

# Imitatio and Aemulatio: Reevaluating Aert de Gelder's Self-Portrait as Zeuxis

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On October 1, 1727, the *'s Gravenhaegse Courant* announced a posthumous sale of the collection of the Dordrecht painter Aert de Gelder (1645-1727). It advertised:

a great quantity of extraordinarily artful and astonishingly beautiful paintings, all of which were painted and subsequently owned by the renowned gentleman and painter, the late Aert de Gelder, the only disciple who scrupulously followed his renowned master, Rembrandt, in the art of painting.<sup>1</sup>

Conspicuous within this text is the identification of De Gelder as a "disciple" of Rembrandt van Rijn (1609-1669),

I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to H. Perry Chapman, who has provided me with invaluable support, suggestions, challenges, and a critical eye throughout my work on this essay. I would also like to thank Christopher D.M. Atkins, who provided immeasurable support as well as helpful comments and suggestions as I worked to complete this essay. Finally, I would like to thank Margarita Karasoulas, a fellow author in this volume, for her inexhaustible support as a friend and colleague throughout this process.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gabriël M.C. Pastoor, "The Life of Aert de Gelder," in *Aert de Gelder: Dordrecht 1645-1727*, ed. J.W. von Moltke (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1994), 8. Pastoor identifies the date and placement of the advertisement as the 20 September 1727 issue of the *Amsterdamsche Courant*. However, I could not find the ad in the copy of the *Amsterdamsche Courant* that I examined, though Pastoor 8n54 notes that the ad ran in the paper again on 2 and 14 October. Nevertheless, the *'s Gravenhaegse Courant* text cited here corresponds with the passage he reproduces. The original reads (transcription mine from *'s Gravenhaegse Courant*): "Maendag den 22 Octoberen volgende dagen, zal te Dordrecht verkogt worden, een grote quantiteyt zeer uyt muntende, ongemeen konstige en verwonderenswaardige schilderyen, alle geschilderd en nagelaten door den vermaerden Heer en Konst schilder, *Aert de Gelder*, de eenigste Discipel, die zyne beroemden Meester *Rembrandt*, stiptelyk in de Schilderkunst nagevolgd heeft." This advertisement also references the fact that De Gelder was the main collector of his own works, which comprised about 70 of the 190 paintings left among his belongings at his death. The probate inventory also listed, among other things, painting equipment, sketchbooks, framed drawings and prints. Inventory list cited in David Raymond van Fossen, *The Paintings of Aert de Gelder* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1969), 9.

<sup>2</sup> De Gelder likely began his training as a painter in 1660 around the age of 15 with Rembrandt's former pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), who was one of the leading painters in Dordrecht in the 1660s. Though he is commonly believed to be the last or among the last of the master's pupils, the exact dates of De Gelder's tenure in Rembrandt's studio have been the subject of some debate. Pastoor ("Life," 4) puts the date of his entry at 1662, the year that Samuel van

whose studio De Gelder entered around 1662 and probably left between 1666 and 1669.<sup>2</sup> The tone of the *Courant* advertisement is foreshadowed in Arnold Houbraken's 1721 biography of De Gelder, which calls him "the most successful imitator of Rembrandt's manner," a label that De Gelder himself may well have promoted.<sup>3</sup> Houbraken's description of him is echoed over 250 years later by Albert Blankert, who characterizes De Gelder as Rembrandt's "unembarrassed imitator."<sup>4</sup> This designation comes from De Gelder's rough, visible brushwork, which by the 1660s was heavily associated with Rembrandt and distinguishes De Gelder from many of the master's other former pupils, such as the *fijn* painter Gerrit Dou. Thus within his lifetime, immedi-

Hoogstraten left for England, concluding that De Gelder most likely left Amsterdam in 1666. Writing earlier, Van Fossen (*Aert de Gelder*, 73-74) puts the artist's return date from Amsterdam to Dordrecht as 1669-1670, listing among other reasons the death of Rembrandt on that date. Van Fossen concludes, however, that there are no documents placing De Gelder back in Dordrecht before the 1680s, and that De Gelder could have possibly left Amsterdam at an earlier date and/or returned to the city from Dordrecht. Joachim W. von Moltke likewise supposes that De Gelder may have had continued contact with Rembrandt after leaving his studio; he gives the apprenticeship dates as 1662-1664, but specifically mentions that De Gelder may have seen the *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* on later visits to Rembrandt's studio ("A Personal View of the Artist as a Painter," in Von Moltke, *Aert de Gelder: Dordrecht 1645-1727* [Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1994], 19). Ernst van de Wetering uses the 1662 date of De Gelder's entry as justification for the back-dating of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* ("Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: Problems of Authenticity and Function," in *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings IV: The Self-Portraits*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering, et al. [New York: Springer Publishing, 2005], 296). Van de Wetering concludes later in the corpus entry, however, that the date of 1662 is only a supposition, albeit in favor of an even earlier start date ("Cat. no. IV 25: Self-Portrait as Zeuxis Laughing," in Van de Wetering, et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings IV*, 558). Albert Blankert dates the Rembrandt to the last years of the artist's life, giving a range of 1663-1669 ("Rembrandt, Zeuxis, and Ideal Beauty," in *Selected Writings on Dutch Painting: Rembrandt, Van Beke, Vermeer and Others* [Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2004], 44) and suggests that De Gelder must have been in the position to see Rembrandt's painting in full while he was working on it ("Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 36).

<sup>3</sup> David de Witt, "Aert de Gelder, Jan Steen, and Houbraken's 'Perfect Picture'," in *Rembrandt and Dutch History Painting in the 17th Century*, ed. Akira Kofuku (Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art, 2004): 85. On Houbraken (1660-1719) and De Gelder see Pastoor, "Life," 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 36. Blankert characterized De Gelder as "Rembrandt's last and most faithful pupil...the only direct follower—one could even say unembarrassed imitator—of Rembrandt's late, broad style."

ately after his death and continuing well into the twentieth century Aert de Gelder's name has been inseparable from that of Rembrandt.<sup>5</sup>

In his 1973 article Blankert used a then little-known *Self-Portrait* by De Gelder in Frankfurt (Figure 1) to identify the subject of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* in Cologne (Figure 2) as Rembrandt in the guise of the fourth-century BCE Greek painter Zeuxis. Rembrandt's laughing expression and the figure to his left are the unique identifiers of the Cologne painting, suggesting a specific subject but not leading easily to one. Art historians had struggled with Rembrandt's painting, identifying it alternately as the laughing philosopher Democritus with a bust of the crying Heraclitus or as Rembrandt laughing at an image of death.<sup>6</sup> By way of De Gelder's painting, Blankert persuasively connected Rembrandt's portrayal to the legend of Zeuxis's death. A story uncommon in literature on art and unprecedented in painting before Rembrandt, it first appeared in Dutch in Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604). Van Mander relates:

Zeuxis is supposed to have died laughing immoderately, choking while painting from life a funny, wrinkled old woman... Here is a poet's version of these lines: "Do you laugh without moderation? Or do you wish to be like the painter, who died from laughing?"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From 1998-1999 a major exhibition of the artist's work was staged in Dordrecht, Cologne, and Ghent. Two major catalogues for this show were published, the Dutch version declaring De Gelder as "Rembrandt's last pupil," (Dirk Bijker, et al., *Aert de Gelder [1645-1727]: Rembrandts laatste leerling*, exhibition catalogue [Dordrecht: Dordrechts Museum, 1998]) and the German catalogue hailing him as "Rembrandt's master pupil and successor" (Udo Brüssow, *Aert de Gelder [1645-1727]: Rembrandts Meisterschüler und Nachfolger*, exhibition catalogue [Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht: Dordrechts Museum; Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1998]). Notable reexaminations of the relationship between De Gelder and Rembrandt are Van Fossen's (*Aert de Gelder*, 1969) systematic comparisons of Rembrandt's and De Gelder's paintings to determine the extent of his reliance on his last teacher (*Aert de Gelder*, 188; see more broadly 182-191) as well as De Witt's ("Aert de Gelder, Jan Steen," 86) conclusion that it was Jan Steen who served as an important source for De Gelder, an innovation that I examine in a longer version of this essay.

<sup>6</sup> Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 33.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading: The Artist's Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 202. Von Moltke ("A Personal View," 29n48) refers to the story as available to Aert de Gelder through Van Mander or Van Hoogstraten's writings. See also Van de Wetering, "Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," 296; Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 38; and Van de Wetering "Cat. no. IV 25," 556. Van de Wetering ("Cat. no. IV 25," 559) also details that Samuel van Hoogstraten, following Van Mander (1548-1606), describes the story of Zeuxis laughing in two places within his 1678 *Inleyding*. Emphasizing Zeuxis as a painter of emotions, Van Hoogstraten explains that in painting the old woman Zeuxis finally revealed his "unusual" character by splitting with laughter before his own painting.

This paper seeks to assess De Gelder's emulation of Rembrandt, arguing that De Gelder's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* marks his own innovation and experimentation. Because Rembrandt's painting is the only other version of the story of Zeuxis's death, De Gelder's choice of subject can be read as a deliberate homage to and rivalry with Rembrandt. De Gelder's *Self-Portrait* is used as a case study through which to explore his ideas of emulation—imitation with the aim of surpassing—as a selective appropriation of both style and subject matter.<sup>8</sup> Though Blankert's characterization of De Gelder's *Zeuxis* implies a lack of creativity—imitation, not emulation—now one can recognize the central role that both concepts played in artistic modes of the seventeenth century, to the extent that De Gelder used emulation as a self-promotional trademark style.<sup>9</sup>

Aert de Gelder was the eldest of four children and upon the death of his father in 1698 inherited the family's massive fortune, which gave him an astounding level of financial independence as well as artistic freedom.<sup>10</sup> Since De Gelder did not rely on the sale of his paintings for survival, he was at liberty to emulate Rembrandt's work in any manner he chose without much concern for marketability. It also seems that De Gelder was not interested—or successful—in circulating his paintings among Dordrecht collectors. Only a few documents mention him as a painter within his lifetime, and his works do not appear in public sales with any regularity until

<sup>8</sup> This definition of *aemulatio* dates back to antiquity and was transferred to seventeenth-century theoretical writing via the Renaissance. A tripartite process consisting of *translatio-imitatio-aemulatio*, imitation implies a visual reliance on but not direct copying from an original, while emulation requires that the original, admired work is surpassed through purposeful allusion but not reliance or copying. For more detailed discussions of this concept, its breadth, and its positive connotations see H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 65-67. For the key discussion on this conceptual framework for *aemulatio* see Eddy de Jongh, "The Spur of Wit: Rembrandt's Response to an Italian Challenge," *Delta* (1969): 49-67. For a discussion of this concept in relation to Rembrandt's followers, see Blankert "Rape Again: Notes on *Aemulatio* and Plagiarism in Dutch Painting," in *Aemulatio: Imitation, Emulation and Invention in Netherlandish Art from 1500 to 1800, Essays in Honor of Eric Jan Sluifjter*, ed. Anton W.A. Boschloo, et al. (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2011), 277-287. On artistic competition for Rembrandt see also Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 204-205.

<sup>9</sup> Underlining this conclusion is the fact that by the 1680s many of Rembrandt's other pupils had already gone in a different direction (several of them toward fine or smooth brushwork), so that De Gelder's *rouw* style (rough or visible brushwork) can be seen as his attempt to separate himself from the pack, so to speak.

<sup>10</sup> Pastoor, "Life," 6. De Gelder never married or had children. This inheritance was valued between 10,000 and 20,000 *f*. For comparative purposes, Pastoor points out that the assets of Godfried Schalcken were valued between 1,000-4,000 *f*, whom Houbraken reports was paid handsomely for his work. De Gelder's inheritance included houses and other properties, stocks, and bonds.

after 1740.<sup>11</sup> This leads to the conclusion that he likely led a socially prominent yet artistically minor life in Dordrecht.<sup>12</sup> Although his inclusion in Houbraken's biographies indicates that De Gelder's work was well known among contemporaries, his paintings could not command the prices or prestige of his teachers, and his critical fortunes continue to be linked almost exclusively to Rembrandt.<sup>13</sup>

At this point it is beneficial to distinguish the exact relationship between the two paintings. Beyond their shared subject, in De Gelder's *Self-Portrait* the artist's position and relation to the canvas are indeed based on Rembrandt's earlier painting, however there are several key differences between the two that speak to De Gelder's emulative practice. Rembrandt's painting was once thought to have been much larger—and thus possibly closer in format to De Gelder's—but recent technical study has demonstrated that this is not the case.<sup>14</sup> Rembrandt depicted his half-length figure with shoulders and chest turned slightly right and head tilted left but still held fairly upright while De Gelder's upper body is turned further from the viewer and the left tilt of his head is more extreme. The relationships between the two figures and their canvases also vary. Rembrandt's painting places more distance between the artist and canvas, the right side of which likely terminated above the center of his head as revealed by an x-ray examination of the painting (Figure 3). De Gelder's work, on the other hand, positions him surrounded on all sides by his canvas, emphasizing that he is the creator of this image and the painting as a whole—that he is an artist at work. Significantly, the x-ray reveals that this is the very aspect that Rembrandt erased from his *Self-Portrait* by eliminating his painting hand, today only visible through the x-ray like the edge of Rembrandt's fictive canvas men-

tioned above. This detail of Rembrandt with brush in hand, however, would have been clearly visible in the painting's initial appearance.<sup>15</sup> Branching away from Rembrandt, De Gelder shows himself as actively at work and even modifies Rembrandt's original gesture to suggest a different moment: just after the completion of the work and the beginning of his laughter at its ugly comedy. This is emphasized by De Gelder's action: by leaning forward to clean his brush on a painter's box, he signals that he has finished painting and is preparing his materials for storage (Figure 4).<sup>16</sup> Thus in response to Rembrandt's erasure of his working hand, to his reliance on just a laughing face for his identification with Zeuxis, De Gelder both preserves this gesture and expands the size and level of detail in his canvas. By doing this De Gelder maintains the compositional and stylistic links between his picture and Rembrandt's while simultaneously expanding the narrative possibilities (and identifiability) of a self-portrait as Zeuxis. De Gelder, then, chose to portray himself as Zeuxis laughing, a subject that had no precedent before Rembrandt's painting, but in a drastically different manner from his late teacher. It is useful to address the status of Zeuxis before speculating on De Gelder's motives.

In seventeenth-century Holland, the reputation of Zeuxis was manifold. By far the most-repeated legend of Zeuxis, both visually and textually, thematized the construction of ideal beauty from nature (Figure 5). Commissioned to paint a picture of Helen of Troy by the city of Croton, Zeuxis called for the most beautiful women of the city and found none adequate to the task. He ultimately combined the most pleasing parts of the five most beautiful Crotonians, perfecting nature to create an ideal.<sup>17</sup> From Alberti's writings in the fifteenth century onward, this story was repeated as

<sup>11</sup> Pastoor ("Life," 7-8) notes a 1669 probate inventory of the woolen cloth merchant Adriaen Coenen that lists a painting by De Gelder. He also painted portraits of some Dordrecht citizens and was close friends with Jakob Moelaert, an amateur painter and art collector, who likely also served as a patron and whom could possibly be the sitter in De Gelder's so-called *Self-Portrait with the Hundred Guilder Print* (1710, St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum).

<sup>12</sup> De Gelder's father, Jan de Gelder (d. 1698), had trained as a cooper and in 1638 succeeded his father Arent Jansz. de Gelder as caretaker of the Dordrecht West India House. Jan advanced from caretaker to bookkeeper and then treasurer of the West India House as he also expanded his income through moneylending, independent merchant activities, and real estate ventures. Throughout the 1660s Jan's status in Dordrecht continued to grow, resulting first in several prestigious militia appointments and culminating in his election to the College of Eight Worthy Men in 1680. While Aert's social success did not rival that of his father, he was made the ensign of the same militia company and eventually advanced to captain in 1694, signaling that he, too, was a respected member of the Dordrecht community. See Pastoor, "Life," 1-4.

<sup>13</sup> See note 2 for De Gelder's training with Hoogstraten and Rembrandt.

<sup>14</sup> Based on the notion that Rembrandt's painting was originally much larger, Blankert ("Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 36) intimated that De Gelder's entire composition might have been based on Rembrandt's original, which he thought may have been of similar dimensions. The most

recent conservation work done by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne on the Rembrandt demonstrates the significant difference in size between Rembrandt's and De Gelder's canvases (Iris Schaefer, Kathrin Pilz, and Caroline von Saint-George, "Rembrandts 'Selbstbildnis als Zeuxis': Neues zum Original, zur Erhaltung und zur Frage der Restaurierung," *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung* 25, no. 2 [2011]: 289-290). Conservators determined that Rembrandt's canvas could have been at most 119 x 85 cm and at least 100 x 69 cm, those maximum dimensions increasing the current measurement (82.5 x 65 cm) by only 36.5 cm in height and 20 cm in width. In both the minimum and maximum expansion scenarios, the Rembrandt retains its vertical orientation and the extra canvas space would still not allow for the scene to resemble De Gelder's more closely.

<sup>15</sup> See note 2 for the possibility of De Gelder's exposure to Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* throughout his work on the canvas.

<sup>16</sup> The box, also known as a *Wasch-Fasse*, closely matches contemporary descriptions. The *Wasch-Fasse* united both cleaning and storage, with a scraper in the partition between two oil-filled chambers used to loosen and remove colors as well as store brushes so they would not dry out. For a description of the construction and function of the *Wasch-Fasse* as published in J.M. Cröker's 1736 painter's manual, see Katja Kleinert, *Ateliendarstellungen in der niederländischen Genremalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts: Realistisches Abbild oder glaubwürdiger Schein?* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2006), 50.

<sup>17</sup> The story was first recorded by Pliny and then published in the Neth-

support for the idealization of nature and the adherence to a classical model of painting.<sup>18</sup>

A second popular anecdote was the story of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, where the former painted a bowl of fruit so convincing that birds pecked at it and the latter depicted a curtain with such success that his opponent attempted to lift it to find the painting underneath.<sup>19</sup> Even Joachim von Sandrart, who knew Rembrandt and wrote extensively about his life, only illustrated these first two legends in his artistic treatise, where they appeared, as seen here, on a single sheet (Figure 5). A third legend is a variation of the contest with Parrhasius. As told by Pliny, Zeuxis supposedly painted a picture of a boy holding a basket of fruit so convincing that birds were again fooled into trying to eat it. Zeuxis was highly troubled by this, since it meant that he had painted the fruit better than the boy since the birds were not frightened.<sup>20</sup> Where the most popular anecdote of Zeuxis's life frames him as a master of nature and idealization, these two cast him alternately as a second-tier illusionist and a fruit- rather than figure-painter. This judgment is also found in Van Mander, where rather than the inventor of idealized female beauty Zeuxis becomes the premier fruit painter, albeit one who is still worthy of imitation.<sup>21</sup>

The fourth story, that of Zeuxis' death, is by far the most obscure. The version by Van Mander related above was expanded in a Dutch edition of Petrus Lauremberg's 1661 *Acerra Philologica*. He writes:

Zeuxis, a Painter, once portrayed very expertly from life an old, wrinkled, crooked, and misshapen Woman. When he keenly regarded his work, which fully corresponded to the [old woman's] form, he began

to laugh so immoderately and violently that he laughed his own living breath out of himself, and fell dead on the ground.<sup>22</sup>

Significant to this retelling is the emphasis on Zeuxis painting from a wrinkled, ugly model, from life, where his illusionistic prowess is ultimately responsible for his death. De Gelder's model and the orange in her hand thus incorporate all the legends of Zeuxis into this depiction of the artist's death, perhaps even specifically referring to Lauremberg's account, a version that likely inspired Rembrandt as well.<sup>23</sup> Zeuxis's most well known biographical detail, his painting of Helen of Troy, is conjured here not through direct reference but rather through subversion. To a seventeenth-century viewer, the name Zeuxis would likely bring to mind that famous portrait, but in both versions—especially De Gelder's with the presence of the model—they are presented with an old woman rather than an idealized beauty, the implications of which will be discussed below.

On the surface this image presents the quotidian seventeenth-century studio with the artist at work. However the identification of the subject as a portrait of the artist as Zeuxis laughing also makes this image a historiated portrait.<sup>24</sup> This particular type of *portrait historié* is performative, in that—rather than inserting a portrait into an historical scene—the subject is an allusion to an historical personality that is set in the present and thereby suggests specific qualities of character in the portrayed individual.<sup>25</sup> In other words, De Gelder used this portrait type to craft his own image and artistic persona as the modern Zeuxis through the use of a performative self-portrait as the famous painter.

Though assuming the role of Zeuxis at his death could be viewed with condemnation for its immoderation, the ancient

erlands by Karel van Mander in 1604 and Samuel van Hoogstraten in 1678. Significantly, this was previously the only story about Zeuxis to be depicted in painting (Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 39). For the legend see Leonard Barkan, "The Heritage of Zeuxis: Painting, Rhetoric, and History," in *Antiquity and its Interpreters*, ed. Alina Payne, Ann Kuttner, and Rebekah Smick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 99; Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 103; and Van de Wetering, "Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," 296.

<sup>18</sup> For this story as a theoretical justification for the selection from nature see Van de Wetering, "Cat. no. IV 25," 559. The legend was often cited as support of the Academic principle of *electio*. See Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 39; and Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 103; Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-boeck* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 31-32; Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Irene Schaudies ("Trimming Rubens' Shadow: New Light on the Mediation of Caravaggio in the Southern Netherlands," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 55 [2004]: 344-345) repeats this story as the antique theoretical legitimacy for Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (1593, Rome, Galleria Borghese).

<sup>21</sup> The *Schilder-Boeck* begins with biographies of ancient painters. Ac-

ording to Walter Melion, these biographies cast the ancients as "the masters whose practice deserves imitation" (*Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*, 28). For Zeuxis according to Van Mander, see Melion, *Shaping*, 6. Van Mander says of Zeuxis, "one finds that among those who pursued our art in old or ancient times, some were better at one thing and others at another just as you shall see in their lives...Zeuxis fashioned over-large heads, but was a good painter of fruit." Quoted in Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*, 28. Van Mander's praise of successfully painting inanimate objects is quite different from Alberti's praise of the same artist, where he values Zeuxis for his ability to animate female figures rather than simply rendering fruit well (Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*, 30).

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 203.

<sup>23</sup> Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 203.

<sup>24</sup> This is suggested in *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> See Ann Jensen Adams, "The Performative Portrait Historié," in *Pokerfaced: Flemish and Dutch Baroque Faces Unveiled*, ed. Katlijne Van der Stighelen, Hannelore Magnus, and Bert Watteeuw (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010). Adams ("Performative Portrait Historié," 199) identifies two distinct trends in *portraits historiés*, the attributive and the performative types. The attributive type had mostly fallen out of fashion by 1630, its depiction of contemporary sitters with the attributes of a historical figure being usurped by the performative type.

painter had a lofty reputation that spoke to the value of non-conformity and expressiveness, qualities that initially drew Rembrandt's interest and continued to attract De Gelder.<sup>26</sup> Zeuxis was a famed painter of emotions and was noted for his unusual and unexpected subjects, the high prices obtained for his work, and for his eccentric style of painting and his hubris.<sup>27</sup> The second-most famous and respected Antique painter in the Netherlands (after Apelles), Zeuxis's status and above all his appeal for Rembrandt culminated in De Gelder's desire to emulate this model.<sup>28</sup> This emulative self-portrayal as Zeuxis marks De Gelder's effort to identify with and portray himself both literally and theoretically as Zeuxis incarnate.

De Gelder's style, like Rembrandt's, stood firmly opposed to the smooth classicism that had dominated the Netherlands since mid-century and whose proponents praised Zeuxis's life but ignored his death.<sup>29</sup> Writing in 1668/69, Jan de Bisschop (1628-1671) attacked what he saw as the preoccupation in Dutch art with the painterly and ugly, railing, "whatever is unsightly in reality is pleasing and praiseworthy in art, and that consequently a deformed, wrinkled and tottering old man is more suitable for a painting than a handsome and youthful one."<sup>30</sup> Although it is unclear whether De Gelder read these theoretical texts,

by the 1680s the popularity of classicism would have been all but unavoidable in artistic communities throughout the Netherlands. While Rembrandt's knowledge of the classicist critique of his own work is problematic though highly likely, De Gelder would have been unable to escape such commentary about his work and Rembrandt's, as well as the constant linking of the two.<sup>31</sup> Houbraken applied this type of criticism when he wrote that De Gelder used his "brush, but also his thumb and finger if he found it necessary, and the butt end of his brush."<sup>32</sup> Condemning what he thought to be crude methods of painting, Houbraken's words likely reflect the popular opinion of De Gelder's paintings and at the very least conversations the two may have had over the many years they knew each other.<sup>33</sup>

What seems significant in this theoretical context is De Gelder's deliberate choice not only to paint in a manner derided by classicists—to his continued lack of artistic success—but also in this instance to select the very wrinkled, old subject condemned by De Bisschop. If we define "painterly" and "ugly" as simply not idealized and young, it seems that De Gelder is deliberately defying classicist tenets by presenting a traditionally realist subject rather than a picturesque one.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the realistic studio serving as a vehicle for De Gelder's performative identification with Zeuxis, the

<sup>26</sup> Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 203. Lauremberg concludes the story of Zeuxis with "Moderation is good in all things, because it is as one says in the Proverb: Too much is unhealthy. By avoidance, all excess may be overturned."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204; Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 102; Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture*, 20; Van de Wetering, "Rembrandt's Self-Portraits," 296.

<sup>28</sup> De Gelder was an artist who was himself eccentric (as described by contemporaries), and was wealthy but not yet a famed painter. On Zeuxis's fame as the inspiration for Rembrandt's image see Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 102 and Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 28. On Zeuxis's hubris see Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> On classicist art theory in the Netherlands, specifically Gerard de Lairesse and his critical vocabulary, see Lyckle de Vries, *Gerard de Lairesse: An Artist between Stage and Studio* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998) and "Gerard de Lairesse: The Critical Vocabulary of an Art Theorist," *Oud Holland* 117, no. 1/2 (2004): 79-98. See also Blankert, "Rembrandt, Zeuxis," 39-41.

<sup>30</sup> De Vries, *Gerard de Lairesse*, 79-80: De Vries emphasized that classicist art theory was slightly behind the reality of painting practices, which had conformed to a more classical mode beginning around 1650.

<sup>31</sup> Ernst van de Wetering finds fault with Blankert's argument that Rembrandt's work constitutes a response to classicist criticism. Van de Wetering doubts that already by 1665 when Rembrandt painted De Lairesse's portrait the latter was such a staunch classicist that Rembrandt "felt impelled to come up with a painted statement opposing him," and that there is no clear evidence that such ideas were prevalent during the 1660s and thus whether Rembrandt was even aware of such critique (Corpus, "Cat. no. IV 25," 559). Chapman (*Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 103-104 and 129) argues that such classicist commentary "must have been obvious from the 1650s," but nevertheless maintains that to see Rembrandt's painting as only a theoretical critique or celebration of naturalism is a shaky supposition.

<sup>32</sup> De Witt, "Aert de Gelder, Jan Steen," 85.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher D.M. Atkins rightly pointed out to me the fluidity of terms such as "classical" as applied to painting styles in the seventeenth century. In his explorations of the terms *rouw* and *net/fijn* as used in relation to the work of Frans Hals, Atkins demonstrates that the connotations of the *rouw* style evolved over the course of the century. This is particularly true in relation to Hals, whose works, Atkins argues, overcome possible objections to their brushwork through their unequivocal virtuosity (*The Signature Style of Frans Hals: Painting, Subjectivity, and the Market in Early Modernity* [Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012], 89-101). While this argument that *rouw* does not necessarily constitute un- or anti-classical is successfully applied to Hals, De Gelder's surviving body of work demonstrates no rival for the virtuosic complexity of Hals, and De Gelder's purposeful and sustained connection with Rembrandt indicates to me that De Gelder is taking up Rembrandt's legacy and, particularly in the *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*, defending this self-consciously *rouw* style in direct response to classicists like De Lairesse and De Bisschop who condemned these specific elements in Rembrandt's work.

<sup>34</sup> "Picturesque" is a loaded term in the discussion of seventeenth-century classicism. Van de Wetering, "Cat. no. IV 25," 559 cites the criticism of Rembrandt from 1670 onwards as "someone with a predilection for 'picturesque' subjects—such as wrinkled old women." Gerard de Lairesse's (1640-1711, published *Groot Schilderboek* 1707) critique of Rembrandt and his followers focused on their painterly style and lowbrow realism while praising the depiction of emotions (Van de Wetering, "Cat. no. IV 25," 559). Following De Bisschop, De Lairesse even attempted to change the definition of *schilderachtig* (painterly), traditionally applied to the varied, colorful, peculiar, and distinctive. Lyckle de Vries finds that the term was usually applied to landscapes, "but also to human figures, buildings, and utensils that were old and unsightly" (De Vries, "Gerard de Lairesse," 83). De Lairesse instead promoted the classically picturesque, emphasizing symmetry, grace, and classical beauty. Protesting vehemently against the original definition, De Lairesse and the classicists before him condemned adherence to a personal style. As Lyckle de Vries observes, "although De Lairesse

spare and simple space also seems to emphasize a break with classicist ideals of painting.<sup>35</sup> As with Rembrandt's *Zeuxis* and his early *Artist in his Studio* (at the MFA, Boston), De Gelder's painted studio contains no theoretical texts, no paintings or sculpture or drawings. We are presented solely with an artist, his model, and his tools,<sup>36</sup> a bold statement on painting from nature rather than classical idealization. Moreover, De Gelder here makes reference to the popular reputation of Zeuxis as a revered classical painter, an icon of idealization, but transforms him into a rough-hewn image of an artist painting *naer het leven* (from/after life).

Perfectly evocative of his view of *aemulatio* as selective appropriation, in the *Zeuxis* De Gelder furthermore presents a style that directly imitates the rough manner typical of Rembrandt, but modifies it to be more descriptive than expressive. For example, Rembrandt has built up the image of his face using layers of impasto that are heavily worked in a manner that evokes his ongoing fascination with the expressive potentialities of his own visage. De Gelder, on the other hand, is interested in rougher brushwork as a means of conveying emotions through realism and plasticity of form.<sup>37</sup> In a distinction that becomes even clearer in comparison with other late self-portraits by Rembrandt such as the *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (Figures 6 and 7), in De Gelder's *Zeuxis* it is the expression on the face of the artist rather than the way in which it is painted that conveys the emotion of the moment. His subject and style evoke Rembrandt without the same type of emotionality, expressing his desire to emulate Rembrandt more than a desire to experiment with the capabilities of brushwork. Thus in one work De Gelder was able to confront both Zeuxis and Rembrandt through

hardly ever mentioned Rembrandt's name when criticizing him, it is hard to read these phrases without thinking of Rembrandt's later work and that of his followers, such as Arent de Gelder" (De Vries, "Gerard de Lairese," 95).

<sup>35</sup> The evolution of this section was greatly aided by Perry Chapman in discussions about this paper on 30 April 2014.

<sup>36</sup> The conspicuously placed compass on the table's edge may also comment on this, with its source De Gelder's first teacher and Rembrandt's student Samuel van Hoogstraten. In his *Inleyding* (Rotterdam, 1678), Van Hoogstraten emphasizes the importance of observation and drawing from nature, the prolonged practice of which will allow the artist to transform his eye into a compass, to draw through the eye directly from nature. See Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 227.

<sup>37</sup> In reference to this contrast it is helpful to keep in mind the exceeding rarity of De Gelder's self-portraits. They are limited to only two, one of which has been questioned by some: the *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* and the *Self-Portrait with the Hundred Guilder Print* from 1710 (St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum). On an alternative identification of the sitter in the Hermitage painting, see Pastoor, "Life," 7. Thank you to Christopher D.M. Atkins for his comments on this point in the genesis of this article.

<sup>38</sup> De Witt, "Aert de Gelder, Jan Steen," 86-87.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

this emulative self-portrait that addresses Zeuxis through its content and Rembrandt through its form. Conceived as both homage and challenge, De Gelder achieves *aemulatio* by way of *imitatio*.

The distinct difference between the emotionalism of De Gelder and that of Rembrandt is demonstrated through a brief examination of just a few works. Identifying the strange—often unattractive—expressions of figures in De Gelder's history paintings, David de Witt concludes that De Gelder rejected the tendency toward serenity and calm—but with powerful emotions—characteristic of Rembrandt's late work.<sup>38</sup> A comparison of *The Jewish Bride* (Figure 8) with De Gelder's *The Banquet of Ahasuerus* (Figure 9) starkly illustrates this point. Where Rembrandt's figures are characterized by their dignified and affecting interiority, De Gelder's tend to appear inelegant and exaggerated by comparison. Though De Gelder's style was much in the manner of his late teacher, he consistently chose what De Witt calls an "extremely candid" depiction of human emotions.<sup>39</sup> In other words, these sometimes-strange faces represent De Gelder's version of raw realism, his attempt to show emotion as it actually appeared.<sup>40</sup> In the Berlin *Holy Family*, for example, De Witt emphasizes the absence of grace and grandeur that one would expect from a Biblical scene, with Joseph sporting an odd grin as he tries to amuse the infant Christ (Figure 10).<sup>41</sup> This characterization of De Gelder's emotionalism as exaggerated certainly applies to the *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis* as well. Here the image of the artist appears less as a meditation on painting and mortality—as it likely was for Rembrandt<sup>42</sup>—and more a cheeky expression of artistic self-fashioning through the exaggeratedly cross-eyed visage of the painter himself.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* On this painting see also Seymour Slive, *Dutch Painting: 1600-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 119.

<sup>42</sup> See especially Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 101-104 and Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading*, 200-205.

<sup>43</sup> By all accounts De Gelder was actually cross-eyed (or had some related eye condition): Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747) writes of De Gelder in his 1729 *Lives*: "The pious Arent de Gelder, who was a painter in his soul and lived as a painter would, was a pleasant man, full of wit and droll conversation, and since he squinted unpardonably in both eyes, and one could never tell whether or not he was looking at the person he stood or sat with in conversation, often made people laugh quite a bit, without his taking offense." Quoted in Van Fossen, *Aert de Gelder*, 13. ["Den vroomen Arent de Gelder, die een Schilder in de ziel was en op een schilderachtige manier leefde, was een aardig Man vol quinkslaagen en kluchtige diskoerssen, en dewijl hy onvergeeslijk sceel zag met beyde de oogen, kon men nooit zeggen, of hy den person daar hy mee stont of zat te praten aankeek ofte niet, dat dikmaals de luyden niet weynig deed lacghen zonder dat hy zich daar eens aan stoorde."] in Jacob Camp Weyerman, *Levens-beschryvingen der Konstschilders* (The Hague, 1729), 3: 44. Pastoor ("Life," 5) also alludes to Weyerman in characterizing De Gelder as a "cross-eyed, good-natured, cheerful, and inspired painter." However, Weyerman only mentions that De Gelder's condition is a squint, so it is possible that he could have been wall-eyed rather than cross-eyed, though scholars more commonly substitute the latter for squint today.

This paper has aimed to show that De Gelder's interest in this subject constitutes a multi-faceted exercise in emulation that simultaneously demonstrates his reliance on, admiration for, and desire to surpass Rembrandt and by extension Zeuxis. His choice of such an anti-classical, rough mode of painting was one beyond mere dedication to a former instructor—after all these works were created twenty years apart—though it can be seen as the defense of Rembrandt's (and his own) realism against classicist critics. By painting himself as Zeuxis laughing De Gelder also places himself in direct comparison to both the ancient painter and the late master. De Gelder at once pays homage to and triumphs over Zeuxis, whom he surpassed through his mastery of figure, object, and expression, and over Rembrandt, that

in taking up his master's subject and style he was able to present a more descriptively successful laughing image. In light of the present study, one can conclude that Blankert was unequivocally correct in labeling De Gelder as Rembrandt's "unembarrassed imitator." It is through this strategy that De Gelder makes his own separate artistic statement, giving the unembarrassed grin of a painter who believes this selective appropriation has allowed him to best both the ancients and moderns. Above all, De Gelder's picture seems to speak to his aspiration: constructing himself in the image of both Zeuxis and Rembrandt, De Gelder's picture has a lofty aim that did not match his reality, but certainly matched his ambitions.

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Figure 1. Aert de Gelder, *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*, 1685, oil on canvas, 141.5 x 167.3 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, © U. Edelmann - Städel Museum – ARTOTHEK.



Figure 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis*, c. 1668, oil on canvas, 82.5 x 65 cm. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne (WRM 2526), Photo © Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne: rba\_c004951.



Figure 3. X-ray of Figure 2, 2011. Photo courtesy of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne.



Figure 4. Detail of Figure 1.

Figure 5. Johann Jakob von Sandrart, *Composuit Zeuxes Iunonem e Quinque Puellis; Parrhasius Velo, Volucris Ceu Fallitur Uva*, from Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Bau-Bildhauer-und Maler-Kunst*, Bd. VII, Plate C, first published 1675-1680, this edition Nürnberg: Johann Andreas Endterischen, 1774. Engraving, page h 46 cm. Photo courtesy of Marquand Library of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University.

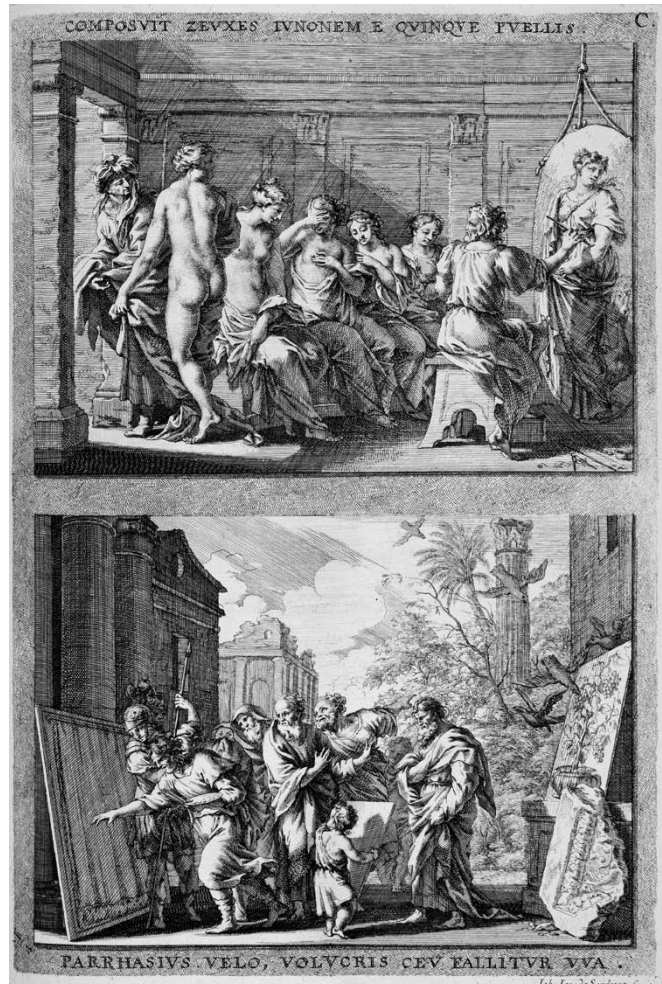






Figure 6. Detail of the face of the artist from Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul*, 1661, oil on canvas, 91 x 77 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 7. Detail of Figure 1.



Figure 8. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Isaac and Rebecca*, known as *The Jewish Bride*, c. 1665-1669, oil on canvas, 121.5 x 166.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 9. Aert de Gelder, *The Banquet of Ahasuerus*, c. 1680s, oil on canvas, 44 x 55 in. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 79.PA.71. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.



Figure 10. Aert de Gelder, *Holy Family*, 1680s, oil on canvas, 80.5 x 97.3 cm. bpk, Berlin / Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Photo credit: Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY.