

# The Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art Market: The Influence of Economics on Artistic Production

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During the seventeenth century, Holland enjoyed numerous benefits of an unprecedented economical growth. This newly-found wealth affected almost all levels of society, including artistic production. During the "Golden Age," as it became later known, the notaries in charge of listing inventories of Dutch households and businesses became noticeably more conscious of recording artists' names and the specific subject matter of painting.<sup>1</sup> This meticulous record keeping affords us with the means of investigating and analyzing the distribution of particular artists' works and subjects among the art buying public as well as providing the tools to examine their tastes<sup>2</sup> and collecting habits.<sup>3</sup>

This study will attempt to examine the specific role of subject, that of paintings of market scenes in relation to the Dutch art market.

The depiction of markets in painting reflects a slice of Dutch life and an essential aspect of the national character. The basis for wealth of the Dutch economy was a sophisticated network of national and international markets, ranging from the typical rural farmers' market to the complex financial market at the Amsterdam Beurse. The new republic had become a truly capitalist nation with a marked, very mercantile national identity.<sup>4</sup> Linda Ferrier, in her discussion of Gabriel Metsu's *Vegetable Market at Amsterdam* observes: "whether literary or visual, the description of markets, in the city histories of Amsterdam acknowledges the importance and prominence of that colorful aspect of street commerce."<sup>5</sup> An anonymous quote of 1662/63 states that "the markets extend to a support of people and quays. This is the gold mine of an honorable tradesman."<sup>6</sup> The significant role played by the market system in the success of seventeenth-century Dutch capitalism one assumes to be translated into a widespread popularity of paintings of market scenes. Ferrier mentions the appearance of an unprecedented number of paintings of vegetable markets by Dutch artists. According to her these paintings convey pride in local markets and often relay scientifically accurate information.<sup>7</sup> She lists nineteen examples of market scenes in the *Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie* in The Hague and provides a list of artists generally known for the depictions of market scenes.<sup>8</sup> The discovery of only nineteen market scenes, painted at a time when the average middle-class Amsterdam household contained, according to Bredius, between one hundred and two hundred paintings,<sup>9</sup> seems infinitely small and in clear contradiction to her statement regarding an "unprecedented number" of market scene

paintings. This discussion seeks to resolve the curious discrepancy between the importance and familiarity of markets for the Dutch populace and the infrequency of the pictorial representation of this subject.

An examination of the two main sources of recorded inventories, Bredius' *Kunstler Inventare* and Montias' *Artists and Artisans in Delft*,<sup>10</sup> shows an almost complete absence of market scene paintings. For the most part, the subject of the recorded works were specified in a manner which would preclude an intentional omission. Nevertheless, allowing for the possibility that market scene paintings may have been described under a different subject heading, I examined a five year span of auction sales of Dutch seventeenth-century paintings held worldwide between 1984 and 1989. Assuming that loss and destruction of seventeenth-century Dutch art works occurred in similar proportion among all different subject matters, auctions would reflect, to some degree, the popularity of certain subjects in the seventeenth century through the frequency of their appearance at recent auctions.<sup>11</sup> The survey results corroborated the data obtained from the inventories examined. Even with the inclusion of paintings depicting a single figure involved in or alluding to the selling of merchandise, the number of market scene paintings amounts to fewer than thirty out of a total of over three thousand works offered for sale. One cannot help but get the impression that Dr. Ferrier's general observations regarding the appearance of an "unprecedented" number of market scene paintings disregarded contemporary inventories. The recognition of the significant scarcity of fully developed market scene paintings<sup>12</sup> in seventeenth-century Dutch art poses the obvious question as to the reasons for this curious phenomenon. The answer for this may lie within the very structure of the highly sophisticated Dutch art market. I will therefore examine the scope or size of the art market in seventeenth-century Holland, its dynamics and inner workings, the roles played by art dealers as well as artists, the popularity and value of specific subjects and methods of valuation and pricing of paintings. I will conclude my discussion by looking at several typical market scene paintings in relation to the aforementioned considerations.

*The Size of the Art Market in Seventeenth-Century Holland.* The frequently used observation of John Evelyn, the English diarist and art patron, regarding the annual markets in Rotterdam is worth repeating here. Evelyn comments on the amount and low price of the paintings offered for sale and gives as a reason the lack of available



land as a place to invest surplus money. He further reports that it is an “ordinary thing to find a common farmer lay out two-or-three thousand pounds in this commodity [paintings]. Their houses are full of them, and they vend them at their fairs to very great gains.”<sup>11</sup> If we take Evelyn’s observation at face value, his report tells us three important things: paintings were available in large numbers; paintings were inexpensive; and paintings were used for investment and speculation.

The growth of the Dutch art market was directly related to the economic expansion the Netherlands experienced after 1609 and the truce with Spain. The prosperity of the middle class played a major role in accelerating private patronage.<sup>14</sup> Even the lower-middle class exercised influence on art taken as merchandise (*i.e.* art not specifically commissioned but acquired through a middleman).<sup>15</sup> Although public patronage had declined, the growth of the market for individual consumption more than picked up the slack.<sup>16</sup> Besides Bredius’ observation concerning the existence of large numbers of paintings in an average apartment (see *n.* 9), Montias provides additional data regarding the widespread purchase of paintings in the city of Delft: two thirds of the population, estimated at twenty eight to thirty thousand people, lived in households possessing paintings which amounted to as many as forty to fifty thousand paintings in the city’s more than four thousand houses, or an average of eleven paintings per household.<sup>17</sup> Although much work still has to be done analyzing inventories in other Dutch towns, Montias suggests that his findings in Delft are not atypical, particularly as far as proliferation of artworks among the broad population is concerned.

The art market, or more precisely, the offering of paintings as a finished product in the form of merchandise to an anonymous buyer is not an invention of the seventeenth century. Although it reached a hitherto unknown level of sophistication during that age, art dealing activity is mentioned as early as 1457 in Brugge.<sup>18</sup> Numerous regulations governing the business with paintings in mid-sixteenth century Utrecht attest further to the importance of the art market. The lucrative and enjoyable character of markets in general attracted art dealing, and artists traveled from market to market selling their works. Sometimes traveling salesmen sold, along with other merchandise, inexpensive paintings for two to ten guilders at these markets,<sup>19</sup> thus satisfying the growing demand for cheap paintings often in the form of copies manufactured by the dozen.<sup>20</sup> Just because these works were sold for low prices, they were not necessarily second rate. Isaac van Ostade, for instance, once painted a group of thirteen paintings for the art dealer Leendert Hendricksz for a total of twenty-seven guilders, or slightly above two guilders per work.<sup>21</sup> Typically, those pictures were simple, popularly-appealing subjects intended for sale to the art hungry lower middle class and rural population. Eloquent sales techniques enhanced the works desirability and speculative attraction.<sup>22</sup> As the art market grew in complexity towards the mid-century, specialization occurred:

soon the general merchant, who in addition to selling other goods, also offered paintings at fairs and markets, and the traveling artist, who sold his works and perhaps some paintings by others during the same occasion, found competition from professional art dealers. The appearance of this new profession and its in-built demands and requirements paved the way to an art market in which anonymous consumer demand, observed and manipulated by the professional middleman—the art dealer—dictated to a large degree the artistic production. The role of the dealer was to recognize, respond to, or create this demand and find the most effective, efficient, and profitable way to satisfy it. The widespread popularity of paintings and the profit potential of art dealing also attracted other professions to the business. Paintings were sold, for example, by book dealers, in pubs, often because painters gave them to the inn-keeper in lieu of payment for food and drink, by dealers in religious objects, second-hand merchandise dealers, jewelers, flower dealers and frame makers.<sup>23</sup> The trade in Dutch art in the seventeenth century did not just touch almost every facet of the consuming public in Holland proper, but also encompassed an active export trade with France, Italy (although to a lesser degree), Spain, Germany, and England.<sup>24</sup>

From the aforementioned, one can thus conclude that the market for paintings was extensive; the emergence of the middle class as patrons significantly broadened and solidified the demand, while the supply—the artist painting for an increasingly anonymous market—was to a large extent regulated by professional merchants, members of an advanced capitalist society. Artistic production and private patronage were thus affected by considerations such as saleability of product, cost and supply of inventory, overhead, profit and loss, risk factor, loans and interest rates and speed of turnover.

*Dynamics and Structure of the Art Market.* Having briefly discussed the size of the Dutch art market, we now turn to its structure and dynamics. During the seventeenth century, paintings were accepted by the majority of the population as a liquid, tangible value. This conclusion can be derived from the variety of financial functions pictures fulfilled in Dutch society.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary records show that artists, and sometimes also art dealers, had to resort on occasion to settling their debts with paintings as payment.<sup>26</sup> These debts could consist of anything—rent payments, house purchases, clothing costs, wine and food bills, pub tabs (which caused many pub owners to double as art dealers), even interest payments on loans.<sup>27</sup> Due to the relatively high liquidity of paintings coupled with the surplus wealth among the burgeoning middle class, art works took on the characteristics of an investment suitable for speculation. Those who benefitted from the economical growth that the young country enjoyed needed places to invest their money—land was scarce and property in limited supply. The rarity of such traditional investments also significantly helped (for example, the popularity of the Amsterdam Beurse, in these days the most advanced investment vehicle) as well as affected the



art market.<sup>28</sup> With a passion almost equal to that of the famous tulip mania (1623-1637), the Dutch population collected, invested, bought and sold paintings.<sup>29</sup> Because the pictures were still intended for homes, a system of secondary markets had to be developed to facilitate the busy trading activity. Of course, private patrons still visited studios of artists they admired to purchase their work. Not infrequently, painters also kept works by fellow artists in their possession to copy and to sell to any interested buyer.<sup>30</sup> Besides the master's original compositions the choice of paintings available in the studio could typically consist of: works by Italian artists used for copies and eventual sale; and paintings by contemporaries for the same purpose, as well as copies executed by either master or apprentice. Due to the low price of copies and workshop pictures, they were popular sellers, in other words, "pot boilers" or "bread and butter" pictures. In addition to direct buyer-to-seller contact, the market also offered lotteries to artists, dealers, and collectors. The Dutch enjoyment of betting and gambling enhanced the popularity of these lotteries and provided one of the outlets for speculation.<sup>31</sup> Art lotteries appeared as early as 1445 in Brugge and gained widely in popularity in the seventeenth century. Sometimes the paintings raffled off were the work of one artist only as was the case at a lottery of thirty paintings by the landscape painter Jan Willemsz Decker held in The Hague in 1614. At other times the offering could have been more varied, as for example at a Utrecht auction held in 1649: 2182 tickets were sold for 158 objects, mostly paintings by contemporary local artists and some copies.<sup>32</sup> Other marketplaces for paintings were weekly-held auctions. The busy schedule of sales further enhanced the potential for speculation. Strict regulations governed this aspect of the business and attempts to violate these were not uncommon.<sup>33</sup> These auctions, sometimes called "Fridaymarkets," were the ideal place for the speculator, and also for the professional art dealer, as an important and convenient source for inventory.<sup>34</sup> Towards mid-century the auction system was so much in demand that it presented a danger of proliferation of the market.<sup>35</sup> The accessibility to the public, the open, competitive spirit, and the seemingly unlimited supply of goods, made the auctions an inexpensive buyer's market,<sup>36</sup> as well as providing instant liquidity for tangible art assets of both collectors and dealers. It is worth noting that Montias, in his extensive analysis, found no evidence of artists using these weekly auctions to sell their own works.<sup>37</sup> One can only speculate on the reasons; perhaps the unpredictability of the eventual selling price made this way of selling too risky for the artist. Nevertheless, the records of these auctions are considered one of the most important sources of knowledge about the prices of paintings in Holland.<sup>38</sup> Besides these weekly auctions, estate auctions were held as needed, by the order of creditors or heirs which could, of course, also serve as a supply source for art dealers' inventories.<sup>39</sup> Art exhibitions, as we know them today, were still in their infancy and had difficulty finding support

from artists as well as collectors who preferred the more traditional avenues of buying and selling.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to marketing vehicles such as lotteries and auctions, another important factor influenced the dynamics of the art market: the collector, whose taste demands and pocketbook extended the power of patronage. As the market for paintings grew and specialization of artists developed further, the needs and habits of the patron exerted an increasing influence over the artistic production.<sup>41</sup> This control exercised by the demand side of the market went as far as having clearly detailed contracts between patrons and artists specifying time frame, price, size, subject, and quality of the painter's production.<sup>42</sup> Painting "to sell" was not only acceptable but necessary for an artist to attain commercial success, and one must be conscious of the dialectic of the painter/patron relationship and its significant impact on the artistic and cultural character of the age.

In summary, the sophisticated Dutch art market of the seventeenth century was highly active, competitive and liquid. Middle class collectors, speculators and the emerging specialized art dealer added to the overall volume and exercised both financial and aesthetic influence.

*The Role of the Dealer.* Although direct contact between artists and collectors persisted throughout the seventeenth century, the age gave birth to the professional art dealer, which, in job description was very similar to his or her twentieth-century counterpart. As middleman, he or she stepped between consumer and producer of art works, and, since his or her income was derived from the frequency of turnover, the art dealers' activities were governed by the desire to enhance this aspect of the business. Increasing one's turnover required a knowledge and awareness of current popular trends as well as the ability to actively promote styles and artworks suitable for a trendy and widespread market. One must, therefore, consider the art dealer in a passive as well as active relationship to the market. Not only did the business require the ability to satisfy existing demands but also to create new ones. As in any business dealing with merchandise, inventory was essential. Sensibly the cost—and therefore the risk—of this stock of paintings was kept as low as possible for each individual item in order to present the largest selection for the least capital output. Frequently, the inventory was bought at auctions or *kirmesses*, and purchases often consisted of fine originals which were then copied by the dozen by young artists employed for meager wages.<sup>43</sup> Occasionally, these young painters were assigned to do independent work, such as Van Dyck who at age sixteen was ordered to execute thirteen paintings—Christ and the twelve apostles—for the Antwerp dealer Willem Vergaagen.<sup>44</sup> The auctions were also an excellent source for inexpensive paintings, sometimes even unfinished, which were purchased with the intention of having them completed by the dealer's own stable of artists.<sup>45</sup> It was also common practice for dealers to commission painters to execute specific works in large quantities, again for very little money.<sup>46</sup> A wide selection of cheap but popular



paintings reduced the dealers' risk and facilitated quick and easy selling to satisfy the growing demand among the middle class who represented the bulk of the buying public. Selling works on consignment was also practiced to further reduce capital investment in stock.<sup>47</sup> More expensive works were only found in very small numbers in dealers' inventories, generally there to be copied or occasionally sold to a wealthy client.<sup>48</sup>

The popularity of art collection, and the potential profit to be made from dealing in paintings, attracted a variety of individuals to the business. In his essay on art dealers in the seventeenth-century Netherlands,<sup>49</sup> Montias differentiates between three different types of dealers. The first category was the *exclusive dealers* who were oriented more or less entirely to meeting the demand of a high class clientele for quality paintings, offering their customers different national styles (*i.e.*, Dutch, Italian, Flemish) and periods. They almost certainly did not have a stable of artists working for them on a regular basis. Second, and on the other end of the spectrum, were those dealers who made their living by selling works for which they paid very little by obscure artists.<sup>50</sup> And finally, the middle ground was occupied by dealers who catered to a clientele somewhat superior to that of the aforementioned though far below the exclusive category of wealthy art collectors of the first group. Besides the full-time professional dealer, there existed also a wide variety of enterprising individuals seeking to enhance their livelihood by trading in paintings (page 23), and it comes as no surprise that the business in paintings enjoyed a somewhat dubious reputation. Dealers quite regularly changed the attribution of paintings to follow market trends by removing authentic signatures and replacing them with more currently-popular painters.<sup>51</sup> Practices such as these and other devices earned the trader in art the reputation of doing anything for a sale, dishonest or not. This liberal attitude towards authorship is also among the chief reasons for the ongoing difficulties in correctly identifying many works of this period.

The role of the art dealer as described above leads to certain conclusions regarding the effects of this profession on the art scene in seventeenth-century Holland. As money flowed into art, the growth of the market gave birth to the specialized art dealer. The momentum inherent in this further fed the demand for paintings and resulted in increasing pressure on the suppliers effecting a need for inexpensive, quickly executed, often mass-produced paintings. The subsequent flooding of the market exercised a further downward pressure on the average price of paintings. Dealers in art took on the role of financiers while collectors became speculators. The volatility of an active and overloaded market in contemporary paintings made art of the past a more attractive and safer investment.<sup>52</sup> This leads to the further conclusion that the majority of pictures produced by living painters for dealers were necessarily of the inexpensive kind, while only artists with an already-established reputation and direct contact to collectors were inclined to devote

time and money to the execution of major—and thus expensive—works which could only be afforded by a wealthy and, therefore, much smaller group of patrons.<sup>53</sup> The high prices these artists had to charge for their works also put them in competition with older, pre-seventeenth century art, which added further to the inherent risk and their reluctance to execute expensive paintings. The position of the dealer created the very anonymity of the consumer for which the artist painted. Rules of business more than aesthetic considerations of the artist exercised influence over artistic production, and the dealer manipulated artist and patron alike to satisfy the demands of his or her business.

*The Role of the Artist.* The next aspect to be considered in this survey of the Dutch art market is the role played by artists in their relationship to dealers and the buying public. Many of the painters came from the middle or upper classes of society who could afford the relatively high cost of the required six-year training period or were themselves the children of painters.<sup>54</sup> This fact also accounts for the very few instances of illiteracy among painters.<sup>55</sup> Initially, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, these artists owned small workshops with only a few helpers and worked primarily for the church and private patrons. As the middle class grew in wealth the artists adapted to the new environment. Artistic expression was directed by the perception and understanding of the anonymous customer's taste and painters were forced to create large inventories to be able to have a broad selection of works available for sale.<sup>56</sup> This necessity demanded that the artists work in genres which could be inexpensively mass produced, such as still lifes, landscapes, simple interiors, etc.<sup>57</sup> To market the production of their studios, it was frequently necessary for the artists to actively seek buyers. Once their names were firmly established, it became possible to sell directly to the consumer by engaging in personal contact with the patrons. Special arrangements with collectors, such as the right of first refusal, did exist.<sup>58</sup> However, the artists, already occupied with a busy studio, preferred to work through dealers whose very roles gave them a better understanding of consumer taste and could give suggestions or outright commissions to the painters as well as providing working capital.<sup>59</sup>

The activities of a painter were very demanding, and the organization of a studio taught most Dutch artists to work hard and produce easily at a young age.<sup>60</sup> Their lives were regulated by the rules of the powerful guild, membership of which was almost essential to the artists' economic survival. The art market was very competitive, and it was by no means easy for painters to make a decent living. Many died in poverty,<sup>61</sup> and it was not uncommon for artists to have more than just one source of livelihood. A further demand the market placed on the artists was the need for specialization regarding subject matter of their work. Montias records, for example, the specialization of thirty-four guild members in Delft in 1613.<sup>62</sup> This growth of specialties provides an accurate mirror of trends



in consumer taste throughout the century.<sup>63</sup> Mass production of certain subjects and the resulting downward pressure on prices gave way to a form of exploitation of artists known as the "galley" system,<sup>64</sup> whereby dealers and heads of studios would employ professional artists for poverty wages to produce large amounts of special subjects of particular current interest to be sold inexpensively to the public.

What can be concluded from all this? The change from direct contact with the patron to painting largely for the anonymous market reached through the professional dealer, and the resulting mass production, forced the value of art to go down. This price tendency again increased mass production, further depressing prices.<sup>65</sup> It became therefore economically imprudent for painters to execute major, *i.e.* expensive, works unless they were intended for a specifically identified buyer.

*Value and Valuation of Paintings.* The popular use of paintings as a financial instrument, the position of artists as members of a professional guild coupled with the already described dynamics of the art market, necessitated a structured system of valuation for artistic production. The prime factor determining a given artwork's cost was the artist's labor influenced to a degree by the forces of supply and demand.<sup>66</sup> As far as demand was concerned, one must take into consideration the change of the painter's role from craftsman to artist. Through skillful promotion, certain individuals succeed in breaking out of the confinements of a valuation based strictly on labor and incorporated more ambiguous and flexible considerations in the pricing of their works.<sup>67</sup> Leaving these exceptions aside, painterly skill, subject matter, and production time remained the determining factors for valuation. On the high side were painters like Vermeer, Gerard Dou, and Frans van Mieris—the *Fijnschilder*—who received anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 guilders per work.<sup>68</sup> These artists worked slowly, executing highly-detailed, meticulously-finished paintings which took six months or more to complete. For these artists it was difficult, if not outright impossible, to paint works "on spec." The long production time and the resulting high prices of their paintings significantly reduced the number of potential buyers—works by van Mieris and Dou cost the equivalent of an average house—and they would have needed a great deal of capital to keep an inventory on hand.<sup>69</sup> A small group of wealthy patrons, who bought their works on a fairly regular basis, functioned as the main source of livelihood for these artists (*e.g.*, Vermeer). It comes, therefore, as no surprise that paintings, which by their very method of execution were very expensive, were also exceedingly rare. On the low side of the market, were the unattributed, often mass-produced paintings for the broad public. An analysis of dealers' inventories shows without exception that unattributed works comprised well over 60% of their stock with prices rarely exceeding 50 guilders per painting.<sup>70</sup> Even attributed paintings by well-known artists were subject to the value reducing effects of a flooded market.<sup>71</sup>

One of the most interesting consequences of this oversupply was the effect of the market on style. What is often thought of as a change of aesthetic considerations was actually the result of certain cost-lowering innovations which painters were forced to adopt for reasons of competition. One of the devices was the shift from a linear-mannerist to a painterly baroque style. Originating in Harlem, from the 1620s on, the supply of works in the "new" style increased by leaps and bounds as prices declined simultaneously. The typical cost of a landscape in the new style was around 15 to 20 guilders as compared with 60 or more guilders for the old.<sup>72</sup> Such outright prostitution by market forces may be shocking to modern critics, but one must not forget that the majority of artists treated their craft as a way of making a living rather than a sacred calling. Numerous instances are known of well-established artists who ceased to paint when they made rich marriages or found a more lucrative occupation.<sup>73</sup>

Production time was closely linked with subject matter. A broadly executed landscape by van Goyen, for example, took considerably less time to paint than an architectural interior by de Witte. Consequently, the inventories of the period recorded not only prices but also subject matter.<sup>74</sup> On the average, history paintings and architectural pictures were the highest priced throughout the century while landscapes were the cheapest and enjoyed the widest distribution among the middle class collections; again, no market scenes are mentioned in the records of these inventories.<sup>75</sup> This confirms the notion that the very forces of the market played a significant and dominating influence on the artistic production of seventeenth-century Holland.

*Examples of Market Scene Paintings.* An analysis of several representative examples of seventeenth-century Dutch market scenes allows for a judgement of their position in relation to their place in the market.<sup>76</sup>

The first painting to be addressed is a work by Hendrick Sorgh depicting a *Vegetable Market*, signed and dated 1662 (oil on panel, 20 x 28", Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).<sup>77</sup> (Figure 1) The painting incorporates three distinct elements: architectural painting, still life, and genre. All aspects of the composition are executed with meticulous attention to detail. This, as well as the highly-finished surface quality of the picture which shows almost no visible evidence of individual brushstrokes, puts this work clearly in the category of "*Fijnschilder*"—by itself the most expensive method of execution. In order to depict the various elements of townscape, figures, and market goods on this relatively small panel, highly detailed execution was necessary and months of labor went into this painting. Taking quality and production time into consideration, as well as the mixture of three different pictorial elements, the cost of this particular, and typical, example of a market scene must have been extremely high. If the artist was actually paid a large price for this panel or if he had to settle for a lesser amount is, unfortunately, not known, nor can we identify its first purchaser and



the method of acquisition. It is unlikely that Sorgh put so much time and money at risk and executed the panel to be sold on the open market. It is far more likely that he had a specific buyer in mind or was actually commissioned to do this work. The portrait-like quality of the seated female figure on the left could possibly provide a clue. A dealer would also not be inclined to purchase this work for resale and tie up a large amount of capital with only one single very expensive piece which, due to price, appealed to a very wealthy and small group of buyers who preferred to commit large sums of money to the purchase of established Old Masters. Thus, market appeal, inventory cost considerations, and production time would explain why paintings executed in the described manner were not likely to exist in large numbers.

Another quite similar example is the *Fish Market* painted by the same artist in 1654 (oil on panel, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Kassel).<sup>78</sup> (Figure 2) The same aspects apply. Architectural elements, figurative painting, and still life elements, even seascape, are combined in a painstakingly executed, time-consuming, and, therefore, costly picture. Although Sorgh was noted for his market scenes and to a degree even specialized in them, by far the larger part of his oeuvre consisted of much less elaborate works which could be sold much more easily on the open market to the average middle-class collector.

Another market scene painted by Gabriel Metsu, *Vegetable Market at Amsterdam* (oil on canvas, 97 x 84-1/2 cm, Louvre, Paris)<sup>79</sup> incorporates fewer still life elements, but places emphasis on the figurative parts of the composition. (Figure 3) Also, highly finished, the painting again falls under the category of the expensive "Fijnschilder."

Note: *The Art Bulletin* of September 1990 (Volume LXXII, number 3, pp. 358-373) published an essay "Socio-Economic Aspects of Netherlandish Art from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century: A Survey" by J. M. Montias. I received the article after the completion of this paper, and, while it endorses my argument for the economical basis of the relative scarcity of certain subject matters among the works of seventeenth-century Dutch painters, the author addresses several sources I relied upon. Montias criticizes the often quoted diary entry of John Evelyn regarding the widespread popularity and speculative use of paintings by the Dutch rural population as well as the diarist's conjecture that the reason for the abundance and cheapness of pictures in Holland was to be sought in the lack of land in which to invest money. Equally, Montias disputes Bredius' claim that "almost every Dutchman in the seventeenth century owned a small gallery; there were lots of pictures hanging in the houses of citizens, from the most distinguished to those of the plainest status." I cited both Evelyn and Bredius as evidence for the widespread popularity of paintings among the population of seventeenth century Holland, as well as Montias' own findings in this regard in the city of Delft. A significant reduction of Evelyn's and Bredius' quantitative comments is of little bearing to my argument and the proliferation of paintings among the Dutch population during the period addressed in my study remains still significant. For readers with specific interest in the study of the Dutch art market of the seventeenth century, Montias' article presents an up-to-date critical analysis of past and present scholarship on the subject as well as a basis from which to undertake further specific research.

1 John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft. A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 227.

2 I am using the term "taste" loosely here. Taste, as we will see, was

There exists a slightly larger number of pictures depicting individual market stalls or single figures offering products for sale. Less elaborate in composition and execution, they were much cheaper to produce and, consequently, enjoyed a broader base of potential buyers, perhaps the members of the very trades they depicted.<sup>80</sup> Even so, their numbers, as recorded in the inventories, are still very small in comparison with other categories. (Figure 4)

Examining market scene paintings with respect to their cost or potential selling price and its related consequences will almost always produce the same conclusions. The technical challenges and the time needed to successfully execute a typical example of good quality puts these paintings into an exclusive category. Because they were time consuming and difficult for the artist, expensive and risky for the dealer, affordable only to the very wealthy, therefore of relatively low liquidity and unsuitable for speculation to the investment-hungry middle class, the very nature of the art market dictated a very limited production of this category of paintings.

Regrettably, in my investigation I was unable to locate any records which could identify the first purchasers and original prices of well-known market scene paintings. Such information would provide further insight into this issue. Ultimately, more studies of the complex interrelation between patron—market—and artist are needed to fully gauge the extent to which economic forces affected the visual heritage of the first fully developed capitalist economy of Western Europe.

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not strictly a reflection of aesthetic concerns but subject to manipulation from the side of art dealers and also directly affected by price.

3 See Montias 227 and also Albert Bredius, *Kunstsler-Inventare, Urkunden zur Geschichte der Hollaendischen Kunst des XVIIten, XVIIIten und XVIII Jahrhunderts* (Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag, 1921). It should be pointed out that it was generally customary to record inventories of the middle and upper class households only, yet it can be assumed that the lower classes imitated to a large degree the collecting habits of their wealthier counterparts.

4 Eric Larsen and Jane Davidson, *Calvinist Economy and 17th Century Dutch Art* (University of Kansas Publication, Lawrence, 1979) 19, as quoted by J. W. Smits, *Preconditions of Revolution*, 52, 53.

5 Linda Scott Ferrier, "Gabriel Metsu's Vegetable Market at Amsterdam: 17th Century Dutch Market Paintings & Horticulture," *Art Bulletin* LXXI, 3, (1989): 442.

6 Ferrier 442.

7 Ferrier 428. Quote: "After the middle of the seventeenth century an unprecedented group of paintings of vegetable markets was produced. . . . The large number of such paintings extant demonstrates their popularity at the time they were produced. . . . the growth in the importance of Dutch horticulture in these communities paralleled the growth of production of the marketplace paintings."

8 Ferrier 428, and note 3. Gerrit Dou, Jan Steen, (and others of the Leiden School), Gabriel Metsu, Jan Victors, Nicolaes Maes, Hendrick Sorgh, Quirijn van Brekelenkam, Emmanuel de Witte, Michiel van Musscher, Jacob Toorenvliet and others.



- 9 Albert Bredius, *Meisterwerke des Rijksmuseums* (Amsterdam, 1903) 62. For accuracy of this statement see my note at the end of this essay.
- 10 Bredius 62; Montias 227.
- 11 Christie's, Sotheby's, Hotel Drouot.
- 12 By fully developed, I mean market scene paintings similar in elaboration to their sixteenth-century predecessors by Aertsen and Beuckelaer. However, one must recognize the difference in their meaning as well as the difference of the patronal structure in the sixteenth versus the seventeenth century.
- 13 John Evelyn, *Diary & Correspondence of John Evelyn, Frs*, ed. W. Bray (London) 15, as cited by Larsen 40, and H. Floerke, *Studien zur Niederlaendischen Kunst-und Kulturgeschichte*, Georg Muller, Munchen und Leipzig, (1905), ed. Davaco Publishers, Soest Holland, (1972) 20. See also my note at the end of this essay.
- 14 John Michael Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," *Art in America* July 1988: 27.
- 15 Larsen 17.
- 16 Montias 48.
- 17 Montias 220. The difference between Bredius' number and Montias' is probably due to the fact that most of the inventories of the poor and lower class people in Delft artworks are summarily described. Montias caveats that his sampling does *not* provide unbiased data but records mostly the upper end of wealth distribution—about one inventory to every 10-15 households (222,224).
- 18 Floerke 6.
- 19 Floerke 11, 14, 17, 18.
- 20 Floerke 158. These paintings were often called "Brabanter Dutzendware" after the city in which they were frequently produced, Brabant and their mass production "by the dozen."
- 21 Floerke 22.
- 22 Floerke 28, 29, 100.
- 23 Floerke 74.
- 24 Floerke 74-83.
- 25 Montias 25.
- 26 Montias 195; Floerke 30ff.
- 27 Floerke 30ff.
- 28 Larsen 48.
- 29 Larsen 37, 38, 48; Montias 197; Floerke 164.
- 30 More on the role of the artist in the art market will be discussed in a subsequent part of this paper. Doubling as art dealers was a common source of supplementary income and a natural extension of the studio activity. (See for example Vermeer, who, for most of his career as a painter also maintained, together with his wife, an active trade in pictures by other artists.)
- 31 Montias 197.
- 32 Floerke 55-57.
- 33 Floerke 42.
- 34 Floerke 37.
- 35 Floerke 46.
- 36 Montias 203.
- 37 Montias 203.
- 38 Montias 202.
- 39 Floerke 37.
- 40 Floerke 58-67. Floerke is of the opinion that the idea of exhibitions seemed to have been contradictory to the interest and habits of artists and collectors.
- 41 Alan Chong, "The Market for Landscape Paintings in Seventeenth Century Holland," *Masters of the Seventeenth Century Dutch Landscape Painting*, ed. Peter Sutton (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987) 113.
- 42 Floerke 168.
- 43 Floerke 96, 105.
- 44 Floerke 95; for an additional example see 19.
- 45 Floerke 95.
- 46 Floerke 97. For example, the art dealer Peter Coenrarts commissioned Tobias van Haecht to paint 18 works for a unit price of 30 guilders. Floerke lists numerous similar cases; John Michael Montias, "Art Dealers in the 17th Century Netherlands," *Simiolus*, 18, no. 4, 245; Larsen 44.
- 47 Montias 209.
- 48 Floerke 105.
- 49 Montias, "Art Dealers in the 17th Century Netherlands," 252.
- 50 Montias 202, 204. The dealers of this category were often women from lower class backgrounds. See also Floerke 116.
- 51 Floerke 99.
- 52 Floerke 120.
- 53 Larsen 43.
- 54 Montias 133.
- 55 Montias 114.
- 56 Montias 195.
- 57 Larsen 195.
- 58 Larsen 195.
- 59 Montias, "Art Dealers in the 17th Century Netherlands," 246.
- 60 Floerke 131.
- 61 Montias 130.
- 62 Montias 141; Floerke 87, 88.
- 63 Montias 146; Floerke 87, 88.
- 64 Floerke 246.
- 65 Larsen 48.
- 66 John Michael Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," *Art in America* July 1988: 25; Floerke 54, 55, 178.

67 Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Alpers suggests that Rembrandt's style, quite opposite to that of the "Fijnschilder" method, was designed to save production time as well as to remove his work out of the traditional evaluation system. This argument stands largely unsupported but Rembrandt, like all other painters, had to deal with a saturated market and the resulting low prices. Merely reducing production time by adopting a more painterly style would have depressed the prices of his work. Therefore, consciously changing the expressive quality of his work to step outside the value system generally applied seems a plausible solution to maintain his high prices.

68 Chong 115; Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," 25.

69 Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," 25.

70 Chong 116.

71 Floerke 52, 109; Larsen 46.

72 Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," 27.

73 Montias, "On Art and Economic Reasoning," 25.

74 Montias 231, 238. In 1,224 inventories between 1610-1679 the subject was specified in a little over half of the pictures listed. 9,623

paintings were classified in various categories: monks, hermits, confessions, seascapes, river landscapes, barn scenes, dogs, cats, live birds, other small domestic animals, family portraits, royal portraits, Old Testament, New Testament, other religious subjects, mythologies, landscapes, genre, still lifes, children, naked persons, and candlelight scenes.

75 Chong 112, 116.

76 I am purposely omitting any discussion regarding the emblematic versus descriptive content of these paintings, since the aspect I am addressing in this paper does not concern itself with this issue.

77 Peter C. Sutton, ed, *Masters of Seventeenth Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) 305, plate 95.

78 Sutton, fig. 87, LI.

79 Christopher Brown, *Images of a Golden Past* (N.Y.: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1984) 114.

80 Sutton, 138, plate 119. *The Baker* by Job Berckheyde, (o/c, monogrammed, 25 x 20-3/8").



Figure 4. Job Berckheyde, *The Baker*, c. 1681, oil on canvas, 25" x 20 7/8", Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.



Figure 1. Hendrick Sorgh, *Vegetable Market*, 1662, oil on panel, 20" x 28", Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 2. Hendrick Sorgh, *Fish Market*, 1654, oil on panel, 20" x 24", Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Kassel.





Figure 3. Gabriel Metsu, *Vegetable Market at Amsterdam*, mid 1650s, oil on canvas, 97 x 84½cm, Louvre, Paris.