CHAPTER 10

Iconoclasm and *Poesie*

The 1560s is a decade widely associated with the destruction of images, particularly in the Netherlands, yet for Floris it was also a period of intense creativity in which religious and political tensions became catalysts for a new approach to art. The Iconoclasm of 1566 laid waste to much of the region’s visual culture, especially the monumental religious paintings that filled its churches. By some accounts, Floris never recovered from witnessing the destruction of his work in this so-called *Wonderjaar* or Year of Miracles, when many of his altarpieces suffered extensive damage. Far from a sudden blow, the Iconoclasts’ attacks, which will be examined in the Coda of this book, actually solidified a transformation in Floris’s work that the painter himself had set in motion when he embarked on an intensely personal project to reform his own art. By about 1560, Floris largely stopped painting the altarpieces that were once his mainstay, delving instead into the world of mythology and exploring a new poetic register of image making. The smaller paintings, drawings, and designs for prints Floris produced in this late period effected a more intimate viewing experience. They addressed a new and expanding market for secular works while advertising a novel lyric inventiveness in Floris’s art.

A number of immediate factors may have helped drive this shift. These include a decrease in commissions for altarpieces in the tense years of political and religious unrest preceding the Dutch Revolt, changes in taste and the growth of new modes of collecting, increased professionalism among print publishers in Antwerp, and the evolution of vernacular poetry, both in printed form and in the public performances of rhetoricians’ guilds. In addition, as we have seen, increasing sectarian polarization placed unprecedented stress on Antwerp’s leading artists. Floris’s own convictions reflect his deep concerns with the temporal and spiritual authority of the Catholic Church. At the same time, other members of his artistic community publicly voiced concerns about the threats of aniconic Protestantism. In 1562, 1564, and 1566, the *Violieren* or Violet Rhetoricians’ Guild, whose members included many artists, staged plays that publicly aired their concerns about the impact of new religious denominations and doctrines on their work as artists. In these plays, which eerily portend some of the effects of the later

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Figure 10.24, detail

*Diana and her Nymphs Surprised by Actaeon*