Between painter and painter stands a tall mountain
Van Mander's *Italian Lives* as a source for instructing artists in the *deelen der consten*

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In the opening verses of the first section of the *Schilder-boeck*, the *Grondt der edel-vrij schilder-const* directed at aspiring young painters, Karel van Mander came straight to the point. Before allowing his readers to embark on a journey that would acquaint them with the foundations, development and principal examples of the art of painting, he was adamant to warn those wishing to try their luck at working in the field of painting:

'O sprigs of Hebe/ students of Genius/
All of you who couldn't stop yourselves,
from doodling figures, boats, and various animals on your papers/
instead of writing/ barely leaving an empty place on the sheet.
It's as if you were driven by nature to become painters/
So now your parents are carrying you in that direction. [...] Yet between painter/ and painter/ see/ there stands a mountain so tall/
That many are forced to cut their journey short.
Not months or weeks/ but whole years are needed/
Before you may taste any sweet reward'.¹

Art, Van Mander went on, had a way of sweetly imitating the voices of the Sirens, thus luring everyone into joining the game. But to reach art itself:

'[...] many roads must be traveled and many waters crossed/
And still/ you will have to climb a mountain so high/
you will never succeed to conquer it/
without the aid of nature'.²

Inclination, raw talent and sheer perseverance were indispensible for attaining art. Yet, if artists wished to reach immortal fame – that ultimate goal any competent artist should strive for – additional qualifications were required. Continuing into the poem, the reader learned that only those who possessed both art and courtesy, such as the famous Apelles and Raphael, would successfully cross the Lethe River and not sink into oblivion. Only such a favorable combination of capacities would ensure that one could successfully climb the tall mountain and arrive at the temple of immortal fame that stood on its summit (fig. 1).³

In those opening lines of his book, Karel van Mander thus made good use of the stoic metaphor of the difficult path one had to travel in order to reach the temple of immortal fame and virtue, without however referring to any definite examples.⁴ He got more specific towards the end of the