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The portrait of a building

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The Amsterdam Town Hall in Words and Images



The Amsterdam Town Hall in
Words and Images

Constructing Wonders

Edited by
Stijn Bussels, Caroline van Eck and
Bram Van Oostveldt

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The Portrait of a Building

Stijn Bussels

Many buildings have a face. They look, they even speak, but buildings do not speak alone, nor do they speak by themselves. Buildings speak with and through texts and images. Together they perform conversations for a large audience. Sometimes that conversation is delicate and elegant, sometimes powerful and overwhelming, sometimes pompous and excessive. These conversations can deal with the building itself, with the place where it stands, with its founders and architects, with a higher reality, with desires and even with our deepest fears. We find telling examples in the Amsterdam Town Hall. The speech of the Town Hall is performative. It gives the city and her rulers dignity and esteem. That has pointed out already in the only English monograph on the subject, Katherine Fremantle's *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam*, now sixty years old.¹ In what follows, I will not look at the impact of the building itself, as Fremantle and several other authors have done, but I will focus on how seventeenth-century artists represent the building and even strengthen its impact in their work.² The seventeenth-century paintings of the Town Hall, as well as the drawings and prints (separate or included in books, such as travel guides) are almost impossible to count and were quickly distributed throughout the whole of Europe.

Previous research has related visual representations of the Town Hall to the popularity of maps, panoramas and bird's-eye-view perspectives of Amsterdam.³ Equally popular were the literary counterparts, the genre of the poem praising a city, the so-called *laus urbium*.⁴ The preceding chapter has discussed the very substantial number of poems written in praise of Amsterdam and its Town Hall. All these visual and textual representations of Amsterdam are not surprising, as in the mid-seventeenth century the city was a commercial and financial hub. The citizens of Amsterdam, led by their four Burgomasters, strove for strong autonomy to protect this prosperity as well as possible. This desire fed into the large stream of images and descriptions of the city as a coherent whole. The

Amsterdam success attracted a rich set of seekers after riches and fortune.⁵ Visual and textual imagery of the city was equally used to make sure that the identity of the city would not become blurred in the growing diversity and quick transformations of the city that this immigration brought along. The construction of the Town Hall can be related to this centripetal ambition, as well as the poems praising the building, but certainly the hundreds of paintings and drawings and the thousands of prints representing the building as well.

In this essay I focus on how in the context of the Town Hall a new genre comes to full fruition, a genre that I would like to call the ‘portrait of a building’.⁶ This genre is defined by the feature that an artist visualizes a real building in such a way that that building is endowed with character. Therefore, the use of a portrait to depict either a human or a building is equally valid: just like an artist has to depict a person as recognizably as possible, but in the same time has to emphasize his or her particular characteristics, the portraitist of a building has to represent that building. It has to be clearly identifiable, but the artist can also draw attention to certain features and represent them as humanlike characteristics.⁷ Thus, these portraits are different from previous representations where buildings play a prominent role, but are subordinated to particular narratives. Even centuries before, buildings appeared in works of art to place an historical event or an ideal situation in a particular setting. In the celebrated *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1339), Ambrogio Lorenzetti provides the very first accurate panoramic view of a city, Siena, since Antiquity.⁸ Only two centuries later, however, painterly strategies are used to the full to animate buildings – to give them a face.

A direct precursor of such a portrait can be found in a 1628 etching of Haarlem’s Grand Square after a design of Pieter Saenredam (1597–1665) (Figure 5.1).⁹ This etching shows an urban space from three sides. The viewpoint is chosen in such a way that the viewer seems to be looking out from a window on the first floor of an imaginary house located at the fourth side of the square. This view point contrasts sharply with sixteenth-century architectural perspectives, with the etchings of Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527–1607) as prominent examples (Figure 5.2), where the viewer stands on a far higher point and thus looks *over* the buildings to the city walls. The perspective that Saenredam uses, by contrast, creates the illusion that the viewer of the painting is standing a bit higher than the people on the Grand Square and thus can look directly at the central building, Haarlem Town Hall.

To show how the Amsterdam Town Hall brings this tradition to full growth, we can start with a painting by the Haarlem painter Gerrit Berckheyde (1638–



Figure 5.1 Jan van de Velde after Pieter Jansz. Saenredam, 'View on the Grand Square with Town Hall of Haarlem', as published in Samuel Ampzing, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* (Haarlem: Adriaen Roman, 1628). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Public Domain.



Figure 5.2 Johannes or Lucas van Doetechum after Hans Vredeman de Vries, 'View on a city with palaces and canal from a bird's eye perspective', as published in *Variae Architecturae formae* (Antwerp: Theodoor Galle, 1601). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Public Domain.

98), one of the most famous and innovative artists to depict the building. No fewer than thirty-six works by him depicting the Town Hall are preserved.¹⁰ One of the earliest of these, now in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, dates from 1668 (Figure 5.3).¹¹ Like Saenredam, the painter shows the vivacity of groups of people immersed in conversation and trade on the square. Here, the viewer sees a city that is full of life where the whole world comes to trade and whose international dignity is affirmed by means of the new, impressive building. Berckheyde goes further than Saenredam, however, in juxtaposing these daily activities with the monumentality of the Town Hall.

Berckheyde uses painterly techniques to the full in order to visualize this monumentality. Next to this central building, there are two other buildings that define the view on Dam Square, the Weigh House and the New Church. The painter places the Weigh House in a deep shadow while he throws full light and a varied shadow on the façade of the Town Hall. He makes the most of the whiteness of the latter's façade by contrasting it with the dark stone of the former. The painter enhances the prominence of the corner and middle bays by bringing them further forward than they are in the actual building. He also carefully represents the colossal Composite columns running over two floors, as well as the grand festoons in between the floors. This all results in a rich play of



Figure 5.3 Gerrit Adriaensz. Berckheyde, *The Town Hall on Dam Square*, 1668, oil on canvas, 70 × 110 cm. KMSKA, photo: Hugo Maertens, Public Domain.

chiaroscuro. Besides, he pays attention to the fact that the pediment is sculpted in a whiter stone than the rest of the façade. Thus, we get a façade that is monumental and spirited at the same time.

Moreover, the viewpoint is chosen in such a way that the Weigh House blocks most of the view of the New Church, but obstructs only a very small part of the view of the Town Hall. Thus, with his choice of viewpoint, Berckheyde gives prominence to the Town Hall and shows the building in its full splendour without failing to show the actual situation on Dam Square. Further, Berckheyde uses a strikingly large space – one-third of the canvas – to show the grounds in front of the Town Hall. By representing Dam Square as a space that gradually runs up towards the Town Hall, he stresses the monumentality of the central building even more. As a result, none of the figures on the square stands higher than the steps of the entrance. Moreover, the cobblestones – with their patterning following the vanishing line of the perspective – makes the upward effect even more prominent. They increase the sense of space and direct the viewer's gaze inescapably to the Town Hall.

Besides the emphasis on the building's monumentality, Berckheyde also 'portrays' it, as the building seems to have characteristics similar to humans. Thanks to the perspective used, the Town Hall appears to recline a little. Thus the central bay and the carillon suggest a human head that is proudly held high. It is also remarkable that the vanishing point of the perspective is not in the middle, but has moved slightly to the left. Due to this shift away from the centre, the building seems to turn a little in order to look in a certain direction.

Rixtel's praise

The idea of the Town Hall being portrayed as a person is certainly not new; it was suggested by contemporaries of Berckheyde. Of special interest is the laudatory poem *On the Town Hall of Amsterdam painted by the illustrious Painter Gerrit Berckheyden of Haarlem (Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam, Geschildert door den vermaerden Schilder Gerrit Berckheyden van Haarlem)*. It was written by Pieter Rixtel (1643–73), a fellow townsman of the painter, and published in 1669, so just a year after the painting was done.¹² Only a few modern art and literary historians have read the poem, and if they have done so, they have labelled it as 'a long verse full of clichés' ('een lang en clichématig vers').¹³ However, in my opinion Rixtel's laudatory poem is totally the opposite: it is a clever play in which architecture, painting and literature are closely connected.

As the title indicates, it is not a poem about the Town Hall, but a poem about *Berckheyde's painting of the Town Hall*. Moreover, as we shall see, the poet not only focusses on the building itself and its pictorial representation, he also involves famous laudatory poems on the Town Hall. In this way we can read the poem as a complex reflection on the relation between different means to present Amsterdam, as a *paragone* where diverse mediums are tested in their effectivity.

At the very start of the poem, Rixtel observes that in Berckheyde's painting the building is painted from the 'shoulders' and writes that this is done precisely in the same way as a person might lift up their head proudly, since in the painting the Town Hall raises 'bravely the Marble Crown of Its/His Head, on Shoulders of White Freestone' ('moediger zijn Marm're Kruyn, op Schouderen van Witte Arduyn').¹⁴ After a few introductory verses, Rixtel uses a prominent means of his own medium, personification, to do exactly the same. The poet transforms the Town Hall into a living being that addresses the reader. The talking building praises Berckheyde for – among other qualities – showing how 'the Sun caresses my Brow' ('de Zon my 't Voorhoofd streeft'). However, it is far from easy to get a grip on what kind of living being is actually speaking here. Due to the fact that in seventeenth-century Dutch the possessive noun 'zijn' can be both 'its' and 'his', Rixtel can suggest the building is animated by using grammatical ambiguity.¹⁵ To put it more precisely, it is not clear if the reader is confronted with a living human or an animated object.

Besides, the reader cannot immediately define how the personification has to be interpreted. Does it merely stand for the new building? In what follows, Rixtel plays with the idea that something more is going on. He makes the Town Hall say that it/he owns its/his animation first and foremost to Berckheyde. The topos of praising works of art for creating life has a rich history.¹⁶ Homer praised the divine Shield of Achilles by describing actions represented on it as if they took place before his eyes.¹⁷ In early modern Europe, the topos is used time and again to acclaim a portrait for keeping a person alive, even if that person has passed away.¹⁸ Rixtel gives a new twist to this popular topos: his portrait of the building not only keeps it alive, but brings it to life in the first place. Thanks to the animation, the painter further constructs the Town Hall, if not in brick, but in paint. The role of the architect and the painter, and the status of the architectural prototype and its painted representation, become intermingled. Rixtel tried to create an inextricable knot confronting his readers with the complexities of medial intersections.

Directly after this intermingling, the poet refers to his own medium. Poetry brings the Town Hall to life, too. In order to make this clear, he refers to one of

the most famous poems dedicated to the Town Hall, namely Joost van den Vondel's poem written for the Town Hall's ceremonial inauguration in 1655.¹⁹ The talking building proclaims that it/he is 'carried by Maro [Virgil], Vondel, the honour of the Poets, as far as his Songs can please the Ear, yet flies my Fame no further than where one can find Dutch Ears' ('Gevoert van Maro, Vondel, d'eer/ Der Dighteren, werd' om gedragen,/ Soo ver zyn Zangen 't Oor behagen,/ Nogh vlieght myn roem niet verder, dan/ Men Neerduytse Ooren vinden kan').²⁰ So, following the words of the building, the Vondel's poem carries it/him, but only in the places where Dutch is read. The portrait of Berckheyde surpasses poetry as it reconstructs the Town Hall with paint and thus transcends national language barriers, even at the expense of his own medium. In doing so, the poet introduces a surprising hierarchy. Since painting reaches further than Vondel's poetry and much further than van Campen's building, the newly made artwork of the relatively young Berckheyde – the painter did not yet enjoy the excellent reputation he would have at the end of his career – surpasses the praise of the celebrated poet, even when Vondel is seen as on a par with Virgil. Even more surprisingly, the painting outperforms the grand building designed by the most famous architect of that time, the building on which all poems and images actually relied.

Besides using the metaphor of 'carrying', Rixtel also writes that the poem and portrait of the building can 'climb' higher than the building itself. His metaphors separate his personification from the architectural construction. In the animation of word and image, the personification seems to take on a life of its own apart outside of the prototype. This choice further illustrates that the relation between the building, the portrait and the poem is far from evident. The portrait and the poem are not entirely subordinated to their duty of representing the Town Hall. The poet presents all three as mediums to spread the prosperity of Amsterdam. The three mediums convey the name and fame of the city; they let that name and fame 'climb', be that in different ways. Therefore, Rixtel does not start from the building and then look at the portrait and poem. Instead he presents the Town Hall, as well as its portrait and laudation as *partes pro toto* of the city's prosperity. So, they do not merely show the prosperity but also form an important part of it. Rixtel suggests that architecture, the visual arts and literature play full parts of the city's success, with the visual arts as the most successful. Therefore, the poet's play with animation essentially falls back on Amsterdam's vibrancy and connects the liveliness of the people in front of Berckheyde's painting with the Town Hall, its laudatory poems and its portraits. Thus he does not fully acknowledge the primacy of architecture.

Once Rixtel has established this nuance, he further reflects on his own medium and on painting to use a popular point of reference as a way of praising the Town Hall. Time and again, Dutch seventeenth-century poets repeated each other by writing that the building emulated the seven ancient Wonders of the World and therefore could rightfully be named the eighth Wonder, Rixtel surprises by going one step further to praise Berckheyde. To conclude his poem, the poet takes over from the talking building again and says that ‘the Eighth Wonder, constructed in Stone, stands near the river Y, but the Ninth, is the Eighth, in this Painting’ (‘Het Aghtste Wonder staat, van Steen gebout, aen’t Y,/ Maer ’t Negenste, is dat Aghtste, in deze Schildery’).²¹ Right up to the end, the poet deconstructs the uniqueness of the wondrous building so as to create the suggestion that Amsterdam performs a chain reaction of wonders in diverse mediums, but most prominently in painting, where the building is portrayed with international approval.

God’s grace

Rixtel does not go into detail about how Amsterdam brings about that wondrous chain reaction. By contrast, other poets focus less on the medial reflection, but on the hidden causes behind the construction of the wondrous Town Hall and more generally the exceptional flowering of the city of commerce. That cause is a miracle which is entirely God’s doing. Several poets present the impressive building as proof of divine grace. One of the most famous authors making the connection between the building and the latter is the politician and art lover Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687). He does this in his congratulations addressed to the four Burgomasters, written in 1657. A few years later the laudatory poem was engraved in black marble and even today it is displayed prominently in the Burgomasters’ chamber in the Town Hall, now Royal Palace (Figure 5.4).²² After a reference to the ancient tradition of the seven Wonders of the World, Huygens addresses God. He writes: ‘God, who ordered you to combine Power and Splendour with Reason,/ God may give you that you can show in the Building/ Who you are with Reason and Pleasure’ (‘God, die U Macht en Pracht met Reden gaf te voeghen,/ God gev’ u in ’t Gebouw met Reden en Genoeghen/ Te thoonen wie ghij zijt’).²³ As impressive as it might be, in the eyes of the poet a building is in the end merely a sign of God’s grace.

Now we can return to the portraits of the building where artists also tried to show God’s grace. We can start with a direct predecessor of Berckheyde’s portrait,



Figure 5.4 Elias Noski, stone engraved with Huygens' poem, 1660, ebony, gilding and black marble, 100 × 90 cm, Amsterdam Museum, Courtesy Stichting Koninklijk Paleis Amsterdam. © The Royal Palace of Amsterdam, photograph: Tom Haartsen.

a drawing by Jacob van der Ulft (1621–89) from 1653 (Figure 5.5). While the similarities are remarkable, on the drawing the tower of the New Church is much higher than in Berckheyde's portrait. The artist visualizes the plans of the so-called 'religious faction' within the Amsterdam municipality headed by Burgomaster Willem Cornelis Backer (1595–1652). He wanted to crown the New Church with the highest tower in the Dutch Republic to increase God's



Figure 5.5 Jacob van der Ulft, *Market on Dam Square*, 1653, drawing, 276 × 472 mm. Collectie Atlas Splitgerber, Courtesy of Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Public Domain.

benevolence over the city. Recent studies by Thomas von der Dunk and Gabri van Tussenbroek have reconstructed the tensions between the plans for a tower and the Town Hall.²⁴ On the surface they were about how to spend limited financial means, but the real conflict was about whether the Calvinist faction or the merchants should rule the city. Eventually, after the death of Backer in 1652, the plans for the tower became less and less dominant.

However, van der Ulft made the drawing a year after Backer's death. Therefore, it could be an ultimate attempt to promote the plans for the tower. The artist presents the tower shoulder to shoulder with the Town Hall, as he depicts a view on Dam Square with both the Town Hall and the church tower completed (whereas in fact the building was still unfinished at the time, and the tower merely planned). The style of the two buildings is different, which reflects the difference in their functions.²⁵ However, whereas Berckheyde highlighted these differences by his use of colours and shadows, van der Ulft uses the same colours for both buildings.

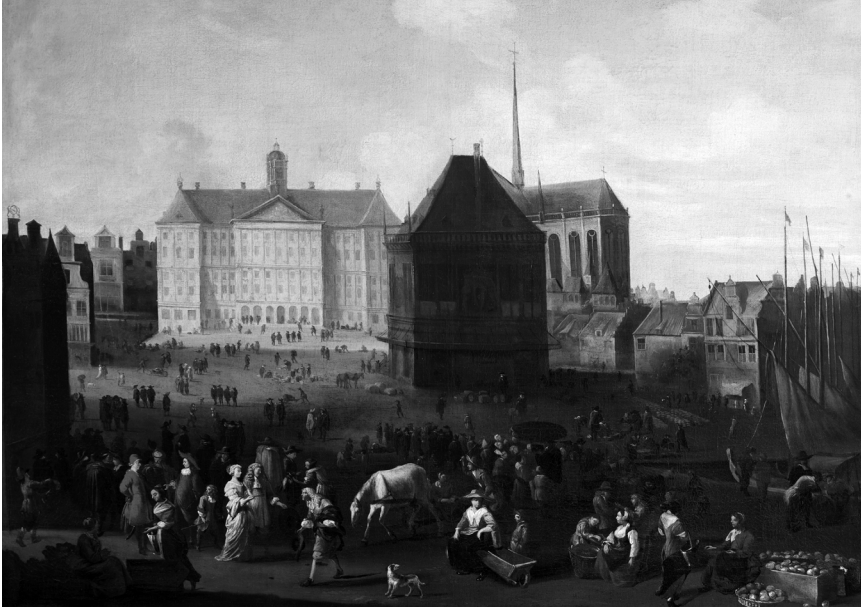


Figure 5.6 Hendrick Mommers, *Market Scene before the Dam*, c. 1665, oil on canvas, 84.5 × 120.7 cm. Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, courtesy of the National Trust.

Another Haarlem painter, Hendrick Mommers (1619–93), was inspired by the drawing of van der Ulft as well. His view on Dam Square dating from c. 1665 is now in Dyrham Park; three variants are still preserved (Figure 5.6).²⁶ Once again the similarities with the drawing are striking, although Mommers has left out the projected tower of the New Church, just like Berckheyde did. This is a painting that requires careful attention, as it is not merely a visual document of how Dam Square must have looked like in the mid-seventeenth century. In comparison with van der Ulft, Mommers plays in a different way with the rendering of light. With the exception of a ray of sunshine on some figures in the foreground, only the Town Hall receives full light, much more than the New Church behind the Weigh House. The new building seems to radiate a sharp white light, strangely illuminating a rectangular space right in front of the building. The artist may have wanted to emphasize the use of white stone for the façade or to suggest that the space in front of the building was paved with white stones. However, there is also another interpretation for this bright white light, an interpretation that can be connected with Huygens' congratulation poem in which the supernatural rendering of light can be seen as an attempt to present the building as an instrument of God, a medium through which He expresses His extraordinary relation with Amsterdam.

Resurrection

To further argue that Mommers' extraordinary bright light can be linked with divine providence, we can look at depictions of the burning of the old Town Hall. The medieval building entirely burned down in 1652. Viewed with architectural parameters the building did not amount to much, and was only a conglomerate of different buildings and styles constructed throughout the ages. Nevertheless, the fire was engraved on the collective memory, although not presented as a disaster, but as a token of God's foresight.

The fire was depicted time and again in countless images, such as a painting by Jan Beerstraaten (1622–66) (Figure 5.7).²⁷ It is an accurate topographical document that can be localized within inches, thus memorializing a ruin that had to be demolished to make way for the new Town Hall. Only thanks to the burning and demolition could Amsterdam show herself in renewed glory. Beerstraaten visually preserves the old splendour of the city, as the painting can be placed within the widely spread aesthetic appreciation of ruins of that time.²⁸ The frontal view and the emphasis on the horizontal and vertical lines, the sober colours with



Figure 5.7 Jan Beerstraaten, *Ruins of the old Town Hall*, c. 1660, oil on canvas, 110 × 145 cm. Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Public Domain.

striking light and dark effects and the close framing, make the ruin grand and monumental, almost heroic.²⁹ In a similar way, Maarten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) had depicted the ancient ruins of Rome. So, by presenting the ruins of the old Town Hall as a monument, once again, the respectable history of Amsterdam under God's protection is compared with the history of the Eternal City.

Many laudatory poems mention this fire as well, linking it to God's foresight. The poets present the new Town Hall as evidence that the fire of the old Town Hall fits perfectly within the good intentions of God for Amsterdam. Although the construction of the new Town Hall started long before the fire, the poets suggest that the fire was actually the crucial event that led to the new Town Hall. Rixtel, for instance, makes this connection. As we just saw, the poet animates the Town Hall to let it/him praise the portrait Berckheyde made of it/him. However, the poet refers not only to the new Town Hall, but also to the old one, as the animated Town Hall speaks about its/his old embodiment as well, the medieval building.

This can be compared with the theory of the two bodies of the king (or queen), famously discussed by Ernst Kantorowicz.³⁰ In medieval and early modern political theory, the ruler has a body natural, a personal and mortal body, as well as a body politic that coincides with the political position he/she holds and is handed down from parents to children. In the political context of the Dutch Republic and the city of Amsterdam, this political theory could not be easily adopted, but was still a too dominant way of thinking to neglect.³¹ Although only a small number of families held the important political positions, a clear dynastic succession was out of the question. So, after the Dutch had dismissed the Habsburg rulers, they could no longer clearly present a body natural. Most certainly not in Amsterdam, a city that time and again had opposed attempts by the princes of Orange to claim the body politic of the highest rulers in the Republic.³² The four Burgomasters could not claim the body politic of the ultimate power in the city either. Every year they had to be replaced. Moreover, as there were four of them, that body politic would have suffered from a dissociative identity disorder. The idea that the body politic became related to a building instead of a person is not farfetched. As we already saw, Rixtel and other poets animate the Town Hall as a living entity. The rhetoric concerning the fire of the old Town Hall shows us how the building is a concrete, mortal body, as well as a body politic that is resistant against death. Just as the king never dies, so the Town Hall of Amsterdam will never disappear.

Rixtel uses the phoenix as a symbol of the eternal existence of the Town Hall. The very first words of the speaking Town Hall are: 'I am, from the smoking ashes of my ancestor, / risen as a Phoenix' ('Ik ben, uyt Voorzaets rokende

Asschen, / Gelyk een Phaenix, op-gewasschen'). This bird is often linked with Christ, who sacrificed Himself for the wellbeing of humankind. The recurring reference to the fire opens up associations with the resurrection of Christ, but it also makes the animation of the building more complex. We have already indicated how hard it is to fully assess the precise functioning of Rixtel's personification due to the intermingling of the Town Hall and its portrait. The personification is all the more multifaceted, as there is not so much one particular building at stake, but a succession of town halls.

One portrait of the old Town Hall plays an important role in the idea of resurrection under God's protection. The painting was done by Pieter Saenredam, who actually painted it years after the actual fire (Figure 5.8). Recently, Lorne Darnell has argued that the Burgomasters had the painting put in their room, right in front of Huygens' poem engraved in marble. Because of this position we can see Saenredam's painting as a pendant of the poem, as if both were in conversation.³³ In his poem Huygens speaks about the eighth and ninth Wonder of the World; or the new Town Hall and the Town Hall that eventually would replace the latter if destroyed. In his painting, Saenredam portrays the old Town



Figure 5.8 Pieter Saenredam, *The Old Town Hall of Amsterdam*, 1657, oil on panel, 65.5 × 84.5 cm. Courtesy of Rijksmuseum, Public Domain.

Hall in a scene of sobriety and rest. So, in this diptych, past, present and future are taken into account in word and image.

Once again, it is Rixtel that creates more clarity in how the portrait of the old Town Hall functions in the heart of the new Town Hall, since the poet praises not only Berckheyde's portrait of the new Town Hall, but Saenredam's portrait of the old Town Hall as well.

Dat oudt Gebouw, gesloopt aen Vonken,
Lagh langh in Assche, en Puyn, versonken,
En wiert niet meer genoemt, indien
Het sigh niet op 't Paneel liet zien,
Door *Saenredams* Pençeel en Verven:
Die *Spaer-Geest*, heeft het, voor zyn sterven,
Herbooren, en, eer 't lagh gebukt,
De Doodt, die 't al vernielt, ontruk;³⁴

*That old Building, demolished by Fire,
Laid for a long time in Ashes and Debris,
And was no longer mentioned, if
Its view would not have been visible on Panel
With Saenredam's brush and Paint:
This Saving-Spirit, let it/him, before it/he died,
Reborn, and before it/he was subjected,
He took it/him from the Death, who destroys it all;*

Just as a deceased person is kept alive thanks to his or her portrait, the talking Town Hall holds that Saenredam has succeeded to keep the old Town Hall alive. Thanks to the painting hanging in the room of the Burgomasters, the respectability of the old Town Hall is literally incorporated in the new body of the Town Hall. The old phoenix had to die for a resurrection to be possible, but thanks to the painting the honour attached to the old building is transferred to its new iteration. The portrait of the old Town Hall makes sure that the room of the Burgomasters can 'still shine, thanks to the old splendour' ('nogh glans trekt, uyt dien ouden prael').

Across the borders

Until now I have focused on the connections between the visual arts and poetry in their imagining of the Town Hall. However, next to transmedial connections, we can also consider the international connections that were sparked off by the

construction of the Amsterdam building. The genre of the portrait of a building is a significant example of the fact that we cannot consider the Dutch seventeenth century in splendid isolation. The portraits of the Town Hall enjoyed international acclaim. In his laudatory poem on Berckheyde's portrait, Rixtel already hoped that the painting would be viewed by the whole world. This was not a hyperbole. For example, when Cosimo III de' Medici visited the Town Hall in 1668, he purchased the very same day a portrait of the building by Jan van der Heyden. The fact that four years later Cosimo asked his agent in the Republic to visit Van der Heyden to inquire whether other paintings of the Town Hall were for sale proves that his purchase was not a mere whim.³⁵

Moreover, visual artists across the whole of Europe were inspired by the portraits of the Amsterdam Town Hall to paint other grand buildings. The influence on Italian *vedute* painters has already been studied. The so-called 'father of *vedute*' is a painter from Amersfoort, Caspar van Wittel, who at the end of the seventeenth century under the name of Gaspare Vanvitelli acquired name and fame with his cityscapes, as well as his portraits of buildings in Rome and Venice.³⁶ Van Wittel was influenced by the portraitists of the Town Hall.

Whereas the influence of Dutch painters such as Berckheyde through van Wittel on famous *vedutisti* such as Canaletto is already well established, the international context of the rise of the building portrait as a genre is understudied. Here, too, the Dutch played an important role. At the start of the seventeenth century ancient buildings and ruins, as well as imaginary cityscapes or *capricci* are represented in many prints, drawings and paintings of Dutch artists in Rome, such as Pieter van Laer and Willem van Nieulandt.³⁷ Their role in initiating this genre can be seen for instance in the latter's 1609 depiction of the Arch of Septimius Severus. The architecture is given centre stage, represented neither from the front nor laterally, but from one of the corners (Figure 5.9). As a result, its setting at the foot of the Capitoline Hill is clearly shown and the grandness of the arch is contrasted with the Tabularium directly behind it which actual appearance is toned down. Moreover, thanks to this viewpoint, the three richly coffered semi-circular vaults, so much admired and copied in the early modern period, are maximally brought to the fore.

Alongside these Italian contexts there is also a French connection. In the seventeenth century, many Dutch artists were active in the French capital and their images of the most important buildings would be influential for decades, if not centuries. One of the earliest Dutch artists to paint Parisian buildings was the Haarlem painter, Abraham de Verwer (1585–1650).³⁸ Seven of

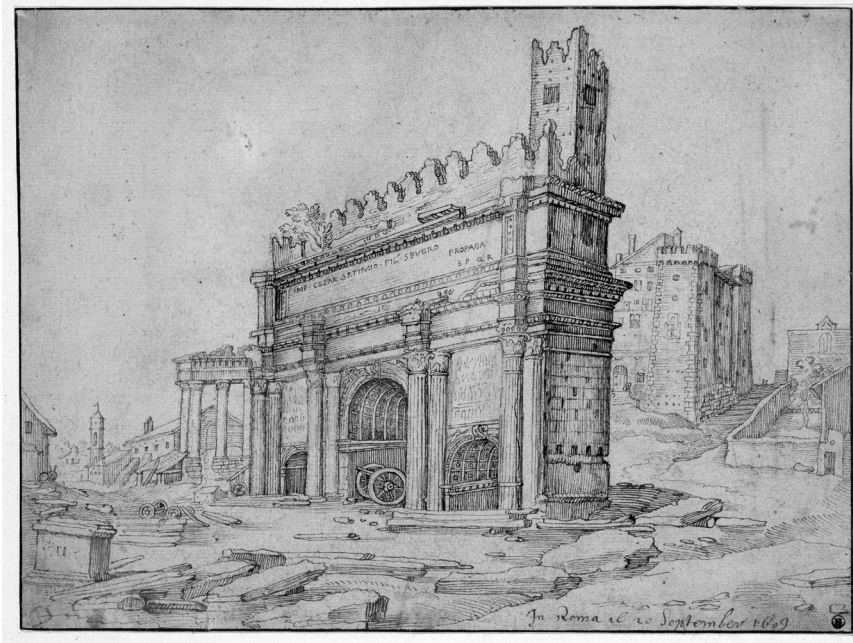


Figure 5.9 Willem van Nieulandt (II), *The Arch of Septimius Severus*, 1609, drawing, pen and brown ink over black chalk, 20.2 × 27 cm. Kupferstichkabinett Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © 2020, Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

his cityscapes of the Louvre are still preserved. I consciously call them ‘cityscapes’ and not ‘portraits’, since these paintings can be situated in the ‘prehistory’ of the portraits of buildings. They are an early step in the direction, but not yet a portrait, as they do not yet depict the Louvre as if it is a person or as if it has human characteristics.

With his paintings of the Louvre, de Verwer experiments with light and light reflection. In a series of paintings of the Grande Galerie seen from the Pont-Royal, of which three are preserved in the Musée Carnavalet (Figures 5.10–12), he tries to capture how the sun and the clouds chequer the ambience of the building in a subtle way. The three paintings are almost identical – but not entirely: the number of figures standing on the quaysides is different, as is the number of boats, and the laundry is displayed differently. So here time plays its role. There is a time-lapse: the pink morning sun gives the Louvre a rosy glow, the midday sun sharpens the façade and makes it white, while the evening sun caresses the building with golden tones. Subsequently in the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries, the interest in the influence of sunlight will



Figure 5.10 Abraham de Verwer, *The Louvre Grande Galerie, view of Paris from the Barbier bridge*, c. 1640, oil on wood, Musée Carnavalet. Credit: Bridgeman Images.

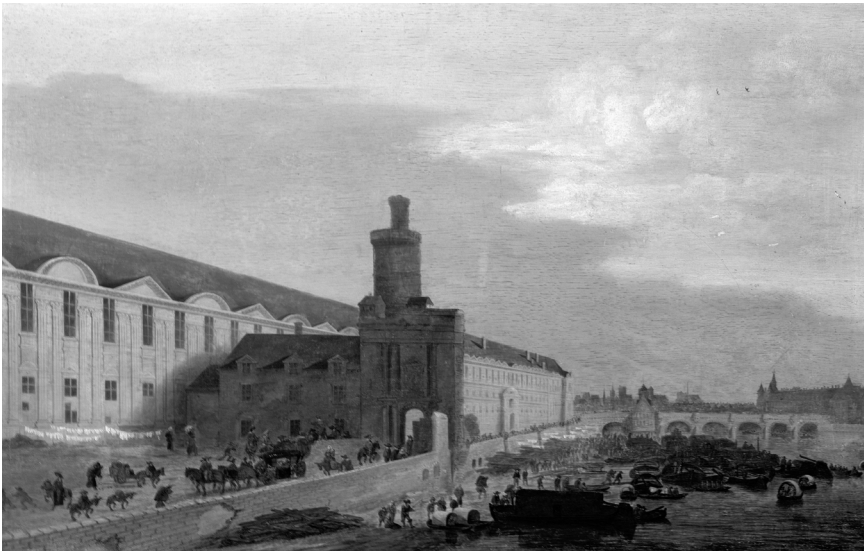


Figure 5.11 Abraham de Verwer, *Galerie du Louvre and the Porte Neuf*, c. 1640, Oil on panel, Musée du Louvre. Credit: Bridgeman Images.



Figure 5.12 Abraham de Verwer, *The Louvre Grande Galerie, view of Paris from the Barbier bridge (upstream)*, c. 1640, oil on wood, Musée Carnavalet. Credit: Bridgeman Images.

be a major element in the development of the portrait of a building by *vedute* painters among others, but these experiments would culminate in the portraits of Rouen Cathedral painted by Claude Monet at the end of the nineteenth century.

De Verwer's paintings also gives more insight into the political context of the origins and early development of this genre. More specifically, these paintings make clear that European rulers were very interested in each other's buildings. The focus that de Verwer put on the Grande Galerie was not defined by artistic motives alone. The Grande Galerie was begun in 1594 under Henri IV, and was finished in 1610, in the period when Prince Frederick Hendrick of Orange lived in Paris. Two decades later, when he had become Stadholder, he asked de Verwer to paint it.³⁹ Frederick Hendrick was also interested in the broader urbanistic interventions by Henri IV and Louis XIII on the right bank of the river Seine. The so-called *Plein* (a square adjacent to the *Binnenhof* in The Hague), constructed in the 1630s, was an answer to these Parisian interventions. Later in the century the Oranges and the Bourbons would continue looking attentively at each other's buildings, with the competition between William III and Louis XIV the climax of this rivalry that was fought out with stones, as well as words and paint.⁴⁰

Notes

- 1 Katharine Fremantle, *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1959).
- 2 Fleurbaay and Goossens already discussed the images of the Town Hall but from a less transmedial and international perspective: Ellen Fleurbaay, *The Building of Amsterdam Town Hall, now the Royal Palace Amsterdam. The Eighth Wonder of the World* (Amsterdam: Stichting Koninklijk Paleis, 1982) and Eymert-Jan Goossens, *Het Paleis in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).
- 3 B. Bakker and E. Schmitz (eds), *Het aanzien van Amsterdam. Panorama's, plattegronden en profielen uit de Gouden Eeuw* (Bussum: Toth, 2007). Cfr. Christopher Brown, *Dutch Townscape Painting* (London: National Gallery London, 1972); Giuliano Briganti, *The View Painters of Europe* (London: Phaidon, 1970); Rolf Fritz, *Das Stadt- und Strassenbild in der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Inaug. diss., Berlin, Stuttgart, 1932); Jeroen Giltaij and Guido Jansen (eds), *Perspectieven. Saenredam en de architectuurschilders van de 17^e eeuw* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen, 1991); Maria Elisabeth Houtzager (ed.), *Nederlandse architectuurschilders, 1600–1900* (Utrecht: Catalogus Centraal Museum, 1953); Carry van Lakerveld (ed.), *The Dutch Cityscape in the 17th Century and its Sources* (Bentveld-Aerdenhout: Landshoff, 1977); A. van Suchtelen and A.K. Wheelock Jr. (eds), *Hollandse stadsgezichten uit de Gouden Eeuw* (Den Haag: Mauritshuis, 2008), 82–5.
- 4 Eddy Verbaan, *De woonplaats van de faam. Grondslagen van de stadsbeschrijving in de zeventiende-eeuwse Republiek* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011).
- 5 Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17^e-eeuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005).
- 6 As Boudewijn Bakker already pointed out, in the seventeenth century this genre of the cityscape was named with the term 'conterfeitsel', a term that in seventeenth-century Dutch comes close to our modern word 'portrait'. Boudewijn Bakker, "Conterfeitsels" en "perspectieven". Het stadsgezicht in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw, in Van Suchtelen and Wheelock, *Hollandse stadsgezichten*, 34–59, esp. 34.
- 7 For a general discussion of the portrait, see Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013). For the portrait in the Dutch seventeenth century, see Mariët Westermann, *The Art of the Dutch Republic, 1585–1717* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), 131–56 and Joanna Woodall, 'Sovereign Bodies: The Reality of Status in Seventeenth-century Dutch Portraiture', in Joanna Woodall (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 75–100.
- 8 Jack Greenstein, 'The Vision of Peace: Meaning and Representation in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Sala Della Pace Cityscapes', *Art History* 11, no. 4 (1988): 492–510. Cf.

- Quentin Skinner, 'Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Buon Governo Frescoes: Two Old Questions, Two New Answers', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 62 (1999): 1–28.
- 9 Stapel, *Perspectieven van de stad*, 24.
- 10 Giltaij and Jansen, *Perspectieven*, cat. nr. 61, 287–9 and Van Suchtelen and Wheelock, *Hollandse stadsgezichten*, 82–5.
- 11 Leonore Stapel, *Perspectieven van de stad. Over bronnen, populariteit en functie van het zeventiende-eeuwse stadsgezicht* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2000), 58–9.
- 12 Pieter Rixtel, 'Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam, Geschildert door den vermaerden Schilder Gerrit Berckheyden van Haerlem', in his *Mengel-rymen* (Amsterdam: Van de Gaete, 1717 (Haarlem, 1669)), 36–40. Digital version on Google Books: <https://books.google.com/books?id=rxJeAAAACAAJ> (consulted 19 September 2018). Cf. van Suchtelen and Wheelock, *Hollandse stadsgezichten*, cat. nr. 9 for a discussion in how far Rixtel actually praised this painting.
- 13 Giltaij and Jansen, *Perspectieven*, 287. Only in the context of Saenredam some attention is given to the poem. Gary Schwartz and Marten Jan Bok, *Pieter Saenredam: The Painter and His Time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 242.
- 14 Rixtel, 'Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam', 36.
- 15 Thanks to Olga van Marion for advising me on this subject.
- 16 See among many other literature, Stijn Bussels, *The Animated Image. Roman Theory on Naturalism, Vividness and Divine Power* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012) and Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).
- 17 Fritz Graf, 'Ekphrasis. Die Entstehung der Gattung in der Antike', in Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (eds), *Beschreibungskunst/Kunstbeschreibung. Ekphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Fink, 1995), 143–55.
- 18 Besides Westermann and Woodall mentioned in previous notes, see the exhibition catalogue: Quentin Buvelot, et al., *Dutch Portraits: The Age of Rembrandt and Frans Hals* (Den Haag: Mauritshuis, 2007).
- 19 For an annotated edition, see Joost van den Vondel, *Inwydinge van 't Stadthuis t' Amsterdam*, ed. Saska Albrecht, et al. (Muiderberg: Couthinho, 1982).
- 20 Rixtel, 'Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam', 39.
- 21 Rixtel, 'Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam', 40.
- 22 See Stijn Bussels, Laura Plezier and Marc Van Vaeck, 'Amsterdam sierlijk verbonden met God. Het lofdicht op het Amsterdamse Stadhuis van Constantijn Huygens', *Spiegel der Letteren*, 59, no. 2–3 (2017): 261–90.
- 23 The poem can be found in Worp's edition of Huygens' manuscripts: *De gedichten van Constantijn Huygens naar zijn handschrift uitgegeven* (Groningen: Wolters, 1895) VI, 108. My translation.
- 24 Thomas von der Dunk, *Toren versus traditie. De worsteling van classicistische architecten met een middeleeuws fenomeen* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2015) and Gabri

- van Tussenbroek, *De toren van de Gouden Eeuw. Een Hollandse strijd tussen gulden en God* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2017).
- 25 Koen Ottenheim, 'The Attractive Flavour of the Past. Combining new Concepts for Ecclesiastical Buildings with References to Tradition in Seventeenth-Century Holland', in Jan Harasimowicz (ed.), *Protestant Church Architecture in Early Modern Europe. Fundamentals and New Research Approaches* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2015), 99–114.
- 26 One of them was offered in 1995 at the Auction Philips, Son & Neal, a second in 1999 at Christie's Amsterdam and a third in 2005 at Finarte-Semenzato Milaan. See [https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images#filters\[kunstenaar\]—ommersy%2C+Hendrick](https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images#filters[kunstenaar]—ommersy%2C+Hendrick) (consulted 19 September 2018).
- 27 Many thanks to Boudewijn Bakker for sharing his analysis of this painting.
- 28 Boudewijn Bakker, 'Oud maar niet lelijk', in *Oud en lelijk. Ouderdom in de cultuur van de Renaissance*, ed. Harald Hendrix and M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 37–56.
- 29 See Susan Kuretsky and Walter Gibson, *Time and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Poughkeepsie: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, 2005), 111–39.
- 30 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- 31 Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Chapter VII, and Isaac Ariail Reed, *Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King's Two Bodies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).
- 32 Geert H. Janssen, 'Political Ambiguity and Confessional Diversity in the Funeral Processions of Stadholders in the Dutch Republic', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 40 (2): 283–301 and Angela Vanhaelen, 'Recomposing the Body Politic in Seventeenth-century Delft', *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 3 (2008): 361–81.
- 33 Lorne Darnell, 'A Voice from the Past: Pieter Saenredam's *The Old Town Hall of Amsterdam*, Historical Continuity, and the Moral Sublime', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 2 (2016): <http://www.jhna.org/index.php/vol-8-2-2016/341-darnell-lorne> (consulted 19 September 2018).
- 34 Rixtel, 'Op het Stadthuys van Amsterdam', 37.
- 35 For further discussion and an elaborate bibliography, see Peter C. Sutton (ed.), *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), cat. nr. 9, 122–5.
- 36 Fabio Benzi, *Gaspare Vanvitelli e le origini del vedutismo* (Rome: Vivanti Arte, 2002), 33 and Laura Laureati, *Vanvitelli. Gaspar van Wittel* (London: Robilant and Voena, 2008), 10.
- 37 Many thanks to Eric Jan Sluijter for pointing me at this influence.
- 38 Georges Pascal, 'Les premiers peintres du paysages Parisien, Abraham de Verwer', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 68, no. 2 (1926): 288–92; Madeline Charageat, 'Une vue du

- Louvre et de l'Hotel de Nevers par Abraham de Verwer', *Bulletin du Musée Carnavalet* 2 (1949): 3–6; Jeroen Giltaij and J. Kelch, *Lof der zeevaart. De Hollandse zeeschilders van de 17e eeuw* (Rotterdam and Berlin: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie im Bodemuseum, 1996), 133–36; Stijn Alsteens, Hans Buijs and Véronique Mathot (eds), *Paysages de France dessinés par Lambert Doomer et les artistes hollandais et flamands des XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Fondation Custodia, 2008), 247–56.
- 39 On ordinance from 1639 presents that the painter received 400 *Carolusgulden* from Frederick Hendrick for two paintings of the building. Ariane van Suchtelen and Arthur K. Wheelock jr. (eds), *Hollandse stadsgezichten uit de Gouden Eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2008), Cat. No. 127.
- 40 Mark A. Thomson, 'Louis XIV and William III, 1689–1697', *The English Historical Review* 6 (1961): 37–58 and Luc Panhuysen, *Oranje tegen de Zonnekoning. De strijd van Willem III en Lodewijk XIV om Europa* (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2016).

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