

# 'Plain' and 'Old'

*Why Did Paintings Go out of Fashion?*

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TSEG 21 (3): 71–106

DOI: 10.52024/j7pf6z12

## **Abstract**

This article answers a simple question: Who or what pulled the rug from underneath the demand for Dutch paintings in the second half of the seventeenth century? Previous explanations – diminished purchasing power, overproduction, depleted social distinction potential, budget and space constraints – are tested with a unique database of Amsterdam probate inventories but found insufficient. Following scholars like Jan de Vries and Bruno Blondé, I maintain that the downfall of the painting in Dutch interiors is best explained within the framework of the consumer revolution, on which this case study offers a fresh perspective by arguing that the ascent of fashion gave rise to a consumer version of creative destruction. The modernity of Holland's burgeoning consumer society was borne out of the fact that Dutch burghers simply lost interest.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

*Slecht* or *oud* – these were the ominous descriptions given to almost a quarter of paintings in all surviving probate inventories in Amsterdam's

<sup>1</sup> This study was made possible by funds from the Research Foundation – Flanders for the project 'The Embarrassment of Riches? Inequality and the Dutch Material Culture. Amsterdam, 1581-1780'. Blijke Haes wrote a bachelor's thesis on declining painting ownership in the context of this research project, which helped to give impetus to the research presented here. I would like to express my gratitude to Bruno Blondé, Matthijs Korevaar, and Wout Saelens for sharing valuable data which have improved the empirical framework of the paper. I also thank attendants of the Posthumus Conference 2024 and of a lecture at the International Institute of Social History for their feedback, in particular

notarial archives from the year 1680. In the aftermath of the 1672 'disaster year', notaries assessing the movable possessions of households in the leading (artistic) city of the Dutch Republic apparently felt a particular need to distinguish 'plain' and 'old' paintings from quality pieces, which were on average estimated to be four times more valuable, because the two descriptors were much rarer in earlier and later samples of probate records examined in this article. The end of the Golden Age indeed coincided with a steep decline in the output of Dutch paintings, although Amsterdam for much of the eighteenth century stood at the helm of a smaller high-end auction market that followed the era of mass production and consumption.<sup>2</sup> This article investigates the waning dominance of paintings in the interior of burgher homes in the decades straddling the turn of the century, a process that has been attributed to a variety of concurrent social, cultural, and economic phenomena. Were the 'plain' and 'old' paintings a reflection of declining talent, or was the need to differentiate these ordinary works from the artistic genius of the 'old masters' borne out of social distinction processes? Did affluent households find alternative outlets for conspicuous consumption due to the pernicious influence of new French fashions, or should we adopt a global material cultural view that includes the role of Asian porcelain and textiles as well? Or does the falling demand for paintings perhaps find a more straightforward answer in economic sluggishness?

Art critics who witnessed the dwindling opportunities for master painters did not see any decline in creativity but instead laid the blame at the feet of a cultural elite that had capitulated to extravagant French tastes in art and interior decoration, which subordinated paintings and (painted) wall constructions, textiles, furniture, and other ornamental objects to a designed and united ensemble.<sup>3</sup> Historians of Dutch culture and civilization put forward similar arguments of foreign influence instigating cultural decay well into the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Social and economic historians increasingly encouraged art historians to place more emphasis on the interaction between culture and society, however

Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Henk Looijesteijn. Finally, I also extend my gratitude to Judith Noorman and Weixuan Li for their insightful comments.

2 Weixuan Li, 'Innovative exuberance. Fluctuations in the painting production in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlands', *Arts* 8 (2019) 1-21; Frans Grijzenhout (ed.), *Kunst, kennis & kapitaal. Oude meesters op de Hollandse veilingmarkt 1670-1820* (Zutphen 2022).

3 Lyckle de Vries, *Diamante gedenkzuilen en leerzaeme voorbeelden. Een bespreking van Johan van Gools Nieuwe Shouburg* (Groningen 1990) 87-101.

4 E.g., Simon Schama, *Overvloed en onbehagen. De Nederlandse cultuur in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam 1988) 289-293.

– a challenge that led to interdisciplinary collaborations by the end of the century.<sup>5</sup> This academic interaction fostered a debate on the role of purchasing power in both the unprecedented rise in production after the Twelve Years' Truce in 1609 and its dramatic collapse half a century later.<sup>6</sup> Yet the proposition that a downturn in living standards instigated artistic decline was deemed increasingly unlikely as a growing body of evidence from probate inventory research showed that economic slowdown did not prevent the expansion of other decorative household objects among middling households in cities and towns across the Low Countries.<sup>7</sup> As Jan de Vries summarized it, “the simple appeal to

5 Frans Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen (eds), *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief: het beeld van de Nederlandse zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst in later tijd* (Nijmegen 1992); David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (eds), *Art in history, History in art. Studies in seventeenth-century Dutch culture* (Santa Monica 1991).

6 Compare Jan de Vries, 'Art history', in: Freedberg and De Vries (eds), *Art in history*, 249-282; Marten Jan Bok, *Vraag en aanbod op de Nederlandse kunstmarkt, 1580-1700* (PhD dissertation Utrecht University 1994); Idem, 'The rise of Amsterdam as a cultural centre. The Market for paintings, 1580-1680', in: Patrick O'Brien, et al. (eds), *Urban achievement in early modern Europe. Golden ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London* (Cambridge 2001) 186-207.

7 Jan de Vries, 'Peasant demand patterns and economic development: Friesland, 1550-1750', in: W.N. Parker and E.L. Jones (eds), *European peasants and their markets. Essays in agrarian economic history* (Princeton 1975) 205-267; Hans van Koolbergen, 'De materiële cultuur van Weesp en Weesperkarspel in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw', *Volkskundig Bulletin* 9 (1983) 3-52; Thera Wijsenbeek-Olthuis, *Achter de gevels van Delft. Bezit en bestaan van rijk en arm in een periode van achteruitgang (1700-1800)* (Hilversum 1987); J.A. Kamermans, *Materiële cultuur in de Krimpenerwaard in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw. Ontwikkeling en diversiteit* (PhD dissertation Wageningen University & Research 1999); P.J. van Cruyningen, *Behoudend maar buigzaam. Boeren in West-Zeeuws-Vlaanderen* (Aardenburg 2000); Hester Dibbits, *Vertrouwd bezit. Materiële cultuur in Doesburg en Maassluis, 1650-1800* (Nijmegen 2001); Harm Tjeerd Nijboer, *De fatsoenering van het bestaan. Consumptie in Leeuwarden tijdens de Gouden Eeuw* (PhD dissertation University of Groningen 2007); Carolien De Staelen, *Spulletjes en hun betekenis in een commerciële metropool. Antwerpenaren en hun materiële cultuur in de zestiende eeuw* (PhD dissertation University of Antwerp 2007); Anne McCants, 'Poor consumers as global consumers. The diffusion of tea and coffee drinking in the eighteenth century', *Economic History Review* 61 (2008) 172-200; Veerle De Laet, *Brussel binnenskamers. Kunst- en luxebezit in het spanningsveld tussen hof en stad, 1600-1735* (Amsterdam 2011); Wouter Ryckbosch, *A consumer revolution under strain. consumption, wealth and status in eighteenth-century Aalst (Southern Netherlands)* (PhD dissertation University of Antwerp/Vrije Universiteit Brussel 2012); Inneke Baatsen, *A bittersweet symphony. The social recipe of dining culture in late Medieval and early modern Bruges (1438-1600)* (PhD dissertation University of Antwerp 2016); Anne McCants, 'Porcelain for the poor. The material culture of tea and coffee consumption in eighteenth-century Amsterdam', in: Paula Findlen (ed.), *Early modern things. Objects and their histories, 1500-1800* (New York 2013) 316-341; Johan Poukens, 'Cultivateurs et commerçants. Huishoudelijke productie, consumptie en de industriële revolutie in het westen van het hertogdom Brabant (1680-1800) (Leuven 2020); Wout Saelens, *The comforts of energy? Consumer culture and energy transition in eighteenth-century Gent and Leiden (1650-1850)* (PhD dissertation University of Antwerp/Vrije Universiteit Brussel 2021); Wout Vande Sompele, *Tussen landbouw en de markt. De rurale middenstand in Doel, 1614-1900* (PhD dissertation University of Antwerp 2021); Julie De Groot, *At home in renaissance Bruges. Connecting objects, people and domestic spaces in a sixteenth-*

a reduction in the Dutch Republic's prosperity in the late seventeenth century is insufficient."<sup>8</sup>

Following Johan Huizinga, who as far back as 1941 wrote that social and economic circumstances could hardly explain the quantitative decline in production and consumption, most historians have returned their gaze to changing tastes while staying clear of the moralizing discourse of their nineteenth-century predecessors.<sup>9</sup> One view has it that paintings were outcompeted in the interior by porcelain, mirrors, hanging textile furnishings, and painted furniture. Because the space and/or budget for adornment was scarce, households ultimately had to choose between an increasing number of options. Given the choice, according to C. Willemijn Fock and John Michael Montias, they opted more and more for alternatives that were more in tune with fashion developments.<sup>10</sup> Bruno Blondé has discerned a similar process of substitution but has instead highlighted the sociocultural agency of consumers, who may or may not have been motivated by social distinction. In this latter scenario, paintings lost their potential for conspicuous consumption by the upper classes after they had become affordable to middling households. Probate inventories from Antwerp seem to support this view, as there the urban elites were first to downsize their painting collections.<sup>11</sup> In Delft, too, the wealthy swapped paintings with new fashions unaffordable to middling households, who held fast to their pictures.<sup>12</sup> A small dataset from 's Hertogenbosch shows a reverse trend, however: while the stock of paintings there decreased

*century city* (Leuven 2022).

8 De Vries, 'Art history', 268; see also: Idem, 'Between purchasing power and the world of goods. Understanding the household economy in early modern Europe', in: J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the world of goods* (New York 1993) 85-132.

9 Johan Huizinga, *Dutch civilisation in the seventeenth century and other essays* (London 1968) 97-104; Bruno Blondé, 'Art and economy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Antwerp. A view from the demand side', in: Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Economica e arte secc. XIII-XVIII: atti della 'Trentatreesima settimana di studi' 30 aprile - 4 maggio* (Prato 2002); Bruno Blondé and Veerle De Laet, 'Owning paintings and changes in consumer preferences in the Low Countries, seventeenth-eighteenth centuries', in: Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping markets for paintings in Europe, 1450-1750* (Turnhout 2006) 69-86; Harm Nijboer, 'Een bloeitijd als crisis. Over Hollandse schilderkunst in de 17de eeuw', *Holland* 42 (2010) 193-205.

10 C. Willemijn Fock, 'Het interieur in de Republiek, 1670-1750. (G)een plaats voor schilderkunst?;', in: Ekkehard Mai, Sander Paarlberg and Gregor J.M. Weber (eds), *De kroon op het werk. Hollandse schilderkunst 1670-1750* (Cologne 2006); J. Michael Montias, 'Works of art competing with other goods in seventeenth-century Dutch inventories', in: De Marchi and Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping markets*, 55-66.

11 Bruno Blondé, 'Art'.

12 Ad van der Woude, 'The volume and value of paintings in Holland at the time of the Dutch Republic', in: Freedberg and De Vries (eds), *Art in history*, 285-329, 289-290.

in middling groups, it continued to increase among the wealthiest households.<sup>13</sup>

These two hypotheses, which alternately ascribe the demise of popular painting consumption to competing products and competing consumers, fit into two broader schools of thought concerning the early modern 'consumer revolution'. This concept revolves around the expanding domestic material culture of broad segments of Northwest European society – an observation that led historians to locate the breakthrough of fashion well before the Industrial Revolution – in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> If we are permitted to be inspired by an outdated method of classifying Netherlandish art, recent historiography on the consumer revolution in the Low Countries can be divided into a 'Dutch' and a 'Flemish' school. Leaning on Smithian economics, the former has pointed to the increasing uniformity of the Dutch material culture across social classes and has placed special emphasis on the expanding array of consumer choices available to a widening group of households.<sup>15</sup> The latter is more critical of capitalist development and has challenged the "integrating rather than differentiating" impact that the consumer revolution is alleged to have had on society.<sup>16</sup> As the social reach of consumer choice expanded, a number of Flemish historians have argued, so did the opportunities for differentiation in terms of quantity, quality, and refinement.<sup>17</sup> The discourse of 'plain' and 'old' paintings, like the increasing practice of framing with gilded coating or ebony wood, is indicative of this pattern, while the subsequent replacement of paintings with other decorative luxuries could have been motivated by the relative inadequacy of these social distinction practices. In most material culture histories of the Northern Netherlands, in contrast, the inner workings of fashion cycles are largely left unexplained.<sup>18</sup>

13 De Laet, 'Schilderijenconsumptie', 49.

14 Michael Kwass, *The consumer revolution, 1650-1800* (Cambridge 2022).

15 See especially the conclusions in: Jan de Vries, *The industrious revolution. Consumer behavior and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (Cambridge 2008); Van Koolbergen, 'De materiële cultuur'; Wijsenbeek-Olthuis, *Achter de gevels*.

16 De Vries, *The industrious revolution*, 40-58.

17 Ryckbosch, *A consumer revolution*; Saelens, *The comforts*; Bruno Blondé et al., 'The Low Countries' paradox. Historical perspectives on inequality and the city', in: Bruno Blondé et al. (eds), *Inequality and the city in the Low Countries (1200-2020)* (Turnhout 2020) 15-42; See also: William H. Sewell Jr., *Capitalism and the emergence of civic equality in eighteenth-century France* (Chicago 2021) 103-119.

18 For an exception, see: Nijboer, 'Een bloeitijd'.

In fact, material culture researchers in general have in their fascination with the rise of novel objects of interior decoration paid scant attention to the ways in which consumer fashions vanished. This article therefore not only seeks to explain why households stopped buying paintings en masse at the eclipse of the Dutch Golden Age, it also contributes to this neglected yet crucial aspect of the consumer revolution. Can existing models explain the declining consumption of paintings? Can we definitively exclude the role of diminished purchasing power? Were paintings outcompeted by new products more attuned to novel tastes, or were these tastes themselves molded by processes of social distinction? Did wealthier households lose interest in artworks after the walls of poorer dwellings were increasingly decorated with them – as the data from Antwerp and Delft seem to suggest – or did their declining popularity unfold in equal speed across social classes? What does the present case study, finally, teach us about the historical emergence of modern fashion cycles?

These questions are answered with a dataset of 402 probate inventories drawn from Amsterdam's notary archives. By including four samples with intervals of 50 years, we have a long-term view that encapsulates the fashion cycle of paintings and a good deal of other products. In addition to real property and other assets, all (groups of) movables were estimated on value. On the object level, these estimates approximate the second-hand value of consumer items and form indirect indicators of their evolving prices. On the aggregate level, they permit calculation of the share of different categories of objects in the 'material culture budget'. Yet they also form the basis of the stratification methodology, which classifies inventoried households based on how this budget relates to the interquartile range of the movable wealth of artisans and shopkeepers, an occupational group that formed a large, inclusive, and stable group at the middle sections of urban society in the early modern Low Countries.<sup>19</sup> With the help of an external tax

19 Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone, and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene (eds), *City and society in the Low Countries, 1100-1600* (Cambridge 2018); Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *Pioneers of capitalism. The Netherlands, 1000-1800* (Princeton 2023); Clé Lesger, 'De wereld als horizon. De economie tussen 1578 en 1650', in: Willem Frijhoff and Maarten Prak (eds), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam, vol. II.1. Centrum van de wereld, 1578-1650* (Amsterdam 2004) 103-187; Idem, 'Vertraagde groei. De economie tussen 1650 en 1730', in: Willem Frijhoff and Maarten Prak (eds), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam, vol. II.2. Zelfbewuste stadstaat* (Amsterdam 2005) 21-87; Idem, 'Stagnatie en stabiliteit. De economie tussen 1730 en 1795', in: Frijhoff and Prak (eds), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam, vol. II.2*, 219-265. The methodology is an adaptation of similar methods previously employed in: De Laet, *Brussel*; Baatsen, *A bittersweet symphony*; Saelens, *The comforts*.

source, the classes are estimated to be representative of comparably sized sections of the wealthiest two thirds of Amsterdam’s household population. Classes B and C cover the upper and lower segments of the broad middle classes, with the former representing the *petite bourgeoisie* and the latter the actual middle sections of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Class A includes regent households, such as the estate of Pieter Trip and Christina de Graef recorded in a 1680 inventory, but also brings into view the material culture of a wider group of mercantile elites. The representation of the upper end of the art market in a random sample of wealthy households can thus be gauged, but the social breadth of the inventories also enables analysis of mass consumption processes. The appendix describes the methodology in further detail.

The second section compares the dataset with other probate studies in the Low Countries, examines the representativeness of Amsterdam for the region, and describes the place of the Dutch metropole in the early modern art sector and consumer revolution. The third section analyzes purchasing power, finding its role lacking. Budget and space constraints also do not seem to have played a significant role, as the fourth section reveals, leaving taste as the remaining explanatory variable. The fifth section investigates the different ways in which social distinction motivations informed changing tastes but finds evidence that the upper middle classes were at the forefront of rendering paintings outmoded. Amsterdam’s consumer revolution, I conclude, was as much a story of flowering diversity as it was characterized by increasing uniformity and persisting inequalities.

## The rise and fall of paintings

In 1977, the Austrian art historian Ernst Gombrich lamented the fact that very little was known about the “domestication” of easel painting. Up to a certain point in European history, commissioning art remained the prerogative of institutions and elite patronage, although its gradual penetration into humble abodes could be gleaned from the increasing portrayal of paintings inside contemporary paintings. The realist tendencies of Netherlandish artists naturally guided the art historian to the Low Countries, where depictions of middle- and lower-class interiors showed ever more artworks hanging on the walls. In his *longue durée* view stretching from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, Gombrich called specific attention to the Dutch Golden Age, where he

saw an unequivocal breakthrough in the domestic display of art. There, oil paintings were not only commonplace, they were also for the first time hung at eyesight and not only higher up the wall. Thus, in Dutch homes of the seventeenth century, “the descent into the living room” was accompanied by “the increasing self-assertion of the painting itself”.<sup>20</sup>

Not long after Gombrich wrote these words, social and economic historians started to develop a keen interest in art history, and in the decades since they have embedded the domestication of paintings into two broader societal developments that transformed the economic forces of production and consumption in the late medieval and early modern North Sea region. Both developments led to the recognition that the roots of the mass market for paintings stretched back to an earlier ‘golden age’ in Antwerp. On the demand side, the widening art market became part of a more extensive expansion in material culture. The origins of this ‘consumer revolution’ were ultimately pushed into pre-industrial times – first to seventeenth-century Holland and then to sixteenth-century Brabant and even fifteenth-century Bruges – although the term was first coined for eighteenth-century Britain by Neil McKendrick in 1982.<sup>21</sup> That same year, Montias started his decades-long research into the Dutch art market with a study of Delft painters.<sup>22</sup> With a focus on the supply side, he pioneered the second development, which attributed the increasing ability to satisfy the growing demand for paintings to a range of product and process innovations that made works of art increasingly affordable.<sup>23</sup> Eric Jan Sluiter subsequently showed that innovations in painting methods and styles, too, harkened back to sixteenth-century Antwerp. This is evident from the paintings that flooded the Dutch market as the signing of the Twelve Years’ Truce approached. The bitter complaints of the Saint Luke guilds in

20 E.H. Gombrich, *The uses of images. Studies in the social function of art and visual communication* (London 1999) 108-135.

21 Neil McKendrick, ‘The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England’, in: Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (eds), *The birth of a consumer society. The commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (Bloomington 1982); Bruno Blondé and Wouter Ryckbosch, ‘In “splendid isolation”’. A comparative perspective on the historiographies of the “material renaissance” and the “consumer revolution”, *History of Retailing and Consumption* 1 (2015) 105-124; Inneke Baatsen, et al., ‘At home in the city. The dynamics of material culture’, in: Blondé, Boone, and Van Bruaene (eds), *City*; Bruno Blondé and Wouter Ryckbosch, ‘Material cultures’, in: C. Scott Dixon and Beat Kümin (eds), *Interpreting early modern Europe* (New York 2020).

22 John Michael Montias, *Artists and artisans in Delft. A socio-economic study of the seventeenth century* (Princeton 1982).

23 John Michael Montias, ‘Cost and value in seventeenth-century Dutch art’, *Art History* 10 (1987) 455-466.



Amsterdam and Haarlem about Brabantine “rags”, “copies”, and “pupil work” is indicative of their transformative impact on the art sector.<sup>24</sup>

Inventories of confiscated goods from the sixteenth century confirm the pioneering role of the Scheldt city. Around half of the households recorded in both a large dataset of 813 Antwerp inventories (1532-1567) and a smaller collection of 64 Amsterdam inventories (1567-1568) contained one or more art objects. Middling professions were well represented in each corpus, suggesting a comparable coverage of urban society, but only in Antwerp had paintings become the dominant domestic art object by mid-century. There, the average number of paintings in art-owning households was already more than 5 in the 1530s, whereas the 35 Amsterdam inventories with art objects three decades later still included a mean of only 1.3 paintings or drawings.<sup>25</sup> Bruges – a city where the local market faced competition from imported Antwerp works in the second half of the century – occupied a middling position, with a mean of 2.2 paintings per household in the period 1559-1574 and 3.4 in 1584-1600.<sup>26</sup>

The massive influx of Southern Netherlandish artworks after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585 transformed first consumption and later production in the Dutch art sector. 60 percent of paintings auctioned off in the period 1597-1619 during sales organized by the Amsterdam Orphan Chamber, which in part targeted the lower segments of the market, were sold at less than fl. 5; 40 percent even went under the hammer at circa fl. 1 or less. This trend continued into the period 1620-1638, when 64.4 percent were sold at less than fl. 5 and 34.4 percent at less than fl. 2. In this second interval, however, the share of pieces attributed to artists from the Northern Netherlands doubled from 30.5 to 63.8 percent, supplanting the dominance of Southern (immigrant) paintings.<sup>27</sup> In spite of initial guild lamentations, Dutch painters thus

24 Eric Jan Sluiter, 'Over Brabantse voddens, economische concurrentie, artistieke wedijver en de groei van de markt voor schilderijen in de eerste decennia van de zeventiende eeuw', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek Online* 50 (1999) 113-144. For an extensive study of Antwerp's sixteenth-century painting industry, see: Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the market. Commercialization of art in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Turnhout 2003).

25 Maximiliaan P.J. Martens and Natasja Peeters, 'Paintings in Antwerp houses (1532-1567)', in: De Marchi and Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping markets*, 35-51; Amsterdam City Archives (hereafter ACA), arch.no. 5028, Archief van Burgemeesters: stukken betreffende verscheidene onderwerpen, inv.no. 549, Annotatiën van de goederen (boedelinventarissen) van fugitiieven en andere vervolgd, 1567-1568. Socially stratified analyses of Antwerp in the second half of the sixteenth century can be found in: Vermeylen, *Painting*; De Staelen, *Spulletjes*.

26 De Groot, *At home*, 139.

27 John Michael Montias, *Art at auction in 17<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 2002) 87-92, 96.

profited after Dutch consumers started emulating the immigrants' habit of furnishing their interiors with paintings. By adopting the product and process innovations of Southern artists and refining them further, supply was able to keep track with the massive growth in demand. The volume of Dutch output soared as a result.<sup>28</sup>

Still, recent research has shown that Amsterdam only overtook Antwerp as the leading regional center of production after 1650. The number of master painters in the Scheldt city had fallen following the events of 1585, but did not drop below that of Amsterdam. It recovered quickly, and in the seventeenth century the number of artists tripled in both cities. Only after Antwerp had reached its summit around 1650 did Amsterdam accommodate more master painters, but their numbers, too, peaked around 1660.<sup>29</sup> Further signs of market integration can be found in the fact that the parallel rise of the two metropolises was flanked by similar increases in the painter populations of other cities in Holland, including Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam, Haarlem, and Delft.<sup>30</sup> Unlike in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the expansion of the Antwerp market had gone hand in glove with a decline of master painters in Bruges, art production in the seventeenth century did not follow the rules of a zero-sum game.<sup>31</sup>

The regional pattern of the seventeenth-century production boom is reflected in the geographic dispersion of consumption growth, which is perhaps the clearest distinction with the previous century. While the geographical spread of the Antwerp boom remained limited, pictures penetrated deeply into the interior of middling households across the Low Countries over the course of the seventeenth century. Larger towns led the way, but many peasants and village dwellers came to own paintings or prints by the end of the century as well.<sup>32</sup> Among the cities,

28 Li, 'Innovative exuberance', 4-8.

29 Harm Nijboer, Judith Brouwer and Marten Jan Bok, 'The paintings industries of Antwerp and Amsterdam, 1500-1700', *Arts* 8:3 (2019) 1-11.

30 Weixuan Li, *Painters' playbooks. Deep mapping socio-spatial strategies in the art market of seventeenth-century Amsterdam* (PhD dissertation University of Amsterdam 2023).20; Piet Bakker, 'Crisis? Welke crisis? Kanttekeningen bij het economisch verval van de schilderkunst in Leiden na 1660', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27 (2011) 232-269, 241.

31 Brecht Dewilde, 'De productie en verkoop van schilderijen in het zestiende-eeuwse Brugge', in: Anne van Oosterwijk (ed.), *Vergeten meesters. Pieter Pourbus en de Brugse schilderkunst van 1525 tot 1625* (Ghent 2017) 19-30, 23.

32 In addition to the cities listed in fig. 1, for the Southern Netherlands: De Laet, *Brussel* [Brussels], 201; Ryckbosch, *A consumer revolution*, 215 [Aalst]; Poukens, 'Cultivateurs', 197 [Leuven, Lier and Brabant villages]; Vande Sompele, *Tussen landbouw*, 183 [Doel]. For the Northern Netherlands, see: Wijzenbeek-Olthuis, *Achter de gevels*, 205-211 [Delft]; John Loughman, 'Een stad en haar

painting consumption in Amsterdam was by no means exceptional, as a cursory comparison with comparable datasets of notarial probate inventories demonstrates (table 1). If anything, it seems that it was less spectacular than in other large towns and that the percentage of households owning paintings decreased the earliest and sharpest in the Dutch metropole. This situation suggests that the processes leading to the decline of the mass market for paintings were most operative in Amsterdam, making it an ideal case study.

**Table 1 Percentage of households owning at least one painting and mean and median number of paintings in databases of probate inventories of several cities, 1630-1780.**

	1630			1680			1730			1780		
	%	x	Me	%	x	Me	%	x	Me	%	x	Me
Amsterdam	69.8	6.8	4	90.1	13.4	10	79.4	10	10	50.5	5.6	1
Antwerp	86.9	17.1	13	98.6	18.5	19	93.3	21.8	17	89.1	14.1	12
Leiden				82.3	23.8	19.5	80.4	15.3	12	69.5	13.2	7
Ghent				79.3	10.3	5	90.9	13.1	8	75.5	10.4	4

Sources: Centre for Urban History (CUH), Unpublished database of Amsterdam probate inventories, 1630-1780 (hereafter Database Amsterdam); Bruno Blondé, Unpublished database of Antwerp probate inventories, 1630-1780; Wout Saelens, Unpublished database of Leiden and Ghent probate inventories, 1630-1830. Notes: 1) Number (n) of inventories from Amsterdam = 402; n Antwerp = 357; n Leiden = 288; n Ghent = 287. 2) Unspecified plural quantities (e.g. *enige schilderijen*) are in all datasets and subsequent analyses counted as their statistical minimum (i.e., two).

The Amsterdam dataset gains in appeal because all household objects were estimated on value. The painting collection of Samuel Godijn – a wealthy merchant from Antwerp who lived on the Keizersgracht and died in 1633 – was evaluated by the master painters Lucas Luce and David Colijns. All other monetary valuations were the work of *gezworen schatsters* (sworn assessors) appointed by the city council, who were

kunstconsumptie. Openbare en privé-verzamelingen in Dordrecht, 1620-1719', in: Peter Marijnissen et al. (eds), *De Zichtbaere Werelt. Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad* (Zwolle 1992) 34-64, 47 [Dordrecht]; Nijboer, *De fatsoenering*, 49-50 [Leeuwarden]; Piet Bakker, *Gezicht op Leeuwarden. Schilders in Friesland en de markt voor schilderijen in de Gouden Eeuw* (PhD dissertation University of Amsterdam 2008) 130-142 [Leeuwarden and Harlingen]; Veerle De Laet, 'Schilderijenconsumptie in de marge van de Republiek. Smaak en voorkeur in het Bossche interieur in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw', *TSEG – The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 3:4 (2006) 37-63, 49 [’s Hertogenbosch]; Dibbits, *Vertrouwd bezit*, 281-286 [Maassluis and Doesburg]; Van Koolbergen, 'De materiële cultuur', 16 [Weesp and Weesperkarspel]; Kamermans, *Materiële cultuur*, 130 [Krimpenerwaard]; Van Cruyningen, *Behoudend*, 335 [West Zeeland Flanders].

contracted by the notaries to estimate the market value of all movable goods of an estate. These (as a rule female) professional appraisers were in the seventeenth century usually recruited from the milieu of the *uitdraagsters*, saleswomen of second-hand goods who were very active at the aforementioned Orphan Chamber auctions and served a key role in the circulation of paintings from higher to lower strata of the population.<sup>33</sup> They were therefore well situated to estimate the value of the 2,477 paintings in the dataset (68.5 percent of the total) which were not assessed together with other inventoried items.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the value distribution in the first sample is strikingly similar to that of the prices at the Orphanage Chamber auctions held in the period 1620-1638 (table 2), boosting my confidence that the inventory values of the other sampled periods, for which there are no comparable auction price data, will resemble the market value of pre-owned paintings as shown in figure 1.

**Table 2 Distribution of painting values in sample 1 (1630-1635) and of painting prices at Amsterdam Orphanage Chamber auctions (1620-1638), in guilders.**

	0-0.5	0.51-1.5	1.51-2.5	2.51-3.5	3.51-4.5	4.51-9.9	10-19.9	20.49.9	50-99.9	100+
Inventories	14.2	16.0	15.4	11.7	6.3	16.0	12.7	5.5	1.0	1.7
Auctions	14.9	19.5	14.9	8.4	6.6	16.3	10.4	6.8	1.6	0.7

Sources: Database Amsterdam; Montias, *Art*, 89.

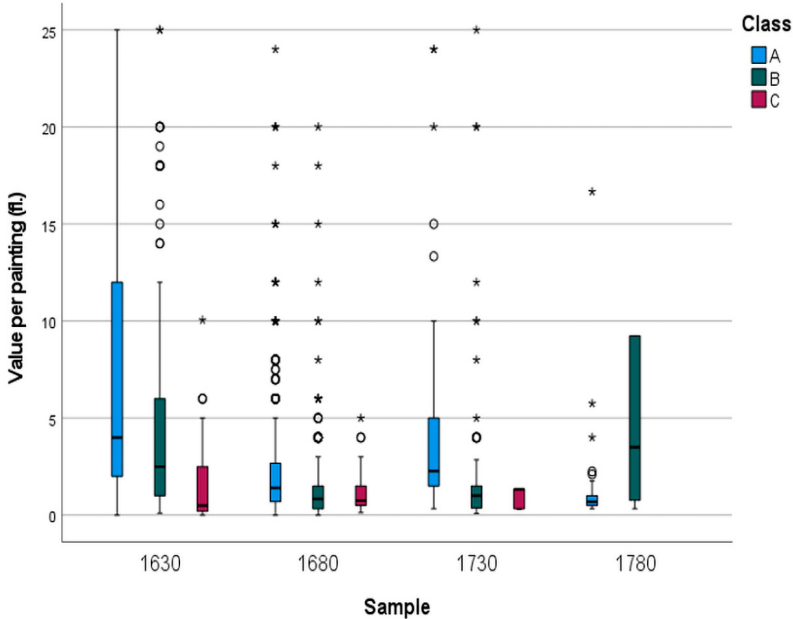
Remarkably, the 25 percent lowest valued paintings in each sampled class remained consistently under fl. 2 throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent such cheap *schilderijen* were in fact paintings rather than prints, but they must have been pictures hung on the wall.<sup>35</sup> Together with the knowledge that a well-oiled second-hand market at which pre-owned ‘paintings’ were resold existed, this finding is powerful evidence that urban

33 Marleen Puyenbroek ‘Vrouwen op de kunstmarkt. Gezworen schatsters’, in: Grijzenhout (ed.), *Kunst*, 59-85; Montias, *Art*, 41-51, 108.

34 This percentage increased with time as paintings became less valuable, but it remained a comfortable majority until the last sample year: 88.7 percent in 1630, 69.7 percent in 1680, 64.8 percent in 1730 and 49.5 percent in 1780. One potential result is an overestimation of the market values of pre-owned paintings at the lower end of the distribution because the works that were not individually assessed were in large part the cheapest.

35 Drawings (*tekeningen*) and printed (*prentbord*) or painted plates (*geschilderde borden*) were not interpreted as paintings, only *schilderijen* and portraits (*portretten* or *konterfeitsels*) were.

**Figure 1** Boxplot showing the distribution around the median of painting values (in guilders), 1630-1780, per class.



Source: Database Amsterdam.

households in the Low Countries not only had access to cheap pictures but purchased them regardless of social status in the first half of the seventeenth century. Art experts indeed celebrated the new and cheap production techniques, although the indigenous tradition of expensive 'fine art' continued unabated.<sup>36</sup> The result was a segmented market in which owning modestly priced paintings and prints was common across the social spectrum, although wealthier households augmented their collections with more valuable art.<sup>37</sup> At the top of the Golden Age consumer pyramid stood art collectors like Godijn, who could afford to own works by some of Europe's most famous painters, including Jan van Eyck, Palma Vecchio, Marten van Cleve, Gortzius Geldorp, Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, Pieter Brueghel de Jonge, Abraham Bloemaert, Joachim Wtewael, Sebastiaen Vrancx, and Guido Reni.

<sup>36</sup> Sluijter, 'Over Brabantse voddén', 121-133.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt's rivals. History paintings in Amsterdam 1630-1650* (Amsterdam 2015); Angela Jager, *The mass market for history paintings in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Production, distribution, and consumption* (Amsterdam 2020); Li, *Painters' playbooks*.

This social distribution is visible in figure 1 in the first sample, where the medians and first and third quartiles all show a clear divergence between the three classes. By 1680, however, the social segmentation had all but disappeared in the distribution around the median, although the outliers show that a small number of quality paintings retained their high values. This trend dovetails with previous research, which has demonstrated how the opportunities for master painters who had profited from the boom in demand started to dry up in the middle of the century. The number of artists in the Dutch Republic peaked around 1660, followed by total output a decade later, and both fell precipitously in subsequent decades.<sup>38</sup> Research by Piet Bakker and Weixuan Li on the end-of-the-century painting sectors in Leiden and Amsterdam has shown that the decrease in master painters was in large part offset by the parallel rise of *kladschilders*, the craftsman painters who painted interior walls, ceilings, hangings, and furniture. In a sense, then, the crisis in the Dutch painting industry can more accurately be described as a transition from art to decoration.<sup>39</sup> The following sections therefore examine the fate of paintings in conjunction with the consumption of other decorative luxuries. By analyzing the evolution of the average number of these decorative goods recorded in the different classes of inventories, this methodology can first and foremost shine a light on the role of purchasing power.

## The role of purchasing power

Marten Jan Bok emerged as the most vocal proponent of writing purchasing power into early modern art history in the last decade of the twentieth century. In his doctoral dissertation, he applied a supply-and-demand analysis to the rise and fall of Dutch art production, in which he took on De Vries's claim that "disposable income [...] could not have accounted for more than a small part of the phenomenon". The economic boom of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries certainly enabled consumers to buy more art, but the magnitude of the explosion in artistic output, coupled with the suddenness of its conclusion, indicated to De Vries that even economic historians must

<sup>38</sup> Li, 'Innovative exuberance', 4-8; Bakker, 'Crisis?', 241; De Vries, 'Art history', 272-274; Claartje Rasterhoff, *Painting and publishing as cultural industries. The fabric of creativity in the Dutch Republic, 1580-1800* (Amsterdam 2017) 246-248.

<sup>39</sup> Bakker, 'Crisis'; Li, *Painters' playbook*, 215-217.

ascribe a dominant role to changing fashions.<sup>40</sup> Bok, on the other hand, challenged nuanced views of Dutch economic performance after the 1648 Treaty of Münster and alleged that the “acute” threat of war precipitated a number of artist estate bankruptcies, including those of Rembrandt van Rijn (First Anglo-Dutch War, 1652-1653), Gerrit Uylenburgh, and Johannes Vermeer’s widow (Franco-Dutch War and Third Anglo-Dutch War, 1672-1674). In the short term, “the wealthy art enthusiast had other things on his mind” after 1672, according to Bok, while the subsequent protracted period of war and economic malaise led “broad layers of the population to lose so much of their purchasing power that the mass market for paintings disappeared”.<sup>41</sup>

The crisis in the painting industry indeed unfolded in the context of chronic warfare, which lasted from the Orangist Restoration (1672) to the Peace of Utrecht (1713). Earlier, the Eighty Years’ War had failed to rein in the depletion of artistic creativity behind both sides of the frontier, however, and signs of market saturation following the resumption of hostilities in 1621 – in the form of a reduced expansion in the number of master painters in Antwerp and Amsterdam, as well as a brief standstill of the growth rate in overall Dutch output – likewise did not prevent a second round of rapid growth in painting production in the middle two decades of the century.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, real wages in Holland showed remarkable stability for all but the last decades of the Dutch Republic’s lifespan, as the stabilization of consumer price inflation after 1672 absorbed much of the negative impact on purchasing power caused by Amsterdam’s stagnating wages.<sup>43</sup> Holland’s gross domestic product per capita, meanwhile, continued its pattern of gradual growth due to stagnating population levels.<sup>44</sup> Amsterdam’s population kept increasing until the 1730s, but the metropolitan economy kept growing, too, albeit at a slower pace than before.<sup>45</sup>

40 De Vries, ‘Art history’, 265-70.

41 Bok, ‘Vraag’, 120-130; Idem, ‘The rise’, 204-209. For a similar emphasis on the relationship between purchasing power, conflict, and luxury production in early modern Antwerp, see: Alfons K.L. Thijs, ‘De Antwerpse luxenijverheid. Winstbejag en kunstzin’, in: Jan Van der Stock (ed.), *Antwerpen: Verhaal van een metropool* (Ghent 1993) 105-113.

42 Nijboer, Brouwer and Bok, ‘The painting industries’, 5; Li, ‘Innovative exuberance’, 4.

43 Jan Luiten van Zanden, ‘What happened to the standard of living before the Industrial Revolution? New evidence from the western part of the Netherlands’, in: Robert C. Allen, Tommy Bengtsson, and Martin Dribe (eds), *Living standards in the past. New perspectives on well-being in Asia and Europe* (Oxford 2005) 173-224.

44 Jan Luiten van Zanden and Bas van Leeuwen, ‘Persistent but not consistent. The growth of national income in Holland 1347-1807’, *Explorations in Economic History* 49 (2012) 119-130.

45 Lesger, ‘Vertraagde groei’.

Material culture studies – a field that was only emerging in the 1990s – offer further proof of the continued ability of middling households to sustain expenditures on decorative goods in periods of economic stagnation and even recession.<sup>46</sup> In 1993, De Vries already drew attention to the discrepancy between stagnant real wages and the expansion of decorative objects in towns as well as on the countryside.<sup>47</sup> In the most recent overview of the consumer revolution, built on the edifice of three additional decades of research, Michael Kwass locates the core period of the phenomenon between 1650 and 1800, precisely when the demand for paintings receded in the Low Countries.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the material culture in other localities expanded in spite of depressed living standards in this period (e.g., in Aalst, Antwerp, and Delft), the effects of the consumer revolution in Amsterdam were amplified by sustained increases in the material prosperity of middling households, because the total value of movables in the inventories of artisans and shopkeepers grew substantially between 1680 and 1730, and was still on a higher level than the seventeenth century in 1780 (appendix, table 6).

In terms of quantities, table 3 confirms that the decades of faltering painting consumption were marked by the growth of consumption writ large, as the amount of ‘stuff’ elite and middling households accumulated increased dramatically between 1680 and 1730. The series of wars against Louis XIV which followed in the decades after the Sun King’s invasion of 1672 did little to curtail the appetite for and ability to indulge in new fashions emanating from Paris, while the collections of porcelain from China and elsewhere started to take on mind-boggling proportions. The demise of the painting stands in stark contrast to the diffusion of decorative goods typical of the eighteenth century, such as mirrors, hanging textiles, and painted furniture. Even the average pieces of silverware, which due to its high intrinsic value could not easily be acquired in a second-hand bargain, increased in all three classes between the second and third samples. Purchasing power therefore does not seem to have been at issue in the declining popularity of paintings in Amsterdam – not even for the lower middle orders, which recorded some of the most remarkable growth rates in the consumption of new decorative luxuries. De Vries, Blondé, and other historians were therefore right to put forward changing tastes as

46 See footnote 7.

47 De Vries, ‘Between purchasing power’.

48 Kwass, *The consumer revolution*.



the dominant variable. The remainder of this article investigates who or what instigated shifting fashions.

**Table 3 Average number of inventoried household goods and of a selection of decorative object categories, 1630-1780, per class.**

	1630	1680	1730	1780	1630	1680	1730	1780	1630	1680	1730	1780
	CLASS A				CLASS B				CLASS C			
Paintings	10.9	24.9	14.6	11.8	7.5	12.4	9.2	3.4	2.2	5.2	3.6	1.5
Mirrors	2.5	3.8	6.3	5.1	1.3	1.9	2.6	3.0	0.5	1.0	1.2	2.8
Porcelain	23.9	46.7	297.0	120.5	7.2	19.4	49.1	54.3	0.5	5.8	15.3	24.8
Hanging textiles	0.6	0.9	1.6	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.1
Painted furniture	4.3	6.3	6.1	19.3	2.3	2.3	1.5	6.3	0.4	0.8	0.4	2.5
Silverware	25.1	34.0	69.4	67.3	6.2	13.5	17.5	19.5	3.1	1.7	4.2	11.1
Total	811.9	876.2	2284.3	1651.2	440.0	439.7	843.6	667.9	131.8	161.4	247.3	398.7

Sources: Database Amsterdam.

## No budget? No room?

We start with the 'what' question. The resilience of decorative spending shown in table 3 should not automatically lead to the conclusion that money did not matter. Even if the material culture budget increased in the decades straddling the turn of the century, it was by definition not unlimited. On the basis of a small sample of 32 notary probate records from seventeenth-century Amsterdam, Montias has speculated that paintings competed with other decorative luxuries because the value of silverware, linens, and porcelain showed a negative – though weak and statistically insignificant – correlation with the value of paintings.<sup>49</sup> Spending on new items of interior decoration might thus have crowded out the budget for painting purchases. The same methodology can be employed to test a different variant of the same hypothesis, which shifts attention from the scarcity of budget to the scarcity of space. The combined effects of the art production boom and consumer revolution could have saturated the demand for goods destined for

49 Montias, 'Works of art competing', 62-63.



*Illustration 1 Dollhouse of Petronella Oortman, ca. 1686-1710, 255x190x78cm. In this famous dollhouse from turn-of-the-century Amsterdam, paintings have for the most part made room for new decorative fashions. (source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.250587>).*

interior decoration in prosperous cities such as Amsterdam. A negative correlation between the quantity of paintings and the quantity of other categories of decoration would indicate a divergence between households that substituted their stock of paintings with other adornments and those that held on tight to their art collections. The stagnation and decline in the total and some of the specific categories of movables in classes A and B in the eighteenth century (table 3) lend credence to Fock's hypothesis that there was "no room" left on the walls of burgher homes in Holland after painting output had reached its peak around 1670.<sup>50</sup> Budget and/or space constraints, in short, could have sped up the fashion cycle by forcing consumers to choose between competing decorative furnishings.

<sup>50</sup> Fock, 'Het interieur'.

There are a few methodological caveats surrounding this exercise. Probate inventories generally listed only movable objects. Therefore, the presence of fixed elements, such as stucco, wallpaper, and mural paintings, are rarely if ever recorded. Fortunately for our purposes, tapestries, and gilded leather were seldom attached completely to the wall before 1700, and although panelling was more common with painted textile hangings, the (near) doubling of recorded *tapijten* (from 15 to 27) and *behangsels* (from 28 to 62) in the database between 1680 and 1730 is reassuring, especially because contemporary art critics were unanimous in decrying the new French fashion of painted hangings as the closest competitor to the painting industry.<sup>51</sup> The absence of wallpaper is less important because it came into fashion only later in the eighteenth century, parallel to the acceleration in painting and coating furniture.<sup>52</sup> Architectural transformations of the interior are another shortcoming. Heidi Deneweth has highlighted a shift of elite expenditures from the housing to the renovation market after 1670 in houses on the Rapenburg, the Leiden equivalent of Amsterdam's prestigious Canal Ring, although it is somewhat comforting that the uptick in renovation projects there started in earnest only after 1700.<sup>53</sup> Not all manifestations of eighteenth-century household decoration are covered, in short, but most caveats are highly biased toward the upper segment of the market and thus less relevant to our broad social focus.

Although we need to proceed with caution, the strength and consistency of the results are significant. The fashion cycle comes to life in the average shares of the material culture budget: the substitution of mirrors, porcelain, and hanging textiles for paintings is clearly discernible in table 4. Interestingly, most of the growth in painted and coated furniture was concentrated in the second half of the eighteenth century, long after the crisis in demand for new paintings had left many master painters unemployed. Together, the average worth of the five decorative luxuries at no point exceeded that of silverware, although the elevated aggregate percentage points in 1680 and 1730 show that the

51 C. Willemijn Fock, Titus Maria Eliëns, and Eloy Koldewei, *Het Nederlandse interieur in beeld 1600-1900* (Zwolle 2001) 101; De Vries, *Diamante gedenkzuilen*, 91, 190.

52 Fock, Eliëns, and Koldewei, *Het Nederlandse interieur*, 272; J.H.P. Heesters, *Vier eeuwen behang. De geschiedenis van de wandbespanning in Nederland* (Delft 1988) 63-90; Hans Piena, *Kleurrijk Nederland. Beschilderd meubilair 1600-1900* (PhD dissertation University of Leiden 2020).

53 Heidi Deneweth, 'Renovating early modern Leiden. New perspectives on the building trades,' in: Ine Wouters et al. (eds), *Building knowledge, constructing histories, Volume I: Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Construction History (6ICCH 2018), July 9-13, 2018, Brussels, Belgium* (Boca Raton 2018) 537-545.

increased quantities of decorative luxuries recorded in the inventories in this period (table 3) was at least partly a result of larger allocations of the material culture budget to interior decoration spending. Supply-side research on the occupational structure of Amsterdam confirms this trend, for the number of people employed in the art and luxury industries increased in this period.<sup>54</sup>

New decorative fashions might have crowded out the budget for paintings, as indicated by the fact that the weight of the four alternative decorative categories in the material culture budget increased substantially from 1630 to 1680 while that of paintings stagnated. As importantly, mirrors, porcelain, and hanging textiles climbed further in the next 50 years while the value share of paintings more than halved. Yet the findings of Montias are not replicated in our larger and less biased samples. In fact, as the second measurement of table 4 reveals, the complementarity of paintings with mirrors, porcelain, hanging textiles, and painted furniture in the first three samples, which cover the period in which paintings were still a commonplace in the Dutch interior, are all statistically significant at the 99 percent level. With quotas between 0.30 and 0.69, the degrees of correlation are moreover relatively strong. In the seventeenth century, especially, the correlation coefficient is higher than 0.60 in all computations, with the exception of porcelain in 1630 (0.48). Even in 1730, though, the strength of association is still moderately positive, with coefficients ranging from 0.30 to 0.56. This result means that valuable art collections often went hand in glove with prodigious consumption of other luxuries. As the relatively low levels of correlation between paintings and silverware show, however, some households did not follow the trend of accumulating fashionable decorative goods, opting instead for prudent investment in liquid durables.

Trendsetters of new decorative fashions, in short, generally did not need to stop purchasing valuable art, let alone sell their more expensive paintings, to free up money in order to afford their expanding assortments of other decorative luxuries. This result increases the probability of the second variant of the hypothesis, because the apparent lack of constraints on decorative spending could and did lead to ever more accumulation. At some point, we might presume, the walls and, by extension, the living quarters as a whole were fully decorated, causing older decorative luxuries like paintings to be actively forced

<sup>54</sup> Lesger, 'Vertraagde groei', 68.

**Table 4 Measurements (from top to bottom): 1) Average share of the total value of movables, 2) Pearson's correlation coefficient of the value of paintings and the value of a selected number of decorative categories, and 3) Pearson's correlation coefficient of the quantity of paintings and the quantity of a selected number of decorative categories. Per sample and cross-sample total.**

Sample	Category	Paintings	Mirrors	Porcelain	Hanging textiles	Painted furniture	Total	Silverware
1630	Avg % of tot. value	2.76	0.40	1.22	1.71	0.59	4.38	9.35
	r of value	/	0.67**	0.48**	0.62**	0.69**	/	0.39**
	r of quantity	/	0.70**	0.28**	0.59**	0.34**	/	0.49**
1680	Avg % of tot. value	3.20	1.31	2.65	2.44	1.02	7.16	8.88
	r of value	/	0.68**	0.69**	0.61**	0.68**	/	0.56**
	r of quantity	/	0.57**	0.38**	0.61**	0.46**	/	0.25*
1730	Avg % of tot. value	1.46	2.09	3.29	2.65	0.70	6.84	10.96
	r of value	/	0.50**	0.30**	0.46**	0.56**	/	0.34**
	r of quantity	/	0.40**	0.00	0.32**	0.46**	/	0.28**
1780	Avg % of tot. value	0.60	1.66	2.15	5.37	2.55	4.41	11.67
	r of value	/	0.17	0.05	0.09	0.04	/	-0.04
	r of quantity	/	0.16	0.13	0.15	0.16	/	0.02
All	Avg % of tot. value	2.05	1.4	2.34	3.07	1.23	5.79	10.23
	r of value	/	0.31**	0.33**	0.33**	0.21**	/	0.17**
	r of quantity	/	0.29**	0.05	0.28**	0.17**	/	0.13*

Notes: 1) \*\* p< 0.01 (two-tailed), \* p<0.05 (two-tailed); 2) Samuel Godijn's inventory, which in terms of painting collection value was a strong outlier, was excluded from the first and second measurement.

Source: *Database Amsterdam*.

out of the interior to make room for novel ones. My research of the real estate tax reform carried out in the early 1730s, used in this paper for estimating the representativeness of the dataset, drives home the point that space was scarce. At the end of Amsterdam's urban sprawl, this source suggests that only slightly more than half of households lived in a single-family house.<sup>55</sup> Many of the poor inhabitants but certainly also a substantial share of middle-class households lived in

55 Of the 35,496 housing units recorded in the source, 54.0 percent were houses, 25.8 percent rooms, and 12.4 percent basements.

back annexes, basements, and one-room apartments. In the database of notary probates, the median number of rooms in inventories that contained spatial information was nine among the mercantile elites (n=104), five in the upper middle class (n=109), and three in the lower middling group (n=46). The fact that less than half of class C inventories indicate the number of rooms suggests that many of the lower middle-class households probably lived in a one-room home. All of this offers tantalizing hints that space constraints contributed to the reduced demand for paintings, as Fock has argued.<sup>56</sup>

The proposition does not stand up to empirical scrutiny, however. The third measurement in table 4 tests the correlation between the number of inventoried paintings and the number of objects contained in each of the other examined categories. A negative result signals that households either had many paintings or many goods of the alternative category, while a positive result instead adds to the hypothesis of multifaceted decorative consumption. We find no evidence of space constraints during the downfall of the painting industry. Quite the opposite: all but one (porcelain, 1730) of the correlations with the four other categories in the first three samples are again statistically significant at the 99 percent level. The strength of association is again moderate to strong, with the coefficients of correlations between 0.28 and 0.70. Households that displayed a lot of one decorative luxury were in other words likely to also display a lot of goods from other categories as well. Having disproven a role for diminished purchasing power, budget constraints, and space saturation, it is now time to look at consumer agency.

## Snobs and bandwagons?

In 1750, the cattle and landscape painter Johan van Gool published *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen* (The new show hall of Netherlandish artists), the latest in a genre of national artist biographies that stretched back to Karel van Mander's 1604 *Schilder-boeck*. Even more than the nefarious influence of novel fashions, Van Gool ascribed the scarcity of job opportunities for master painters in eighteenth-century Holland to the popularity of seventeenth-century old masters.<sup>57</sup> Although the *kunstkopers* (art buyers) from his own day were scapegoated as *kunstslopers* (art demolishers), the share

<sup>56</sup> Fock, 'Het interieur'.

<sup>57</sup> De Vries, *Diamante gedenkzuilen*, 92-101.

of works by contemporary artists in wealthy Amsterdam inventories in reality had started to decline as early as 1630, dipped below 50 percent after 1660, and dropped to less than 20 percent in the last two decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>58</sup> This decline has led some scholars to describe the mid-century output explosion in terms of a boom, set in motion by positive feedback loops between a consumer frenzy and misplaced producer expectations, which inevitably went bust when the artificially inflated artist community failed to entice consumers to replace their current stock of paintings.<sup>59</sup> Harm Nijboer has even likened the “painting craze” to the tulip mania that bewitched the Dutch in the mid-thirties.<sup>60</sup> Such a comparison alerts us to the role of consumer dynamics, which are investigated in this section.

Van Gool’s complaints echo the guild protests from the first decade of the seventeenth century, when a similar glut caused by the inflow of Antwerp paintings proved to be a boon rather than an impediment to the Dutch painting industry. Overproduction was thus certainly not a sufficient cause of decline, although it might have contributed to the abruptness of the collapse. In time, the preference of older paintings appears to have changed from a mere aversion to substitute pieces already in possession toward an active revaluation of paintings by old masters.<sup>61</sup> Van Gool was perhaps not far off in dating the start of this trend around 1720, because the values of paintings in class A inventories had risen again by 1730 – albeit modestly – from its low point in 1680 (figure 1). In conjunction with this trend emerged a specialized auction market, which became the dominant place where revalorized pre-owned paintings changed hands in the eighteenth-century Low Countries.<sup>62</sup> In the process ‘proper works of art’ were separated from the ‘plain’ and ‘old’ paintings introduced in the opening paragraph of this article. The latter were perhaps never more than goods of interior decoration, and they thus often did not survive the creative destruction of the fashion cycle. Indeed, even though new works were still produced, Ad van der Woude has estimated that the number of paintings hanging on the walls of Holland homes fell from three to one million in the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>63</sup> While

58 Montias, ‘Works of art’, 363.

59 Bok, ‘Vraag’, 124-127; Li, ‘Innovative exuberance’, 8-17.

60 Nijboer, ‘Een bloeitijd’.

61 Bruno Blondé and Dries Lyna, ‘Neophilia and old master paintings. Changes in consumer choice and the evolution of art auctions in the eighteenth century’, *Continuity and Change* 31 (2016) 361-389.

62 Grijzenhout (ed.), *Kunst*; Blondé and Lyna, ‘Neophilia’.

63 Van der Woude, ‘The volume’, 314.



*Illustration 2 Simon Fokke, Auction of the art collection of the deceased Leiden burgomaster Johan Aegidiusz. van der Marck at the courtyard of the Oudezijds Herenlogement in Amsterdam, etching, 1773. A comparatively small number of pre-owned quality paintings were revalorised at these kind of high-end auction sales.*

*(source: Amsterdam City Archives, Amsterdam. Collection drawings and prints, 010097010815.)*

ordinary paintings were thus lost to history through wear and tear – or thrown away – a small number of seventeenth-century paintings were catapulted to the highly acclaimed status that they still enjoy today. The reappraisal of old master paintings dovetails with previous research, in which we have shown that the allure of the antique – in the form of ‘old porcelain’, for instance – could make outmoded luxuries fashionable again.<sup>64</sup>

64 Bruno Blondé, Jeroen Kole, and Bas Splet, ‘Between aesthetics and a culture of decency. A comparative analysis of the vocabularies of consumption on the secondary markets of eighteenth-century Amsterdam and Antwerp’, *History of Retailing and Consumption* 9 (2023) 141-163.





*Illustration 3* Isaac Ouwater, *The Sint-Anthoniuswaag in Amsterdam*, oil on canvas, ca. 1780-1790. In the poor neighbourhood of the Nieuwmarkt, in contrast, street vendors tried to sell 'plain' and 'old' paintings in a completely different marketplace. (source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.6756>).

If this process of product differentiation was informed by motives of social distinction, we might expect it to follow a model first outlined by Georg Simmel. In his 1905 essay "Fashion", the German sociologist theorized about the fashion cycle as follows: "The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode". In economic jargon, the emulation phase is sometimes described as the "bandwagon effect" and the abandonment phase as the "snob effect".<sup>65</sup> The outmoding of a consumer product is often assumed to be initiated by elites in sociological and economic theories of fashion cycles, but toward the end of his essay, Simmel also recognized the potential agency of the progressive middle classes, who in modernizing

65 Harvey Liebenstein, 'Bandwagon, snob, and Veblen effects in the theory of consumers' demand', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 64 (1950) 183-207.

societies demand constant change and “find in fashion something that keeps pace with their own soul-movements.”<sup>66</sup> The more empirical research has supplanted theory in recent decades, the more material culture historians have become convinced that consumer motivations in the Age of Enlightenment could no longer be reduced to medieval models of emulation and distinction. During the consumer revolution, according to Kwass, “modern” forms of consumption revolving around new and complex sets of middle-class values increasingly replaced “courtly” forms aimed simply at reaffirming social rank.<sup>67</sup>

A thorough understanding of the relationship between affluence and consumption is needed to examine if the marginalization of paintings in the interior and the subsequent revaluation of the old masters followed social distinction processes. Montias has already provided calculations of the wealth elasticities of demand for seventeenth-century Delft (1.23) and Amsterdam (1.37).<sup>68</sup> These computations were derived from a logarithmic regression that measures how the value of the painting collection (dependent variable) is impacted by the value of all other movables (independent variable). Elasticity in this case estimates the percentage with which the value of the painting collection in the average household is augmented with each percent increase of the material culture budget. When the number is above one, as was the case in Montias’s two calculations, elasticity is above unity, which means that the demand for paintings increased disproportionate to wealth. Montias’s estimates inspired a generation of historians, but they can be improved on a number of points. First, his Delft and Amsterdam samples were not randomly selected and thus even more biased toward wealthy collectors than other datasets of probate inventories; they are therefore only relevant to the upper segment of the art market.<sup>69</sup> Second, wealth elasticity is different from income elasticity, which, as Bok has pointed out, is more closely related to the purchasing of – and *a fortiori* the demand for – paintings.<sup>70</sup> Third,

66 Georg Simmel, ‘Fashion’, *The American Journal of Sociology* 62 (1957) 541-558. This is an English translation of: Georg Simmel, ‘Philosophie der Mode’, *Moderne Zeitfragen* 11 (1905) 5-41.

67 Kwass, *The consumer revolution*, 99-132; Idem, ‘Big hair: A wig history of consumption in eighteenth-century France’, *The American Historical Review* 111 (2006) 631-659.

68 Delft: Montias, *Artists*, 266 (n=461,  $r^2=0.55$ ); Amsterdam: Montias, ‘Works of art competing’, 60 (n=59,  $r^2=0.69$ ).

69 For Montias’s heuristic methods, see: Montias, *Artists*, 220-224; John Michael Montias, ‘Works of art in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. An analysis of subjects and attributions’, in: Freedberg and De Vries (eds), *Art in history*, 331-372, 332-334.

70 Bok, ‘Vraag’, 123.

the aggregate value of movable goods is not an ideal proxy for wealth because it excludes other assets, such as real estate, occupational goods, and capital investments.<sup>71</sup> My Amsterdam dataset rectifies these issues to the extent possible through its stratified sampling, the use of rental values as a proxy for income, and the inclusion of gross wealth calculations of the inventoried estates.<sup>72</sup>

The improved calculations show wealth (0.32) and even income elasticity (0.62) to be far below unity – even if, in analogy with Montias's methodology, inventories without paintings are discounted. The low values of the determination coefficients (0.14 and 0.19), moreover, indicate that wealth and income explain less than twenty percent of the variation in the value of painting collections. However, if we restrict the independent variable to the value of inventoried movable goods, as Montias had done, the elasticity of paintings across the entire period more than doubles, from 0.32 to 0.71. The discrepancy between the two proxies for wealth suggests that they in fact measure two different things. While the association with gross wealth was clearly weak, the relation with material wealth was much stronger. The level of spending on an elastic product in this latter measurement is determined by the wealth on display in the home environment and thus closely tied to the ability and willingness to engage in conspicuous consumption, that is, the consumption of expensive luxuries as a show of wealth.

Table 5 demonstrates that the material wealth elasticity of paintings was in 1630 above unity (1.09) and in 1680 only slightly below unity (0.90); in both seventeenth-century samples of painting owners spread across the mass market for art, material wealth predicted more than 40 percent of the variation in painting stocks. On the other hand, after the turn of the century, as painting consumption fell, the relation grew much weaker in inventories with one or more paintings. This proportion means that for affluent households, quality paintings gradually lost their potential function of conspicuous consumption. A juxtaposition to the evolving material wealth elasticities of other decorative luxuries suggests that – even before the price collapse of quality paintings in the middle decades of seventeenth century – porcelain, hanging textiles, and silverware already held a higher potential for conspicuous consumption, while mirrors and painted furniture did so after the turn of the century. The overall trend was downward, moreover, which might have amplified

71 Montias, 'Works of art competing', 58.

72 See appendix for more background information on the sources and methodologies behind the computations of income and wealth elasticity.

the search for items of conspicuous consumption among the elites. In all six categories of decorative goods, indeed, the largest quantities in class A households (table 3) were recorded one or two samples after material wealth elasticity had attained its highest level, implying that the potential for social distinction did inform elite consumer behavior.

**Table 5 Material wealth elasticity of paintings and other categories of decorative goods, per sample and cross-sample total.**

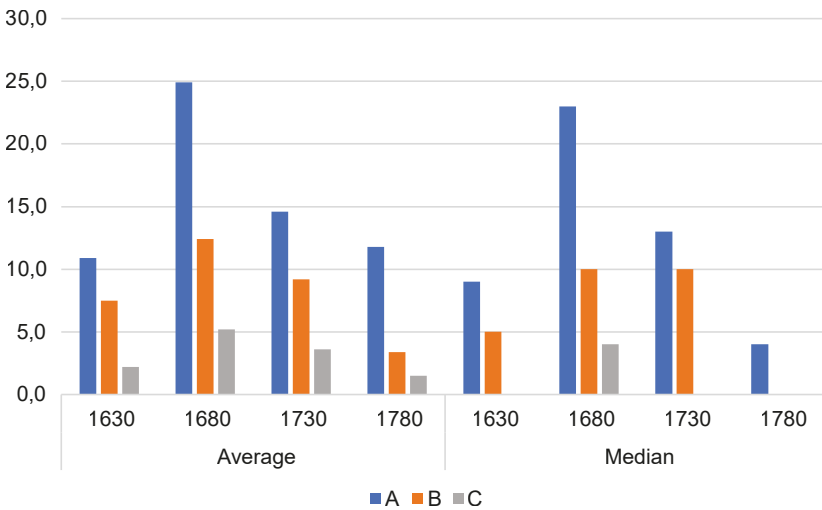
	1630		1680		1730		1780		All	
	$\beta$	$r^2$	$\beta$	$r^2$	$\beta$	$r^2$	$\beta$	$r^2$	$\beta$	$r^2$
Paintings	1.05	0.44	0.90	0.41	0.72	0.35	0.56	0.22	0.71	0.28
Mirrors	0.82	0.42	0.90	0.51	0.87	0.62	0.79	0.53	0.92	0.53
Porcelain	1.21	0.44	1.14	0.38	0.78	0.33	0.89	0.48	0.95	0.39
Hanging textiles	1.24	0.57	1.10	0.54	0.76	0.57	0.62	0.39	0.97	0.52
Painted furniture	0.62	0.20	0.72	0.28	0.76	0.38	0.52	0.19	0.64	0.25
Silverware	1.34	0.44	1.02	0.31	1.30	0.63	1.06	0.61	1.19	0.50

Notes: 1) All logarithmic regressions are statistically significant at the 99 percent level; 2)  $\beta$  = regression coefficient,  $r^2$  = determination coefficient.

If conspicuous consumption guided the rise of decorative fashions, though, did it also cause their fall? If the decline of painting consumption followed Simmel's model, we would expect the elites to have spearheaded the process of "abandonment". Unlike in Antwerp and Delft, however, the snob effect is not clearly discernible in the Amsterdam dataset. As figure 2 shows, average painting quantities rose and fell in comparable speed across the three classes. Class A did record the biggest relative decrease between 1680 and 1730, but the pace of that decline subsequently slowed down. By 1780, the average number of paintings in elite homes therefore only halved, while the two middle-class means fell to less than a third from their high point in 1680. A comparison with the median numbers unveils subtle developments in the consumer behavior of the upper middle-class group in the century of declining painting consumption. The collection size in the quintessential bourgeois home remained stable at ten paintings between the second and third sample, but it subsequently dropped all the way to zero between the third and fourth sample. Behind the initial stability of the median, in other words, the balance of atypical outliers among affluent burghers influencing the mean shifted from

art enthusiasts with an exceptionally large stock of paintings in 1680, to trendsetters of novel interior design developments who had relinquished most of their paintings in 1730. By 1780, most middle-class homes had followed these trendsetters and rid their interior entirely of paintings.

**Figure 2 Average and median number of paintings per household, 1630-1780, per class.**



Source: Database Amsterdam.

It is of course possible that the revaluation of the old masters moderated the declining number of paintings in the upper-class inventories. Amsterdam not only served as an important center of art dealership in the eighteenth century, after all; it is also estimated to have housed by far the most art collectors in Holland.<sup>73</sup> To jump on the bandwagon of this new trend, you needed the wealth of a class A household, for the average painting at the specialized Dutch auction market already went under the hammer at fl. 174 in the 1760s. It had soared to that height from the middle two decades of the century, when one piece switched hands at the more modest average of fl. 75.<sup>74</sup> Even then, that latter sum was equal to the value at which the two priciest paintings recorded in

<sup>73</sup> Frans Grijzenhout, 'Kopers op de veilingmarkt. Collectioneers, kenners, liefhebbers', in: Grijzenhout (ed.), *Kunst*, 173-205, 176-189.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

the two eighteenth-century samples of the database were valued – not alone, but together. These were two seascapes in the possession of the painter Adriaan Alewijn, whose inventory was classified in the upper middle class. Alewijn, who was probably a *kladschilder* rather than a master painter, owned the most valuable collection of paintings in the 1730 sample, at fl. 222.<sup>75</sup> In 1780, the priciest stock of paintings was likewise in the possession of a class B household, at fl. 209, as were the third (fl. 50) and fourth (fl. 46.5) most valuable ones. This situation explains why in figure 1, the median painting in class B was much higher than in class A in the last sample. In terms of numbers, too, no less than 10 of the 25 largest eighteenth-century collections were found in upper middle-class inventories.

This brief examination of the best pieces recorded in the last two samples qualifies the low material wealth elasticities of paintings in the eighteenth century. The relation between income or wealth and the consumption of quality paintings had already been low when they were still fashionable items of interior decoration, but when other decorative luxuries overtook their potential for conspicuous consumption in the eighteenth century, they also lost their utility as symbols of affluence. Yet this loss did not result in a faster relinquishment of paintings in the wealthiest households. And although only these households possessed the purchasing power to buy the works of old masters, the absence of art collectors in the database after Godijn reveals the marginal occurrence of the phenomenon. Upper middle-class burghers lacked the capital to become true art collectors, on the other hand, but they nevertheless owned some of the more expensive artworks, although these were almost never attributed. On the whole, however, bourgeois consumers spearheaded the elimination of paintings from Amsterdam interiors, which demonstrates the dynamic role of middling groups in the consumer revolution, not only in the rise of new fashions but also in the replacement of old ones.

The complexities of the fashion cycle of paintings, in short, cannot be reduced to simplistic models of emulation and distinction, because bandwagons and snobs were not easily ranked according to wealth. Consumer motivations in the Age of Enlightenment appear to have

75 His name yielded no results in the database of the Netherlands Institute of Art History (<https://research.rkd.nl/nl>), but he is mentioned in a book on the building and renovation history of the Oude Kerk as the person who covered over a new mantelpiece made by the sculptor Hendrik Knoop with marble coating in 1716. See: Herman Janse, *De Oude Kerk te Amsterdam. Bouwgeschiedenis en restauratie* (Zwolle 2004) 264, 428.

been marked by the diversity of genuine interests at least as much as the desire for social distinction. In the year 1780, no art collector seems to have left a probate inventory in Amsterdam, but the last sample does include five owners of musical instruments and two amateur scientists, both of whom were of middling background.<sup>76</sup> Other affluent households certainly did indulge in conspicuous consumption in an attempt to highlight the tightening social boundaries of the eighteenth century, just like others abstained from it for motives of economic prudence, republican frugality, or Calvinist abstinence. However, most middling and elite burghers developed consumer preferences that were more in tune with the “soul-movements” of globalization, imperialism, and industrialization – forces that would only become more paramount in the nineteenth century. In that sense, we can employ the terminology of both Simmel and Kwass – the first and latest theoretician of fashion cycles – in concluding that the cosmopolitan consumer society of Amsterdam was both progressive and modern.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

Why did paintings go out of fashion? Purchasing power can quite conclusively be excluded, and with it, supply-side explanations. Many Dutch households in the century following peak consumption in 1680 could afford artworks as well as an array of additional decorative goods, both of which were available in abundance. Huizinga was correct in his statement that “the country was richer than ever” at the end of the seventeenth century. The addendum that “the demand for painting was as great as before”, however, seems less accurate, at least as far as paintings as distinct objects of art or decoration were concerned.<sup>78</sup> My findings conform to the conclusions of previous researchers who have placed changing fashions center stage, although the two most common demand-side hypotheses were found wanting. Paintings were neither crowded out of the interior (budget) by the emergence of newly fashionable decorative luxuries, nor were they rendered outmoded because they had lost their potential for social distinction by virtue

76 Lotte Kemps and Bas Spliet, ‘Domesticating human capital. The material culture of knowledge in early modern Amsterdam’, *Early Modern Low Countries* 8 (2024) 25-50. See also: Frans Grijzenhout, ‘Epiloog’, in: Grijzenhout (ed.), *Kunst*, 298-301; Fanslau, ‘Wohl’, 185.

77 Kwass, *The consumer revolution*, 32-45; Simmel, ‘Fashion’, 555-556.

78 Huizinga, *Dutch civilisation*, 99.

of their omnipresence in burgher homes. The observation that upper middle-class households were as (un)likely to emulate the emerging phenomenon of old master collecting demonstrates that there was, in the eighteenth as in the seventeenth century, no one-to-one relation between affluence and the demand for paintings.

The checkered consumer profiles that have instead emerged from my analysis of interior adornment developments are of broader relevance to the research field surrounding the early modern consumer revolution. Conspicuous consumption might have switched to a higher gear in the eighteenth century, as a result of growing social and economic inequality or perhaps in reaction to the increasing homogeneity of the material culture, but it did not define every aspect of Amsterdam's consumer society. The relatively low eighteenth-century elasticities of decorative luxuries – whether we are looking at the impact of income, wealth, or material wealth – suggest that consumer inequalities among the established households of Amsterdam narrowed in the course of the consumer revolution, confirming the upswing in consumer choice that the Dutch school has emphasized. If middling households managed to participate in the growing scope and accelerating turnover of fashion, however, the impact on poorer households remains an open question. In towns that fared less well in the eighteenth century, like Delft, Antwerp, and 's Hertogenbosch, social distinction seems to have formed a more important variable in the fashion cycle of paintings. Further research can therefore place the results of this article in a broader context, in terms of geographical comparison as well as in the social scope of the analyzed consumers. This latter prospect, indeed, aligns closely with the research agenda of the Flemish school.<sup>79</sup>

Either way, the coexistence of art enthusiasts, amateur scientists, thrifty republicans, and conspicuous consumers during Amsterdam's Age of Enlightenment shows that the consumer revolution was as much characterized by diversity and individualism as it was exemplified by budding conformity and persistent inequality. The noses of consumers did not always point in the same direction, which makes the concerted abandonment of decorative paintings all the more remarkable. The lacking evidence of alternative explanations leads to the conclusion that paintings went out of fashion on their own. The rise of fashion brought with it its own engine of creative destruction, an observation that is relevant to contemporary challenges because it shows that our

79 Blondé et al., 'The Low Countries' paradox', 24-27.



modern 'throw-away society' is historically conditioned.<sup>80</sup> One can only hope that this understanding can help in the transformation toward a more sustainable future.

## About the author

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## Appendix

The dataset consists of all surviving post-mortem inventories from Amsterdam's notary archives in the four sampled periods (1630-1635, 1680, 1730, and 1780), provided that the notary was assisted by a professional assessor who taxed the value of movable goods.<sup>81</sup> Whereas outstanding debts were often only mentioned *per memorie*, there are no references to auctions sales at which some goods were already disposed of before the inventory taking. All movable property – from the most insignificant *rommeling* ('junk') to the most conspicuous luxuries – were described by the notaries and appraised on value by the accompanying assessors. Each sample was stratified on the basis of the interquartile range in the total value of the movables of artisans and shopkeepers, who were identified by the mention of their occupation or references to shops or tools. Inventories falling within the interquartile range were classified as class B, while households with more or less material wealth were relegated to classes A and C, respectively. The average identified merchant was in each sample comfortably located above the class A

80 See also: Kwass, *The consumer revolution*, 15.

81 ACA, arch.no. 5075, Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam.

threshold, suggesting that the upper group was in large part populated by the mercantile elites of the metropole.

My confidence in this methodology (table 6) is strengthened by the similarities across the sample years in the nonparametric yardsticks (Q<sub>1</sub>, median, and Q<sub>3</sub>) between the select group of artisans and shopkeepers and all sampled households. Inventories from this occupational group were generally situated in the middle of the samples. In none of them did the Mann-Whitney Test reveal that the distributions around the median of artisan and shopkeeper households and of all sampled inventories were significantly different. The only large discrepancy can be found between the two Q<sub>3</sub> values in the third sample. In 1730, as a result, a relatively large share of the inventories ended up in class A, thus helping to mitigate the apparent bias in this sample.

**Table 6 Upper panel: distribution of total value of movables (in guilders) of all inventories; middle panel: distribution of total value of movables (in guilders) of identified artisan and shopkeeper inventories; lower panel: number of inventories in each class. Per sample.**

	1630	1680	1730	1780
<b>All inventories</b>				
Q1	301.2	251.5	428.4	360.1
Q2 (median)	621.4	524.7	913.1	796.6
Q3	1216.9	1078.3	2719.9	1535.2
<b>Artisan and shopkeeper inventories</b>				
N (% of all)	41 (42.7)	48 (47.5)	41 (40.2)	33 (32.0)
Q1	370.3	297.1	339.3	362.5
Q2 (median)	632.1	621.6	792.7	750.2
Q3	1041	1109.6	1675.9	1308.6
<b>Stratification</b>				
Total	96	101	102	103
A	28	25	35	33
B	38	47	48	43
C	30	29	19	27

Source: Database Amsterdam.

Linkage to a real estate tax reform permitted rough estimates of the representativeness of the three classes. For 139 inventories in the

dataset (34.6 percent), annual rent values could either be calculated from rental debts or derived from the records of a real estate tax, which listed the estimated rental values of owner-occupied houses.<sup>82</sup> The (artificial) rental values in the registers of this *verponding* were updated around 1730, and in the process the actual rents of sublet back annexes, basements, rooms, and attics were systematically recorded in 47 out of 60 quarters. Since the thirteen remaining quarters were quite evenly spread across the city, the 35,496 home units in the well-recorded quarters must give a fairly complete representation of the housing hierarchy, which ranged from independent houses to rental units of all sizes and qualities.<sup>83</sup> The 139 rents from the inventories that were not already in 1730 values were subsequently adjusted to this year with an existing index of Amsterdam rents.<sup>84</sup> The resulting rental distribution of each class could in this way be juxtaposed to an approximation of housing conditions and inequalities at the end of Amsterdam's population and construction boom. Table 7 shows that there is quite some overlap between the classes, which is not surprising, because the 1730 rents and total movables value were only moderately correlated.<sup>85</sup> Still, the exercise shows in which quintiles of the housing hierarchy inventories from the notary archives were generally located. Each class was overrepresented (i.e., their representation reached above twenty percent) in two quintiles. Households from class A and B were both concentrated in the upper two quintiles, but only the upper class lived predominantly in the top twenty percent most valuable homes. Class C was more dispersed, but more than two thirds were situated

82 ACA, arch.no. 5044, Archief van de Thesaurieren Extraordinaris, inv.nos. 254-293 [1680] & 297-401 [1780]; ACA, arch.no. 5045, Archief van de Honderdste en Tweehonderdste Penningkamer of Commissarissen tot de Ontvangst van de Honderdste en Andere Penningen, inv.nos. 203-268 [1730]. The second method was unfortunately not available for the first sample, because records from before 1647 are missing.

83 I am grateful to Matthijs Korevaar for sharing his dataset of this source, which only contained the rental values at the house level, however. In our adjusted database, the rental values of houses that were (partly) rented out were replaced by the rental values of the different home units. For this task we turned to the version of the source in the Amsterdam City Archives that included the rental values of all housing units: ACA, arch.no. 5045, Archief van de Honderdste en Tweehonderdste Penningkamer of Commissarissen tot de Ontvangst van de Honderdste en Andere Penningen, inv.nrs. 203-268. To fill in the gaps in this source, we turned to the original records kept in the Dutch National Archives: National Archives, arch.nr. 3.01.29, Inventaris van het archief van de Financie van Holland (1515) 1572-1806 (1830), inv.nrs. 498-501.

84 Piet Eicholtz, Stefan Straetmans, and Marcel Theebe, 'The Amsterdam rent index. The housing market and the economy, 1550-1850', *Journal of Housing Economics* 21 (2012) 269-282.

85  $r=0.535, p=<0,001$ .

in the third or fourth quintiles. Conservatively estimated, then, the notary corpus brings into view 60 percent of the population, although middling people occasionally lived in cheaper dwellings as well.

**Table 7 Distribution of rental values (in guilders) in the reformed register of the *verponding* and in the three classes.**

Verponding reform		Class A		Class B		Class C	
Quintile (%)	Range (fl.)	n	%	n	%	n	%
1: 0-20	0-40	0	0.0	2	3.6	4	11.4
2: 20-40	40.1-60	0	0.0	3	5.4	6	17.1
3: 40-60	60.1-110	1	2.1	7	12.5	11	31.4
4: 60-80	110.1-250.2	14	29.2	21	37.5	12	34.3
5: 80-100	250.2-...	33	68.8	23	41.1	2	5.7

Sources: Database Amsterdam; CUH, Unpublished database of Amsterdam's reformed 1732 *verponding* register.

The calculation of the income elasticity of paintings was based on those 101 inventory records that 1) included a rental value and 2) possessed at least one painting. With the value of paintings subtracted, the gross wealth of the 402 inventoried estates formed the independent variable of wealth elasticity, although in this computation inventories without paintings were excluded, too. Debts were not systematically recorded by the notaries, so they were excluded along with claims; hence gross rather than net wealth. Assets included cash, real property, shares, bonds, craft tools, and shop goods. Of these, real estate was the only major asset category that generally lacked a monetary valuation, but estimates were procured for most houses by linkage to sales acts and adjustment with a housing price index for Amsterdam.<sup>86</sup> After this data enrichment, 1,421 of the 1,556 recorded assets (91.3 percent) were assigned value. The remaining gaps in each asset category were interpolated.

The data work of this article, it should be noted in closing, was carried out in the context of my PhD research. The databases will be published along with my doctoral dissertation in 2025.

<sup>86</sup> Matthijs Korevaar, Piet Eicholtz, and Marc Francke, 'Dure huizen maar geen zeepbel in Amsterdam', *Economisch Statistische Berichten* 106 (2021) 32-34, data published at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d5n0AuyFcD7KhGrgRj3jhlvAgvEfCXto/view>; ACA, arch.no. 5066, Archief van de Schepenen: register van willige decreten van het Hof van Holland; ACA, arch.no. 5067, Archief van de Schepenen: register van de afschrijvingen bij de willige decreten.