HONDIUS MEETS VAN MANDER: THE CULTURAL APPROPRIATION OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDISH BOOK ON THE VISUAL ARTS SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE IN A SERIES OF ARTISTS’ PORTRAITS*

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This essay addresses a paradox. It explores the way in which an early seventeenth-century Netherlandish book on the art of painting communicated notions of a visual arts system of knowledge in which bookish wisdom played only a minor role. The book is Karel van Mander’s *Schilder-boeck*, published in Haarlem in 1604 and republished in Amsterdam in 1618.¹ It is generally considered to be the first Netherlandish art theoretical text of a kind, very much inspired by its Italian counterpart, Giorgio Vasari’s *Vite* of 1550 (reprinted 1568). Although scholars still disagree on the true nature of the book, its canonical impact is beyond doubt.² Every author after Van Mander (1548–1606) responds one way or the other on the *Schilder-boeck*. Even today the book is still a *Fundgrube* for art historical research.

Until now the focus of research has been predominantly on the text of the book. Hessel Miedema’s editing and translating endeavours have opened up the *Schilder-boeck* to international scholarship, but interpretative contextual studies of the impact of the book on contemporary art history have been lacking.

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(artistic) readership are remarkably scarce.\(^3\) Walter Melion’s *Shaping the Netherlandish canon*, the only interpretative monograph so far that adds up to Miedema's scholarship, focuses more on the underlying philosophy and strategy of the *Schilder-boeck*, than on its reception by northern artists in terms of their professional self-perception.\(^4\)

The present essay starts from the presupposition that Van Mander’s *Schilder-boeck* represented and communicated, however implicitly, notions of a visual arts system of knowledge that were pivotal to the artistic professional identity of the early modern northern artist. This system of knowledge encompassed an interesting blend of innate talent on the one hand and propositional and tacit types of knowledge on the other hand. Propositional knowledge or descriptive knowledge is practical as well as theoretical, logical and explicit, and can be learned from written sources. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is implicit and embodied and can only be transferred from person to person and by lifelong experience.\(^5\) In this visual arts system of knowledge, that of course was grounded in artistic practices of the time and was not as such ‘invented’ by Van Mander, *mind* and *hand* – being metaphors of the human intellect and skill – were perceived to be very much interrelated.

This essay will address the issue of artistic readership of Van Mander’s *Schilder-boeck* (more precisely the parts *Den Grondt der Edel vry Schilder-const* and *Het Leven der Doorluchtighe Nederlandtsche en Hooghduytsche Schilders*) by exploring how the aforementioned visual arts system of knowledge embedded in this book resonated with Hendrick Hondius’ popular series of 68 artists’ portraits. This series was published half a decade after the first edition of Van Mander’s book and was entitled *Pictorum Aliquot Celebrium Praecipuae Germaniae Inferioris Effigies* (The Hague, 1610 and republished in 1618).\(^6\) The existence of actual copies of the second

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4 Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon*.
