LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS IN DUTCH SEVENTEENTH CENTURY INTERIORS
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The problem of the nature and degree of realism found in Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century has occupied recent scholarship a good deal. We may still be justified in expecting a costume painted by Mierevelt to be absolutely "true to life"; silverware in still lifes by Heda can be classified and identified; Saenredam's well-nigh fanatical clinging to truth in architecture is almost proverbial. But many aspects of Dutch realism have become increasingly suspect. The greatest masters were not the only ones to overstep the limits set by exact observation and matter-of-fact rendering of the outside world; the problem also affects painters whose optical fidelity would hardly have been called in question a few decades ago. It is not necessary to dwell upon the reasons for this new attitude. That the contemporaries of Courbet saw in Hals (whom they rediscovered) an all-out realist is just as natural as that contemporaries of Kokoschka do not.

Many of the newly observed discrepancies between "picture" and "fact" correspond to those between plain "naturalism" and more complex meaning. Still lifes, seemingly painted for their natural appeal pure and simple, more and more often turned out to be elaborately devised allegories; by the same token, still lifes often turned out to be made up of details drawn from pattern books and individual studies combined into a composition without primary regard for such realistic considerations as seasonal credibility, unified light source and exact perspective. Group portraits once considered faithful renderings of specific events and moments "enacted" on a stage, developed infinitely more complicated aspects than had ever been suspected; by the same token, their settings were found to defy some of the most obvious rules of realistic representation in their treatment of color, light and space. At the same time, landscapes, once confidently expected to conform to topographical correctness, began to show, as often as not, the strangest anomalies: a realistically painted motif was transplanted into totally alien surroundings, and buildings from cities separated by many miles were comfortably united in the most intimate neigh-

1 van Gelder 1936; Bergström.  2 van de Waal 1956 and 1952, 50-2; Heckscher.
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borhood\(^3\). In short, paintings began to reveal a stubborn tendency toward stylization and the flouting of truth for the sake of more subtle meanings and of more independent compositional values. The decline of realistic content and form which had long been observed in the sequence from landscape drawings to etchings and paintings of such artists as Rembrandt and Ruisdael was found to apply to paintings in a much more comprehensive sense.

These facts must be kept in mind as we approach the task of interpreting, however cursorily, the “truth” about landscapes shown hanging on the walls of Dutch seventeenth century paintings of interiors. There does not seem to exist any previous literature on this subject. Smith and Hofstede de Groot were usually non-committal on identifications of this kind, and so are all catalogues of collections, with the exception of Neil MacLaren’s of the National Gallery in London (1960). A systematic perusal of the great photographic collections would certainly supplement, probably modify, and possibly render altogether obsolete the brief sketch offered here.

Caution with regard to the problems mentioned above would of course be equally necessary in a survey of any other “pictures within pictures”; but the case of landscapes is made a bit more difficult by the fact that it seems impossible to find a single example of a clearly identifiable landscape painting in any such interior, while in the field of genre painting we have at least two well-known instances of a more or less exact reproduction of identifiable works: the Baburen Procuress discussed below, and Frans Hals’s Mulatto, which appears on Jan Steen’s Christening in Berlin (HdG 446). This drawback may well turn out to be a result of the present author’s incomplete knowledge of the vast number of such interiors but it may also be due to a tendency on the part of the painters of interiors to think of landscapes as something individually less important, something more generally decorative than genre paintings; the latter were apt to be treated with a little more regard for their specific meaning, even though less so than the iconographically very telling mythological scenes found on the walls of Jan Steen’s rooms, particularly his Doctor’s Visits. It also seems that landscapes were somewhat less frequently distinguished by gold frames than were other subjects.

It must also be borne in mind that Holland never produced any “painted galleries” of the kind so extremely popular in seventeenth century Flanders; this fact deprives us of another chance of investigating closely the way in which a Dutch painter would have interpreted a known landscape painting on a small scale.

We are thus facing many unknowns. Did the painted landscapes correspond

\(^3\) Stechow; Beck; Niemeyer; van de Waal 1952, 51.