Art at Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam

Montias, J.

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Part II  Profiles of Selected Buyers
Introduction

In the first part of this book, I focused on aggregates – the value of works of art sold, the number of buyers in certain occupations or of various origins, the relative importance of different subjects represented – rather than on the lives and careers of individuals, even though I cited many names who in one way or another illustrated overall trends and tendencies. In the second part, I have selected a number of buyers for detailed treatment who, for one reason or another, were deserving of attention. The idea of this sharper focus is to give the reader some notion of who these people were: their family background, their business connections, their links to artists or poets, in the hope that, if these buyers did not exactly come alive – an ideal that I will return to in the last chapter of the book – they could at least be assigned a place in a clearly recognizable milieu. I begin with three chapters on merchants and artists who became art dealers. In the next five chapters, I investigate the connections of some private collectors to artist-painters: in chapter 16, I follow the trail of a painting that Rubens had promised to the jeweler Hans Thijsz.; in chapter 17, I develop the conjecture that Jacob Swalmius, the buyer of numerous works of art at auction, was a pupil of Rembrandt; in chapter 18, I look into a possible business relation between the merchant Marten van den Broeck and Rembrandt; in chapter 19, I show how the rich merchant/jeweler Jan van Maerlen was linked by marriage to various artist-painters, both in his own generation and in that of his children and grandchildren until the early 18th century; in chapter 20, I use an inventory “find” – an anonymous painting of the Feast of Belshazzar – to forge a link between a merchant named Jean le Bleu, the nephew of the Pre-Rembrandtist François Venant, and Rembrandt. I then turn to buyers who were linked to major cultural figures or played a role themselves on the cultural scene: Dr. Robbert van der Hoeve and the “Muiden Circle” in chapter 21, Pieter van den Broeck and Jacob Valcksz., amateur poets and the authors of a lampoon on the cultural elite of Amsterdam, in chapter 22. My last three chapters are eclectic: chapter 23 deals with an interesting case of a painting by Pieter Lastman that went through two auction sales but remained in the extensive family of the first buyer; chapter 24 is about a collector who bought a painting at an auction in 1620 then kept the painting, which had been seen by Karel van Mander in the early 1600s, until his death 51 years later; the painting is still extant today. The last chapter briefly recounts a few stories about buyers, culled from notarial archives, that throw at least a glancing light on their mentalités. I also single out for close analysis the auction sales in which these selected buyers participated.