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GERRIT DOU'S ENCHANTING TROMPE L'OEIL: VIRTUOSITY AND AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN COLLECTIONS

Angela Ho

This paper focuses on *Painter with Pipe and Book* (ca. 1650) by Gerrit Dou, a painter much admired by an exclusive circle of elite collectors in his own time. By incorporating a false frame and picture curtain, Dou transformed this work from a familiar “niche picture” into a depiction of a painting composed in his signature format. Drawing on anthropologist Alfred Gell’s concepts of enchantment and art nexus, I analyze how such a picture would have mediated the interactions between artist, owner, and viewer, enabling each agent to project his identity and shape one another’s response. I thus treat the painting as the center of a complex web of social relations formed in the specific setting of early modern collecting. DOI: [10.5092/jhna.2015.7.1.1](https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2015.7.1.1)



Fig. 1 Gerrit Dou, *Painter with Pipe and Book*, 1645–50, oil on panel, 48 x 37 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-86 (artwork in the public domain)

1 **A**t first glance, Gerrit Dou’s *Painter with Pipe and Book* (fig. 1), now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, is a typical example of the many “niche pictures” the artist produced between the 1640s and 1670s. Featuring a solitary figure framed by an arched stone window and surrounded by appropriate accoutrements, it follows a formula that Dou used for a variety of subjects, including doctors, maidservants, scholars, and musicians. In Dou’s time, contemporaries like Philips Angel praised the artist’s extraordinary ability to conjure a “semblance without being” (*schijn zonder sijn*) in his paintings.¹ In the niche pictures, such as *The Doctor* (fig. 2) and *The*

Trumpeter (fig. 3), Dou accentuated his mimetic skill by employing techniques we now associate with trompe l'oeil easel paintings: the book and musical instruments protruding over the ledge, the illusionistic stone reliefs, and the foreshortened objects at the pictorial threshold. The *Painter with Pipe* augments these features with the strategic addition of a fictive frame and curtain, transforming it from a lifelike genre painting into a *depiction* of a painting.



Fig. 2 Gerrit Dou, *The Doctor*, 1653, oil on panel, 49.3 x 37 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. GG 592. Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY (artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 3. Gerrit Dou, *The Trumpeter*, ca. 1660–65, oil on panel, 38 x 29 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1216. Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY (artwork in the public domain)

- 2 This paper examines how such a work as the *Painter with Pipe* elicited specific responses from its intended viewers and, in so doing, shaped the relations between the artist, owner, and visiting spectators. A feigned painting can produce an unsettling—but also delightful—viewing experience for the beholder by raising questions about pictorial representation and sensory perception. Identified in the literature as a rare “true” trompe l’oeil in Dou’s oeuvre, the *Painter with Pipe* plays a sophisticated game with beholders, inviting them to consider how the illusionistic devices complement but also contradict each other.² Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Charpentrat, and Louis Marin have theorized about the psychological effects of trompe l’oeil imagery,³ while Celeste Brusati has demonstrated that the makers of such “pleasant and praiseworthy” deceptions earned the admiration of a sophisticated clientele among Europe’s elite in the early modern period.⁴ This paper builds on this recent scholarship by identifying and examining the stakes of Dou’s complex visual game. I propose that the anthropologist Alfred Gell’s concept of enchantment provides a useful framework for this investigation.⁵

- 3 Through the analysis of Dou’s painting, this paper also seeks to explore the utility of Gell’s theory to the study of high-value paintings destined for collectors’ cabinets in the seventeenth century. It may seem surprising to apply the ideas of Gell, who has argued for “an attitude of resolute indifference” towards aesthetics, to such examples of supreme craftsmanship as trompe l’oeil easel paintings. It is clear, however, from his essay “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” that in calling for “methodological philistinism” Gell is far from urging anthropologists to ignore the formal qualities of art objects. On the contrary, he repeatedly

states that the visual and material characteristics of the object are crucial to the way it acts upon the beholder. Indeed, enchantment happens when the viewer is startled by the technical expertise demonstrated in an art object. Yet the element of surprise can be triggered only if the viewer possesses knowledge of the technology of production and standards of evaluation. Gell's scrutiny of the art object's power thus takes into account the sense of wonderment associated with the viewing of trompe l'oeil described by Baudrillard but at the same time grounds the discussion in historically specific conditions of production and reception.

- 4 In addition to demanding greater attention to cultural and social contexts in which trompe l'oeil was viewed, Gell's concept of enchantment offers a different explanation of the powerful impact of the image on the beholder. For Gell, the viewer's sense of awe arises not just from observations of the visual properties of the work of art but from his or her recognition of the powers possessed by the people who made or control that object. Moreover, enchantment often unfolds in a web of social connections, with the work of art mediating the relations among the artist, the collector, and visiting spectators. Art historians have sourced Gell's insights effectively to study the role of objects in ritual activities; for example, a cultic object possessing miraculous powers encourages devotees to venerate it, or an official portrait acts as a physical manifestation of a ruler in all parts of his empire.⁶ While Dou's *Painter with Pipe* was not an object connected to formal rites, its viewing would have been choreographed in ways not unlike the organizing of a ritual. At issue is not only who had access to such an exquisitely crafted work but the lived conditions in which reception took place.
- 5 The *Painter with Pipe* serves as a thought-provoking case study, for it was not just a trompe l'oeil painting by a famous artist but also a "depiction" of a picture in his signature compositional format. What did it mean for Dou to declare his distinctive creation to be a mere image on a flat surface? As a work by an artist who was known for his skill at naturalistic rendering, how did this counterfeit niche picture enchant the informed viewer? How did such a piece help the owner impress his visitors, and how might the latter use the occasion to affirm their own cultural capital? This paper draws on Gell's concepts of art and agency to address these questions. In the process, I seek to demonstrate that Gell's anthropological theory can yield insights into the social role of paintings in the elite circles of early modern European collectors.

Gerrit Dou, "excellent painter of life in miniature"

- 6 Before his critical fortune started to fade in the late eighteenth century, Dou's refined, painstakingly detailed genre paintings made him one of the most admired Dutch painters in his homeland and beyond. In 1641, he was included in Jan Jansz. Orlers's *Description of the City of Leiden* as one of the "illustrious, learned and renowned men" of his hometown.⁷ Orlers calls the then twenty-eight-year-old Dou an "excellent master, especially as regards small, subtle and curious things," and observes that his paintings were "highly valued by art lovers and dearly sold." The painter-author Angel extolled Dou as an exemplary artist in the *Lof der Schilder-konst (Praise of Painting)*, a lecture delivered in 1641 to Leiden artists and art-lovers.⁸ Recurring words and phrases such as "neat" (*net*), "curious" (*curieus*), and "true to life" (*gelyk als eygen*) in contemporary sources indicate that collectors esteemed Dou's works for their polished finish and lifelike simulations of figures and objects.⁹ Yet the descriptions suggest something more than an appreciation of technical skill; indeed they convey a sense of wonder at the microscopic details—"refined minuteness"

in Simon van Leeuwen's words—that filled the small panels.¹⁰

- 7 The so-called niche picture, which Dou developed in the 1640s and would go on to use repeatedly for almost three decades, accentuates the artist's ability to create images of convincing illusionism. *The Doctor* (1653), a characteristic example, is conceived as a view through an opening, with the simulated window closely following the physical contour of the painting. This correspondence between the depicted and actual boundaries encourages a conflation of the fictive masonry wall and the picture plane. Objects and figures that seem to project beyond the pictured wall thus also threaten to transgress the pictorial threshold. These include a luxuriously soft carpet draped over the windowsill, partially covering the grisaille stone relief; a copper basin positioned so that its wide rim extends beyond the window; and a large book on the right, a corner of which overlaps the edge of the wall.
- 8 Although the suggested breaching of the picture plane is a typical feature of trompe l'oeil images, the depicted objects in Dou's niche pictures are too small to be literally confused with reality. There may have been a practical explanation for the diminutive sizes of Dou's panels: his meticulous rendering of minute details made it almost impossible for him to work on a large scale. Yet, the very manner of painting produced such persuasive simulations of visual phenomena that the artist was designated an "excellent painter of life in miniature." This combination of convincing surface descriptions and the tiny size of the painting creates a paradox between verisimilitude and artifice.
- 9 Scale is not the only indicator of the artificial nature of Dou's paintings. The arched masonry window, the distinctive compositional device shared by Dou's niche pictures, was not a common feature in Dutch domestic architecture in the seventeenth century. While there have been suggestions that the window's function was to monumentalize the genre pictures,¹¹ I agree with Eric Jan Sluijter that the repeated use of such a prominent but unusual motif extracts the framed scene from quotidian life.¹² I would further argue that the framing device offers opportunities for Dou to manipulate the rules of perspective to create abrupt shifts in space.¹³ For example, *The Trumpeter* from the 1660s (fig. 3) consists of two distinct spatial zones. The central figure stands on the left side of a shallow foreground area, while a tapestry is pulled to the right to reveal a group of revellers in the interior. The difference in scale between the figures in these two zones is pronounced, but there are no transitional elements in the composition to create a gradual recession into the distance. Instead, the background scene is contained by the drapery on the right, the trumpet at the top, and the body of the trumpeter on the left. Different light sources—the foreground is lit by a strong raking light from the upper left, whereas the merry company is illuminated by light entering through a window deeper in pictorial space—heightens the sense of separation. The compositional idiosyncrasies combine to give the background the appearance of an image within an image.
- 10 Dou's skill at rendering an array of materials is on full display in *The Trumpeter*. He uses short parallel strokes to simulate the weave of the carpet that drapes over the sill but produces stronger highlights on angular folds to suggest the reflective leather of the curtain on the right. Likewise, the artist's depiction of the dish and the ewer constitutes a pictorial parallel to Angel's assertion that painting should be capable of imitating various kinds of metal.¹⁴ The silver body of the ewer

has softer highlights, which differ from the brighter reflections off the gilded decorations. Such finely wrought textural renderings are, however, juxtaposed with blatant spatial disjunction. The viewer is thus challenged to process the contrast between persuasive textural simulations and reminders of the illusory nature of mimetic artistry.

- 11 The central figural scene in the *Painter with Pipe* (fig. 1) looks similar enough to that in *The Doctor* and *The Trumpeter*. It shows a male figure at an arched window holding a pipe in his left hand and resting his right on an open book that sits on the windowsill. He looks up from the book and engages the viewer's gaze, as if he has been distracted from his reading. Two more figures, one standing and the other seated, are barely visible next to an easel in the dark background. Dou again suggests the transgression of the pictorial threshold: the painter is pushed into the shallow space behind the window, with his left forearm and foreshortened pipe extending beyond the opening; the book, with its stiff parchment pages carefully differentiated, hangs over the ledge and casts a shadow over the wall surface beneath, to which a creased and curling *cartellino* is affixed. The effectiveness of these pictorial maneuvers depends, of course, on Dou's celebrated ability to render the objects in a lifelike fashion.¹⁵
- 12 *The Doctor* and *The Trumpeter* provide clues—miniature size, improbable setting, spatial compression—that ground the paintings as crafted images on flat supports. Dou problematizes this distinction between representation and referent in *Painter with Pipe* by adding a few well-established trompe l'oeil devices to a niche picture. Surrounding the figural and architectural features is a depicted black frame with an illusionistic brass rod attached at the top. Hanging from this rod is a fictive green curtain, which has been drawn to the right to “reveal” the image of the smoking painter at a window. Curtains and draperies are standard features in Dou's niche pictures, and he has in fact included brown swags of fabric behind the stone window. However, the green curtain is understood as an object not within the framed scene, but hanging “in front of” the panel. The false frame and curtain purport to belong to the “expositional accessories” of the painting,¹⁶ and their inclusion establishes two orders of simulated space. They negate the already complex spatial organization of the niche picture, emphatically declaring the central scene to be a mere illusion on a flat panel. Of course the viewer also recognizes that the curtain and frame are themselves no more than simulations. The artist thus establishes a tension between recession and protrusion, generating a push and pull effect between depth and surface. By alternately producing, then counteracting illusionistic effects, the *Painter with Pipe* puts the spotlight firmly on Dou's artistic accomplishment. It claims to expose the artifice of the niche picture yet ultimately withholds the secret to how the artist achieved such dazzling effects.

“Anti-Painting” and the Failure of Perception

- 13 Dou's *Painter with Pipe*, as a counterfeit painting, participates in the development of a specific kind of deceptive easel painting in the second half of the seventeenth century. Depicting feigned letter racks, cabinet doors, or framed pictures, these paintings are now considered examples of trompe l'oeil, even though the term did not come into use until around 1800. Academic theorists in the eighteenth century and later opined that, in attempting to deceive the viewers with heightened verisimilitude, the trompe l'oeil failed to express ideals and truths, which ought to be the highest goal of art.¹⁷ More recently, scholars such as Baudrillard, Marin, and Charpentrat have argued that trompe l'oeil paintings raise profound questions about perception and representation.

Baudrillard highlights the radical nature of such pictorial creations by referring to them as “anti-painting.” What Baudrillard implicitly defines as “painting” seems to correspond to the *istoria* described by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De Pictura*.¹⁸ Against the narrative scenes staged in perspectival spaces, trompe l’oeil images—according to Baudrillard—offer painted surrogates of things in the “unreal reversion to the whole representative space elaborated by the Renaissance.”¹⁹ In other words, the quality of trompe l’oeil paintings that disturbed academic authors, i.e., the collapse of the distinction between image and referent, is what intrigues modern commentators.



Fig. 4. Wallerant Vaillant, *Wooden Board with Letters and Writing Implements*, 1658, oil on paper affixed to canvas, 51.5 x 40.5 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, inv. no. 1232 (artwork in the public domain)

- 14 Consider, for example, Wallerant Vaillant’s *Wooden Board with Letters and Writing Implements* (fig. 4). The picture portrays an inherently flat object, namely, a letter board. Because the board is parallel to the picture plane, with its boundaries coinciding with the edges of the support, an identification between the board and the picture surface is implied. It thus presents the viewer with an opaque surface rather than a recessive view into a three-dimensional realm. In order to produce vivid simulations of the letters and writing instruments, Vaillant carefully modeled the forms and captured the quality of the reflections off different materials. The artist imagined a raking light from the upper left, which allowed him to heighten the sense of shallow relief by supplying the life-size motifs with dark cast shadows. Using only paint, Vaillant has transformed the paper support into two wooden planks, on which letters and writing implements are held in place by leather strips. The depicted objects appear to project into a zone of virtual space *in front* of the picture plane, rather than occupying perspectival space *behind* it.
- 15 Paintings such as Vaillant’s *Wooden Board* (fig. 4) thus challenge the understanding of a painting as a representation of figures and objects in three-dimensional space seen through a transparent screen. They conjure the presence of objects rather than offering images explicitly as representations of those objects. To Baudrillard and Charpentier, such effects are unsettling. In psychoanalytic terms, linear perspective is an instrument of pleasure and power in that it purports to be constructed around the viewer’s vantage point, allowing him or her a mastering gaze over the representation. The trompe l’oeil, by inverting that scheme, threatens this relationship between viewer and picture. Invoking Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that depth is invisible, Marin and Hanneke Grootenboer also remark that Albertian perspective, a geometric model for representing the third dimension in painting, leaves behind a blind spot. Marin explains that a viewing

subject cannot actually see depth, for it is “the very axis of [his/her] vision.” To consider depth as “breadth in profile,” the subject would have to leave his/her original position, that is, the fixed point of view dictated by a perspectival composition. Trompe l’oeil, like anamorphosis and other distorted projections, exposes this blind spot and draws attention to the incompleteness of visual perception.²⁰

- 16 These recent studies, which are informed by psychoanalysis and phenomenology, probe the impact of reversals of perspective on an individual viewer, but they appear to posit a universal response across periods to the visual effects.²¹ The question is whether that is a valid assumption. We do find similarly bemused responses in early modern sources. Samuel Pepys, the English diarist, recorded in his entry for March 15, 1668, that two friends brought to his home “several things painted upon a deal Board.” He claims to have been confused before discovering that the objects and the board were painted simulations. Pepys then praises the craftsmanship of the work: “even after I knew it was not board, but only the picture of a board, I could not remove my fancy.”²² In the eighteenth century, Denis Diderot would recall Oudry’s painted depiction in a similar way: “Our hand felt a flat surface and our eyes . . . perceived a relief: so that one could have asked the philosopher which of the two senses, whose indications contradicted each other, was the liar.”²³ These commentaries register a sense of tangible, persisting doubt, with the viewer wavering between accepting the illusion of three-dimensionality and acknowledging the deception. While Baudrillard and others highlight the psychological effects trompe l’oeil images produce in viewers, the language in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources suggests that the trompe l’oeil images were more sources of delight than “disturbing hallucinations.”
- 17 To shed light on how the trompe l’oeil participated in the contemporary discourse on representation in early modern Europe, the theoretical analysis of the images needs to be combined with a consideration of the prestige enjoyed by deceptive artistry in that culture.²⁴ To that end, the studies of Brusati, Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, and Victor Stoichita, for example, focus on the appeal of mimetic artistry to an elite circle of art lovers. These scholars have also established that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, trompe l’oeil images would have been viewed in collectors’ cabinets.²⁵ Moreover, the viewing process was not a private affair; instead the paintings were received in a social setting. How did trompe l’oeil paintings, by inspiring probing questions about perception, shape the power relations among different viewers in the environment of an elite collection? I propose that Gell’s concept of “enchantment” offers a productive model for considering this question.

The Enchanting Trompe l’Oeil

- 18 Gell uses the term “enchantment” to refer to an interaction in which a work of art impresses—or even intimidates—the viewer with its technical excellence.²⁶ Gell’s designation of art as “a means of thought-control” may seem to agree with the disorientation described by modern theorists of trompe l’oeil, but he provides a different explanation of the source of that bewilderment. Following Gell’s concept, the power of a trompe l’oeil painting derives not only from its negation of the viewer’s confidence in his or her perception. Instead, its efficacy lies in the artist’s magical skills (and, by extension, the power of the owner who secured the artist’s services), which the viewer infers from his or her study of the object. Furthermore, even though he argues that human beings seem to be universally predisposed to be attracted to technical virtuosity, the artist’s manipulation

of a medium to produce enchanting effects and the viewer's propensity to be persuaded rest on both parties' knowledge of that medium. Gell therefore also insists that artists and viewers are situated in particular societies, where the technology of enchantment is configured and produced in specific forms.²⁷

- 19 Underpinning the concept of enchantment is Gell's definition of art as "the outcome of technical process," which sees the expertise embodied by the art object as central to its social function. In Gell's analysis, virtuosity is the crucial quality that creates the mismatch between the artist's perceived powers and the viewer's own and is thus the key to an art object's capacity to impress or seduce. Notice again how Pepys described his experience of viewing the painting brought to him by his friends by writing that even after he had ascertained that he was looking at a picture of a board, he could not "remove his fancy." The sense of astonishment recorded in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts suggests that the beholders of trompe l'oeil easel paintings recognized technical mastery that surpassed their expectations or even comprehension.
- 20 But what did Dou's and Vaillant's viewers understand as the "technical process" of oil painting? Dutch treatises and verbal testimonies in the seventeenth century offer some insights into their expectations. Angel, writing in mid-century, urges painters to capture the eye of the viewer with convincing renderings of optical effects.²⁸ He argues that a most praiseworthy painting is one that is so close to nature that it does not reveal the manner of the artist who made it.²⁹ Van Hoogstraten, a pioneer in developing the feigned letter rack, likens a perfect painting to "a mirror of nature which makes things which do not actually exist appear to exist, and thus deceives in a permissible, pleasurable, and praiseworthy manner."³⁰ Lifelikeness and deception are thus central to the Dutch discourse on painting in the seventeenth century.
- 21 Yet enchantment goes beyond the appreciation of well-crafted images; it presupposes a familiarity with painting techniques on the viewer's part. The viewer holds knowledge and expectations with regards to the medium of oil painting, but he or she is unable to understand fully how makers of trompe l'oeil images could create such radical deceptiveness. Commentaries about Dou suggest a similar difficulty in imagining the genesis of his paintings. His pictures, which were called works of wonder and curiosity in his own time, inspired fanciful descriptions of his method. Joachim von Sandrart recounts that Dou "painted all his works wearing glasses, even when he was still young" and spent days on the most minute details in his paintings. He also claims that Dou waited for the dust to settle when he sat down to paint and was fastidious in protecting his pigments and brushes.³¹ In his biography of the artist, Arnold Houbraken speculates that Dou created his finely detailed pictures by painting "with the greatest care looking through a frame strung with [horizontal and vertical] strings."³² The French author Roger de Piles meanwhile claims that Dou painted with the help of a convex mirror.³³ Such speculations reflect the authors' struggles to articulate their experience of viewing Dou's work in the terms of conventional artistic discourse. By suggesting that Dou went to extraordinary measures to create his paintings, these authors imply that the artist's achievement exceeded what was thought possible for the medium. In turn, the viewers' ultimate failure to retrace and discover the procedure by which a painting like *Painter with Pipe* was generated made them keenly aware of the artist's mastery of his craft.
- 22 Authors of the early modern period often discuss trompe l'oeil in terms of a contest between artist

and viewer, echoing Gell's characterization of enchantment as a tool in "psychological warfare." Karel van Mander, for example, writes that Jan Gossaert impressed Emperor Charles V with a counterfeit silk tabard made out of white paper. Instead of being punished for his deceit, Gossaert won the admiration of his patron, the Marquis of Veere, and the emperor himself with his ingenuity.³⁴ Houbraken tells a similar story about his teacher Van Hoogstraten. According to Houbraken, Emperor Ferdinand III admitted that Van Hoogstraten had deceived him with a vivid still life, for which the emperor honored him with a gold chain and medallion.³⁵ By the seventeenth century, then, the social status of the deceived viewer was seen as the measure of the artist's success. Whether the events were true or merely described in accordance with established literary tropes, the authors make a statement about the power of art by describing a reversal of the hierarchical relationship between the artist and the eminent patron. Dou, by making the central figure in this painting a painter who engages the viewer's gaze, further emphasizes the power of artistry in a witty confrontation.

The Nexus of Agency

- 23 In the seventeenth century, a beholder might have been impressed by the virtuosity displayed in a painting, but the agency of the work extended beyond this enchanting effect in individual viewings. Gell's "art nexus," which maps the relations among the artist, viewers, and the owner of an art object, asks how cultural and social forces provided the impetus to create an art object, and how that object could then inspire certain behaviors in the viewers. It represents a productive approach for elucidating how a prestigious trompe l'oeil painting operated as a center of social networks forged in its historical environment.
- 24 Even though the provenance of *Painter with Pipe* can only be traced back to the eighteenth century, certain inferences can be made about its intended viewers—the "recipients" in Gell's art nexus. Biographies of Dou marvel at the exorbitant prices of his paintings, some of which sold for sums equivalent to a master craftsman's yearly income.³⁶ Available sale records support their assertions, as works attributed to Dou are frequently among the most expensive listed in the inventories of substantial collections of the period.³⁷ The prices he commanded would have limited his potential buyers to a small circle of wealthy collectors or prominent dealers, among whom he had an established reputation.³⁸ As Brusati and Wheelock have demonstrated, trompe l'oeil paintings likewise circulated among similar groups, who appreciated the ironic critiques of representation and visual perception.
- 25 These knowledgeable consumers from the upper echelons of European society formed a group of individuals referred to as *liefhebbers* (translated loosely as "art-lovers") by Netherlandish writers in the seventeenth century. In the Netherlands, some nonpractitioners registered as *liefhebbers* with the guild of St. Luke, seeking formal recognition of their roles as supporters of the visual arts.³⁹ Van Mander uses the term in his *Schilder-Boeck* to refer to individuals who not only had the financial resources to amass substantial collections but also had an interest in promoting living artists.⁴⁰ Analogous terms appear in seventeenth-century Italian and French writings—*virtuosi* and *curieux* respectively—where they are applied to individuals ranging from rulers and aristocrats to prominent burghers in the urban centers of Europe.⁴¹ The term *liefhebber*, then, was less a designation of social class than of cultural standing, for individuals could, through the practices of collecting and connoisseurship, claim membership in this elite circle.⁴²

- 26 Art collecting provided the site for individuals to demonstrate their discerning eye and familiarity with current art criticism, allowing them to negotiate their cultural status. Travelers' accounts and art treatises from the period indicate that collectors received visiting *liefhebbers* to their residences, creating an environment of communal viewing and discussion.⁴³ In this setting, collectors strove to impress with paintings by canonical masters in their possession, while viewers were expected to demonstrate their visual acuity, familiarity with the personal manners of canonical artists, and an ability to deploy the language of criticism.⁴⁴ Individuals made their taste visible in their purchases and their opinions in discussing art, as their agreement with accepted standards of excellence would confirm their taste. The term "taste" here refers to a set of shared preferences that enable a community to construct its group identity.⁴⁵ In relation to the appreciation of trompe l'oeil paintings, those preferences were shaped by several factors that conditioned the viewer to react in a particular way. These include the predictable motifs, viewing conditions, and existing accounts of similar displays of consummate skill.
- 27 The settings in which fine examples of trompe l'oeil were viewed were thus far from neutral. Beholders encountered these paintings under specific conditions in collectors' cabinets, where the dazzling visual effects conferred prestige not only on the artists but also on the owners and guests. For example, Pepys had to be granted access to the king's cabinet to see the trompe l'oeil pictures in the royal collection, and, in a more informal manner, his friends revealed to him an illusionistic letter board on a visit to his residence.⁴⁶ Enchantment took place within a specific social milieu, which shaped the interactions among the painting and various participants in the practice of art collecting. The paintings therefore not only captivated individual viewers but were also sites for painters and viewers to construct and project cultural and social identities.
- 28 For all their eye-fooling tricks, the works by Dou and Vaillant share familiar tropes with other trompe l'oeil easel paintings of the period. The artists draw on a restricted range of motifs—letters and pens attached to letter racks, personal items hanging from cabinet doors, curtains drawn aside to reveal depicted paintings—to generate the momentary illusion of objects projecting forward from a flat surface. At the same time, the presence of stock elements signals to the viewer that he or she is looking at a painting. No matter how lifelike their images, early modern European artists reference artistic precedents and conventions in creating their compositions. The *Painter with Pipe* draws not so much on actual smoking men, stone windows, or other objects represented, but on Dou's niche pictures and the Netherlandish tradition of descriptive artistry. Dou's prototype, to use Gell's term, consists of the artistic solutions achieved by artists (including himself) engaged in similar pictorial experiments.
- 29 The verbal accounts of reactions to trompe l'oeil easel paintings, while vivid in the description of the viewers' amazement and admiration, likewise follow a recognizable pattern: the authors claim to be temporarily confused by the painting before discovering that it is a clever deception; they may feel compelled to touch the surface of the picture to verify its flatness. The formulaic character of the compliments suggests that the writers were conforming to literary conventions and invoking famous topoi, which reminded the reader not to take the textual accounts at face value.⁴⁷ At the same time, these descriptions both register the historical viewer's appreciation of illusionistic artistry and play a part in shaping it. The ability of a trompe l'oeil painting to inspire

wonder in its viewers is contingent upon visitors' shared knowledge of artistic tradition, as well as the language and standards for evaluating descriptive artistry. This is not to suggest that the contemporary proclamations of the power of trompe l'oeil paintings were deliberately misleading, but that knowledgeable viewers came to these works in the seventeenth century with pre-existing expectations and conceptual tools.⁴⁸

- 30 Collectors and artists alike ensured that viewers responded in the desired manner by carefully managing the encounters with these paintings. Anecdotes from the period indicate that trompe l'oeil images were often installed among the furnishings of a residence. The owner of the collection could then stage the visit to create fleeting confusion, recognition, and delight for the visitor.⁴⁹ A record of a well-known example comes from Pepys, who saw Van Hoogstraten's *Perspective from a Threshold* at the home of Thomas Povey. Van Hoogstraten's life-size canvas, which offers a carefully constructed view into a deep interior, was installed behind a door. Povey was the one who could "activate" the illusion by opening the door to reveal the fictive view to his guests.⁵⁰
- 31 Artists could also present their works in such a way as to control the circumstances of viewing more precisely and to draw attention to specific fictive devices. Dou was known to both place his small panels in cases and to attach painted doors to the frames.⁵¹ These devices invited the beholder to interact physically with the painted ensemble, while also situating him or her at the optimal viewing distance from the picture.⁵² The sense of revelation created in the act of opening the cases alludes to veiled or shuttered devotional images, enhancing the prestige and value of Dou's artistry. The simulated black enclosure and curtain in Dou's *Painter with Pipe*, I argue, thematize the drama created by the artist's own strategies of presentation.
- 32 The references to pictorial precedents, the development of literary conventions in art criticism, and the staged display of trompe l'oeil paintings—all these factors ensured that the viewing experience was highly structured in the seventeenth century. It is in this context that some recent art historical studies have referred to the trompe l'oeil as a "ritualized form."⁵³ The reception of early modern trompe l'oeil paintings is analogous to certain aspects of what historians have called "ritual-like activities."⁵⁴ The adherence to a restricted set of motifs and the choreographed process of viewing mark the formalism of the genre, while the current discourses and pictorial conventions—components of what Gell calls the prototype—provided a framework for the reception of painted deceptions.⁵⁵ The appreciation of these witty pieces was not a private or spontaneous process, but was instead shaped by the recipient's prior knowledge of the prototype and the staged viewing experience.
- 33 In the production and reception of Dou's *Painter with Pipe*, the artist, various beholders, the painting, and artistic precedents relate to one another variously as agents and patients.⁵⁶ While Dou captivated the spectator through the visual qualities of the painting, the owner impressed other viewers with his or her discernment and wealth in securing a work by the celebrated master and properly staging its reception. The preferences and standards articulated in this environment would in turn form part of the evolving artistic tradition. In that sense the recipients were not simply passive enchanted spectators but instead played a significant role as agents in the generation of future works of art. Paintings such as Dou's *Painter with Pipe* became examples of artistic repertoire from which subsequent artists could draw. Or, to borrow Gell's terminology again, the

indexes became part of the prototype. Gell's art nexus highlights the fact that production and reception happen over time and in social spaces, so that the relations among artist, painting, and viewers are fluid and reciprocal.

Enchantment and Distinction



Fig. 5. Gerard Houckgeest, *Interior of the Oude Kerk in Delft*, ca. 1651, oil on panel, 49 x 41 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-1584 (artwork in the public domain)

- 34 It is notable that Dou's *Painter with Pipe* was more than an expertly crafted trompe l'oeil piece; it was a variation of his trademark composition—the niche picture.⁵⁷ Dou's niche pictures were full of convincingly rendered details, but their small scale, unrealistic setting, and spatial manipulation declare them representations set behind a transparent picture plane. The *Painter with Pipe*, as a *feigned* niche picture, confronts the viewer with the opacity of a simulated presence. Yet it is through the lifelikeness of the counterfeit curtain and frame that such a presentation was made possible. In this case, the highlighting of the artist's superlative artistry is effective only if the visible traces of his hand are downplayed. The technical means of achieving such beguiling effects thus remain hidden, preserving the enchanting spell over the beholder.
- 35 Dou's *Painter with Pipe*, as a trompe l'oeil niche picture, is thus doubly reflexive. It also makes an additional demand on viewers, who have to draw on their knowledge of the artist's oeuvre and the tradition of illusionistic artistry to appreciate the playful imagery. As Brusati has demonstrated, enterprising artists in the seventeenth century often employed meaningful motifs and learned allusions to appeal to their sophisticated viewers. Far from meaningless scraps, the objects featured in letter rack paintings often performed this function. Van Hoogstraten, for example, includes the medallion and gold chain conferred by Emperor Ferdinand among the carefully arranged gentleman's accoutrements in his trompe l'oeil still lifes. Vaillant's letter rack features inscribed sheets and envelopes that hint at his relationships with prominent collectors.⁵⁸ In *Painter with Pipe*, Dou refers to himself in a slightly different manner. Instead of honors bestowed by aristocratic patrons or networks forged with connoisseurs, Dou's identity is defined here through a distinctive for-

mat—the niche picture—and the technique for which he won renown.

- 36 If the niche picture format is associated specifically with Dou, the curtain signifies the power of eye-fooling images more broadly. Despite Gell's apparent skepticism of the idea that art communicates meaning through a visual code or symbols, the semiotic approach to studying visual material is not necessarily at odds with his project of analyzing agency.⁵⁹ Some trompe l'oeil devices not only produce effects of illusion but can ultimately be traced to classical tropes of artistic excellence. The painted fly that appears to have landed on the surface of a painting, for instance, alludes to a passage in Philostratus's *Imagines* and Filarete's anecdote about Giotto deceiving Cimabue with a painted fly.⁶⁰ The combination of a simulated frame and feigned curtain is another familiar device. An examination of the illusionistic curtain, a multivalent motif, demonstrates that technical execution and iconographic communication are intimately linked in how a painting acts upon the viewer.
- 37 As has been frequently observed in the art historical literature, to an informed viewer in the seventeenth century, the curtain would have brought to mind the legendary contest between the ancient Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios, a story that had become a topos for discussing illusionistic artistry by this time.⁶¹ Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers likened contemporary artists to those ancient masters, and the painters themselves inserted references into their pictures to encourage the comparison. The classical association carried by the curtain communicates the very idea of artistic virtuosity, and thus complements the trompe l'oeil effect created by the motif. The curtain would have been a particularly apt device for Dou, who was called the "Dutch Parrhasios" by the Leiden poet Dirk Traudenius.⁶² At the same time, by showing their understanding of the evocation of the classical story, as well as its purchase in contemporary criticism, viewers could confirm their knowledge and sophistication as *liefhebbers*.
- 38 The curtain further confers a sense of prestige and value on a painting by creating what Wolfgang Kemp calls a "veiling effect." The veiling of images has been a common practice in Christian worship since the Middle Ages. Miracle-working images are kept from view to heighten their efficacy when they are displayed in times of need.⁶³ The use of drapery was adopted in art collections in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the practice was documented in Italy, France, and the Netherlands. It has been traditionally assumed that collectors sought to protect their pieces from light, but, as Kemp points out, such concerns for the conservation of oil paintings arose at a later time.⁶⁴ Instead, Kemp argues that the curtain might be seen primarily as a device that accentuated the aesthetic value of the picture it veiled. In an early modern collection, where paintings were hung in a dense, wallpaperlike pattern, picture curtains allowed the collector to control the display of select paintings.⁶⁵ Nicolas Poussin, for example, explained that veiling the pictures would bring attention to the works one by one, so that the viewer did not become overwhelmed by too much visual material all at once.⁶⁶
- 39 Just as the acts of concealment and revelation deepened the divine mystery in a religious setting, covering cabinet pictures with curtains generated a sense of anticipation and enhanced the paintings' impact. Conversely, coverings could also be a means of controlling images that were thought to arouse problematic responses from viewers. Sources suggest that erotic images, for example, were intended to be shown in private settings to privileged beholders.⁶⁷ The curtain thus not only

conferred honor to a painting, but it could also connote affective power, whether its source was religious or erotic. The motif of the counterfeit curtain, by alluding to the actual picture curtain, appropriates this veiling effect. By inserting the false frame and curtain in the *Painter with Pipe*, Dou aligned his painting with images that possess spiritual or affective powers, allowing him to claim potency for his own work. As signifiers of visual deception, those stock trompe l'oeil motifs further intensify the painting's enchanting effects, which drove awestruck commentators to speculate on Dou's process for making such beguiling images. The artist's demonstration of skill in replicating the shimmering fabric of a silk curtain is complemented by the motif's associations with excellence and value. Viewers infer Dou's agency by observing the virtuosic craftsmanship embodied in the pictures *and* by appreciating the iconographic significance of the pictorial elements. Form and content reinforce one another to underscore the painter's mastery of his art.

- 40 The incorporation of a counterfeit curtain and frame thus transforms the *Painter with Pipe* into a representation of a collectible work of art.⁶⁸ Like the allusion to Parrhasios, the reference to the practice of veiling paintings in a collection is directed at a viewer who was accustomed to seeing works displayed under such conditions. As Kemp argues, what these *liefhebbers* expected from objects in a cabinet were the qualities of “deception, subterfuge, optical illusion, and surprise.”⁶⁹ Dou's *Painter with Pipe* fulfills these requirements admirably. The participation in the social rituals of visiting collections and engaging in conversations about works of art was a means of performing one's role as a member of the cultured elite. The owners, who were known to control access or the conditions under which the pictures were seen, acted as agents as they showed off ingenious creations in their collections.⁷⁰ The viewers, meanwhile, proved their regular exposure to such works of art by articulating their appreciation of an art object in accepted terms—as expected of *liefhebbers*—thus also confirming their status.
- 41 Using Gell's concepts of enchantment and art nexus, this paper has demonstrated how a work of art could act as a conduit for the complex and overlapping relationships between various human agents involved in the practice of collecting. The interaction between a painting like Dou's *Painter with Pipe* and an individual viewer took place within a larger cultural framework, where to be enchanted was also to show his or her connoisseurial skill and taste, or, in other words, to make visible his or her social distinction.

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Fig. 5. Gerard Houckgeest, *Interior of the Oude Kerk in Delft*, ca. 1651, oil on panel, 49 x 41 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-1584 (artwork in the public domain)

¹ Philips Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 1642, facsimile (Amsterdam: Kunsthistorisch Instituut, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1972), 24. To bolster his claims for the nobility of the art of painting, Angel draws on accounts of painters winning fame and fortune in antiquity (largely derived from Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck*) and addresses the *paragone* debate. Angel contends that although sculptors might dismiss painting as “semblance without being,” it is precisely that ability to achieve illusionistic effects on a flat surface that makes painting the superior art. For an analysis of Angel's tract, see Eric Jan Sluiter, “In Praise of the Art of Painting: On Paintings by Gerrit Dou and a Treatise by Philips Angel of 1642,” in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 199–263.

² In common usage, the term *trompe l'oeil* refers to an image that is not merely naturalistic but is made to temporarily deceive the viewer into mistaking it for the three-dimensional object it depicts.

³ See, for example, Jean Baudrillard, “The Trompe-l'oeil,” in *Calligram: Essays in New Art history from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53–62; Pierre Charpentrat, “Le trompe-l'oeil,” *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 4 (1971): 161–68; Louis Marin, “Representation and Simulacrum,” in *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 309–19; Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 53–59.

⁴ Celeste Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions and Dubious Distinctions: Self-Imagery in Trompe-l'oeil,” in *Illusions: Gijsbrechts, Royal Master of Deception*, ed. Olaf Koester (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 1999), 61–69.

⁵ Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams* (London and New Brunswick: The Athlone Press), 159–86.

⁶ Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, eds., *Art's Agency and Art History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell,

2007), compiles examples of recent critical applications of Gell's theory to the study of cultic objects. These include Irene Winter, "Agency Marked, Agency Ascribed: The Affective Object in Ancient Mesopotamia" (pp. 42–69), Peter Stewart, "Gell's Idols and Roman Cult" (pp. 158–78), Jeremy Tanner, "Portraits and Agency: A Comparative View" (pp. 70–94). See also Peter Stewart, "The Image of the Roman Emperor," in *Presence: The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects*, ed. Robert Maniura and Rupert Shepherd (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 243–54.

⁷ Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stad Leyden*, repr. (Leiden: Cornelis Heyligert, 1781), 403.

⁸ Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 23.

⁹ See for example Orlers, *Beschrijvinge*, 403; Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 23; Joachim von Sandrart, *Academie der Bau-, Bild-, und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675*, ed. A. R. Peltzer (Munich: G. Hirth's Verlag, 1925), 196.

¹⁰ Simon van Leeuwen, *Korte besgryving van het Lugdunum Batavorum nu Leyden* (Leiden: Johannes van Gelder, 1672), 191. For quotation and discussion, see Sluijter, "In Praise of the Art of Painting," 205.

¹¹ See Richard Hunnewell, "Gerard Dou's Self Portraits and Depictions of the Artist" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1983), 89–92; Ute Kleinmann, *Rahmen und Gerahmtes: Das Spiel met Darstellung und Bedeutung* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1996), 56–73; Stephanie Sonntag, *Ein "Schau-Spiel" der Malkunst: Das Fensterbild in der holländischen Malerei des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006), 50–54; Ronni Baer, "The Life and Art of Gerrit Dou," in *Gerrit Dou 1613–1675*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 41. Although Sonntag concludes that Dou's pictures convey ambivalent moral messages about the depicted figures, she agrees with Hunnewell and Kleinmann that the framing window adds a sense of monumentality to genre scenes.

¹² Eric Jan Sluijter, "On Fijnschilders and Meaning," in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 271–73.

¹³ According to Hollander, the niche picture format masks Dou's weakness in spatial description (Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002], 64–65). Such paintings as *The Young Violinist* and *The Young Mother* would suggest, however, that Dou was adept at creating a sense of depth. My argument here is that the spatial disjunctions seen in the niche pictures were strategic. For a more thorough discussion of the spatial complexities in Dou's niche pictures, see Kleinmann, *Rahmen und Gerahmtes*, 77–96, 109–16; Angela Ho, "Rethinking Repetition: Constructing Value in Dutch Genre Painting, 1650s to 1670s" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007), 76–82.

¹⁴ Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 25.

¹⁵ The surface of the painting in Amsterdam seems somewhat abraded, but it is still possible to see Dou's delicate modeling of the figure's face with small, almost invisible marks, and his suggestion of the reflective quality of the figure's costume with minute tonal gradations.

¹⁶ Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60.

¹⁷ Already in the seventeenth century, the potential of well-crated paintings to deceive invited suspicion as well as admiration. See Eric Jan Sluijter, "Over Brabantse vodden, economische concurrentie, artistieke wedijver en de groei van de markt voor schilderijen in de eerste decennia van de zeventiende eeuw," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50 (1999): 114 (English translation by Jennifer Kilian and Katy Kist in *JHNA* 1, no. 2 [2009]); Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, "Trompe l'Oeil: The Underestimated Trick," in *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*,

ed. Ebert-Schifferer (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 17–18.

¹⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (1436; New York: Penguin, 1991), 37–59. In Book I, Alberti imagines a painting as a cross section of the visual pyramid. In Alberti's formulation of linear perspective, orthogonals converge at the vanishing point on the horizon, which in turn determines the ideal viewer's position. This geometric construction is an abstraction of natural vision that allows the artist to suggest spatial relations among figures and objects in a coherent space. Painters rarely followed Alberti's instructions with mathematical accuracy, instead they would manipulate the rules for narrative or visual emphases. Nevertheless, they drew on the principles of linear perspective in distributing motifs, so that figures and objects relate to one another within a coherent spatial structure. See also James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 117–80.

¹⁹ Baudrillard, "Trompe-l'oeil," 53–54.

²⁰ Marin, "Representation and Simulacrum," 311ff.; Grootenboer, *Rhetoric of Perspective*, 51–53.

²¹ Baudrillard's characterization of the trompe l'oeil has to be considered within the context of his theory of the simulacrum in culture, and one can argue that his goal is not to present an art historical analysis of the genre. Marin and Grootenboer likewise do not consider accounts by contemporary observers. Other art historians, however, have pointed out that what would now be classified as trompe l'oeil images were not clearly distinguished as a separate genre in early modern records. Arthur Wheelock, for example, has argued that trompe l'oeil might have been considered a logical extension of the early modern artist's attempt to imitate nature. See Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., "Illusionism in Dutch and Flemish Art," in *Deceptions and Illusions*, 78.

²² Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970–83), 9:118–19. See also Brusati, "Honorable Deceptions," 65.

²³ Denis Diderot, *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:135–36. Translation from Alberto Veca, "Honest Lies: The Meaning, Language, and Instruments of Trompe l'Oeil," in *Deceptions and Illusions*, 57.

²⁴ Grootenboer, *Rhetoric of Perspective*, 45–46. Grootenboer suggests that recent scholarship on the trompe l'oeil can be divided into two main approaches. British, American, German, and Dutch scholars mainly concentrate on the historical context in which the works were produced, while French scholars are more concerned with theoretical and philosophical importance of the images.

²⁵ Brusati, "Honorable Deceptions"; Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*. Stoichita argues that painting lost its religious function in Protestant lands following the Reformation, which provided the impetus for the development of a "self-awareness" of its emerging status as a portable, aesthetic object. Brusati situates experimentation in illusionism within the broader context of contemporary artistic discourse, which privileged the ability of painting to emulate, or even surpass, nature. She also discusses the ways in which the artists negotiated the complex art market by building reputations as masters of deceptive artistry.

²⁶ Gell, "Technology of Enchantment."

²⁷ Gell, "Technology of Enchantment," 165. See also Jeremy Tanner and Robin Osborne, "Introduction: *Art and Agency* and Art History," in *Art's Agency*, 7.

²⁸ Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 37–57. The criteria Angel lists for good painting include the rendering of light and shadow in such a way that the depicted objects seem "very real"; a knowledge of perspective and proportion; the careful observation of different objects in nature; and the description of textures.

²⁹ See Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 53–54.

³⁰ Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst, anders de zichtbarere werelt*, facsimile (1678; Doornspijk: Davaco, 1969), 25. For translation and discussion, see Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 158–59.

³¹ Sandrart, *Academie*, 196.

³² Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, facsimile (1753; Amsterdam: Israel, 1976), Book 2, p. 3. See also Jørgen Wadum, “‘Dou doesn’t paint, oh no, he juggles with his brush’: Gerrit Dou; A Rembrandtesque ‘Fijnschilder,’” *Art Matters* 1 (2003): 70.

³³ Roger de Piles, *Abrège de la vie des peintres avec des reflexions sur leurs Ouvrages*, facsimile (1699; Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1969), 439. See also Wadum, “‘Dou doesn’t paint,” 70.

³⁴ According to Van Mander’s “Life of Mabuse [Gossaert],” the painter was in the service of the Marquis of Veere at the time. The marquis decided to dress his court in silk damask for a reception for Charles V, but Gossaert sold the fabric and spent the money before the event. To conceal his misdeed, the painter made a tabard out of white paper and decorated it with damask ornaments (Van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the Schilder-Boeck [1603–1604]*, trans. and ed. Hessel Miedema [Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994], fol. 226r).

³⁵ Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh*, Book 2, pp. 157–58; Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 162–68; Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions,” 50–54, 65–59; Ebert-Schifferer, “Trompe l’Oeil,” 17–37.

³⁶ Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 23; Orlers, *Beschrijvinge*, 403; Sandrart, *Academie*, 196. For discussion of Dou’s exclusive clientele, see also Eric Jan Sluijter, “Schilders van ‘cleyne, subtile ende curieuse dingen’: Leidse ‘fijnschilders’ in contemporaine bronnen,” in *Leidse Fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1670*, ed. Eric Jan Sluimers, Marlies Enklaar, Paul Nieuwenhuizen et al., 15–55 (Zwolle: Waanders, 1988), 51; Baer, “Life and Art,” 31.

³⁷ The information on prices is obtained from inventories in the Montias Database, the Getty Provenance Index, and Gerard Hoet’s and Pieter Terwesten’s compilations of auction catalogues from 1680 to the mid-eighteenth century. See Gerard Hoet, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelver pryzen*, 2 vols. (’s Gravenhage: Pieter Gerard van Baalen, 1752); Pieter Terwesten, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelver pryzen*, vol. 3 (’s Gravenhage: Johannes Gaillard, 1770).

³⁸ Already in the seventeenth century, commentators characterized Dou’s audience as an exclusive circle of wealthy collectors. Jan Orlers notes in his *Beschrijvinge* that Dou was held in great esteem by *liefhebbers*, who paid high prices for his paintings. Sandrart likewise marvels that Dou’s palm-sized panels would sell for between 600 and 1,000 guilders. See Orlers, *Beschrijvinge*, 403; Sandrart, *Academie*, 196.

³⁹ For discussions of *liefhebbers* in the early modern Netherlands, see Zirka Z. Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550–1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 51–53; Elizabeth Alice Honig, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 202; Angela Ho, “An Invitation to Compare: Frans van Mieris’ *Cloth Shop* in the Context of Early Modern Art Collecting,” *Renaissance Studies* 23 (2009): 699–706.

⁴⁰ Marten Jan Bok, “Art-Lovers and Their Paintings: Van Mander’s *Schilder-boeck* as a Source for the History of the Art Market in the Northern Netherlands,” in *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art 1580–1620*, ed. Ger Luijten and Ariane van Suchtelen (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum-

um, 1993), 143–47.

⁴¹ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 53–57; Maria H. Loh, “Originals, Reproductions, and a ‘Particular Taste’ for Pastiche in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Painting,” in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450–1750*, ed. Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 243–51.

⁴² For discussion of the fluid boundaries of the category of *liefhebbers*, see Ho, “Invitation to Compare,” 699–706.

⁴³ Sandrart, for example, writes of seeing paintings in the residences of Pieter Spiering Silvercroon and Franciscus de le Boe Sylvius, both well-known collectors of Dou’s work, while Balthasar de Monconys records his visits to Johan de Bye, Dou’s Maecenas, in Leiden, as well as private collections in Rotterdam in 1663. See Sandrart, *Academie*, 195–96; Balthasar de Monconys, *Journal des voyages de Monsieur de Monconys . . .*, vol. 2 (Lyon: H. Boissart & G. Remevs, 1665–66), 131ff.

⁴⁴ On the theory and practice of connoisseurship in early modern Europe, see Anna Tummers, *The Eye of the Connoisseur: Authenticating Paintings by Rembrandt and His Contemporaries* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011); Carol Gibson-Wood, “Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli” (PhD diss., University of London, 1982). C. Willemijn Fock states that wealthy citizens in Leiden evidently opened their collections to artists and other interested visitors. See C. Willemijn Fock, “Kunstbezit in Leiden in de 17de eeuw,” in *Het Rapenburg. Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, vol. 5a, ed. T. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, C. Willemijn Fock, and A. J. van Dissel (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1990), 3.

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 6; Ho, “Invitation to Compare,” 703–4.

⁴⁶ On the significance of Pepys’s access to the king’s cabinet, see Pepys, *Diary*, 1:257–58; Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions,” 55.

⁴⁷ Wheelock, “Illusionism,” 79–81.

⁴⁸ The publication of Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion* drew attention to the production and reception of naturalistic pictorial representation. Various art historians and theorists have since critiqued Gombrich’s assumptions and method and considered the full implications of his seminal study. Although a thorough examination of the literature on this topic is outside the scope of this paper, my analysis draws on ideas from Gombrich’s book and the debate it sparked. Two of Gombrich’s arguments are particularly relevant to this paper: first, even illusionistic images are grounded in artistic conventions; and second, the context of reception is crucial to creating what he calls “conditions of illusion.” In the case of trompe l’oeil easel paintings, “illusion could turn into deception only when the context of action set up an expectation which reinforced the artist’s handiwork.” See Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, repr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially 203–41.

⁴⁹ Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 201–2.

⁵⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 4:18, 26; 5:161. See also Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 93.

⁵¹ Eric Jan Sluijter, “All striving to adorne their houses with costly peeces’: Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors,” in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001), 107–8.

⁵² Wheelock likens the doors over the painting to the peephole in a perspective box. See Wheelock, “Illusionism,” 80.

⁵³ Baudrillard, “Trompe l’Oeil,” 53. Likewise, Brusati writes that the pictures are presented as de-

ceptive paintings through “the ritualized display of predictable objects.” See Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions,” 56.

⁵⁴ For discussion of ritual-like activities, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138–69.

⁵⁵ Bell, *Ritual*, 139–44, 159–69; Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 53–68. I am drawing on the expanded definition of ritual offered by Bell and Grimes to describe the formal, choreographed nature of interactions within an early modern collection.

⁵⁶ Gell defines “patient” as “the object which is causally affected by the agent’s action.” For example, a painting is a patient to the artist who made it, but it can be an agent (or more precisely, a secondary agent) when it elicits responses from the viewers, who in turn occupy the role of patients. See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21–23.

⁵⁷ Nor was Dou the only Dutch painter to construct counterfeit paintings from his signature product. Gerard Houckgeest—who specialized in picturing church interiors and was known for his mastery of linear perspective—adds a fictive frame and curtain to his *Interior of the Oude Kerk in Delft* (ca. 1651; fig. 5). For Houckgeest and his career in Delft, see Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists Around 1650* (New York and London: Garland, 1977), 229–60; Walter Liedtke, *Architectural Painting in Delft* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1982), 34–56; Walter Liedtke, *A View of Delft: Vermeer and His Contemporaries* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 81–92, 107–21

⁵⁸ Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 162–68; Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions,” 52, 60–62. Samuel van Hoogstraten includes the chain and medal awarded by Emperor Ferdinand III in several of his trompe l’oeil pieces, making those objects emblems of his success. The letters in Vaillant’s *Wooden Board* bear various names, including those of Johann Maurits of Nassau-Siegen and the De Neufville brothers, suggesting that the artist was connected to these renowned collectors.

⁵⁹ Gell, *Art and Agency*, 6–7; Gell, “Technology of Enchantment,” 162. Gell insists on the distinction between visual material and text and argues that iconology treats art objects as passive representations of symbolic meanings. Art historians have been critical of Gell’s narrow definition of the method, and some have sought to introduce iconographic interpretation into a Gellian analysis. See, for example, Stewart, “Gell’s Idols,” 166–71 (see note 6 above); Michelle O’Malley, “Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its ‘invisible skein of relations,’” *Art History* 28, no. 4 (2005): 417–41. As other commentators have pointed out, Gell does not rigidly follow his own recommendation to avoid issues of style and symbolic interpretations. See for example Matthew Rampley, “Art History and Cultural Difference: Alfred Gell’s Anthropology of Art,” *Art History* 28, no. 4 (2005): 539ff.

⁶⁰ Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, ed. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi vol. 2 (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1972), 665; Ebert-Schifferer, “Trompe l’Oeil,” 20–21. See also Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi vol. 2 (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 121–22.

⁶¹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.65. Van Mander, Angel, and Van Hoogstraten invoke Pliny’s story as a powerful classical precedent for the value ascribed to illusionistic painting. See Van Mander, *Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, fol. 265r-v; Angel, *Lof der Schilder-konst*, 12–13; Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 24–25.

⁶² Willem Martin, *Gerard Dou*, trans. Clara Bell (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1902), 60; Sluijter, “In Praise of the Art of Painting,” 209.

- ⁶³ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 108.
- ⁶⁴ Wolfgang Kemp, *Rembrandt. Die Heilige Familie mit dem Vorhang* (Kassel: Staatliche Museen, 2003), 26–29. Compare Baer, “Life and Art,” 41.
- ⁶⁵ Kemp, *Rembrandt*, 30. See also Emmanuelle Hénin, “Parrhasios and the Stage Curtain: Theatre, Metapainting and the Idea of Representation in the Seventeenth Century,” *Art History* 33 (2010): 249–61.
- ⁶⁶ Kemp, *Rembrandt*, 30; Stoichita, *Self-Aware Image*, 60, 290n52.
- ⁶⁷ See for example Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, ed. Adriana Marruchi (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), 1:142–43. For discussion of the display of licentious pictures, see Stoichita, *Self-Aware Image*, 61.
- ⁶⁸ Wolfgang Kemp, “The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception,” in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191–94; Stoichita, *Self-Aware Image*, 55.
- ⁶⁹ Sluijter, “In Praise of the Art of Painting,” 192.
- ⁷⁰ Brusati, “Honorable Deceptions,” 54–56; Wheelock, “Illusionism,” 80.

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