Session at HNA 2024 (London/Cambridge, 10-13 Jul 24)

London and Cambridge, Jul 10–13, 2024
Deadline: Sep 29, 2023

Lucie Rochard

Call for the session "Netherlandish migrant artists and the emergence of creativity in late seventeenth-century London" at Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2024 (HNA).

Organisers: Dr. Sander Karst (University of Amsterdam), Dr. Marije Osnabrugge (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Lucie Rochard, M.A. (Universities of Lille, Geneva and Leiden)

According to creativity expert Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, creativity is the result of a system combining three elements: “a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 6). In art historical terms, this translates to a functioning art scene, innovative artists and discerning art consumers. Until well into the seventeenth century, London compared poorly in terms of these elements with artistic centres such as Amsterdam, Paris and Rome. The city had yet to bring forth exceptional creative talents on equal par with Rembrandt, Poussin and Caravaggio.

From the last decades of the seventeenth century onwards, however, conditions in London gradually started to improve. By the early eighteenth century, English art theorist Jonathan Richardson could now even start to imagine that “A Time may come when Future Writers may be able to add the Name of an English Painter” (Richardson 1715, 211). By the late eighteenth century, London had emerged as one of the most important artistic centres in Europe. By that time, the city could boast an esteemed art academy, a bustling art market, a broad audience engaged with local art and had, indeed brought forth internationally esteemed -English- artists such as Hogarth, Gainsborough and Reynolds. The arrival of a great number of artists from the Low Countries, of varying artistic merit, at the end of the seventeenth century played a significant role in this process (Karst 2021). Examples of the contributions of these Netherlandish artists include the cultivation of a market for new -typically English- sub-genres such as the sporting picture, the establishment of the first (informal) drawing academies, the introduction of new innovative painting techniques and their involvement in the many auctions organised in London from the 1670s onwards, bringing the art of painting increasingly into the public domain.

This session will focus on the development of London into a vibrant art centre during the decades around the turn of the century (1670-1730); an art centre in which conditions were such that individual artistic creativity could flourish. To do so, it is necessary to identify the processes, events and people that facilitated the development of all three elements evoked by Csikszentmihalyi.

Using London as a case study allows us to dive deeper into the mechanisms that contribute to the flourishing of individual creative talent. While economic theory explains the establishment of 'creative industries' by favourable macro-economic conditions and the presence of a critical mass of artistic activity (or "cluster", cfr. Rasterhoff 2016), it has not paid much attention to individual artistic creativity. What is required for a city to become an art centre bringing forth exceptional artistic talent? Are newcomers more creative than local artists? Can second-rate artists be considered creative or innovative? How can the activity of individual artists contribute to the establishment of a thriving art scene? How does a discerning local audience emerge? We invite papers that touch upon one or several of these elements and relate to the many immigrant-artists from the Low Countries in London.

Proposals should consist of a title and an abstract (about 500 words) that clearly states the goals of the paper, and a CV (one page). Please send your proposal by Friday September 29th to all three of the organizers:
Dr. Sander Karst: s.karst@uva.nl
Dr. Marije Osnabrugge: marije.osnabrugge@unige.ch
Lucie Rochard, M.A.: lucie.rochard@unige.ch

Accepted participants will be notified by Friday October 6th, and will be expected to give confirmation of their participation before Friday October 13th.

References:
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (New York: Harper, 1996);
- Karst, Sander, Schilderen in een land zonder schilders: De Nederlandse bijdrage aan de opkomst van de Britse schilderschool, PhD-dissertation, 2021, Utrecht University;
- Rasterhoff, Claartje, Painting and Publishing as Cultural Industries: The Fabric of Creativity in the Dutch Republic, 1580- 1800, Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016);
- Richardson, Jonathan, An Essay on the Theory of Painting (London, 1715)

Reference:
CFP: Session at HNA 2024 (London/Cambridge, 10-13 Jul 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 17, 2023 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/39811>.