

Concerning the ‘Mechanical’ Parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth-Century France

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“La représentation qui se fait d’un corps en trassant simplement des lignes, ou en meslant des couleurs, est considérée comme un travail mécanique.”

—André Félibien, *Conférences de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, Paris, 1668, preface (n.p.).

“. . . les Connoisseurs, après . . . avoir veus [les Tableaux] d’une distance raisonnable, veüillent s’en approcher en suite pour en voir l’artifice.”

—Roger de Piles, *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture*, Paris, 1677, 300.

A Champion of French Classicism and His Discontents ca. 1660

In 1662 Roland Fréart de Chambray published his *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, an exposition and defense of the theoretical principles of what has come to be called the French “classical” aesthetic in the art of his time.¹ Contemporary painting in France and its appreciation, especially as they had developed in official circles in Paris, were by then indelibly marked by pictorial ideals that seemed to have been most fully realized in the work of Nicolas Poussin. Several years earlier Poussin’s disciple, Charles Le Brun, had emerged as the leading artist on the Parisian scene, and by 1660 he was officially recognized as “first painter of the King and of his royal Academy” (Fig. 1).² For the next two decades Le Brun’s personal and doctrinaire interpretation of Poussin’s style was to be the dominant pictorial idiom of the nation.

Chambray was acquainted with, and idolized, Poussin, and he was the brother of the artist’s great friend and patron, Paul Fréart de Chantelou. For these men and their allies, painting derived its aesthetic meaning and justification from those of its components that require the exercise of the rational faculties, namely the invention and arrangement of a subject and its setting, and the delineation of appropriate expressive figural movements and physiognomies. Chambray believed that everything else needed in the process of

making pictures is “mechanical” in nature. He understood proportion, color, and perspective to be mere instruments in the service of the painter’s noble science, and pictorial elements such as the character of draftsmanship or of the application of paint to canvas did not in his view even warrant notice—as if they were of no more consequence in judging the final product than the handwriting of an author setting out the arguments of a philosophical treatise.³ Painters who devoted their best efforts to the “mechanics of the art” were, he declared, nothing more than craftsmen, and people who admired them were ignorant.⁴

Judging from Chambray’s text, there were a good many ignorant people in France, people who, in his view seduced by false fashion, actually valued the display of mere craftsmanship. Chambray expresses special contempt for the “modern *cureux*” who have discovered “novel beauties, very fashionable today, which they believe constitute all the excellence and all the refinement of painting.” He describes these “superficial, or rather imaginary, beauties” and the people who praise them:

They have even invented a Jargon expressly for them, with which, accompanied by gestures and very emphatic expressions, they exaggerate magnificently in order to make one admire the Freshness and Loveliness of the Coloring, the Freedom of the brush, the bold Touches, the Colors thickly impasted and well nourished, the separation of the Masses, the Draperies well cast, the rare Folds, the Masterful Strokes, the Grand Manner, the Muscles strongly felt, the beautiful Contours, the beautiful Tints, and the Softness of the Fleshtones, the beautiful Groups, the beautiful Passages, and a great many other chimerical beauties of this kind, that one never saw in the Works of the great Ancient Painters. . . .

Surely, Chambray says, such beauties were not to be found in such noble masterpieces of antiquity as Timanthes’ famous

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Quotations from 17th-century sources preserve the original orthography. Unless otherwise cited, all translations are my own.

¹ See W. Fraenger, *Die Bild-Analysen des Roland Fréart de Chambray*, Heidelberg, 1917, for a useful, if somewhat limited, discussion of the book and its author.

² Unofficially Le Brun was referred to as “First Painter to the King” as early as 1658. See J. Thuillier, *Charles Le Brun*, exh. cat., Château de Versailles, Paris, 1963, liii–lviii.

³ This is precisely Félibien’s view. His statement, cited in the epigraph to this essay, introduces a paragraph on the hierarchy of the genres, his point being that the mechanics of representation are the same whatever the painter depicts and that qualitative differences between artists stem only from the subjects that occupy them, low and common or noble and grand.

⁴ Chambray, 118–19, 129, 133.



1 Largillierre, *Portrait of Charles Le Brun*. Paris, Louvre (photo: Musées Nationaux)

Sacrifice of Iphigenia;⁵ nor, he might have added, do most of them appear very conspicuously, when at all, in the works of Poussin, Le Brun, and most other notable masters of French painting active at the time his book was published.

Who were these “modern *curieux*” and what were they looking at? How and why did they become so passionately fond of the “mechanical” parts of painting, and what significance did their taste have for the history of art in France? Before taking up these questions, something more must be said about Chambray’s motives in writing his book.

Chambray wrote as a polemicist. It was not enough merely

⁵ The passage appears on pp. 61–63: “Ce seroit à mon avis une chose bien divertissante, si on la pouvoit rendre possible, de faire voir ce fameux Tableau antique [Timanthes’ *Iphigenia*] à nos Curieux Modernes, pour l’exposer à leur examen: . . . je doute . . . qu’ils y trouvent ces beautés nouvelles, et à la mode du temps qui court, dans lesquelles neantmoins ils font consister toute l’excellence et tout le raffinement de la Peinture; au sujet desquelles ils ont mesmes inventé un Jargon exprés, avec lequel ils exagerent magnifiquement par des gestes et des expressions fort amphatiques pour faire admirer, la Fraischeur et la Vaghesse du Coloris, La Franchise du pinceau, les Touches hardies, les Couleurs bien empastées et bien nourries, le Detachement des Masses, les Drapperies bien jettées, les beaux Plis, les Coups de Maistre, la Grande Maniere, les Muscles bien ressentis, les beaux Contours, les belles Teintes, et la Morbidesse des Carnations, les beaux Groupes, les beaux Morceaux, et force autres beautés chimeriques de cette nature, qu’on n’a jamais remarquées dans les Ouvrages de ces grands Peintres Anciens. . . . Car il est certain qu’après toutes ces beautés superficielles, ou plustost imaginaires, si l’Invention du Sujet qu’on traite n’est bien raisonnée . . . jamais un Ouvrage ne donnera de reputation à son Auteur parmiles Sçavans.” Elsewhere (p. 120) he speaks of “une je ne sçay qu’elle Nouveauté que ceux d’aujourd’huy appellent une Furie de Desein, et une Franchise de pinceau. . . .”

to set out and explicate the principles of “perfect painting.” It was necessary to refute the claims of a misguided taste in art.⁶ Chambray is constantly on the attack, ridiculing the ignorant and censuring the “*Cabalistes*,” among them the champions of newly imagined beauties in art, and his vehemence indicates that when he was writing the “classical” style had not established a comfortable hegemony among the tastemakers of France.⁷

A cabal of foolish people wasting their money and praise on worthless pictures might not have generated such heat, however, were it not for the fact that its attention to bold touches and masterly strokes, purely mechanical parts of painting, strengthened a long-established belief that this art was in essence just a craft. And to Chambray and those who thought as he did—and they genuinely appreciated the special power of art, even if they were blind to some aspects of it—this idea was monstrous. To counter it was his main purpose. At the very beginning of his book, he declares that the principal problem for the art of painting is that “it has now been lowered to the status of the most vulgar crafts,” and he exclaims: “It is an intolerable abuse to demean [painting] by including it with the mechanical Arts, since it is founded on a demonstrative science.”⁸ The text that follows is eminently logical—an exposition of the “scientific” basis of the art and an insistently drawn distinction between the true artist and the image-making artisan.

Artisans and Artists, *Curieux* and Collectors

The disparagement of the visual arts, and their creators, because of the mechanical, or manual nature of their production was based on a widespread, ancient social prejudice. People of quality do not work with their hands; which said, was enough to put artists in their place. During the Renaissance and first in Italy, artists and their allies, advancing the intellectual claims of painting and sculpture, struggled with considerable success to loosen the perceived link to craft and to secure a bond to the liberal arts and hence to an elevated status for artists. But the old prejudice was not universally

⁶ Fraenger (as in n. 1), 29–30, rightly concluded that Chambray’s interest in the essence of art was overshadowed by his concern with the essence of judgment. It should be noted that in addition to the partisans of the mechanical parts of painting, Chambray viewed as villains those critics who admired the bizarre, licentious (therefore intellectually defective) art of Michelangelo (“le Mauvais Ange de la Peinture” [p. 66]) and other moderns (pp. 64f., 83f., 117f., 120, 133). He had a deep dislike for “mannered” artists, who practiced unnatural styles, and he condemned by name also Primaticcio, Rosso Fiorentino, Veronese, Parmigianino, Fréminet, Cavaliere d’Arpino, and Lanfranco (pp. 117, 120). On Michelangelo’s reputation at the time, see J. Thuillier, “Polémiques autour de Michel-Ange au XVIIe siècle,” *XVIIe siècle*, xxxvi–xxxvii, 1957, 353–391.

⁷ J. Thuillier (“Les Débuts de l’histoire de l’art en France et Vasari,” in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista*, Arezzo-Florence, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1974, 674) notes that Chambray’s book is largely based on ideas and attitudes formed around 1640. Thuillier, however, emphasizes Chambray’s hostility toward artists of the guild rather than his more general quarrel about the taste shown by many amateurs and collectors, the latter being, as will be seen from the discussion below, still vital when his book was published. Furthermore, as Olivier has argued (1976, 72f.), the elevated status sought for painters of the Academy was not yet, even in the 1670s, as secure as Thuillier believes.

⁸ Pp. 2–3.

abandoned, of course, and it certainly faded more slowly in France than in Italy.⁹

Traditionally, painters and sculptors in Paris had been ranked in the third of the five categories of the city's *arts et métiers*, along with pork butchers, millers, and clockmakers, beneath barbers, hatmakers, and dyers, and just above brewers, herring vendors, soap makers, and engravers of iron and copper.¹⁰ Therefore, in 1660, when Samuel de Sorbière, the author of a witty tirade against "excessive interest in painting," compared artists to barbers, and paintings to clocks, eyeglasses, and "a thousand other useful and beautiful objects,"¹¹ he was merely reaffirming the established societal concept of art and artists in the scheme of things. In all likelihood he was reflecting the attitude of most upper-class householders of the time, including the king of France,¹² for whom attractive pictorial decorations and visual records or evocations of people, places, and things were necessities, but who were not impressed by the pretensions, intellectual or otherwise, of social inferiors.¹³

A person's place in the hierarchical ordering of the citizenry explicitly and implicitly determined legal obligations and restrictions, tax liabilities and privileges. It both reflected and defined an individual's economic and social standing, and, as an historian of seventeenth-century Paris has remarked, "those who worked with their hands not only were inferior, they felt inferior."¹⁴ The desire of French artists to convince themselves, as much as others, that they did not belong to the lowly society of artisans helps to explain (perhaps better than the customary assumption of an inherent French "classical" spirit)¹⁵ why around 1650 they so readily adopted an apparently intellectual mode of picture-making, one in which the significance of mechanical execution was minimized. Not for them to be pictured like some Dutch little master, laboriously plying his craft in a humble workshop (Fig. 2). They aimed to be seen as Largillier was later to depict Le Brun, as a handsomely dressed, authoritative figure, holding brushes but not at work, and surrounded

by objects reflecting the sources and showing the products of his noble and learned intellect (Fig. 1).¹⁶

During the course of the seventeenth century the more ambitious among French artists succeeded in breaking their connection to the craft guild and in establishing an academy,¹⁷ which, in theory at least, gave them a ranking in society comparable to that of lawyers, physicians, and university professors.¹⁸ They had drawn on Italian precedents and had been supported by art lovers like Fréart de Chambray, who were well educated, steeped in the classics, and acquainted with the most modern ideas about art. Many of these *amateurs* held government posts,¹⁹ and it was natural for them to have especially valued the educative, civic, and moral purposes to which art, practiced as a rational, "scientific" discipline, could be put. But, in fact, the idea that the artist was primarily a craftsman was slow to change in the public mind. As late as 1667 a plea had to be made before Parliament to secure the rights of the sculptor Girard Vanopstal, a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, who had been refused payment for his work on grounds that applied to craftsmen, but not to those who practiced liberal professions.²⁰ The artist's plea was accepted but, still, it was only at the turn of the century that the idea of painting and sculpture as liberal (or "fine") arts began to be accepted by the community at large. Even so, for another hundred years there were people who continued to regard

⁹ For the history of this effort and its cultural context, see esp. P.O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Renaissance Thought*, II, New York, 1965; D. Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, Cambridge, 1987, 235–265; M. Warnke, *L'Artiste et la cour*, Paris, 1989, *passim*; A. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600*, London, 1962, 48–57. Z. Z. Filipczak (*Picturing Art in Antwerp, 1550–1700*, Princeton, 1987, *passim*) discusses the situation in Flanders. As Sohm writes (p. 25), in Italy by the end of the 16th century, "no one . . . seriously claimed painting to be a manual art."

¹⁰ This is the ranking that appears in a document prepared by the government in 1582 (and reaffirmed in 1597) for tax purposes. Forty-nine trades and crafts out of a total of 157 are included in the third category, nineteen in the first and second categories, and eighty-nine in the fourth and fifth. See R. Pillorget, *Paris sous les premiers Bourbons. 1594–1661 (Nouvelle Histoire de Paris)*, Paris, 1988, 119f.

¹¹ Sorbière, 258, 260–61. Cf. nn. 22, 23 below.

¹² Cf. n. 45 below.

¹³ It did not help that, with some exceptions, French artists of the time, including the academicians, were mostly uneducated, and some of them were barely literate. Cf. M. Weyl, *Passion for Reason and Reason of Passion: Seventeenth Century Art and Theory in France, 1648–1683*, New York, 1989, 89–93.

¹⁴ O. Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, New York, 1968, 171f.

¹⁵ Cf. n. 52 below.

¹⁶ This is the point of an engraving of ca. 1635 by Abraham Bosse, *The Noble Painter*, where a scene of an elegantly dressed French painter in his neat studio is contrasted to the shabby appearance of a Dutch painter's shop, and the inscription explains that the noble painter depicts scenes of war and love and the likeness of kings, and is not like the "Peintres vulgaires" who reveal their ignorance in their works. (Cf. *Maler und Modell*, exh. cat., Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, 1969, 55.) One might recall in this connection Leonardo's somewhat different *paragone*, that of the grimy toil of the sculptor with the cleanly activity of the painter. (See Blunt [as in n. 9], 54–55.)

¹⁷ At the time of its foundation, in 1648, the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was essentially conceived as an organization of craftsmen, working, however, independently of the city guild of painters and sculptors, and therefore not bound by its rules. Only in the 1660s did it manage to take on its elevated, "intellectual" character. (For the early history of the Academy, and the question of the status of artists at the time, see the excellent discussion, with references to the earlier literature, in Louis A. Olivier's remarkable, unpublished dissertation, 1976, esp. pp. 55–82; also *idem*, 1979.) It should be noted that independence from the guild had long been possible for artists through appointment as a member of a princely household, but that did not by itself alter attitudes about their social status. The artists Henri IV housed in the Louvre, for example, were regarded as craftsmen, serving along with swordmakers, clockmakers, and other artisans. See H. Ballon, *The Paris of Henri IV*, New York, 1991, 47–48.

¹⁸ See Ranum (as in n. 14), 183. These professions were organized into corporations to which the art academy may be likened. Despite its adherence to the theory of *ut pictura poesis*, the art academy was necessarily a professional organization, unlike the Académie Française, which was in a sense an organ of polite society. Cf. Olivier, 1976, 55f., 1979, 379–80. Lawyers and physicians, it should be noted, were classed as "honorables hommes," a step up from the members of ordinary working society, but beneath the "nobles hommes," that is, financiers, landowners, and like people, and, of course, beneath true "gentil hommes." Cf. F. Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, New York, 1986, 482f., 551.

¹⁹ This is especially true of the French collectors of Poussin's paintings. See A. Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, London, 1967, I, 215.

²⁰ The latter could claim money owed for as many as thirty years after services rendered, but there was a one-year limitation on claims made by craftsmen. See Olivier, 1976, 67–71; 1979, 384–387.



2 Adriaen van Ostade, *A Painter's Studio*. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (photo: Museum)

them as mechanical arts.²¹ It didn't help, especially in the early days of the struggle, that there were individuals who admired and called attention to the manual execution of paintings. That could only have had the effect of undermining the claims made in academic circles. Hence, the wrath of Chambray.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1976, 59, 71–72. See also Kristeller (as in n. 9), 194–196, and K. Scott, "Hierarchy, Liberty and Order: Languages of Art and Institutionalized Conflict in Paris (1766–1776)," *Oxford Art Journal*, xii, 2, 1989, 59–70. The manual fabrication of artworks, regardless of their putative intellectual content, was a fact not easily overlooked. In this connection it might be noted that in 1702 French merchants appealed to the Conseil de Commerce not to grant merchant status to people who actually made the products they sold. (Braudel [as in n. 18], 382.) In the arts, one reason for the slow pace of change is surely that a large part of the ordinary educated population was just not interested enough to absorb new ideas about art readily. A. Lanavère, calling attention to the paucity of references to painters and paintings in literature around 1700 produced for wide diffusion, concluded that "l'opinion commune des honnêtes gens avait comme cantonné la peinture dans une sorte de singularité, où peut-être la technicité même du métier valait à toute la profession le désintérêt de la littérature." ("L'opinion des gens de lettres sur la peinture italienne au moment de la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes," in *Seicento*, 177, and *passim*.)

²² Sorbière (1615–1670) became historiographer to the king in 1660. He was a follower of Gassendi and a translator of More and Hobbes. His own writings on philosophical and moral questions were mostly facile and cleverly satirical. He traveled widely, and, judging from his letter, was fairly well informed about art and the contemporary art scene, although he does not seem to have been deeply interested in them. (Cf.

To people who remained unconvinced of the nobility of painting, the impassioned art lovers of the time must have seemed all of a piece, and all of them deluded. Samuel de Sorbière, a man well known in contemporary intellectual and social circles,²² presented the "commonsense" view of the matter. In a published letter of 1660,²³ he explains that he

Biographie Universelle [Michaud], Paris, xxxix, n.d., 637–638; and n. 23 here.) In 1656, using the sobriquet "Aléthophile," Sorbière wrote a satirical tract in the form of a letter maintaining that Paris and the French were "barbarous." The letter appears in the *Mémoires* (1657) of Michel de Marolles, who responded at length, noting among other proofs of "la politesse & la civilité" of Paris and its inhabitants, "les Cabinets de ceux qu'on appelle Curieux." (ii, 253f., 337f.; iii, 194f., 219.)

²³ Sorbière's motive for writing the letter is obscure (and his sincerity is certainly not beyond question, as he unashamedly attempted to curry favor with its recipient [pp. 266f.]). The letter seems designed to supply arguments for use in a polemical suit. It is dated July 24, 1660 and addressed to "Monsieur [Louis] Boucherat, Conseiller du Roy en ses Conseils d'Etat & Privé, & Maistre des Requestes de son Hostel." Boucherat was a highly respected administrator who became Chancellor of France in 1685. One might speculate (in view of Sorbière's comments about the economic sterility of art collecting [p. 263]) that in the summer of 1660 Boucherat was counseling against Royal expenditures for the purchase of artworks, possibly proposed in connection with the sale of the Jabach pictures. (Cf. A. Schnapper, "Encore Jabach, Mazarin, Louis XIV, mais non Fouquet," *Bulletin de la Société de Histoire de l'Art Français* [1989], 1990, 75–76; Schnapper, 1993, 53f.) In fact, the stupendous growth of the Royal Collection began in 1661 under the aegis of Colbert. (See below, n. 45.)

rather likes paintings, for they suggest thoughts and show things that are not immediately present to us.²⁴ But, he continues, paintings are not, of course, as good as reality. No portrait by Raphael or Titian conveys the spirit and vitality of the living person; no landscape by Paul Brill, Claude, Foucquières, or anyone else is as delightful as the real views one sees when walking in the country.²⁵ As for the claim that painters "invent," having imagined beautiful things—well, we all do that in our heads.²⁶ The only thing the painter can do that the rest of us can't is to put the image on a canvas, for he has professional knowledge of the manual craft of mixing colors and handling a brush. It is clear, therefore, that however fine his handiwork, he is, after all, only an artisan.

It seemed to Sorbière that while well-made paintings, like most craft products, are to be esteemed, excessive admiration for them is foolish and even base,²⁷ and like Chambray, he ridiculed a contemporary group of art lovers who enthused over the signs of the artist's hand at work. He mocked the "experts" who scrutinized brushwork and knew whether a particular artist made his strokes lengthwise or crosswise. These people had a certain style of talking about painting, a jargon that could fill a fat dictionary. They found something to praise in every picture; even those having no merit at all elicited comments like, "it is *bien touché*."²⁸ He remarked, with disapproval, that sketchy paintings, in which colors are confusedly thrown on the canvas, were all in vogue; he was unconvinced by the argument of their admirers that such works need a certain viewing distance to make their effect.²⁹

Sorbière, a man of modest means, claimed that he owned some paintings and that he enjoyed displaying them,³⁰ as surely did most members of polite society. But what he and undoubtedly many others found hard to comprehend was a passion to collect paintings that seemed to flout good sense and even civic responsibility. What point was there in accumulating quantities of pictures that had to be stored in a room and that would be looked at only occasionally? As Sorbière saw it, excessive sums of money were being converted into objects of limited intrinsic value; capital that ought to have been employed for some economically productive or socially beneficial purpose was idling on the walls of three or four rooms of the collector's house.³¹

These comments remind us that art collecting was still, around 1660, something of a novel social phenomenon in France. It was an activity with a long and respected tradition in Italy, of course, but it had no well-established roots in the culture of France. Francis I's enthusiasm for acquiring works

of art was exceptional, and after his death more than a hundred years were to pass before another French king, Louis XIV, again began to build the Royal Collection.³² Lacking the stimulus—or perhaps, the authorization—of a royal example, private initiative in the realm of dedicated art collecting was slow to develop.³³ When it did emerge, around 1630, it drew on two main sources of inspiration.

A passion for art, and for pictures in particular, had "wormed its way" into France, as Sorbière was to remark acerbically, "along with a lot of other fine customs that we owe to Italy."³⁴ Naturally, during the reign of Maria de' Medici Italian tastes and fashions made a particularly strong impact on French society. Maria herself, like her ancestors and relatives in Italy, was a great patron and lover of the arts,³⁵ and knowledge and appreciation of art surely served as marks of sophistication in the elite circles she influenced.

A small number of powerful people began to collect on a grand scale, and during the course of the next three decades they assembled collections that were extraordinary both in the quality and quantity of their holdings. Among them were Cardinal Richelieu; the duc de Créqui, ambassador to the Holy See in 1633–34, when he purchased a great many notable Italian pictures; Louis Phélypeaux de La Vrillière, who had married into a family of Italian ancestry which already had the collecting habit; and Cardinal Mazarin, who had developed his acquisitive taste for art while still a young man in his native Italy.³⁶ Most of these collections were not without political purposes, or at least usefulness. Again, following the example of Italian princes of state and church, important people affirmed their status and wealth by the possession and display of artistic riches. La Vrillière even appealed directly to the authority and message of Italian precedent by housing the greatest of his artistic treasures in a

³² Schnapper, 1988b, 185–202. A. le Pas de Sécheval ("Les Collections Ludovisi et la politique artistique royale française au XVIIe siècle. Une Tentative d'achat à la fin du règne de Louis XIII," *Revue de l'art*, xciv, 1991, 69–73) discusses what seems to have been an abortive attempt, probably inspired by Richelieu, to make a major purchase for the Royal Collection in 1641–42.

³³ As Schnapper has rightly insisted (*ibid.*, 200f.), it is important to distinguish collecting from patronage. Granted that motives were frequently mixed, encouraging the arts for reasons of state, political or economic (cf. Ballon [as in n. 17]), or commissioning art for decorative or propagandistic purposes is functionally different from collecting art objects, especially preexisting ones, for their perceived intrinsic value. It is striking that in 1683, when inventorying the Royal Collection, Le Brun did not include pictures that had been commissioned. (A. Schnapper, "Observations sur les inventaires des tableaux de Louis XIV, de Le Brun à Bailly," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français* [1990], 1991, 20–21.) Another distinction, between collecting artworks as "curiosities" in the context of encyclopedic collections of "wonders," and collecting them for the sake of aesthetic or historical interest, is noted in the text below.

³⁴ P. 253.

³⁵ D. Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici*, Ann Arbor, n.d. [ca. 1982], *passim*.

³⁶ See H. Levi, "L'Inventaire après décès du cardinal de Richelieu," *Archives de l'art français*, xxvii, 1985, 9–87; J.-C. Boyer, "Le Mécénat officiel et l'Italie," in R. Mousnier and J. Mesnard, eds., *L'Age d'or du mécénat*, Paris, 1985, 130–133 (for Créqui); C. Haffner, "La Vrillière, collectionneur et mécène," and S. Cotté, "Un Exemple du 'goût italien': La Galerie de l'hôtel de La Vrillière à Paris," in *Seicento. Le Siècle de Caravage dans les collections françaises*, exh. cat., Grand Palais, Paris, 1988–89, 29–46; Brejon de Lavergnée, 61–65 (and further, n. 42, for Mazarin).

²⁴ For this and what follows, see Sorbière, 244–251.

²⁵ Sorbière, starting from the premise that art is a craft, was naturally not interested in art theory and did not engage the issue of the relationship of everyday nature to an ideal concept of it.

²⁶ As Olivier notes (1976, 70f.; 1979, 386), this argument was anticipated and cleverly countered in the plea for Vanopstal.

²⁷ P. 254.

²⁸ Pp. 253f., 258.

²⁹ Pp. 248–251. In Sorbière's view, this was an excuse for craftsmen who were unwilling to devote the time and effort to finish their works properly.

³⁰ Pp. 236, 264.

³¹ Pp. 262–263.

gallery that referred unmistakably to the famous *Galleria* of the Farnese family palace in Rome.³⁷ But political motivations aside, the artworks these people collected were or became, for most of their owners, sources of great intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. It was not for their value as political symbols that the dying Mazarin went to look a last time at his pictures, going from one to the next, as an eyewitness recorded, murmuring to himself, "I have to leave all this . . . and that one too! Oh, what it cost me to acquire these things! Can I leave them without regret? Where I'm going I shall never see them again. . . . Farewell, dear pictures that I have loved so much. . . ."³⁸

The exercise of intellectual curiosity itself was another major source for early art collecting. The *cabinets des curiosités* that proliferated in the second half of the sixteenth century were collections, or accumulations, of any and every thing produced by nature or by man that seemed rare or unusual, and that could illustrate the wonders and variety of God's universe. In many of these collections, which have been much studied in recent years,³⁹ works of art had their place alongside precious stones, unicorn horns, sea shells, flowers and other "curiosities." Although encyclopedic collecting continued to the end of the seventeenth century, and into the next, specialization naturally developed early. Individuals tended to concentrate their collecting and hone their expertise in one or several particular areas, botany, zoology or mineralogy, numismatics, prints, paintings, etc. Many of the *curieux* were obsessively acquisitive, eager to possess every known species of tulip, or every print by Jacques Callot or Rembrandt, and, foolishly in the eyes of Sorbière and others, willing to invest great sums of money to satisfy their immoderate passion.

"Curiosity" as a historic phenomenon flourished everywhere in Europe around 1600. By the third decade of the seventeenth century, in France and elsewhere, the influence of Italian artistic ideals undoubtedly helped to focus the interests of some of the *curieux*, giving a certain priority to art collecting. It should be noted, however, that the main collections in the seventeenth century continued to be fairly wide ranging, and were rarely composed exclusively of works of art or of any other class of object.⁴⁰

The collecting activity of influential people naturally inspired emulation, although many members of Parisian society would necessarily have had to collect on a relatively restricted scale. One must, of course, beware of exaggerating this phenomenon. In number, there were still not a great many major painting collections in Paris around 1660,

probably not many more than about a dozen. But there were perhaps that many more of the second or third rank, and many households must have contained from a few works to small groups of paintings collected and exhibited for aesthetic, and not just decorative, reasons.⁴¹

The appeal of pictures cut across the social hierarchies, firing the enthusiasm of individuals in the mercantile, financial, and governmental professions as well as of some of the great aristocrats.⁴² Appearing to know something about painting—demonstrating in conversation, letters, and other writings a certain familiarity with its special qualities and some of its technical vocabulary—became one of the fashionable marks of cultivated people.⁴³

Taking 1630 as an approximate starting point, this new French interest had been born and had matured within the lifetimes and memories of people of Sorbière's generation, and it is understandable that many of them were bewildered by it and tried to ignore or to belittle it.⁴⁴ But, as if to signal the nation's definitive acceptance of the new shape of French artistic culture, the Crown, beginning in 1661, began to collect art on the grandest scale imaginable.⁴⁵

Although our knowledge of the contents of Parisian collections of the time is on the whole much less than perfect, it is clear, and quite well known today from surviving inventories and commentaries,⁴⁶ that a very wide range and a great quantity of pictures, Italian and Netherlandish as well as French, in all genres and styles, and from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, could be seen in or near the city from at least the mid-century on.⁴⁷ The most prestigious collections, in part formed for the purpose of ostentatious display, naturally boasted many old and modern masterpieces: paintings by Leonardo, Raphael, by all the

⁴¹ Marolles (III [11e discours], 215–219) lists over 25 collections, ten of which he singles out for their exquisite pictures. But he notes paintings, prints, and drawings as constituents of many others. In 1673 the principal collections of all kinds in Paris was numbered at 85, and in 1693 at 134. (Bonnaffé, 47.) The number of picture collectors increased rapidly around the turn of the century. Pomian (as in n. 39), 185, conservatively estimates their number in the period 1700 to 1720 at 150, and growing.

⁴² Cf. M. Laurain-Portemer, "Le Palais Mazarin à Paris et l'offensive baroque de 1645–1650," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, LXXXI, 1973, 160; also Marolles, III, 215–219.

⁴³ Cf. Adhémar; J.-C. Boyer, "Le Discours sur la peinture en France au XVIIe siècle: De la subordination à l'autonomie," *Storiografia della critica francese nel Seicento (Quaderni del Seicento Francese, VII)*, Bari-Paris, 1986, 253–266. Adhémar (p. 230f.) calls particular attention to the role of tutors, "alcôvistes," and *concierges* or guides in elaborating the body of oral art criticism. He notes also (p. 236) the appearance of terminology and metaphors based on art in the conversation manuals of the time.

⁴⁴ Boyer (as in n. 36), 131, notes that in 1681 the biographer of the duc de Créqui called attention to his subject's literary tastes, but did not consider his remarkable activity as an art collector worthy of mention.

⁴⁵ Brejon de Lavergnée, 34 and *passim*. Colbert was undoubtedly primarily responsible for this initiative. Louis XIV's personal interest in the visual arts, other than architecture, was limited, and seems not to have been awakened until he moved to Versailles in the early 1680s. (See Schnapper, 1988b, 194–199, and 1993, 58; also below, n. 100.)

⁴⁶ See Brejon de Lavergnée, 52–71, and his bibliography for references to published inventories; also n. 36 above, and Bonnaffé's index (pp. 333–351) of artists' names appearing in 17th-century collections.

⁴⁷ Many pictures owned by the Crown were to be seen at Fontainebleau and other royal residences outside the city. Cf. Brejon de Lavergnée, 47. The art lover, of course, could also study pictures, foreign as well as French, housed in the religious institutions of the city.

³⁷ Haffner and Cotté (as in n. 36), 32, 44–45.

³⁸ The story of Mazarin's last visit to his collection was told by Brienne (III, 88–90).

³⁹ Our knowledge of the French collections has been vastly advanced with the publication of Schnapper's superb book of 1988. Very useful, and with extensive references to the literature, is the exhibition catalogue, *The Age of the Marvellous*, ed. J. Kenseth, Hanover, N.H., 1991. Of particular importance is K. Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVIe–XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1987 (Italian ed., Turin, 1978), esp. pp. 61–80 on "La culture de la curiosité." Incidentally, I am wholly in agreement with Schnapper, who has argued vigorously (esp. 1988b, 185–188) against the recent tendency to interpret virtually all collecting activities as political acts.

⁴⁰ Cf. Schnapper, 1988a, 8 and *passim*, and next note.

great Venetians of the sixteenth century; by such modern artists as the Carracci and Caravaggio, Reni, Guercino, Pietro da Cortona, and by Rubens⁴⁸ as well as by Poussin.

The more modest collections, about which we have only scanty information, must necessarily have been built largely of less costly objects—minor works by major masters, works by minor and anonymous artists, probably more modern than Old Masters, more Netherlandish than Italian pictures, and proportionately large numbers of works in the lower genres. But in effect, regardless of quality, such collections had the virtue of extending the range and depth of knowledge about art.

The inventory of a not quite modest collection, but one that certainly did not rank among the most distinguished, suggests the interests of art lovers whose budgets for acquisitions were relatively limited and indicates the possibilities available to them. At the time of his death in 1650 Jean-Baptiste de Bretagne owned nearly three hundred and fifty pictures.⁴⁹ The collection included a small group of works given to such outstanding artists as Leonardo and Giorgione, Bassano, Tintoretto, Barocci, Carracci, Reni, Van Dyck, and Poussin. Judging from the inventory valuations, not all, but most, of them were probably studio productions, copies, or misattributions—at best minor efforts by their creators. Among the lesser luminaries represented in the collection, and more likely to have been authentic, were pictures attributed to artists like Muziano and Palma Giovane, Manfredi, Charles Mellin, Blanchard, La Tour. And, descending from the less well known to the unknown, there were many anonymous works, including nearly a score of what appear to be Northern and Italian fifteenth-century pictures. Still-lives and landscape paintings figured prominently in Bretagne's collection. He owned more than eighty of the latter and, though including works by Albani, Grimaldi, and Claude, the majority were by Netherlandish artists: Jan Breughel, Paul Bril, Miel, Breenberg, Swanevelt, and Poelenburg among them.

The catholicity of taste and interest exhibited by Bretagne—and surely many others like him—was in part a function of the culture of “curiosity,” the desire to collect and study every known variety of a species. Georges de Scudéry confessed in 1646 to an irrepressible passion “to gather together in one place all the rarities of art . . .,” and he found a kind of fulfillment in the poetic description of an “ideal” picture collection. It contained one hundred and twelve

works by great and not so great artists from the different national schools, and it was varied in subject matter, styles, and genres.⁵⁰

Curiosity about all pictures and the perception of value or interest in every variant form was bound to collide with the efforts of art lovers like Fréart de Chambray who were trying to establish specific principles for aesthetic judgment and who, in consequence, wished to censure the appreciation as well as the production of works of art created in ignorance or in disregard of those principles. For reasons that are in the main fairly evident, a rational, erudite ideal of art—widely admired since around 1640 in the work of Poussin and his French followers—was theorized and institutionalized in the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the 1660s, and for the next two decades or so it provided the mold from which the main body of French artistic production was cast.⁵¹ So commanding, and nearly exclusive, was the output of French “classical” or “academic” painting, and so powerful, or at least so insistent, was its theoretical accompaniment, that we tend to equate it with seventeenth-century French artistic culture as a whole.⁵²

But an artistic culture cannot be defined exclusively by its productions and their literary defense. It is also composed of the reception and appreciation of art, in the form of collecting, connoisseurship, and pleasurable inquisitiveness. While the king's academicians produced “classical” works of art to decorate public places and great houses, French collectors continued to buy paintings exhibiting a wide range of styles; indeed, in the 1660s and 1670s a vast body of paintings of the most varied kinds was eagerly absorbed into the Royal Collection itself.⁵³

There were, of course, *amateurs* who affected a certain contempt for works of art that seemed antithetical to the classical ideal. André Félibien, who was to become historiographer of the Royal Academy, may have been speaking for

⁴⁸ See G. Isarlo, *La Peinture en France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1960, 30–34; J. Adhémar, “Le Cabinet de M. de Scudéry, manifeste de la préciosité,” *Gazette des beaux-arts*, LXX, 1970, 369–376; Bonaffé, 285, for the quotation.

⁵¹ The motivation for artists has been noted in the text above, p. 585. For people like Chambray, the classical ideal provided a socially acceptable justification for their interest in art and brought it into one of the mainstreams of modern (i.e., Italian) thinking about art. For the government, its inherently orderly, hierarchical, and absolutist principles both mirrored forms and served the organizational structure of the royal administration. At the intersection of the interests of these groups was the example of the work of Poussin, the modern Raphael, whose international reputation flattered national pride.

⁵² Indeed, it is not unusual to view it as the artistic embodiment of the French “spirit” of the time. As is indicated here, the national spirit was in fact multifaceted, and it may be argued that the manifestation of an extreme rationalistic bias, at least in art, represents only an interlude a few decades long in an otherwise more open and intuitive mode of cultural expression. I note that Isarlo's interpretation of 17th-century French painting (as in n. 50) was largely based on what he states was his obstinate refusal “de souscrire à cet éternel refrain qui fait de la raison et du cartésianisme le synonyme de l'âme française. . . .” His contention that “en France, la raison est toujours dominée par le sentiment . . .” (p. 45), seems, however, as much an overstatement as the one he objects to.

⁵³ Cf. Brejon de Lavergnée, 75–76 and *passim*. Significantly, aside from paintings by the national hero, Poussin, the Crown made no special effort to collect works by the French “classicists,” and seems, in fact, not even to have called special attention to its Poussins by their display. (See Schnapper, 1993, 57f.) On the distinction between collecting artistic treasures and commissioning artistic decoration, see above, n. 33.

⁴⁸ In addition to Rubens's Maria de' Medici cycle in the Luxembourg Palace, and of particular importance in connection with the display of the painter's “handicraft,” were the sixteen sketches for the cycle owned by Claude Maugis. (See J. Thuillier and J. Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici*, New York, n.d. [ca. 1970], 130, 134.) Maugis's collection was one of the ten listed by Marolles as outstanding for its paintings (see n. 41 above), but it is not known whether the sketches were still in his possession when he died in 1658. L. Clément de Ris (*Les Amateurs d'autrefois*, Paris, 1877, 57) claims that de Piles saw them at Maugis's home in 1650, but cites no source.

⁴⁹ C. Mignot, “Le Cabinet de Jean-Baptiste de Bretagne, un ‘curieux’ parisien oublié (1650),” *Archives de l'art français*, xxvi, 1984, 71–87. Bretagne, a bourgeois, was a “commissaire des guerres,” apparently of no more than moderate wealth. Marolles (III, 217) seems to indicate that his collection was actually more appreciated for its medals and sculptures than for its pictures, although the latter were valued at almost 17,000 *livres* and the others combined at just over 6,000 *livres*.

himself and some others when he claimed in 1647 that “in France today we don’t look at Flemish pictures anymore, . . . we love the beautiful way of painting used by the Carracci and M. Poussin”;⁵⁴ but in 1660 Samuel de Sorbière took it for granted that his readers were familiar with the styles of artists like Quentin Massys and Lucas van Leyden, and he noted that the contemporary art world of Paris counted Rubens, along with Poussin (and Reni, Sacchi, and Pietro da Cortona, too), as one of the “grands hommes” of the century.⁵⁵ Shortly before 1662 the comte de Brienne, then only twenty-six years old, formed a collection that boasted, along with the names of Raphael, Domenichino, and Poussin, those of Dürer, Brouwer, Teniers, and Van Dyck;⁵⁶ Brienne was later to enthuse over a *Madonna and Child* by Van Dyck: “to my taste it is the most beautiful picture of its kind . . .,” equal or superior in its qualities, he wrote, to works by Raphael, Titian, and Carracci.⁵⁷ By the 1670s, the duc de Richelieu, guided by the critic Roger de Piles, began building his great collection of paintings by Rubens.⁵⁸ However much Fréart de Chambray railed against them, the modern *curieux*, who rejected the narrow focus of a “classical” taste, were well entrenched, and they were not about to go away.

Connoisseurs and Amateur Artists

With the expansion of the market in the seventeenth century, the French public for art had at its disposal for acquisition, study, and pleasure an ever growing body of pictures. But this included a vast number of problematic objects: works with often obscure provenances that had passed through many hands in the course of commerce; some attributed to great or relatively well-known masters, but very many to

minor foreign or domestic artists; and, of course, works produced or marketed with intent to deceive. Being able to identify these objects, to discriminate between them, was then as now one of the enjoyable challenges to the art lover’s eye, memory, and intellect. On one level, this activity was only a continuation of the normal taxonomic tasks of the old-fashioned *curieux*, since works of art, just like flowers and sea shells, had to be named and classified. The rapid growth of dedicated art collecting in France beginning around 1630, however, gave it a new urgency, and forced upon it a new sense of professionalism.⁵⁹

The idea of art expertise as a specialized activity was, in fact, so new that for most of the seventeenth century there was no fixed name to designate people who practiced it. In Italy the word *conoscitore* appeared very early in the century, but was used interchangeably with *intendente*, *virtuoso*, and *amatore*.⁶⁰ In France *curieux* was long the usual term, but, with the deepening of its pejorative connotation of indiscriminate acquisitiveness, it was gradually replaced.⁶¹ One used *amateur*, *savant*, *un docte*, and, finally, *connoisseur*, a name that was introduced in connection with the visual arts in the 1640s and did not come into general use for two more decades. As late as the 1670s it was considered a neologism.⁶²

A new name for a discipline that had taken on something of a new character, connoisseurship was now being practiced with increasing knowledgeability and refinement,⁶³ driven largely by the exigencies of a very busy, international market.⁶⁴ Some *amateurs* surely took pleasure in just knowing about pictures and their authors, but for collectors, dealers, agents, and appraisers, connoisseurship skills, however enjoyable their exercise, were also of the greatest importance in directing financial and acquisitive activities.

Mistaking one artist’s work for another’s could be costly; Mazarin is reported to have bought a painting by Lanfranco believing it to be by Annibale Carracci, and therefore to have

⁵⁴ J. Thuillier, “Lettres familières d’André Félibien,” *XVIIe siècle*, xxxv, 1, 1983, 144. Félibien, in fact, was defending the national honor in response to the opinion expressed by Italians that the French lacked good taste in art.

⁵⁵ Pp. 249, 257–258.

⁵⁶ E. Bonnaffé, *Le Catalogue de Brienne (1662)*, Paris, 1873.

⁵⁷ “C’est à mon gré le plus beau tableau qui soit en nature” (*Mémoires*, 1, 296–297). The *Madonna* that he described, when composing his memoirs around 1680, was possibly a version of the picture now in the Galleria dell’Accademia di S. Luca, Rome. (Cf. E. Larsen, *The Paintings of Anthony Van Dyck*, Freren, 1988, II, 261, no. 639.)

⁵⁸ B. Teyssède, “Une Collection française de Rubens au XVIIe siècle: Le Cabinet du Duc de Richelieu décrit par Roger de Piles,” *Gazette des beaux-arts*, LXII, 1963, 241–300. Thuillier ([as in n. 48] p. 55, and esp. in his “Doctrines” [1968], 142f.), exaggerates, I think, in suggesting that the French were generally uninterested in Rubens’s work until after 1665, and that the enthusiasm it generated then was primarily the result of a “publicity campaign” organized by the “glib-tongued Roger de Piles . . . in return for a large profit.” De Piles (and the dealer Picart) undoubtedly profited, but it was certainly because there existed a long-standing, if until then necessarily passive, appreciation of the internationally famous master, that such fervent interest in his works could flower when they became available on the market. Before 1665 there were not many, but some, and some notable, examples of Rubens’s work in private collections, as Thuillier himself has pointed out (1968, 154, n. 3, 158, n. 1; see also above n. 48). Incidentally, Boyer (as in n. 43), 259, n. 27, notes Georges de Scudéry’s sonnet in praise of Rubens, which was published in 1649. Many *amateurs*, of course, traveled and saw the artist’s work in Flanders. Paris, furthermore, was an important outlet for prints after Rubens. (Cf. S. Zurawski, “Connections between Rubens and the Barberini Legation in Paris,” *Revue belge d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’art*, LVIII, 1989, 46.)

⁵⁹ The situation was probably similar almost everywhere in Europe. The statistics assembled by J. M. Montias (“Art Dealers in the 17th-Century Netherlands,” *Simiolus*, XVIII, 1988) indicate, as he notes (p. 245), that in the Netherlands in the 1630s and 1640s an increasing attention was paid to authenticity and originality as collectors became more discriminating. In France Père Léon de Saint-Jean remarked in 1655 (*Le Portrait de la sagesse universelle*, Paris) that “La curiosité est aujourd’huy extrême, entre ceus qui se picquent de se connoître en tableaux; pour juger de leur prix, & de leur excellence.” (Cited in J. Thuillier, “Textes du XVIIe siècle oubliés ou peu connus,” *XVIIe siècle*, xxxv, 1, 1983, 136.)

⁶⁰ For examples from before 1650, see D. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, London, 1947, 233, 238, 250, 273, and *passim*.

⁶¹ The terminology in France has been thoroughly explored by Olivier, 1976, 21–53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶³ The main stages in the development of connoisseurship are well analysed by Gibson-Wood.

⁶⁴ Cf. Brejon de Lavergnée, 47–48; J.-C. Boyer, “Peintures italiennes et négoce parisien au XVIIe siècle: Figures du marchand de tableaux,” in *Seicento*, 157–170; E. Duverger, “Réflexions sur le commerce d’art au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes (Acts of the 21st International Congress for the History of Art, Bonn, 1964)*, Berlin, 1967, III, 81. D. Ewing (“Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460–1560: Our Lady’s Pand,” *Art Bulletin*, LXXII, 1990, 580, and n. 155) has stressed the fact that already in the 16th century the expansion of the art trade in Flanders was largely driven by the influx of foreign merchants, including great numbers of Frenchmen.

paid two thousand *écus* for an object with a market value of at most only five hundred *écus*.⁶⁵ Worst of all was to be deceived by a copy or fake purported to be an original, and the risk of error was high. Copies were produced in quantities hard to imagine today,⁶⁶ and they as well as outright fakes cast a large shadow on the market.⁶⁷ There were everywhere, in the words of Jonathan Richardson, "Picture-Jockeys who will make what Advantage they can of the Credulity of Others,"⁶⁸ and, in fact, everyone seems to have gotten swindled sometimes, including great collectors and connoisseurs of the highest reputation. The duc de Liancourt paid well for a couple of pictures, one of which he believed to be by Annibale Carracci and the other by Giorgione. They were sold to him, fraudulently, by a fellow collector, Evrard Jabach, but the connoisseur Loménie de Brienne recognized them as extremely good counterfeits, made by that "dangerous copyist and rogue," Sébastien Bourdon. Brienne explained that he was able to spot Bourdon's manner "in a few folds of drapery." But Brienne admitted that he himself was occasionally fooled too.⁶⁹ So was Jabach⁷⁰—Jabach, possessor of an "eye" believed sharp enough to discover the only two authentic drawings in a group of three hundred attributed to Raphael.⁷¹

Connoisseurship was a defense and guide, albeit imperfect, for anyone venturing into the ever widening world of art. By the middle of the century interest in the acquisition, or at least comprehension, of this skill was great enough to suggest the need for a primer, and there appeared in 1649, for the first time in the history of art,⁷² a book devoted to the subject of connoisseurship, Abraham Bosse's *Sentimens sur la distinction des diverses manières de Peinture*. . . . That such a book was first published in France is symptomatic of the rapid modernization of that nation's artistic culture.

Bosse's book, as one might expect, confirms what has already been noted about mid-century French taste in art, that is, the appreciation of a wide variety of artistic styles. Bosse describes, in rather general terms to be sure, the different manners of the various schools of painting and of

individual artists, ranging from Perugino to Caravaggio and from Holbein to Rubens.⁷³ What is particularly striking is that the author, himself a respected academician with special interest in the rational, in fact, the mathematical, components of visual representation,⁷⁴ is as positive about the colorism of the Venetians and the chiaroscuro effects of the Caravaggisti as he is about the pictorial erudition displayed by Raphael.⁷⁵ And, among living artists, he lauds both Poussin and Pietro da Cortona, who, he says, "have at present achieved the greatest excellence in the art [of painting], even though different in their tastes or manners."⁷⁶ Paintings based on different notions of beauty, he explains at one point in his discussion, are not strictly comparable.⁷⁷ If they are well executed, they deserve to be esteemed, regardless of the taste they reflect.

Although such qualities as expression, proportion, and adherence to the example of antiquity come into his discussion of various pictorial manners, Bosse's focus as a connoisseur is on the distinctions revealed by an examination of handling and surface appearance. The reader may not be taken a great distance on the road to expertise by learning that Bellini's works differ from Tintoretto's in having smooth, unified surfaces in contrast to a heavy impasto and clearly visible brushstrokes.⁷⁸ But the point Bosse makes, cumulatively, is that the connoisseur's diagnostic field, although it extends to the terrain of composition, figure types, contours, color, and so forth, is centered on the manual idiosyncracies of pictorial execution, because, Bosse explains, all components of a painting are shaped by "the use and handling of the brush."⁷⁹

The great challenge to the connoisseur was to recognize copies and forgeries.⁸⁰ In describing their tell-tale characteristics,⁸¹ Bosse alerts the reader to the fact that carefully wrought, highly finished styles are easier to imitate than those displaying bold and spontaneous handling, "where a single stroke of the brush creates what is hard to replicate in a hundred" (a fact that may have led some collectors, wary of the possibility of being duped, to favor more freely painted

⁶⁵ Brienne, I, 290f., 300. Doubt has been cast on the story, and, as well, on the attribution of the painting, now in the Louvre, which may be by a master of still less monetary value, François Perrier. See Brejon de Lavergnée, 252f.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, Bosse (pp. 14–17) discusses "copyists" as if they practiced an independent craft, distinct from that of "painters." Much of J. Chatelus's discussion (*Peindre à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1991, 182f.) concerning copies is relevant to 17th-century artistic culture.

⁶⁷ Cf. O. Kurz, *Fakes*, 2nd ed., New York, 1967, 35f. In Antwerp, already by the second half of the 16th century, art forgeries had become a problem calling for government action (Ewing [as in n. 64], 574f.).

⁶⁸ *Two Discourses*, London, 1719, II, 149.

⁶⁹ L. Hourticq, "Un Amateur de curiosités sous Louis XIV. L.-H. de Loménie, Comte de Brienne, d'après un manuscrit inédit," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xxxiii, 1905, 332f.

⁷⁰ Brejon de Lavergnée, 59, 128f.

⁷¹ See F. Grossmann, "Holbein, Flemish Paintings and Everhard Jabach," *Burlington Magazine*, xciii, 1951, 18, n. 29. De Piles was to remark that, partially because of its difficulty, serious connoisseurship of drawings was practiced by relatively few people (1715, 67).

⁷² Giulio Mancini's *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, written some twenty-five years earlier, and intended in part to provide instruction in connoisseur-

ship, was not published until this century (see n. 89). For Mancini's ideas on connoisseurship, see Gibson-Wood, 33f., who notes (p. 44) that Bosse appears not to have known Mancini's manuscript.

⁷³ Chap. iv.

⁷⁴ See A. Blum, *Abraham Bosse*, Paris, 1924, *passim*; also C. Goldstein, "The Platonic Beginnings of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris," in *Academies of Art: Between Renaissance and Romanticism* (*Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, v–vi), 1986–87, 187f.

⁷⁵ Pp. 35f., 50.

⁷⁶ P. 45. See also p. 51.

⁷⁷ Pp. 36–37.

⁷⁸ Pp. 47–48.

⁷⁹ Pp. 59–60.

⁸⁰ The idea of the absolute, or philosophical, value of authenticity has been discussed in a brief, but insightful essay by J. Muller, "Measures of Authenticity: The Detection of Copies in the Early Literature on Connoisseurship," in *Retaining the Original. Multiple Originals, Copies and Reproductions* (*Studies in the History of Art*, xx), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1989, 141–150. See also, R. Spear, "Notes on Renaissance and Baroque Originals and Originality," in *ibid.*, 97–99.

⁸¹ Pp. 60–64.

works).⁸² Bosse notes, too, that the idiosyncratic qualities of originals may have been dependent on the singularity of the brushes the artist worked with, often worn in certain ways from long use, or purposefully trimmed to create special pictorial effects. The difficulty in reproducing these effects, lacking the same brushes, may lead the imitator to betray himself by handling that appears shaky and uncertain.

It was the new attention given to the evidence of the artist's hand at work that necessitated the expansion of the art-critical vocabulary. Bosse begins his book by defining some score of technical terms, a fair number of them, like *croquée*, *tranché*, *frais*, *noyé*, and *union*, describing the way pigment has been applied or the quality of the painted surface. There are many more such terms, he adds, "and everyday new ones are invented."⁸³

As Bosse was well aware, no set of written descriptions and prescriptions can teach the art of connoisseurship, which is founded on study and experience. For Bosse, a professional artist himself, practical experience in making pictures was a requisite for the complete connoisseur; a sharp-eyed *amateur* might be superior to an ignorant painter, and Bosse encourages the lay reader to hone his or her connoisseurship skills, but he stresses the need to seek the advice and guidance of a knowledgeable practitioner.⁸⁴

Historically, professional artists had been the people one turned to for expert advice.⁸⁵ As long as art was primarily considered a craft, dependent on special technical procedures and trade secrets, the presumption was that only experienced craftsmen could properly assess the nature and quality of a work of art. In the seventeenth century many French artists were active in the picture trade, as agents, advisers, experts, and dealers.⁸⁶ The idea that practitioners had unique qualifications for such activities was, however, undermined by artists themselves as they came to insist that their art be regarded as a liberal, intellectual discipline, on a par with literature, and not a craft dependent on learned mechanical skills. Although there was an implied contradiction in their arguments, artists naturally sought to retain their authority, and economic advantages, as the most knowledgeable experts.⁸⁷ But as the concept of art was transformed, laypeople

became ever more serious competitors in the markets that needed the services of connoisseurs.⁸⁸

The question whether effective connoisseurship required practical experience in picture-making has a long history and was debated deep into the eighteenth century,⁸⁹ although it seems to have been widely conceded that some such experience was at least very useful in making informed judgments about art. Indeed, the question might have been more profitably put: not whether, but how much, experience was needed. In reality, most laypeople with an interest in art probably tried their hand at making pictures, and some did so with considerable success. These people, it must be stressed, did not *work* with their hands in the sense of laboring for their daily bread, as did professional artists. They used their hands in the pursuit of pleasant diversion and of intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction.⁹⁰

Some of the more dedicated art lovers devoted considerable effort to learning and practicing the skills of professional artists. Ironically, some may have done so precisely because of the insistence of artists that proper judgments of art could not be made without "hands-on" experience. The collectors Claude Maugis, early in the seventeenth century, and Hubert Gamard later were known for their activity as amateur painters.⁹¹ Martin de Charmois, the layman who played the most important role in the foundation of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648, was praised by André Félibien and Roger de Piles for having cultivated the practice of painting, and of sculpture too, leaving, at his death, a "houseful of paintings, statues and drawings" that he had made.⁹² Félibien himself, around 1645, probably took lessons from the portraitist Louis Du Guernier, whom he later acknowledged for helping him

⁸² In 1655 Léon de Saint-Jean wrote that "les Sçavans remarquent, que les Originaux . . . paroissent d'une manière . . . librement & franchement exécutée; . . . les Coppies quoyques lechées & frottées marquent toujours un pinceau peu ferme & une main trablante . . ." (cited by Thuillier [as in n. 59]). Muller (as in n. 80), 144, notes that "what we call a painterly style came to be associated ever more closely with the signs of authenticity."

⁸³ Unpaginated "Sommaire" prefacing the book.

⁸⁴ Pp. 3–7, 17–19.

⁸⁵ An early recorded example involves the courtroom testimony of the painter Pietro da Milano concerning the authenticity of works by Mantegna. Pietro explained that "out of long experience, which he has in this art of painting," he knew them to be "by the hand of the said Master Andrea." (Cited in C. Gilbert, *Italian Art 1400–1500: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980, 32.)

⁸⁶ The painter Claude Vignon is a well-known example. His activity involved commercial dealings in England and Holland as well as in France. See S. Slive, *Rembrandt and His Critics*, The Hague, 1953, 33–35; also de Piles, 1715, 492. Almost certainly Bosse was also engaged in the trade.

⁸⁷ To some extent they succeeded. Indeed, probably the more distinguished the artist the more valued his expertise. A letter written by the academician Pierre Mignard around 1685, when he had effectively supplanted Le Brun in authority, shows him "at the center of the art trade, informed about everything, guiding amateurs and their intermediaries" (J.-C. Boyer, "Quatre lettres de Pierre Mignard," *Archives de l'art français*, xxix, 1988, 12–13).

⁸⁸ Incidentally, Adhémar suggests that there was a growing demand around 1660 for letters of authenticity (p. 247).

⁸⁹ In 1557 Lodovico Dolce had defended the judgment of the non-practitioner, citing Greek and Roman precedents (M. Roskill, *Dolce's "Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, New York, 1968, 100f.), and early in the 17th century the layman connoisseur Giulio Mancini argued the question, concluding: "Supposto dunque per vero che si possi dar giuditio della pittura da un huomo perito che non sappia maneggiare il pennello . . ." (*Considerazioni sulla pittura*, ed. A. Marucchi and L. Salerno, Rome, 1956–57, I, 5–12). Still, as late as 1792, Watelet declared "qu'on n'est jamais parfait connoisseur en peinture sans être peintre." (Cited by Duverger [as in n. 64], 69.) See further, Gibson-Wood, 33f. and *passim*; Olivier, 1976, 164, 217–220.

⁹⁰ Many members of Europe's ruling elites were avid hobbyists, practicing such manual crafts as turning wood or ivory as well as painting and drawing. See W. Liebenwein, "The Prince as Artisan and Artist," in *World Art (Acts of the 26th International Congress of the History of Art, Washington, D.C., 1986)*, University Park, Pa., 1989, II, 465–469. The social acceptability of such activity was primarily based on the fact that, as the French author Catherinet wrote in 1657, such people "peignent par honneur et non point pour en faire profession pécuniaire." (Cited in Bonnaffé, 208.)

⁹¹ Bonnaffé, 121f., 208. Cf. also, for Maugis, n. 48.

⁹² Félibien, IV, 183. De Piles, 1715, 475f.

learn "all the ways of painting."⁹³ De Piles, as is well known, was tutored by Frère Luc, a professional painter who had himself been a student of Vouet.⁹⁴ But it was not only people like these, whose lives were shaped in large measure by their love of art, who learned what it was like to make pictures.

Painting and drawing were recreational activities that had long been recommended to gentlepeople. Aristotle had recognized their value in refining the sensibilities, in making one "observant of bodily beauty,"⁹⁵ and, with the support of ancient authority, Castiglione early in the sixteenth century insisted that a Renaissance courtier must know how to draw and must understand the art of painting.⁹⁶ Undoubtedly, many lords and ladies pursued these arts just for the fun of it, giving no special thought to the cultural values that might be attached to them. Whatever the motive, however, the list of distinguished people, kings and queens not least, who practiced art is a long one.⁹⁷ In seventeenth-century France, Maria de' Medici was experienced and very able in painting and printmaking,⁹⁸ and her son, Louis XIII, learned from Vouet to make tolerably good pastel portraits.⁹⁹ (Louis XIV surely played with chalks and brushes in his childhood, with lessons probably offered by the court artists, possibly the portraitists, the cousins Beaubrun, but the representational arts seem not to have captured his fancy.)¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Thuillier (as in n. 54), 143. Félibien doesn't say that he actually painted pictures, but it is hard to imagine that he did not.

⁹⁴ Teysseïre, 46f. Needless to say, everywhere in Europe "professional" art lovers sought practical experience. In Italy, for example, Bellori and Malvasia both painted and had taken lessons, the former from Domenichino (K. Donahue, "The Ingenious Bellori," *Marsyas*, III, 1943-45, 112f.), the latter from Cavedoni (A. Arfelli, ed., *C.C. Malvasia. Vite di pittori bolognesi [Appunti inediti]*, Bologna, 1961, xiv).

⁹⁵ He also noted their utility in teaching one to judge the works of artists, and to avoid being cheated when buying or selling them, but he did not consider these primary reasons for their practice. (*Politicus*, VIII, II, 6; III, 2.)

⁹⁶ *Il Cortegiano*, ed. C. Baudi di Vesme, Florence, 1854, 64f. (Bk. I, xlix). Almost all apologists for the study and practice of art by laypeople had recourse to the authority of the ancients (e.g., de Piles, 1715, 93).

⁹⁷ See Warnke (as in n. 9), 290f; Liebenwein (as in n. 90); R. Ciardi ("Le regole del disegno di Alessandro Allori e la nascita del dilettantismo pittorico," *Storia dell'arte*, no. 12, 1971, especially 274f.), who explains that the amateur artist tradition spread from the ruling elite to wider segments of the educated populace first in Italy after about 1560; J. Roberts, *Royal Artists: From Mary Queen of Scots to the Present Day*, London, 1987.

⁹⁸ Marrow (as in n. 35), 6. Maria, of course, was educated in Italy, but in France, too, it must have been customary to give the royal children (of both sexes?) lessons in art. In the 15th century Charles VIII's child bride, Margaret of Austria, was taught drawing and painting along with vocal and instrumental music. (W. Cahn, *Masterpieces*, Princeton, 1979, 49.)

⁹⁹ Félibien, III, 396.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. R. Crozet, *La Vie artistique en France au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1954, 36. Louis's son, the dauphin (b. 1661), however, enjoyed making landscape drawings and etchings (E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs . . .*, Paris, VI, 1976, 754). Late in life Louis XIV seems to have acquired a modest appreciation of paintings, or at least of the need to appear to possess it. Daniel Cronström, in a letter of 1700, recorded the king's remarks about a painting attributed to Correggio: "Je vois bien qu'il est fort beau, mais je ne m'y connois pas assez pour en découvrir toutes les beautés. . . . L'on trouve les draperies d'un autre goût que celles des autres tableaux du Corrège, mais comme c'est [une] esquisse . . . il ne faut pas s'en estonner." (R.-A. Weigert and C. Hernmarck, eds., *Correspondance Tessin-Cronström*, Stockholm, 1964, 266. I owe this reference to Professor Guy Walton.)

Royal and aristocratic practice gave social legitimacy to the disinterested exercise of a manual craft. There is, of course, no way of knowing just how many laypeople took lessons from artists¹⁰¹ and spent part of their Sundays trying to seize the likeness of family members and friends or to convey the character and charms of the landscapes they knew or imagined.¹⁰² But surely, as interest in art became ever more widespread, increasing numbers of cultivated people and probably a fair percentage of those who collected art were spending some of their time making pictures.¹⁰³

A natural consequence (and a partial proof) of the growing numbers of amateur artists was the production of literature aimed to meet their special needs.¹⁰⁴ Until the seventeenth century, books on art, insofar as they were addressed to laypeople, were historical, critical, or theoretical in nature. There was little published on the materials or technical procedures involved in creating works of art, in part because such matters were viewed as belonging to the category of craft "secrets" not to be divulged to "outsiders," and in part because they seemed of very limited interest or use to nonprofessionals.¹⁰⁵ But this was to change—haltingly, to be sure—after 1600.

To my knowledge, the earliest "how to paint" book published in France is the *École de la miniature* of 1621, attributed to one Claude Boutet. With this book, the author claims on the title page, one can "easily learn to paint miniatures without a master." He explains in his preface that he wrote the book because aspiring amateur artists cannot always find instructors easily (he mentions nuns and people at their country houses).¹⁰⁶ Many amateurs must have learned from his book, for there was a considerable demand for it well into

¹⁰¹ Chatelus (as in n. 66), 102f., discusses the popular demand for instruction in drawing and painting in 18th-century Paris, when teachers, many only on the fringes of the professional art world, advertised in the press for students. In some form this phenomenon probably began in the previous century.

¹⁰² I have the impression that portraiture made an especially great claim on amateur interest (cf. the pictorial activity of Félibien and Louis XIII mentioned above). Landscape depiction, too, seems to have engaged amateurs. Bellori provides an example, as does the dauphin Louis (see nn. 94, 100). History and religious subjects presupposed skills that were probably beyond most amateurs.

¹⁰³ This is also the opinion of Adhémar, 240f.

¹⁰⁴ For the following discussion I have benefited from an unpublished "Qualifying Paper" by Elizabeth Ardrey ("The Search for the Secrets of the Old Masters. Studies in the Technical Literature on Painting from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries," Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ When discussions of technical matters do appear, they tend to be broadly descriptive, and not of great value for practical instruction. (See, for instance, *Vasari on Technique*, ed. and trans. L. Maclehoose, New York, 1960.) Armenini's treatise of 1586, which specifically sets out to instruct the reader in techniques as well as principles (on the grounds that overmuch craft secrecy was a cause of the decline of art), was addressed primarily to professionals; indeed, he seems to presuppose that his readers have completed some years of apprenticeship. (*On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, ed. and trans. E. Olszewski, n.p., 1977, 31, 72f., 177, n. 2.) It is true that instructional drawing books began to be published in the 16th century, but they were meant as primers for the use of students learning their craft in a master's workshop, not manuals for the amateur. (See E. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Washington, D.C., 1961, 156f.; D. Rosand, "The Crisis of the Venetian Renaissance Tradition," *L'arte*, nos. 11-12, 1970, 12-23; Ciardi [as in n. 97].)

¹⁰⁶ Ed. 1679, Lyons, p. vf.

the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Boutet has suggestions for people who cannot draw very well but want to paint anyway, and he leads the student systematically through a description of the tools of the craft and the procedures to follow in making portraits, landscapes, and flower pictures.

The majority of amateur artists probably did find teachers to give them lessons in manipulating chinks, brushes, and printmakers' tools, but many of them, especially those who liked to frequent artists' studios and feel like insiders, probably also wanted instruction in the technical arcana, jargon, sayings, and stories of the craft. In 1635 a Parisian painter, Pierre Lebrun, prepared a collection of essays designed to teach amateurs how to talk about painting, so that when they visit the workshops, he explains (with a reference to Pliny's story about Alexander the colours [will not burst] with laughter at the mistakes" they make.¹⁰⁸ He describes tools and procedures, names pigments and their sources and mode of preparation, tells a little about famous painters of past and present, discusses beauty from a craftsman's viewpoint, listing, for example, eighteen points of female beauty (e.g., "the chin round and dimpled, not pointed or flat, or creased"; "the neck like snow or coagulated milk, beautifully rounded and of proper size"), and suggests appropriate things to say about works of art, such as: "That is not painting, it is nature"; "Is it possible that the brush can have given such softness by such rough touches, and that such apparent carelessness should be so attractive?"¹⁰⁹

Probably because it was easy enough for most amateurs to consult or study with working artists, the market for instructional literature was slow to develop. By the late seventeenth century, however, demand quickened. In 1679 there appeared a book designed to instruct "young amateurs" in the practice of "oil painting and miniature painting." Not incidentally, the book was also addressed "to neophyte art lovers [*nouveaux curieux*]" who wanted to understand "the different manners of the best masters, their coloring, their touches and handling of the brush, their compositions, and the beauty of their drawings."¹¹⁰

In 1684 Nicolas Langlois, the Parisian publisher of one of Roger de Piles's now lesser known works, *Les Premiers Elements de la peinture pratique*, explained that although one can get advice from painters on practical matters, he is publishing this treatise, and hopes to follow it with others, "because a great many people who are beginning to paint have ex-

pressed a strong desire to have a notion of all these things."¹¹¹

The thirty-eight brief chapters of de Piles's book constitute a kind of "do-it-yourself" manual. Intended to get the beginner started, they include advice (with engraved illustrations) on what equipment to buy, which colors and brushes are the best investments, how to lay out colors on the palette, and the proper working posture at the easel. Common faults of beginners are described, as well as what to aim for and how to proceed in training the hand to draw with facility.

Langlois, in his remarks to the reader, suggests that this book is meant to complement de Piles's annotated translation of Charles Alfonse Du Fresnoy's *De arte graphica*, the third edition of which he published in the same year, 1684. Du Fresnoy's treatise is a work of art theory and not intended, Langlois notes, "to instruct people who wish to learn to paint."¹¹² The pairing of the two books confirms the idea that, at least for many art lovers, practice had come to be regarded as a necessary adjunct to theory for them as well as for professional artists.¹¹³

From Abraham Bosse to Roger de Piles and Watteau

In his book on connoisseurship Abraham Bosse was not concerned with questions of aesthetic quality. The function of connoisseurship, as he understood it, was strictly classificatory, calling for value-neutral identification of the authors of pictures and of the distinctions between them and between them and their copyists and imitators. Of course, a value judgment was implicit in the work of the connoisseur. Bosse might claim that pictures by different masters in different manners each had their own virtues,¹¹⁴ but they were relative, not equal, virtues. In fact, a painting by Annibale Carracci was worth more, in money, than one by Lanfranco, and an original was better than its copy. Why this was so was presumably the business of theorists; ironically, the explanations offered by theorists like Fréart de Chambray excluded consideration of precisely those elements in a work of art—its "mechanical" parts—which were necessarily the prime focus of connoisseurship.

It was, however, not only the connoisseurs who were looking with great attentiveness at the evidence of artists' craftsmanship. The growing body of amateur artists, some, but not all, of them also connoisseurs, constituted another audience for it. People who tried their own hand at drawing and painting, who encountered the difficulties of describing the contours of figures or draperies, or of suggesting the colorful animation of a face or of the morning light in a landscape, naturally studied the manners, methods, and tricks of professionals. Just as naturally, they came to look with admiration at the facility of the masters, and learned to distinguish between the superior manual skills of a Raphael

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the comments in the preface of the English translation of 1752. Miniature painting was appealing, especially to women, because of its relative ease and cleanliness, jewel-like character and intimacy. It might be noted, however, that B. Dupuy du Grez, in his *Traité sur la peinture* (Toulouse, 1699, 82), praises Boutet's book as useful for a knowledge "non seulement pour la Miniature, mais pour toutes les manieres de peinture."

¹⁰⁸ Lebrun's manuscript, in the National Library in Brussels, was not published in the 17th century, although that was evidently the author's intention. It is printed in M. P. Merrifield, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting*, London, 1849, II, 759–841. The quotation is on p. 766.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 802, 824, and *passim*.

¹¹⁰ C. de La Fontaine, *L'Académie de peinture . . . pour instruire la jeunesse à bien peindre en huile et en miniature*, Paris, 1679. The quotations, from the dedicatory epistle, are cited by Olivier, 1976, 44, n. 6).

¹¹¹ "Le Libraire au lecteur," unpaginated.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Even a writer like Dupuy du Guez ([as in n. 107] unpaginated preface), who did not believe that "hands-on" experience was a necessity for art expertise, nonetheless recognized the value of time spent in the studios of painters and the consequent understanding of "tout ce qui dépend de la pratique."

¹¹⁴ See above, p. 591.

or a Rubens and the lesser ones of their followers and of so many other artists. They would have seen, too, as Bosse explained, that some painters could, with a single brushstroke, do what others needed a hundred for, and that sometimes, as was remarked in a discussion by Parisian intellectuals about painting in 1634, "the most excellent strokes of the masters are the roughest ones."¹¹⁵ In these perceptions they were aided by developments that had originated earlier in Italy.

Venice in the late sixteenth century was the main testing ground for pictorial techniques that derived representational and expressive effects from the *process* of making a picture. That is to say, the visible trace of the artist's hand at work was understood to be a carrier of meaning.¹¹⁶ The difficulty the contemporaries of Titian and Tintoretto experienced in comprehending this aspect of their works is well known, and the history of critical responses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy to the extreme painterly styles of these artists has been thoroughly and acutely studied by Philip Sohm in his recent book, *Pittoresco*. It is unnecessary to review that history here, but it should be stressed that the early audience for such pictures, or more exactly, for their special pictorial qualities, was essentially a professional one.¹¹⁷ Armenini, in 1586, remarked that lovers of art particularly appreciate "those last finishing touches and refinements which the old masters bestowed upon their paintings," and he advised spectators, therefore, not to view Tintoretto's paintings from too close up, because he left "his sketches as finished works, so rough that his impetuous and fierce brushstrokes may be seen." But he added: "The first sight of his works amazes many of our craftsmen, so that they [too] use expeditious ways and techniques . . . to finish their works quickly . . . so that their colors remain very fresh, sweet and lively."¹¹⁸

Before the seventeenth century it would have been, in fact, unusual for people other than craftsmen to study works of art from close up. Of course, a spectator might want to peer closely at a tiny figure or object wonderously complete in every detail in a painting by, say, Jan van Eyck, or he might delight in the finesse that enables one to count the individual hairs of a mustache in a portrait made by Lucas van Leyden.¹¹⁹ But to get so close that one could look, so to speak, beneath the represented object, to the crafted fabric of strokes and spots that constitute it, was normally of no more interest to the *amateur* than was examining a piece of furniture to see the character of its interior joins.¹²⁰ Crafts-

men studied, and might learn from, the handiwork of fellow craftsmen. The ordinary spectator was expected to take a "proper viewing position" before the work of art, one that would allow him to survey the whole in relation to pictorial perspective and, most important in our context, one that, because of the corrective of distance and the "interposition of air," would make brushstrokes invisible and conceal the breaks in the coloristic and tonal field.¹²¹ As the second epigraph to this essay indicates, this continued to be regarded as the sensible way of apprehending pictures—with the qualification that one also came to discover the value, for art lovers as well as for craftsmen, of a near viewing position.

This discovery was initially made in Italy, and it had its first extended critical explication in *La Carta del navigar pitoresco* of 1660 by the Venetian connoisseur Marco Boschini, who shaped a vocabulary and a literary style to illuminate, for instance, the expressive power of the effects created by the "thunderbolt" of the brush that Tintoretto wielded "like fulminant Jove."¹²² And Boschini insisted that an appreciation of this power was accessible to nonpractitioners—but they had to learn to think and see like painters.¹²³ The perceptions and aesthetic responses that culminated in the writings of Boschini rapidly generated interest in artistic circles within and outside of Italy.¹²⁴ French visitors to Italy—artists, *amateurs*, collectors, dealers, and agents—absorbed and carried home new critical ideas¹²⁵ that gave added meaning to the "mechanical" parts of painting that connoisseurs were studying for purposes of attribution and that amateur artists were studying to gain practical skills.

It was inevitable, then, that "painterly" styles found an appreciative audience in France. In 1649 Bosse wrote approvingly of the "sketchy" manner "of many artists from Venice, Florence, Rome and other parts of Italy," which, he said, is described as "*artistement touchée*."¹²⁶ The wonder, and, perhaps, a degree of bewilderment, that this manner inspired in many *amateurs* is conveyed by Henri Sauval's description, most likely written in the 1650s, of Veronese's *Supper at*

tions to the rule. Professor Kathleen W.-G. Brandt called my attention to Vittoria Colonna's inspection of a drawing by Michelangelo: "Io l'ho ben visto al lume et col vetro e col specchio et non viddi mai la piu finita cosa" (in C. Frey, *Die Dichtungen des Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Berlin, 1964, 533f.). It is also possible, as Professor David Rosand suggested to me, that, in what might be regarded as a special case, early collectors and connoisseurs of prints commonly gave close attention to techniques of handling.

¹²¹ See Sohm, 43–53, 55f. Félibien stresses the interposition of air in his discussion of viewing distance in relation to Rembrandt's rough and bold handling (III, 458f.).

¹²² Cited by A. L. Lepschy (*Tintoretto Observed*, Ravenna, 1983, 48) from Boschini's *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana* of 1674.

¹²³ Sohm, 43.

¹²⁴ Interest, of course, does not necessarily imply approval. See Sohm, 53f., and *passim*.

¹²⁵ It must be stressed that an interest in the manual skills of artists was intertwined in critical thinking of the time with a number of ideas that have to some extent independent histories. They involve the unique character of an artist's imagination as revealed in his first thoughts (sketches), the ideal of spontaneity, and concepts of "naturalism." They are discussed in their Italian context by Sohm, *passim*. In France this complex of connected ideas was brought together in programmatic form by Roger de Piles. See n. 132.

¹²⁶ P. 44.

¹¹⁵ "Conférence de l'Académie Renaudot," in Thuillier, 149.

¹¹⁶ See D. Rosand, "Titian and the Eloquence of the Brush," *Artibus et historiae*, II, 3, 1981, 85–96.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁸ As in n. 105, 184, 196f. For the last quotation I have slightly altered Olszewski's translation. The original reads: ". . . à prima vista le diano meraviglia à molti de i nostri Artefici, si che questi, con così spedite vie, e maniere adoprando i lor colori carrichi, e con prestezza finendo i lor lavori, son cagione che i lor coloriti vengono à rimaner freschissimi, morbidi, e vivace . . ." (ed. 1586, 116).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Sorbière, 250f.

¹²⁰ See the brief but cogent article by M. Warnke, "Nah und Fern zum Bild," in *Forma et subtilitas. Festschrift für Wolfgang Schöne*, ed. W. Schlink and M. Sperlich, Berlin, 1986, 190–197. Naturally, there were excep-

Emmaus, a picture that was acquired before 1638 by Charles de Créqui and very highly valued.¹²⁷

One sees nothing of the polished and slick [*rien de flatté, ni de leché*], everything is free: from close up it seems . . . a work made in haste; this beautiful surface, this rich union of colors . . . , these grand attitudes of the heads that astonish, the beautiful choice in the draperies, the rare and ingenious composition, they all disappear, becoming nothing more than a confusion of color . . . without order or design, nothing more than sketchy figures, a great canvas . . . scraped and scrubbed with a shoebrush.¹²⁸

Amateurs were evidently not keeping their distance from the painted surface of works of art. They were looking at the details of their manufacture with keen attention; the enthusiasm of many of the “modern *curieux*” around 1660 for the “new beauties” thus discovered has already been noted. Discoveries involved Netherlandish as well as Italian paintings. The classicist Félibien, commenting on the broad brushwork, thick impasto, and lack of color blending in Rembrandt’s portraits, conceded that “since tastes are different, there are people who have praised his works,” and he granted that “there is a good deal of art in them.”¹²⁹ Indeed, like it or not, it became difficult for the *amateur* to ignore the marks of the artist’s hand at work. In the 1670s we even find a “Poussiniste,” Hubert Gamard, commenting on the craftsmanship of works of art in order to respond to the claims made by the great champion of Rubens, Roger de Piles.¹³⁰

De Piles, the theoretician of “painterly” painting, received his early education in art expertise in Paris in the 1650s, when major picture collections were being formed and when connoisseurship was being refined as a tool for the identification of an artist’s hand. He learned from collectors, *curieux*, and painters who were catholic in their tastes, and were, some of them, as articulate as they were knowledgeable about art. The most important influence on the young de Piles was probably the painter-theoretician Charles Du Fresnoy, who had lived more than two decades in Italy and had returned to Paris in 1656 with a great admiration for Venetian and Lombard painting.¹³¹

De Piles learned to recognize the individuality of pictorial handicraft, and also to take pleasure in its skillful display. He surely moved in the circle of those art lovers whose perceptions puzzled Sorbière and angered Chambray. This is not the place to analyze the critical and theoretical achievements

of de Piles,¹³² which began in 1668 with his annotated translation of Du Fresnoy’s Latin treatise. But in the present context it is important to stress that while de Piles understood the expressive range and force of a painter’s manual operations, he was not an uncritical enthusiast for bold brushwork and sketchy effects.

In his *L’idée du peintre parfait* he wrote of the “beautiful brush”—“free, swift and light” in touch, “which is to painting what a beautiful voice is to music.” But freedom of the brush, he added, is “nothing much if the mind doesn’t guide it and if it doesn’t show that the painter understands his art.”¹³³ He admired the vigorous brushwork of Tintoretto and Rubens,¹³⁴ but it was his insight to recognize that the painter’s manual skills were to be esteemed, not in themselves, but in proportion to their consonance with, and contribution to, the character of the image as a whole, the “*Tout-ensemble*.” The facility of the artist’s hand, he explained, is only one component in a pictorial statement formed and ordered by his intellectual faculties, his “spirit” or imagination, and his “science,” and expressed through his manual skills.¹³⁵ Hence, his low opinion of the paintings of Claude Vignon, whose rough, rapid handling seemed to him that and nothing more. Vignon, he wrote, takes neither nature nor the antique as a guide, and there is nothing special about his inventions and expressions; the painterly transcription of his ideas seemed aesthetically irrelevant to de Piles, an empty, “purely manual practice.”¹³⁶

De Piles established the grounds on which connoisseurship could stand not only as a science of attribution, as it was for the generation of Bosse, but also, and primarily, as one of aesthetic judgment.¹³⁷ In his view, enlightened connoisseurship would not only appreciate the brilliant brush of Rubens, but would know how to assess its quality in relation to the pictorial visions generated by the nobility and learning of his imagination and intellect.

The current of taste that existed in the decades before 1670—one that was rising even at the moment when the “classicists” were successfully asserting their authority in the Academy and in art literature—was strengthened and reshaped by de Piles in a body of writings that had a great impact on the development of art in France, as well as on its theory and criticism. “Painterly” styles were nourished by his ideas, many of which are directly relevant to our understand-

¹²⁷ In addition to Teyssèdre, see esp. A. Fontaine, *Les Doctrines d’art en France*, Paris, 1909, 120–156, and T. Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles’ Theory of Art*, New Haven, 1985.

¹²⁸ Printed with the *Abregé* . . . , 1715, 53.

¹²⁹ 1715, 265–266, 394–396; also *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres*, Paris, 1681, 70.

¹³⁰ See, e.g., 1715, 68. On the “*Tout-ensemble*,” see Puttfarken (as in n. 132), 75–79. S. Alpers’s conclusion (“Roger de Piles and the History of Art,” in *Kunst und Kunsttheorie, 1400–1900* [Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, XLVIII], Wiesbaden, 1991, 178) that de Piles “combined an emphasis on artifice . . . with the privileging of an appeal to the eye over an appeal to the mind,” seems to me somewhat misleading and in need of qualification.

¹³¹ 1715, 492.

¹³² De Piles insists that recognition of quality is the leading, and most difficult, task of the connoisseur, followed by the identification of authorship and then the distinction between copies and originals (1677, 3–12; 1715, 91f.). Cf. Gibson-Wood, 59–70.

¹²⁷ Now in the Louvre, it passed to Richelieu who gave it to the king in 1639. Brejon de Lavergnée, 96f.

¹²⁸ The much edited manuscript of Sauval’s *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de . . . Paris* was published in 1724. C. Mignot (“Henri Sauval entre l’érudition et la critique d’art,” *XVIIe siècle*, xxxv, 1983, 56, 60) cites the quoted passage among those he believes were written between 1654 and 1660. The passage appears in Vol. II, 171, of the 1724 edition.

¹²⁹ III, 458. Rembrandt’s work was known in France from early in the artist’s career. See Slive (as in n. 86), 33f., 56.

¹³⁰ This is perhaps less surprising in view of the fact that Gamard was himself an amateur painter. His “Reponse d’un gentilhomme flamant a une lettre . . .” is reprinted in Thuillier, 153–162; see esp. 157.

¹³¹ De Piles arrived in Paris when he was about sixteen years old, around 1651. Besides Du Fresnoy, Michel de Marolles must have had a great impact on the young de Piles. See Teyssèdre, 44–49.



3 Watteau, *Gersaint's Shoptsign* (detail). Berlin, Charlottenburg Palace (photo: Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten, Berlin)

ing of the emergence of eighteenth-century French art, including, as many present-day writers have stressed, the great novelty of the time, the work of Antoine Watteau. But it is necessary to insist that de Piles's artistic hero was a learned *history* painter, grappling with grand themes,¹³⁸ and in France his aesthetic ideals were most completely embodied in the work of such masters as Charles de la Fosse and François Lemoyne rather than Watteau.

We must beware of attributing too much to the influence of de Piles's ideas and of underestimating, therefore, the importance of the more spontaneous, less reasoned responses of ordinary *amateurs* to art in their time. The people who made up Watteau's initial audience were not notably concerned with art theory,¹³⁹ although, of course, they could not help being touched by it. They were *amateurs*, mostly modest collectors, dealers, and also professional artists, some, perhaps most, of the others being people who made pictures for recreation and self-education.¹⁴⁰ And they were prepared, by decades-long looking at the mechanical parts

of pictures on the part of so many French art lovers, to respond to the magic of Watteau's brush, chalks, and pen. In fact, they recognized from very early on the master's potential, and they aggressively supported and encouraged his development.

These people were presumably charmed by Watteau's novel subjects, his "*petits sujets galants*," but early comments about his work stress above all the character and effects of his inspired handiwork: "the vivacity and truth of his color," "the delicacy and precision" of his rendition of figures, "his fine and light touch," "the easy flow of his brush," "the inimitable finesse of his brushwork."¹⁴¹ This critical focus was explained and justified during the artist's lifetime by the aesthete, the abbé Dubos. Writing about the attraction that pictures in the minor genres have for the viewer, he asserted what seemed to him self-evident, that unlike history or religious pictures the objects they represent have no particular interest for us. When looking at them, therefore, our attention is given instead to "the skill of the Artisan."

¹³⁸ He praised Rubens in his *Dissertation . . .* (as in n. 134), 42, 50, as "un savant Peintre, mais encore un savant homme dans toute sorte de littérature," who treated "les grands sujets."

¹³⁹ An early member of his audience who did become concerned with art theory, Caylus, found fault with the artist's work in his biography of Watteau. Cf. P. Rosenberg, *Vies anciennes de Watteau*, Paris, 1984, 53–89, and *passim*.

¹⁴⁰ Jullienne once considered becoming a professional artist. Caylus and Hénin drew after the live model in the company of Watteau. The former was an active printmaker. For these people and other admirers of Watteau, see D. Posner, *Antoine Watteau*, London, 1984, 121–128.

¹⁴¹ See Rosenberg (as in n. 139), esp. 4, 6f. 17, 50, 74.

"The art of painting is so difficult, it seizes us by a sense which has such a great effect on our soul, that a picture can please us by the charms of its execution alone."¹⁴² Virtually all Watteau's works, of course, fall into the categories of the minor genres,¹⁴³ wherein execution, rather than invention, could be understood as making the primary appeal to the spectator's aesthetic sensibilities.

Attention to how, as much or more than what, the artist paints or draws, had, of course, great implications for the development of eighteenth-century and later art. Watteau and the *amateurs* who responded so enthusiastically to his work stand near the beginning of this development. The artist himself testified to it. In the *Shopsign* he painted for the art dealer Gersaint—the broadly brushed display of manual wizardry that he made, as Gersaint tells us, "just to get the stiffness out of his fingers"¹⁴⁴—two customers look at a landscape, and they get up close to admire the painter's artifice (Fig. 3).

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¹⁴² *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), Dresden, 1760, 1, 65–66.

¹⁴³ His *fêtes galantes* seem to have been regarded by his contemporaries as belonging to the genre of landscape. See D. Posner, "Watteau, 'Parklandscapist,'" in F. Moureau and M. Morgan Grasselli, eds., *Antoine Watteau, le peintre, son temps et sa légende*, Paris, 1987, 113–116.

¹⁴⁴ In Rosenberg (as in n. 139), 37.

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