

The Plaster Cast and the Intimacy of the Studio

Isabella Lores-Chavez

Abstract: In the seventeenth century, plaster casts, which were essential sources of inspiration and instruction, became a recurring motif in images of Dutch painters' workspaces, a marker of both intellectual and manual labor. Painters used plaster casts to proclaim their erudite knowledge of antiquity and of Renaissance sculpture that emulated ancient models. Plaster casts also provided a means for ambitious painters to communicate their personal and aspirational ties to other masters. The presence of plaster casts in archival records along with painted depictions of the studio provide insights into the impact of these objects on Dutch artists' practice and the distinguished lineages they claimed.

Keywords: plaster cast, studio, lineage, Netherlands

El vaciado en yeso y la intimidad del estudio

Resumen: En el siglo diecisiete, vaciados en yeso que eran fuentes esenciales de inspiración e instrucción, aparecieron en imágenes de los espacios de trabajo de pintores holandeses, resaltando las labores tanto intelectuales como manuales que ocurrían en el estudio. Estos pintores usaban vaciados de yeso para proclamar su conocimiento erudito de la antigüedad y la escultura del Renacimiento fundada sobre modelos antiguos. Vaciados en yeso también proporcionaron una manera de comunicar vínculos profundos entre pintores ambiciosos y otros maestros. La presencia de vaciados en yeso en documentos históricos y en pinturas del estudio del pintor señalan el impacto que estos objetos tuvieron en los hábitos artísticos de pintores holandeses, quienes aspiraban a afirmar linajes eminentes.

Palabras clave: molde de yeso, estudio, linaje, Países Bajos

O moldelo de gesso e a intimidade do estúdio

Resumo: No século XVII, os modelos de gesso, fontes importantes de inspiração e instrução, apareceram em imagens dos espaços de trabalho de pintores holandeses, destacando os trabalhos tanto intelectuais como manuais que ocorriam no atelier. Estes pintores usavam modelos de gesso para proclamar o seu conhecimento erudito da Antiguidade e da escultura do Renascimento fundamentada nos modelos antigos. Os modelos em gesso também proporcionavam uma maneira de comunicar vínculos profundos entre pintores ambiciosos e outros mestres. A presença de modelos de gesso em documentos históricos e em pinturas do atelier do pintor mostram o impacto que estes objetos tiveram nos hábitos artísticos de pintores holandeses, que aspiravam a afirmar as suas linhagens distintas.

Palavras-chave: molde de gesso, estúdio, linhagem, Holanda

In 1742, Frans van Mieris the Younger painted an affectionate portrait of his family's three generations of painters in the company of images, including a lively variety of plaster casts [Figure 1]. The portrait captures each painter's likeness alongside specific aspects of their shared craft. Van Mieris focuses on the bond that exists between them not merely as relatives but also as painters in a studio, a site of intimacy as much as a workspace. The plaster casts in the background invite the viewer to

consider the creative practices and activities that they share in the privacy of the studio. By the time Van Mieris inherited the profession of his distinguished father and grandfather, the plaster cast had become an expressive marker of both the intellectual and manual labor of an ambitious artist.

The motif of the plaster cast in the studio enjoyed increasing popularity in the seventeenth-century Dutch



Figure 1.- Frans van Mieris the Younger, *The Three Generations* (1742). Oil on panel, 34 x 30.4 cm. Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, S 311.

Republic as painters continued to advocate for the nobility of their art. The trend reflects the multiple ways that painters used casts, whether to develop essential drawing skills, to find inspiration for original compositions, or to demonstrate erudition and knowledge of antiquity. In the absence of extant plaster casts from the seventeenth century, I look to traces of plaster casts in the historical record combined with close readings of individual paintings to gain a clearer understanding of the impact these objects had on Dutch artistic practice. Period sources, particularly inventories, provide evidence for the circulation of plaster casts that have not survived due to their material fragility and modest valuation. Dutch paintings offer insights into the specific subjects these casts popularized, information not necessarily accounted for in historical documents. Through this dual consultation of archival material and Dutch painters' pictorial choices, I argue that, in self-referential depictions of studios, plaster casts accrue meaning beyond the subjects they show and create opportunities for painters to imagine personal and aspirational ties to other masters.

Plaster casts augment the impression of looking in on the painter not only because they refer to the physical work that normally occurred behind closed doors but also because they visualize and claim artistic lineages. The particular penchant of Dutch artists for placing these objects alongside their self-portraits has been largely overlooked. Though their colleagues in Italy had used plaster casts since at least the end of the fifteenth century (Marchand 2010), Dutch painters more consistently chose to represent themselves accompanied by casts. The resulting images are a testament to the fact that Dutch

painters frequently owned plaster casts and, through them, forged relationships with one another. Furthermore, plaster casts of famous works by Netherlandish sculptors gave Dutch painters another means to celebrate their countrymen and, by extension, themselves.

Entering the Studio

Painters across the Dutch Republic depicted artists' studios and their contents for the benefit of curious laymen and discerning elites. As their social status improved, painters were caught in a bind: how could they celebrate their profession and stoke their patrons' curiosity about it without revealing its challenges and drudgery? To produce paintings of the studio was to control the narrative of what occurred there. In the Netherlands, the image of the artist at work had its most significant precedents in the visual tradition of Saint Luke drawing the Virgin, inaugurated by foundational masters like Rogier van der Weyden. These pictures, first and foremost devotional icons, related painters to their patron saint through their craft (Chapman 2005: 111-114). The privilege afforded to Saint Luke, to depict the Virgin and Child, doubled as a way to showcase the tools of the trade. The instruments essential to the painter's work thus entered easel paintings before the contemporary painter himself. In the Renaissance, the studio also invoked the legendary tale of Apelles, the court painter to Alexander the Great who was tasked with making a likeness of his patron's beloved Campaspe. This prototype for the virtuoso painter—who created a portrait so astonishing that Alexander offered him the real Campaspe in exchange for her image—fittingly appears in a 1628 cabinet picture by Willem van Haecht, of an imaginary gallery lined with the work of active Flemish masters who sought to emulate Apelles.

As Léon Lock (2010) has summed up, "during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a few painters in the Low Countries developed what might be termed a specific genre: the studio interior" (Lock 2010: 251). Plaster casts appeared within this genre as a major indicator of the skills these painters cultivated. The rise of paintings of an artist at work coincided with a proliferation, in the Dutch Republic, of images that featured the tools and physical activity involved in a variety of occupations. According to Allison Kettering (2007), "Dutch artists produced—and Dutch buyers purchased—paintings of men engaged in all sorts of skilled labor," more than in any other European society (Kettering 2007: 694). Painters had a renewed imperative to differentiate themselves from professionals with similar attributes and work sites. Plaster casts, among the most distinctive objects painters regularly used, became a valuable choice for pictorial studios, where they are more numerous than in scenes of bookish scholars. The laboratories painted by Thomas Wijck, for example, resemble the painters' studios portrayed by his fellow Dutchmen, but plaster casts never number among the abundant items at the alchemist's disposal.

Plaster casts were never the exclusive reserve of artists in training, but rather the companions of even the most accomplished masters. Among them were Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem and Hendrick Goltzius. Together with Karel van Mander, they established in Haarlem a group referred to as an academy in an anonymous biography of Van Mander included in the 1618 edition of *Het Schilder-boeck*. The so-called academy held drawing sessions, most likely centered on the sculptures and plaster casts that Cornelis and Goltzius owned (Van Thiel 1965: 124). Cornelis eventually gave some of his casts to the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, while Goltzius's were inherited by artists like Abraham Bloemaert, who later founded his own drawing academy with Paulus Moreelse (Reznicek 1961: 449; Taverne 1972-1973: 55; Roethlisberger and Bok 1993). Plaster casts connected subsequent generations of painters to illustrious individuals like Goltzius and Cornelis. The casts that appear in studio pictures carried associations not only with the sculpture they reproduced, but also with a specifically Netherlandish history of drawing.

Sculptors also interacted with plaster casts, as they actually made them in their workshops. The goods of the sculptor Cornelis van den Block, sold in Amsterdam in 1629, included one plaster Cupid ("1 Cupido pleijster"), dozens of pieces of plaster work ("pleijsterwerck") and eleven "pieces of plaster" ("stucx pleijster") (Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories: Inventory 631). Albert Vinckenbrinck, who primarily sculpted in palmwood, owned twenty-two small boxes of plaster work ("tweentwintich doosjens met playsterwerck") at the time of his death in 1665 (Montias Database: Inventory 287). The contents of the Amsterdam workshop of Bartholomeus Eggers offer other clues into a sculptor's dealings in plaster. The room called the shop contained a cabinet in which Eggers kept unused plaster, as well as casts of ancient subjects such as an Athena and a Mars made of plaster ("een pallas van plyster" and "een beelt synde Mars van plyster"), presumably for sale. 29 plaster and clay heads were in the casting room ("giet camer"), while in the "best room" of the house, Eggers kept a series of Roman emperors and three sculptures on the fireplace mantelpiece, all made of plaster (Bredius 1915-1922: 717-719). Though he was a prominent sculptor best known for his marble portrait busts, he also made his own plaster casts as intermediary steps in his sculptural practice and as items to sell in his shop. At the same time, he selected other casts to decorate his home. The many seventeenth-century inventories that list plaster objects provide at least a partial picture of their circulation in the Dutch Republic. Depictions of plaster casts grant further insight into their multiple meanings and functions, most of all in images of the studio.

Reproducing Reproductions

Dutch artists lived with plaster casts, perhaps more than anyone else in the prosperous Republic, and pictured

them as consistent sentinels of their practice. The casts in Gerrit Dou's *Artist in His Studio* evoke classical literature, disciplined learning, and the modern taste for copies of famous sculpture [Figure 2]. Behind the painter looms a large plaster *Hercules and Cacus*, based not on the era's most famous example—Baccio Bandinelli's 1534 marble in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence—but on one that captures the struggle between the adversaries. It closely resembles a bronze statuette now in the Walters Art Museum, which is based upon prototypes by the Flemish sculptor Giambologna [Figure 3]. Though he never undertook the subject of *Hercules and Cacus*, Giambologna designed a series of Hercules's twelve labors in silver for the Grand Duke of Urbino (Avery 1987: 141). Versions of these small sculptures circulated soon thereafter; Giambologna himself preserved ephemeral material easily carried out of the workshop, which helps account for the survival of many of his models (Cole 2011: 25, 63). The maker of the sculpture that inspired the cast of *Hercules and Cacus* in Dou's painting could also have looked to Giambologna's earliest marbles, such as *Samson Slaying a Philistine* (1560-1562).

Dou's use of this cast alongside the solitary painter reflects the impression made by Van Mander's interpretation of the story. In *Het Schilder-boeck* (1604), Van Mander expounded upon the moral significance of Hercules's defeat of the fire-breathing giant, which he understood to represent virtue's



Figure 2.- Gerrit Dou. *The Artist in His Studio* (1647). Oil on panel, 43.5 x 34.5 cm. © Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gal.-Nr. 1704. Photo: Elke Estel / Hans-Peter Klut.



Figure 3.- Anonymous Umbrian artist after Giambologna, *Hercules and Cacus* (ca. 1700). Bronze, H: 39.8 cm. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 54.248.

victory over vice and envy. As envy was considered a chief enemy of art, the mythical hero's triumph had special significance for Dou, who had by 1647 achieved wide acclaim and success (Gaskell 1982: 18). The contemporary celebration of Hercules as a paragon of virtue augmented his allure as a character from the ancient world. Moreover, identifying the story of Hercules's confrontation with Cacus—a minor episode not represented as frequently as others—required a deeper knowledge of classical literature. The *Hercules and Cacus* appears in Dou's painting as a manifestation of the painter's social and professional aspirations.

Plaster casts, including the female head in the *Artist in His Studio*, appear regularly in Dou's oeuvre. One cast in particular, of a marble relief by the Flemish sculptor François Duquesnoy, provided the source for a motif that recurs in several paintings. Dou must have seen Duquesnoy's relief, carved in 1626 in Rome, in the form of a plaster cast. The composition, which shows putti taunting a goat, appears in Dou's work, among others, along the bottom of the stone niche in the *Self-Portrait* from around 1665 [Figure 4]. Copies of Duquesnoy sculpture proliferated in the seventeenth century; according to the biographer Giovanni Battista Passeri, "In the studios of many painters and sculptors in Rome can be seen his statuettes in plaster, so novel and elegant in pose and execution that one recognizes in them a knowledge that is not ordinary"



Figure 4.- Gerrit Dou, *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1665). Oil on wood, 48.9 x 39.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 14.40.607.

(Lingo 2007: 32). Duquesnoy's brother and collaborator Jérôme was instrumental in the wider dissemination of his designs. According to Peter Hecht, after Duquesnoy's death in 1643, Jérôme returned to Flanders and "brought with him all the material his brother had already packed to be shipped to Paris" (Hecht 2002: 194). Jérôme's access to original works put him in a privileged position to oversee the production of casts to sell (Hecht 2002). By mid-century, there was evidently a lively market for copies of Duquesnoy sculpture in the Netherlands. Frits Scholten has analyzed the 1664 inventory of the Larson family of sculptors in The Hague and convincingly proposed that one of the plaster casts made in their busy workshop was a copy of Duquesnoy's *Cupid With a Bow*, which had been gifted to Amalia van Solms, wife of stadholder Frederik Hendrik, in 1637 (Scholten 2004-2005: 60-61).

Dou could have purchased—or at the very least seen and drawn—a cast of Duquesnoy's *Children with a Goat*. As many scholars have noted, Dou's choice of the Duquesnoy relief in the 1650s and 60s points to his participation in the theoretical debate of *paragone*, the legendary competition between painting and sculpture. Hecht in particular has explored how Dou was primarily preoccupied with *paragone*, citing the modifications he sometimes made to Duquesnoy's composition (Hecht 2002). Given that the source for the relief was a plaster cast, Dou's depictions of it are doubly performative: to boast that paint can completely imitate stone, he must use it to

transform plaster into marble. Through the repetition of this motif, Dou also turned the citation of another artist's work into a personal trademark (Ho 2017). He cultivated an association with the relief that his successors recognized. In Jacob Toorenvliet's *Allegory of Painting*, a truncated cast of the *Children with a Goat* sits beside a personification of the art of painting [Figure 5]. Dou, Toorenvliet's uncle-in-law, had died in 1675, around the time Toorenvliet completed the painting (Aono 2017). Toorenvliet's choice of the Duquesnoy cast pays homage to Dou and his legacy by explicitly linking the *Children with a Goat* to the nobility of Painting, who is being crowned with the laurel wreath of poetry.



Figure 5.- Jacob Toorenvliet, *Allegory of Painting* (ca. 1675-1679). Oil on copper, 24.6 x 31 cm. Leiden Collection, New York, JT-106. Image courtesy of The Leiden Collection.

Central to the appeal of plaster casts was their capacity to simulate an encounter with antiquities that were otherwise remote, making classical models available to a wider range of practitioners. As a result, generalizations made about plaster casts in Dutch paintings suggest that ancient sculpture was the primary reference material. To be sure, painters frequently boasted their knowledge of ancient statues in studio scenes. In his 1679 *Self-Portrait*, Michiel van Musscher presents himself in an interior that is both refined home and workspace, next to a cast of the *Borghese Gladiator* [Figure 6]. The Hellenistic statue had been discovered in 1611 among the ruins of Nero's seaside palace in Anzio, and subsequent reproductions, in media including bronze and plaster, supplied it with a sword and shield based on the assumption that it depicted a gladiator (Haskell and Penny 1981: 222). In the *Self-Portrait*, there is a visual affinity between the painter and the statuette: the sweep of the gladiator's body echoes Van Musscher's own elegant bend, while the thin sword finds a counterpart in the maulstick between his fingers. Van Musscher painted the same cast, seen from behind, on another occasion, which suggests he may have owned it at some point. According to the inventory of his studio taken upon his death, he had Cupid-like statues, likely made of plaster,

which could be hung up ("seven vliegende beeltjes") (Bredius 1915-1922: 993). He also included plaster casts in other images of painters at work, such as his 1667 drawing of a rustic artist's home scattered with casts. In the 1679 *Self-Portrait*, the plaster casts play a double role: they exemplify the taste of a sophisticated burgher and convey the working methods of a painter. The *Borghese Gladiator* is as much a collector's item as it is an authoritative model from which to draw an idealized male body.



Figure 6.- Michiel van Musscher, *Self-Portrait* (1679). Oil on panel, 57 x 46.5 cm. Museum Rotterdam, 10567-A-B.

But ancient prototypes were by no means the norm. The plaster casts in the paintings of Dou and his contemporaries were often based on the creations of Netherlandish sculptors like Duquesnoy. Dutch painters sometimes showed a favor for "modern" sculpture and, in so doing, propagated the fame of fellow Netherlanders. Their warm reception of sixteenth-century Netherlandish sculptors is an inadvertent corrective to Van Mander's focus only on the lives of painters in the *Schilder-boeck*, which excluded such renowned sculptors as Giambologna (De Koomen 2013). One of the most frequently reproduced casts in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings is the anatomically instructive *Écorché* by Willem van Tetrode of Delft. Van Tetrode modeled and cast the *Écorché* in bronze between 1562 and 1567 while working in Florence, based at least in part on the ancient *Dioscuri* (Scholten 2003: 39, 42). Plaster versions of the *Écorché* subsequently circulated. In 1655, Gerard van Honthorst included a plaster cast of the statuette in his portrait of an artist working on a portrait drawing [Figure 7]. A later picture of a young scholar reading by lamplight, attributed to Johannes Voorhout



Figure 7.- Gerard van Honthorst, *Portrait of an Artist* (1655). Oil on canvas, 116 x 93.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-1479.



Figure 8.- Frans van Mieris, *The Painter in His Studio* (ca. 1655/57). Oil on panel, 64 x 47 cm. © Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gal.-Nr. 1751. Photo: Elke Estel / Hans-Peter Klut.

in a Sotheby's New York sale (31 January 2019), also puts the plaster *Écorché* prominently on view. The casts in these pictures indicate an abiding enthusiasm among Dutch painters for Netherlandish sculpture, available through plaster copies even when the originals resided elsewhere on the continent.

Pictura's Plaster Attributes

Frans van Mieris, Dou's most successful pupil, also recognized plaster casts as essential components of the painter's work. A cast of *Hercules Wrestling the Serpent* appears in two different scenes of guests in a studio. In *The Painter in His Studio*, the visiting patron has taken a seat before the pastoral painting on the easel, but his body and gaze are oriented towards the plaster cast on the table [Figure 8]. The cast, which Van Mieris probably owned, reproduces a statuette that entered the collection of the Uffizi in the late 1500s (Buvelot 2005: 88). The centrality of casts in Van Mieris's practice is most fully articulated in his diminutive and gem-like *Pictura* from 1661, an innovative conception of painting itself [Figure 9]. In the seventeenth century, most representations of this allegorical figure adhered to the conventions set by Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593). In the frontispiece to the book's Dutch edition (1644), *Pictura* wears a cloth over her mouth and a necklace bearing a mask, with brushes in both hands. Van Mieris not only omitted the figure's mouth covering,

thereby affording her a more naturalistic aspect, but he also determined that *Pictura* required another attribute representative of the work of painting.

Van Mieris's *Pictura* holds a plaster statuette that depicts a muscular bearded man holding a shield, which suggests he is either Mars or Hercules. Scholten has identified it as a design by Artus Quellinus from his Amsterdam period, on the basis of its resemblance to a terracotta herm made for the De Neufville family (Scholten 1999: 32). That a Mars or Hercules by Quellinus would have been replicated in plaster is conceivable given the documented circulation of plaster casts of Quellinus's sculpture. The marble bust of the pensionary Johan de Witt commissioned from Quellinus in 1665 entered the collections of De Witt's elite supporters in the form of plaster casts, while the sculptor's busts of Amsterdam burgomasters were a popular choice for reproduction in plaster (Scholten and Hoyle 2006: 112-116). The plaster statuette after Quellinus in Van Mieris's *Pictura* thus extends the preference for centering the work of Netherlandish sculptors in Dutch painters' depictions of their fundamental tools.

Quentin Buvelot (2005) proposed that the plaster Hercules or Mars "alludes to the age-old competition between the arts of painting and sculpture" and is "intended to enhance



Figure 9.-Frans van Mieris, *Pictura* (1661). Oil on copper, 12.7 x 8.9 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 82.PC.136.

the scene's antique ambience" (Buvelot 2005: 148). That invocation of the *paragone* coheres with the mask on Pictura's necklace, a symbol of imitation that Van Mieris would have known well, not least from its appearance in the Duquesnoy *Children with a Goat* so frequently reproduced by Dou. If Pictura's mask promises that a painting can deceive the eye, the plaster statuette solicits comparison with sculpture as the principal way to evaluate the success of a painted illusion. But Van Mieris's choice to give Pictura a plaster cast is also anchored in a literal exploration of the painter's supplies. The varied brushes in Pictura's hand are highly individualized, rooted in firsthand experience rather than the generalized mode of an emblem. The palette, too, is specific, with seven distinct colors evenly laid out along one edge. In his Self-Portrait of 1667, Van Mieris repeated this arrangement of colors from light to dark, which reflects both a personal preference and a custom among later seventeenth-century painters (Van de Wetering 1995: 199-200). Even the figure of Pictura herself arises from a real-life model: Van Mieris had his wife, Cunera van der Cock, pose for the painting (Buvelot 2005: 148). Van Mieris paints the plaster statuette, too, as if closely observed, careful to render visible the seams across the figure's right forearm and wrist that recalls its assembly from pieces cast in multiple molds.

As the head of a family of painters, Van Mieris commanded a formidable legacy. His sons continued to incorporate

plaster casts into both their real and painted studios. Jan van Mieris's 1688 *Portrait of a Smoking Painter* shows an artist taking a pause from his work to smoke a pipe, but the casts in the picture proclaim that his diligence is not to be called into question [Figure 10]. Behind him stands a plaster Apollo, after a sinuous bronze by Duquesnoy, and, beside it, the plaster head of Cupid. The *Apollo and Cupid* had been published in Jan de Bisschop's *Signorum veterum icones* (1670), which likely precipitated the creation of plaster versions, including enlargements such as this one. The smoking painter has made the effort to procure casts of an idealized male nude to study and learn from. At the edge of his table, a drawing of a muscular torso further confirms his commitment to mastering the contours of the body in charcoal and chalk before painting them.



Figure 10.- Jan van Mieris, *Portrait of a Smoking Painter* (1688). Oil on panel, 17.7 x 14.3 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Inv. Nr. HK-625. Courtesy of Hamburger Kunsthalle / bpk. Photo: Elke Walford.

The impact of the elder Frans van Mieris is proudly memorialized by his grandson in *The Three Generations*. Frans van Mieris the Younger included his namesake by displaying a framed drawing of Van Mieris the Elder alongside Arnold Houbraken's *Groote schouburgh* (1718), open to the page with an engraved portrait based on the drawing. The seated Willem turns his head towards the likeness of his father, while Frans the Younger points emphatically at the engraving. The three painters are presented as a unit whose bonds depend not only on their familial ties but also on the materials and techniques they share. As the author of this picture, Frans holds the brushes and palette, which, dotted with paint judiciously distributed

for handling with individual brushes, is characteristic of the meticulous method advocated by the eldest Van Mieris. Willem has a sheet of paper in his lap unrolled just enough to reveal a drawing of a raised hand and a head turned almost to full profile. Between father and son lie sources of learning and inspiration: a large landscape, an album of drawings and prints, and the ultimate exemplar, Frans van Mieris.

The living painters have come together in a room outfitted for their work, with an easel set next to a window and shelves bedecked with plaster casts. While training with his father, Willem may have drawn from casts like the *Hercules Wrestling with the Serpent* and the plaster statuette after Quellinus that at the very least passed through Van Mieris's studio. Willem went on to be a keen observer of sculpture and plaster casts as a master painter. In 1694, he, along with Jacob Toorenvliet and Carel de Moor, founded a drawing academy in Leiden, for which they amassed a collection of plaster casts of ancient statues and fragments thereof (Sluijter, Enklaar and Nieuwenhuizen 1988: 31-33; Aono 2007/2008: 244). Around the turn of the eighteenth century, Willem turned his attention to contemporary sculpture: he made highly finished drawings of classicizing sculptures by the Flemish sculptor Francis van Bossuit, whose excellent reputation in Amsterdam related in part to his study of ancient sculpture in Rome (Aono 2007/2008: 244). Some of Willem's most important patrons owned examples of Van Bossuit's work, a number of which were casts; Pieter and Allard de la Court alone had twelve plaster casts after Van Bossuit originals, which Willem could have used for his study drawings (Aono 2007/2008: 244).

Willem apparently also bought plaster casts for himself. The German art lover Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, who visited Willem in 1711, noted in his travel book that the Leiden master must have had many in private possession (Von Uffenbach 1754: 423-424). These were the most likely to end up with his son Frans van Mieris the Younger, and in fact the casts in the background of *The Three Generations* suggest as much. One of the plaster casts on the top shelf had served Willem as the model for the crouching dog in several genre pictures (Aono 2007/2008: 244). Below it, a Cupid repeats the type of cast that Van Mieris the Elder showed hanging from the ceiling in his lost *Artist's Studio*, while the cast beside it, a reduction of the famous Belvedere torso, signals the family's knowledge of the canonical works of antiquity. The types of fragments and casts of extremities that Willem drew from and used in the Leiden academy also hang on the adjacent wall: a cast of a head in profile and a left arm that humorously repeats the pointing finger of Van Mieris the Younger in the foreground.

It is the plaster cast on the shelf partially hidden behind the green curtain that most amplifies the working process of the three painters. This one, too, recalls Willem's past familiarity with plaster casts. A standing female nude with a long cloth wrapped around her left leg, this cast resembles the Venus and Cupid after Van Bossuit that Willem composed in black chalk and used for inspiration in his history paintings (Aono 2007/2008: 245-246). In the triple portrait, Van Mieris the Younger has followed suit. The plaster cast is the model for the

painting set on the easel, which depicts Venus accompanied by Cupid, in a similar stance: her left leg is bent and a blue cloth decorously wraps around her upper thigh. Through this painting, the plaster cast also relates to the drawing in Willem's lap. The sheet shows the initial renderings of the head and hand of Venus. The drawing also completes the truncated image of the plaster cast, whose head is obscured by the curtain. Plaster cast, drawing, and painting are inextricably related variations on the same subject. This relationship across the triple portrait offers subtle insights into the steps taken by each painter to achieve a carefully planned, idealized classical subject. The painting within the painting is the product of a generations-old and measured approach.

The Three Generations enlists the studio and the plaster casts therein to communicate the admiration the youngest Van Mieris felt for his father and grandfather and to express their affinity with one another. It is comparable to friendship portraits that emerged in the later seventeenth century as visual declarations of mutual regard between like-minded men. The training, the tools, and the creative choices through which the men so closely relate amplify the intimacy of the painted scene. Van Mieris's *Three Generations* urges the viewer to see the studio and its contents as physical reminders of the interactions between the three painters, determined as much by blood as by artistic inclination.

References

- AONO, J. (2007/2008). "Ennobling Daily Life: A Question of Refinement in Early Eighteenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting," *Simiolus*, 33 (4): 237-257.
- AONO, J. (2017). "Allegory of Painting." In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, Wheelock Jr., A. K. and Yeager-Crasselt, L. (eds.), <https://www.theleidencollection.com/artwork/an-allegory-of-painting/> [consulted: 6/22/2020]
- AVERY, C. (1987). *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture*. Mr. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell.
- BREDIUS, A. (1915-1922). *Künstler-Inventare: Urkunden zur Geschichte der Holländische Kunst des XVIIten, XVIIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhundert* (Vol. 1-4). The Hague: M. Nijhoff.
- BUVELOT, Q. (ed.) (2005). *Frans van Mieris, 1635-1681*. Zwolle: Waanders.
- CHAPMAN, H. P. (2005). "The Imagined Studios of Rembrandt and Vermeer." In *Inventions of the Studio, Renaissance to Romanticism*, Cole M. W. and Pardo, M. (eds.). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 108-146.
- COLE, M. W. (2011). *Ambitious Form: Giambologna, Ammanati, and Danti in Florence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- GASKELL, I. (1982). "Gerrit Dou, His Patrons, and the Art of Painting," *Oxford Art Journal*, 5 (1): 15-23.

HASKELL, F. and PENNY, N. (1981). *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

HECHT, P. (2002). "Art Beats Nature, and Painting Does so Best of All: The Paragone Competition in Duquesnoy, Dou and Schalcken," *Simiolus*, 29 (3/4): 184-201.

HO, A. (2017). *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting: Repetition and Invention*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

KETTERING, A. M. (2007). "Men at Work in Dutch Art, or Keeping One's Nose to the Grindstone," *The Art Bulletin*, 89 (4), 694-714.

DE KOOMEN, A. (2013). "'Una cosa non meno maravigliosa che honorata': The expansion of Netherlandish sculptors in sixteenth-century Europe," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 63: 82-109.

LINGO, E. C. (2007). *François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

LOCK, L. E. (2010). "Picturing the Use, Collecting and Display of Plaster Casts in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Artists' Studios in Antwerp and Brussels." In *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Fredriksen, R. and Marchand, E. (eds.) Berlin: De Gruyter, 251-267.

MARCHAND, E. (2010). "Plaster and Plaster Casts in Renaissance Italy." In *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Fredriksen, R. and Marchand, E. (eds.) Berlin: De Gruyter, 49-79.

REZNICEK, E. K. J. (1961). *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius* (Vol. 1). Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert.

ROETHLISBERGER, M. G. and BOK, M. J. (1993). *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints*. Doornspijk: Davaco.

SCHOLTEN, F. (1999). "Een ijvoren Mars van Francis, de beeldsnijder Van Bossuit en de familie De la Court," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 47 (1): 26-43.

SCHOLTEN, F. (ed.). (2003). *Willem van Tetrode, Sculptor* (c. 1525-1580). Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum.

SCHOLTEN, F. (2004-2005). "The Larson Family of Statuary Founders: Seventeenth-Century Reproductive Sculpture for Gardens and Painters' Studios," *Simiolus*, 31 (1/2): 54-89.

SCHOLTEN, F. and HOYLE, M. (2006). "Quellinus's Burgomasters: A Portrait Gallery of Amsterdam Republicanism," *Simiolus*, 32 (2/3): 87-125.

SLUIJTER, E. J., ENKLAAR, M. and NIEUWENHUIZEN, P. (eds.). (1988). *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630-1760*. Zwolle: Waanders.

TARVENE, E. (1972-1973). "Salomon de Bray and the Reorganization of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1631," *Simiolus*, 6 (1), 50-69.

VAN THIEL, P. J. J. (1965). "Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem as a

Draughtsman," *Master Drawings*, 3 (2): 123-154, 189-199.

VAN DE WETERING, E. (1995). "Reflections on the Relation between Technique and Style: The Use of the Palette by the Seventeenth-Century Painter." In *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice*, Wallert, A., Hermens, E. and Peek, M. (eds.). Marina del Rey, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 196-203.

VON UFFENBACH, Z. C. (1754). *Merkwürdige Reisen durch Niedersachsen, Holland und Engelland* (Vol. 3). Ulm: Johann Friedrich Gaum.

Author/s



Isabella Lores-Chavez

iloreschavez@famsf.org

California Palace of the Legion of Honor,
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, USA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4549-7420>

Associate Curator of European Paintings at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, completed her Ph.D. in Art History at Columbia University in May 2022. Her dissertation focused on the circulation and depiction of plaster casts in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Isabella was the 2020-2022 Samuel H. Kress Predoctoral Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts. From 2018 to 2019, she was the Theodore Rousseau Fellow in European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. From 2016 to 2018, she was the Academic Coordinator for the Getty-funded project Spanish Italy and the Iberian Americas. Born in Cali, Colombia and raised in Los Angeles, Isabella received her B.A. in Art History from Yale in 2012. In 2013, she curated a small exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entitled *Dutch and French Genre Drawings from the Robert Lehman Collection*. She has also worked at the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Artículo enviado el 26/05/2023

Artículo aceptado el 17/06/2023



<https://doi.org/10.37558/gec.v23i1.1214>