

Art and Immigration

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[J A A P H A R S K A M P]

Painters should go to the Dutch School to learn the art of Painting, as they would to a Grammar School to learn Languages.
Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1781

When the Merchant Adventurers set up their headquarters in Bruges in 1344, it marked the beginning of a long period of commercial, intellectual and artistic interactions between the Low Countries and Britain. Bruges had become a staple for merchandise sent from every part of the world, the centre of European commerce and finance. In order to defend their interests, foreign merchants united in 'Hansen', including the powerful 'Flemish Hanse of London'. Contacts were intense and beneficial. From 1463 to 1469, for example, William Caxton (ca. 1421-1491) was living in the city as governor of the Merchant Adventurers. He learned the art of printing in Flanders and on his return installed the first printing press near Westminster Abbey in 1476. The early history of English printing is identified with Caxton and hence with Flanders.

By 1460 Antwerp was one of the largest cities in Europe with a total population of some 100,000 citizens. Of those inhabitants, just twenty were recorded as being painters. A century later, as many as three hundred master painters in the city were registered as members of the Guild of St Luke. Antwerp had grown into the most important trading centre in Western Europe. Its success was based on its port and wool market. In parallel with its economic prosperity, there developed an astonishing cultural and intellectual activity in the city. By the sixteenth century both art and printing had reached unparalleled levels of perfection. Four famous names associated with the history of early English Bibles - William Tyndale, George Joye, Miles Coverdale and John Rogers - are all connected to the city of Antwerp and its printers. The publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* was very much a Flemish affair, with support from Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Cosmopolitan humanism created a mental atmosphere that proved highly conducive to the pursuit of art and science. Antwerp became the most vibrant cultural city in Europe. If the arts were initially stimulated by commissions from the Church and gentry, increasingly works of art were created 'on spec', in oth-

Nicolas Hilliard (after Levina Teerlinc),
Portrait Miniature of Lady Hudson, 1575.
Executed on ivory.
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



er words, they were produced for sale on the open market. A sophisticated commercial infrastructure gave birth to the so-called *panden* which were specialized sales halls for the arts. That structure made it possible to sell works of art directly to the customer, either at home or abroad. The Guild of St Luke took a pragmatic approach to this commercialization of art.

English market

From the outset, England was a major market to which the Flemish exported their paintings, tapestries, illuminated manuscripts and other works of art. From the eleventh until well into the sixteenth century, for instance, the Meuse Valley was known in England for its *dinanderie* (after Dinant), which included both ecclesiastical and domestic articles in copper, bronze, or pewter. During the sixteenth century paintings and other works of art produced by Flemish masters were shipped from Antwerp to London in quantity. This happened even in a time when Catholic subjects (the bulk of the Flemish output) were *not* appreciated, specifically in the aftermath of Henry VIII's defiance of the Pope. If art could not be imported legally, there were ways and means of getting the product across anyway. The absence of a reliable London port record of art shipments is an indication that many cargos were smuggled into the country.

In 1585 Antwerp was conquered by the troops of Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, and placed under the rule of Philip II. The subsequent Protestant exodus included the industrial and intellectual elite. Of Antwerp's 100,000 inhabitants in 1570, by 1590 no more than about 40,000 remained. Spanish repression reduced the once cosmopolitan city to a Catholic provincial town: stagnant, intolerant, inward-looking. The wealth of Antwerp, the know-how, the expertise, and in many cases even the equipment (printing presses for ex-

Sir Peter Lely, *George Monk, First Duke of Albemarle*, 1700. Oil on canvas, 118 x 96 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



ample) - all of that moved to the Northern Netherlands, to Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, and elsewhere.

The mass migration of Flemish talent to the North caused a shift in the balance of power within the Low Countries. Building on the experience of Flemish refugees, the Dutch created a commercial, intellectual and artistic empire that for a considerable time remained unrivalled in Europe. Antwerp had set the example. Amsterdam would follow in its place. Boosted by the dramatic decline in the population of Antwerp after 1585, that of Amsterdam grew in a spectacular manner. It increased from 30,000 to over 100,000 in the course of a single generation. Many of the refugee Flemish industrialists, printers, painters and other professionals settled there. Over 30% of those obtaining citizenship in Amsterdam in the years 1575-1606 were from the South (of whom 50% came from Antwerp). Of the three hundred and twenty biggest account-holders in the Amsterdam Exchange Bank in 1610, over half had immigrated from the South. Of the thirty-eight goldsmiths who became citizens of Amsterdam in 1585, twenty-eight were of Flemish descent. The large-scale immigration of artists into the Netherlands transported a ready-made infrastructure of art education

and trade from the South to the North. The development towards an open art market which had started in Antwerp continued in an even more spectacular manner in Holland. That development was accelerated dramatically because of specific socio-economic conditions in the Northern-Netherlands.

Competition

In a time that the notion of nationhood was not a matter of concern, Holland was effectively made up of cities. This city-culture created a society that did not nurture the leading role of an aristocracy as was the case in Britain. Socio-economic life was dominated by well-to-do 'burghers' who lived and worked in the cities. Equality of opportunity in Dutch economic life gave society a competitive edge that at the time had no rival elsewhere in Europe. The Dutch 'Golden Age' was an era of extraordinary vitality, be it in economic, scientific or artistic terms. With the growing prosperity of the Republic, the demand for works of art increased.

The influence of the Church was no longer a dominant force in that society. Calvinism may have left its mark on the age, but it did not enslave people to religion. Christian duty and sharp business practice did not exclude one another. It was an age of prayers and profit. Protestantism also brought about the decay of sacred art. What once had been mere background to a picture - such as landscape, flowers, groups of figures, the face of the donor - now came to the fore. Once the divine element was eliminated, the decoration of houses rather than churches became the main purpose of the pictorial arts. With the discarding of transcendental aims, portraiture and genre painting were to dominate the art market.

In order to satisfy growing demand the artist's studio was rationalized in a remarkable manner. The studio became a kind of early industrialized factory floor, with a proper division of labour amongst specialist employees who worked on a production line of art. The example of Rubens's studio is well documented. Similar ways of working were introduced by Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) and by Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680) in their London studios. All this, of course, long before the notion of the 'division of labour' was discussed by Scottish economists of the eighteenth century. Dutch painters tended to cultivate the taste of their clients, who did not want large canvasses at home, but rather something modest that was a 'joy to their eyes', a pleasant image decorating the wall. They also wanted value for money. Originally, the price of a work of art was calculated according to the cost of materials added to the working hours spent by the artist.

Intense competition made art cheap. It meant that painters needed to supplement their income in order to keep their families afloat. Jan Steen ran a public house, Jan van de Capelle was a textile merchant, Willem Kalf an antique dealer, Jacob van Ruysdael was a surgeon, and most cruelly of all: Meindert Hobbema stopped painting altogether after marriage. He found a more lucrative job in an Amsterdam tax office. The seventeenth century produced too many artists and not enough clients. The market was too small for such an overwhelming presence of talent. It has been estimated that during the seventeenth century some five to ten million paintings were produced in the Netherlands. Less than 1% survives of this unbelievable output.

To young artists, the presence of so many painters proved inhibiting. For many there was but one solution: *move* - move elsewhere, anywhere. And move they did during the Golden Age. They moved in their hundreds. They headed for Italy, Sweden, Germany, even for Russia - they moved above all to Britain. After all, there was a well-established tradition of English collectors buying art in the Low Countries. From an English point of view it made perfect sense to attract artists to cross the Channel. If Flemish and Dutch art was in high demand, why import just single paintings? Why not employ the painters themselves? It is interesting to note that English ambassadors in the Netherlands - William Temple for instance - regularly functioned as 'scouts' who encouraged artists to move to England with the promise of employment or commissions.



Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Sir Thomas Wharton*, 1639.
Oil on canvas, 217 x 128,5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Early immigrants

Artists were invited to England as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century. A reference in 1502 to a 'Mynour, the Inglis payntour' records payments to this figure for bringing portraits of Henry VII, his queen and their children to James IV of Scotland. The painter concerned is Vewicke Maynard (the name appears in different forms). He is one of the few painters from that period whose presence is securely documented in England, although none of his works have survived. He enjoyed a long career at the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII where in 1506 he is referred to as 'Maynard Waywike Duchman'. In that same year Maynard undertook to produce designs for the tomb effigy of Henry VII's mother Lady Margaret Beaufort (Westminster Abbey) which were carried out by the Italian sculptor Pietro Torrigiani in 1511/2. In around 1540, Henry VIII tempted the Flemish stonemason and sculptor Willem Keur (known as William Cure) to join those working on Nonsuch Palace. William stayed in England. His son Cornelius Cure was appointed master of the Royal works by Elizabeth I. He is best known for his tomb of Mary, Queen of Scots in Westminster Abbey. It was not just men who were invited over. Bruges-born painter Levina Teerlinc (1510-1576), eldest daughter of Simon Benninck (1483-1561), one of the finest Flemish illuminators of his time, was employed by Henry VIII as court painter; she produced a number of fine miniatures of the young Mary I. Her annual salary was higher than that of her illustrious predecessor Hans Holbein.

What was at the time considered of fundamental importance in English socio-religious life seemed to matter little when it came to immigrant artists from the Low Countries. There were Catholic artists at work in Protestant England, there were Protestant artists commissioned to work in Catholic Britain. Anthony van Dyck was one of a number of Flemish Catholics who agreed to work in a Protestant country. Ironically, his most important English patrons were Puritans or Puritan sympathizers, amongst them Philip, the fourth Lord Wharton, who acquired more than twenty paintings by the artist. Aesthetics eclipsed all religious strife.

Some artists arrived under extraordinary circumstances. In 1630 the Amsterdam-born still life painter Jan van der Beeck (1589-1644) - Latinized name: Johannes Torrentius - was released from prison and allowed to travel to England at the request of Charles I. The artist had been tried in 1627 for being involved with the outlawed Rosicrucians. In spite of expectations, Torrentius produced little in England and eventually returned to Holland. Even more remarkable was that in June 1672 Charles II issued a declaration in which he invited Dutch artists to move to England. The Restoration brought about an expanding demand for paintings which could not be satisfied by English artists. Marine painter Willem van de Velde (1611-1693) responded to the call and left Holland to enter the service of the king. He was joined by his son Willem van de Velde the Younger, who was to become a master marine painter. The quality of his work inspired the emergence of an English school of seascape painters. The fact that the English and Dutch were at war with each other at the time (the Third Anglo-Dutch War) did not bother father and son. Soon after arriving they began work on the first of many major commissions for the king, designing a set of tapestries that depict the bloody sea-battle of Sole Bay.

In spite of sporadic tensions, it appears that the immigration policies pursued by the English authorities contributed to the relatively quick integration of immigrants from the Low Countries. Many of them set up workshops and were legally forced to employ local workers. The establishment of the tapestry industry in England is an example of this practice. The same process however did *not* function in the arts. As early as 1444, London goldsmiths complained that alien competitors in Southwark only employed fellow foreigners. In 1570, Jacob Jansen and Jasper Andries, immigrant potters from Antwerp, petitioned Queen Elizabeth for a patent in tin-glazed earthenware. The request was rejected, but they set up a successful business in the liberties of Aldgate. In the following years the workshop attracted potters from Flanders who worked in an establishment known as 'the Rose' close to the Dutch Church of Austin Friars. The potters who ran the studio kept their expertise confined within the circles of men trained in the Low Countries and did not employ English apprentices. Why did immigrant artists ignore the conditions laid down by the authorities? How was it possible that Flemish and Dutch painters in exile - some of whom were of a second or even third generation and born in England - were able to maintain an almost unbroken tradition in art?

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, artists from the Low Countries may have become socially integrated in their country of refuge; professionally, however, they refused to mix with British artists. The work of these immigrant artists was much sought after, which allowed them to run a 'closed shop'. There were tensions with local artists. In 1627 for example the Painter-Stainers' Company unsuccessfully attempted to prosecute Cornelius de Neve, Daniel Mytens, George Geldorp and Abraham van der Doort for failing to obey the company's ordinances. Artists from the Low Countries did not employ English apprentices. They used fellow countrymen instead. They married each other's daughters or widows. They educated their children in their own workshops and saw to it that they finished their apprenticeship in the Low Countries. They literally kept their art within the family, be it in London, Norwich or Edinburgh.

In 1585, Arnold Bronckhorst was succeeded as court painter to James VI of Scotland by Adriaan van Son. The latter had been a citizen of Edinburgh for some time and was an active member of the Netherlandish community in the city. His son, Adam de Colone (1595-1628), was baptized in Edinburgh on 19 October 1595. Among the witnesses at this baptism was Sir Adrian van Damman, who had been a professor at Leiden University and was now ambassador of the confederate provinces at the Scottish court. The family circle was distinctly Dutch and included merchants, clockmakers, and jewellers. Adam de Colone used his mother's maiden name and was trained in the Netherlands and Flanders. Some thirty portraits by him have survived and both in technique and style his work remained distinctly Dutch.

In his London studio Peter Lely employed predominantly artists from the Low Countries. The Brussels-born portrait painter Jeremiah van der Eyden was one of them. He was employed by Lely to paint the draperies in some of his portraits. Another painter employed by Lely was the Antwerp-born portrait painter John Baptist Gaspar, who had settled in London in 1642. His long-term association with Sir Peter earned him the nickname of 'Lely's Baptist'. He was specifically employed to paint postures and drapery. Joseph Buckshorn



Hendrik Carré (after Gottfried Kneller),
Portrait of the *First Duke of Albemarle*, 1697.
Oil on canvas, 85 x 68 cm.
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

[Boxhorn] was a native Dutchman who had settled in London about 1670 and worked there for Lely, whose pupil he had been. He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the last good copiers in England. Amsterdam-born portrait painter Willem Wissing moved to London in 1676. He entered Sir Peter Lely's studio as an assistant. After Lely's death he pursued a successful independent career. Dordrecht-born portrait painter Willem Sonmans [William Sunman] was one of the Dutch artists who had followed Sir Peter Lely to England during the reign of Charles II. After Lely's death he obtained permission to paint the king's portrait, but failed to gain appreciation and subsequently moved to Oxford. Thereafter he spent term-time in Oxford and the rest of the year in London. A number of his portraits are to be found in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

Trade secrets

Artists from the Low Countries were acutely aware of the distinct contribution they made to the arts in Britain. Protecting their trade secrets was crucial to them maintaining their enduring success. Painters guarded every aspect of their art, be it the mixing of their paints, the make and handling of their brushes, or the intricate matters of style and technique. They grouped together in order to exclude all 'intruders'. Their work remained Flemish or Dutch both in content and in style: even if they had been born in Britain or if they were commissioned to paint typical English subjects. The Thames as depicted in



Willem van de Velde,
*The Taking of the English
Flagship the Royal Prince*,
1666. Oil on canvas,
59 x 81 cm.
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

their paintings could very well have been a Dutch river. And those artists who specialized in portraying the grand estates and country houses in Britain - another genre in which they excelled - did so with a Dutch eye for detail. This form of 'protectionism' was not new to these immigrants. In fact, it had been part of their education. Artists in the Low Countries received their training through a long-established master-apprentice relationship that was regulated by local guilds of St Luke. These guilds governed the commercial activities of their members, protected them from outside competition, and assured the high level of technical competence for which Flemish and Dutch painting was renowned.

It was not until the eighteenth century that the Dutch and Flemish artistic presence in Britain began to wane. And once it did, the collapse was spectacular. Lübeck-born Godfrey Kneller (formerly Gottfried Kniller, 1646-1723) had moved to London in order to study the artistic achievements of Anthony van Dyck. Although young Kneller had studied mathematics at the University of Leiden, he was drawn to the arts instead. He learned his trade with Rembrandt and Ferdinand Bol in Amsterdam. Once settled in London, he continued the Van Dyck-Lely tradition with spectacular success. By the mid-1680s he was the most sought-after portrait painter in England. During the reign of William and Mary his position as a court painter was unrivalled. In 1701 he painted the

famous equestrian portrait of the king at Hampton Court Palace in which William III is conceived as a modern Hercules delivering England from the despotism of James II.

Kneller's reputation suffered during the late eighteenth century. Changes in aesthetic appreciation mixed with elements of xenophobia made critics flatly deny Kneller's contribution to English art. In fact, the attack on the baroque culture was aimed at William III personally. In his influential *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1762/80 - reprinted in 1826) Horace Walpole rejected any artistic value in the art commissioned by the court, expressing the extraordinary point of view that the Netherlands never had developed any sense of aesthetic refinement at all:

The prince ... contributed nothing to the advancement of the arts. He was born in a country [Holland] where taste never flourished.

Walpole's view was exceptional and controversial. Later historians expressed a more balanced view, and the admiration for art from the Low Countries has to this day never diminished. ■