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Harriet Stone, *Crowning Glories: Netherlandish Realism and the French Imagination during the Reign of Louis XIV*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. xii + 298 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$72.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781487504427; \$72.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781487530150; \$72.00 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 9781487530143.

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Much has been claimed regarding the impact of seventeenth-century Dutch realism on French culture. In the wake of the fascination shown by nineteenth-century French realist painters for Netherlandish scenes depicting daily life, writers and thinkers often showed a predilection for the Dutch art of describing. Well-known instances include Marcel Proust's fixation (developed via his protagonist Charles Swann) on a patch of yellow in Vermeer's *View of Delft* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*; Paul Claudel's vision of Dutch realism as a world of things about to fall apart; Roland Barthes's claim that Dutch still life paintings are fundamentally existentialist; or Daniel Arrase's art-historical focus on the effect of the real in his marvellous exploration, *Le Détail*.<sup>[1]</sup>

This list should now include Harriet Stone's exciting new publication *Crowning Glories: Netherlandish Realism and the French Imagination during the Reign of Louis XIV*, a study extending the effect of Dutch art back to the French court culture of the seventeenth century. Stone's book claims that Dutch art's influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was preceded by the impact that the substantial collection of Dutch painting at Louis XIV's court at Versailles exerted on French politics, philosophy, and aesthetics. This largely overlooked collection of Dutch paintings gradually shifted the perception of the French away from the grandiose illusionistic allegories dominating seventeenth-century visual culture and towards a more rational comprehension of the outside world. Stone makes a persuasive claim by demonstrating how Dutch realistic painting gradually chipped away at the French monarchy's hold on ideas. Building partly on Svetlana Alpers's classic study *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1983), she ultimately argues that Dutch still life's emphasis on description and taxonomy had a profound influence on Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.<sup>[2]</sup>

This claim is bold enough to require extensive explanation, which Stone provides within a strong conceptual framework based on her firm understanding that the imagination is a cognitive system and, hence, a model of thought conditioned by images and texts. Following Descartes's notion of the world as represented in and through thinking, she studies paintings and texts as "integrated systems of thought" (p. 14). Stone's previous work, most notably *Tables of Knowledge: Descartes in Vermeer's Studio* (2006) laid a portion of the groundwork for the complexities of visualized thought outlined in great detail in *Crowning Glories*.<sup>[3]</sup>

On this philosophical foundation she can differentiate, in considerable detail, the French and Dutch models of thought and their reliance on painting and theatrical performances. She argues that French and Dutch visual culture did not so much reflect different outlooks on the world as actually contribute to the *production* of two distinct models of thought. For instance, still life painting presents, in its composition and subject matter, a mode of logical inquiry that differs significantly from the propagandistic art produced around the figure of Louis XIV in France. It reveals an obsession not only with things but also with distinct *arrangements* of objects that, set against particular clusters, provide an order of things. Taking Foucault's treatment of the classical *episteme* as a point of departure, Stone looks at how ideas are "filtered" in the mind through exposure to word and image; she analyses how concepts attach themselves to objects and to a constellation of objects (as in a still life composition), and how such constellations form patterns of thought that underlie how the world is perceived. She speaks of an epistemological dilemma at the heart of court culture, which emerged from a clash between two distinct forms of thought: the dominant French analogical model and a Northern realist alternative. The latter model, based on differences, slowly gained ground and ultimately prevailed in the wide acceptance of empiricism. The realistic images of daily life at the core of the Northern model not only express the values of the merchant class but, Stone argues, reveal an entirely different means of classification and understanding. Whereas the large-scale allegories celebrating the glory of Louis XIV adorning the walls and ceilings of Versailles depended on metaphor and similarity, Netherlandish art relied on difference, multiplicity, and contiguity. It stressed the defining characteristics of the world of things in an empirical way.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, entitled "Divergent Patterns," first explains the distinction between the analogical and the realist models by contrasting the portraits of Louis XIV with Dutch still life and genre paintings in compelling close readings. Subsequently, the interplay between these models is analysed on the basis of three different ways that French art responded to Dutch realism: through inspiration and imitation, through a redirection of the viewer's gaze, and through the growth of the royal collection. The core of the argument is developed in part two, "Transformation," which explores the links between aesthetics and politics in France through juxtapositions of French and Dutch images and texts. One of the clearest oppositions offered in this study (in chapter four) takes the magnificent portraits of the Sun King intending to transform the king's mortal body into a symbol of his immortal glory and sets them against the stilled vanitas images so typical of Dutch realism, which "unthink" precisely this process.

Another comparison is between the strict regulations of French classical theatre and the logic of Dutch genre painting, which establishes a myriad of relations among objects, people, and the ordinary spaces they both inhabit. Here, the Dutch tradition could have been treated in greater depth. Stone argues that audiences familiar with Dutch genre painting would have come to different interpretations of French theatre, a claim that may well be true. The contemplative mindsets of the figures and in works by Vermeer or Emanuel de Witte might have taught people to question the notion of sovereignty and the monolithic power of the French state as expressed in plays by Racine and Molière. However, Stone emphasizes only the intimacy she finds in genre paintings. Her reading does not account for the theatricality of these scenes, often emphasized by drawn-back curtains. Indeed, it would have been interesting to draw a parallel with the rise of classicism in Holland (first in the theatre, quickly followed by painting) after the Franco-Dutch war of 1672-78, resulting in quotidian scenes of daily life being replaced gradually by elegant images possessed of aristocratic (and French) allure.

The third part, "Patterns of Change," deals with the question of how French viewers would have responded to the differences in style and subject matter of French and Dutch art. The treatment here, I must admit, is the least exciting part of the book. The comparison between the works of Jacob Ruysdael and Nicolas Poussin falls back on generalizations; however, the section on the influence of still life painting on the classification and presentation of lemmas in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert (1761) as different modes of knowledge assemblage is intriguing. The book ends with a coda, "Trompe L'oeil Illusions and the Thoughts They Inspire," that by way of a conclusion discusses Diderot's intriguing view of Chardin.

What makes Stone's work so fascinating for the study of seventeenth-century visual culture--and of art history as a whole--is her insistence that images play a crucial role in the development of thought. While there is a rich body of work exploring the relation between art and philosophy in later eras (see the exemplary work by T.J. Clark for modernism; or by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth for the eighteenth century), such connections have remained generally underexplored in early modern art.[4] In recent years there has been a rise in studies on the role of image-making on the production of knowledge, but not on the production of *thought*. This is remarkable, as it is precisely in Dutch art theory (and French, for that matter) that these two subjects are often considered to be sister arts. In addition, philosophers have often acknowledged the sway of art works on processes of thinking. An obvious example is Hegel's fascination with Dutch painting, but Descartes in the first meditation famously presented his method for thinking about himself "as if in a picture," which, although Stone does not mention it, was certainly a source of inspiration.[5]

Stone is among a group of eminent North American scholars of comparative (French and English) literature who have taken an interest in seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture, among them Brian Wolf, Christopher Braider, Harry Berger Jr., and more recently Martine van Elk.[6] These figures have brought fresh, original approaches to the over-researched field of Dutch art, which long could have benefitted from new impulses arising from genuinely interdisciplinary perspectives. It is unfortunate that the important, thought-provoking studies by these scholars are not more widely read by art historians outside the United States. It is my hope that Stone's *Crowning Glories* will usher in a new direction for the field.

## NOTES

[1] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way; Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1981); Paul Claudel, 'Introduction to Dutch Painting', *The Eye Listens* (New York, 1950), 40-51; Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail: Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009); Roland Barthes, 'The World as Object', in: *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[2] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[3] Harriet Stone, *Tables of Knowledge: Descartes in Vermeer's Studio* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006)

[4] See T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999) and Ewa Later-Burcharth, *The Painter's Touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). Notable exceptions within scholarship on early modern art are Susanna Berger's *The Art of Philosophy: Visual Thinking in Europe from the Late Renaissance to the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), Maria Loh's notion of visual philosophy in *Still Lives: Death, Desire, and the Portrait of the Old Master* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), while my research explores the relation between Dutch art and thought, most recently in *The Pensive Image: Art as a Form of Thinking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[5] R. Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), p. 2.

[6] Harry Berger Jr., *Caterpillar: Reflections on Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting* (Fordham University Press, 2011); Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400-1700* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Martine van Elk, *Early Modern Women's Writing: Domesticity, Privacy, and the Public Sphere in England and the Dutch Republic* (London: Palgrave, 2017); Brian Jay Wolf, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

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