2 Sessions at HNA (Cambridge/London, 10-13 Jul 24)

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

Lisa Wiersma

[1] Material depiction and (cut-out) trompe l'oeils: The enchantment of material depiction by Netherlandish painters and the development of British traditions.
[2] Half the World Away: Cultural Circulations between Isfahan and the Early Modern Low Countries.

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[1] Material depiction and (cut-out) trompe l'oeils: The enchantment of material depiction by Netherlandish painters and the development of British traditions.

From: Lisa Wiersma (A.L.Wiersma@uva.nl)
Date: 20 July 2023
Deadline: 29 September 2023

Session organiser: Lisa Wiersma (University of Amsterdam)
Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2024 (HNA): 'Britain and the Low Countries.'

Tricking a spectator into believing a painting is real, was an important aim for early modern painting. From skies to roses, a painting was to evoke interaction, appealing to all senses by appearance and association. To create a convincing illusion, perspective proved an important and efficacious optics, but for a trompe l'oeil-effect the suggestion of tangibility was essential, as was underscored by Samuel Pepys famous engagement with a Simon Verelst painting. 'I was forced again and again to put my finger to it to feel whether my eyes were deceived or no,' he wrote in his diary on 11 April 1669. By apt 'colouring' or material depiction, which was standardised by the second half of the seventeenth century, Netherlandish painters created highly appealing images that seem part of three-dimensional space. Observation and ideas concerning ideal appearances were combined with excellent brushwork and paint application. Upon their migration to Britain, Netherlandish artists changed the country's painting tradition dramatically.

Meanwhile, seventeenth-century material depiction extracted the cut-out from the decorative arts: emerging from liturgical, theatrical and festive examples, it became an independent art form. Arnold Houbraken claimed that the Dutch seventeenth-century Cornelis Bisschop was 'the first, if not the best' maker of these advanced trompe l'oeils and Rembrandts pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten is said to have deceived his visitors with life-like depictions of fruit, shoes and dried fish scattered around the house. In London, John Evelyn saw a painted menagerie. The human cut-out or dummy board gained great popularity in centuries thereafter in Britain. Dummy boards, cut-out books, letter pouches and chimney boards, shaped and painted to simulate children and pets, are found in several collections throughout Europe. Their popularity as a genre seems rather momentarily in the Low Countries, whereas in Britain dummy boards lasted far longer

and many examples remain. These ‘silent companions’ enlivened empty halls, guarded houses shaped as soldiers and tricked visitors as fake maids.

Studying material depiction as a vehicle for art and style development is upcoming. The depiction of foliage, skin, fabrics, brocade work, fruit, pearls, and techniques for material depiction in seventeenth-century painting were studied recently, but the topic invokes much more research. The dummy board has received some, but no exhaustive attention. It is often mentioned as a frivolous niche of the trompe l’oeil genre. Papers may lead to contributions to a publication about material depiction and the cut-out.

Proposals may include, but are not limited to the following:
- (Execution, reception, and perception of) material depiction or display by certain schools, in an artist’s oeuvre, for a specific material type, with specific equipment, in sculpture, or considering style development (preferably with an emphasis on exchange between Netherlandish and British art);
- Liturgical, theatrical, and / or festive cut-outs or schoreersels, and / or the emergence of the cut-out in the Low Countries and Britain, and the cut-out as an alternative for (polychromised) sculpture;
- Illusions, ‘bedriegertjes’ or trompe l’oeils, and convincing painting in general in the Low Countries and Britain;
- Proposals about material depiction and illusions from other countries, preferably showing exchange with the Netherlandish and British traditions as forerunners, peers or followers (and everything in between).

Proposals should consist of a title and an abstract (about 500 words) that clearly states the goals of the paper, and a short CV (one page). Please send your proposal by Friday September 29th to Lisa Wiersma, a.l.wiersma@uva.nl

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[2] Half the World Away: Cultural Circulations between Isfahan and the Early Modern Low Countries

From: Dr. Adam Sammut (adam.sammut@york.ac.uk)
Date: 21 July 2023
Deadline: 29 September 2023

Organisers: Dr Adam Sammut, University of York; Dr Ahmad Yengimolki, University of York

When Shah ‘Abbas I made Isfahan his imperial capital in 1597, he wished to put Safavid Persia at the centre of the global economy, building the Image of the World Square (Maydan-e Naqsh-e Jahan) with the royal bazaar to the north. This feat of urban planning was praised by an English traveller as ‘as spacious, as pleasant and aromatic a market as any in the universe’, noting that it was ‘six times larger’ than equivalent squares in Paris or London.

The seventeenth century was a golden age of Euro-Safavid diplomacy, transcending political and religious differences on a war-torn continent. Persian ambassadors actively solicited military support from Catholic powers and vice-versa, against their mutual enemy, the Ottoman Turks. At this time, Catholic missionaries including Jesuits were permitted to reside in Isfahan. The relationship was also mercantile. Between 1617–65, the Dutch, English, French and Portuguese all signed trade agreements with the Shahs, entangling Persia in European colonial enterprises and giving new meaning to the saying “Isfahan, Half the World” (esfahan nesf-e jahan).

The European fascination with Persia has been the subject of exhibitions, most recently Rembrandt’s Ori-

ent (2020–21). This panel seeks to explore cultural exchange between the Low Countries and Isfahan from both sides. Works of Netherlandish art were acquired by the Safavids as diplomatic gifts but also through trade and Catholic global mission, through which channels engravings and illustrated books also arrived in Isfahan's bazaars. Armenian merchants were key mediators, importing portraits of contemporary European rulers that were highly prized at the Safavid court. With bases in Amsterdam, Livorno and Rome as well as New Julfa, what cultural presence did Persian Armenians have in the early modern Low Countries?

On the back of commerce and missionary work, at least eleven Netherlandish artists travelled to Persia in the seventeenth century. Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt became master painter to 'Abbas I, decorating the royal palace at Ashraf, while 'Abbas II took drawing lessons from Hendrick Boudewijn van Lockhorst. Famously, 'Abbas II rescued Philips Angel from legal conviction by the VOC, employing him as a court artist on 4,000 guilders per year and presenting Angel with a robe of honour upon his departure. Encounters with Netherlandish art led to a new, "hybrid" style of painting known as Farangi-sāzi, which saw Persian miniaturists adopt European painting techniques and iconography.

To paraphrase Barbara Fuchs, the story of Isfahan in the seventeenth century 'compromises the narratives of national distinction by emphasizing inconvenient similarities and shared heritages'. The same could be said of Catholic Europe. In Antwerp, Rubens painted the Levantine merchant Nicolas de Respaigne standing on a Herat-type Persian carpet. The same artist copied a corpus of Persian miniatures, annotating the costumes in detail. As for Van Dyck, he painted the English envoy of Shah 'Abbas I, Sir Robert Shirley, in pendant portraits with his Circassian wife, Terezia Sampsonia, whose habitually magnificent attire helped them negotiate the silk trade in tandem with military alliances. Just how fluid was cultural identity in this period?

Please send paper proposals of c. 500 words, clearly stating the goals of the paper, along with a CV (no longer than one page) to adam.sammut@york.ac.uk.

Accepted participants will be notified by Monday October 9th, and will be expected to give confirmation of their participation before Friday October 13th.

Reference:
CFP: 2 Sessions at HNA (Cambridge/London, 10-13 Jul 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 21, 2023 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/39850>.