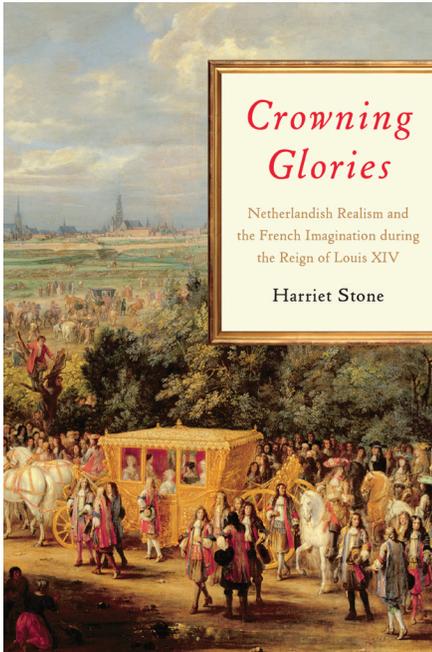


Review

Harriet Stone, *Crowning Glories. Netherlandish Realism and the French Imagination during the Reign of Louis XIV*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019, 42 ill., 312 pp. ISBN 9781487504427.



Within scholarship on the early modern Netherlands, many recent studies seek to break down the national lines that have divided contemporary scholars more than they did seventeenth-century artists and patrons. This increased nuancing of geographic divisions has fostered a consequent tendency to also blur those lines that have traditionally divided subfields of the humanities such as art history, history, literature, and language studies. Harriet Stone's *Crowning Glories. Netherlandish Realism and the French Imagination during the Reign of Louis XIV* demonstrates how productive and creative scholarship on Dutch art can be when it transgresses such divisions.

Stone's study offers a fresh and vivid take on the striking and often frustrating ambiguity characteristic of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. For an audience used to the singular, often allegorical, voice of state authority under King Louis XIV, Stone asks,

what function(s) could the subtexts and empiricism of northern paintings have had? The answer, she argues, was a subtle, often completely subconscious revolution of thought. Without direct intentionality, the presence of Dutch art – specifically those works concerned with naturalism and mimesis – by virtue of its 'difference from official French court art', laid bare what Stone calls 'the spectacle of the propaganda machine that moved the arts under the court's patronage' (227). Stone's examination begins by defining the intersections at which we find Dutch art in France under Louis XIV. Chief among these is the Dutch 'empirical reality' and what Stone calls the 'constructed reality' (58) of French art glorifying the king. These modes come together in two lesser-known works by Adam

Frans van der Meulen, a Flemish painter working at the French court. Commemorating Louis XIV's military victories in a 'Northern realist style', works like Van der Meulen's would eventually undermine the authorial voice of French state art.

Subsequent parts of the study, on the slippage between these new modes of thought and older vehicles for propaganda such as French classical theater, Charles Le Brun's painted scheme for the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, and – most intriguingly – the death and autopsy of Louis XIV himself, demonstrate Stone's deep wells of knowledge and the impressively thorough scope of her research. A direct line between the Dutch paintings that Stone considers and French painting is drawn in the final chapters with the categorisation of the world in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) and Chardin's still lives, which would have been unthinkable without the example of the Dutch Old Masters, whose paintings only increased in popularity among French collectors as the century wore on.

A French language and comparative literature professor by expertise, Stone's admiration of, and long fascination with, Dutch art shines through to great effect in *Crowning Glories*. So too does, in places, her lack of formal art historical training. This is most noticeable in her choice of objects to support her argument. It appears that in most cases, for instance Jan van der Heyden's *Amsterdam City View with Houses on the Herengracht* (now in the Rijksmuseum), Stone has chosen objects that reinforce her view of the role of Dutch art, rather than examples that were actually in France or were commented upon by contemporary French viewers. In the case of Van der Heyden's view of the Herengracht, Stone admits that the 'painting never entered France, but it is representative of Dutch urban life and the compositional organization of Dutch paintings' (67). One often comes away yearning for more quantitative information on the presence of Dutch art in French collections or of foreign artists at court. Indeed, Stone's fascination with Dutch art – and the basis for her study – is the multiplicity of meaning found within such paintings. Given this, then, her insistence on the 'representative' qualities of just a few examples is puzzling, as is the lack of attention paid to portraiture, probably the genre most dominated by northern artists at foreign courts, including Frans Pourbus and Peter Paul Rubens under Louis XIV's grandmother, Marie de' Medici. This emphasis on representative examples of Dutch paintings leads, in some cases, to an uncomplicated and almost simplistic view of Dutch artistic production in this period, for example Stone's assertion that 'Dutch art "removes the frame" to the world outside. Things appear unmediated, as they are in nature.' (206) This may well have been the French view of Dutch painting in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but the repetition of such statements throughout the book undermines Stone's important (and convincing) argument about the complicated and dynamic role that Dutch art had for the French viewing public.

Stone's study is principally concerned with the ways in which new forms of painting led to new forms of knowledge, and the direct place that Dutch art had in the advancement of French thought from Louis's Academy to Diderot's *Encyclopédie* to the Enlightenment writ large. Appropriately, Stone's wonderfully written, lovingly researched, and carefully considered book itself offers just such an alternative way of looking, thinking, and situating Dutch art globally in the seventeenth century.