

Marije Osnabrugge, *The Neapolitan Lives and Careers of Netherlandish Immigrant Painters (1575-1655)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 400 pp., ISBN 9789462988200).

Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more than six hundred Netherlandish artists undertook the journey to Italy. Whereas studies on artistic migration and cultural exchange have been conducted for early modern Netherlandish painters in Rome, Florence and Venice, the city of Naples has been neglected. Marije Osnabrugge, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Geneva, fills this important gap with her scholarly book based on her doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam. It is the first extensive study on Netherlandish painters in Naples. The author thoroughly examines published and unpublished archival evidence (such as baptismal records, marriage documents, contracts, bank payments, inventories, and letters), seventeenth- and eighteenth-century biographies and securely identified paintings.

Approximately forty Netherlandish painters were active in Naples for at least a year in the period of 1570 to 1654. Some of these artists became immigrants, taking on the challenges of living and working as a foreigner in a competitive art market. The availability of source material led Osnabrugge to select five painters who lived and worked in Naples for seven years or longer: Aert Mytens (circa 1575-1598), Louis Finson and Abraham Vinck (1604-1612 and 1598-1609, respectively), Hendrick De Somer (1622-1655), and Matthias Stom (circa 1632-circa 1639). Using these five artists as case studies, Osnabrugge illustrates well the variety of work possibilities and life choices made by Netherlandish artists over a collective time span of eighty years (1575-1655), and the complexity of artistic and social integration for them in post-Tridentine Naples.

In the first chapter the author addresses Aert Mytens who belongs to the first generation of immigrants whose number reached its peak with about fifteen artists from 1570 to 1610. Due to increased building in Naples, many commissions for artworks were available and there were relatively few local painters to compete with. Mytens successfully painted religious works as an equal alongside local painters, disproving the commonly held belief that Northern artists were unable to paint figures well. He was also elected as board member of the Neapolitan painters' guild twice (in 1592 and 1593), and his career shifted from working for patrons from the Spanish vice royal provinces to those from Naples. Osnabrugge suggests a small miracle may have also helped Mytens receive at least seven commissions to paint the Madonna of the Rosary. During the installation of his painting of this subject

in the church of the Dominicans of San Severo Maggiore al Pendino, a wooden beam fell from the ceiling to the floor without harming anyone. According to the prior of the church, the Virgin mediated through her presence in the new altarpiece by Mytens.

The second chapter treats Abraham Vinck and Louis Finson who both belong to a generation that has been less studied. They are joined because of their similar life stories, even though their artistic and social choices are very different. Both were art dealers, ran a workshop together and had at least three Italian apprentices. No paintings by Vinck have been identified for his Neapolitan period (1598-1610), but payments he received in Naples indicate he was one of the first to specialise in portrait painting and his clients came from the nobility. Indeed, the bourgeoisie and nobility pouring in from the provinces in this period increasingly demanded paintings to embellish their residences. After Vinck left, Finson continued the workshop for a while. The author draws attention to how Finson and Caravaggio probably interacted as equals and colleagues, perhaps even friends, to counter the view that Finson was merely a copyist. Finson's copies of Caravaggio's paintings were greatly acclaimed and highly priced. The diversity of Finson's artistic abilities is highlighted by putting his *The Four Elements* (1611), a painting unrelated to Caravaggio, on the cover of the book.

Chapter Three focuses on Hendrick De Somer. Since De Somer spent his adult life in Naples and received his artistic training there, he may be considered more Neapolitan than Netherlandish. During the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the number of Northern painters active in Naples decreased considerably, perhaps due to the economic growth in the Dutch Republic and Antwerp. In contrast, the number of Neapolitans who decided to become painters increased, and so did the quality of their paintings, leading to a more competitive professional environment. In 1622, Netherlandish artists were allowed to join the German national church of Santa Maria dell'Anima. De Somer was elected leading church official in both 1644 and 1654, demonstrating the good reputation he had among Netherlandish and German residents in Naples. Upon his arrival as a young foreigner in Naples in 1622, De Somer gained access to Jusepe de Ribera's prestigious workshop. Most of the subjects of De Somer's signed paintings and those listed in inventories were also painted by Ribera. Osnabrugge views De Somer's adherence to subjects popularised by his master Ribera as a strategy to obtain commissions by taking advantage of the great demand for Ribera's works. However, De Somer was not merely a follower of Ribera's work for there are a number of paintings by him that cannot be connected to his Spanish master. De Somer's *Baptism of Christ* (1641) for Santa Maria della Sapienza hung alongside works by his Neapolitan peers, demonstrating further his status and successful social and artistic integration.

In the next chapter, Osnabrugge investigates the life and career of Matthias Stom. Despite the lack of available documentation and the large

number of repetitive paintings attributed to Stom, the author questions the negative view British art historian Benedict Nicolson had of him as an unimaginative Northern Caravaggist. Osnabrugge asserts that when Stom repeated his subjects, he also improved them. By using the same models, Stom had an efficient working method appropriate to a peripatetic painter like him, who quickly started a workshop in Naples in 1632 and then left the city seven years later. By connecting paintings attributed to Stom to those listed in Neapolitan inventories, Osnabrugge concludes that Stom was the first to introduce subjects, which became popular in Naples, like *Samson and Delilah* and *Christ and the Adulterous Woman*. Stom also launched candlelight scenes in Naples by combining elements from the Utrecht Caravaggist Gerard van Honthorst with the warm palette and loose brushwork of Peter Paul Rubens. Stom's successful compositions inspired paintings by Mattia Preti, Luca Giordano, and Nicola Malinconico. However, due to scant evidence of Stom's interaction with local painters, it appears he remained primarily an outsider. In fact, in August 1637, his pupil Mattheus De Roggiero filed an accusation of heretic propensities against him with the Neapolitan Holy Office, which implies the hardships Stom may have faced as a foreigner. The wealthy Antwerp merchant and ship owner Gaspar Roomer may have played a decisive role in Stom's arrival and success in Naples since works by Stom were in his collection.

The fifth and final chapter summarises the findings of this study with the conclusion that there was no single method for foreign artists to work in Naples. This book is a valuable contribution not only towards our understanding of Netherlandish artists and their innovative contributions, but also the different ways they integrated artistically and socially in Naples from 1575-1655. I hope that Osnabrugge will continue to conduct other similar case studies. By adopting a micro historical approach, she avoids generalisations based on the subjective detection of anonymous 'artistic influences', which plague the study of Seicento painting in Naples. By thinking in terms of the sociology and economics of migration, Osnabrugge uses available sources to challenge fixed art historical notions, changing the customary narrative of foreign artists in Naples.

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