A conviction for homicide forced the Amsterdam painter Jacob van Loo (1614-1670) to flee the Dutch Republic. In 1661, he permanently moved to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1670. Despite his criminal past, Van Loo continued to be socially and professionally successful in Paris, adjusting his production to suit a Parisian market predominantly focused on portraiture. At the same time, he continued to work for the Dutch elite while expanding his clientele to include wealthy and important French patrons. In 1663, he became a member of the Académie Royale, an institution that appears to have been particularly hostile towards foreign artists; Van Loo's admission took a lengthy thirteen months due to extra requirements, but his official acceptance into the profession enhanced his social status and his studio consequently became something of a social meeting place. Perhaps the ultimate testament to Van Loo's successful integration into Parisian society, however, was the so-called Van Loo painters' dynasty; Van Loo's descendants came to dominate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French painting.

Van Loo was not a typical immigrant artist. A wealth of documentation and the unquestionable permanency of Van Loo's immigration set him apart from others. Because of the manslaughter conviction, he knew he could never return to his home country. While other immigrant artists who were abroad for shorter periods of time could afford failure, Van Loo's success was paramount not just for his own survival, but also for the future of his children, who followed their father into exile. Van Loo's relatively advanced age also came with several advantages: experience, a reputation and a social network, all of which he put to good use. Based on contemporary sources, some of which have been newly discovered, this article argues that Van Loo's social expertise and his wealth and connections in Amsterdam gave him a particular character as a migrant. At the same time, the story of his success allows insight into the structure and goings-on of the Dutch refugee community in seventeenth-century Paris, a marginalized yet fascinating and revealing instance of Netherlandish artists on the move.

The Dutch in seventeenth-century Paris

Prior to his migration to Paris, Van Loo had achieved personal and professional success in Amsterdam. In 1654, the poet Jan Vos (1612-1667) praised him along with Rembrandt, Govert Flinck, Bartholomeus van der Helst and others ‘whose small-scale accomplishments are of such