



Koenraad Brosens, Leen Kelchtermans, Katlijne Van der Stighelen (eds.), ***Family Ties: Art Production and Kinship Patterns in the Early Modern Low Countries*** (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, 239 pp., ISBN 978 2 503 54227 0).

This volume gives pride of place to an issue that is a highly promising subject for further research: the importance of family ties in artistic creation. More specifically, it throws new light on the convergence of business strategies and family relations. In pre-industrial societies these constitute effective factors in socio-professional success. Breaking with the somewhat romantic image of the artist creating in isolation, the book aims to relocate the artist within the socio-economic network on which his success largely depended. Far from accepting the idea of the inheritability of artistic talent, the book shows that social patterns were of much greater importance in the choice of the profession and that support, relief, assistance and solidarity were all family-related.

The volume opens with a study by Hessel Mieda on the importance attributed by Karel van Mander to family ties in his *Schilderboeck*. The second study, by Axel Marx, offers a very useful methodological framework borrowed from the Social Network Analysis (SNA), the social network defined as ‘a set of nodes or actors (persons or organizations) linked by social relationships or ties of a specified type’. Koenraad Brosens applies this methodology to tapestry, a field where he has already demonstrated all the interest of this kind of approach, going beyond pure econometric conclusions. Turning his back on an ‘object-centric’ approach in order to favour an ‘actor-centric’ approach, he sheds new light on the conditions for success in a highly competitive sector. Within a field, as the tapestry industry, where the investment capital is substantial and therefore the risk very high, a collaborative industry based on trust and family networks was a guarantee of security and success. The SNA can reveal how this type of organization functioned: ‘it records and maps ties and social structures and the way these networks produced trust and the various form trust took’. In line with this study, the article by Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet also invites us to consider the family rather than the individual creator as the relevant decision-making entity. This is illustrated by the Antwerp art scene between 1650 and 1670. Through a flexible analytical framework, the authors take into consideration the underlying climate of risk avoidance and, in particular, two types of perceived levels of risk-taking the strictly cautious, and the cautious-yet-inventive. Since these elements could be combined in different ways very diverse situations could result from them. The authors therefore draw on numerous case studies in order to reach

more general conclusions concerning the ways in which family ties were intertwined with economic interests.

The second section is devoted to a number of case studies of family circles and networks. Drawing on his own field of research, that of portraiture, Rudi Ekkart's contribution deals with those Dutch artists who formed a company where two or more members of one family worked together in the same studio and/or where a son, brother or another family member took over the workshop after the death or retirement of the master. One of the best examples of business cooperation between two brothers is the firm of Gerard van Honthorst and Brother. In addition to citing a number of examples of father/son relationships from The Hague, this contribution shows that the city of Haarlem had the most extensive tradition of painter families, the most famous being the Hals dynasty. If we compare the situation of the painters between the North and the South of the Low Countries, it appears that family companies of painters spanning more than two generations were somewhat rare in the Northern Low Countries, with a few exceptions such as the Van Mieris dynasty, covering more than a century of painting in Leiden. The author concludes by saying that 'in general, members of family companies of painters seem to have been more dependent on commissions than independent painters who worked more frequently for the free market'. The case of Bruges is then considered by Brecht Dewilde. The importance of humanist networks is highlighted as a new type of social relationship towards the end of the sixteenth century. This type of friendship was based on intellectual ties and discarded motives of calculated interest. The examples of Gerards and Claeissenses show the importance of the reliance on this type of network in times when demand for art was in decline. In the case of the Claeissenses, the family served to complement the abilities and possibilities of the individual; it also served as the basis for their investment in formal social life and in particular for establishing predominance in the painters' guild. The Claeissenses' case therefore fits within the traditional structures of late medieval and early modern social life. Natasja Peeters analyses the exemplary Francken dynasty of five generations and thirteen painters, a dynasty that displayed great diversity of styles, themes and quality. She demonstrates that the Francken family name was a stepping stone, and that by the third generation it had grown into a quality label, while the fourth generation lacked natural talent. Another interesting case study is of the De Herdt family, who worked for the Habsburg court in Vienna, and in particular for Leopold. Miroslav Kindl deals here with another category of artist: the travelling artist.

The articles of the third section concentrate on the ties between father and son. Nils Büttner revisits the figure of Peter Paul Rubens and his descendants, in particular his son Albert Rubens, whose humanist career follows the same lines as his father's. The next study deals with example of the Steenwyck paintings as products of family enterprise. Here too there is a

clear demonstration of the extent to which collaboration within and between families was a vital factor in artistic success as well as in the development of an artistic tradition and in the perpetuation of styles. It offers a good example of how artistic families managed to continue a family tradition of painting in a recognisably similar style into the second or third generation. Hans Vlieghe considers the opposite case of the different paths followed by members of one of the most famous dynasties of painters: the Teniers. Unlike other artistic families, David Teniers I, II and III did not capitalize on the repertory of their respective fathers. They consciously sought and found new niches, thus demonstrating that they had deliberately left the paternal path. This section ends with a study by Prisca Valkeneers devoted to the case of a Flemish artist who settled in Paris: Justus van Egmont. She considers the way in which a foreign artist, cut off from his family, seeks support in new networks to ensure that his descendants have a professional future.

The fourth section concludes the volume with two final studies. Bert Timmermans offers an investigation into the importance of the family as an operational unit within the field of art patronage. This contribution studies in particular the role played by the brothers Lodewijk and Gaspar de Roomer in the revival of the family chapel in seventeenth-century Antwerp. The study, by Alison Stoesser, focuses on the network that Lucas and Cornelis de Wael were able to establish in Antwerp and which they were also able to extend to Italy, two networks that they also put at the service of other artists.

This volume displays great thematic and methodological coherence, a coherence which is not sufficiently highlighted in the Introduction, which is a mere half a page long. But, with the exception of this lack of introductory outline or perspective, one can only emphasise the richness of its approaches and case studies. These throw new light on the sociology of the art world in the Early Modern period but also and above all on the influence of this socio-familial context on artists' production at this time. The volume will not fail to generate and inspire other studies on the same subject.

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