

Preface

Little is known about the earliest history of Old Master paintings in America, but newspaper advertisements and surviving auction catalogues indicate that Old Masters, including Flemish pictures, were available by the late eighteenth century. For example, in June 1786—ten years after the Declaration of Independence was adopted—a collection of “capital and well chosen” Old Masters was auctioned off by one Viner Van Zandt at Corre’s Tavern in New York. Among the Flemish paintings Van Zandt offered for sale were works by—or presumed to be by—Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck (“Van Dyke”), a member of the Teniers family (“Tenier”), and one of the Bruegels (“Van Brogel”). (For the sale’s advertisement, see fig. 37.)¹ Unfortunately, not one of these works has been identified; it is not known where they came from, who purchased them, or what happened to them after Van Zandt auctioned them off.

Many thousands of Old Masters, including numerous seventeenth-century Flemish paintings, have arrived on America’s shores since then. The present volume, the fifth in the series *The Frick Collection Studies in the History of Art Collecting in America*, comprises twelve essays by noted scholars, who examine the American taste for the art of Rubens, Van Dyck, and members of their circles over the past centuries.² By its nature, the history of collecting is interdisciplinary, and our topic requires not only a knowledge of the history of Flemish painting but also an understanding of the impact that cultural, economic, and political conditions and

changes may have had on the long lives of the artworks that have crossed the Atlantic over the years.

Perhaps surprisingly, the American taste for Rubens, Van Dyck, and their contemporaries has not been studied in depth since 1992, when the eminent Walter Liedtke, longtime Curator of European Paintings at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, published his landmark introduction to our subject in *Flemish Paintings in America*, a survey of the works by masters of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Flemish schools then in public collections in the United States and Canada.³ Liedtke, who was in charge of the Metropolitan Museum’s seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings from 1980 until his untimely death in 2015, raised a number of important points with regard to the American reception of seventeenth-century Flemish art. For example, Americans generally seem to have preferred Dutch over Flemish paintings, even though they often made no clear distinction between the two schools and characteristically conflated works of Dutch and Flemish origins. As Liedtke also observed, Rubens and Van Dyck were often not seen as Flemish painters; rather, Americans viewed them as cosmopolitan artists—after all, both masters spent substantial parts of their respective careers outside of their native Flanders. Notably, many of the points Liedtke made in his 1992 essay are emphasized once again in the current volume, and our authors owe him a great debt for his pioneering research and exceptional insights into this topic.

Nevertheless, while Liedtke’s research laid a remarkably solid foundation, our subject is still not entirely understood, and many questions remain. For example, how exactly did the paintings by Rubens, Van Dyck, the various members of the Bruegel family, and other Flemish artists come to proliferate in America? How did the taste for specific genres and the appreciation for certain masters change over the years? Who were the main



1. Anthony van Dyck, *Lucas van Uffel* (d. 1637), ca. 1622. Oil on canvas, 124.5 × 100.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.619). Photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

tastemakers for Flemish painting on this side of the Atlantic? Why did Americans so often prefer the Dutch over the Flemish school? And what effect did the great bequests that included Flemish paintings to American museums have?

Our book opens with an historical overview by Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., former Curator of Northern Baroque Painting at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and former Professor of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Art at the University of Maryland at College Park, who is now Senior Adviser for The Leiden Collection. Wheelock, who arrived at the Gallery in 1973 as a David E. Finley Fellow and subsequently served as its curator of Dutch and Flemish paintings from 1975 until 2018, is the author of many articles, books, and exhibition catalogues on Dutch and Flemish art. Among his publications that deserve special mention in the context of our current subject are, for example, his catalogue for the Gallery's groundbreaking exhibition *Anthony van Dyck* (1990–91; with Susan J. Barnes and Julius S. Held); an edited volume of essays on the same master (1994; with Susan J. Barnes); as well as the collection catalogue of the Gallery's seventeenth-century Flemish pictures (2005).⁴ In 2006, Wheelock's accomplishments and contributions to this field were acknowledged by the Belgian government, which named him Commander in The Order of Leopold I. It should be noted here that, over the course of his long curatorial career, Wheelock was also able to add significantly to the National Gallery of Art's seventeenth-century Flemish holdings: during his tenure, the number of Flemish paintings grew from thirty-six to sixty-five.⁵ In our volume, Wheelock sets the stage, both historically and culturally, exploring the reasons why Americans chose to collect the art of seventeenth-century Flanders in his introduction titled "Pleasure and Prestige: The Complex History of Collecting Flemish Art in America." At the same time, Wheelock's essay paves the way for the other investigations into the

actions, motives, and tastes of American collectors of Flemish paintings that are brought together here.

The remainder of this book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "The Early Years: The Formation of America's Taste for Flemish Painting," begins with Lance Humphries's study of Robert Gilmor, Jr. (1774–1848; see fig. 12), the Baltimore merchant who is often considered America's first major collector of Old Masters, and by extension of Flemish paintings. Humphries, the Executive Director of Baltimore's Mount Vernon Place Conservancy, is an acclaimed scholar not only of American painting but also of America's collecting history during the years of the Early Republic. In his essay, he paints a lively picture of Gilmor, who was well traveled in Europe and whose collection had its beginnings in the late years of the eighteenth century. A leading promoter of the nascent American school, Gilmor believed, like other collectors and patrons of his day, that an American school of painting would emerge out of Europe's artistic traditions, and that, therefore, Old Master pictures needed to be available for study for artists in the United States. Gilmor, who amassed his collection over the course of five decades, is known to have owned some sixty paintings he thought to be by seventeenth-century Flemish masters, including works by (or attributed to) Rubens and Van Dyck, as well as David Teniers the Younger, long a highly sought-after artist on both sides of the Atlantic.

Humphries's essay is followed by Margaret Laster's investigation into the taste for Flemish painting in early nineteenth-century New York. Laster, an independent scholar and a former associate curator of American art at the New-York Historical Society, is, like Humphries, an Americanist. A specialist in nineteenth-century art and material culture, she has a particular interest in collecting and patronage histories of Gilded Age New York. In her current essay, Laster focuses on two pioneering collectors, Luman Reed (1785–1836;

see fig. 21) and Thomas Jefferson Bryan (1800–1870; see fig. 22), men who came from very different backgrounds and led very different lives. Reed, a self-made man who became a successful drygoods merchant, started collecting pictures in about 1830, just six years before his death. Subsequently, his paintings initially became the nucleus of The New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, the city’s first permanent art gallery; after it closed, they were placed in perpetuity at the New-York Historical Society. Bryan, by contrast, was born in Philadelphia to great wealth and built his collection when he lived in Paris during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1853, he opened his Bryan Gallery of Christian Art in New York. Citing historical context—culled from period commentary, photographs, catalogues, and other ephemera—Laster demonstrates how Reed and Bryan, albeit for different reasons and in different ways, both included Flemish art in their larger collecting pursuits.

Next, Adam Eaker surveys the American taste for one artist in particular, Anthony van Dyck, arguably long the most sought-after master of the Flemish school. Eaker, Assistant Curator in the Department of European Paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, is a scholar of seventeenth-century Flemish painting. A Van Dyck specialist, he has served as a guest curator of the highly praised exhibition *Van Dyck: The Anatomy of Portraiture*, held at The Frick Collection in 2016.⁶ As Eaker points out in his current essay, titled “The American Van Dyck,” it is important to remember that American collectors did not primarily conceive of the cosmopolitan Van Dyck in terms of Flanders or Flemishness. Rather, he was often collected as the head of the “British school,” a status long claimed for him by British painters. In addition to the taste of American collectors for Van Dyck, Eaker explores the social, literary, and artistic ramifications of this phenomenon for figures such as Edith Wharton, Henry James, and John Singer Sargent.

Subsequently, Louisa Wood Ruby examines America’s taste for the works by the various members of a famed Flemish family of painters, that of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and four generations of his descendants, among them his sons—Pieter Bruegel the Younger and Jan Bruegel the Elder—as well as various grandsons and great-grandsons. As Wood Ruby, Head of Research at the Frick Art Reference Library and a specialist in Flemish drawings, argues, the American collecting history of the Bruegel dynasty closely mirrors the situation as it was during the artists’ own lifetimes: the desire of many collectors to own works by members of the family outweighed their interest in which member had actually painted them. Pieter Bruegel the Elder painted relatively few pictures—only around forty are known to have survived—most of which entered princely collections early on. Thus, a few centuries later, Americans had only limited opportunities to buy Pieter’s paintings, and as a result American museums now possess only two consistently accepted paintings by the master, among these the magnificent *Harvesters* at the Metropolitan Museum (see fig. 36), as well as four generally accepted ones. Many more paintings by Pieter’s descendants crossed the Atlantic, and a large number of these were donated to or purchased by American museums in the middle years of the twentieth century. According to Wood Ruby, the last two decades have seen a high interest: nearly every American institution that owns a small assembly of Flemish paintings either owns or hopes to add at least one work by a member of the Bruegel dynasty to its holdings.

Part 2 of our book, “The Gilded Age and Beyond,” is mainly devoted to the era of great wealth preceding the First World War and the following decades, and it focuses on various great collectors and collections of Flemish painting. This section commences with an essay by Ronni Baer, who, in 2019, was appointed the Allen R. Adler,

Class of 1967, Distinguished Curator and Lecturer at the Princeton University Art Museum. Baer, who served as the William and Ann Elfers Senior Curator of European Paintings at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts from 2000 until her appointment at Princeton, discusses the formation of that institution's collection of Flemish paintings. Baer has published widely on Dutch and Flemish art, and on the history of collecting, most notably in *The Poetry of Everyday Life: Dutch Painting in Boston* (2002), which accompanied the exhibition of the same name.⁷ With her essay in our volume, Baer returns to Boston's rich collecting history, this time focusing on Flemish art. She observes that Flemish paintings, whether copies or originals, were collected in Boston by the late decades of the eighteenth century. From early gentleman-collectors such as Richard Codman (1762–1806) and his nephew Charles (1784–1852), Baer goes on to discuss seventeenth-century Flemish painting in the context of nineteenth-century Boston institutions such as the Boston Athenaeum (founded in 1807) and the Museum of Fine Arts (founded in 1870), and of course Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924)—who purchased Rubens's exceptional *Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel* (see fig. 6)—also makes a cameo appearance before Baer turns her attention to Boston collectors of the later twentieth century. For the Museum of Fine Arts, the most significant recent event was without doubt the promised gift, in 2017, of 113 seventeenth-century Northern paintings from the Van Otterloo and Weatherbie collections. The largest gift of European paintings in the history of the Museum of Fine Arts, it includes nine Flemish works that will complement and augment the institution's present holdings.⁸

The present author's contribution focuses on one of America's most exceptional collectors of Flemish art, the Philadelphia lawyer John Graver Johnson (1841–1917; see fig. 52), whose collection of almost thirteen hundred Old Master and nine-

teenth-century paintings is now under the stewardship of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Johnson's tastes and collecting approach differed significantly from those of most of the great magnate-collectors of the Gilded Age: in contrast to many of his collecting peers, among them his friend and fellow Philadelphian Peter A. B. Widener (1834–1915; see fig. 78), Johnson was not merely interested in the Big Names and Big Pictures. Although he owned a number of paintings by (or, more often, hopefully attributed to) Rubens and Van Dyck—he bought works by lesser-known masters with at least equal enthusiasm, and thus his Flemish acquisitions also include paintings by artists such as Alexander Adriaenssen, David Ryckaert III, Antoine Goubau, and Jan Siberechts, to name a few. One of just a handful of major American collectors to write about art, Johnson was (and still is) seen by many as one of the most informed Old Master collectors of his era. Thanks to his collecting efforts, Philadelphia now boasts one of the largest groups of seventeenth-century Flemish paintings in the United States.

Next, Dennis Weller discusses several men who played key parts as advisers and tastemakers for Flemish painting, including such figures as A. Everett “Chick” Austin (1900–1957) and Julius Held (1905–2002). However, the main focus of Weller's essay is on the man who was arguably the main tastemaker for seventeenth-century Flemish painting in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century: the German-born Wilhelm Valentiner (1880–1958; see fig. 60), protégé of Wilhelm Bode, the renowned Berlin museum director and scholar, who once described him as “the most gifted and best equipped young student of art.”⁹ Weller, who joined the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh in 1995 and was its Curator of Northern European Art until his retirement in 2018, has long been a student of Flemish painting. In 1998, he curated the exhibition *Sinners and Saints, Darkness and Light*, which focused

on Caravaggio's Dutch and Flemish followers, and in 2009, he published the collection catalogue of his museum's Dutch and Flemish pictures.¹⁰

In his present essay, Weller sets out to assess Valentiner's long and many-sided American career, examining how he helped shape the taste for seventeenth-century Flemish painting in his adopted country. As a scholar of Flemish painting, and of Rubens in particular, Valentiner served as an adviser to many of America's leading private collectors, among them the Philadelphian John G. Johnson. In addition, Valentiner was for decades an exceptionally powerful force on the American museum scene: first as a curator of decorative arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; then as the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, and ultimately, at the end of his life, as the founding director of the North Carolina Museum of Art.

Weller's essay is followed by George Keyes's exploration of several eminent collections of Flemish paintings in the Midwest. Keyes, Curator Emeritus of European Paintings at the Detroit Institute of Arts, has had a long curatorial career, which started in 1982 when he became Curator of Paintings at one of the exceptional museums of the Midwest, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which he left in 1994 for Detroit, where he remained at the Institute of Arts, another leading museum, until his retirement in 2008. Keyes's narrative starts in Detroit, with the newspaper publisher James E. Scripps (1835–1906), who, in 1889, gave his collection of Old Masters—which included Rubens's *Meeting of David and Abigail* (see fig. 5) and other Flemish works—to the fledgling Detroit Museum of Art (later renamed the Detroit Institute of Arts), in the hope that others would be inspired to collect Old Masters and give them to public institutions as well. As Keyes notes, it was at about the same time that a group of Chicago collectors secured a number

of paintings from the famed Demidoff sale, with the intention of donating them to the newly founded Art Institute as its first group of Old Masters. In later decades, notable figures in the Midwest with a taste for Flemish art include Oberlin College professor Wolfgang Stechow (1896–1974), who helped shape the collecting activities of the Allen Memorial Art Museum; Otto Wittmann (1911–2001), longtime director of the Toledo Museum of Art; and, most importantly, the abovementioned Wilhelm Valentiner, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts from 1925 until 1945, who not only acquired aggressively for “his” museum but also advised several other distinguished Detroit collectors, including Ralph Harman Booth and Edsel and Eleanor Ford. According to Keyes, the pattern of collecting Flemish art in the Midwest continues to this day, albeit on a more modest scale, attested by recent acquisitions in Minneapolis, Toledo, Detroit, and elsewhere.

Our volume's final section, “The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: The Dissemination of Flemish Art Across America,” opens with an essay by Marjorie (Betsy) Wieseman, “Collecting Rubens in America.” Wieseman, who, in 2017, left her curatorial post at London's National Gallery for the Cleveland Museum of Art, where she was named the Paul J. and Edith Ingalls Vignos, Jr., Curator of European Paintings and Sculpture, 1500–1800, was appointed Curator and Head of the Department of Northern European Paintings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 2019. Wieseman has written extensively on Dutch and Flemish art, and especially on Rubens, the grand master of the Baroque. Among her publications are *The Age of Rubens* (1993), written in collaboration with Peter C. Sutton and others and published in conjunction with the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Toledo Museum of Art; as well as *Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens* (2004), again in collaboration with Sutton and

published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Bruce Museum of Art and Science in Greenwich, Connecticut, the Berkeley Art Museum, and the Cincinnati Art Museum.¹¹ In her essay in the present volume, Wieseman examines patterns in the collecting of paintings by Rubens in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Observing that the master's art was thought to represent much of what America's Puritan settlers and colonial founders had so determinedly rejected when they left Europe, she argues that it is hardly surprising that Rubens's artistic reputation often had little positive resonance on this side of the Atlantic. The handful of "Rubens" paintings that arrived in America prior to the very end of the nineteenth century scarcely did the master credit, Wieseman notes, while the enormous number of lesser-quality works by his workshop and followers complicated issues of attribution and authenticity.

Wieseman's text is followed by Alexandra Libby's essay on the formation of the collection of Flemish paintings at the National Gallery of Art. Libby, the Gallery's Assistant Curator of Northern Baroque Painting, completed her dissertation, "Piety and Politics in Peter Paul Rubens's 'Triumph of the Eucharist' Tapestry Series," in 2013. In her current essay, titled "Personal Treasures, Public Gifts," she discusses several of the Flemish collections that were donated to the Gallery in detail, most notably those given by its founder, the Pittsburgh-born banker and politician Andrew Mellon (see fig. 76), in 1937, and by one of its founding benefactors, Joseph E. Widener, son of the Philadelphia traction magnate Peter A. B. Widener (see fig. 78), in 1942. Mellon as well as father and son Widener adhered to prevailing nineteenth- and early twentieth-century tastes that approved of the two greatest Flemish masters, Rubens and Van Dyck, but had little regard for their lesser contemporaries. While Mellon's Flemish purchases went almost immediately into storage to await their transfer to

the Gallery, the Wideners initially collected works for display at Lynnewood Hall, their palatial residence outside Philadelphia. The Mellon and Widener gifts have long set the tone for the Gallery's later acquisitions. Nevertheless, in recent decades the artistic canon has widened, and changing tastes and other factors have impacted the Gallery's Flemish collections as well, as Libby shows. For example, due to the construction of three so-called Cabinet Galleries in 1995, the museum is now able to acquire and exhibit small-size Flemish paintings—such as the works by Adriaen Brouwer (see fig. 82), Osias Beert, and Michael Sweerts (see fig. 11), all fairly recent acquisitions that, for the most part at least, would not have appealed to masterpiece collectors such as Mellon and the Wideners.

This volume's final essay is by Anne Woollett, Curator in the Department of Paintings at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, who charts collecting Flemish paintings, most notably Rubens, in Southern California. A Rubens specialist, Woollett has co-organized the exhibitions *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship* (with Ariane van Suchtelen; J. Paul Getty Museum and Mauritshuis, The Hague, 2006) and *Spectacular Rubens: The Triumph of the Eucharist* (with Alejandro Vergara; J. Paul Getty Museum, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2014–15).¹² As Woollett shows in her essay, substantial collections of seventeenth-century Flemish paintings can be found at institutions such as the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Norton Simon Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. California business tycoons J. Paul Getty (1892–1976; fig. 91) and Norton Simon (1907–1993) entered the scene later than their East Coast counterparts, as Woollett points out, and although their collecting interests were broad, they ranked among the most formidable twentieth-century collectors of Flemish Baroque painting; moreover, they shared a predilection for Rubens. Nevertheless, while California collections

such as those founded by Getty and Simon approach the breadth of those of East Coast museums, they cannot match their depth, which is largely due to the longer collecting history of many East Coast institutions.

With these essays, we do not aspire to chronicle the entire history of seventeenth-century Flemish painting in the United States. Had that been our aim, we could have included studies on many other collectors, other institutions, and other cities and geographic regions. Many stories had to be left untold in these pages, as we limited our topic in order to focus on several important themes and on representative or remarkable examples. It is our express hope that the essays in this book will not only serve as worthwhile contributions to the history of collecting Flemish painting in the United States but will also help inspire further research. After all, these explorations are only part of a much larger history that is still unfolding.

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