden verzelt, ... en zyne uitdrukkingen waren verstaanbaar, en zoo zyn zeggen noch met den eersten niet wierd begrepen, nam hy gedult om het door gebaarden te beduiden.’ Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 163.

³⁹ ‘t Is gebeurt dat een van zyn Discipelen de schets van zyn ordonantie (gelyk ieder alle week doen moest) aan hem vertoonde, maar weinig acht gegeven had op de rechte werkinge der beelden, die hy zoo maar had neergesteld. Straks was het zeggen, “Lees den Text;” en gevraagd, “Wil dat nu het Beeld wezen dat zulks zeit?” antwoordde zy dan Ja, zoo was gemeenlyk zyn zegge: “Verbeeld u eens dat ik die andere Persoon ben, daar gy zulks tegen moet zeggen; zeg het tegens my.” Als zy dan de reden volgens de letter van den Text, zonder aandoeninge, met de handen in de zak, ... uitspraken, ... stond [hij] met een van zyn plaats op: ... zeggende: “Nu zal ik het u voordoen, let op de Gebaarden, wyze van staan, of buiging des lichaams, als ik spreek”.’ Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 163.

historical action in our minds.’ This metaphor may have been inspired by Junius’s theory of empathy; it may also reflect a practice first developed in Rembrandt’s studio.

C13.P23

Scholars have repeatedly speculated about plays performed in the studio as the basis for pictorial narratives in Rembrandt’s circle.⁴⁰ In fact it is not easy to determine Rembrandt’s relation to the Amsterdam theatre. The master surely made sketches of Vondel’s popular play *Gijsbrecht van Amstel*; his etching of *Medea* resembles an actual stage-setting; the painting *The Sacrifice of Abraham* resembles a play by Theodorus Beza; and his red-blooded *Blinding of Samson* may echo Julius Caesar Scaliger’s theory of drama, which mentioned ‘the putting out of eyes’ as a subject fit for tragedy.⁴¹ What is more, Dutch playwrights realized that paintings responded to the Aristotelian ideal of ‘unity of action’ in an exemplary way. Vondel, for instance, praised a painting by Jan Pynas that showed the moment when Joseph’s parents, upon seeing his bloody clothes, conclude that he is dead.⁴² The tradition of art theory mentions this scene as an example of a sudden emotional outburst; the ‘dramatic’ passion may have made it a subject for drawings in Rembrandt’s studio.⁴³

C13.P24

The performance of plays may have been a well-known practice to those of Rembrandt’s pupils who had had formal education before entering the studio, as acting was a regular assignment at Latin school.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether Rembrandt adopted acting as a teaching method in his workshop, but surely Van Hoogstraten did so (if we may believe Houbraken):

C13.P25

In order to give his pupils a firmer impression of the gestures and motions that ought to accompany an artful oration, and accustom them more to these things, he chose the most able of his disciples (. . . as he could build a complete theatre in his spacious attic) and gave each of them a role in a play of his own or by another author: and they were allowed to invite their parents and good acquaintances as public.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Peter Schatborn, *Dutch Figure Drawings from the Seventeenth Century* (Amsterdam/The Hague: Rijksmuseum, 1981), p. 12; Brusati, pp. 86–91.

⁴¹ Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World; Samuel van Hoogstraten’s Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 214–15.

⁴² Houbraken, vol. 1, p. 215.

⁴³ Gian Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’arte de la pittura* (Milan: Pontio, 1584), vol. 2, fol. 166. For this scene in Rembrandt’s circle, see Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School* (New York: Abaris, 1979–92), p. 2685.

⁴⁴ Wilfried Barner, *Barockrhetorik: Untersuchungen zu ihren geschichtlichen Grundlagen* (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1970), pp. 302–3.

⁴⁵ ‘Om van deze gebaarden, en roeringen die een Konstige Redenvoeringe behoorden te verzellen, zyne Leerlingen een vaster indruk te geven, en zig daar aan meerder te doen gewennen; koos hy de bekwaamste van zyne Discipelen uit (. . . daar hy op de ruime zolderingen gelegenheit had van een volkomen Tooneel op te slaan) en gaf hun yder een Rol van zyne, of een’s anders Tooneelstuk te spelen: tot het welke zy dan vermochten hunne Ouders en goede bekenden te noodigen.’ Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 163.

- C13.P26 Not only does Van Hoogstraten’s treatise reveal his knowledge of Vondel’s theatre and even his poetical theory, a number of plays by his own hand are extant too.⁴⁶ Although the painter’s long-winded drama *Dieryk en Dorothé* (1666) was probably not intended for performing, a shorter piece, *Roomsche Paulina* (1660), was developed according to the doctrine of unity of place, time, and action that was fashionable on the stage. Van Hoogstraten’s students may have taken part, according to his advice that ‘when you have two or three of your disciples to help you, let them try to perform the action of the main group of figures that you want to depict. Many great masters have taken recourse to such small-scale plays.’⁴⁷
- C13.P27 Such ‘great masters’ may have included his teacher, Rembrandt, who sketched his own face in different expressions.⁴⁸ Van Hoogstraten states that, before a painter can express emotions on canvas, he must have been through them first. One way of achieving this is to act them out in front of a mirror:
- C13.P28 If one wants to gain honour in this noblest area of art, one must transform oneself wholly into an actor. It is not enough to show [emotions] weakly in a story; Demosthenes was no less learned than others when the people turned their backs on him in disgust: but after Satyrus had recited verses by Euripides and Sophocles to him with better diction and more graceful movements, and he had learnt . . . to mimic the actor precisely, after that, I say, people listened to him as an oracle of rhetoric. You will derive the same benefit from acting out the passions you have in mind, chiefly in front of a mirror, so as to be actor and spectator at the same time.⁴⁹
- C13.P29 Van Hoogstraten advises pupils to study their own feelings: ‘Thus you should take comfort in art if you are afflicted by grief, and if something agreeable happens to you; this is the time to observe the inner feelings and outward movements these events cause.’⁵⁰ Their classical example should be the ancient actor Polus, who dug up the bones of his dead son in preparing the role of Electra.

⁴⁶ IHSS, pp. 25, 145, 282.

⁴⁷ ‘[Z]oo’t u gebeuren mach twee of drie uwer gezellen tot hulp te hebben, laet hun eens een proef doen, ofze de voornaemste groep van de daedt, die gy wilt uitbeelden, eens te zamen vertoonen kunnen. Zoodanich een kamerspel hebben veel groote meesters te hulp genomen.’ IHSS, p. 191.

⁴⁸ Weststeijn, *Visible World*, pp. 183–5.

⁴⁹ ‘Wilmen nu eer inleggen in dit alleredelste deel der konst, zoo moetmen zich zelven geheel in een toneelspeeler hervormen. Ten is niet genoeg, datmen flaeuwelijk in een Historie kenbaer make, Demosthenes was niet ongeleerder als anders, toen hem het volk walgelijk den rug toe keerde: maer sedert Satyrus hem Euripides en Sopohokles vaerzen met beeter toonen en bevallijker bewegingen had voorgezeyt, en hy hem zelven . . . geheel den komediant leeren nabootsen hadde, sedert, zeg ik, hoorde men hem als een orakel der welsprektheit. Dezelve baet zalmen ook in’t uitbeelden van diens hartstochten, die gy voorhebt, bevinden, voornaemlijk voor een spiegel, om te gelijk vertooner en aenschouwer te zijn.’ IHSS, pp. 109–10.

⁵⁰ ‘Zoo moogt gy ook, als u eenigen druk overkomen is, u met de konst troosten, en als u iets behaeglijx voorkomt, zoo is’t tijdt, dat gy aenmerkt wat innerlijke gevoeligheden en uiterlijke bewegingen deeze lijdingen veroorzaken.’ IHSS, p. 109.

C13.P30 These theatrical comments put Houbraken's remarks about Rembrandt's pupils in perspective. He knows a painting by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, presenting Christ among the scholars in the temple, 'in whose features, their diligence in teaching and astonishment about the Lord Christ's answers were depicted so naturally, that *one seemed to see what they wished to say to each other*' (italics mine).⁵¹ Likewise in Rembrandt's own etchings: 'the motions of the mind concerning all kinds of events are expressed so artfully and clearly, that it is astonishing. Anger, hatred, sadness, gladness and so forth, everything is depicted so naturally that, in those strokes, one can read what everyone wants to say.'⁵²

C13.P31 Even if we cannot conclude that the practice of fully fledged stage-acting advised by Van Hoogstraten was common, archival evidence and extant drawings suggest that painters, regular pupils, and learned art-lovers convened to draw from the life variations of the same scene.⁵³ In connection to this practice, the notion of approaching art as 'reall performance' merits attention. A single group of figures was sometimes drawn from different angles. As Nigel Konstam has suggested, these drawings were not made after a group of pupils modelling for each other, but from smaller-than-life-size dolls.⁵⁴ Apparently, wax figurines helped pupils in 'turning their [scenes] and altering them in numerous ways' in their minds, in Van Hoogstraten's words, a practice that was rooted in the Italian tradition.⁵⁵ Van Hoogstraten concludes that in teaching, this kind of staging should be complemented by sketching corrections directly on the pupils' drawings. Practising painting in terms of 'reall performance' could apparently be a collaborative effort, with some reading aloud, others acting out various roles, composing model figures in a spatial choreography, or making drawings, which the teacher would correct on the basis of the original text.

C13.P32 Another practice suggests that viewers were, in turn, expected to anticipate these performative elements of painting: artworks were often hung behind curtains, as is demonstrated in various images depicting art collections.⁵⁶ Although

⁵¹ '[I]n welker wezenstrekken de yver in 't onderwyzen, en de verwondering over de antwoorden van den Heere Christus, zoo natuurlyk verbeelt was, dat men scheen te zien wat zy tegens malkander wilden zeggen.' Houbraken, vol. 2, p. 100.

⁵² '[W]aar in de driften van't gemoet ontrent allerhande voorvallen zoo konstig en duidelyk zig in de wezenstrekken vertoonen dat het te verwonderen is. Toren, haat, droefheit, blytschap, en zoo voort, alles staat zoo natuurlyk afgebeelt datmen uit de pentrekken lezen kan wat elk zeggen wil.' Ibid., vol. 1, p. 270.

⁵³ Cf. Ben Broos, 'Een nieuwe aanwinst. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Isaak en Rebecca, 1663', *Mauritshuis Cahier*, 1 (1989), 5–32 (pp. 11, 18).

⁵⁴ Nigel Konstam, 'Rembrandt's Use of Models and Mirrors', *The Burlington Magazine*, 119 (1977), 94–103.

⁵⁵ IHSS, p. 191; Jan Blanc, 'Works in Progress: Painting and Modelling in Seventeenth-Century Holland', *Art History*, 39 (2016), 234–53.

⁵⁶ Some examples are: Frans Francken, Jr, *Sebastiaan Leerse in His Gallery* (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten); Willem van Haecht, *The Picture Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (Antwerp, Rubenshuis). There are furthermore works such as Gabriel Metsu, *Woman Reading a Letter* (Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland), in which someone in the background is drawing a curtain to briefly glance a painting, and *trompe-l'oeils* in which a curtain is suggested, such as Rembrandt's *Holy Family* (Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen) and Gerard Houckgeest, *Interior of the Oude Kerk, Delft*

PAINTING AS ‘REALL PERFORMANCE’ IN REMBRANDT’S STUDIO 217

the primary reason was to protect these works from dust, it is also possible that the viewer was told part of the story in front of a covered painting. When the curtain was drawn, the illusion that the action depicted had been in progress for some time would be strengthened; the viewer felt confronted with a split second in a narrative sequence (what Van Hoogstraten called an *oogenblikkige beweeging*, or ‘instantaneous movement’).⁵⁷ Junius’s classical theory could legitimize this practice, pointing at the famous contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius (when Zeuxis goes to draw the curtain covering his rival’s work, to find that the curtain is the painting). A clarion might be sounded at this moment of revelation. Junius recounts how Theon, ‘having made the picture of an armed man who seemed to runne most furiously on his enemies that depopulated the country round about, he did thinke it good not to propound the picture before he had provided a trumpetter to sound an alarme somewhere hard by’,⁵⁸ at the same time as ‘starting to draw the curtain that kept the work concealed’.⁵⁹ Depictions of painter’s studios suggest that painters had musical instruments that could be used in this way; Rembrandt also owned a couple of wind instruments.⁶⁰

C13.P33

Junius’s theory explicates that although the artwork necessarily depicts a single moment, a skilfully made image summons up the entire narrative to the mind’s eye. In fact, he thinks that the very focus on one affectively charged moment has the *greater* power to transpose the viewer to a complex narrative situation: ‘Our outer senses need present only the beginning of a story to our mind, and our active wit will soon readily comprehend the entire story, as a sequence of events.’⁶¹ Sudden revelation was supposed to contribute to the impact of the image, as becomes clear from accounts of visits to art collections. No one less than Nicolas Poussin advises art lovers that to achieve the most satisfying effect, one should draw aside the paintings’ covers one at a time.⁶² Analogously, Huygens writes that if a viewer is shown a painting of Medusa that is normally kept behind a curtain, ‘he will be suddenly stricken with terror, but even so he will take pleasure in its dreadfulness because it is lifelike and refined’.⁶³

(Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Cf. Wolfgang Kemp, *Rembrandt, die Heilige Familie oder die Kunst, einen Vorhang zu liften* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1986); and Christopher Heuer, ‘Picture Curtains and the Dutch Church Interior, c. 1650; Framing Revelation in the Golden Age’, *Chicago Art Journal*, 7 (1997) 15–34.

⁵⁷ Weststeijn, *Visible World*, p. 185. ⁵⁸ TPA, p. 303–4.

⁵⁹ ‘[A]lsmen de gordijne die ’t stuck bedeckt hield beghost te verschuyven.’ SKDO, p. 341.

⁶⁰ See the inventory of his insolvent estate (Cessio Bonorum, 25–6 July 1656, fol. 37^r): <http://remdoc.huygens.knaw.nl/#/document/remdoc/e12727>.

⁶¹ ‘Onse uytellicke sinnen behoeven slechts het beghinsel eenigher gheschiedenissen aen ons ghemoed aen te dienen, en strecks sal ons werckende hoofd de gantsche gheschiedenis, gelijkse uyt veele en vast aen een gheschaeckelde omstandigheden bestaet, ... vaerdighlick beseffen.’ SKDO, p. 340.

⁶² Nicolas Poussin, *Correspondence*, ed. Charles Jouanny (Paris: Société de l’histoire de l’art française, 1911), p. 384.

⁶³ ‘[U]t subito terrore percussum spectatorem (velari nempe tabella solet) ipsa tamen rei diritate, quod vivida venustaque, delectet.’ Constantijn Huygens, *Fragment eener autobiografie*, ed. J. A. Worp (s.l., s.a.), p. 73.

C13.P34

These peculiarities of the studio, the use of small figures to aid the ‘premediation’ of painterly narratives and the hanging of works behind curtains, suggest that the ancient ideal of affective involvement was taken seriously. Artists tried to ‘make themselves present’ in the situation they wanted to depict: since painting was even better than poetry able to conjure up things ‘as if they were as yet adorning before our eyes’, these experiments were by no means trivial, but contributed to the status of painting among the liberal arts, on a par with rhetoric and drama.

C13.S4

Conclusion

C13.P35

The civil conversation that workshop visits required, called for a performance by the learned viewers themselves. Junius therefore emphasizes repeatedly that not only artists, but also art lovers must train their powers of imagination.⁶⁴ To judge paintings adequately, viewers should compare them not to other works of art but to the images stored in their minds: ‘it is furthermore required, that all those who mean to enter into a judicious consideration of matters of art, must by the means of these Images accustom their mind to such a lively representation of what they see expressed in the picture, as if they saw *the things themselves and not their resemblance onely*’ (italics mine).⁶⁵ Just as the experience of making art requires the artist to ‘make himself present’ in the narrative, so the experience of looking at art requires the viewer to take part in the ‘real performance’ of the events. Similar to a critic of literature, the viewer brings his knowledge and expectation of narrative to bear on a work of art; the artist, for his part, must ensure that the immersion in the work’s reality rivals that of theatre stage. Criticism, in short, or an acknowledgement of the ‘beholder’s share’ in the artistic experience, is essential to understand practices and theories in Rembrandt’s circle.

⁶⁴ SKDO, p. 52.

⁶⁵ TPA, p. 303.