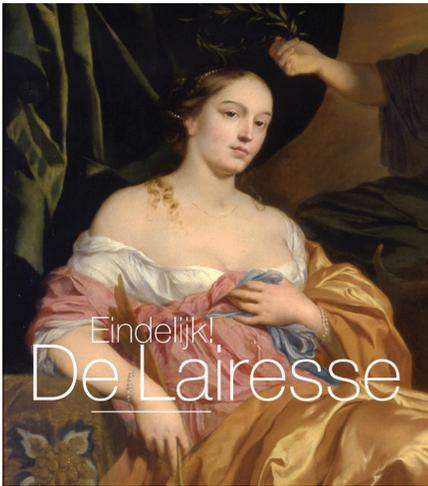


## Note

J. Beltman, P. Knolle and Q. van der Meer Mohr (eds.). *Eindelijk! De Lairesse. Klassieke schoonheid in de Gouden Eeuw*, Zwolle, Uitgeverij Waanders & De Kunst, Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, 2016. 176 pp. ISBN 978-94-6262-096-4.



This book accompanied an important exhibition on Gerard de Lairesse in Rijksmuseum Twente (Enschede, 10 September 2016 – 22 January 2017). In his own time De Lairesse was arguably the most appreciated painter, printmaker and art theorist in Holland, but his work went out of fashion in the first half of the nineteenth century, when his classicized art came to be seen as un-Dutch. The exhibition and the book, directed at the non-specialist, aim to reinstall the painter to his former throne.

The editors have opted for no less than 16 short essays, which are divided into four sections and followed by a checklist of the paintings, drawings, prints and books in the exhibition. In the biographical section only

the first two of four essays actually discuss De Lairesse's life. Friso Lammertse tells the story of the painter's escape from Liège and his entrance in Amsterdam, while Jaap van der Veen discusses the artist's life in Amsterdam and presents three new findings: a contract between the painter and a pupil from the orphanage, a sketch of the artist's character by George Virtue and a document on the financial support of the church to the impoverished painter and later to his widow. A valuable essay by Eric Jan Sluijter demonstrates how the young painter merged the classicist tendencies that dominated Amsterdam's history painting with his own ideas about classicism, which resulted in a style of his own that became highly successful. Eddy Schavemaker examines to what degree De Lairesse's allegedly libertine life style has shaped his classical scenes with luscious nudes. However he does not consider the possibility that the relation might also have been the other way around: did De Lairesse's very sensual art not inspire talk about a libertine walk of life?

The section on De Laïresse's ideas contains no new information for the initiated reader, but is a valuable summary for the wider audience. It opens with Lyckle de Vries' concise introduction into the artist's ideas on the relation between beauty and truth. Tijana Zakula argues that De Laïresse's preoccupation with decorum and the expression of the passions prompted him to return to some subjects to improve on earlier versions.

The chapters on De Laïresse's oeuvre virtually ignore the easel paintings and prints made for the open market and his entire production of workshop drawings, and instead focus on a number of special projects. Following up on Sluijter, Robert Schillemans and Robert Nachbar describe how the painter adjusted his art to a new audience: religious scenes were reserved for patrons in and near Liège, while the allegories and classical histories were for the art lovers of his new home town. Margriet van Eikema Hommes and Tatjana van Run present a valuable digital reconstruction of De Laïresse's impressive ceiling for Andries de Graeff (1672). Cécile Tainturier, Norbert Middelkoop and Nicolette Sluijter summarize what is known about Bidloos's anatomy drawings, the ceiling and drawings for the Leper's hospital and the lost stage scenes De Laïresse painted for the newly erected Amsterdam theatre, unfortunately without providing new insights. Patrick Larsen discusses De Laïresse's small portrait production. Surprisingly, he concentrates on paintings of which it is uncertain whether they are portraits or tronies, and omits the unambiguous painted family groups and drawn and etched portraits. A text about the most special paintings in the exhibition by far, the organ shutters for Amsterdam's Westerkerk (1686), is dearly missed, while the series for the Hof van Holland (c. 1688) and Soestdijk palace (c. 1680) also remain unmentioned.

The final section presents the changing appreciation of the artist. The section opens with Jasper Hillegers' concise and well-written overview. The second chapter, by Justus Lange, explains that the painter was much appreciated by rulers of German principalities, whose taste seem to reflect that of the Dutch highest social classes. Paul Knolle closes this section with an article on the popularity of De Laïresse's art theoretical work throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The museum has to be applauded for its succesful effort to present the variety of De Laïresse's work, the range of which will have been a surprise even to the more initiated visitors. The show also made clear that the attribution of at least one painting, *Apelles and Campaspe*, cannot be maintained (checklist no. C94). The book however, offers little new research and appears slightly imbalanced due to the focus on special projects at the cost of De Laïresse's work for the open market. Current issues such as workshop organization, copies and variations, painting technique, patronage and social networks, De Laïresse's position in the emerging enlightenment and his place in Dutch and international classicism do not resonate in the essays. Understandably, a museum with limited means cannot take up all these challenges, and it is to be hoped that the successful reintroduction of this fascinating and important artist will inspire new research.

Elmer Kolfin, University of Amsterdam