Borderless Creativity? A New Perspective on Netherlandish Artists in Early Modern Spanish Naples

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Abstract
Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century artist biographers documented the mobility of early modern Netherlandish artists. Yet, research into the movements of Dutch and Flemish artists still fails to capture the full significance of this essential aspect of the artistic profession. This article presents a novel approach to artist mobility, by applying Michael Baxandall's interpretation of the artwork as "a solution to a problem" to a selection of artworks by Northern artists in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Naples. By analyzing itinerant artists' abilities to solve the challenges they faced as foreigners in the Spanish Viceroyalty, this study offers new insights into their creativity.

Keywords: Artist Mobility, Methodology, Creativity, Baxandall, Early Modern Netherlandish Art, Spanish Naples

Una creatività senza confini?
Una nuova prospettiva sugli artisti nederlandesi nella Napoli spagnola della prima età moderna

Abstract
I biografi degli artisti attivi tra Seicento e Settecento hanno documentato la mobilità degli artisti nederlandesi della prima età moderna. Eppure, la ricerca sulla circolazione degli artisti olandesi e fiamminghi non ha finora colto appieno il significato di tale aspetto essenziale della loro attività. L'articolo presenta un nuovo approccio alla mobilità artistica, applicando l'interpretazione dell'opera d'arte, offerta da Michael Baxandall, quale "soluzione ad un problema", ad una selezione di dipinti e disegni eseguiti da artisti nordici nella Napoli del tardo Cinquecento e del Seicento. Attraverso l'analisi dell'abilità di affrontare le sfide, connesse alla loro condizione di artisti "forestieri" nel Viceregno di Napoli, lo studio apre ad una nuova prospettiva sulla loro creatività.

Parole chiave: mobilità degli artisti, metodologia, creatività, Baxandall, arte nederlandese e fiamminga della prima età moderna, Napoli spagnola

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In 1718, artist biographer Arnold van Houbraken (1660-1719) emphasized the enormous effort he had made to obtain information about Dutch artists who spent their career outside the Dutch Republic:

> Dutchmen, stimulated by the desire to travel, have spent their whole life outside their fatherland, and practiced their art in the service of foreign courts. For this we frequently had to overcome wild seas and steep Alps[1].

Houbraken's words still ring true for art historians interested in itinerant artists today. Documenting the mobility of artists is a daunting task that requires the reconstruction of fragmented oeuvres and hard labour in the archives in search of sparse traces of proof of an artist's life and activity. Besides the importance of documenting artist's movements and activity outside their hometown,

[1] A. Houbraken, *Groote Schouburgh der konstschilders en schilderessen*, The Hague, J. Swart & C. Boucquet, 1718-1721, p. 7 [translated by the author].

what else can the study of artist mobility tell us about the history of art? The myriad of ways in which itinerant artists and their work can be studied–and indeed have been studied–indicates the complexity of the phenomenon[2].

Artist mobility involves social, economic, cultural, technical, and of course artistic factors, both on the side of the artist and on that of the "host society". These factors are not stable, but in constant development. Indeed, the mobility of artists contributes to changes in all of these aspects, on both sides. The prism of artist mobility and the relative outsider's perspective of the itinerant artist sheds light on the dynamics of the art scene in a specific location, as well as on the mechanisms involved in artistic exchange[3]. To a certain degree, the inevitable confrontation between foreign and local practices and ideas about art that is integral to artist mobility functioned as a catalyst to (re-)define these internalized skills and perceptions[4]. As such, the study of the career and work of a particular itinerant artist (or group of artists) can serve as a vehicle to examine the development of local artistic ideas and practices. The act of moving around, on the other hand, also forced artists to reconsider their own approach to their profession and challenged them to adapt to local circumstances.

Since almost all artists experienced mobility in some form or degree during part of their career, it is essential to attempt to better understand the various processes involved in this complex phenomenon[5]. This essay proposes a novel methodological approach to artist mobility to complement existing approaches. It consists in framing the artworks that itinerant artists created abroad as concrete solutions to challenges they encountered in the new environment[6]. After

[2] It would be impossible to provide a full bibliography on artist mobility throughout the history of art or even one limited to the early modern period, especially since most publications focus on groups or individuals of a specific origin moving to a particular location, thus demanding caution in terms of general applicability. I hope the reader will excuse me for merely evoking some thought-provoking studies showcasing different approaches to the phenomenon. T. DACOSTA KAUFMANN, *Toward a Geography of Art,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004*,* connects mobility to the notion of (national) identity–an approach with a long and mostly problematic history; D. KIM, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014 demonstrates the value of a philological approach to artist biographies; K. GLUDOVATZ, J. REES, J. NORTH (eds.), *Itineraries of Art: Topographies of Artistic Mobility in Europe and Asia,* Leiden, Brill, 2015 adopt an original topographic perspective; K. WAGNER, J. DAVID, M. KLEMENČIČ (eds.), *Artists and Migration 1400-1850: Britain, Europe and Beyond*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017 displays a range of important questions regarding artist mobility; S.J. CAMPBELL, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2019, revisits the center-periphery discourse from the perspective of artist mobility; G. WALCZAK, *Artistische Wanderer: die Künstler(e)migranten der Französischen Revolution*, Berlin, Deutsche Kunstverlag, 2019 offers a comparative geopolitical approach. Regarding Netherlandish art in particular, we should mention H. GERSON, *Die Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der Holländischen Malerei des 17.Jahrhundert / De expansie der 17e-eeuwsche Hollandsche schilderkunst*, Haarlem, De Ervan J. Bohn, 1942, providing an inventory of Dutch artists abroad, as well as its recent annotations and additions by the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague (ongoing: https://rkdstudies.nl/rkd-series/ [consulted on 9 October 2023]), for more examples of studies on the mobility of early modern Netherlandish artists, see note 17, below.

[3] Cfr. P. BURKE, *Cultural Hybridity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, for a discussion of the terminology used for the interaction between foreigners and local people.

[4] An artistic idea is here understood very broadly as 'a thought related to art', in the minds of all actors involved (artists, consumers, theorists, dealers, etc.). Artistic practices consist in the actions involved in the production, consumption and reception of art, again by all actors.

[5] M. OSNABRUGGE, *The Practices of Early Modern Artists Abroad: Some Methodological Considerations*, in M. SCHNEIDER (ed.), *Mobilités artistiques à l'époque moderne: XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, Centre allemand de l'histoire de l'art, forthcoming 2024. In this publication, I propose a typology of mobile artists, including: the student, immigrant, court artist, nomad, refugee, traveler/explorer, local.

[6] This short essay focuses on the production of itinerant artists abroad. The artworks created after these artists returned to their home region or moved on to another location necessitated a reaction to that environment. While this is equally interesting, it would be complicated to consider this dynamic as well in this article.

providing a background and description of this approach, I will present a couple of case studies in the form of artworks created by Netherlandish artists in early modern Naples. Finally, I will discuss how this approach allows us to appreciate the creativity of itinerant artists.

Artworks as Solutions to Concrete Problems

In *Patterns of Intention: on the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985), British art historian Michael Baxandall (1933-2008) sets out to develop a historical understanding of pictures. In line with his conceptualization of the "period eye"[7], he aims to understand or indeed explain the existence and shape of an artwork by examining the context in which the artist created it. At the beginning of the book he states:

> The maker of a picture or other historical artefact is a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve and the specific circumstances out of which he was addressing it[8].

To reconstruct the problem that an artwork solves, Baxandall proposes that the art historian attempts to identify what he calls the Charge and the Brief. The Charge consists of the more general assignment, either formulated by a commissioner or consciously or unconsciously imposed by artists on themselves. The Brief contains a series of more or less detailed specifications required of the artwork by the commissioner or the artist (again either explicitly or implicitly), or by art, culture and society in a more abstract and general sense. The art historian furthermore needs to consider the resources that were available to the artist. Baxandall references resources of medium, models or those of an "aesthetic" nature[9]. It is noteworthy that these three categories of resources stay within the narrow boundaries of traditional art historical research, addressing technique and materiality, imitation or emulation and style.

In his quest to understand artworks from other periods, Baxandall distinguishes participants (the actors involved with art at a particular place and time) and observers (people trying to make sense of the world of the participants through what he calls "inferential criticism"). He argues that the former appropriated and internalized current local artistic ideas and practices[10], whereas the latter can never really get to that same level of understanding. Baxandall develops his approach with the help of the examples of Benjamin Baker's Forth Bridge, Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*, Chardin's *A Lady taking Tea*, and Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ*. Undeniably, this quintessential publication was a product of the heated methodological discussions that took place in the humanities on an international scale during the 1980s. At times, Baxandall's concern with intentionality, influence and authorship can feel somewhat outdated to art historians in the 2020s.

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[7] Baxandall first developed the concept of the "period eye" in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (M. BAXANDALL, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972).

[8] M. BAXANDALL, *Patterns of Intention: on the Historical Explanation of Pictures,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 14-15.

[9] ID., p. 35.

[10] Although Baxandall does not cite Polanyi explicitly here, it seems he has the Hungarian-British scholar's notion of *tacit knowledge* in mind. (M. POLANYI, *The Tacit Dimension*, New York, Doubleday, 1966).

The phenomenon of artist mobility is not taken into consideration in *Patterns of Intention*[11]. It would presumably have complicated the book's already complex argument to an unworkable extent. In the opposition between participants and observers that is at the crux of Baxandall's concept of the "period eye", there is little space for itinerant artists. We could argue that like the observer from another period, the itinerant artist "lacks the participant's pure tact and fluid sense of the complexities"[12]. They are literally "foreign" to the ideas and practices and need to attempt to bridge this incomprehension to the best of their abilities in order to work. And although itinerant artists are contemporaries to local participants and therefore lack the temporal distance and hindsight of twentieth- or twenty-first-century art historians, they share what Baxandall describes as "perspective". It is this outsider's perspective that allows them to distinguish the particularities of a culture through comparison. In turn, this insight offers them the opportunity to respond and to contribute to the culture in a way that is literally unimaginable for the local artist. Some challenges were the same for all artists, whereas others were specific for itinerant artists. On the one hand, mobility generates problems of incomprehension and mismatch that need to be solved in the artworks itinerant artists create. At the same time, the resources of the outsider are different, arguably resulting in different and novel solutions.

Baxandall defines a problem as "a state of affairs in which two things hold: something needs to be done, and there is no purely habitual or simply reactive way of doing it"[13]. Besides the examples of problems evinced in his four case studies, he does not elaborate on the nature of potential problems. I would like to be more precise regarding the types of problems artists could encounter and consequently attempted to solve with their artworks. The development of the discipline since the publication of *Patterns of Intention* allows for such elaboration. The field has become increasingly specialized, leading art historians to consider artistic production from angles like technique, socio-economic theory, cultural history, amongst others, each with their own advanced methods of analysis that allow for the recognition and study of these problems.

First of all, we might want to distinguish between problems that are internal and others that are external to an artist's practice. Artistic, technical and psychological challenges can be considered internal, whereas challenges imposed by society and culture or by economic circumstances are external. An example of an artistic problem is an artist's desire to emulate others, for example in the depiction of a common iconography. The shortcomings of a particular material require an artist to find technical solutions. The desire to paint more realistically (a technical problem), arguably led to the development of oil paint, for example[14]. Time pressure or an overbearing patron may pose practical challenges and conceptual concerns. Externally, changing cultural or societal norms could impose restrictions on what an artist was allowed to depict and force them to adapt.

One example is the existential challenge of the religious criticism on artworks in the context of both the Protestant and Catholic Reformation[15]. Changing taste equally required adjustments to the manner of working. In economic terms, a particularly competitive art market was a very real problem that many artists navigated in different ways[16]. Oftentimes, the problems faced by artists were not that

[11] Pablo Picasso was a Spanish immigrant in Paris and Piero della Francesca moved around Tuscany and the Marche, but this is not part of Baxandall's analysis.

[12] BAXANDALL, *Patterns of Intention*, cit., p. 109.

[13] ID., p. 69.

[14] Cfr. M. BOL, *The Varnish and the Glaze: Painting Splendor with Oil*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2023.

[15] In his excellent study of Flemish art in the wake of the Iconoclastic Fury, Koen Jonckheere discusses several examples of effective problem-solving (K. JONCKHEERE, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm: Experiments in Decorum: 1566-1585*, Brussels, Mercatorfonds, 2012).

[16] We might think of the way in which monochromatic landscape painting allowed Jan van Goyen to paint more rapidly,

all-encompassing. In fact, if we take Baxandall's approach very literally and consider each artwork a concrete solution to a problem then all artists were "problem-solvers".

I believe that Baxandall's perspective on artistic production is particularly insightful when we turn to the kind of artists that are at the centre of this thematic issue of *Intrecci*: itinerant artists. In what follows, I will explore whether the interpretation of artworks as solutions to concrete problems can help us to appreciate the artistic production of artists active outside their home town. In order to make this experimental perspective on artist mobility more tangible, I will focus on a selection of artworks created by Netherlandish artists in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Naples.

Netherlandish Painters in Naples

In comparison to major art centres like Rome, Florence and Venice, or indeed Paris and London, the number of early modern Netherlandish artists who travelled through or settled in Naples is relatively small[17]. Yet, from the last quarter of the sixteenth century onwards the capital of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Southern Italy held a certain attraction to foreign artists and to Netherlandish artists in particular[18]. Many artists on their Italian sojourn undertook the journey southwards from Rome

studied by Eric Jan Sluijter: E.J. SLUIJTER, *Jan van Goyen: Virtuoso, Innovator, and Market Leader*, «Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art», 13/2 (2021) [a translated and updated version of a catalogue essay from 1996].

[17] For studies on Netherlandish artists in these art centers (Rome, Florence, Venice, Paris, London), see for example: G.J. HOOGEWERFF, *Nederlandsche schilders in Italië in de XVIe eeuw: de geschiedenis van het Romanisme*, Utrecht, Oosthoek, 1912; N. DACOS, B.W. MEIJER (eds.), *Fiamminghi a Roma 1508-1608: kunstenaars uit de Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik te Rome tijdens de Renaissance*, exhibition catalogue (Brussels / Rome), Ghent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1995; G. SAPORI, *Fiamminghi nel cantiere Italia 1560-1600*, Milan, Mondadori Electa, 2007; B. AIKEMA, B.L. BROWN (eds.), *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer and Titian*, exhibition catalogue (Venice), Milan, Bompiani, 1999; G.J. VAN DER SMAN, B. WIERDA, *Wisselend success: de loopbanen van Nederlandse en Vlaamse kunstenaars in Florence, 1450-1600*, «Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek», 63 (2014), pp. 170-239; B.W. MEIJER (ed.), *Firenze e gli antichi Paesi Bassi, 1430-1530: dialoghi tra artisti: da Jan van Eyck a Ghirlandaio, da Memling a Raffaello*, exhibition catalogue (Florence), Livorno, Sillabe, 2008; S. LEVERT, *"Étrangers, mais habitués en cette ville de Paris": les artistes néerlandais à Paris (1550-1700): une prosopographie*, doctoral thesis (Utrecht), 2017; S. KARST, *Schilderen in een land zonder schilders: De Nederlandse Bijdrage aan de Opkomst van de Nederlandse Schilderschool 1520-1720*, doctoral thesis (Utrecht), 2021; K. HEARN, "*Picture Drawer, Born at Antwerp": Migrant Artists in Jacobean London*, in T. COOPER (et al.), *Painting in Britain 1500-1630: Production, influences and patronage*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 278-287.

[18] For the *pittori fiamminghi* in Naples, see for the sixteenth century: G. PREVITALI, *Teodoro d'Errico e la 'Questione meridionale'*, «Prospettiva», 3 (1975), pp. 17-34; C. VARGAS, *Teodoro d'Errico: la maniera fiamminga nel Viceregno*, Naples, Electa, 1988; C. VARGAS, *Cornelis Smet tra i "paisani" fiamminghi*, «Mélanges de l'École Francaise de Rome», *Italie et Méditerranée*, 103 (1991), pp. 629-680; P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli: 1573-1606. L'ultima maniera*, Naples, Electa, 1991; P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli: 1540-1573. Fasto e devozione*, Naples, Electa, 1996; For the seventeenth-century: P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *Finson and the 'Colony' of Flemish Artists in Early Seventeenth Century Naples*, in P. SMEETS, "Louis Finson: The Four Elements", exhibition catalogue (Geneva), Milan, Rob Smeets, 2007; M. OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers of Netherlandish Immigrant Painters 1575-1655*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, constitutes the only comprehensive study covering the period 1575-1655. For substantial research on individual Netherlandish artists in Naples, see: V. Farina, *Intorno a Ribera: nuove riflessioni su Giovanni Ricca e Hendrick van Somer e alcune aggiunte ai giovani Ribera e Luca Giordano*, «Rivista di Storia Finanziara» (Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II), 27 (2011), pp. 155-194; G. Porzio, *La scuola di Ribera: Giovanni Dò, Bartolomeo Passante, Enrico Fiammingo*, Naples, Arte'm, 2014; C. MALICE, *Matthias Stom: oltre i confini del naturale – un "caravaggesco romanzato" on the road*, «Zeusi», 3.5/6 (2017), pp. 68-82; T. De Nile, *Rethinking Swanenburg: the Rise and Fortune of New Iconographies of the "Hell" in Italy and the Northern Netherlands*, in M. OSNABRUGGE, *Questioning Pictorial Genres in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Art*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2021, pp. 291-309; G. Capitelli, T. De Nile, A. Witte (eds.), *Fiamminghi al Sud. Oltre Napoli*, Rome, Edizioni Quasar,

to Naples, by sea or on foot or horseback over the Via Appia. These travellers include the Dutch artists Hendrick Goltzius, Hendrick Terbrugghen, Otto Marseus van Schrieck, and Leonart Bramer, as well as the German Joachim van Sandrart and Frenchman Claude Lorrain[19].

Naples was the most densely populated European city after Paris and would have made an overwhelming impression on visitors. Before the rediscovery of Pompei and Herculaneum in the eighteenth century, the main attractions consisted of natural marvels like the active volcano Vesuvius and the Phlegraean Fields with the Solfatara crater as well as antique monuments such Virgil's Tomb at the entrance of the Grotto of Posilippo, sculptures and other objects[20]. In terms of more recent artworks, the programme of visiting artists would have likely featured frescoes by Giotto, the *Compianto* by Guido Mazzoni and the vault of the old sacristy by Giorgio Vasari in the church of Monteoliveto, Donatello's tomb of Cardinal Brancacci in Sant'Angelo a Nilo and numerous other Renaissance artworks visible in the city's many churches. The list expands further during the seventeenth century, to include paintings by Caravaggio and other painted and sculpted Baroque masterpieces by local and foreign artists.

Besides punctual visitors, around fifty Netherlandish artists can be documented as having (temporally or definitively) made Naples their home and having integrated (to various degrees) in the local art scene and society. These "immigrant painters" had a distinctly different experience of mobility, facing a set of challenges related to the process of integration[21]. During the last quarter of the sixteenth century the first generation of Netherlandish artists in Naples profited from the relatively lack of local masters and increased demand for artworks due to the Counter Reformation and gradually developing interest in painting by the Neapolitan elite. The situation changed decisively over the course of the seventeenth century, when a steady local demand for public and private artworks gave rise to a flourishing and competitive art market that attracted many local and other foreign artists.

This brief characterization provides a general background to the activity of Netherlandish artists in Naples, but it does not sufficiently explain the existence and shape of the specific artworks these artists created during their sojourn in the city. This is why I now propose to take a closer look at some of their works and attempt to reconstruct which problem(s) they attempted to solve and how.

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forthcoming 2024.

[19] In my book on Netherlandish immigrant painters in early modern Naples, I list about twenty Northerners whose trip to Naples and further South was mentioned in early modern biographies, but Neapolitan subjects (views or objects) in extant sketches evince that the number was much higher (OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers*, cit., pp. 17-20).

[20] The *grotto* (or rather: tunnel) with Virgil's alleged tomb monument was a very popular destination. Guilliam van Nieulandt II (Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, inv. Hz 8742), Willem Schellincks (Ackland Museum, Chapel Hill, inv. 2017.1.80) and Gaspar van Wittel (a.k.a. Gaspare Vanvitelli, at least three versions of different sizes: two in private collections, dated 1701 and 1702 respectively and one in the Museo del Prado, inv. 2463) are amongst the Dutch artists who depicted this view. There are significant differences between the drawings: while Van Nieulandt (c. 1601-04) and Schellincks (c. 1664-65) focused on the challenge to depict the mystery of the dark passage, Van Wittel (c. 1701-02) seems to have been more attracted by the architecture of the poet's tomb monument.

[21] In order to get a better grip on the different experiences of mobility and their impact on artistic creativity, I developed a 'typology of mobile artists' that presents different types of itinerant artists like visitors, immigrants, court artists and wanderers, see: OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Career*, cit., pp. 261-264; and OSNABRUGGE, *The Practices of Early Modern Artists Abroad*, cit. Stefania Girometti's study of Michele Desubleo's multi-centric career is an excellent illustration of the issues faced by immigrant painters (S. GIROMETTI, *In Italien Karriere machen: Der flämische Maler Michele Desubleo zwischen Rom, Bologna und Venedig (ca. 1624-1664)*, Heidelberg, arthistoricum.net, 2022).

Gerard Ter Borch I, View of the Phlegraean Fields with the Solfatara Crater*, c. 1610*

A *View of Naples* signed and dated 1610, places Gerard Ter Borch I (c. 1582-1662) in Naples in that year[22]. During the same trip, he visited the volcanic area between Naples and Pozzuoli, called the Phlegraean Fields (*Campi Flegrei*). He made at least two pen drawings in brown ink of the Solfatara crater, now in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam [figs. 1 and 2][23].

A quick glance at the first drawing does not immediately allow us to understand what we are looking at. On the left in the foreground, we see a small wave-like shape, probably depicting a pool of bubbling boiling mud. With a couple of strokes with his pen, he captured three large columns of gases and vapours escaping from the *fumaroles* (vents) in the crater. Between the mud pool and the steam, a small group of six people, one holding an umbrella, are finding their way. Their inclusion emphasizes the overpowering force of nature. An isolated figure stands close to one of the vents on the right. It is difficult to get a sense of space. A third, coloured-in autograph copy, in which green and blue wash are used to indicate the grass and sky, make it possible to see where the land ends and the clear Italian sky begins [fig. 3].

Although it includes the same elements (i.e. mud pool, vapour columns, visitors), Ter Borch's second rendering of the landscape is distinctly different. The drawing has a clear horizon and the rocks on either side frame the main scene. The two figures in the foreground keep a safe distance– for themselves and for the viewer–from the vapour columns, suggesting the choice between joining the other visitors that are standing closer to the vents or admiring the landscape from a position of relative safety.

What problem (or problems) did Ter Borch try to solve with these drawings and which resources were available to him in this challenge? There are no indications that the drawings were made for someone other than himself. Therefore, the implicit assignment (Charge) the artist imposed on himself was to capture what he was seeing. The detailed drawings he made of (ancient) buildings in Rome, often from original angles, had a similar function[24]. Regarding ancient subject matter, he partook in a well-established tradition of Northerners experiencing and appropriating Roman antiquities in their own way, in the footsteps of Jan Gossart and Maarten van Heemskerck[25]. However, Ter Borch drawings of the Solfatara crater address additional challenges. If the artist and the context are the same, why are the two drawings so different? Ter Borch used the same medium and materials, his skills, knowledge and style were unchanged between the moments in which he made the first and second sketch. It seems that with the first drawing, Ter Borch was not only capturing the view, but also the experience. The volcanic landscape must have been wildly unfamiliar to the Northerner. The smell of sulphur, the hissing sound of the vapours emitted through the vents and the intense heat were impressive and disorientating. The first drawing captures this disorientation, whereas the

[22] Gerard Ter Borch I, *View of Naples*, 1610 (signed and dated), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1887-A-881.

[23] A. MCNEIL KETTERING, *Drawings from the Ter Borch Studio Estate*, Catalogue of the Dutch and Flemish drawings in the Rijksmuseum, The Hague, Staatsuitgeverij, 1988, 2 vols., I, pp. 31-33, cat. nrs. GSr 29, 30 and 31.

[24] The Rijksmuseum collection holds Ter Borch's Roman sketchbook, see: MCNEIL KETTERING, *Drawings from the Ter Borch Studio Estate*, cit.

[25] See, in particular: M.A. Bass, *Jan Gossart and the Invention of Netherlandish Antiquity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016; A.J. DIFURIA *Maarten van Heemskerck's Rome: Antiquity, Memory, and the Cult of Ruins,* Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2019. Regarding the informal drawing sessions after antiquities undertaken by Northern artists like François Duquesnoy and Joachim von Sandrart, see (with extensive bibliography): L. YEAGER-CRASSELT, *Joachim von Sandrart's "Academy of antiquity" and François Duquesnoy: The Experience of Academy and Community in Rome in 1629*, in J. BLANC, M. OSNABRUGGE, *Roma 1629: una microstoria dell'arte*, Rome, Artemide, 2021, pp. 69-91.

second responds more squarely to the desire to depict the extraordinary landscape. In other words, the Brief–in this case consisting of the details of the assignment of the artist to himself–had changed, despite the fact that both drawings were made by the same artist, likely within a short time of each other. The first drawing is a solution to the problem of how to depict a sensory experience, the second solves the challenge to make a recognizable view of an unfamiliar landscape.

Since he was only passing through Naples (and the rest of Italy) as a visitor, Ter Borch did not have to face the challenges that an immigrant artist would encounter in the process of integrating in Neapolitan society and the local art scene. The next two case studies will focus on artworks produced by two Netherlanders who did go through this integration process: Aert Mytens was active in Naples during the last quarter of the sixteenth century and Hendrick De Somer between circa 1622 and 1655. As a result, the problems they encountered illustrate a more complex reaction to their new environment.

Aert Mytens, Virgin of the Rosary*, c. 1584*

Brussels painter Aert Mytens (c. 1556-1601) arrived in the capital of the Viceroyalty around 1574, following a short sojourn in Rome. It was an opportune moment, since the demand for altarpieces in Naples was taking off as a result of the Counter Reformation and there were few artists available to meet it. Between 1582 and 1584 Mytens worked on a large altarpiece representing the Virgin of the Rosary [fig. 4, only the central panel survives] for the newly built Neapolitan church of San Severo Maggiore al Pendino, located at a few steps from the Cathedral in the city centre. San Severo was the headquarter of the Observant Dominicans in Naples, guided by the zealous Fra Paolino Bernardini[26]. This branch of the Dominicans set out to return to a strict observance of the order's original Rule. As such, the commission placed Mytens right at the centre of the Counter Reformation in Naples.

In this case, the contract between Mytens and the board of the brotherhood of the Rosary in San Severo Maggiore, signed on 22 October 1582, stipulates the Charge. Although perfectly in line with the customs of the period, the commission is disappointingly vague with regard to the visual aspects of the altarpiece, solely stating: «the Virgin with the fifteen mysteries and in the centre of the painting the Virgin, St Dominic, and all the other figures necessary to decorate the altarpiece, [painted] in fine colours and to be judged by experts»[27]. In fact, the commissioners spend more words to indicate that the panel and its lavish frame should be made with properly seasoned wood of the highest quality. Apparently, all parties involved were confident that Mytens would know what the iconography of the Virgin of the Rosary required. We learn from a later convention between Mytens and the brotherhood, which was stipulated during the final stage of the production of the altarpiece in January 1584, that Mytens had submitted a design to the experts for approval[28]. The "*colori fini*" mentioned in the initial contract refer to the quality of the pigments.

[26] After the installation of the altarpiece, a small miracle occurred, which was described by Bernardini's biographer. For more on the context of the commission, see: M. OSNABRUGGE, *Aert Mytens and the Virgin of the Rosary Altarpiece for San Severo Maggiore al Pendino in Naples (1582-1584)*, «Memorie Domenicane», 44, (2013/2014), pp. 477-486.

[27] Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Notai del '500, A. Rosanova (inv. 212), prot. 15, cc. 51r-51v. First published in P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli*, cit., p. 333, transcribed in OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers,* cit., p. 271 (Appendix, doc. 8).

[28] Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Notai del '500, A. Rosanova (inv. 212), prot. 15, cc. 167r-167v (18 January 1584), first published in P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli*, cit., p. 333, transcribed in OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers*, cit., p. 275 (Appendix, doc. 13).

The contract thus provides information about the resources of material that was required and presumably available to Mytens (seasoned wood and high-quality pigments). The question of the models and aesthetic of this Netherlandish painter in the capital of the Viceroyalty is more complex. How did the almost 30-year-old painter go about creating an altarpiece of the *Virgin of the Rosary* that would satisfy the Rosary brotherhood and Observant Dominicans? The iconography had only recently regained popularity in the context of the reinforced devotion to the Virgin of the Rosary in the wake of the victory of the Holy League at the Battle of Lepanto (1571), which was assigned to her[29]. The few available models of Rosary altarpieces in the region were of the hand of other *Fiamminghi* like Cornelis Smet and Dirck Hendricksz Centen (Teodoro d'Errico). Mytens was certainly aware of these, being closely acquainted with both painters within the small "colony" of Northern artists in town. According to artist biographer Carel Van Mander, Mytens had spent his initial years in Naples in Smet's workshop[30]. In turn, the rigid composition of the altarpieces seems to have been based on the devotional prints by Northern engravers that circulated across Europe. It features a central panel with the Virgin and "necessary" saints, framed by fifteen small scenes depicting the miracles of the rosary, as well a top panel with God the Father and a bottom panel depicting a scene of devotion (either with St Dominic or a brotherhood). Stylistically, Mytens' work recalls the soft hues of the Sienese master Marco Pino (c. 1525-c. 1587), who was one of the main artists on the Neapolitan art scene since 1557.

Mytens' solution is intricately connected to his status as a Netherlandish immigrant painter in late sixteenth century Naples. His Northern background gave him access to appropriate models and may even have been the reason he received the commission in the first place. In terms of aesthetic, he connected to local style. He went on to paint at least another seven *Virgin of the Rosary* altarpieces in the Viceroyalty[31]. In the contract of 1587 for the version for the Rosary Confraternity in Pogerola, on the Amalfi Coast, it is stipulated explicitly that the altarpiece should resemble the work in San Severo Maggiore, indicating that his solution had been successful.

Hendrick De Somer, St Jerome*, 1652*

Seventy years after Aert Mytens painted his *Virgin of the Rosary*, another Netherlandish immigrant painter in Naples signed and dated a *St Jerome:* «Enrico Somer f. 1652» [fig. 5]. By that time, Hendrick De Somer (1602-after 1655) from Lokeren had had a successful career in the city spanning over three decades[32]. He had married and started a family with a local woman and established friendships with several local artists, including Domenico Gargiulo and Viviano Codazzi. Besides his successful integration, he also maintained a connection with his Flemish roots, amongst others

[29] For an analysis of paintings with this iconography in the Viceroyalty, see: C. GELAO, *Aspetti dell'iconografia rosariana in Puglia tra il XVI e la prima metà del XVII secolo*, in M.A. Pavone (ed.), "Modelli di lettura iconografica: il panorama meridionale", Naples, Liguori, 1999, pp. 135-158; and for Mytens' paintings with this subject: P. LEONE DE CASTRIS, *La Madonna del Rosario di Aert Mijtens ed altre questioni di fine Cinquecento*, in S. MILANO (ed.), *La Chiesa di S. Lucia in Cava de' Tirreni*, Cava de' Tirreni, Tipolitografia De Rosa & Memoli, 2005, pp. 123-137.

[30] C. VAN MANDER, *Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem, Paschier van Wesbusch, 1604, fol. 263v.

[31] OSNABRUGGE, *Aert Mytens and the Virgin of the Rosary Altarpiece*, cit., p. 479. In total, nine paintings by Mytens with this subject are known through extant artworks and archival documents.

[32] Cfr. the chapter on Hendrick De Somer in OSNABRUGGE, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers*, cit., pp. 123-174, for a complete analysis of De Somer's integration. For the discovery of Hendrick's birth record, which allowed us to firmly establish his origin and age, cfr. E. BIELEN, *Contribution to the Biography of Hendrick De Somer (1602-after 1655): a Seventeenth-century Neapolitan Painter from Lokeren*, «Oud Holland», 134/1 (2021), pp. 1-8.

through active participation in the governance of the German-Netherlandish church of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Naples. Soon after his arrival around 1622, he had entered the prolific workshop of the Spaniard Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). After his apprenticeship, he received many commissions from private collectors as well as for a large *Baptism of Christ* for the nuns at Santa Maria della Sapienza in 1641.

We do not have a commission for this *St Jerome*, but its size and composition suggest it was destined to be exhibited in a private collection. The popularity in Naples of paintings of hermit saints like St Jerome means that De Somer could have either painted it on commission or on speculation for the Neapolitan art market[33]. In the 1650s, Neapolitan collectors would have certain expectations that painters had to take into consideration. In fact, the principal artist to have popularized and developed this kind of subject matter was the Fleming's old master Ribera[34]. De Somer must have seen the Spaniard create and sell several paintings of St Jerome during his tenure in the workshop. After he had gained independence, he probably encountered later versions by his former master in the collections of his clients.

By the time De Somer painted this *St Jerome* in 1652, Ribera had been unable to work properly for several years due to diminished health and would in fact die that same year. The association of Ribera's paintings with this subject and De Somer's relation to his master were part of the challenge of creating this work at that moment in Naples.

Closely following his master's composition and style would satisfy collectors, who were unable to obtain a new work from Ribera at that time. However, De Somer had developed his own style since his apprenticeship and now had a name and reputation to uphold. His solution was to create a St Jerome that followed Ribera's example very closely in terms of composition and style. He also demonstrates that his skills in the depiction of the texture of the old man's skin and beard are on par with his former master. Nevertheless, he keeps his artistic integrity intact by creating his own invention rather than copying an existing St Jerome by his former master[35]. The see-through with a landscape bathed in evening light on the right, forms a deviation from the dark rocky or non-descriptive background common in Ribera's models.

The problem that De Somer needed to solve with this painting was not so much one of finding an appropriate way to depict the subject, since models were plenty. Rather, he needed to make the subject his own while satisfying buyers accustomed to Ribera, who had dominated the representation of hermit saints in Naples for decades. He had the choice between imitating or attempting to emulate Ribera. As such, the challenge can be characterized as artistic and economic. That he encountered this Brief reflects De Somer's thorough integration into local artistic developments and the irrelevance of his immigrant status in his artistic practices.

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[33] For an analysis of the Neapolitan art market, see the publications by Christopher Marshall, in particular: C.R. MARSHALL, *Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting: The World in the Workbench*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016. For more about Neapolitan art collections and collectors: G. LABROT, *Collections of Paintings in Naples 1600-1750*, Munich, Saur, 1992; and G. LABROT, *Peinture et société à Naples - XVIe-XVIIIe siècles. Commandes, collections, marchés*, Seyssel, Champ Valon, 2010.

[34] Studies that specifically address the development of thematic developments in early modern Neapolitan painting remain a *desideratum*. However, regarding Ribera's contribution to the iconography of hermit saints in Naples, see: N. Spinosa, *Ribera: l'opera completa*, Naples, Electa, 2003; PORZIO, *La scuola di Ribera*, cit.; and G. FORGIONE, *Ancora sulla cerchia di Ribera a Napoli: proposte per Hendrick de Somer e Giovanni Ricca*, «Commentari d'Arte» 19 (2013), pp. 54, 55, 91-97, 125; and G. PORZIO, *Hendrick De Somer: Ritratti senili in dialogo con Ribera*, in G. PORZIO, *Tra Nord e Sud d'Europa: episodi di pittura dal Cinque al Seicento*, exhibition catalogue (Naples, Galleria Porcini), Naples, Porcini, 2013, pp. 86-100.

[35] This composition by De Somer is closest to Ribera's *St Jerome* in the Narodní Galerie in Prague, dated 1646 (inv. DO4374).

Closing Remarks: Problem-solving and the Creativity of Itinerant Artists

These three examples illustrate some of the challenges that mobile artists potentially faced and how the specific circumstances of their mobility played a role in the solutions they offered. Gerard Ter Borch's problem of how to capture the sensorial experience of visiting the otherworldly landscape of the Phlegraean Fields is a direct result of his mobility. In his solution, he relied on his skills of drawing *naer het leven* (after life), which had likely been part of his training in the Netherlands. The result of a short-term visit, Ter Borch's drawings show no traces of an exchange with local artists regarding artistic ideas or practices.

The circumstances leading Aert Mytens' to create the *Virgin of the Rosary* in 1582-84 were very different. As an immigrant painter in a city in which the local art scene was relatively underdeveloped, Mytens solved the problem of having to depict a prominent Counter Reformation iconography with the help of Northern models (prints and altarpieces by other *pittori fiamminghi* active in the city). The proposed solution is quite schematic as a result, but highly successful. In fact, because his solution was so appreciated by his clients, Mytens made hardly any changes to the composition in his other altarpieces with the same subject. Arguably, his status as a foreigner, with different resources at his disposal than local artists, allowed him to come up with this solution. The problem he was trying to solve was iconographical, not aesthetic. Finally, Hendrick De Somer's solution reflects the Fleming's thorough integration in Naples. He was asked to step in when one of the most prominent local painters was no longer able to meet demand, without consideration of his foreign origin.

The exercise of reconstructing the problem(s) that an artist tried to solve with an artwork forces us to carefully consider all the conditions under which the artwork was created. It combines the various extant approaches to artist mobility (connoisseurship, cultural-historical contextualisation, iconographical research, network analysis, a reconstruction of the economic conditions, and many more) in a concrete and valorising manner, placing the artworks centre stage. The act of moving around forced artists to reconsider their own ideas and practices and challenged them to adapt to local circumstances. Depending on the type of mobility (the examples above focus on a visitor and two immigrants), the challenges changed considerably[36]. In fact, the reconstruction of the problem(s) and solution that an artwork represents make it possible to identify the type of mobility. A visitor like Ter Borch "only" needed to digest his own experiences and observations, whereas immigrants like Mytens or De Somer required to position themselves to survive in their new environment, by either appropriating, innovating or refusing what they encountered. In order to do so, they had to understand the particularities of the local situation.

The hidden agenda of this methodological essay is to make a point about artistic creativity in relation to artist mobility. Art historians of early modern art generally do not take the concept of creativity into consideration, leading to Christopher Wood's historiographical observation that: «Art history has no native discourse of creativity»[37]. It is time for a reappreciation of creativity in early modern art history. Baxandall's definition of artworks as concrete solutions to problems offers one possible avenue to make creativity a workable concept for art historians.

Researchers of current-day creativity in the social sciences have determined that the capacity to problem-solve is one of the principal characteristics of the creative individual[38]. Similar to equally

[36] Cfr. note 5 above.

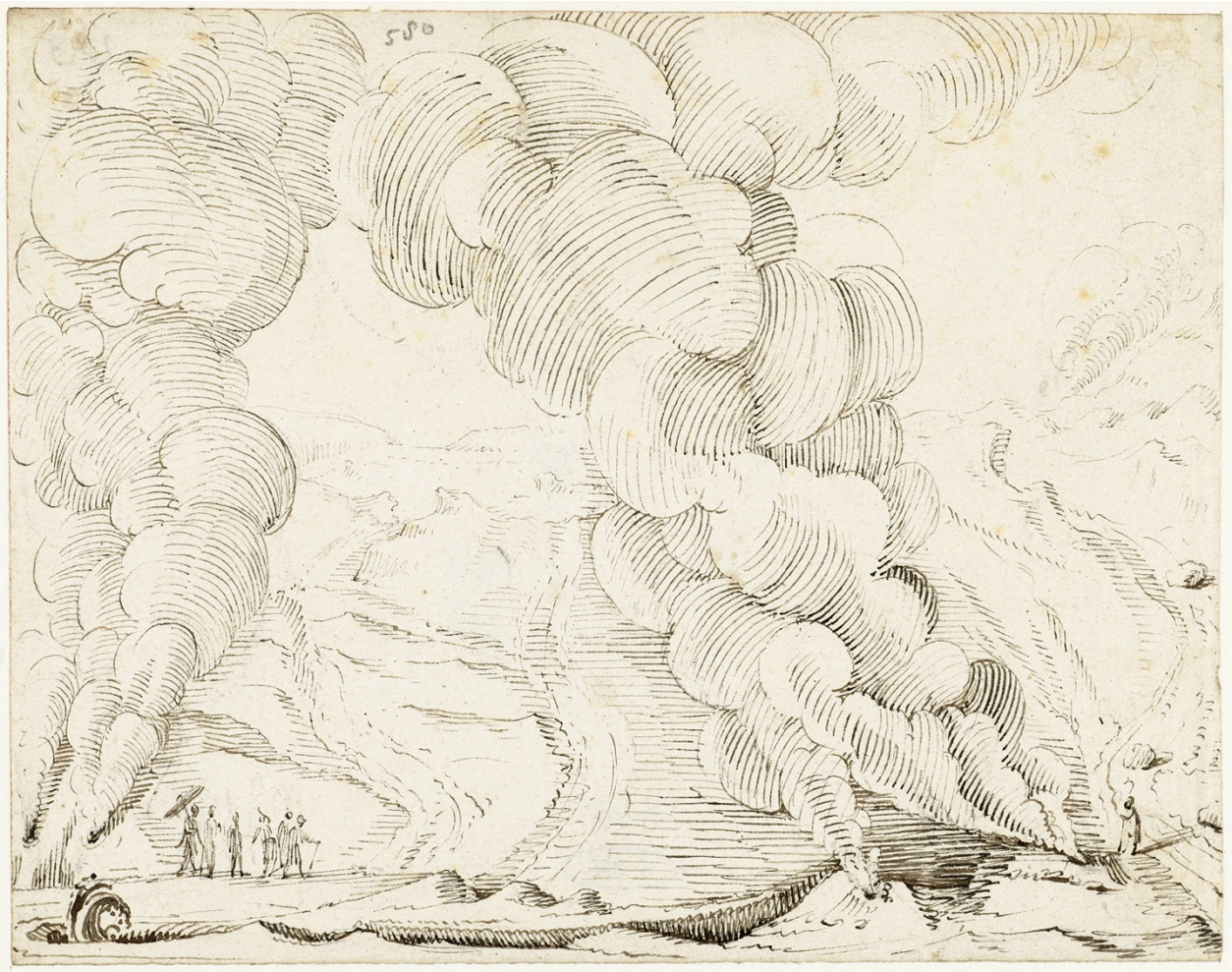
[37] C.S. Wood, *Editorial: Source and Trace*, «Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics», 63 (2013), pp. 5-19, [p. 18].

[38] J.S. Puryear, K.N. Lamb, *Defining Creativity: How Far Have We Come Since Plucker, Beghetto, and Dow?*, «Creativity Research Journal», 32/3 (2020), pp. 206-214. Other common characteristics of creative individuals are divergent thinking and originality. Theories about different kinds or degrees of creativity, seem equally promising for the study of early modern art.

anachronistic but generally accepted concepts in the field of early modern art history like innovation and technique, creativity can help us to better understand artistic practices and artworks. For example, it makes it possible to address the challenges and solutions that artists offered with aesthetically less-appealing artworks. Some of the solutions proposed by artworks may have been so ground-breaking that they changed the course of art history, like the development of oil paint to replace quick-drying tempera. Others just addressed particular demands of a patron or a specific situation and can only be considered creative within that context.

The concept of creativity is particularly helpful to appreciate the work of itinerant artists. As they tried to navigate an unfamiliar environment, itinerant artists faced even more challenges than local artists, especially if they actively tried to engage with the art market. They encountered different ideas and practices and a different culture and society with specific expectations that they needed to uncover. At the same time, their outsider's perspective may have also given them enough leeway and different resources to come up with novel solutions to "local" problems.

To surpass the mere documentation of the presence and activity of itinerant artists, like Arnold Houbraken and other early modern biographers tasked themselves to do long before the dawn of art history as an academic discipline, creativity can serve as a powerful concept to appreciate the dynamics of artist mobility and the particular challenges with which itinerant artists engaged.

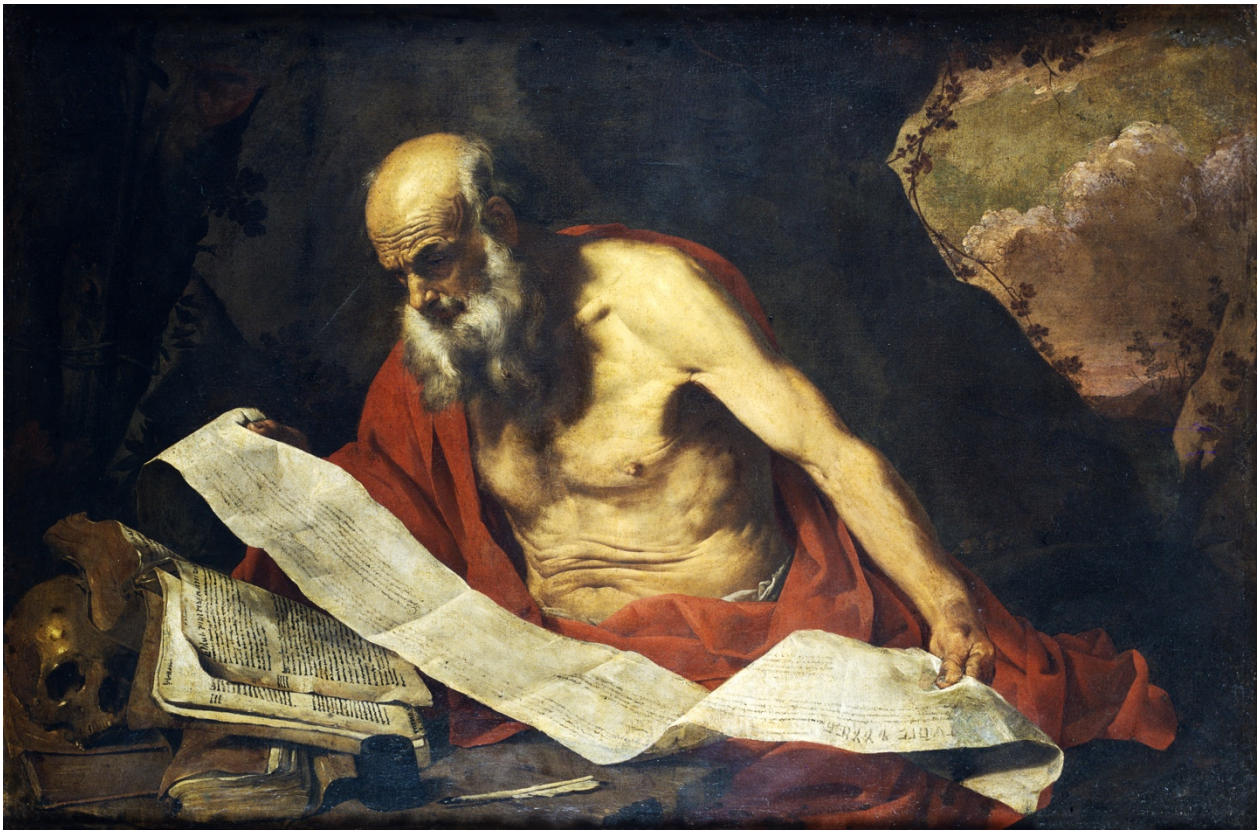


1. Gerard Ter Borch I: *View of the Phlegraean Fields with the Solfatara crater*
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1887-A-751

2. Gerard Ter Borch I: *View of the Phlegraean Fields with the Solfatara crater*
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1887-A-753

3. Gerard Ter Borch I: *View of the Phlegraean Fields with the Solfatara crater*
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-T-1887-A-752

4. Aert Mytens: *Virgin of the Rosary*
Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, inv. Q1092



5. Hendrick De Somer: *St Jerome*
Rome, Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica - Palazzo Barberini, inv. 2330