

# Pieter de Hooch and the Classicizing Phenomenon in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup>-century Genre Painting

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Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) is primarily known for his paintings created while living in Delft from approximately 1650 to 1661; quiet, modest interiors commonly featuring a mother and child bathed in warm light streaming through an open door or window. These works can be, and most often are, understood as constructions of domestic virtue and illustrations of child-rearing practices, as well as masterful, illusionistic interpretations of interior space.<sup>1</sup> After his move to Amsterdam around 1661, De Hooch's paintings featured increasingly opulent settings showcasing classical pilasters and sculptures more befitting a history painting than a genre scene. His style also shifted toward a more refined technique, effacing brush strokes with cooler, harmonious tones complemented by diffused light. His figures became more generic, flattened, and repetitive as if based on an idealized amalgamation of features rather than an individualized citizen of the Dutch Republic.<sup>2</sup> While these features are not conventionally classical, they anticipated

and shaped the more recognizable classicism of the next century.

De Hooch's late works have fallen out of favor due in large part to a distaste in later centuries for these pictorial refinements and near-classicizing elements, which were perceived as artificial. While these features are not conventionally classical, they anticipated and shaped the more recognizable classicism of the next century. The supposed "failure" or decline of De Hooch's art was often blamed on the artist's deteriorating mental health since he was thought to have died in an asylum in 1684. Scholars also fault the demise of the quintessentially Dutch realism, understood as a faithful transcription of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> However, Frans Grijzenhout discovered in 2008 that the painter's 24-year-old son, of the same name and identified as a painter in asylum records, had died in the institution, rather than the acclaimed artist.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the idea of the decline of Dutch art has since been revised and is now understood as the resurgence and modification of a classicizing trend evident in earlier art and literature. Despite these clarifications, scholars have yet to revisit De Hooch's later works.

This article argues that De Hooch was contributing to and participating in the emerging classicizing phenomenon, in part, to create works that would mirror and thus give shape to the civilizing sensibilities of collectors of his art. De Hooch's innovation was also responsive to changing conditions of the art market, which caused some artists and theorists to praise the virtues of the state-sponsored art production in France. The costly construction of the classicizing Amsterdam Town Hall, decorated with the largest site-specific commission of history paintings at the time, further affected the strained artistic environment. This unprecedented project prompted De Hooch to consider new subjects and his professional status, as well as the changing value and function of painting in the Dutch Republic.

The revitalization of classicism is crucial to understanding De Hooch's paintings created after his move to Amsterdam. Dutch seventeenth-century classicism can be defined loosely

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1 Wayne Franits explores De Hooch's genre paintings as pictures of domestic virtue as well as illustrations of child-rearing practices. Martha Hollander addresses the artist's imagery as windows into the feminine realm and several scholars including Eric Jan Sluiter discuss De Hooch's paintings as illusionistic interpretations of interior space. See Wayne Franits, *Pieter de Hooch: A woman preparing bread and butter for a boy* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006); Wayne Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Wayne Franits, *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Wayne Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-century Dutch Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Martha Hollander, "Pieter de Hooch's Revisions of the Amsterdam Town Hall," in *The Built Surface: Architecture and Pictures from Antiquity to the Millennium*, ed. Christy Anderson and Karen Koehler (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 203-225; Hollander, "Space, Light, Order: The Paintings of Pieter de Hooch," *The Low Countries: Art and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands* 9 (2001): 108-115; Hollander, "Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter de Hooch," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 51 (2000): 273-923; Hollander, *Structures of Space and Society in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Interior* (PhD diss., University of California, 1990); and Eric Jan Sluiter, *Seductress of sight: studies in Dutch art of the Golden Age 2* (Zwolle, NL: Waanders, 2000).

2 Most, if not all, scholars have acknowledged these changes in De Hooch's paintings.

3 Scholars aside from Frans Grijzenhout, including Peter Sutton and Wayne Franits, argue that De Hooch died in a mental asylum and that his late works exemplified the decline of Dutch art. See Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, and Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch, 1629-1684* (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1998).

4 Frans Grijzenhout, "New information on Pieter de Hooch and the Amsterdam lunatic asylum," *Burlington Magazine*, 150 (2008): 612-613.

as the amalgamation of sixteenth-century Dutch and German, Italian Renaissance, and French classicist styles that Dutch artists and theorists would absorb, reclaim, and emulate as classicism descended from the heritage of their ancient Batavian past, superior than or at least equal to that of ancient Rome. As Junko Aono rightly reasoned, renewed interest in classicist ideals at the end of the seventeenth century reinforced the production of paintings that embodied and promoted changing sociocultural values as well as reflected artists' attempts to appeal to multiple types of buyers in a highly competitive art market.<sup>5</sup> Through the portrayal of refined, antique-inspired figures and settings, artists promoted and participated in the fashionable trend that favored idealized, rule-based imagery rather than the *naer het leven* or true-to-life works popular during the first half of the century. Elevated scenes featuring the preoccupations of the burgher elite became more prevalent than roughly painted tavern pictures portraying the lower echelons of Dutch society.<sup>6</sup> Artists, patrons, and collectors in the later seventeenth century embraced the thematic conventions of the previous decades but rejected realist artifice in favor of idealized figures in antique-inspired settings.

Although De Hooch's peers, including Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635-1681) and Caspar Netscher (1639-1684), created genre paintings in a style closer to classicism, De Hooch's late works can be understood as precursors to the classicizing phenomenon that would dominate the eighteenth century. De Hooch would embrace this new idealized style effectively blending it with the *naer het leven* style of the Dutch sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. In this way, the artist was responding and contributing to this broader classicizing style evolving during the later seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Dutch artists, patrons, and collectors increasingly embraced classicist values at the end of the seventeenth century as an embodiment of civilizing trends throughout the upper echelons of society. Dutch elites' self-conscious awareness of codes of civility provides a context for De Hooch's imagery featuring wealthy, fashionably-clad men and women whose behavior and appearance modeled or sometimes challenged ideal social refinements.<sup>8</sup> According to Arthur DiFuria, the viewer's engagement with and self-conscious contemplation of genre images allowed "the pictures themselves [to] condition the ways in which viewers saw the everyday with a pictorialized gaze."<sup>9</sup>

Wealthy Dutch citizens, such as *The Jacott-Hoppesack Family* portrayed by De Hooch in 1670, demonstrated social distinction through dress, posture, gesture, refined sensibilities, and the ownership of artworks that emphasized their good taste and elevated social status (Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> According to Wayne Franits, the cultural practices of luxury in the Dutch Republic "involved the costs incurred to create material goods and to buy them, their aesthetic qualities, the rituals wherein they were deployed, and the social and behavioral traits (and status) of those who consumed them."<sup>11</sup> In his *Groot Schilderboek* (1707), Dutch artist and art theorist Gerard de Lairese (1641-1711) recommended that genre painters depict the decorous leisure activities of the civic elite in order to dignify their *burgelijk* works. He believed collectors and patrons should appreciate these works as lofty mirrors of their own ideals.<sup>12</sup> De Hooch and others catered to and advanced the trend by including expensive furnishings, clothing, and décor in their imagery, which matched the "dignified air of gentility" emanating from the elegant figures occupied with the activities of "urban sophisticates," such as letter writing and musical parties.<sup>13</sup> By introducing conventional subjects of courtship and music-making into the civic realm of the Amsterdam Town Hall, De Hooch was combining several popular themes into a new subject that would appeal to fashionable collectors as an innovative, modern, and elegant adaptation of familiar scenes. The artist's collectors could imagine themselves as the wealthy citizens promenading through or observing the splendors of the newly-built Town Hall.<sup>14</sup> As Alison Kettering stated, art plays an active role in constructing ideologies, such as acceptable social and sexual behavior among women.<sup>15</sup> De Hooch's paintings of upper class youths and fledgling families in contemporary civic settings would resonate among viewers as they gazed upon the portrayal of idealized yet naturalized constructs of love and courtship.

While De Hooch's figures do not seem to be modeled directly on classical sculpture, as suggested by Lairese, in his later works they progressively feature idealized facial

5 Junko Aono, "Ennobling Daily Life: A Question of Refinement in Early Eighteenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting," *Simiolus* 33, no. 4 (2007/2008): 257.

6 Ibid.

7 Scholars including Sutton, Franits, and Hollander acknowledge classicizing trends in De Hooch's later paintings.

8 Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*; Lyckle de Vries, *Gerard de Lairese: An Artist between Stage and Studio* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 1998); and H. W. Roodenburg, "The Eloquence of the Body: Perspectives on Gesture in the Dutch Republic," *Studies in Netherlandish Art and Cultural History* 6 (Zwolle, NL: Waanders, 2004).

9 Arthur DiFuria, "Genre: Audience, Origins, and Definitions," in *Genre Imagery in Early Modern Northern Europe* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2016): 19.

10 Pieter Sutton, *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Art Museum, 1984), 57-59; Wayne Franits, *The Cambridge Companion to Vermeer* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 295-98; Marjorie Weisman, *Caspar Netscher and late seventeenth-century Dutch painting* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002), 47-48; and Junko Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting 1680-1750* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 95.

11 Wayne Franits, "Gabriel Metsu and the Art of Luxury," in *Gabriel Metsu*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010-11), 57.

12 Claus Kemmer, "In Search of Classical Form: Gerard de Lairese's 'Groot Schilderboek' and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting," *Simiolus* 26 (1998): 115; and DiFuria, "Genre: Audience, Origins, and Definitions," 19.

13 Franits, "Gabriel Metsu and the Art of Luxury," 60.

14 Alison McNeil Kettering, "Ter Borch's ladies in satin," *Art History* 16, no. 1 (1993): 95-124.

15 Ibid.

types characteristic of classicism.<sup>16</sup> De Hooch implemented other motifs and techniques to elicit a sense of classicism in his genre pictures. He introduced classicizing architectural elements such as pilasters and sculptures, inspired primarily by the Amsterdam Town Hall, into his genre scenes. Additionally, as Kettering rightly argued, at the end of the seventeenth century, artists mixed genre with select portrait and history elements to appeal to a variety of preferences among a diverse population of art lovers, just as they did in previous centuries.<sup>17</sup> In several of De Hooch's late pictures, the antique-inspired style common in history paintings coexists with the lifelike style of genre imagery, creating a picture or image type that carried the complex connotations of both categories. For example, in De Hooch's *Musical Party in a Hall*, c. 1663-5, the artist portrayed Raphael's *School of Athens*, 1509-1511, in the interior of the Roman-inspired architecture of the Amsterdam Town Hall as the setting for a gathering of richly dressed contemporary figures, playing music and socializing (Figure 2). The classicizing interior and the harmonizing youths mirror Raphael's noble philosophers and scholars conversing while strolling through ancient architecture and sculpture. The antiquity-inspired setting and the Renaissance master's fresco, designated by artists and collectors as supreme models of artistic accomplishment, lend an air of authority and elegance to the genre scene.

The resplendent, classically-inspired Amsterdam Town Hall, partially open to the public as early as 1655, was often the subject of paintings both during its construction and after its completion. The building and its decorative elements emerged as powerful symbols of the changing role of art and painting in the Dutch Republic for Pieter de Hooch and other artists, including cityscape painters Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-1698) and Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712). Known by contemporaries as "the eighth wonder of the world," the structure gave monumental expression to the artistic preferences of the upper classes as well as the wealth and power amassed by the Dutch Republic through trade during its Golden Age.<sup>18</sup>

Pieter de Hooch portrayed the only two areas of the Amsterdam Town Hall open to the public at the time: the *Burgerzaal* or Citizen's Hall and the Burgomasters' Cabinet or Council Chamber (Figures 3 and 4). The artist also incorporated the building's floor designs, wall coverings, fireplace mantels, and columns as decorative elements in several unidentifiable interiors. The grandiose chambers provided the ideal setting for De Hooch because he specialized in genre scenes featur-

ing elite, upper class figures in elegant settings. He used the magnificence of the Town Hall as a recognizable and fashionable feature to increase the appeal of his genre scenes as well as portraits commissioned by a few wealthy patrons during his tenure in Amsterdam.<sup>19</sup>

De Hooch's depiction of mantels, marble floor patterns, pilasters, and history paintings from the new Town Hall reveals his engagement with the impact that this lavish structure exerted on the classicizing trend in Dutch art. The prominence of the Town Hall in De Hooch's later genre paintings also relates to his creative response to the changing role of painting on the struggling art market. By portraying the patricians of Amsterdam in the municipal interior and by including components of its decorations, sculptural features, and history paintings in his genre scenes, De Hooch was explicitly referencing the Town Hall's preeminent political and cultural status and placing his paintings in direct conversation with it. To the city's patricians and his audience, the building connoted civic pride and wealth through trade and commerce, exchange, and regulation, as well as artistic achievement.<sup>20</sup> Artists and art lovers associated classicism with grace and prestige, as well as proto-cosmopolitan aesthetic and social values.

De Hooch's peers also utilized these decorations in their genre paintings. In Gabriel Metsu's (1629-1667) *A Visit to the Nursery*, 1661, the opulent mantel and the patterned marble floor resemble those of the Burgomaster's Cabinet, adding what Franits calls a "palatial" feeling to the genre image (Figure 5).<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681) included the antique-inspired mantel from the renovated town hall in Deventer to ennoble and enrich the settings of several of his genre pictures from the 1660s, such as *A Lady at Her Toilet* (Figure 6).<sup>22</sup> These works, like De Hooch's *A Musical Conversation*, 1674, were designed to appeal to the growing interest of the upper classes in lavish interiors, fashion, and décor—an interest fulfilled by architectural components of classically-inspired public buildings as well (Figure 7). In response to the evolving conditions of the market toward more rarefied and elite aesthetic values, De Hooch sought to appeal to patrons who could identify with the wealthy, well-dressed figures parading through the massive colonnaded corridors or striding across the patterned marble floor. The introduction of these features into De Hooch's works was meant to trigger those associations and

16 Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age*, 109; and De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*.

17 Alison Kettering, "The Rustic Still Life in Dutch Genre Painting: *Bijwerck dat Verclaert*," in *Genre Imagery in Early Modern Northern Europe* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2016); and DiFuria, 3, for the summary of Kettering's chapter.

18 Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol: 1616-1680: Rembrandt's pupil* (Doornspijk, NL: Davaco, 1982), 50-55; Eymert-Jan Goossens, *Treasure Wrought by Chisel and Brush: The Town Hall of Amsterdam in the Golden Age* (Zwolle, NL: Waanders, 1996), 29; and Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt's Rivals: History Painting in Amsterdam (1630-1650)* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

19 In the three documented portraits (*Portrait of a Family Playing Music*, 1663, Cleveland; *Family Portrait on a Terrace*, 1667, unknown location; and *Portrait of the Jacott-Hoppesack Family*, 1670, Amsterdam Museum), De Hooch included various elements of the town hall from fireplace mantel to columns and marble floor pattern. His two later works that are likely portraits (*A Man with a Book and Two Women*, 1676, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; *A Sportsman and a Lady in a Landscape*, 1684, Private Collection) are classicizing in style but do not necessarily include recognizable elements of the town hall.

20 Sluijter, *Rembrandt's Rivals*, 7.

21 Wayne Franits, "Gabriel Metsu and the Art of Luxury," 55; and Jan Peeters and Eymert-Jan Goossens, *The Royal Palace of Amsterdam in paintings of the Golden Age*, exhibition catalogue (Amsterdam, NL: Royal Palace, 1997), 27.

22 Peeters and Goossens, *Royal Palace of Amsterdam*, 26-27.



attach them to his genre scenes, thereby elevating their status and value. The same attributes given to classicism were then transferred to the potential procurer who had the discernment to recognize those attributes or symbols.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the seventeenth century, De Hooch and others aligned their works with antique values perceived by cultural and social elites as decorous and graceful while navigating the tumultuous environment of the entrepreneurial art market. By 1660 the art market was slowing and essentially stagnant by the next decade.<sup>24</sup> Three Anglo-Dutch wars between 1652 and 1674 as well as the invasion by France in 1672, known as the *Rampjaar* or Disaster Year, had taken its toll on Dutch trade, the heart of the economy. This disastrous situation had far-reaching consequences throughout all sectors of life including the art market, which had been flooded by quickly produced, less expensive artworks filling the demand not met by slowly produced, more expensive art during the peak of economic prosperity.<sup>25</sup> The expansive variety of pictorial categories and varying levels of quality inundated the market, increasing competition. De Hooch negotiated this environment in part by increasing his production. Forty-five percent of the artist's surviving oeuvre of approximately 167 paintings was created in the last fourteen years of his life.<sup>26</sup> Despite his efforts, the artist is thought to have died in poverty in 1684.<sup>27</sup> Vermeer, De Hooch's Delft peer, would suffer a similar fate, leaving his family struggling with debt after his death in 1675. Seeking financial clemency from the local leaders in Delft, the artist's widow, Catharina Bolnes, would testify in July, 1677, that "during the long and ruinous war with France [Vermeer] not only had been unable to sell any of his art but also, to his great detriment, was left sitting with paintings of other masters that he was dealing in."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, at the end of the century, artists struggled to succeed in an oversaturated art market where supply exceeded demand.

As a result, some, including De Hooch, were led to reexamine the value and place of painting in the declining market for art in the Dutch Republic.

Perhaps in response to the struggling art market or the desire to elevate or ennoble Netherlandish art, certain Dutch artists and art theorists looked to the academies of Louis XIV's France as a successful model for art production and patronage. While an official art academy would not be established in the Dutch Republic until 1682, state-sponsored patronage and rule-defined art production practiced in France inspired artist-theorists such as Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-78) and Lairese to press for a similar model in the northern Netherlands.<sup>29</sup> According to Thijs Weststeijn, in the first chapter of *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (1678), Hoogstraten described his nine chapters as rooms in an academy where different stages of painting were taught and practiced, indicating that he was inspired by the academy founded in Rome by Louis XIV.<sup>30</sup> Lairese vehemently praised the classical model and cited Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665), the epitome of rule-based, classicizing French academic painting, among the few artists whose works exemplified his ideal manner of painting.<sup>31</sup> Art theorists were not alone in their admiration of the French, suggesting a larger cultural interest in the model. The Dutch poet and classicistic critic Andries Pels, in his *Gebruik, én misbruik des tooneels* (1681), praised the sponsorship of and respect for art and literature in France, as well as the renowned French royal academies. He also identified Cardinal Richelieu (the first minister to Louis XIII) as a great patron of the arts, acknowledging the connoisseur's involvement in the establishment or expansion of French academies. By recognizing Richelieu, Pels was also honoring Louis XIV, who institutionalized and dramatically expanded the arts in France.<sup>32</sup>

The efforts of these theoreticians and critics coincided with the renewal of interest in the publication and transla-

23 For a discussion of viewers drawn into space and joining internal viewers to discuss works of art see Angela Vanhaelen, *The Wake of Iconoclasm* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 125.; Hans Jantzen, *Das niederländische Architekturbild* (Braunschweig, DE: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1979), 144, 156; Arthur K. Wheelock, "Gerard Houckgeest and Emanuel de Witte: Architectural Painting in Delft around 1650," *Simiolus* 8, no. 3 (1975): 167-185; and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 187.

24 Marie Christine van der Sman, "The Year of Disaster: 1672," in *Dutch Society in the Age of Vermeer*, ed. Donald Haks and Marie Christine van der Sman (Zwolle, NL: Waanders, 1996), 140; for discussions of the Dutch Art Market see scholars such as Sluijter, *Rembrandt's Rivals*, 19-20; Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*; John Michael Montias, *Art at Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2002); Michael North, *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); and Ton Bevers, ed., *Artists, Dealers, Consumers: on the Social World of Art* (Hilversum, NL: Verloren, 1994).

25 Van der Sman, "Year of Disaster: 1672," 140.

26 Pieter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 35; and Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch, 1629-1684*.

27 Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 33. Franits rightly notes Sutton's conclusion that there is not enough information about the prices of De Hooch's pictures to conclude he died in poverty.

28 John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 212; Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 33; and Van der Sman, "Year of Disaster: 1672," 136.

29 De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*, 73.

30 Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 41-42. See also Note chapter 1, 111.

31 Kemmer, "In Search of Classical Form," 96.

32 Andries Pels, *Gebruik, én misbruik des tooneels* (Amsterdam, NL: Albert Magnus, 1681), 5 (Voorrede); and Pels, *Gebruik, én misbruik des tooneels*, ed. M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (Culemborg, NL: Tjeenk Willink/Noorduijn, 1978).

"Onder zoveel wetenschappen én vernuftige vonden, gevolgen de Fransche geesten ook geen kleen trék én lust, om naauwkeurig te onderzoeken het geen Latynen én Italiaanen hadden bestaan, omtrént het opbouwen én verryken hunner taalen, én het ophelderen en vermeerderen der Dichtkunst; réchtende hier toe ook een Oeffenschool, én beroemd strydpérk op, waar in mannen niet alleen van letteren, maar ook van hoogen staat yverden, én arbeidden om den prys van eere te behaalen, én boven hunne tydgenooten uit te steeken. Hier uit sprooten zo veel geleerde schriften, alom geächt, naagedrukt, én in andere taalen, tót nut der Liefhebberen, overgegoeten, het eenig middel tót het bewérken van órde én zuiverheid in deeze kunst, waar aan zich toen voor al liet gelégen leggen de Kardinaal van Richelieu, die groote voorstander én réchte Mecénas van fraaije vernuften, door wiens toedoen de Fransche Dichtkunst én vooral de Tooneelpoëzy, zo verre is gevórdert, datze zélf de Grieksche én Latynsche in net nette schikking én óre heeft overtroffen, én als een régel en maat gestrékt waar naar zich schikken moest al wie in deeze stóffe met lóf de pén voeren wilde."

tion of ancient treatises on art, rhetoric, and literature. The theoretical principles in these ancient discourses were heavily studied and debated in contemporary visual and literary circles.<sup>33</sup> Hoogstraten and Lairese sought to raise the status of Dutch art through instruction and a framework for the creation of high-quality pictures. They saw the quickly produced artworks flooding the market as low-quality pictures created by uneducated artists.<sup>34</sup> In his treatise, Hoogstraten advocated for the creation of illusionism, grace, and beauty in paintings and called for artists to be universal rather than to specialize in a single subject. The artist-theorist perpetuated the notion of a hierarchy that privileged subjects depicting lofty, memorable narratives with proper decorum and probable expressions of emotion.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in his *Groot Schilderboek*, Lairese instructed painters to emulate the rationally-proportioned, idealized, and graceful creations of the ancients and the old masters.<sup>36</sup> While history painting maintained the premier place in the hierarchy of genres, for Lairese scenes of daily life or “modern” paintings could earn an honorable place adjacent to biblical and mythological compositions.<sup>37</sup> He argued that a successful “modern” subject should feature the decorous behavior of leisured urban elites and the believable rendering of emotion visible through gesture, attitude, and facial expression.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, these images should portray classical architecture and fashion that gave the impression of timelessness and elegance. For the artist-theorist, works by Frans van Mieris the Elder, such as *The Concert*, 1675, exemplified these rules through its decorous subject, graceful figures, timeless fashion, and proper gestures. Much to Lairese’s delight, Van Mieris was proficient in the painting of histories and allegories as well.<sup>39</sup>

Both De Hooch and Van Mieris ennobled their genre imagery by depicting wealthy Dutch citizens enjoying leisure activity in luxurious settings rather than raucous peasants in grimy taverns. While De Hooch’s images lacked Van Mieris’s refined, classically inspired figures and timeless fashion, he did incorporate antique-inspired architecture, elegant attire, and idealized figures into his genre scenes. Moreover, De Hooch turned to the classicizing architecture of the newly built Amsterdam Town Hall to elevate his genre

images.<sup>40</sup> Lairese also employed elements of the building in his painting, *Cleopatra’s Banquet*, c.1675-1680. The carved figures framing the arched portals, engaged columns, and caryatids supporting entablatures emulate those decorating the Town Hall.<sup>41</sup> Executing his rules for an ideal image, Lairese combined classicizing architecture with a historical narrative depicting graceful figures in timeless attire. While De Hooch did not directly refer to the artists or academies of France, the artist’s refined classicizing figures, settings, and décor in his paintings foreshadow and advance the resurgence of classicism in the antique-inspired works prevalent in the next century.<sup>42</sup>

The persistent goal of artists and theorists from the beginning of the seventeenth century to elevate and ennoble Dutch art was realized in the commission of history scenes for the Amsterdam Town Hall. This state-sponsored patronage of art spoke to the value of art among wealthy civic elites and aligned with the principles of painting underwriting the academies in France, which were promoted by the Dutch art theorists Hoogstraten and Lairese. Through the inclusion of these history works in his genre scenes, De Hooch drew attention to the intensified debate about the hierarchy of pictorial subject matter in the Dutch Republic that valued history paintings over all. Perhaps he also sought to associate his genre scenes with the grandeur of history paintings, thereby empowering his pictures with their inclusion. Additionally, the artist could have portrayed narrative paintings within paintings to celebrate the achievements of Dutch art as a whole. Artists and theoreticians had been striving to elevate painting above craft early in the seventeenth century as evidenced by Philip Angel’s affirmation of the professionalization of artists in his *Lof der schilder-konst* (1642). For Angel, in order to achieve honor and fame, a painter should be virtuous, industrious, and educated in the texts of the great stories in history paintings.<sup>43</sup> The grand history pictures commissioned for the Amsterdam Town Hall and the splendor of the classicizing architecture were the pinnacle of Dutch art, equal to triumphs of the great masters of antiquity and the Renaissance. In his depictions of the

33 Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form,” 89; and Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, “Grace, Genius, and the Longinian Sublime in Rembrandt’s *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*,” *JHNA* 8:2 (Summer 2016), 4. DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2016.8.2.5. Available at <http://www.jhna.org/index.php/vol-8-2-2016/330-joanna-sheers-seidenstein>.

34 De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*, 72-73, 82-83; Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, 41-42; and Van der Sman, “Year of Disaster: 1672,” 140.

35 De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*, 81.

36 De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*, 10, 72.

37 Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form,” 93, 113; and Lyckle de Vries, *How to Create Beauty: De Lairese on the Theory and Practice of Making Art* (Leiden, NL: Primavera Press, 2011): 121.

38 Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form,” 90-113; and De Vries, *How to Create Beauty*, 117-123.

39 Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form,” 98-99, 112.

40 Kemmer argues De Hooch would remain bound in the “modern” style because his figures wore contemporary dress despite the timeless classicizing setting of the town hall. Kemmer, “In Search of Classical Form,” 112.

41 Thank you to Elmer Kolfin for bringing Lairese’s use of the town hall in this painting to my attention (12/16/2016).

42 It is important to note that while artist-theorists like Hoogstraten and Lairese praised French academies and promoted imagery emulating ancient models, artists were creating a vast array of subjects in a plethora of styles. Although their publications were intended as manuals for the creation of art, there is no evidence that artists treated them as such. However, as several scholars have noted, their theories did seem to predict the stylistic trends of the eighteenth century, which would favor classicism.

43 Unlike other theoreticians of the time, Angel did not stress a ranking between the genres. Rather, he established a hierarchy among painting, sculpture and poetry. See Eric Jan Sluijter, *De lof der schilderkunst: over schilderijen van Gerrit Dou (1613-1675) en een traktaat van Philips Angel uit 1642* (Hilversum, NL: Verloren, 1993); and Philips Angel, *In Praise of Painting*, trans. Michael Hoyle, and Hessel Miedema, *Simiolus* 24, no. 2/3 (1996): 227-258.

monumental history paintings adorning the Town Hall, De Hooch invited his audience to engage with his commentary on the hierarchy and function of paintings by calling attention in his modest-size scenes of modern life to the monumental history pictures in the Town Hall by means of citizens pointedly gazing up at them. By visually articulating the act of looking, De Hooch emphasized the evolving status and value of painting as an art object.

The Amsterdam Town Hall interior and its decorative elements emerged as powerful symbols of the changing role of art and painting in the Dutch Republic for De Hooch and other artists. Given the large scale of history paintings commissioned for the Town Hall's interior and the emphasis that De Hooch's paintings place on the act of looking at those images, the artist was most likely commenting on the function of painting in the northern Netherlands at the time.<sup>44</sup> While patronage of portraiture was common in the Dutch Republic, the demand for public history paintings had decreased after the Protestant Reformation and revolt of the previous century.<sup>45</sup> Images displaying historical narratives became common in domestic interiors, alongside genre, family portraiture, landscape, and still life scenes. The commissions of monumental histories for the Town Hall resembled the patronage models of countries with monarchical or religious leadership such as France, rather than the Dutch entrepreneurial market that relied on artistic innovation and specialization. Surprisingly, however, some form of genre painting was originally intended to decorate the Town Hall alongside history painting.

De Hooch may have been inspired by Lairese to create scenes of figures examining artwork while touring the Town Hall. Lairese was commissioned by the magistrates to create a painting for the lunette at the far end of the *Burgerzaal* of the Town Hall. Unfortunately, Lairese was unable to complete the artwork because the project ran out of funds before he could finish the commission. However, according to Lyckle de Vries, the unrealized painting was known in the seventeenth century (as it is to scholars today) from drawings and the original plan for the building (Figure 8). Lairese's image featured illusionistic figures in classical attire standing on a trompe l'oeil balustrade that would have matched the actual architecture of the Town Hall had it been completed. Some figures look back down into the hall interior while others gaze at the emblematic exaltation of Amsterdam's prestige and commercial might. Although the

figures standing before the grand allegory are not in contemporary dress (that would have violated Lairese's rules), they appear to stand on an architectural walkway in front of the artist's allegorical idealization of their majestic city. Lairese achieved this illusion by painting the figures in color, in the viewer's space, in front of the massive grisaille lunette. The painted balustrade upon which the fictional figures stood would have matched the actual balustrade below, which was never completed but is known from drawings. Actual contemporary visitors could have stood on the sculpted lower balustrade, visually mirroring the painted viewers standing on a fictional balustrade in front of Lairese's painting.<sup>46</sup> While the project was never realized, its existence casts new and revealing light on De Hooch's unusual imagery (Figure 4). By portraying figures interacting with the images in the Town Hall, De Hooch, like Lairese, was mixing scenes of daily life with traditional history paintings, aligning himself with the artists tasked with creating the grand narratives for the interior. De Hooch's figures gazing up at artwork in a public space compel viewers to consider said images in their current and historical context as well as the value and function of painting in the Dutch Republic. By depicting these art admirers, the artist self-consciously worked to stimulate participation in spaces of discourse that were familiar to collectors and connoisseurs as those they gathered in to discuss art. Viewers of De Hooch's stimulating paintings might consider the struggling art market in contrast with the lavish celebration of the Amsterdam Town Hall as a symbol of prosperity. Additionally, connoisseurs likely would contemplate the artist's juxtaposition of genre and history painting in relation to the hierarchy of genres that designated narrative imagery as preeminent. Art appreciators could also recognize the witty connection of the pictured contemporary viewers viewing art as they themselves gazed at said viewers, acknowledging painting as an object for contemplation and purchase. By visually articulating the act of looking in his genre imagery, De Hooch emphasized the evolving status and value of painting as an art object in the Dutch Republic.

In conclusion, by De Hooch's arrival in Amsterdam in the early 1660s, classicist theory and the privileging of history painting were becoming more firmly established in the city's competitive artistic environment. The artist's late seventeenth-century genre paintings are multivalent negotiations of the classicizing phenomenon dominating Dutch culture. The formerly vibrant open market for art, in many ways the backbone of the Dutch art world, was struggling, in part as a result of the oversaturation of the market with artworks as well as the economic atrophy caused by the wars

44 Eric Jan Sluijter, "Didactic and Disguised Meanings? Several Seventeenth-Century Texts on Painting and the Iconological Approach to Dutch Paintings of This Period," in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 78-87.

45 Christian Tümpel, "Die Reformation und die Kunst der Niederlande," in *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst* 84 (Hamburg, DE: Kunsthalle, 1983); Christian Tümpel, *Rembrandts Ikonographie: Tradition und Erneuerung* (Berlin, DE: Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, 2006).; and Albert Blankert, *Rembrandt: A Genius and his Impact* (Zwolle, NL: Waanders, 1998).

46 De Vries, *Gerard de Lairese*, 46-47: "Of course, the daring visitors who had climbed all the way up were meant to be illusionistic to the highest degree as well." Note 72- "Large openings with balustrades were planned in the walls of the Burgerzaal; they were either not executed to plan or soon filled in. In the original plans, De Lairese's painted visitors would have repeated real visitors on the lower level." See also, Katharine Fremantle, *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam* (Utrecht, NL: H. Dekker and Gumbert, 1960), 41-42.



with France and others. In his navigation of this environment, De Hooch seems to have attempted increasingly to cater to the ideals of the upper strata of the burgher class by producing proto-classicizing works that articulated changing societal norms among Amsterdam's elites. The artist transformed themes he popularized in Delft, such as domestic interiors, to match the fashions of the time, and depicted conventional imagery including musical parties and scenes

of courtship in the stately settings of the Amsterdam Town Hall or patrician urban residences. De Hooch's inclusion of figures looking up at the monumental history paintings of the Town Hall in scenes of elegant modern life suggests the artist was coming to terms with the purpose of painting in late seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

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Figure 1. Pieter de Hooch, *The Jacott-Hoppesack Family*, 1670, oil on canvas, 92.2 x 112.8 cm. Amsterdam Museum, SA41337.



Figure 2. Pieter de Hooch (1629-1681), *Couple Making Music in an Upper Class House*, 1666-68, oil on canvas, 81 x 68.3 cm. Inv. I. 1031. Photo credit: Ursula Gerstenberger, Museum der Bildenden Kuenste, Leipzig, Germany.



Figure 3. Pieter de Hooch (1629-1681), *Couple Walking in Amsterdam Town Hall*, c. 1663-65, oil on canvas, 72 x 85 cm. Musées de Strasbourg, M. Bertola.



Figure 4. Pieter de Hooch (1629-1681), *Interior of the Council Chamber of Amsterdam Town Hall*, c. 1663–65, oil on canvas, 112.5 x 99 cm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, INV. Nr. 196 (1960.3).

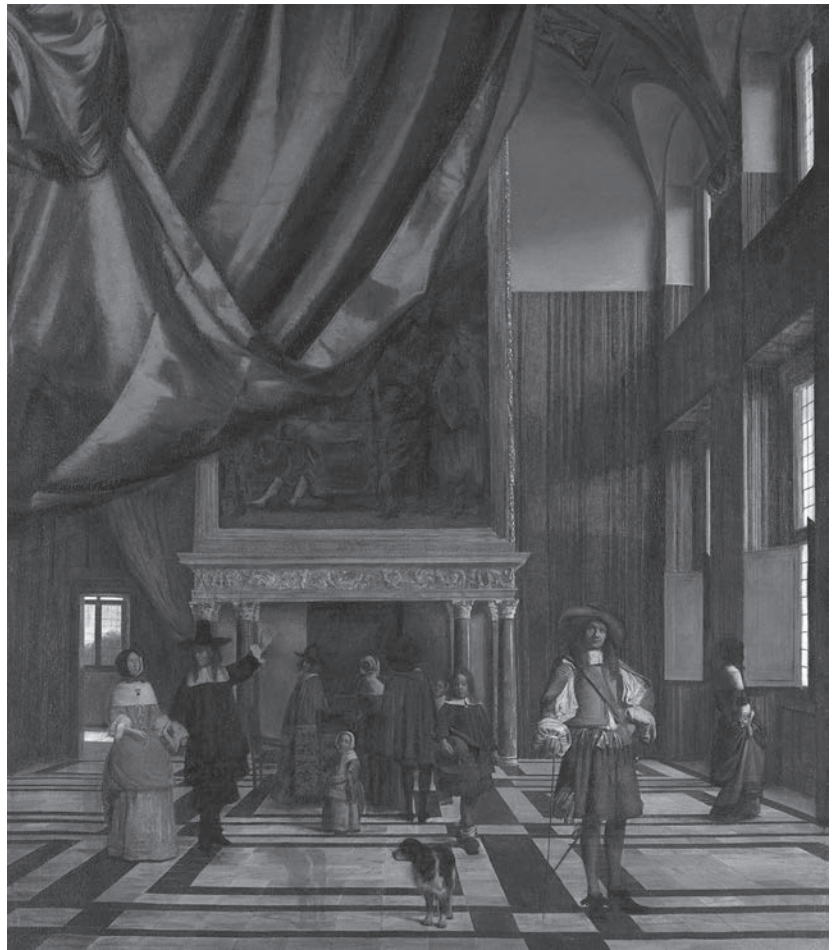


Figure 5. Gabriel Metsu, *The Visit to the Nursery*, 1661, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 81.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, 17.190.20.



Figure 6. Gerard ter Borch, *Lady at her Toilette*, c.1660, oil on canvas, 30 x 23 1/2 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Eleanor Clay Ford Fund, General Membership Fund, Endowment Income Fund and Special Activities Fund, 65.10.



Figure 7. Pieter de Hooch (1629-1681), *A Musical Conversation*, 1674, oil on canvas, 98.1 x 114.9 cm. Purchase, 1971, Honolulu Museum of Art, 3798.1.



Figure 8. Gerard de Lairesse, *Allegory of Amsterdam*, 1670-90, drawing, 46.5 x 62 cm. Amsterdam Museum, SA8214.