Art at Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam

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Art Dealers I: Artists and Merchants in the Trade

In accord with Adam Smith’s famous dictum about specialization and the size of the market, most artists in the course of Holland’s spectacular development in the course of the 17th century chose to concentrate on increasingly specialized subjects. Still life, to take the most conspicuous example, developed as a separate subject toward the end of the 16th century. At first, specialization was limited to flowers, fruit, vanitas and “banquets”. Later, painters began to explore narrower subjects: fish, game, live and dead poultry, medallions enclosed in wreaths of flowers or fruit, and so forth. There also emerged within the artists’ community a group of individuals, perhaps not sufficiently talented to earn a living from their craft, who developed a side-trade in paintings and other objects of art. Some of these artist/dealers visited the yearly or biannual fairs and the estate auctions held in the various towns of the Republic to scout for paintings that were in demand in Amsterdam but that would-be buyers might not have had the time or the inclination to visit themselves. Some had direct contacts with artists in out-of-town communities from whom they bought works of art that could be sold at a profit in Amsterdam. “Arbitrage” of these various sorts was probably a mainstay of their activity. A few had the connections in municipalities to co-ordinate special projects, like the decoration of the Amsterdam town-hall in the late 1650s. Another category of dealers consisted of merchants endowed with capital who branched out into trading works of art and competed with the artist/dealers for the favor of rich clients. Both artist/dealers and merchant/dealers benefited from the expansion of the market in two ways: first, there was the increasing demand for art goods which lifted all boats; but there were also more opportunities for arbitrage, as a consequence of the growing specialization of artists, than there would have been if all artists had been painting more or less the same subjects. That is, there were more gains to be had from seeking out the works of specialized artists and reselling them to buyers who did not have the time, or perhaps the necessary information, to find the paintings they liked themselves. And, if the supply was not there to begin with, dealers could help augment it by setting painters and other artists to work to produce subjects and manners-of-painting that were in demand. This supply-augmenting function was itself a specialized branch of the trade.

In Amsterdam, we find artist/dealers from the 16th century on, the most important of them being the various members of the Conincxloo dynasty. Merchant/dealers emerged in the 1630s, some of them, like Johannes de Renialme and Jan le Thoor (the
subjects, respectively of chapters 14 and 15), who graduated from trading in jewels and precious stones to trading in paintings. With the possible exception of Jan Antonio Romiti, a merchant/dealer, and of Louis Rotcourt and Joris Kaersgieter, both artist/dealers, all the important Amsterdam-based art dealers are known to have bought at Orphan Chamber auctions. The painter Cornelis van der Voort, in whose studio copies of works by well-known masters were executed, was perhaps the first supply-augmenting artist/dealer in Amsterdam. The best known of these, however, was Hendrick Uylenburgh, for whom Rembrandt himself worked in the early 1630s. Merchant/dealers are difficult to identify with certainty because we can never be sure that a transaction in works of art that they are known to have engaged in was part of a regular activity or was just an occasional opportunity. To cite just one example, we have only one document clearly referring to an art-dealing transaction of the sugar refiner Jan Thivaert; we have to rely on circumstantial evidence to infer that this transaction was part of an ongoing practice. Jan Thivaert’s career will be traced out in some detail in the present chapter. As to other merchants (Michel le Blon, Michel le Fort, the brothers Cornelis and Abraham de Bruijn, Abraham de Goijer, Marten Kretser, and many others) who also at least occasionally traded in paintings, I prefer to leave them out of detailed consideration at this point in my limited knowledge.

The Conincxloos

The first known painters of the Conincxloo dynasty were the brothers Hans van Conincxloo I and Gillis van Conincxloo, the famous landscape artist. Both were born in Antwerp, in 1540 and 1544, respectively. The first migrated to Emden (in present-day Germany), the second traveled to France, later to Frankenthal, and finally reached Amsterdam in 1595. Hans van Conincxloo I, noted in Emden in 1592, was a painter of classical allegories in the mannerist style. As far as we know, he did not become an art dealer. Hans van Conincxloo II, the son of Hans van Conincxloo I, born and married in Emden, joined the Guild of St. Lucas there. He migrated to Amsterdam in 1598, shortly after his uncle Gillis. He had become at least a part-time art dealer by 1604, when, according to Karel van Mander, he commissioned a couple of paintings from David Vinckboons. One of these paintings, which turned up at auction in 1620 and again in a private collection in 1671, will be discussed in chapter 24. We first encounter him as a buyer at auction in March 1607, when he attended the sale of the estate of his uncle Gillis van Conincxloo. There he bought many lots, most of them drawings and artists’ materials, including a grinding stone. With the exception of a couple of landscape paintings (which he bought for £ 17: 5:– and £ 8:14:–, respectively), his purchases seemed to be more oriented toward his work as an artist than as a dealer. On March 5 and 6, he organized two separate sales. The latter specified that the paintings belonged to him. The first consisted of prints, alabaster slabs,
and paintings, 47 lots in all, most of which went for 3 to 5 gulden. Only two exceeded 20 gulden, one of them a painting of an Ecce Homo for 24 gulden. The second sale consisted of paintings only, some of which were quite expensive: an Andromeda for 84 f; the seven virtues by Crispiaen van den Broeck, 90 f, and an Ecce Homo, 97 f. If at least the second sale unloaded a part of his stock in trade, as it probably did, we may infer that he was also operating somewhere between the middle and the high level of the quality scale. A year later, in 1608, he made his testament with his wife. From a sentence inserted in the testament to the effect that the art trade “belonged to his daily commerce and affairs”, we may conclude that he was already seriously engaged in the business. It was not until 1612, at the sale of Claes Rauwart, the son of the Jacob Rauwart whose valuable collection had been repeatedly cited by Karel van Mander, that he first bought really expensive paintings, including an unattributed Birth of Christ for 325 f and a Kitchen Scene (by Pieter Aertsen?) for 101 f. He was joined at this sale by his son Hans van Conincxloo III (born in Emden in 1589) who made a winning bid on a tondo “by S” for 7:10:-- f. (Hans III’s activities as a dealer are traced later on in this chapter.) The Rauwart sale is the last one – as far as we know – that was attended by Hans van Conincxloo II. In 1618, he returned to Emden where he died on 14 June 1620. This paucity of information leaves us little ground for speculation, but the upward trajectory of the prices he paid at auction suggests that he may have plunged more deeply in the market around 1612. This was of course the first year of the Twelve-year Truce in the war with Spain when trade resumed on a large scale with the Southern Netherlands. This expansion of the market, needless to say, was propitious to specialization, both by artists and dealers.

The landscape painter and art dealer Isaack van Conincxloo was the younger brother of Hans II. Born in Emden about 1580, he migrated, like his older brother, to Amsterdam, where he was first noted in 1600. He apparently moved to Antwerp where he was noted as a member of the St. Luke’s guild in Antwerp between 1607 and 1614. By 21 June 1614, he was back in Amsterdam where he was betrothed to Reymsge Cornelis, the widow of Ysbrand Danckers. Reymsge was the daughter of the prominent silversmith Cornelis Sybrantsz. Her sister Marijtgen married the silversmith and art collector Anthony Boonhoff (whose important collection was sold at auction in 1613). Isaack van Conincxloo was the only witness named at the baptism of the painter Adriaen van Nieulandt’s daughter Barber (the first of that name) in 1618. He was probably her godfather. In 1626, Isaack issued an interest-bearing obligation with the Orphan Chamber for 650 f, which was eventually acquired by the merchant Jacob Jansz. Fortuijn. (Fortuijn tried to collect on the obligation after Isaack’s death in 1634). This was perhaps to finance his art-dealing business. We have only two records of Isaack’s purchases at auction, both in 1627, at the sales of the wealthy merchant Jacob Poppe and of the dealer Louis Rotcourt. At the former, he bought a market scene for 192 f and at the latter, a landscape for 14 f. There were, of course, other auction sales beside those of the Orphan Chamber, including principally those of the Desolate Boedelskamer, the
records of which have been lost. He may have been a more assiduous attendant at those sales.

In 1631, Isaack was cited as one of the headmen of the St. Luke’s Guild in Amsterdam. In the same year, when he was living in the St. Janstraat, he paid a wealth tax of 40 f, which implies that his wealth was estimated at 8,000 f (not much more than the value of his house, which was valued at 5,000 f after his death).

In early 1634, Isaack van Conincxloo, “weak in body but still standing and sitting”, drew up his testament. He had no children. He left 100 f to the Reformed Community (Calvinist) and named his sister Cathalina living in Emden and the children of his brother Hans (II) as his universal heirs. He died in June of that year, at the age of 55.

Except for his purchases at auction, all we know of Isaack van Conincxloo’s business comes from the notarial record of the accounting of his estate, which was requested by his heirs on 13 June 1635. His widow Reymsge Cornelis declared that the accounting was a true statement of the possessions that she and her husband had owned in common. The paintings that had been sold, apparently at auction, brought 1,382 f 6 st. The records of that auction have not been preserved. These paintings were owned outright by the late Conincxloo. There were also paintings of which he owned a third share, which were also apparently sold at auction. His share came to 316 f 13 st. Unfortunately, the entry does not say with whom he might have collaborated. His household goods (imboel), perhaps also sold at auction, came to 541 f 2 st. This was a very modest sum, but it perhaps can be explained by the decision of his widow to keep most of these goods. His paints, prints (kunst), panels, and other painter’s equipment were appraised at only 160 f. His “shop” (winckelcraem) yielded 762 f 2 st. It is not clear what these consisted of, if the paintings were sold separately and the painter’s equipment was already appraised. The debts due to the estate came to only 27 f 14 st. His house, as we have already seen, was valued at 5,000 f. But he was also owed 6,009 f on a house on Lelijsluijs, which had apparently been sold. His cash holdings amounted to a mere 50 f. He owned a number of interest-bearing obligations, totaling 3,590 f, which had been issued by craftsmen and other obscure individuals. Altogether his assets were booked at 19,878 f, a substantial sum. The liabilities were small. The auctioneer (afslager) was owed 58 f 15 st., in addition to 22 f 13 st. for the hiring of the hall where the paintings were sold. The rest were miscellaneous small debts. Reymsge was allotted 14,607 f plus the usufruct of 2,320 f. The silversmith Cornelis Sybrantsz. (Isaack’s father-in-law), the painter Hans van Essen (his brother-in-law), and Jacob Symonsz. (unidentified) appeared before the notary to guarantee the execution of the estate.

What can we conclude from these figures about the scale of Isaack’s operations? Perhaps the best way to put his business in perspective is to compare the value of the paintings sold, including his one-third share – a total that came just short of 1,700 f – with the value of Johannes de Renialme’s stock in trade as it was assessed after his death in 1657, which was assessed at 36,512 f (including some jewelry). It is fair to say that
Isaack van Conincxloo was a moderately successful dealer who left his widow comfortably well off but who operated at a much lower level of activity than DeRenialme.

Our last representative of the dynasty is Hans van Conincxloo III, the younger brother of Isaack, born in Emden in 1589. He, too, was trained as a painter. Some of his works, in the manner of the landscape and animal artist Gysbrecht de Hondecoeter, have survived. We already saw that, in 1612, when he was only 23, he bought a lot at the Rauwart sale. He was back in Emden with his father in 1618. Shortly after his return, he married Sara de Vogelaer, the daughter of the prominent Emden goldsmith Isaack de Vogelaer. In 1619, he became a master in the painters’ guild of Emden. Five years later he offered 30 gulden for a painting of a Madonna and Child hanging in the library of the Church Council (reformed) of Emden, but the offer was declined. The painting was probably burnt—a late manifestation of iconoclasm. Also in 1624, he was appointed as deacon of the “Impoverished Foreigners” (Fremdlingen-Armen) of Emden. From a document dated nearly 20 years later, we learn that he was discharged after seven years for having “betrayed the trust” of the office. He moved back to Amsterdam about 1635. He appeared as a buyer at auction in 1637, at the Jan Basse sale, and in 1638, at the Spranger sale, at both of which he bought inexpensive drawings and prints, with the exception of a single drawing by Lucas (van Leyden), at the first sale, which he acquired for 18 f. He was noted as a “dealer in paintings” (koopman van schilderijen) in 1639.

Hans III apparently did not fare well after his return to Amsterdam, despite his attempt to branch out into the porcelain trade. On 26 November 1636, Hans van Conincxloo, who now called himself a dealer in porcelain, acknowledged that he owed his cousin Hans van der Putte 1,435 ƒ for money that he had borrowed from him and to cover the losses that his cousin had incurred when he had stood surety for him. Hans van der Putte was the husband of Sara de Vogelaer, who was probably the cousin of Hans’s wife, also named Sara de Vogelaer. To settle “as much as possible of this debt”, he turned over to Van der Putte various porcelain goods, listed in an inventory (which has disappeared). His money troubles were not over. On April 8, 1639, his landlady summoned him to abide by the terms of his rental contract which he had signed for four years, starting in May 1639. She claimed that he had told her that, since his wife had gone away from him, he was no longer inclined to live in the house. The next document has already been discussed in detail in chapter 7. We recall that, on 15 May 1639, Jan Hendrix Admirael had declared that he had obtained two sentences from the Amsterdam magistrates ordering Van Coninxloor to pay him 740 ƒ plus interest. As a result of the mediation of “good friends” (arbiters), it had been agreed that Van Coninxloor would pay him an additional 370 ƒ. The agreement was made under the supervision of Hendrick Uylenburgh. I suggested in chapter 7 that the debt Van Coninxloor had incurred was for tulip bulbs and that Uylenburgh had been approached to evaluate the works of art that Van Coninxloor was about to supply to settle the debt. On 24 October 1640, Hans van Coninxloor and Jan Hendrix Admirael signed a complicated agreement, in connection with the same affair.
Admirael acknowledged having received from Hans van der Putte the sum of 625 f, which Van Coninxloo owed Admirael. In turn, Admirael had delivered to Van der Putte various goods and furniture which he had received from Van Coninxloo. These, as we have already seen, included works by Willem Buytewech, Jan van Bylert, Brouwer, and Dirck Hals, copies after Rembrandt, many prints, and Japanese exotica. In an annex to the document, signed on November 24, Admirael had permitted Hans’s wife Sara to keep the bed on which she slept, at his discretion.  

If the works of art and the exotica Hans turned over to Admirael represented his remaining stock in trade, as appears likely, this stock did not amount to much. In any case, it looks as if the transaction with Admiral had left him and his wife quite destitute.

It was probably soon after this episode that Hans left for Emden, where he was noted in 1642. In the protocols of the Church Council of Emden of 1 and 29 August 1642 (from which we already drew the information that he had been dismissed as deacon), we learn that he was accused of having lived an “eccentric life” and of having committed blasphemy. He was quoted as having said that “there was no God, Devil, or Hell and that the preachers were devils”. He died there after December 1645.

Lucas Luce

The painter and art dealer Lucas Luce led a long life and had a successful career. He was born in Antwerp about 1575, the son of Lucas Luce I (de oude) and of Elisabeth van Roy, who migrated to Amsterdam about 1587, where they settled in the Kalverstraat. The younger Lucas Luce spent some of his life in Utrecht where he married Elisabeth van Rhenen, the daughter of Willem Jacobsz. van Rhenen and Hendrickge Wtewael, probably in 1598. His mother-in-law was the cousin of the painter Joachim Wtewael. In the same year he became a member of the Reformed (Calvinist) community in Utrecht. In 1605, his sister Elisabeth married the painter Gerrit de Buck (or Bucq) who was a frequent buyer at Orphan Chamber auctions in Amsterdam.

Lucas Luce began to buy art at these auctions as early as 1601 (two untitled and unattributed paintings for f 2:10:-- and 7:--:--, respectively) apparently the first dealer who is known to have done so. The extant notebooks show that he bought intermittently at auction from that time on (in 1608, 1609, 1612, 1623, 1625, 1627, 1628, and 1637, 21 lots in all). His purchases were relatively inexpensive, in the f 15 to f 25 range. The most he ever paid was f 48 for an unattributed painting in a sale of 1608. The top prices in an auction sale that was held at his request in 1610 were much higher: eight lots sold in excess of f 63; the highest price attained was f 97 (three of them kitchen scenes). The sale – all paintings and watercolors sold in 127 lots – brought a total of f 3,530, a very large sum for the period. It is not known precisely why such “voluntary sales” were held, but it is at least possible that these works of art were part of his stock in trade, perhaps inventory held in excess of his current sales.
There are occasional traces in archival records of Luce’s purchases from private individuals. In 1619, Lucas Luce, painter, and Nicolaas Hardere, merchant, paid an Amsterdam notary f 30 for a little winter by Avercamp (“de Stomme”). Nearly 20 years later, he gave a procuration to the painter Anthoni Kentelingh in Deventer to try to obtain delivery of an Annunciation by Ter Bruggen which he had bought for f 240 from a widow in Deventer. Although the evidence is very thin, I think it is likely that he practiced intercity arbitrage: buying works of art in one place to sell them in another at a higher price, most probably in Amsterdam where the market was most buoyant. He could also export abroad: in 1607, the agent of the King of Denmark (featured in the next chapter) bought 6 works of art from him, presumably for his master. In 1636, his business brought him to London where he was given power-of-attorney to buy books from the estate of a London merchant.

In addition to painting an occasional portrait, landscape, “banquet”, or battle scene – he continued to practice his art at least intermittently throughout his very long life – and his art dealing, Luce was also active in the affairs of the Guild of St. Luke in Amsterdam. On 8 November 1619, when the truce in the war with Spain was still in effect, he testified at the request of the headmen of the Guild, together with two other painters, a gilder and a sugar refiner, concerning an illegal sale of paintings that a dealer named Guilliam Wittebrood had brought to Amsterdam, some of which he had already sold. Such depositions were presumably entered in court suits against the violators of guild rules, most frequently to block the import of Flemish paintings. Luce was also frequently called upon to appraise the paintings in rich collections, on several occasions with Hendrick Uylenburgh.

One revealing act shows that Luce was well connected socially. On 7 December 1617, he witnessed the baptism of Salomon, son of Gerrit van Schoonhoven and Anna Munx in the Old Church. Schoonhoven was one of the richest merchants in Amsterdam. In 1631, he was taxed f 1,350 on a fortune of f 270,000, the tenth highest assessment in that levy. Whether or not Luce was invited to the baptism as godfather or just as a guest – he does not seem to have been a family member – this was a distinct honor. Lucas Luce paid only a f 40 tax in 1631, corresponding to a wealth of f 8,000. His fortune greatly exceeded this sum, at least in later years. It is worthy of note that his younger brother Louis Luce, who was a blue dyer and merchant, paid a larger tax than he did -- f 90. Louis was well connected too. He married Elisabeth Deijl, the niece of Dionys de Maistre, a socially prominent merchant of South Netherlandish origin, cited in chapter 16 below.

Lucas Luce was 77 years old when he drew up his testament with his wife Elisabeth on 23 October 1642. The couple, who had been been married over a half century, had five daughters, two of whom were married. They left the considerable sum of f 4,600 to each of the unmarried daughters, a total of f 13,800. The married daughters had to content themselves with the dowry and outsetting they had received at the time of their marriage. Two months later a codicil added to the testament provided a bequest of a small portrait by Poelenburg to each of the unmarried daughters.
a new testament, written five years later, Lucas Luce, widower of Elisabeth Willems van Rhenen, again assigned his entire inventory to his unmarried daughters, each of whom was slated to receive the paintings that had been designated with her first name’s initial. Lucas Luce was 81 years old in 1656 when he signed a portrait and added his own age to the signature. He died shortly before 30 November 1661 when his death inventory was taken. The inventory was full of unevaluated paintings. The stock in trade was stored in the back room, which contained “83 paintings of all sorts”. These paintings were said to be listed in detail in “the books held by the deceased”. There was £ 3,000 in cash in the house (recall that Isaack van Conincxloo left only £ 50 in cash after his death). Among the “accounts receivable” were £ 6,000 outstanding for paintings sold. Luce owned three houses: one on the South side of the Hartestraat was assessed at £ 12,000; one on the South side of Reestraat, £ 7,500; and the house called “Appelles” in which he had lived for many years and died, on the Rozengracht, near where Rembrandt had come to live after his bankruptcy, which had cost him £ 5,000 in 1649. It is worthy of note that he lived in the least expensive of the three houses he owned, presumably to economize on capital. The entire inventory was divided into five equal parts, of which two were received by the married daughters. Lucas Luce may have lacked a son, but he was otherwise blessed with all the bounties that life in an interesting business could afford.

Hendrick Uylenburgh

With the possible exception of Jan Thivaert, Hendrick Uylenburgh is the only dealer of the group that I am focusing on who was “supply augmenting” in the sense that he put artists to work and marketed their products. Given his importance in the Amsterdam art market of the second quarter of the 17th century and his close relation to Rembrandt, it is unfortunate that we know so little about his operation. We (almost) have to take Filippo Baldinucci's mention of Uylenburgh’s “famous academy” at his word since we have very little information about the scope of Uylenburgh’s enterprise.

Uylenburgh came from a family that was divided between a Calvinist branch residing in Leeuwarden and a Mennonite branch, some of whose members had migrated to Poland where the followers of Menno Simonsz. flourished. Hendrick himself was born some time between 1584 and 1589 (he is somewhat inconsistent in the age he gave in depositions), probably in Krakow in Poland. He was the brother of Rombout Uylenburgh who was an official painter at the court of King Sigismund of Poland. In 1610, Rombout moved to Dantzig where the king elected to hold his court. Hendrick may have been baptized as an adult in the Mennonite community in Krakow in 1649. It is worthy of note that he lived in the least expensive of the three houses he owned, presumably to economize on capital. The entire inventory was divided into five equal parts, of which two were received by the married daughters. Lucas Luce may have lacked a son, but he was otherwise blessed with all the bounties that life in an interesting business could afford.
an Orphan Chamber sale in October 1627. He would live in this neighborhood, on or near the Breestraat, for many years. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel has recently advanced the attractive hypothesis that Uylenburgh rented the house on the Breestraat that had formerly been occupied by the painter Cornelis van der Voort. The house was located literally “next door” to that of Pieter Belten I, which Rembrandt bought in 1639. We shall see below, from the records of the tax register, that Uylenburgh was renting premises in 1631 that were next door to those rented by Balthasar Visscher from the heirs of Pieter Belten I.

H. f Wijnman, nearly fifty years ago, noted the name “Abraham Ulemburch”, next to that of Balthasar Visscher, in the register of the taxpayers for 1631, living on the Breestraat, near the St. Anthoniesluis. This Ulemburch paid a tax of 15 f (on an assessment of 3,000 f); Visscher paid 50 f (on an assessment of 10,000 f). We know that Visscher at this time was renting the house of Pieter (II) and Magdalena Beltens, which was later bought by Rembrandt. Actually, the painter Abraham Uylenburgh was Hendrick’s son, probably from his first marriage. This identification, coupled with the above arguments, supports Dudok van Heel’s hypothesis: The house on which the 20 f tax was assessed was the one next door to Pieter Belten and Magdalena Belten’s that had formerly been occupied by Cornelis van der Voort and was now rented by Hendrick Uylenburgh.

If we recall that both the art dealers Isaack van Conincxloo and Lucas Luce had paid a tax of 40 f, then we come away with the impression that Uylenburgh’s wealth, which was assessed at 3,000 f, could not have been very large or at least that the tax assessor had not found it very imposing. Still, we should always keep in mind that there was not a precise correspondence between tax-assessed wealth and actual wealth, especially in the case of tax-payers, like Uylenburgh, who rented the premises in which they lived and worked. (Note that Van Conincxloo and Luce owned their houses).

In a deposition dated 8 March 1628, Hendrick Uylenburgh, merchant in Amsterdam, appeared in Leiden, on behalf of his brother’s widow, to block the executive sale of some of his brother’s paintings, apparently ordered by one of the creditors of the estate. A month later, an individual in Leiden declared that he had ordered paintings from Hendrick Uylenburgh in Amsterdam. The first act documenting Uylenburgh’s long-term relationship with Rembrandt is dated 20 June 1631. Here Uylenburgh, called for the first time “art dealer” (kunsthandelaer), acknowledged owing Rembrandt, living in Leiden, the sum of 1,000 f that Rembrandt had lent him. A year later, Rembrandt was living in Uylenburgh’s house on the Breestraat, near the St. Anthonisluis, when he told a representative of a “Tontine” that, thanks to God, he was in good health. Uylenburgh was renting this house – presumably the one which had once been occupied by Cornelis van der Voort – from Nicolaes Seys Pauw, the son of Adriaen Pauw, knight and pensioner of Amsterdam.

That Uylenburgh was acting as Rembrandt’s publisher and business agent about this time emerges from the inscription “Hendrickus Ulenburgensis Excudebat” on
the third state of Rembrandt’s etching, “Descent from the Cross”, the second state of which was dated 1633. In February 1635, when Rembrandt bought a wooden mannequin of a little child at the Barend van Someren sale, he was said to be “tot Uylenburgh”, which means that he was living in the house of Uylenburgh and/or, possibly, that Uylenburgh had guaranteed the purchase. Since Rembrandt had been living in the house in 1631 and (almost surely) in 1633, the hypothesis that he was still living (and working) there in 1635 appears very probable.

The only thing we know about Uylenburgh’s marketing of the paintings that were produced in his workshop is that he utilized for this purpose his connection with the Mennonite painter and art dealer Lambert Jacobsz. in Leeuwarden. Lambert Jacobsz. was related to Uylenburgh via his niece Hendrickje Uylenburgh (1602-c.1680), from the Calvinist side of the family, who was married to the painter Wijbrant de Geest (1592-after 1667). Lambert Jacobsz.’s stock, as it was recorded a year after his death in 1636, contained paintings which undoubtedly originated in Uylenburgh’s shop. There was one original by Rembrandt (an old man’s tronie with a long, broad beard), plus six copies after Rembrandt, including a tronie in Oriental guise which was a portrait of Uylenburgh’s wife Maria van Eyck.

By the time Rembrandt entered the guild – his “funeral guild medal” dates from 1634, which was probably the year that he joined the organization – he was already married (or about to be married) to Hendrick’s cousin Saskia Uylenburgh, which event took place on June 22 of that year. Saskia, the daughter of a burgomaster of Leeuwarden in Friesland, belonged to the Reformed branch of the Uylenburgh family. Rembrandt and Saskia seem to have lived in Uylenburgh’s house for about a year after their marriage, after which both Rembrandt and Uylenburgh moved to new residences. By 1636, Rembrandt had moved temporarily to the Nieuwe Doelenstraat, while Uylenburgh rented a house on the North West corner of the St. Anthoniesluis, which had formerly been owned by the painter Pieter Isaacksz.

Who else worked with or for Uylenburgh? Govaert Flinck apparently joined Uylenburgh’s workshop on the St. Anthoniesluis after Rembrandt’s departure. Or so, at least, it may be deduced from the notice that he was “tot Uylenburgh” when he bought a lot at the Jan Basse sale in 1637. The Danish painter Bernard Keil (or Keilhau), who provided information on many details of Rembrandt’s life and on Uylenburgh’s “Academy” to Philippo Baldinucci many years later, was probably an habitué. Other plausible co-workers include the Mennonite Jacob Backer and the Haarlem-based Willem de Poorter and Jacob de Wet (who turned up as one of Uylenburgh’s creditors some years later, as will be shown below), but these claims are based on the career patterns and styles of these artists rather than on any documentary evidence. A document establishing the presence in Uylenburgh’s shop of one more artist, the virtually unknown Volckert van Lier, will be presented below.

Uylenburgh’s purchases of art works at Orphan Chamber auctions are limited to two sales: that of Barend van Someren in 1635 and that of Gommer Spranger in 1638. At the first, he bought 12 lots for ƒ 18: 7:--, at the second 17 lots for ƒ 61: 7:--.
Curiously enough, virtually all these lots consisted of prints and drawings. At the Spranger sale, for instance, he acquired 160 impressions of a print of St. John and 96 impressions of an image of the Virgin Mary. His most expensive purchase, again at the Spranger sale, was a drawing by Raphael for $25:10:--. He must have dealt in these paper goods, although it cannot be excluded that some of the prints and drawings were used as models in his workshop.371

In April 1639, Uylenburgh borrowed 1,600 $ from Gilbert de Flines and Pieter Sey at 6 percent interest. As a guarantee, he pledged “all his paintings” as well as such as those he might acquire. The creditors were free to bring the paintings to their houses for further reassurance. Gilbert de Flines was a wealthy Mennonite merchant, the father of the well-known collector of paintings and naturalia of the same name. Pieter Sey was probably a member of the Seys family, related to Uylenburgh’s former landlord Claes Seys Pauw.372

Less than a year later, on 16 January 1640, Uylenburgh made a widely encompassing acknowledgement of his debts. He stated before a notary that he had borrowed “a good sum of money to benefit and advance his occupation and commerce”373 from a number of artists and merchants. He recognized that these creditors had done him a good service and favor. Accordingly, in order to satisfy these creditors and to guarantee repayment, he now wished to pledge and mortgage, in proportion to the debt he owed each creditor, his entire stock of paintings, prints, and drawings (\textit{winckel van schilderijen ende kunsten}), including any accounts receivable from them, from which these creditors, in case of need, could reimburse themselves. Unfortunately, the document supplies neither the total amount of money owed nor its breakdown among the creditors. These creditors were: Pieter (Gerritsz.) Hooft and his son Jan, Mennonite merchants; Pieter Belten II (\textit{de jonge}), co-owner of the house that Rembrandt bought in 1639; Jan (Jansz.) Carels (\textit{de jonge}), owner of Amsterdam’s glass factory, for the merchant Jasper van Tongerlo; the painters Claes Moy-aert, Symen de Vlieger, Johannes Staveren, Jacob de Wet, Jan Coelenbier, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jan Jansz. Treck; the widows of Jacob Liewen374 and of the painter Pieter de Neijn, and the heirs of the painter Lambert Jacobsz.; the ebony worker Wybrant Claessen (see below); the merchants Nicolaes van Bambeeck and Claes Ar-entsz. van Neerden; and the totally unknown Jacob Hero.375 At least two of the debts were still outstanding years later. After the wife of the successful and prosperous ebony worker Wybrant Claessen had died, an inventory of the goods she had owned in common with her husband was drawn up on 3 April 1651. Among the debts due to the estate were 70 $ due by “Signeur Oulenburgh”, living on the Dam in “de Bril”.376 This debt, if it was the one that Uylenburgh had owed Claessen eleven years earlier, was so small that it is more likely to have been incurred for frames delivered than for any genuine investment in the Uylenburgh business. It may also have been the residual portion of the debt after Uylenburgh had repaid a part of the loan.377 In any case, it can hardly be compared in magnitude with the debt he owed to Van Bambeeck. On the 3rd of November 1655, Hendrick Uylenburgh and his son Gerrit, who was also by
then an art dealer, promised to repay Nicolaes van Bambeeck a sum of f 2,251:15:8 that they owed him in installments, ending in 1660.378 So, at least, of the debts we know something about, we have one to a framemaker for 70 f, one to Rembrandt for f 1,000 and one to Van Bambeeck for over 2,000 f – a very mixed bag. One would dearly wish to know what sorts of debts Uylenburgh had incurred with the painters other than Rembrandt. Where they unpaid bills for paintings delivered, or did they really invest in Uylenburgh’s enterprise? In either case, it bears notice that the only cities where these painters resided, other than Amsterdam, were Haarlem (Jacob de Wet, Pieter de Neijn, Jan Coelenbier) and Leiden (Johannes Staveren).

But this wasn’t the end of Uylenburgh’s debts. On 22 April 1641, he borrowed another f 1,000 from the Waterland (Mennonite) Community, against which he pledged 125 copper plates (presumably engraved or etched).379

It was probably to save on capital that Uylenburgh took paintings on consignment. We learn from an inventory of a cloth merchant, drawn up in 1645, that a small debt was owed to the estate by “our nephew Volckert”; the money according to a marginal note was to be sought from “Hendrick Oulenberch, painter, who has several paintings on hand that Vockert has given him to sell.”380 The cloth dealer, named Watse Laurensz., was born in Lier about 1595.381 His nephew was very probably the painter Volkard Adriaen van Lier, known to have been of Dutch origin, who was active in Vienna from 1651 to 1676.382

In or about 1647, Uylenburgh had moved to a new house on the Dam, which he rented from the municipality for f 700 a year. He soon fell into arrears on his rent. The house he was renting, named “de Bril”, was the one where he was living when his debt of f 70 appeared in the accounting of the joint possessions of Wybrand Claessen and his wife. By 1654, when the house was slated to be demolished to make room for the new Town Hall, he was two years behind on his rent. He settled the debt for f 1,000 with the Burgomasters, which was f 400 less than he owed the city.383 We also know of a debt recorded in 1653, but which may have been incurred some time earlier, that he owed for canvases and frames: in the death inventory of Pieter de Meldert, who sold artist’s supplies as well as paintings, an entry among the debts due to the estate showed that Uylenburgh owed 105 f 10 st., the second highest debt in the accounts.384

Uylenburgh in those years may have struggled hard to secure the capital needed for his business and to pay his rent, yet he seems to have enjoyed a good reputation in the trade. I judge this, in part, from the numerous occasions on which he was called upon to appraise paintings and from the fact that he was engaged at least twice to arbitrate disputes that had arisen among his friends and colleagues: in 1640, as we have already seen, he had acted as “good man” in the settlement of claims that Hans van der Putte had against the dealer Isaack van Conincxloo. About two years later, around 1642, the future burgomaster Andries de Graeff and Rembrandt had again named him as “good man” in arbitrating their dispute concerning payment for a portrait that Rembrandt had painted “for De Graeff”. (This is presumed to have been
the portrait of De Graeff, now in the Gemäldegalerie in Cassel, that Rembrandt painted in 1639). According to Hendrick Uylenburgh’s own deposition, made in 1659, the parties to the dispute had agreed that Rembrandt would be paid 1,500 f for the painting. Another aspect of Uylenburgh’s reputation, which also testifies to his excellent connections with the city magistrates, is that he was given a contract in 1657 to clean and restore paintings for the city (for 1,130 f) and that he seems to have been given some responsibility for the decoration of the Town Hall in the late 1650s.

In 1657, Uylenburgh moved again, this time to the Lauriersgracht, near Govaert Flinck’s house. By this time he had presumably ceased to run his “academy” (which had perhaps already ceased to exist when he moved away from the Breestraat in 1647). He was buried on 22 March 1661.

Hendrick’s son Gerrit continued in the family trade, but he seems to have concentrated his energies on buying and selling already produced paintings (including those of old masters) rather than on running a large atelier. Since his activities begin many years after the last recorded auction of the Orphan Chamber, I will not describe his career in detail. Suffice it to say that he traveled to Italy (probably to buy paintings), that he is known to have had dealings with the Grand Elector of Brandenburg, and that he bought and sold very expensive paintings in Antwerp. Like his father, he counted on the generosity of patrons to supply him with the capital necessary for his expanded operation. After the market for art collapsed in the wake of the disastrous French invasion of 1672, he could not meet the demands of his creditors and finally went bankrupt in 1674. One may wonder whether his bankruptcy resulted at least in part from the burden of old debts that he had assumed from his father.

Jan Thivaert

Jan Thivaert was born in Wesel about 1575 from parents who had immigrated to Holland from the Southern Netherlands. Although, in all the documents where his occupation is cited, he was said to be a suickerbacker or sugar refiner, he was undoubtedly at least a part-time art dealer. Of all the dealers whose career has been related in this chapter, he was the most assiduous buyer at Orphan Chamber auctions. From his first purchase in 1609 until his last in 1626, he is known to have bought at nine sales. At the great Rauwart sale of 1612, he bought 20 lots, for a total of f 256. The most expensive lot he ever purchased, however, was in an earlier sale, in 1609, where he bought “a painting”, with no title or attribution, for f 132.

Thivaert first crops up in archival protocols in a document of 1618 where he was said to have rented a warehouse, which he presumably used for his sugar business, to the Sephardic community of Amsterdam to hold meetings of their synagogue. A year later the community built their synagogue next to Thivaert’s warehouse.

I have already cited the deposition made in 1618 at the request of the headmen of
the Guild of St. Luke of Amsterdam in which several witnesses reported on the (illegal) sale of paintings by a Flemish dealer. It was Jan Thivaert who had reported this violation of guild rules to the headmen of the guild. The only reason I can think of why he would have done so was that, as an Amsterdam-based art dealer, he wished to thwart the competition of Flemish colleagues.

The key document for interpreting Thivaert’s career was found by Jan Briels in the Utrecht archive. On April 18, 1630, the famous landscape and animal painter Roelandt Savery and Jan Thivaert, living in Amsterdam, had drawn up a contract whereby Savery undertook to paint seven panels for Thivaert that the latter had given him to paint on. Savery had apparently changed his mind, perhaps because he thought he could get more for his paintings. On the 14th of September of the same year, the two men had appeared before the commissaries of the court of Utrecht, who had tried to mediate their differences. In the end, Savery and Thivaert had come to the following agreement. Savery was exempted from having to paint the panels, but he would have to pay Thivaert 33 Flemish pounds (ƒ 198) plus 4 gulden for the 7 panels, which he, Savery, would be allowed to keep. It is evident that Thivaert had advanced the money which Savery was now expected to repay. Savery promised to pay Thivaert half the total sum of 202 ƒ in cash and half within three months. Upon final payment, Thivaert would deliver a painting, presently in his house, which Savery had “dead-painted” (blocked out in gray or beige paint). The act was signed in the house of Jan Verriet and witnessed by the painter Hans Savery (II), the son of Jacob (Jacques) Savery (1589-1639). Jan Verriet was the son-in-law of Jan Thivaert, whose daughter Anthoinette he had married in 1625.

The contract the two men had signed in 1630 was of the classical “putting out” type where the merchant/capitalist advances payment, provides the “raw materials” (in this case the panels), and then collects the product upon completion. It shows that, at least on this occasion, Thivaert acted as a dealer of the “supply-augmenting” type. But we cannot tell whether it was typical since we know of no other transaction to compare it with that Jan Thivaert might have taken part in.

In the same year 1631 that he was negotiating with Savery, Thivaert paid a tax of 40 ƒ corresponding to an assessment of 8,000 ƒ. If the value of his sugar-refining establishment is included in that sum, there is little left for a dealer’s stock. But, of course, we must not take these assessments literally. We know too little about the way they were arrived at to draw any firm conclusions about Thivaert’s wealth.

Aside from wealth, what was Jan Thivaert’s place in Amsterdam’s social network? One way to tell is to look at his circle of intimates, including the families of the children of minor age of whom he was appointed guardian, the attendants at the baptisms of his children, and the individuals his children married. In 1624, for instance, he was appointed guardian of the only child left by the apothecary François Penijn II, whose heirs paid a tax of 90 ƒ in 1631. His co-guardian was Anthonie Thijsz. II, the son of the rich jeweler Hans Thijsz. I, whom we will meet in chapter 16. The Penijn and Thijsz. families were in the solid second rank of Amsterdam’s wealth and social
elite, several notches below the De Renialmes and the Bartolottis. When Thivaert’s son Nicolaes was baptized in 1628, the witnesses, who almost surely included the godparents, were Elssen Frans, Barend Jansz., Trijn Lamberts, and Jaapje Jans, none of whom can be identified. This in itself is significant. The fact that they either had no family names or that none was recorded suggests that the parents were not of the highest social class. All five of Thivaert’s children married while he was still alive. We have already seen that Anthonette married Jan Verriet of Utrecht in 1625. Henri (II) married Gertruyd, the daughter of the wine dealer (and auction buyer) Wouter van Lennep in 1630. Jan (III) married Sara de Penijn (II), who was the daughter (or possibly the niece) of François de Penijn in 1632. Finally, we come to the painter Daniel Thivaert, the talented son of Jan Thivaert, who, at some unknown date, married Machtelt Verniers, the daughter of Huybert Vernier. These in-laws, as far as I have been able to ascertain, were hardly in the top tier of Amsterdam society, although they were all solid burghers.

Jan Thivaert had one brother, named Henri (I), who left a trace in the archival
record. Henri may have collaborated with him in exploiting the Utrecht and Amsterdam markets for art. Like his brother Jan, Henri was a sugar refiner. He lived in Utrecht where he is known to have had contacts with painters. When the still life painter Balthasar van der Ast repudiated the inheritance he had received from his brother Johannes, for instance, Henri Thivaert was a witness. He was also in touch with the famous flower painter Ambrosius Bosschaert (I) and with Frederick van Schurman, the father of the poetess Anna Maria van Schurman.399

Jan Thivaert II died some time in 1634 or 1635. His youngest son Nicolaes (baptized in 1628) died shortly after him, in any case, before the first of January 1636, when Jan’s surviving heirs signed an agreement about the division of his estate.400 The total gross value of Thivaert’s estate came to 32,031 f, not including the middleling and bad debts due to the estate, which amounted to 7,300 f (The notary did not specify whether these debts were for paintings and other works of art, for sugar, or for some other merchandise). From this gross total, the debts due by the estate, amounting to 11,233 f (again unspecified), had to be deducted to come to the net value of the estate available for distribution to the heirs. Each of the children received 1,872 f plus 234 f inherited from their dead brother Nicolaes. However, in the case of Jan III and Henri II, a deduction had to be made for paintings that they had already received from the estate: f 46: 5:-- in the case of Jan and 72 f for Henri.401 Curiously enough, Daniel, the only known painter in the family, did not buy any paintings from his father’s estate. The house on the Singel was valued at 4,500 f. A sum of f 60:17: 8 had been spent for a banquet following the death of the late Jan Thivaert.

Before his death, Jan Thivaert had named two guardians for his minor children in his testament. One, named Constant Bourgeois, a French-speaking master glove maker, is known only from documents in which he contracted to have his two sons apprenticed to a diamond cutter and a surgeon, respectively.402 The other, Mr. Johannes Victorijn, is of greater interest. He was “one of the most intimate friends” of Vondel and a poet in his own right (praised by Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, Mattheus Gansneb Tengnagel, and by Vondel himself). Born about 1590, he was brought up in Amsterdam’s orphanage. He received a fellowship from the Burgomasters of Amsterdam to study in Franeker, where he matriculated in law. He eventually became a successful lawyer in Amsterdam. In 1621, he married Aefje Dircx, the daughter of the wealthy beer distributor (and buyer at auction) Dirck Stoffelsz. He signed the Remonstrant petition of 1628.403 When the death inventory of Maria van Ray, the widow of the insolvent painter Jacob van Nieulandt, was drawn up on 14 July 1638, Jacob’s brother, the painter Adriaen van Nieulandt, and Mr. Joannes Victorijn appeared as curators of her estate, appointed by the court of Amsterdam.404 This provides one more, albeit indirect, link, between Thivaert and the painters’ community.

I postpone my conclusions on the dealers discussed in this chapter until the end of chapter 15, after my more detailed accounts of the careers of Johannes de Renialme and Hans le Thoor.