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Melody as Metaphor in Gerrit van Honthorst's Paintings of Musicians

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Melody as Metaphor in Gerrit van Honthorst's Paintings of Musicians

by

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Abstract

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In this thesis I examine the artistic contributions of Gerrit van Honthorst (1592-1656) to the sudden increase in the pictorial representation of musical subjects in Utrecht during the 1620s. Like his contemporaries, Honthorst was profoundly influenced by the complex and dramatic style of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) during his studies in Italy, and he adopted the new Italianate interpretation of realism and chiaroscuro in his painting technique by the time he returned to Utrecht in 1620. However, Honthorst employed a strategy of representation that combined painterly techniques from the milieu of Italian art with subjects and themes from Netherlandish tradition, resulting in an innovative category of genre painting that was both familiar and new to the contemporary viewer. Through an analysis of a representative sample of Honthorst's paintings of musicians and their relation to contemporary Dutch trends and interests, I consider how his works resonated with the aesthetic tastes of Northern

patrons. I argue for the presence in Honthorst's paintings of musicians of elements from contemporary Dutch culture, such as literary conventions, artistic tradition, and customs of musical performance, and I examine the ways in which these commonalities in ideology appealed to Northern audiences.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the early 1620s, a group of artists including Gerrit van Honthorst (1592-1656), Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629), and Dirck van Baburen (1595-1624) returned to the city of Utrecht from Rome to revitalize the art market of the city through a generous production of paintings. Their depictions of religious and genre scenes grew exceptionally popular throughout the Netherlands, an occurrence that may be explained by their bold emulation of Caravaggesque techniques. When discussing the influences on the works of Honthorst and his colleagues in the Utrecht school, however, one must carefully consider all of the determinants of their styles without attributing the innovative aspects of their work to their Italian counterparts. Although Honthorst and his contemporaries often imitated the style of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) in their paintings, they frequently drew upon Northern artistic traditions in their work. They sought to fuse current trends and stylistic devices from Italian art with the subjects and themes from Northern art, and their numerous portrayals of single musicians and concert scenes produced between 1620 and 1627, serve as examples of their intentions. By providing new interpretations of musicians that possessed attitudes and spirits comparable to those by their Italian counterparts, the members of the Utrecht school strove to enrich the tradition of painting musical scenes already present in the tradition of Dutch art.

Although various artists embraced musical subjects in their respective *oeuvres*, Gerrit van Honthorst was a significant contributor to the establishment of the musician as a rising artistic theme in the North. Unlike his contemporaries, Honthorst explored

various forms of representation of musical subjects as evidenced by his experimentation with representation, including various technical strategies, compositional schemes, lighting techniques that were exclusive to his own style. In focusing on the musician in its diverse forms in the *oeuvre* of Gerrit van Honthorst, we may better understand how he united pictorial elements from both Italy and the Netherlands to gain success amongst Northern audiences and establish the musician as a favorite subject of painting in the Netherlands.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Honthorst draws upon and contributes to Northern contemporary cultural trends in his paintings of musicians. While addressing issues of display, intended audience, and style, I will consider the reasons for Honthorst's extensive output of paintings featuring musical subjects during the 1620s, the role of these paintings as a contemporary trend, and their appeal to Dutch audiences. Instead of discharging the artist as merely a follower of Caravaggio, this investigation explains how Honthorst looked to a variety of sources for the design and making of his paintings of musicians.

Born on November 4, 1592 in Utrecht into a third generation of artists, Gerrit was bound for a career in the arts. His father, Herman Gerritsz. van Honthorst, and grandfather, Gerrit Huygensz. van Honthorst, were painters and designers of interior wall decorations and tapestries. Two of his younger brothers also received artistic training. Herman Hermansz. van Honthorst began training as a student of sculpture, but later relinquished his career in the arts for the priesthood. The youngest of the three, Willem Hermansz. van Honthorst, studied painting with Gerrit and later worked independently in

Utrecht and Germany.[1] Gerrit demonstrated his abilities in the art of drawing at the young age of seven, and in 1606, he began to study with the father of the seventeenth century Utrecht school of painting, Abraham Bloemaert.[2] His natural aptitude for the arts and receipt of professional artistic training ensured a promising future for Honthorst, who later became the most successful artist in the family.

At some point between 1610 and 1613, Honthorst concluded his training with Bloemaert and traveled to Italy for the completion of his artistic education. Sadly, there exist no surviving documents to explicate the details of Honthorst's travel route or year of arrival. Giulio Mancini, an Italian art critic and acquaintance of Honthorst, included a brief biography of the artist in his *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, in which he stated that he arrived in Rome when, "the manner of Caravaggio was frequently adopted," to imply a date of 1610.[3] However, if Honthorst finished his training with Bloemaert at the usual age of 21 and embarked for Rome immediately, he would have arrived in the year 1613. We know that the artist had made his way to Rome by 1616 when he copied Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Peter* in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo.[4]

Honthorst arrived in Rome at an important time, when painters clearly delineated current artistic trends. During his years in Italy, Honthorst studied and emulated the works of Italian painters, especially Caravaggio and his follower, Bartolomeo Manfredi (c. 1582-1622.) Caravaggio died in 1610, but his progressive interpretations of realism and chiaroscuro continued to influence artists from abroad and Italy. Honthorst was

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[1] Leonard J. Slatkes, "Honthorst, Gerrit van," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T038821 (accessed March 11, 2011).
[2] J.R. Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999): 1.
[3] Mancini's text is reprinted with an English translation in Judson, 1999, 47. Originally G. Mancini, *Trattato della Pittura* (otherwise *Considerazioni sulla Pittura*), Ms. it. 5571, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, fol. 86v. + r.
[4] Judson, 1999, 5-6.

familiar with the fusion of realism and chiaroscuro from the Northern tradition, but as Judson noted, "It was… necessary for him to travel to Rome in order to see Caravaggio's revolutionary interpretations of these elements. Caravaggio's significance lies in his fusion of realism in such a way that the realism is accentuated by the mystical light emanating from an unknown source which establishes a strong psychological and religious mood."[5] Honthorst became fond of Caravaggio's style, and adopted a similar painting strategy including intense realism and bold chiaroscuro, which persisted in his style throughout his post-Italianate works. The artist's emulation of Caravaggio is also evidenced by his 1616 drawing of *The Martyrdom of St. Peter*, which adopts an identical compositional scheme to the Rome painting (figs. 1 and 2).

The artist also achieved artistic success and fame in Italy. He received multiple commissions from the Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, Cardinal Scipione Borghese and Cosimo II, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He painted mostly religious scenes for his Italian patrons, such as the Nativity from 1620. Mancini tells us that Honthorst's *Nativity* relates to similar interpretations in which the light stems from the baby Jesus by Correggio and later, Annibale Caracci (fig. 3). However, Honthorst frequently painted biblical narratives in nocturnal settings, and his technique of applying artificial light to create dramatic effects of light and shadow earned him the Italian nickname, "Gherardo della Notte." His popularity and success in Rome are demonstrated by the large number of copies made after his contemporaries. According to Mancini, Honthorst was already able to obtain high prices for his paintings by about 1620.[6]

[5] Judson, 1999, 8.
[6] Judson, 1999, 47.

By the time that Honthorst returned to the Netherlands from Italy in July of 1620, therefore, he had already achieved widespread acclaim as an artist. Upon his arrival, he received a grand welcoming from members of the artistic community in Utrecht. A diary entry from 26 July, 1620 by the Utrecht humanist and lawyer Aernout van Buchel describes details about a party thrown for the artist at the inn "het Poortgen," and provides a list of the guests in attendance, including artists Paulus Moreelse, Abraham Bloemaert, engraver Crispijn van de Passe the Elder, Gijsbertus Vianius, sculptors Jan Colijn de Nole and Robrecht Colijn de Nole, and the artist and art dealer Herman van Vollenhoven.[7] Only one year later, a letter from Sir Dudley Carleton in The Hague to Lord Arundel in London cited Honthorst, who was "growing into reputation in these parts."[8] By 1622, Honthorst was elected to be Master of the Guild of St. Luke in Utrecht, and he was able to secure this position again in 1625, 1626, 1628, and 1629.

Honthorst played a key role in the development of Utrecht Caravaggism. He was one member of a group of artists including Hendrick Terbrugghen and Dirck van Baburen who returned to Utrecht from Rome in the early 1620s to reinvigorate the art market in the northern city. Influenced by Caravaggio's figurative and compositional ideals, they developed a new style characterized by realism and drama. Like Caravaggio, they heightened the visual impact of their scenes by applying bold contrasts of light and shadow, but their use of candles, lanterns, and other sources of artificial light distinguish them from the Italian painter, who never used these tools. The artists in Utrecht primarily painted religious scenes, but they also produced genre paintings including brothel scenes and card players. The Utrecht Caravaggisti were responsible for the sudden increase of

[7] Leonard J. Slatkes, "Honthorst, Gerrit van," *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T038821 (accessed March 11, 2011).
[8] Judson, 1999, 15.

contemporary interest in the artistic representation of musical subjects in the Netherlands during the 1620s. Terbrugghen, Baburen, and Honthorst created numerous paintings of single musicians and concert scenes between 1620 and 1627. Honthorst alone made approximately 40 paintings of musical subjects between these years.[9] The large number of portrayals of the subject and the short span of time of their production speak to the emergence of the artistic rendering of the musician as a rising trend in genre painting in the North.

While the subject of the musician was a consistent motif in Italian art, the painting type of the single figured musician presented itself in Utrecht as early as 1621. The Utrecht art dealer Herman von Vollenhoven possessed a painting of a flute player by Giorgione or Correggio sometime before 1623.[10] It is perhaps due to this Italian painting that early renditions of the flute player by Terbrugghen and Bloemaert reveal their interpretations of the subject in a quiet, solemn, and poetic mood. By contrast, Honthorst's realistic depictions of boisterous, rowdy musician types stand out against the more subdued, peaceful rendering of musicians by his contemporaries. It was the lively, ostentatious musicians by Honthorst that gained popularity among Northern art audiences and were later adopted by Netherlandish artists like Frans Hals and Judith Leyster.

Honthorst's paintings of musicians, it seems, were carefully rendered to appeal to Northern audiences. His participation in the establishment of current artistic trends was a way of ensuring the advancement of his career. He fused traditional elements from the Northern artistic canon with the pictorial vocabulary that he had learned to articulate

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[9] This estimate was produced by the author, based on the number of works in Judson, 1999. It is necessary to consider this statistic only as an educated guess, since discrepancies amongst connoisseurs concerning the number of works by the hand of Honthorst versus those of his contemporaries have served to both increase and reduce this number.

[10] Judson, 1999, 16.

while in Italy. He translated contemporary Italian definitions of realism and chiaroscuro, based on the style of Caravaggio, into a technique appropriate to the tastes of Northern patrons.

A large amount of literature exists on the art of Gerrit van Honthorst and the Utrecht Caravaggisti. Scholars strongly depend on two publications by Jay Richard Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656*, published in 1959, and *Gerrit van Honthorst: A Discussion of His Position in Dutch Art*, a catalog raisonné from 1999. Judson provides relatively similar information in both of these works, albeit his explanations for the artist's biography and his works are much more extensive in the later publication. Judson's first chapter of the 1999 edition discusses the artist as a painter of history and genre, and highlights the half-length musician figure as a unique phenomenon introduced to the Netherlands by the Utrecht School painters. He also provides explanations for iconography and style specific to Honthorst's interpretations of musicians. Judson extensively explores the influence of Italian art on Honthorst's *oeuvre*, especially that of Caravaggio. He did not, however, attempt to consider the relationship between Honthorst's musical subjects and contemporary Dutch culture.[11] Such a limited and interpretative perspective of Honthorst's musicians has the result of minimizing the artist's importance within the scope of Utrecht painting. Honthorst's legacy is restricted to that of a follower of greater Italian artists, and his innovations are discounted within the history of art.

Honthorst's paintings of musicians have yet to be discussed in relation to the influences of a Northern artistic tradition or their production for Dutch patrons. Unfortunately, the provenances for many of Honthorst's paintings of musical subjects

[11] Judson, 1999, 1-24.

remain incomplete, and we have little information to explicate the artist's motivations for their production. We must therefore depend upon the works of art themselves as primary sources. An extensive visual analysis of Honthorst's paintings and their relation to contemporary cultural interests, as demonstrated through Northern literary and artistic traditions, will explain their significance within the framework of seventeenth century Netherlandish art.

While only briefly considering the influence of Italian art on Honthorst's *oeuvre*, I extensively explore three categories that make up the artist's paintings of musicians as a whole: the group concert scene, the half-length musician, and illusionistic decoration. Within the scope of these categories I have chosen paintings that collectively form a representative sample of Honthorst's depictions of musicians. I consider how these works corresponded with traditionally Netherlandish subjects and themes, and modernized genre painting to suit the changing tastes of a Northern audience. I address Honthorst's concert scenes in my first chapter. Through a visual analysis of *Merry Company*, I explain how the artist combined current artistic trend with pictorial traditions from Northern art in order to fulfill the aesthetic tastes of his patrons. My second chapter focuses on the subject-type of the half-length musician, specifically *Woman Playing a Guitar* and *Woman with a Viola da Gamba*. I consider how Honthorst capitalized upon contemporary interest in pastoral subjects and musical instruments to produce these sexually charged interpretations of female instrumentalists. In my third chapter, I describe two illusionistic decorations, *Musical Ceiling* and *The Concert*. While acknowledging the influence of Italian models on the artist, I explain how Honthorst interpreted his illusionistic paintings in an innovative way to suit the tastes of a Northern audience.

These works demonstrate an assortment of influences upon the art of Gerrit van Honthorst: musical prototypes and painting techniques from the *milieu* of Italian art, iconography from Netherlandish art, and cultural interests of Northern patrons. The combination of these elements resulted in the creation of an innovative style unique to the *oeuvre* of the artist, one which was both familiar and original.

Chapter II: '*Amor Docet Musicam*': A Northern Audience for Honthorst's *Merry Company*

Following the radical artistic innovations by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio in seventeenth century Italy, Northern European artists, including Gerrit van Honthorst, felt compelled to modernize their painting techniques. Today Honthorst is celebrated as a Caravaggisti, a "follower" who earned his fame from his successful ability to imitate the dramatic realism and intense chiaroscuro of the prolific artist.[12] What is often neglected by scholars is that Honthorst's pictures frequently represent traditionally Northern subjects and themes, and their iconography specifically beckons to a Netherlandish audience who would be able to recognize and understand the artist's citation of cultural phenomenon.

In the Netherlands during the 1620s, Honthorst and his contemporaries from the Utrecht School, Hendrick ter Brugghen and Dirck van Baburen , established the trend of painted nighttime scenes featuring boisterous merrymakers playing musical instruments. While Honthorst borrowed stylistic devices and compositional schemes from his Italian counterparts, Caravaggio and Bartolomeo Manfredi , the subjects of his paintings

[12] For more on the Caravaggism in Utrecht, see the following sources: *Caravaggio in Holland: Musik und Genre bei Caravaggio und den Utrechter Caravaggisten,* Exh. cat. (Frankfurt am Main: Städel Museum, 2009). Benedict Nicolson, *The International Caravaggesque Movement: List of Pictures by Caravaggio and His Followers Throughout Europe from 1590 to 1650* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979). *Die Utrechter Malerschule: Caravaggisti des Nordens*. Exh. cat. (Köln: Stadt Köln, 1984).

remained consistent with the conventions of Netherlandish art. J. Richard Judson explains the artist's contribution to the canon of seventeenth century art, "Honthorst's great importance to the development of Northern allegorical genre painting is seen in his handling of traditionally Northern themes in an Italianate manner."[13] The essence of Honthorst's creative innovation lies in his practice of rendering popular subjects in the fashionable style of Italian realism.

This chapter will highlight the artist's inclusion of traditionally Northern subjects and themes, such as artistic traditions, literary conventions, and musical instruments in Honthorst's concert scenes, specifically *Merry Company* (1623) (fig. 4). Looking past the influence of the Italian artists of the period, we will discover the ways in which Honthorst modernized traditional genre painting in order to appeal to the taste of a Northern audience.

Honthorst's *Merry Company* best exemplifies the artist's technique for painting group compositions. Gathered around the table, the figures are situated in a dark and intimate setting that is illuminated by the romantic glow of the candle's fire. In the center foreground, a young merrymaker wearing a feathered hat and sword turns his back to the viewer while keeping in profile. With his left hand, he pours wine from a jug into a glass. To his right, a young woman with a feather in her hair sits in three-quarter's profile while smiling flirtatiously. She touches the shoulder of the man with her left hand

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[13] J.R. Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999): 18.

and points with her right hand across the length of the picture plane. In the center behind the table, a second young girl stands wearing a feather headpiece and a provocative off-the-shoulder dress. She gazes at the man across the table while smiling and strumming the strings of her lute. The provocative dress of the women and the presence of alcohol distinguish the setting as a brothel.

The left side of the painting is occupied by a still life with an assortment of meaningful symbols. Highlighted by the candlelight, an opened book displays eight lines of poetry signed with "C. Barlaus" on the left page, and an allegorical illustration on the opposite page, under which the artist signed the work, *Gart van Honthorst f. 1623*. In the dimly lit space of the left background, a grinning old woman nestles an infant in her arms. The aged procuress was a motif used in Northern Renaissance painting to suggest fleeting time and age as a result of excessive vanity.[14] Next to the book on the table are playing cards and dice, which suggest that the immoral activity of gambling took place. Many of these objects, notably the books, globe, cards, and dice were frequently used in Dutch *vanitas* paintings to represent earthly existence and the temporality of material possessions. The candle and the hourglass, which is tucked away to the left side of the composition, are representative of the transitory nature of life.[15]

It is important to note that paintings of brothels, drinkers, and gamblers should not be strictly confined to a moralistic reading. Given the frequency of brothel scenes in

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[14] Christopher Brown, *Images of a Golden Past: Dutch Genre Painting of the 17th Century* (New York: Abbeville Pres, 1984): 180.

[15] Judson analyzes this still life in his description of the painting, Judson, 1999, 221. See also Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, Translated by Christina Herdström and Gerald Taylor (London: Faber & Faber, 1956): 154-156.

Honthorst's *oeuvre*, it is unlikely that he intended his paintings to comment upon the sinful nature of worldly frivolities such as drinking, gambling, and seducing women.[16]

Rather, Honthorst's *Merry Company* must be read as a complicated allegory of love, lust, and *vanitas*.[17] With references to the debate between love and scholarship, the scene represents a tension between moral and immoral choice. Honthorst painted his jolly musicians with delightful smiles in order to delight the viewer with likeable characters. Their improper behavior creates a sense of conflict within the viewer, who is both entertained and uneased by the immoral activities of the brothel dwellers.

Honthorst's *Merry Company* was considered to be a representation of the Prodigal Son was for over 150 years.[18] Lucas van Leyden is responsible for the association between the brothel or tavern and the Biblical parable in illustration (fig. 5).[19] Due to the prominence of the parable of the Prodigal Son in sixteenth and seventeenth century art and literature, scholars frequently associate scenes of men and women drinking and carousing in a tavern setting with the subject to the point that, "…it was no longer necessary for artists to include explanatory details in their pictures that refer back to earlier images of the Prodigal Son since these very same references were implicitly understood as present."[20] However, Honthorst's musical scene must not be restricted to

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[16] An explanation of how Honthorst's genre scenes should be interpreted may be found in Wayne Franits, "Emerging from the Shadows: Genre Painting by the Utrecht Caravaggisti and Its Contemporary Reception," in Brown, 1984, 114-120.
[17] Judson, 1999, 221.
[18] In 1849, the painting was titled *The Empty Jug* by Payne. In the early twentieth century, it assumed the title of *The Prodigal Son* and this interpretation was consistent until the 1980s. See Judson, 1999, 221.
[19] Brown, 1984, 186.
[20] Franits, 1993, 117.

this interpretation. It is misleading to identify genre pictures of this type with Prodigal Son imagery without the visual evidence to suggest a Biblical reference. The context of the painting must determine whether the painting is a representation of the religious narrative or simply a brothel. It is unlikely that Honthorst intended his nocturnal concert scenes actually to represent the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. However, the trend set by the increased market interest in moralizing brothel scenes certainly would have informed Honthorst's artistic choices.

The artist's compositions of musical parties remained firmly tied to an established tradition of brothel imagery stemming from the sixteenth century. In *vanitas* still life paintings, such as one by Dirck Matham, the ephemeral characteristic of musical sound classifies the instrument as a symbol of fleeting time (fig. 6).[21] Emblem books generated cultural associations between the lute and the ideas of musical and romantic harmony, love, or sexual behavior. In brothel scenes, musical instruments traditionally serve the purpose of warning the viewer against a loose, carefree, and unproductive life.[22]

Honthorst must have been aware that musical instruments were charged with significance artistic traditions because he incorporated them into many of his paintings in order to add meaning. In *Merry Company*, the musical instrument occupies the central domain of the picture plane, a space typically reserved for the most significant objects of meaning within a composition. Indeed, the lute possessed a variety of meanings in

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[21] Edwin Buijsen, ed., *The Hoogsteder Exhibition of Music & Painting in the Golden Age*. Exh. cat. (The Hague: Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, 1994): 59.

[22] For a basic discussion of the various meanings of music, see Alberto Ausoni, *Music in Art*, Translated by Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009): 30-60.

Netherlandish art, stemming from the musical iconography of the sixteenth century. A print by Frans Huys, *Master John Blockhead*, demonstrates the link between the lute and sexual behavior (fig. 7). Situated to the left, the lute-maker named Master John Blackhead rejects the advances of an old woman with a stringless lute. In this instance, the lute stands for female genitalia. Accompanying the image is a 'nyeu liedeken' ('new song') from the very popular *Antwerps Liedboek* from 1554 that opens with the following verse:

The girl who stood at the window
Lamented deep and ardently;
'Had I but a man
Who could strike my lute,
That I might bear his child.'

Striking the lute is a reference to sexual intimacy.[23] The popularity of the *Antwerps Liedboek* ensured that the cultural associations between the lute and adult activities would be well known. Northern artists copied and reproduced the subject of Master Blockhead by Frans Huys.[24] The multiple variations on the subject by several artists suggest that a demand for its illustration existed in the art market. The lute as a symbol for female carnality must have been a humorous and popular subject for sixteenth century Netherlandish audiences.

Emblem books also would have communicated meanings for musical instruments to Dutch audiences. As the single most published author in the Netherlands during the

[23] The musical verse and its meaning are from Eddy De Jongh and Ger Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genreprints in the Netherlands 1550-1700 (*Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1997): 64.
[24] A painted copy was made after Frans Huys by an anonymous artist, as well as an etching by another anonymous artist. A third rendition of the subject was painted by a Bosch follower. See De Jongh and Lujten, 1997, 65.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jacob Cats was highly influential in terms of his ability to frame literary and artistic interest of contemporary Dutch audiences. His 1618 publication titled, *Sinnen Minnebeelden*, contains an engraving in which a seated man tunes his lute while the strings of additional lute vibrate in sync with his plucking (fig. 8). The unaccompanied lute calls to female viewers who are invited to pick up the instrument and join the man in making musical harmony. Cats perceived the tuning of instruments as a symbol of two hearts "that vibrate to the same note."[25] The reappearance of this composition within a second edition of *Sinnen Minnebeelden* in 1665 demonstrates the popularity and depth of the cultural belief in the link between music and love.

Emblem books were a popular genre among young scholars, who must apply intellectual effort to unveil the multiple existent meanings between the text and illustrations. Honthorst translated the ambiguous character of emblem books into his *Merry Company* with the inclusion of a poem and miniature illustration within the book on the table, thus using an additional cultural device to capture the interest of his potential audience.

Scholars have been unable to explain the connection between the text in the book and the larger context of the painting.[26] What is disregarded in our modern haste to consider text as narrative of the illustration is that artists and writers of emblem books often intentionally established an abstraction of between word and image. Honthorst's motivation behind the inclusion of text may relate to the use of the genre painting as a

[25] Buijsen, 1994, 41. See the image in a later copy of Jacob Cats, *Sinne- en Minnebeelden en Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tijdt* (Den Haag: Van Goor Zonen, 1977).
[26] The most detailed interpretation as of yet appears in Judson, 1999, 221.

source for conversation. Thought-provoking ambiguities within conversation pieces would be favorable for their ability to stimulate discussion.

What scholars fail to recognize is the idea that the poem reveals a potential audience for Honthorst's painting. The incomplete provenance of the painting makes it difficult to identify a specific audience.[27] However, I would like to propose that the poem's message, the vacillation between a scholarly life and love, would appeal to young male students whose likely hideout from the demands of education would be a tavern or brothel.

The verse is based upon a work written by the Dutch scholar, Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648). The poem is written in elegiac couplets, the traditional meter of erotic poetry. It is barely visible, thus making it difficult to gather a complete reading or translation. However, Marcus Dekiert discovered the verse in Barlaeus's *Poemata*, published in 1628 and provided a translation, which has been reproduced by Wayne E. Franits. It reads as following:

> Off with you, dry pages that you are, overly worri-
> some burdens.
> The learned page ought not to vex youthful heads.
> Thais is my love, my desire, my laughter, my jest,
> A petulant maid with a bit of the god Bacchus mixed in.
> Defeated Pallas sighs while the playful maid with the
> Patrician name at long last gladdens my obedient
> heart.
> Thus crazed Circe transforms my honor

[27] The earliest record of the painting is its location in the Zweibrücken Gallery in 1795. Judson, 1999, 220.

And I through my zeal am a pig, I who was a scholar.[28]

The poem references Thais, a famous courtesan in Ancient Athens, as well as Bacchus, the Roman god associated with wine and music. The text also mentions Circe, an enchantress from Homer's *Odyssey* who transforms some of Ulysses' men into pigs. In this context, the student is also turned into a pig as he is seduced by women and drink.[29] Judson also interpreted the poem, "The last couplet announces the transformation of the meaning of the word studiosus as it applies to the poet. The struggle between the books and the girl is resolved when the scholar of books becomes a scholar of love."[30] The conflict between love and knowledge is a subject that would have appealed to young scholars whose activities would have included visiting libraries, attending lectures, playing sports, and visiting taverns or brothels among other things.

Another contemporary source, the 1611 publication titled *Nucleus Emblematum* by the poet and writer Gabriel Rollenhagen, acknowledges the association between music and love (fig. 9). In the illustration by Crispijn van de Passe the Elder, a cupid prominently holds a lute in his right hand and gestures towards a courting couple in the distant landscape.[31] The motto above the work is, "Quid non sentit amor?" ('What does

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28 "Te procul sicca nimis amor ponere charta/Nec tenenda docet pagina docta caput/Tha amor meus est stadium et usus/Et Bromio petulans mixta puela Deo/Anceps diu que facienda fuerant/Patruo tandem nomine iungi beat/Sic malesoni mos me transformat honoris/Et studiosus qui studiosus eram." This transcription is reproduced in Judson, 1999, 220-221. This original translation may contain misreadings due to the illegibility of the text in the painting. The translation is provided by Wayne E. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 79.

29 Franits, 2004, 79.

30 Judson, 1999, 221.

31 For more on this image, see Brown, 1984, 48.

love not feel?') The circular border boldly reads "Amor Docet Musicam," ('Love teaches music.')[32] Therefore, an addition to the link between music and love is the idea of teaching, or the concept that music could be learned from the experience of love.

The motto "Amor Docet Musicam" appears in yet another illustration in an emblem book by Jacob Cats, in which Cupid sits at a table and directs a concert. The appearance of the concept of "Amor Docet Musicam" in a publication by Cats verifies the popularity of the theme in the Netherlands at this time (fig. 10).[33] Audiences would have cited the motto upon an observation of the poem within Honthorst's painting.

Honthorst would not be the first Utrecht artist to illustrate the recreational activities associated with student life. An engraving by Crispijn van de Passe the Elder in his 1612 titled *Students in a Brothel* displays young men relaxing with their female counterparts in a bordello (fig. 11). In the left background, a man carries a tray of food toward a male and female couple playing backgammon while a second couple sings a duet to the music of the lute. A third couple on the right side fondle one another while a fool looks on, enjoying the "game." The verses below the illustration cite wine and Venus as corrupting influences on student life that offset the influence of Minerva, the Roman goddess associated with wisdom and the arts. This print appeared in a collection

[32] For more discussion of the topic, of "Amor Docet Musicam," see: Ausoni, 2009, 30. Also Alison McNeil Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Totowa, N.J.: Allanheld and Schram, 1983): 36.
[33] Buijsen, 1994, 234.

of illustrations depicting student life titled *Academia sive speculum vitae scholasticae,* which was intended for young scholars.[34]

The miniature image accompanying the poem adds an additional layer of meaning to the message within the text, as well as the larger context of the painting. Perhaps due to the unclear depiction of the image, scholars have not been able to interpret its subject matter. The image appears to be a young cupid beating a woman holding a book. The rendering must depict the personification of Love Victorious, a subject often represented by a Cupid figure beating or stomping upon the worldly symbols of human intelligence. Alberto Ausoni explains the emergence of this theme in Renaissance art, "The Neoplatonic theme of Love as a master of the world, triumphing over war and over mankind's noblest undertakings, was translated into the iconography of Love Victorious, which features a young Cupid trampling on the symbols of human power and knowledge."[35]

The connection between this iconographical metaphor and Honthorst's illustration is strengthened by the fact that the subject was also depicted by his Italian influence, Caravaggio. His painting from ca. 1605, *Amor Vincit Omnia* ('Love Conquers All,') reveals a life-size Cupid standing atop a still life consisting of miscellaneous symbols of human existence, such as musical instruments and armor (fig. 12). By illustrating the subject of Love Victorious with the poem by Barlaeus, the artist juxtaposes the ideologies

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[34] Joaneath Spicer, "A Introduction to Painting in Utrecht, 1600-1650," in Joaneath Spicer, et al. *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age*. Exh. cat. (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1997): 27.
[35] Ausoni, 2009, 30.

of the Netherlands and Italy. In this way, he caters to the interests of his audience in the North while paying homage to his Italian predecessors.

An analysis of style reveals the pictorial associations between the paintings of Honthorst and his Italian influences. Like Caravaggio and Manfredi, Honthorst situates his musicians in a dark interior setting, usually lit by a small candle. The hyperbolic lighting accentuates specific locations of the painting to create a sense of theatricality and dramatic action within the composition. The technique of applying stark contrasts of light and dark was a trademark of Caravaggio, but the method of *chiaroscuro* by Honthorst is more closely linked to that of Manfredi. The so-called *manfrediana methodus* may be characterized by multi-figured compositions placed within a dark setting while certain passages are underscored by popping shades of light derived from an undefined source.[36] Manfredi's 1615 *Concert Party* demonstrates how the artist highlighted the deep expressions of poor musicians with this method of contrasting light and dark (fig. 13).

The nighttime scenes by Honthorst differ from those by Manfredi in their inclusion of an obvious light source. Instead of the calm, melancholic mood established by Manfredi's dim interiors, Honthorst programmed his dark compositions to revolve around a central source of light. This technique had the effect of creating a lighter mood associated with pleasure, flirtation, and joyous mischief. Spicer characterizes the differences between the paintings of Honthorst and his Italian influence, "Although

[36] Spicer, 1997., 236

Manfredi's nocturnal genre scenes proved essential for Honthorst, the Dutchman's merry festivities are always more wholesome and lighthearted, without the atmosphere of threats that hangs in the air of Manfredi's scenes of gambling soldiers, cheats, and gypsies."[37]

Honthorst reinterpreted the Caravaggesque technique of painting figures with a classical, off-the-shoulder dress. He depicted his women with uncovered shoulders and flirtatious smiles in order to establish their character as lighthearted, promiscuous females. The uncovered shoulder of the woman in the center background of *Merry Company* is highlighted by the central light source. The result is a gentle sensuality that "can be seen as emblematic of the warm sensuousness of Utrecht painting as distinguished from the harder sensuality of the sexually charged paintings of Caravaggio and Manfredi."[38] The provocative figures in the paintings by Caravaggio possess a more serious tone of sensuality. The models in his *Concert of Youths,* for example, solidly gaze straight ahead and out of the pictorial space in acknowledgement that the viewer is actively objectifying their bodies (fig. 14).

Honthorst is typically discussed only in the shadow of the artistic innovations of his predecessor, Caravaggio. His art is examined in relation to the disbursement of Italianate style throughout Europe. While the subjects and styles of Honthorst's paintings were fashioned in response to artistic traditions and current trends, the tastes of potential

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[37] Spicer, 1997, 236.
[38] Spicer discusses this in relation to another painting by Honthorst, *Musical Group by Candlelight,* 1623. In Spicer, 1997, 236-238.

patrons also played a decisive role in shaping his pictorial vocabulary.[39] It would have been necessary for Honthorst to fashion his paintings to suit the tastes of a Northern audience. Artists produced their work with a potential or specific audience in mind. The subject matter and style of paintings reveal the cultural interests of the public who bought them.

By drawing upon the iconography from *emblemata* and artistic tradition, Gerrit van Honthorst ensured the success of his artistic style in the Netherlands. The fact that he produced numerous depictions of concert scenes demonstrates the popularity of his work and his ability to fulfill the aesthetic tastes of his patrons.

[39] Franits, 1984, 116.

Chapter III: Merry Women Making Music: The Theme of Seduction in Honthorst's Half-length Musician

Northern patrons demonstrated a profound interest in Italian renditions of the solitary musician. In 1622, the Utrecht art dealer Herman von Vollenhoven acquired a painting of a flute player by the Italian artist Giorgione; between 1622 and 1627, Gerrit van Honthorst and his colleagues in the Utrecht School established the single half-length musician as an artistic vogue in the Netherlands.[40] Honthorst received exposure to Italian prototypes of half-length musicians, such as those by Bartolomeo Manfredi, but he did not attempt to create these types of work himself until he returned to Utrecht. Although the individual musician originated in Italian art, members of Honthorst's circle adopted the artistic theme in their own paintings of peaceful, contemplative instrumentalists. Honthorst's half-lengths, by contrast, featured boisterous, animated musicians who delighted in playing music and drinking wine. Consequently, it was the lively, ostentatious musicians by Honthorst that gained popularity among Northern art audiences.

While scholars acknowledge the importance of the musical instruments for an iconographical reading of the single figures by his contemporaries, they cease to apply this method of analysis to Honthorst's half-lengths.[41] Most scholarship has treated Honthorst's half-length figures as reduced versions of his group compositions of concert

[40] J.R. Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999): 16.
[41] Leonard J. Slatkes, *Hendrick Ter Brugghen, 1588-1629: Catalog Raisonné* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2007): 50-52.

scenes that similarly convey moralizing themes associated with extraneous behaviors. These analyses interpret musical instruments as little more than embellishments used by the artist to suggest an association with a tavern or brothel setting. Honthorst's paintings of female musicians, however, contain visual references that resonate with contemporary literary and artistic interests, specifically the notion of sensuality linked to Arcadian themes.

This chapter investigates Gerrit van Honthorst's manipulation of pastoral imagery and exploitation of musical iconography in his half-length musicians, specifically his paintings of female instrumentalists, *Woman Playing a Guitar* (1624) and *Woman with a Viola da Gamba* (1626) (figs. 15 and 16). These paintings illustrate how Honthorst fashioned his art in correlation to contemporary cultural trends for the purpose of appealing to a Netherlandish audience.

His Italian predecessor Caravaggio painted a *Lute Player* from circa 1595, which served as a model for artists in the Utrecht School like Hendrick Terbrugghen who painted his own rendition of the subject (figs. 17 and 18).[42] Paintings by Honthorst's contemporaries typically feature male subjects and are characterized by a calm, quiet, and peaceful mood. Unlike his colleagues, Honthorst devoted a significant portion of his *oeuvre* to female musicians. He produced between fifteen and twenty paintings of half-

[42] For more information on Caravaggio's *Lute Player*, see Joaneath Spicer, et al., *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age*. Exh. cat. (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1997): 257.

length musicians during his lifetime, at least six of which feature female subjects.[43] Furthermore, his musicians differ from those by other Utrecht artists for their sensual tone and suggestive humor. Therefore, we can assume that Honthorst's motivations for painting female musicians differ significantly from those of his contemporaries who produced renditions compliant with Caravaggio's model.

Woman Playing a Guitar and *Woman with a Viola da Gamba* best exemplify the artist's technique for painting solitary female musicians in half-length. He extends the gaze of each figure out of the picture plane to the left, which suggests that these paintings were originally intended to be displayed with a pendant.[44] Flaunting their flirtatious smiles and flashing their exposed necklines, these attractive young women seem aware of their charms upon the viewer. The *Woman Playing a Guitar* bares an uncovered shoulder, while the *Young Woman Playing a Viola da Gamba* possesses a neckline that plunges so low that it exposes her breasts. The women both wear provocative, vibrantly colored dresses. Their costume is of the type typically worn by low-life entertainers in taverns, and therefore it identifies the figures as courtesans.[45] Each woman sports a playful display of feathers upon her head which draws attention to her face, her cheerful smile and rosy cheeks. Although the women play different instruments, the way in which

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[43] The total number of half-length musicians painted by Honthorst is unknown, due to scholarly disagreements on authorship and the loss of paintings over time. Six half-length female musicians were counted in the catalog raisonné. Judson, 1999, 174-180.

[44] It has been suggested that the *Young Woman Playing a Viola da Gamba* accompanied the *Young Woman Playing a Violin* in The Hague, Mauritshuis. However, this cannot be true because the violinist's gaze extends toward the viewer rather than to a figure in pictorial space. Judson, 1999, 178-179.

[45] Commentary on the costume of Honthorst's subjects is contradictory. This identical costume has also been identified as Burgundian theater costume, or based on styles from the French ballet. Judson, 1999, 16 and 164.

they handle the objects are alike. The left hand is placed on the upper region of the neck of the instrument, while the right hand strums the lower strings near the body. With only minor differences in physiognomy and dress, the compositions of these two paintings are very similar. This replication of a compositional formula testifies to the success of this female musician type amongst Honthorst's patrons.

Sadly, the incomplete provenances of Honthorst's half-length female musicians make it impossible to confirm the original audience for his works. However, several factors suggest that his patrons consisted of the court elite, nobles, and the wealthy bourgeois. These groups expressed great interest in musical paintings by Italian artists, and Honthorst's slightly later involvement in the court of Frederik Hendrik at The Hague in the 1630s points to his success in court circles early on in his career. Certainly, Honthorst's unusual representations of jolly female music-makers would appeal to a collective upper class who constantly sought new trends.[46]

Depicting the female musician afforded Honthorst the opportunity to capitalize on contemporary interest in illustrations of courtesans, an artistic trend that dates to the sixteenth century. Paintings of nude women began to function as erotica around the time that the illustrations of Venus by the German artist Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) became popular amongst international court circles. In one of Cranach's better known renditions of the subject, a nude woman labeled as *Venus* stands full frontal to face the

[46] The earliest known provenance for the *Woman Playing a Viola da Gamba* is from 1931, and is therefore not helpful. The earliest recorded provenance for *Woman Playing a Guitar* is in the inventory of the Stadhouder's quarters and the House in the Noordeinde (Old Court) in 1632, No. 5, "Een schilderije sijnde een nimphe speelende op een bandoor, met eenen ebben lijst doertoe, door den voors Hondhorst gemacht." ("A painting of a nymph playing a guitar with an ebony frame by Honthorst"). Judson, 1999, 175.

viewer while teasingly dangling a translucent veil in front of her body (fig. 19). The draped cloth does not serve to conceal her nakedness, but rather to emphasize her unclothed physical form and entice the viewer with her sensual appeal.

By the seventeenth century, erotic painting had evolved from suggestive nudes to portraits of actual courtesans. Scholars most frequently associate the trend of painting courtesans with sixteenth-century Venetian artists like Titian (1490-1576), but it also has precedence in the Northern tradition.[47] The costume book, titled *Trachtenbuch*, was produced by the German artist Christopher Weiditz in 1529 and it was one of the first publications to contain numerous depictions of courtesans.[48] However, the popularity of such publications also extended into the seventeenth century.[49] These small booklets functioned as inventories of famous coquettes that provided their names, prices, and locations all across Europe. The reproductive qualities of the print medium allowed for multiple copies of these courtesan books to exist, therefore diffusing their popularity through their distribution to a large international audience.

Many artists took advantage of the trend of the courtesan book by producing localized and updated versions that would cater to the changing tastes of male patrons. For instance, the 1630 publication by Crispin van de Passe II, *Le Miroir des Plus Belles Courtisannes de ce Temps*, served as an updated version of the genre for Dutch

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[47] David A. Brown, et al. *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 225-227.
[48] Alison McNeil Kettering, *Dutch Arcadia: Pastoral Art and Its Audience in the Golden Age* (Totowa, N.J.: Allanheld and Schram, 1983): 53. See also Christoph Weiditz, *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the "Trachtenbuch"* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).
[49] For instance, Zacharias Heyns's *Het Dracht Tooneel van de gansche wereld…* (Amsterdam, 1601). See Kettering, 1983, 145.

audiences. Some editions of the book contained inscriptions in multiple languages, including French German, English and Dutch.[50] The inclusion of additional languages suggests the wide appeal of the book's contents for diverse audiences in Europe. Because the book was made by a Utrecht artist, however, it is necessary to consider it through the lens of its creator as an expression of Netherlandish contemporary interests. The book contained engravings of 40 courtesans with accompanying descriptions explaining each figure's dress. According to the preface, the author's intention was to supply a visual guidebook on contemporary ladies' fashion for the benefit of "Painters, carvers and Picture makers, who for a small price herin may be fully satisfied, and may spare their paines and charges in travailing into farr Countries to seeke out the same."[51] The book was not produced for the purpose of being a directory for male suitors, but rather as a type of costume book for artists who sought to educate themselves on current ladies' fashions.

Le Miroir is also notable because it features courtesan types that share the pictorial vocabulary with Honthorst's female courtesans. Van de Passe II presented a diverse milieu of courtesan portraits in his publication, but the most significant illustrations for the purpose of this study are *Coridon* and *Silvia* (fig. 20). These characters are evidence of the contemporary interest in the shepherdess-courtesan. Passively staring out at the viewer, Silvia is identified as a shepherdess by her straw hat adorned with flowers and staff resting upon her shoulder. Her counterpart is Coridon, the

[50] Kettering, 1983, 145.
[51] The book was published in French, Dutch, German, and English. Kettering, 1983, 51.

only male to appear in *Le Miroir*, who plays the flute and admiringly gazes across the pictorial space upon Silvia.

Coridon proclaims:

> *I had no sooner touch'd my pipe within these medowes plaine*
> *But at my heeles there followed mee of Curtizanes a traine.*
> *Who decking up their stately corps in fashion new disguised,*
> *Came setting forth in strange attires and habites late devis'd.*

Silvia replies:

> *Of all the train I was the first that follow'd Coridon*
> *Our Princely Leader to whose pipe I hast'ned to be gone*
> *Of all the rest that follow'd mee, or what they shall require*
> *If Coridon fall to my share, I have what I desire.*[52]

The text accompanying the illustrations demonstrates the author's awareness of contemporary associations between Arcadian themes, music, and love. Coridon sights Silvia and seduces her with his music. Van de Passe's illustrations serve as very clear examples of the shepherdess-courtesan trend that became overtly popular in the early seventeenth century.[53] The existence of the two illustrations in pendant form and the inclusion of musical instruments recall the technique of Honthorst and his contemporaries in their production of pendant paintings only a few years earlier. Van de Passe's publication serves as a guidebook for other artists on an international level, and thus it demonstrates the widespread interest in representations of courtesans by the year 1630. Surely Honthorst was aware of this demand only a few years earlier when he executed his

[52] Kettering, 1983, 52.
[53] See the relevant chapter, "The Pastoral Courtesan: Single-Figure Half-Length Representations of Shepherdesses," in Kettering, 1983, 45-62.

female musicians, and his multiple paintings of courtesans reveal how he responded to the artistic needs of a Northern art market.

Honthorst responded to contemporary interest in the courtesan with multiple painted variations of the subject, such as *Smiling Girl Holding an Obscene Image* (fig. 21). Wearing a low-cut dress and feather headpiece, she flaunts her dimpled smile while pointing to a painting of a nude with her left hand. The inscription confirms her identity as a courtesan. It reads, "Wie kent mijn nears van afteren" (Who knows my ass from behind?)[54] Her gleeful reaction to the medallion encourages the viewer to laugh along and engage in the act of flirtation. The courtesan remained constant as a popular subject in painting during Honthorst's time, but his allusions to sexual humor served to highlight his innovations in a contemporary art market that was constantly seeking new trends.[55]

In his *Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), Carel van Mander recommended an artistic method for painting laughter, "the mouth and the cheeks widen and rise, the forehead drops and in between both eyes are half squeezed and pressed so as to cause little wrinkles to the ears."[56] Honthorst exaggerated van Mander's prescription by painting his female musicians with raised eyebrows, dimpled cheeks, and a tilted head. His characters flaunt their gummy teeth, a trait that came to be associated with his

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[54] See J. de Meyere, *Utrechtse Schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw: Honderd schilderijen uit de collectie van het Centraal Museum te Utrecht* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2006): 246 and Dennis P. Weller, et. al., *Sinners & Saints: Darkness & Light: Caravaggio and His Dutch and Flemish Followers*, Exh. cat. (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1998): 134-135

[55] For more on the topic of humor in seventeenth century Dutch art, see Rudolf Dekker, *Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

[56] Johan Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks, and Society in the Spanish Netherlands* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999): 43.

idiosyncratic style. In seventeenth century Dutch culture, the act of smiling was associated with people who have not yet been taught the social manners of hiding one's teeth, such as individuals from a lower social class or naïve youths. Although Honthorst's courtesans may belong to one of these social strata, his motivation for portraying his characters with a smile also relates to sexual humor. The unsightly display of teeth implied both flirtation and lack of civility, thereby simultaneously pleasing and displeasing the viewer. Honthorst utilized the motif of the smile to communicate a sense of comic irony and moral instability, which surely would have delighted the contemporary viewer's taste for ambiguity. Such illustrations would promote lively discussion amongst circles of critics.

Honthorst also explored suggestive humor in painting pastoral subjects, many of which feature characters with jolly visages similar to his musicians. Honthorst's *Shepherdess* is one of the numerous examples of the artist's interest in pastoral themes (fig. 22). Her straw hat with flowers and the foliage in the background reveal her pastoral identity. She gleefully smiles while extending a nest with two doves toward the viewer. Honthorst's youthful country lass is not as innocent and naïve as one assumes. The birds function as visual metaphors for the courtesan's proposal of sexual pleasures. Judson notes, "This kind of seductive offering of love begins a type that will become exceptionally popular in Utrecht from the early 1620s through the 1630s and at the Court in the Hague in the late 30s and 40s."[57]

[57] Judson, 1999, p. 164.

The trend of the shepherdess-courtesan originated in the *oeuvre* of Paulus Moreelse (1571-1638), whose 1617 *Shepherdess* clearly serves as a visual model for the pastoral subjects of the Utrecht Caravaggisti (fig. 23).[58] Honthorst must have been influenced by the heightened sensual character of Moreelse's shepherdess, who cranes her neck forward to boldly meet the direct gaze of the viewer. The artist positioned the figure to lean back while pushing out her chest and tilting her head forward. Her posture enhances her seductive appeal by allowing a soft light to illuminate her flirtatious expression and jutting bosom. Moreelse's shepherdess must have served as a point of departure for Honthorst's interpretations of pastoral females, as well as his courtesan musicians. However, Honthorst's pastoral courtesans significantly differ from those of Moreelse. Their merry dispositions, audacious exposure of teeth, and animated body language are traits that resonate with Northern artistic preferences.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the similarities between Honthorst's pastoral and musical courtesans, it is important to note that his musicians cannot be clearly identified as shepherdesses. The artist places his female musicians in void space with the absence of a clearly rendered background, thus eliminating the possibility for a solid reading of the subject. Given the lack of any clear visual cues, scholars recognize the difficulty of establishing a precise interpretation of his female musicians. While some scholars consider the feather headdresses or straw hats of the musicians to directly relate to the costume of a shepherdess, this is not sufficient evidence to suggest that his

[58] Spicer, 1997, 34. For more on another shepherdess by Moreelse, see Weller, 1998, 167.

musicians also belong to the realm of Arcadia. However, the similarities in physiognomic appearance, dress, and composition between his pastoral and musical subjects cannot be denied. An analysis of this visual correlation provides insight into the artist's motivations for painting his merry women making music.

Honthorst's contemporaries also recognized the pictorial similarities between these two categories in the artist's *oeuvre*. A print by Theodor Matham, *Young Woman (Phyllis) Playing a Violin* is clearly related to Honthorst's female musicians (fig. 24).[59] The composition of the central figure corresponds with a painting of a female violinist by Honthorst that is now unfortunately lost. Matham has replicated the costume type worn by Honthorst's female musicians, including the wide-brimmed straw hat, to which he added a small floral arrangement.

The print accompanying text was written by the popular Dutch writer Petrus Scriverius (1576-1660).

> "Phyllis luxurious in facial expression, voice, violin, and dress.
> What do you think Pamphilus that she really wants? A husband."[60]

The poem identifies Matham's violinist as the shepherdess Phyllis, a woman from the country who was seduced by the wickedness of city life and consequently engaged in promiscuous behavior.[61] The print is significant because it proposes a pastoral identity for Honthorst's female musician type. The text bluntly identifies the illustrated female musician as a pastoral character Phyllis who became prevalent in seventeenth century

[59] De Jongh, 1997, 200.
[60] "Vultu, voce, chely, vestitu prodiga Phyllis./ Pamphile, quid credas hanc sibi velle? virum." Judson, 1999, 180.
[61] Judson, 1999, 180.

Dutch literature.[62] The influence of Honthorst's female musician for Matham's depiction of a pastoral subject provides insight into how the seventeenth century viewer might have interpreted his half-length female subjects.

Matham's print is also important because it reveals contemporary associations between the theme of the pastoral with music and sensuality. Pastoral poems frequently described amorous encounters between shepherds. Another example of this theme is a poem published in 1640 in the *Nieu-Amsterdamse Liedboeck*:

> He stuck his pretty flute
> Between my breasts
> "Away, away," said I, "you rogue,
> What does love mean?
> While on your flute you play,
> Play as you should!
> It won't bore me:
> It's happened often enough!"[63]

The text provides a humorous metaphor that enacts the flute as a metaphor for sexual advances. It is significant because it directly associates the act of playing of a musical instrument with the activity of seduction. This contemporary idea reveals Honthorst's potential motivations for portraying his courtesans with musical instruments.

Wind instruments were particularly useful for the visual articulation of sexual symbolism, either on the basis of their shape, sound, or both.[64] As such, they were also

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[62] For more information on the shepherdess in Dutch literature, see Kettering, 1983, 49-53.

[63] As cited in Kettering, 1983, 42 and 140. From '*t Dubbelt verbetert Amsterdamse Liedboeck* (or *Nieu-Amsterdamse Lied-boeck*) (Amsterdam, ca. 1640), p. 53: "Hij stack 't aerdigh fluytjen/Bij mijn borsjens in./"wech, wech," syd ick, "guytjen,/Wat beduyt de min?/Wijl' op 't fluytje speelen,/Speelt soo dat behoort!//'t Sal my niet verveelen:/'t Is genoegh geboort!"

[64] R.D. Leppert, *The Theme of Music in Flemish Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1 (München: Musikverlag Katzbichler, 1977): 42.

considered to be a lower class instrument. Slatkes notes that, "instruments occupied conspicuous positions formed within a hierarchy informed by notions of social class and gender."[65] Wind instruments possessed a low status because they required the musician to blow into them, resulting in the distortion of his facial features. Because contemporaries considered one's external appearance to be a visible reflection of character and spirit, the distortion of one's expression caused by blowing into the instrument appeared to be symptomatic of ill-breeding and poor character.

By depicting his courtesans in the act of playing music, the artist creates a suggestive atmosphere within the painting. The sensual mood is already suggested by the flirtatious temperaments and revealing appearances of his courtesans, but the addition of musical instruments serves to communicate a message of conspicuous eroticism. As discussed in Chapter Two, stringed instruments such as the lute were frequently used to reference to female genitalia in Netherlandish Art.[66] What scholars cease to recognize is that women making music, which often required the suggestive motion of fingering the necks of instruments, would also have been an incredibly erotic sight.[67] The message of sensuality is further enhanced when the instrument requires positioning between the legs, such as in his *Young Woman Playing a Viola da Gamba*. In this case, Honthorst's technique of cutting off the pictorial space at half-length is not just a fashionable artistic

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[65] Slatkes, 2007, 51.
[66] See Chapter II of this thesis, 16-17.
[67] Currently, a study on the sensuality of music does not exist. The closest example concerns the topic of sensuality in seventeenth century England by Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminacie': Music and the Idea of the Feminine in Early Modern England," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* Vol. 73, No. 3 (Aug. 1993): 343-354.

trend. The concealment of the lower half of the instrument serves to entice the erotic fantasies of the viewer.

Honthorst reinterpreted the half-length musical subjects popularized by the Utrecht School through the production of his courtesan-musicians. His innovations lie in his abilities to "Hollandize" courtesan illustration by drawing upon pastoral themes and incorporate musical instruments into his paintings. The resulting effect of these new techniques was the creation of a humorous, yet highly erotic female subject whose immoral behaviors simultaneously tempted and displeased the viewer.

In his discussion of the contemporary perspective of women in Holland's Golden Age, Simon Schama describes the ironic character of the century's most successful genre paintings. He claims, "Culture and nature; morality and instinct, were locked in perpetual and unresolvable combat in the Dutch mentality, and the most successful genre paintings are two-way mirrors reflecting the outer world of polite or impolite behaviour, and the inner world of doubt and apprehension. At their most exquisite… they might almost be classified as 'temptation' scenes, for they convey moments of delicate drama when the pure and the impure collide in a milieu of seductive affability."[68] Certainly, Honthorst's paintings of musician-courtesans, whose physical appeal and sensual nature perplex the viewer, would correspond with this description.

Honthorst departed from the techniques of his contemporaries by combining musical iconography, Arcadian themes, and erotic subjects into a singular pictorial space,

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[68] Simon Schama, "Wives and Wantons: Versions of Womanhood in 17th Century Dutch Art," *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Apr. 1980): 13.

which resulted in the creation of a painting type unique to his *oeuvre*. By fashioning his art in relation to popular trends in literary and artistic spheres, he was able to secure his success in the seventeenth century Netherlandish art market.

Chapter IV: Performance and Perception: Honthorst's Early Illusionistic Scenes in Context

In 1622 and again in 1624, Gerrit van Honthorst applied the technique of illusionism to paintings of musical concert scenes. One of these paintings, his *Musical Ceiling*, was the first known illusionistic ceiling decoration to be painted in the Netherlands (fig. 25).[69] The other painting, *The Concert*, represents an early application of illusionistic technique to wall decoration by a Dutch artist (fig. 26). Illusionistic decoration had been popular in Italy since the late fifteenth century, but Honthorst's paintings are particularly significant because he attempted to popularize illusionistic decoration within the Netherlands. These decorative paintings are two of Honthorst's innovative works, since they both demonstrate his experimentation with perspective and spatial effects within the paintings themselves and the domains in which they were exhibited. This chapter investigates Honthorst's contributions to the emergence of illusionistic painting as an appropriate decorative technique for Dutch interiors. While speculating on the conditions of display and intended audiences for his *Musical Ceiling* and *The Concert*, we will discover Honthorst's motivations for painting illusionistic concert scenes and how this newly established pictorial trend appealed to a Northern audience.

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[69] It is important to note the possibility of earlier illusionistic ceiling decorations to exist in the Netherlands. Because only a portion of seventeenth century works survive, it is possible that earlier paintings of this category existed. However, the lack of extant examples leads us to believe that Honthorst's painting was a very early attempt to produce an illusionistic decoration for a Netherlandish audience, if not the first.

While capitalizing upon contemporary interest in international styles, Honthorst demonstrated his ability to replicate the complex decorative schemes of Italy on a smaller scale to suit the homes of Dutch burghers. Judson highlighted the importance of the artist's contributions to the Netherlandish canon, "Honthorst's position in the development of illusionistic wall and ceiling decoration in the Netherlands was that of an innovator. He introduced decorative schemes, popular in Italy since the sixteenth century."[70] Honthorst is not himself responsible for the genesis of illusionistic decoration. Yet his originality lies in his ability to successfully translate this painting technique into an acceptable form for Northern audiences, one which combines both the idiosyncrasies of his style with techniques used by successful international models. The *Musical Ceiling* and *The Concert* best exemplify the artist's attempts to shape illusionistic decoration to the tastes of Dutch audiences.

In the *Musical Ceiling* a group of figures consisting of five men, two women, and two animals including a dog and parrot is distributed across the length of a platform behind a rectangular balustrade. The clear blue skies painted in the background serve as a vantage point and assist in the creation of three-dimensional space beyond the boundaries of the picture plane. Considering Honthorst's interests in depicting musical themes and drawing upon artistic techniques from Italy, as evidenced by the large number of extant paintings featuring musical subjects in his *oeuvre*, it is not surprising that Honthorst chose to fuse the theme of music with this new concept of illusionistic

[70] Judson, 1959, 126.

painting. His experimentation with this combination of musical subject and painting technique would be reinforced with his later illusionistic work, *The Concert*, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Sadly, the original size and location of the *Musical Ceiling* remain problematic due to its lack of clear provenance.[71] We may never know for certain the original location of Honthorst's *Musical Ceiling*, but a consideration of the painting and its potential setting for display will yield significant discoveries in its meaning, and Honthorst's motivations for creating illusionistic works.

Honthorst departed from the overtly moralistic character within his other depictions of musicians in exchange for a light-hearted and jolly illustration of musical harmony in his *Musical Ceiling*. In the lower portion of the picture plane, a man plays the lute and sings while tilting his head to the left and staring dazedly into space. To the right of him, a woman follows along with the music while glancing down upon her songbook. Although she is provocatively dressed with an exposed shoulder and leg stocking, her character is not synonymous with Honthorst's lascivious prostitutes. Her innocuous expression and delicate hand gesture suggest her innocent occupation with the performance of music. Another man stands behind her, perhaps to look upon the woman's musical script and participate in the music-making. To the left, a man and woman glance down upon the viewer with shadowed faces. Next to them, a mustached man fingers the strings on the neck of his lute, which juts out into the center of the

[71] According to Judson, the earliest known provenance for this painting was recorded by auction records in 1924. Judson, 1999, 223.

pictorial space. It points to the right balustrade, on which a brightly colored parrot is perched. Above him, another male lute player accompanies the group with a lute.

Although *Musical Ceiling* appears to be an extension of Honthorst's moralistic scenes of musicians, the subjects and their relationships differ from his other musician subjects, making its meaning difficult to discern. The provocative and accidental exposure of a woman's leg goes unnoticed by the subjects of the painting, and encourages the viewer to secretly delight in voyeurism. The prospect of sensual behavior is hinted upon by the flirtation between the man and his female companion on the left side of the balustrade as he tightly grasps her shoulders.

An iconographic study supports a moralistic reading of the painting in which the painter invites his audience to consider the differences between temptation and virtue. The contemporary viewer would have recognized the exchanges in meaning between the presence of the dog, a symbol of fidelity, and that of a parrot, a common signifier of lust.[72] Surely Honthorst's visual references would have been familiar to the seventeenth century viewer, since the dog was a common motif in art and the parrot was commonly associated with lust as later demonstrated by Jacob Cats, a widely distributed author, in his *Spiegel van den Ouden en Nieuwen Tijdt*.[73] The lute appears in other paintings by Honthorst as a pictorial metaphor for female carnality, but it was also used to signify

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[72] De Meyere, 1976, 26.

[73] "Sy en is niet geheel suyver, die twijfel doet staen aen haer eerbaerheydt. Wat uwe kleederen belanght / uyt-wendigheydt en kostelickheydt is geraden te mijden. 't Is hier (mijns oordeels) een rechte Maeghden sin-spreucke / Reyn gekleet, En niet te breet En west geen paeu in gewaet, Geen papegaey in uwen praet." Jacob Cats, Amoris Laconismi – Liefdes Kort-Sprake, in *Spiegel van den Ouden en Nieuwen Tijdt* (Alle de Wercken, Dordrecht, 1659): 75. As in De Meyere, 1976, 27.

harmony in the Netherlandish tradition.[74] Although the Musical Ceiling contains visual references to the theme of sensuality, the painting is conservative in relation to Honthorst's other interpretations of musicians. When compared to the overtly flirtatious figures and their intimate interactions in his *Supper Party*, for example, the subjects of the ceiling appear innocent and reserved in their appearance (fig. 27). The contrasts between the painting's symbols, relationships, and characters of the figures make a definite meaning within the painting difficult to identify. However, the displacement that exists between the mood of the painting and the suggestive human interaction of the figures may have pleased contemporary viewers, who would delight in using such visual ambiguities as departure points for leisurely conversation.

The visual correlation between Honthorst's attempt at illusionism and Italianate models would have also appealed to potential apprentices and art buyers, since the combinative representation of illusionism with musical subjects was new to decorative illustration in Dutch homes. While he was abroad, Honthorst was influenced by the dramatic illusionistic decorations by Italian artists, which had a profound impact upon his artistic choices after his return to the Netherlands. The conspicuous resonance between the *Musical Ceiling* and illusionistic painting in Italy reveals the artist's awareness of international styles, while it also functions as proof of his artistic training on a worldly spectrum.

[74] See Chapter II of this thesis, 15-17.

In order to create an illusionistic effect and render his musicians as if they were physically present in the space of display, Honthorst painted his figures at a raking angle to be seen from below. This technique is termed *sotto in su* ("seen from below") in Italian. An illusion to three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface could be achieved by rendering foreshortened figures and a vanishing point to create the suggestion of depth.[75] Andrea Mantegna's ceiling frescoes, finished in 1473, in the *Camera degli Sposi* in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua offer a pioneering example of this technique (fig. 28). The artist provided a backdrop of blue skies with white clouds and manipulated the proportions of the putti balancing on the ledges of the framing ocular balustrade.

While Honthorst may have extracted ideas from the successes of early developments in Italian illusionistic painting by artists like Mantegna and Lorenzo Lotto, the paintings featuring musical subjects by Nicolò dell'Abate, Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639), and Agostino Tassi (1578-1644) are more closely linked to Honthorst's renderings. Honthorst may have been influenced by the subject matter and style of dell'Abate's *Concert Played by Three Men and a Woman* of 1510, which depicts musicians sitting upon a wall that bridges the gap between the pictorial space and the domain of the viewer (fig. 29). Although it is impossible to know whether or not Honthorst viewed this painting during his lifetime, we can clearly see how the

[75]Joaneath Spicer, et al., *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age*. Exh. cat. (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1997): 111.

theme of music and heightened realism achieved through illusionistic effects resonates with Honthorst's musical pieces.

One of Honthorst's more likely influences is Paolo Veronese, who placed multiple figures around the interior border of an octagonal picture plan in his *Harmonie,* painted in 1561 for the ceiling of the Sala di Olimpo in Rome (fig. 30). The artist used a diverse milieu of half-length and three-quarter length figures, as well as heads that appear from behind swirling clouds to look down upon the viewer. Both artists positioned the figures in front of a light blue sky in order to expand or open up the walls beyond the limitations of the architectural space, an illusion known as "quadratura."[76]

Another illusionistic ceiling decoration that Honthorst is likely to have seen is the *Concert* painted by Orazio Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi in 1611-1612 for the Casino of the Nine Muses in the Palazzo Pallavinci-Rospigliosi in Rome (fig. 31). The artists played with spatial effects by placing their musical figures behind a balustrade, the same technique employed by Honthorst in his *Musical Ceiling*. By providing the viewer with the full lengths of the figures' bodies, the artist intensifies the illusion of their real presence in the space. Honthorst must have witnessed the frescoes by his Italian contemporaries while abroad since he, Gentileschi and Tassi were working for the same patron, Cardinal Scipione Borghese.[77] Because that the three artists possessed a similar

[76] This is also the technique used by Andrea Mantegna in the *Camera degli Sposi*, mentioned earlier in this chapter.
[77] DeMeyere, 1976, 12.

interest in the art of Caravaggio, it is likely that they conversed with one another about the technical aspects of their art.

The *Musical Ceiling* showcased Honthorst's ability to master spatial relationships between the viewer, the space of the room, and the work of art itself. In order to render a realistic interpretation of musicians within the space, Honthorst had to calculate distances of perspective between the viewer and the ceiling, while also distorting the measurements of the figures to provide the illusion of their presence beyond the limited spatial barrier of the ceiling.[78] The painting functioned as a marketing tool for the artist, since its display would have incited discussion regarding Honthorst's dexterity for painting such complex works. Honthorst's desire to draw attention to his own role as creator of the painting is reinforced by his decision to add a prominent signature on the railing in front of the woman holding a book.

In his article, "Nieuwe gegevens over Gerard van Honthost's beschilderd plafond uit 1622," De Meyere theorizes that Honthorst painted his *Musical Ceiling* for his own house on Domplein 6. Using the floor plan of the house, De Meyere proposed that the painting was located in the hall on the ground floor behind the main entrance of the house. It is important to note that these proposals are purely based on speculation. De Meyere supported his argument with appropriate mathematical proportions and historical methods of display, but he failed to present circumstantial evidence to explicate his logic

[78] De Meyere also provides examples of contemporary treatises on perspective with which Honthorst may have become familiar whilst in Italy. De Meyere, 1976, 12-15.

for picking the artist's home as the location of the *Musical Ceiling*.[79] He also ceased to explain how the ceiling would have performed in the space and how it would have been perceived by its viewers. Regardless, De Meyere raises an interest point through his attempts to pinpoint the original location of the painting: due to the technicalities of perspective involved with painting an illusionistic scene, the work of art must have been customized to fit a specific space. Using De Meyere's proposal of the artist's home to be the original location for the *Musical Ceiling* as a foundation, we will continue to speculate on the existence of the painting in this environment and the reactions it provoked amongst contemporary viewers.

The house on Domplein 6 was purchased in 1596 by Gerrit's uncles, Robert and Hendrick Honthorst. They both resided in the home until the death of Robert in 1621 and Hendrick in 1624. Three years later, Honthorst purchased the house from Hendrick's estate and he lived there until his death in 1656.[80] The difference in time between Honthorst's execution of the painting in 1622 and his purchase of the home in 1627 is problematic for the proposal that the painting was originally displayed at this site. However, it is possible that the painting was hung in the house while it belonged to Honthorst's uncles, as well as when the artist himself lived there.

De Meyere used drawings of the façade and ground plan of the house to determine the initial size of the painting (figs. 32 and 33). He assumed that the

[79] His argument rests largely upon the notion that he would have been dependent on patrons within his close circle, including colleagues and family. De Meyere, 1976, 17.
[80] Judson, 1999, 223.

dimensions of the ceiling were similar to those of the space in order to calculate the initial size of the painting at 2.5 x 7.4 meters, or 250 x 740 cm. According to the drawings, the façade would have been at least 10 meters wide, the adjacent hall would have measured 3.50 x 6.60 meters, and the wall of the kitchen would have been 6.5 meters in length.[81] If these dimensions are correct, the painting would have been significantly larger and more elongated than the size of the painting in its current state.

Before addressing how the *Musical Ceiling* functioned in the actual home of the artist, it is necessary to first discuss the role of the hall behind the main entrance as a space for the display of paintings. This particular room was termed the *voorhuis* (literally, front house.) Jan Sluijter pointed out that the *voorhuis* served as an appropriate setting for genre paintings, as demonstrated by the 1667 collection inventory of a prominent Catholic burgher in Leiden named Hendrick Bugge van Ring. In fact, two grisaille paintings illustrating "the invention and abuses of wine" by Gerrit van Honthorst are recorded as being on display in Bugge's *voorhuis*.[82] This very specific example directly demonstrates the fact that Honthorst's paintings were hung in entry rooms of Dutch houses, and supports De Meyere's suggestion that the painting was hung in the vestibule.

Since the house was connected to the street through the *voorhuis*, paintings on display in this room would be visible to passersby as well as house guests. This room

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[81] DeMeyere, 1976, 22 and Judson, 1999, 223.

[82] Eric Jan Sluijter, "'All striving to adorne their houses with costly pieces': Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors" in Mariët Westermann, *Art & Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001): 121.

functioned as an active meeting space for residents and visitors, rather than a small passageway leading to other living areas as is the case in modern homes. Mariët Westermann defines the *voorhuis*, "as a transitional space between the street and the inner home, neither fully public nor completely private but rather a place where the outside world may intrude upon the domestic."[83] The hall behind the main entryway seems to have functioned as a semi-public space, thereby allowing for passersby to observe possessions within the home and make judgments upon its residents. As such, the *voorhuis* provided an opportunity for individuals to communicate messages about oneself to a wider local audience.

Because people tended to spend a great amount of time in their houses, entertaining guests and hosting activities such as business meetings, the home possessed a social role in addition to serving as a living space. In his exhaustive study on public and private spaces in seventeenth century Dutch culture, John Loughman references Erving Goffman's theoretical idea that human behavior is synonymous with stage performance. Within the home, 'back stage' areas including the bedroom and kitchen provided a setting for private matters, and the more public 'front stage' areas were, "where the performer conveys subliminal information on his or her socio-economic status, conceptions of self, trustworthiness and so forth, to the onlooker or audience."[84] Personal investment was extremely self-conscious, and wealthy burghers in particular

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[83] Mariët Westermann, "'Costly and Curious, Full off pleasure and home contentment' : Making Home in the Dutch Republic" in Westermann, 2001, 29.
[84] John Loughman and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000): 71.

realized the potential of luxurious furnishings and grand works of art to communicate messages about one's character and social distinction.

The *voorhuis*, then, must have provided the perfect opportunity for citizens to broadcast messages about oneself. This idea is evidenced by the remarks of an English visitor to the Netherlands in 1640 named Peter Mundy, "As for the Art off Painting and the affectation of the people to Pictures, I thincke none other goe beeyonde them…All in generall striving to adorne their houses, especially the outer or street roome, with costly peeces…"[85]

The *Musical Ceiling* would have possessed significantly more complex meanings in the home of the artist than in the home of his relatives. The artist's home was exceptionally busy, since it was the site for the production of works of art and the sale of paintings to patrons. By 1627, Honthorst had established a flourishing artist's workshop, with numerous pupils and assistants. As students, they favored Honthorst's style and wished to learn from his artistic abilities while contributing to the production of the workshop's paintings. At the time, approximately twenty-five pupils studied with him, including Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688), Jan Both (1610-1652), and Jan Gerritsz. van Bronchorst (1603-1661.) A large studio measuring 100 square meters on the second floor of the house on Domplein 6 was the designated space for art production and the training of Honthorst's students.

[85] Sluijter, 2001, 103.

The house on Domplein 6 was also a site for conducting business, since the sale of works directly to clients who visited the artist's studio was a common practice. In order to impress patrons and encourage the purchase of paintings, artists often covered the walls of their homes with works by the master himself and by his apprentices. For example, Rembrandt van Rijn received his clients in a *sijdelcaemer*, in which a collection of paintings by the artist, his pupils, and works by Flemish and Italian artists adorned the walls.[86] His patrons then had the option to purchase a painting from the collection on display in the artist's house, or to commission a customized work of art specified to his needs.

If the original location of the *Musical Ceiling* was behind the main entrance of the home, it would have been highly visible both to students of Honthorst's workshop and to patrons visiting the home, in addition to citizens passing by the home on the outside street. Because it was a very early attempt at illusionistic decoration in the Netherlands, Honthorst would have ensured its display in prominent location. By choosing to display the *Musical Ceiling* in his own home, Honthorst was able to publish his ability to master the technical aspects of painting. The spectacle of illusionistic painting attracted students to his workshop and encouraged patrons to purchase works by the hand of Honthorst. Honthorst's Musical Ceiling was primarily significant because it attracted the attention of wealthy patrons, who later adapted illusionistic painting as a decorative medium in their homes.

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[86] Fiese Tissink, *The Rembrandt House Museum Amsterdam* (Antwerp: Ludion, 2003): 34.

In 1624, only two years after Honthorst's execution of the ceiling, he produced another illusionistic work titled *The Concert* (fig. 26). The wall decoration contains five women dressed in Venetian theatre costumes making music while two flying putti hover above them. Honthorst painted a balustrade along the bottom, upon which the woman to the right perches herself while strumming her lute and singing. He also included two songbooks on the balustrade in order to bridge the spaces between the worlds of the painting and that of the viewer. The shadows under the objects on the wall contribute to the rendering of three-dimensionality within the painting while forming the illusion that they extend into the space of the viewer. The women in the background look down upon songbooks and sing along to the music. The woman sitting on the balustrade and the woman playing the theorbo on the left appear to look down at the viewer, which suggests that the painting was intended to be installed above eye level.

One print that provides some visual evidence for the presence of musicians at banquets is Jan Muller's *The Feast of Belshazzar* (fig. 34).[87] This engraving shows a small group of musicians perched upon a balcony overlooking a crowd of dinner guests. Like the musicians depicted in the print, the figures in Honthorst's painting are depicted upon a balcony and would have been displayed at a central focal point within the room. Therefore, *The Concert* appears to be an illusion of actual musical groups that entertained at receptions or banquets. Hiring a band of musicians to perform at social events was a common practice for those prominent members of society who could afford the expense.

[87] This comparison originally appeared in a footnote by Judson, 1999, 209.

The Concert was painted for the Stadholder Frederik Hendrik (1584-1647), who was living in the Oude Hof, now known as the Noordeinde Palace in The Hague. An entry from an inventory of the Stadholder's quarter's in the palace taken between 1632 and 1633 claims, "In the large upstairs hall there is a mantel-piece painting by Honthorst that is a concert."[88] It is difficult to determine whether this particular painting directly relates to the description provided in the 1632 inventory. The disparity between the date of the painting's completion and the time that the inventory was recorded, as well as its vague description of only a "concert," are problematic for the establishment of the Oude Hof in The Hague as the location of Honthorst's *Concert*. However, given the large size of the painting at 168 x 169 cm, and the visual cues that suggest its original location high up on a wall, it is very likely that it adorned a mantelpiece.

Because *The Concert* hung in the stadholder's residence rather than the artist's home, its audience differs considerably from that of the *Musical Ceiling.* Instead of serving as pictorial evidence of an artist's skill and a means of attracting patrons, *The Concert* supplied a visual catalyst for conversation amongst the stadholder's guests, presumably members of the court and visiting nobles from international court circles.

Like many European rulers, Frederik Hendrik was familiar with the potential abilities of visual images to communicate message about one's self-image and political

[88] "De groote bovensael daerop is 611 Een schilderie voor de schoorsteenmantel door Honthorst gemaeckt, sijnde een musijck." Judson, 1999, 207.

ambitions.[89] Upon his receipt of ownership of the Oude Hof, Hendrik commenced its enlargement and renovation. After purchasing plots of land surrounding the palace, he hired the architects Pieter Post and Jacob van Campen to manage the project. With the expansion of the palace, the stadholder also made significant embellishments to the interior, including a variety of commissioned works of art. As Lynn Federle Orr asserted in her exploration of the influence of Italian art on Utrecht artists, "Although not suited for the smaller scale of Dutch domestic interiors, grand illusionistic wall painting was recognized in the circle of the stadholder as both pleasing decoration and a suitable vehicle to convey the iconography of nobility appropriate to the political and dynastic ambitions of the House of Orange-Nassau."[90]

The decorations of Hendrik's palaces were intended to represent the status and refined tastes of the stadholder's court and heritage. In an attempt to emulate the artistic programs of courts in England and France, he often sought the talent of artists who had received an international training.[91] He therefore found a perfect partner in Honthorst, whose style reflected his experience and training in Italy. Honthorst's illusionistic paintings, therefore, provided the perfect medium for the stadholder to place himself on an equal level with international courts.

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[89] See for example, *Princely Patrons: The Collection of Frederick Henry of Orange and Amalia of Solms in The Hague*, Exh. cat. (The Hague: Mauritshuis. Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1997).
[90] Spicer, 1997, 111.
[91] Lyle Wade Williams, *The Art and Architectural Patronage of Frederik Hendrik, Stadhouder of Holland in the 17th Century: Dynastic Ambitions and Artistic Propaganda*, M.A. Thesis (Austin: The University of Texas, 1990): 1-2.

Honthorst's popularization of illusionistic decoration for Dutch interiors may be confirmed through an analysis of two later decorations for Frederik Hendrik's palaces at Honselaarsdijk and the Huis ter Nieuburch, Rijkswijk. Alongside Paulus Bor and Pieter de Grebber, Honthorst was one of three artists responsible for the design of the grand hall at the Honselaarsdijk, which was completed between 1638 and 1639. A drawing attributed to Paulus Bor reveals the composition of the decoration, which included a group of figures including musicians, Turks, and falconers, who appear to occupy the viewer's space (fig.35). They were positioned behind a balustrade in order to create the illusion that the painting blended into the actual architecture of the room. One woman, seated on the edge of the balustrade, is visually similar to Honthorst's *Concert*, and therefore suggests the artist's contribution to the design.[92] In addition to the complex placement and poses of the figures, a luxurious spread of garlands and fabric adorned the balustrade. Extraneous embellishments such as these provided allusions to the idea of abundance and the stadholder's ability to provide for the people.[93] Through complex decorative schemes, especially the spectacle of illusion, the stadholder was able to communicate messages about the status and luxury of his court. A remark by Queen Marie de Médicis upon her visit to the Honselaarsdijk reveals the success of the illusionistic paintings for conveying notions of extravagance and grandeur, "the chambers and small rooms, superbly adorned with various sorts of tapestries, highly prized, have

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[92] Judson, 1999, 208.

[93] For more information on the notion of abundance in European courts, see Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

even more, a new decoration of paintings, which the artist Honthorst, one of the most famous painters of this century, places in the rank of his most exceptional."[94]

Thus far, this study has attempted to examine the potential locations of display for Honthorst's illusionistic works, how they functioned in their respective spaces, and the manners in which contemporary viewers viewed and responded to a work of art. An important theoretical problem with this type of approach is the displacement in perspective between the contemporary reader and the seventeenth century viewer. In his groundbreaking study on contemporary visual culture, Michael Baxandall introduced the concept of the period eye, the idea that people within a culture share experiences that affect their perception of images and determines which visual qualities people find appealing. His assertion that, "human equipment for visual perception ceases to be uniform, from one man to the next," or the idea that one's cultural environment affects how one perceives the visual, serves to illuminate the disparity between cultural understandings of the past and present.[95] Although one may come close to the achievement of an understanding of audience reception through the study of historical

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[94] "les chambers et les cabinets parez superbement des diuerses sortes de tapisseries, touted de haux prix, ont encore vn nouuel ornament de peintures, que l'artiste main de Honthorst, vn des plus fameux peintres de ce siècle, met au rang de ses raretez." The account of Queen Marie de Médicis's visit to Huis ter Nieuburch was published in 1639 by her historiographer, P. de la Serre, *Histoire de l'entrée de la Reine Mère du Roi Très-Chrétien dans les villes des Pays-Bas*. Judson, 1999, 21.

[95] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 29. For more on the concept of the "period eye" and related topics, see Baxandall, 1988, 29-40, Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), and Michael Baxandall, *Words for Pictures: Seven Papers on Renaissance Art and Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

texts and contexts, it is impossible to replicate viewing experiences of the past. However, this does not imply that an audience-reception methodology is obsolete.

While maintaining awareness of cultural differences, the scholar may use the audience-reception approach and benefit from its advantages. Margaret Sullivan argues that this scholarly technique possesses the ability to fill historical gaps between the intentions of the artist and the meaning of the work. She claims, "Since the cultural factors involved in creation and reception are taken into account in an audience-reception study, this permits a more nuanced view of what constitutes 'sources' for an artist, and 'meaning' for an audience in a given historical situation. … Recreating the terms of the creative contract as they operated to join artist and audience in a reciprocal relationship is a way – perhaps the only viable way – to experience the work of art in a manner that approximates that of an earlier age and does not misrepresent the artist's 'intentions' entirely."[96] A consideration of additional cultural factors, such as locations and circumstances of display, provides for the discovery of supplemental meanings for works of art. An audience-reception study, which seeks answers to questions beyond the scope of artistic intention and meaning, is especially valuable for an analysis of contemporary appeal and artistic trends.

By bringing illusionistic painting to the Netherlands, Gerrit van Honthorst ensured his future success as an artist. Because Honthorst customized his illusionistic decorations to fit the dimensions and conditions of specific interior spaces, he must have

[96] Margaret A. Sullivan, "Bruegel's Proverbs: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance," *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (Sep., 1991): 431.

already known the location and potential audience for each painting. The display of the *Musical Ceiling* in the artist's home would have allowed for its exposure to artists in training who were easily influenced by his achievements, as well as potential patrons who would be enticed to buy his works upon seeing the illusionistic decoration. The painting therefore would have served as a marketing tool for the artist. The inclusion of *The Concert* in the residence of Frederik Hendrik demonstrates Dutch collectors' acceptance of illusionistic painting as an appropriate art form for Dutch interiors. The innovative *sotto in su* technique combined with the current artistic interest in the depiction of musical scenes ensured that these works of art would be conversation pieces amongst local and international art collectors and persist as a contemporary trend.

Chapter V: Conclusions

During the early seventeenth century, the city of Utrecht witnessed an artistic development that remained important within the larger scope of Netherlandish painting. Hendrick Terbrugghen, Dirck van Baburen, and Gerrit van Honthorst undertook trips to Italy that would have extensive consequences for the development of Dutch art. These artists incited contemporary enthusiasm for their progressive approach to genre painting, one that united advancements of realism and illusionism in painting from Italy with the persistent subjects and themes of a Northern artistic tradition. Honthorst's work in particular continued to influence subsequent artists' approaches to genre painting, and it had a profound impact on the choices of Frans Hals and Judith Leyster (fig. 36). The choice of musical subjects, both concert scenes and independent musicians, was appropriate for art audiences with combined interests in international developments and local artistic pursuits.

Although the extent to which Honthorst intentionally extracted from the artistic establishments of the Northern tradition remains unclear, his employment of iconography and themes familiar to Netherlandish art seems to have been an appropriate strategy for ensuring the contemporary success of his paintings of musical subjects. A discussion of Honthorst's potential influences provides insight into the evolution of his style, artistic choices, and the idiosyncratic tendencies that resulted in the creation of an original artistic trend. His musical scenes serve as visual evidence of the amalgamation of experiences, stemming from his training with Abraham Bloemaert to his exposure to revolutionary transcriptions of realism and chiaroscuro by Caravaggio, and his observance of concurrent trends thereafter.

Honthorst's tactic of blending pictorial conventions from Italian and Netherlandish art is most conspicuously articulated in his nocturnal scenes, as evidenced by *Merry Company*. Honthorst defined the relaxed mood of the painting with the humble light of a candle, a technique he reinterpreted from the mystical, artificial light sources present in the milieu of Caravaggio. His blunt reference to Dutch humanist poetry with an inscription prescribed to an opened book clearly demonstrates the artist's interest in exploiting cultural devices for the purpose of appealing to the tastes of his audiences.

As Honthorst continued to experiment with different modes of representation afforded to him by musical subjects, he consequently discovered new avenues to suit the aesthetic tastes of his patrons. His paintings of half-length female musicians best express his strategic modification of contemporary themes, such as the recent proliferation of pictures that capture the likeness of courtesans in this instance. Honthorst redefined the Italian prototypes of individual musicians established by Caravaggio and Manfredi by portraying female subjects and characterizing them with an air of sensuality that would successfully appeal to male audiences.

Through the display of wall and ceiling decorations by his hand in relatively public environments, Honthorst was able to aggressively market his paintings of musicians to respective audiences. For instance, *Musical Ceiling* reveals his mastery of the technical complications of the *sotto in su* technique. This work of art functioned as a spectacle for its viewers, and illuminated the extensive skills acquired by the artist during his productive travels in Italy.

By 1630, the representation of musical subjects popularized by Honthorst and his contemporaries began to wane as an artistic trend. Utrecht Caravaggism proved difficult to sustain after the deaths of Dirck van Baburen in 1624 and Hendrick Terbrugghen in

1629.[97] Furthermore, Honthorst's style evolved towards international Classicism upon his acceptance into international court circles. In 1628, Honthorst moved to London to work at the Court of Charles I, where he executed his portrayal of *King Charles I and his Wife Queen Henrietta Maria as Apollo and Diana.* This history painting, which included actual portraits, led contemporaries to discover the artist's potential as a portraitist.[98] His successes in England paved the way for commissions from prominent persons in other international courts, including the exiled King and Queen of Bohemia, Frederik and Elizabeth who were in The Hague, and Stadholder Frederik Hendrik and his wife, Princess Amalia van Solms.[99] With the escalation of his career and receipt of large scale commissions, Honthorst abandoned the musical genre scenes that had helped him to establish his early fame.

Again, the words of Jay Richard Judson provide a satisfying description of Honthorst's role as an artist, "Although Honthorst's work is not considered by contemporary art historians and critics to be in the highest echelon of Dutch artists, it is abundantly clear that during the first half of the seventeenth century he was one of the most highly regarded and rewarded members of his profession."[100] Each category of Honthorst's musical scenes reveals his attempts to customize his works to suit the needs of his patrons. He included themes and subjects that were culturally familiar to Dutch audiences while simultaneously introducing extrinsic techniques from international styles to produce works of art that were both innovative and traditional.

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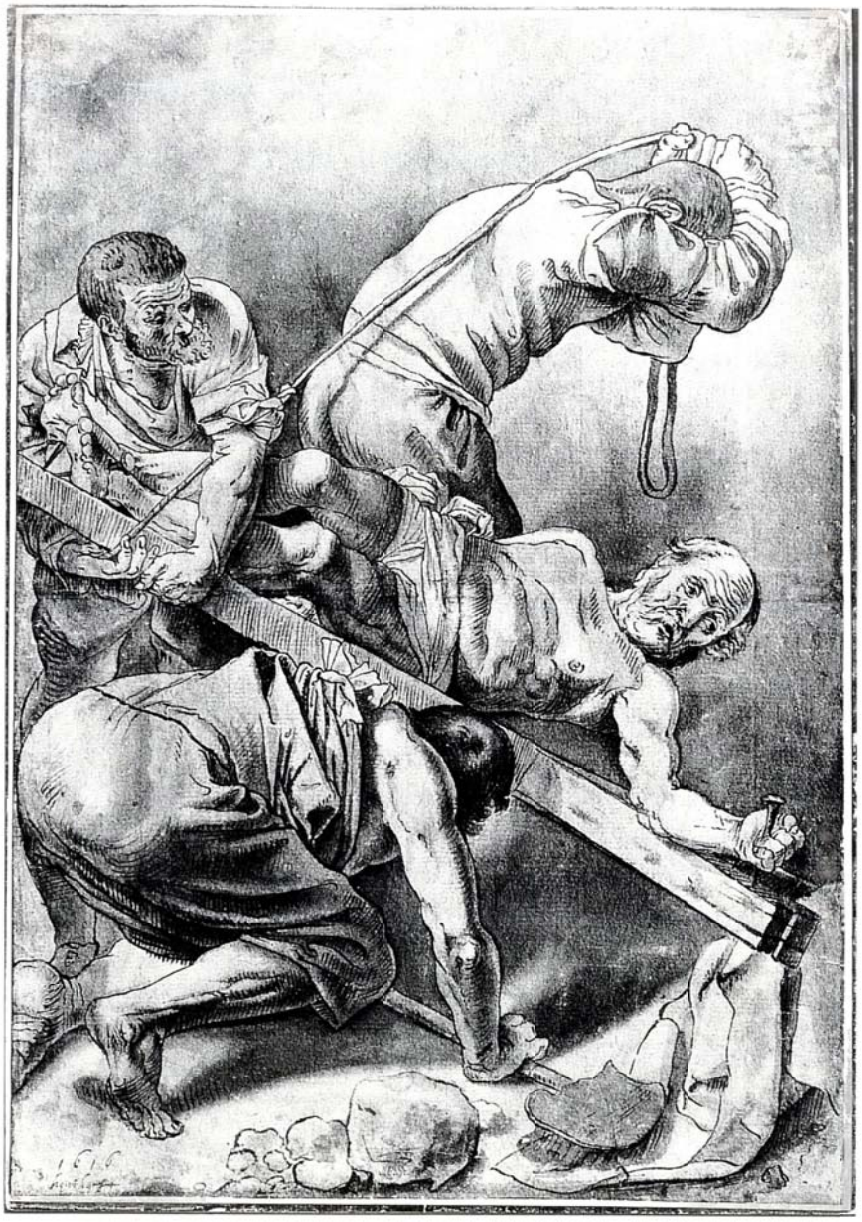
[97] Paul Huys Janssen, "Utrecht Caravaggisti," In Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087469 (accessed June 13, 2011).
[98] J. R. Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999): 27.
[99] Judson, 1999, xxxiv.
[100] Judson, 1999, 23.

Appendix: Figures



1. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Martyrdom of St Peter*, 1616, brown ink, brown wash, 38 x 26.5 cm. National Gallery, Oslo.

2. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Martyrdom of St. Peter*, 1600-1601, oil on canvas, 230 x 175 cm. Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.

3. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Nativity*, 1620, oil on canvas, 95.5 x 131 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Artstor.

4. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Merry Company*, 1623, oil on canvas, 125 x 157 cm. Staatsgalerie, Schleissheim.

5. Lucas van Leyden, *Prodigal Son Carousing*, 1519, woodcut, 67 x 48.6 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

6. Dirk Matham, *Vanitas*, 1622, engraving, Gemeentearchief, Haarlem.

7. Frans Huys, *Master John Blockhead*, date unknown, engraving, 38 x 42.1 cm. Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

8. Emblem from Jacob Cats, *Sinnen Minnebeelden*, 1618, engraving. Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

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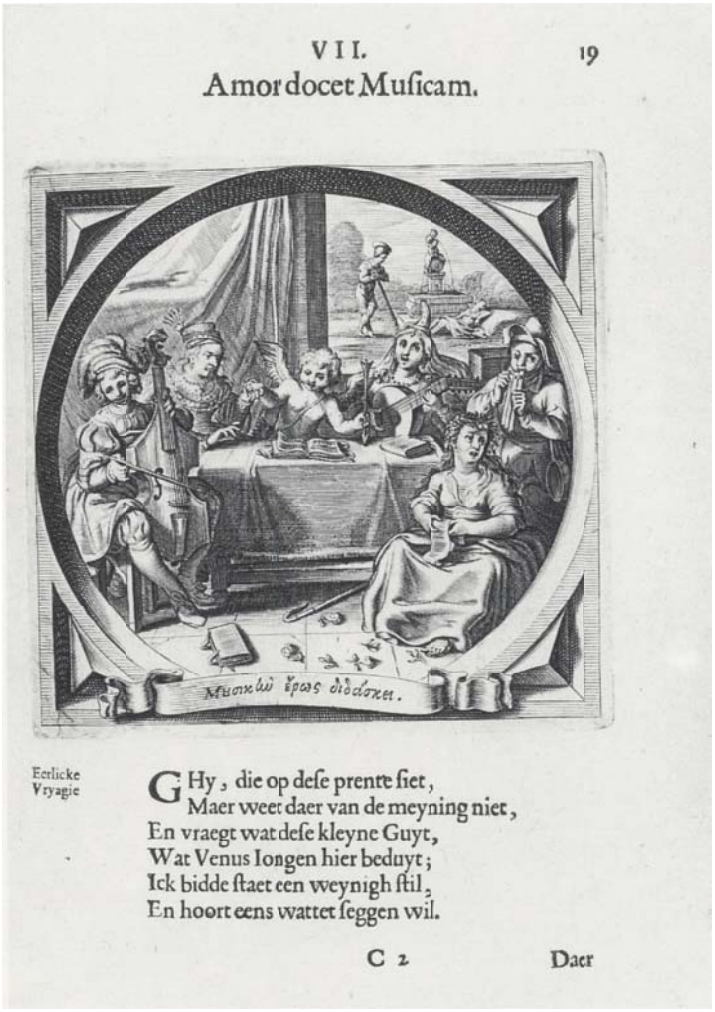
10. Crispijn van de Passe the Elder, *Amor docet Musicam*. Emblem from Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus Emblematum* (Cologne, 1611). Engraving.



11. Anonymous, after Adriaen van de Venne, *Amor docet Musicam*, engraving. Emblem from Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den Ouden ende Nieuwen Tijdt*, The Hague 1632, vol. I, p. 19. Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague.

12. Crispijn van de Passe the Elder, *Students in a Brothel*, from *Academia sive speculum vitae scholasticae* (Utrecht, 1612). Engraving.

13. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Amor Vincit Omnia*, ca. 1602, oil on canvas, 154 x 110 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

14. Bartolomeo Manfredi, *Concert Party*, circa 1615, oil on canvas, 130 x 189.5 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

14. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Concert of Youths*, circa 1595, oil on canvas, 92.1 x 118.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

15. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Woman Playing a Guitar*, 1624, oil on canvas, 82 x 68 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

16. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Woman Playing a Viola da Gamba*, 1626, oil on canvas, 84 x 66.5 cm. Private Collection.

17. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Lute Player*, c. 1595, oil on canvas, 94 x 119 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

18. Hendrick Terbrugghen, *Lute Player*, c. 1626, oil on canvas, 71 x 85 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

19. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Venus*, 1532, oil on panel, 37 x 25 cm. Stadelsches Kunstinstitut und Stadtische Galerie, Frankfurt.

20. Crispin de Passe II, *Coridon* and *Silvia*. Illustrations to *Le Miroir des Plus Belles Courtisannes de ce Temps* (Amsterdam, 1630). Engraving, 11.2 x 15.1 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

21. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Smiling Girl Holding an Obscene Image*, 1625, oil on canvas, 82 x 64 cm., St Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.

22. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Shepherdess*, date unknown, oil on canvas, 80 x 65 cm. Centraal Museum, **U**trecht.

23. Paulus Moreelse, *The Young Shepherdess*, 1617, oil on panel, 53.6 x 42.2 cm. Kremer Collection.

24. Theodoor Matham after Gerrit van Honthorst, *Young Woman (Phyllis) Playing a Violin*, 1626, engraving.

25. Gerrit van Honthorst, Musical Ceiling, 1622, oil on panel, left half: 308 x 102.5 cm, right half: 308 x 114 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA.

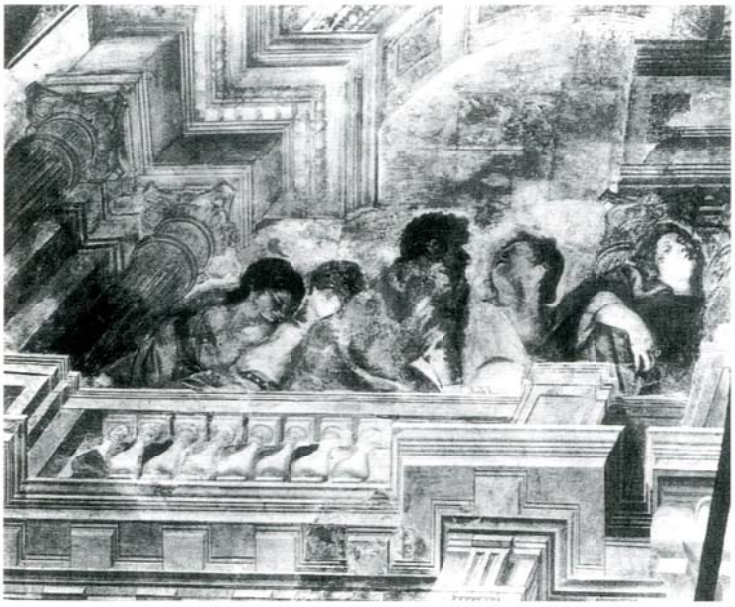
26. Gerrit van Honthorst, *The Concert*, 1624, oil on canvas, 168 x 178 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

27. Gerrit van Honthorst, *Supper Party*, 1620, oil on canvas, 138 x 203 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

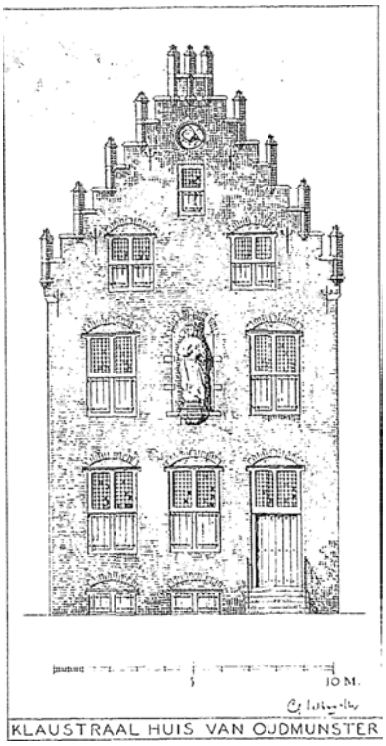
28. Andrea Mantegna, *Camera degli Sposi*, fresco, 1465-74, Palazzo Ducale, Castello di San Angelo, Mantua.

29. Niccolò dell'Abate, *A Concert Played by Three Men and a Woman*, brush drawing in brown wash, heightened with white, on brown prepared paper, 15 x 28.3 cm. The British Museum, London.

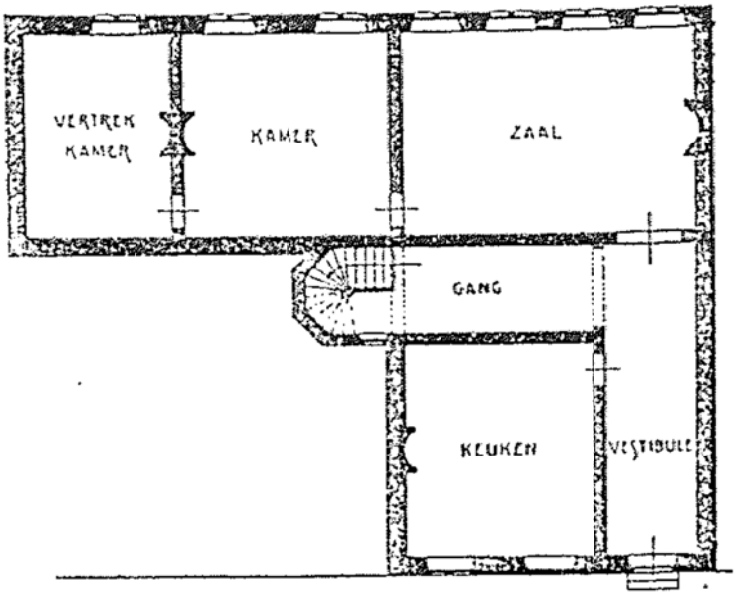
30. Paolo Veronese, *Harmonie*, fresco, ca. 1561, Sala di Olimpo, Rome.



31. Artemisia Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi, *Musical Concert Sponsored by Apollo and the Muses*, fresco, 1611-12, Casino of the Muses, Palazzo Quirinale, formerly Palazzo Pallavicino-Rospigliosi, Rome.



32. Herman Saftleven, *Front façade of Honthorst's house at Domplein 6 in Utrecht*, 1674.



33. Herman Saftleven, *Ground plan of Honthorst's house at Domplein 6 in Utrecht*, 1674.

34. Jan Harmensz. Muller, *The Feast of Belshazzar*, ca. 1600, engraving, 36.04 x 40.48 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

35. Paulus Bor, *Balustrade with Entertainers*, drawing, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

36. Judith Leyster, *Merry Trio,* c. 1629-31, oil on canvas, 88 x 73 cm. Private Collection, Netherlands.

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Vita

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