

Eric Jan Sluijter (valedictory lecture at the Institute of Fine Arts, May 21, 2011; presented in Dutch at the University of Amsterdam. April 15, 2011).

**N.B.** The numbers between brackets refer to the slides in the power point

***‘Here is the stock exchange and the money, and the love of art.’  
On the value of history painting in Rembrandt’s Amsterdam.***

The title of this lecture is a quotation: ‘Here is the stock exchange and the money, and the love of art.’ You might think that I am quoting a successful New York banker who bought work by Jeff Koons during the booming 1990s. But this is, on the contrary, the last line of a poem written in 1653 by the poet Thomas Asselijn: ‘Hier is de beurs en ‘t geld en liefde tot de kunst’. This verse concludes the poem’s argument that the art in Amsterdam far surpassed that of ancient and modern Rome. Asselijn’s lines were meant for a festive occasion where painters, poets and art lovers were assembled. This line demonstrates the pride in the Amsterdam exchange as the nerve centre of commerce in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe (2). It also foregrounds the pride in the city’s great wealth as exemplified by its new Town Hall, the largest public building of that time in Europe, which was then being built (3). And finally – as a self-evident corollary – it underlines the pride in the city’s flourishing community of artists and art lovers (4).

Art and money, that is what I will talk about this afternoon – also a hot topic in our time. But I will restrict myself here to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, I will focus on the huge variation in the prices paid for paintings in an art market that must have been highly unpredictable. Thus, I will talk about a topic that is a rather new field for me, but one that occupies me now in the context of our current research project (5). In this lecture I want to confront you with examples of the remarkable differences in prices and some of the factors that determined them (6). I restrict myself to the market for history paintings in Rembrandt’s Amsterdam, the city where history painting, in particular, flourished. And Rembrandt will take centre stage this afternoon, because, also in this respect, he plays an exceptional role.

As in the poem to which I referred earlier, this beautiful map of 1625 also shows how Amsterdam is often presented as the successor of ancient Rome (7). The map is dedicated to the consuls, praetor, scabini and senators of the *respublica Amstelredamensis* (8). We notice the city’s two patrons, Mercury and Neptune: Mercury (9) represents not only commerce – with an enormous talon-purse in his hand, he sits next to bales of merchandise – but he functions simultaneously as patron of the arts: apart from the piles of books, we find a palette with brushes in the festoons. Finally we notice beneath the gorgeous city profile (10) the name Venus Anadyomene (11), or Venus rising from the sea, the legendary painting of the most celebrated painter from antiquity, Apelles. And then we discover the name of Apelles himself in the Latin poem underneath (12). This poem tells us that Apelles – risen from the dead – wandered around the world lamenting his lost paintings, in particular his renowned Venus Anadyomene, which he made for Alexander the Great. Hoping that he will be able to paint her again, but even more beautiful than before, he finally sees the city of Amsterdam and exclaims: ‘This is Venus, worthy of my endeavours; this is her, not only honoured in Greece, but admired by the whole world.’ Thus, this flourishing beauty, *Amstelredamum* herself (13), epitomizes the extraordinarily beautiful Venus of Apelles and surpasses the one from antiquity, and thus embodies everything of which art is capable, and is at the same time the city where the reborn Apelles finally feels at home.

But who would become the new Apelles of Amsterdam? And how do you become that? How do you manage to turn the love of art and the money in your direction? And how is the way in

which this reborn Apelles conquers a niche in the art market related to the slaving away of painters at the lower end of that same market?

As of the moment he worked in Amsterdam, Rembrandt would have been the favourite candidate (14), and he would have considered himself the best history and portrait painter, doing everything to make sure that others would consider him the best as well. Towards the end of his life, Rembrandt's friend, the poet Jeremias de Decker, praised him profusely in a laudatory poem as the Apelles of his time (15), stating that even in Rome: '.... thousands strike the flag, where / one is free to marvel at his strokes, / and those of Raphael and Angelo compare, / and see he has indeed surpassed them both.' Here, competition with the greatest – and again with Rome – resounds forcefully. Of course, Rembrandt was certainly not the only one to be called the new Apelles. However, I refer to this poem to show how matter-of-course such thoughts about competition with the greatest in the arts would have been, and that a painter like Rembrandt, as well as his admirers, were very much aware of this. Certainly, these are rhetorical commonplaces – I can hear some of you thinking that – but this means precisely that such notions were in everyone's head, that of painters and art lovers alike, and determined their aspirations and expectations.

The truly ambitious artist had to strive to surpass his great predecessors, and then the names of Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and Rubens came up immediately. When mentioning those names, one knew what one was talking about, because works by those masters were certainly known in Amsterdam, if not in originals, then in copies, and in any case, in the many prints after their work. The biographies by Vasari and Karel van Mander of renowned masters of the Renaissance (16) must have functioned as standards for the ambitious artists who strove for the top, as examples of attitudes towards life, as well as of attitudes towards their art. However, this would have been true only for the few at the top; the distance between those at the top and the broad middle and lower sections of producers of paintings must have been considerable in many respects. Both will be discussed here: Rembrandt as the star on the one hand, and as a contrast I have chosen David Colijns and Rombout van Troyen (17).

During the last few years masters students have accomplished excellent work in papers for seminars and in masters theses on second- and third-rate history painters (18); at this moment a group of so-called 'academy assistants', masters students financed by the Royal Dutch Academy of the Arts and Sciences (KNAW), are also working on this (19). I am proud of this and gratefully make use of their findings, some of which appear in this lecture.

But first, a very concise overview of the situation in general. In less than forty years far reaching changes had occurred on the art scene in Amsterdam. In these graphs (20), you see the steeply climbing line of the number of painters who annually started working in Amsterdam between 1580 and 1670; the line falls even more steeply after the 1670s. Although this downward movement is as stunning as the growth, I will, out of necessity, leave that aside. You may notice from the relation between the red and the blue lines that the number of painters coming from outside the city is considerably larger than that of those born in Amsterdam – in the early decades it is even much larger. And the area of recruitment is astoundingly wide, as you see visualized here (21). Today we would say that a true clustering of a creative industry has taken place. But it was short lived. In a recent article, Harm Nijboer argued that one may speak of a market for paintings in permanent crisis (22): a situation in which all those involved had to adapt continually to the constantly changing circumstances in the art market, a market in which there was no moment of stability, of which nobody could fathom where the ceiling was, and that could shrink as rapidly as it flourished; a market, moreover, for a commodity that depended entirely on perception and appreciation.

How this market would develop at the top – and, as I said, I restrict myself to history painting – was still completely open in 1633, the year that Pieter Lastman died and that Rembrandt and Jacob Backer had settled permanently in Amsterdam. Some six years later the

situation had changed spectacularly, boosted by a number of young talents who had come from elsewhere: apart from Rembrandt and Backer, artists like Govert Flinck, for a short time Joachim von Sandrart, followed soon by the young Ferdinand Bol and Jacob van Loo (23). Now we are confronted with production at the top, with Rembrandt in the lead, where the level of prices quite suddenly had become of a different order than before. For the common painters, however, the ones who worked in the cheap segment of the market (24), there was little change, and prices remained about the same.

To obtain insight into the factors that affected the growing divergence in prices, we should first realize that the market for paintings had changed radically in the preceding four decades. Not only had a production come into being that had expanded enormously in volume (and that was still growing rapidly), but paintings had become consumer goods: commodities, with which burghers crammed the walls of their homes – a development that had started in Antwerp in the 16th century; commodities that were for sale in every price category, and of which, more than in Antwerp, a bewildering variety of types, subjects, sizes, styles and techniques had developed, while the methods of marketing could also vary considerably.

It must have been confusing for painters to find their own niche in this extremely varied and constantly changing market. How to position oneself in relation to others by way of type of paintings, choice of subject matter, manner of painting, and organisation of the workshop? How to find patrons and customers, and how to assess one's prices? These must have been pressing questions. Nothing was fixed anymore, except for the prices of materials. Traditional standards of assessment – which we know from the recent dissertation of Liesbeth Helmus on contracts for altarpieces in the Northern Netherlands before 1570 (26) – had evaporated. At that time a small group of painters and patrons shared collective standards of quality, and they agreed about payment based on size, labour time spent and technical quality, and assessment of the artistic accomplishment in comparison to similar altarpieces. In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century we meet already with a few painters, like Jan van Scorel and Maarten van Heemskerck, who achieved a new kind of reputation which translated into significantly higher prices. But in the radically changing art market of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the rapidly growing public who bought numerous paintings, from the wealthy art lovers and collectors to people of modest means, came to control prices. Thus, the assessment of prices became a practice of trial and error. Because of the great variety in styles, opinions about what is good and valuable could also diverge considerably, as we can infer, for example, from the indignation of Jacques de Ville in his curious pamphlet of 1628 (27), in which he fumes about art lovers who gape at, and are willing to pay a lot of money for, paintings about which he has not a good word to say; I will return to this point.

An awareness of the fundamental relativity of the economic value of works of art was nicely expressed around 1620 by the Italian connoisseur Giulio Mancini. He stated that paintings – not a necessity of life, after all, but one of its great pleasures – had no intrinsic price but depended on many variables: not only the quality of the artist and his work, but also the investment of time in his education and training, and the investment of time in making the work. Even more important, however, were the differences determined by the status of the patron or buyer, and especially by the reputation of the artist. Mancini was writing about Italy, but the same certainly holds for the Netherlands.

Since the beginning of the 17th century, the nature of the artist's reputation and the degree of fame he could aspire to had changed drastically. Karel van Mander's *Lives*, supported by the print series of artists' portraits published by Hieronymus Cock and Hendrik Hondius (29), had effectively buttressed the painter's profession with a respectable history, a history in which their predecessors had become illustrious 'old masters', and which included the promise that each painter himself might attain a similar status. This was followed by

several prestigious city descriptions in which renowned painters were included as part of the cities' pride (30). Thus, a powerful process of canon formation had also begun in the Netherlands – a canon in which one could obtain a place oneself, sometimes even during one's lifetime, as happened, for instance, to the still rather young Rembrandt, Lievens, Van Goyen and Dou in Jan Orlers' 2nd edition of his description of the city of Leiden (31).

In an open art market, reputation became particularly decisive. Rembrandt's pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten emphasises the importance of reputation and the advertising needed to acquire this. I quote: "He [the painter] has to seek his good fortune at first by way of his own merit, that is, the virtue and pleasantness of his work, but then he has to see to it, that, with the help of enthusiastic patrons, he finds the favour of powerful princes and kings, or, that he is held in high esteem by wealthy merchants. Because, without the assistance of well disposed connections and supporters who will do some loud advertising ('die hem luidruchtig opschreeuwen', literally 'who loudly shout him up'), he will hardly achieve any fame." Van Hoogstraten also expounds how some artists never acquire the reputation they deserve, and he is annoyed by painters who, often at the expense of others, manage to be much advertised by supporters without great merit. So, the role of art lovers and connoisseurs had become critical. And this group of art lovers and connoisseurs became ever larger and more knowledgeable.

Some painters, Rembrandt first among them, managed to obtain celebrity status and were able to receive high sums from a wealthy audience. They could bargain for prices higher than 100 guilders, sometimes even higher than 1000 guilders, for a painting. (And I remind you that a skilled craftsman had an average yearly income of about 500 guilders.) Many other painters, on the contrary, made excellent paintings for 10 to 50 guilders, while a great number had to be satisfied with sums of less than 10 guilders, even one or two guilders. And in no other genre was there such a wide range as in history painting. Especially in history painting we also find the cheapest pictures, mostly biblical subjects, often painted after prints. One would think that these were made for people of modest means, but the confusing thing is that we also find this cheap production in large numbers in the houses of those who have quite respectable collections.

When Rembrandt started to work in Amsterdam, his reputation was, undoubtedly, already 'advertised' by a select group of connoisseurs, among them Constantijn Huygens, who had praised him profusely as a young man who had surpassed everything that had been created in antiquity and in Italy (33). Works by Rembrandt had already been acquired by the court, strengthening his prestige and his level of ambition (which must have already been exceptional). When in Amsterdam, Rembrandt makes use of the possibilities of an art market where paintings had become a rather inexpensive commodity by selling paintings from his workshop that were made in his style, and copies after his works (34); these were relatively inexpensive products, through which his characteristic style became well known among a wide audience, while copies also confirmed the special status of his work. On the other hand, he tried from the beginning to position himself outside the market by striving to receive exceptional sums for exclusive paintings, which often brought him trouble – social and economic trouble which Paul Crenshaw has discussed with great acuteness.

But first Rembrandt had to further raise his reputation above that of his peers – a process of ranking needed to take place. His pupil Van Hoogstraten wrote later in his treatise: "A good painter pursues the kind of art that is held in esteem in the place where he works and is also stimulated by competition in the art". And that is exactly what Rembrandt did. He focused on the demand for portraiture and history paintings (the kind of art that is held in esteem in the place where he works) and assisted by his irrepressible talent and ambition, the competition in Amsterdam – and thus the need to come up with something new and recognizably his own to attract the attention of connoisseurs – immediately brought him to

great heights: in the art of portraiture, which was a new specialism for him, as well as in history painting (36). That artistic competition was a self-evident motive is made clear by Van Hoogstraten: “It was by means of rivalry that Zeuxis attained such peaks in the art of painting ... And this same fire sparked Raphael of Urbino to surpass the great Buonarrotti, and Michelangelo to climb to unparalleled heights. Do not hesitate, o pupils, to look at one another’s art with, dare I say, envious eyes.” So, keep a sharp eye on one another because the ultimate goal is ‘to overtake the frontrunner’, as he says. Van Hoogstraten, a compulsive competitor himself, would have learned to underline the necessity of artistic competition in Rembrandt’s studio.

I will not examine the nature of Rembrandt’s astounding innovations, but it is clear that in this period, he is in an intense, and for connoisseurs discernible, dialogue with the local as well as the international peak artists (38), seeking to surpass them in a style that is entirely his own in manner, composition and expression of the passions. That his style, his *handeling*, was indeed perceived as entirely his own and as a novelty, is underlined by Arnold Houbraken, a well-informed pupil of Rembrandt’s pupil Van Hoogstraten: “The art of Rembrandt was widely admired as something new in its day, so that practitioners of art were forced, if they wanted their work to be accepted, to adopt that manner of painting.” In a short time his style had become the great fashion, and this fashion must have been legendary. To quote another passage from Houbraken: “the manner of Rembrandt was widely praised in that time ... so that everything had to be based on his example if it was to please the world.” It seems as if Houbraken is describing a present-day star, when he writes: “His art was so much admired and sought after in his day, that one had to beg him and throw in money to boot.”

From the words of Joachim von Sandrart, the German painter who worked in Amsterdam from 1637 to 1645, we can gather that Rembrandt’s style immediately raised controversies as well, as I have argued elsewhere (40). Already in 1628, Jacques de Ville (41) had vehemently attacked a type of painter to which Rembrandt certainly belonged (42) – painters who, according to De Ville, painted without foundation, meaning that they did not place their figures in a space that was clearly constructed through perspective, and that these artists did not take contours as point of departure, but were mainly concerned with working from life and painted with stopped light (‘gestopt licht’), as he calls it, by which he means the suggestion of three-dimensional space by spotlighting figures against a dark background. And what irritates De Ville most is that those painters rely completely on their own particular manner of painting, their *handeling*. He is furious that art lovers and connoisseurs nowadays only gape at, and are willing to pay a lot for, an exceptional manner of painting (even on the title page he warns about this [43]). And indeed, Rembrandt was the type of painter who had great success with a singular manner, to which a ‘from life’ ideology and proceeding from colour, light and shade are central (44). And this manner was perceived as characteristically his own (45), ‘interamente sua’, as Baldinucci would later write on the basis of information provided by the knowledgeable Danish painter Bernhard Keil, who worked in the 1640s for seven years in Amsterdam, at least two of which were in Rembrandt’s studio.

But how does one cash in on one’s reputation? Mancini mentioned the investment of time as a factor for assessing the price. However, like a number of Italian colleagues, this factor was ignored by Rembrandt because such a criterion degrades a painter by assessing his production like a craftsman. Nonetheless, time is money, and time was still the most current point of departure to calculate prices. Rembrandt’s Dutch colleagues had no qualms about this. We know, for instance, that a famous painter like his pupil Gerrit Dou (46) calculated his high prices on the basis of the number of hours spent on a painting, and it is likely that almost all Dutch painters did so – in hours or days, on the basis of a fixed sum that depended on their reputation and which could vary from two to even 25 guilders a day. From the meticulously painted panels of Dou on the one hand or the rapidly and loosely painted works by the

renowned Van Goyen on the other (47), one could “read off”, as it were, the time spent on a painting and the price attached to it (48). But such a craftsman-like method was emphatically not employed by Rembrandt. In fact, he developed a style in which it is impossible to infer from the surface (49) if it took him a long or a short time to paint it, as Svetlana Alpers has already remarked. Time was made irrelevant; it only was the value of art that counted.

Even if, as a Dutch painter, you had never come into contact with the practice of Italian stars like Guido Reni, you could read in Van Mander’s biographies about illustrious predecessors (50) who received fabulous sums from highly placed people as honoraria, or honorary payments, that were totally unrelated to the standards of the time spent on execution; about painters who were deeply insulted if the financial recompense was, in their opinion, too low because they saw this as damaging their honour and reputation. There is, for instance, the anecdote about Michelangelo, who was so profoundly insulted by the sum the patron wanted to pay him for the Doni Tondo that in the end he received twice as much for it. Or about Titian who sent an altarpiece, for which the clients did not want to pay the price that Titian thought it was worth, to Charles the V and received a princely sum from the king that was many times more. Such sums were not discussed beforehand. It was left to the highly placed connoisseur to determine what he was willing to pay for it. In this way the painting’s status as commodity is denied; the financial recompense is in the first place an acknowledgement and confirmation of the status of the great artist and of great art (as Elizabeth Honig demonstrated in an essay ‘Art, Honor and Excellence in Early Modern Europe’).

We recognize this same attitude nicely in Rembrandt’s letters to Huygens, when he delivers the paintings of the *Passion* series, made for stadholder Frederick Henry (51). With the remuneration by a prince in particular, Rembrandt would have considered this sum as determinant for his honour and reputation, and thus for the top level of his prices. And he responded as someone deeply injured when he was paid less than he expected.

For the paintings that Rembrandt delivered, no price had been settled beforehand. After the delivery of the third painting, the *Ascension of Christ* of 1636, comes the first letter that we know (52). Rembrandt wrote to Huygens, the stadholder’s secretary, ‘thus, I certainly deserve 200 pound (1200 guilders) for this painting, but I will be satisfied with what His Excellency will pay me’. Rembrandt mentions a – ridiculously high – sum that he thinks the painting is worth, but he leaves the decision about the value to his patron, the prince. He has no success with this strategy and receives only half of the amount: 600 guilders (still an incredible sum). When he informs Huygens in 1638 that the last two paintings are finished (53), he does not, at first, mention a price. Apparently this was not yet discussed. Only after sending them, he writes ‘I think they will be considered of such quality that His Highness will now even pay me no less than a thousand guilders each, but adding ‘should His Highness think that they are not worth this, he shall pay me less according to his own pleasure; in this I will trust his Highness’ knowledge and judiciousness.’ [not ‘discretion’, as this last word has always been translated]. Quite impudent to write about the prince in such words.

Finally, when it appears that he will not receive more than for the previous paintings – 600 guilders – Rembrandt responds with the self-assured but insulted and insulting words (54): ‘.... if His Highness cannot in all decency be moved to pay a higher price, although the paintings obviously are worth it, I have to be satisfied with 600 Carolus guilders each ....’. This was certainly not the way to handle a prince or his secretary. Nonetheless, seven years later, he does receive 1200 guilders each for two paintings which he added to the series in 1646: the *Adoration of the Shepherds* and the lost *Circumcision* (55). How much he wanted for these last two paintings we do not know, as no correspondence has come down to us about this transaction. The extravagance of these sums, even when considered within the prices the court used to pay, can be demonstrated by comparing them with the sums paid a few years later for paintings delivered for the Oranjezaal, the Hall of Orange (56). The paintings for the

triumphs were four times as high and three times as wide as Rembrandt's paintings, with many larger than life-size figures by painters who were characterised by William Frederick of Nassau as 'the 7 or 8 best painters of the country'. They received for these triumphs 500 guilders per piece, a price likely agreed upon beforehand. This was certainly a large sum, but it was not to be compared to the 1200 guilders that Rembrandt received two years earlier for paintings one-twelfth of the size. Therefore, one saw perfectly well that Rembrandt was *hors concours* and a much greater master than those 7 or 8 best painters of the country, but one also knew that his manner of painting was not suited for this prestigious ensemble meant to glorify the prince (57).

The troubles about which we hear in later instances all show a similar pattern, such as the famous case of Ruffo. When Antonio Ruffo, at the delivery of the second painting by Rembrandt, did not want to pay more than half of the price he had paid for the first one (500 guilders for the Aristotle (58)), he added that this was still four times as much as the most renowned Italian painters would ask for such a work. And indeed, Guercino, one of the best paid artists of Italy, asked about 150 guilders for a similar painting, humbly adding in a letter to Ruffo that this was somewhat more than his usual price because of the exceptional size for a painting of a half-figure. In contrast to Rembrandt, Guercino used to calculate his price in a pragmatic and craftsman-like way, with fixed prices for a head, a half-figure, a full-length figure, and for the overall number of figures. In response to Ruffo's proposal, Rembrandt answers shamelessly that apparently there are no connoisseurs in Messina, meaning, no people who knew how to value his art. Rembrandt's attitude is in sharp contrast with the obliging way in which Guercino approaches Ruffo, but it is in line with that of Salvator Rosa, who writes in relation to a similar difference of opinion, that he would rather die of hunger than throw away his reputation by settling for a lower sum. Rembrandt's attitude is similar to that of Italian masters like Guido Reni and Salvator Rosa, painters with an exceptional sense of self-esteem as independent artists and uncommonly assertive about the financial value of their name and reputation.

Even late in his life, in 1666, Rembrandt behaves in this manner again – in spite of all his financial problems – as appears from the fascinating documents that were published two years ago about the extraordinary commission of a Genovese nobleman to make two modelli for altarpieces (59). Rembrandt promised to do this in one month. However, after eight months of pleading and being driven to total despair by this difficult and unpredictable man, as the Italian agents write, they finally got hold of the modelli. In this case too, no price was agreed upon beforehand, but Rembrandt received the outrageous sum of one thousand and twenty-three guilders, though at a certain point during the negotiations he even wanted 3000 guilders, 'maintaining that he is someone who has knowledge of the art of painting and therefore stands his ground', the agents write. Rembrandt also told them that he applied himself to this task with complete mental commitment ("con tutto il suo spirito") and therefore could not do it in a shorter time, and that, with those paintings, he wished to acquire fame and honour in their parts.

The pattern is clear. Only the honour and fame of his art counts, and he applies himself with total commitment to it. Only he, the great artist, knows the value of his work. And nobody should nag him about the delayed delivery or ugly seams; all that is unimportant in the light of great art. That Rembrandt saw the honour of art and its monetary value as natural counterparts – or, at least, that he was perceived as someone who saw it that way – is corroborated by Baldinucci's, or rather Bernard Keil's, communication, that Rembrandt used to force up the prices of important works of art at auction sales, according to Rembrandt's own words, 'per mettere in credito il professione', that is, to raise the credit, the honour, of the profession.

Apart from the ones mentioned, the only other sum we know that Rembrandt received for a history painting is the 500 guilders he was paid for the *Susanna and the Elders*, now in Berlin (60). However, several appraisals of his paintings during his lifetime are revealing, as well. A collector in Goes, for example, had in his precious collection a *Visitation* (undoubtedly the painting in Detroit [61]), which he valued at 800 guilders in a document he drew up himself (probably in the late fifties), a sum that must be related to the price he had paid for it. In the 1657 inventory of Johannes de Renialme, an art dealer who, considering his costly stock, catered to the top of the art market, the *Christ and the Adulterous Woman*, now in the National Gallery (62), was even valued at 1500 guilders, while the *Raising of Lazarus*, presumably this early painting, was valued at 600 guilders (63). (Remember that the yearly income of a skilled craftsman, like a furniture maker, was about 500 guilders.) But in De Renialme's inventory we also find two paintings of Mary and Joseph valued at only 30 to 36 guilders, and a *tronie* of a moor, for only 12 guilders (64). These must have been workshop paintings, which were produced in great numbers and which we find often with similarly low valuations in Amsterdam inventories. So, although they had the brand name – as we may call it – of Rembrandt, a sharp distinction in quality was expressed in those valuations.

The sums of money that we have been confronted with (65) are, as Ruffo remarked, higher than what the best Italian painters were generally paid. This is confirmed by present-day research on prices for paintings by, among others, Richard Spear.

We may wonder why the *Adulterous Woman* was valued at such a high sum, particularly when compared to other paintings in De Renialme's very costly stock. The painting has a visibly detailed and finely painted central scene (66), as well as passages in the background that are loosely painted in a true virtuoso performance. Sandrart's admiring words on Rembrandt's capabilities are well suited to this painting and offer us the opportunity to look at this painting in 17<sup>th</sup>-century terms of appreciation. He writes that Rembrandt '... was only bent on maintaining overall harmony, in which he was outstanding.,' and that 'he managed with great ingenuity and skill to break the colours in conformity with their own character, and knew how, with the help of this, to portray the true properties and lifelike simplicity of nature with the harmony of life itself.' And further on: 'our artist showed little light and highlighted only what he considered the most important part, around which he artfully bound together light and shadow, including well measured reflected lights, so that the light in the shadows faded away with great judiciousness, the colouring being truly glowing – all of which he did with great insight.' Sandrart elaborates on this again when he explains the concept of 'houding', which denotes the gradations in colours and tones, and their relation to one another in order to create the illusion of space: 'One should observe the diminution [reduction of tone] so that things fade away correctly and the colouring follows unhindered, according to the rules of creating depth, in a clear way from one figure to another, all of them assuming their proper place, which we call in Dutch houding [wass wir auf Niederlandisch Hauding nennen]; ... In this we can learn ... in particular from the industrious and, in this respect, extremely intelligent Rembrandt, who performed miracles, as it were, and constantly observed true harmony ... according to the rules of light.'

The way in which the light creates unity in this painting is truly breathtaking. It does with perfection what Philips Angel describes in 1642 when advising painters: 'Through the reality simulating power as I call it ["de schijn-eygentlijcke kracht", the powerful illusion which makes us see things as real though they are but appearance], we should conquer and seize the eyes of the art lovers, and do so by way of arranging light and shadow with careful order into unity by pulling them together'. Nowadays we can establish from the x-rays that Rembrandt laboured for a long time 'con tutto il suo spirito' on this painting, and changed a many things, especially in the way in which the figures are highlighted and the light diminishes within the group of figures, as Ernst van de Wetering demonstrated in *Corpus*

volume V. An aspect of the painting that also must have appealed to the viewer is the mysterious space in which the bizarre throne of the priest is shimmering – painted with great virtuosity (68) – while an immense temple hall is suggested, with exotic pillars and filled with countless people (69); this type of space would be followed in many works by other artists.

Around the same time that Rembrandt made this work, the painter who might have been considered his main competitor, the German artist Joachim von Sandrart, painted this chimneypiece for the prestigious reception room of burgomaster Joan Huydecoper's newly built town palace, erected in 1641 and designed by Philip Vingboons. In that year, Sandrart was paid 280 guilders for this painting. With this sum we are at a different price level, even though it concerns a painter who was much better positioned socially. Trained in Prague, Utrecht, London and Rome, and from a well to do family, Sandrart felt himself far above Rembrandt, and he underlines this social distance emphatically in his biography of Rembrandt, which he wrote much later. In a short time, the learned Sandrart managed to acquire much better personal contacts in the governing and intellectual elite of Amsterdam than Rembrandt ever did. He was – and this is based on his own information – much praised in Amsterdam for his cosmopolitan knowledge of the arts (*Weltkundigen Kunstwissenschaft*), his courteous behaviour, and elegant conversation. Considering the many poems on his works by the famous poets Vondel and Barlaeus (71), he must have been advertised, 'shouted up', by supporters quite seriously. From the few history paintings of this period by Sandrart that we know, it appears that he did the utmost to be as different as possible from Rembrandt (72). He showed off his up-to-date knowledge and experience of the art in Rome in a curious mix of styles. We find here, for example, elements of the young Poussin, Domenichino, Pietro da Cortona, and even of the sculptor Duquesnoy, all of them artists whom Sandrart had been personally befriended when in Rome. Nonetheless, the value of his work seems to be assessed at no more than half of Rembrandt's.

Sandrart was able to describe Rembrandt's special capacities in an unusually perceptive way, and he obviously admired them greatly. But in his view Rembrandt had a great command of only a part of the art of painting and not of everything that an artist should be able to combine, such as the example of antiquity, drawing with pure outlines, ideal proportions and perspective. Those were consciously dismissed by Rembrandt, Sandrart wrote. However, it appears that this very recognizable and unusual *colore* manner of Rembrandt commanded much higher prices than the idealizing *disegno* of Sandrart – and that must have rankled him.

We know little about the prices for works by his closest competitors, such as Jacob Backer (73), who, of the same age as Rembrandt, had settled in Amsterdam at the same time; and Rembrandt's first Amsterdam pupil Govert Flinck (74). But from the few things we do know, we can gather that they were paid at the same level as Sandrart. About Flinck, Baldinucci informs us, undoubtedly again on the authority of Bernard Keil who was well acquainted with Flinck, that he had great success in Amsterdam and that he was well paid and asked 150 guilders for a painting measuring a meter wide. This information seems to imply that Flinck, in contrast to his master Rembrandt, worked with a fixed price according to size. But I will pass over Jacob Backer, Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol, and the way in which they positioned themselves within the networks of the Amsterdam elite; they were painters with an entirely different attitude towards their clients and patrons and towards their art. This is the subject of the nearly complete PhD dissertation by Erna Kok, and we therefore have to wait a bit longer to explore this topic.

I also pass over the moderately successful middle group, including such artists as Claes Moeyaert, Salomon Koninck, Adriaen van Nieulandt and Isaac Isaacs all of whom are highly interesting. I mention them here only as an example of a network of artists that were linked through pupil/master and family relations, and who, through specific connections,

managed to secure very profitable commissions, such as the series of large paintings for Christian IV of Denmark (75), for which they received high payments – 400 guilders for each painting.

I now make a leap to a significantly lower segment. What did that look like? As an example, I first take someone who did rather well but whose name will not mean anything to most of you: David Colijns (76). David Colijns and Rembrandt lived in the same neighbourhood and were both friends of the poet Jeremias de Decker. Jasper Hillegers has written an outstanding MA thesis about Colijns, so we now know much more about him (77). Colijns' first dated work is of the year 1626 (78); it is a commission for which documentation provides the price he was paid for it. It concerns a large painting of two meters wide, with the *Pharaoh drowning with his army in the Red Sea*, made for the consistory of the Old Church, where it still hangs. He was paid 37 guilders. This comes as a shock after the preceding prices. It was a bargain for the church council. Apparently, they selected someone who did not yet have a reputation and who would be able to execute the work for a pittance. They had no need for a masterpiece but only for the subject to be depicted recognizably (79), a subject that was highly meaningful for Calvinists from the Southern Netherlands to which many members of the church council, as well as the family of the artist himself, belonged. The art historians among you will not be surprised to learn that, in the course of time, this painting came to be attributed to Frans Francken II. Colijns' work would always retain, to our eyes, this old-fashioned Flemish character.

As of this moment, his career as a painter of history paintings would take off. A steady stream of paintings can be traced, most of them from the 1640s and 1650s (80). It remains unclear what Colijns did before 1626, when he was already 44 or 45 years old; we do know, however, that he worked as a furniture painter. He gilded, for instance, the huge wooden lantern with 20 copper arms that had been designed by his neighbour, the architect and sculptor Hendrick de Keyzer, as a gift from the States General to the Ottoman Sultan of Constantinople. We also know that he had copies made in his studio. Remarkable testimony about a totally unknown Norwegian painter who made copies of a seascape by Jan Porcellis in Colijns's workshop suggests this. Colijns also had pupils, and we know that he made copies himself, such as this large, monogrammed work (81), a painted copy after a well-known print after Joachim Wtewael. He also made appraisals of paintings with colleagues, and after 1629 he was head of the St. Luke's guild several times.

Colijns must have had a considerable production, as we find his works quite often in inventories. Many of those paintings listed in inventories include estimates, which gives a fairly reliable impression of the relative value of his work during his lifetime. They are on average 30 guilders, with a peak of 80 guilders for a *Last Judgement*. That sounds very low after the previous sums, but it is not too bad and is on the same level as, for example, landscapes by Gillis d'Hondecoeter or genre paintings by Pieter Codde (82). In styles and subject matter Colijns appears to be a jack of all trades: he is able to cater to every wish, be it organ shutters (83) or familiar biblical subjects that had been popularized by the pre-Rembrandtists or favourites from classical mythology and classical history (84). By borrowing skilfully from 16th-century prints, he is always able to make something of it (85, 86). The time required for painting many different subjects seems to be made up for by a visibly rapid manner of painting and by recycling figures and poses. That paintings by Colijns had been attributed later to such artists as Frans Francken, Karel van Mander, Jacob Savery and David Vinckboons tells much about the old-fashioned and fundamentally Flemish character of his work, which was often mixed with elements of Amsterdam artists such as Jan Pynas and Pieter Lastman.

It is remarkable that his paintings are often quite large in size (87). Many of them are more than a meter to one-and-a-half meters wide and seem to be of the size of an

chimneypiece. They would seem to be destined for people who wanted to have something substantial on their mantel or on the wall but did not want to spend a lot of money. In inventories in which his work is mentioned, his paintings belong to the most expensive pieces in some cases, while the rest consist of mostly very cheap, anonymous paintings. They were owned, it seems, by people who paid more for a work by Colijns than they usually paid for a painting. However, it is not that simple. We also find works by Colijns in quite a number of respectable collections where they belong to the inexpensive category. Therefore, we cannot say that his paintings were only for unsophisticated people, a charge I made a long time ago in my dissertation on mythological paintings when discussing this large panel with an endearing depiction of Diana and Actaeon (88). As a matter of fact, 'a piece of Actaeon by Colijn' is mentioned in an inventory from 1656 and is valued at 25 guilders. The owner, a Calvinist sugar refiner from a Southern Netherlandish family, Johannes Verspreet, owned no less than five paintings by Colijns, valued at an average of 43 guilders (as discussed above, high for Colijns). Several of Verspreet's family and business relations also owned works by Colijns; here we clearly have a network of clients. Apart from works by Colijns, this man had a number of inexpensive anonymous works hanging on his walls, but exceptionally, he also owned a landscape valued at 150 guilders by Alexander Keirincx, an artist still producing a very Flemish type of finely painted landscapes that commanded high prices (89).

A painter like Colijns, just as better-known artists such as Adriaen van Nieulandt or Isaac Isaacsz. (90), did not take up the far-reaching innovations in style and technique that occurred in the 1630s and 1640s. When seeing their work, one would not guess that Rembrandt, Backer, Flinck or Sandrart, and since the early 1640s also Bol, Lievens, and Van Loo, were working at the same time around the corner. True, the latter were a bit younger, but also among younger artists in the low segment of the market one sees little impact of the painters at the top. The lowest category consisted of the many painters producing paintings anonymously by working after prints, but a bit higher up, there was a large group producing paintings under their own name and signing their paintings, painters such as Jan Micker and Leendert de Laeff (91). We do not know of any estimations of their work, simply because their names are not mentioned in inventories, where their paintings remain hidden under the numerous anonymous works. Only in a few inventories listing the stock of art dealers operating at the lower end of the art market do we sometimes find their names. For example, in the inventory of the dealer Cornelis Doeck are listed 53(!) works by Leendert de Laeff, alas, without valuations. It is still difficult to obtain some grip on this group; thorough PhD research is truly needed (and will be carried out, starting in September).

Well, now we think that we know more or less how it works. In the oeuvres of painters in the low price category, we find no innovations, and the paintings look old-fashioned, with all kinds of borrowings, no characteristic or recognizable style, and little reputation. But such a convenient image is thwarted by Rombout van Troyen (92), whose work was valued at even less than half of the level of Colijns. Van Troyen produced very recognizable works and was in some respects definitely innovative; we find his name in many inventories, and he must have had some reputation. Considering that we know a sizeable number of estimated paintings by both Colijns and Van Troyen from the same period, the level of the value of their works, as far as it concerns appraisals, can reliably be compared. If we establish an average of around 30 guilders for the works of Colijns, with Van Troyen we encounter an average of no more than 11 guilders, mostly between 5 and 20 guilders, with a peak of 40 and the lowest of three guilders. These differences would have been determined by size, which varies from more than a meter wide to only 20 to 30 centimetres.

In this case we meet with a painter who must have produced a huge number of very recognizable works. Initially his style shows a simplified extract of his master Jan Pynas (93), but in the late 1630s, Van Troyen had developed a specialism that is very characteristic (94).

He depicted scenes of sacrifice and other creepy scenes in mysterious, huge caverns with dripping vegetation and bizarre, glittering altars and idols, thinly and quickly painted, with small, slight and often wildly gesturing figures, modelled with tiny daubs of light paint against a dark background (95). It is a mix of simplified elements from Jan Pynas and Pieter Lastman with a substantial splash of Leonard Bramer, combined with the caverns of Carel de Hooch and elements from the hell scenes by Jacob van Swanenburg – and sometimes they even include a kind of high gallery with shimmering objects of gold and copper, so that we even see a far cry of Rembrandt (96).

However, from all these elements he created a type that is entirely his own (97). Scenes of sacrifice were Van Troyen's specialism, such as *Salomo's idolatry*. To vary now and then, he also looked around for all kinds of obscure sacrifices such as *King Achas sacrificing his son*, or simply pagan sacrifices without a specific source. Sometimes we also meet with sensational spectacles of sacrifices in the open (98), such as *Jehu killing the priests of Baal*, or the *Burning Troy with Achilles rising from his grave to demand the sacrifice of Polyxena* – the kind of images that recall the scenes of horror so popular in the Amsterdam theatre (99), and in this case, the picture was certainly inspired by Samuel Coster's tragedy *Polyxena*, which was frequently performed on the stage in this period. To be sure, we see a constant recycling of certain figures and postures (100), but he never repeats the composition and the surroundings exactly (101), which means that he invested time in each picture by painting the subject a bit different every time. We find Van Troyen's paintings mainly in inventories of modest estates with mostly anonymous works, with his paintings the only ones with an artist's name. But again, it is difficult to generalise because we do find his works in quite respectable collections, as well.

As yet, I do not have a convincing explanation of why the level of the valuations of his paintings is less than half of that of Colijns' work. If we consider the present day prices at auction sales (102), we notice that in our time, Van Troyen generally commands higher prices than Colijns, but that Colijns has more peaks and valleys. Was it Van Troyen's social background, or that of his clients, that determined the low prices? I am still hesitant to draw conclusions, but at this moment a research assistant is working on this issue through inventory research and network analysis.

Thus, we descended from prices and valuations of 500 to 1500 guilders to sums of mostly around ten guilders or even lower (103), while the lowest segment of the market had still to be left aside. When studying the relations between artist, subject matter, style, customer, market strategy and economic value, there is much that remains unclear. But our insights have certainly increased substantially, and many young scholars are working hard to further develop them. Naturally, much will remain inexplicable, as is the case with the huge differences in prices of works of art in our own time. The Dutch expression "wat de gek ervoor geeft" (what the fool is willing to bid for it), is often used in this context. What the present day 'fool' is willing to bid for it depends, just as in the 17th century, primarily on the reputation of the artist within a certain cultural context, on the social and economic status of the patron or buyer, and on the mechanisms of the art market at that moment, apart from the quality of the work itself – all variables upon which Mancini already observed they are highly contingent.

Being at the end of my lecture, I would like to say that, although in the Netherlands one has to retire at 65, including at the university, which always amazes American colleagues, and rightly so – I certainly do not consider this the end of my career. As a scholar in art history, I hope to be able contribute to the field of Dutch art for several more years; but I am also very happy that we can be certain that there are many young art historians, in Europe as well as in the US, who will continue this on a high level.

I consider myself extremely lucky that during the five years between 2002 and 2007, I was able to teach as a visiting professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, where I had many outstanding students studying Dutch and Flemish art. I am grateful for that, and I am especially grateful for Egbert Haverkamp Begemann's unremitting support. I truly hope that, especially at this great institute, which has such a respectable tradition of teaching Netherlandish art, an institute, moreover, that has one of the most fabulous collections of Dutch and Flemish art on the other side of the street, and in a country with so many other museums that will always need specialists in this field, that this institute will remain a place where students will be able to study Netherlandish art of the early modern period – in a city that is, after all, the only true heir of Amsterdam (104 fades into 105).