

Abigail D. Newman. *Painting Flanders Abroad: Flemish Art and Artists in Seventeenth-Century Madrid*. Leiden: Brill, 2022, 325 pages.

In a testament of 1667, Felipe Diriksen (1590-1679), a Spanish-born artist of Flemish descent, described having almost completed a painting of “the Assumption of Our Lady with a garland of flowers around [it],” for a monk in the Order of San Benito (149-150). Diriksen specialized in portraits and devotional scenes, and this now-lost painting may be the only floral or still life he ever painted. But floral paintings were associated with Flemish artists, and Diriksen was one of many painters working in Madrid who aligned himself with Flemish identity through his social and professional activities. These circumstances help to explain the logic behind this unusual commission. In *Painting Flanders Abroad: Flemish Art and Artists in Seventeenth-Century Madrid*, Abigail D. Newman teases out rich social contexts from this type of evidence, reading paintings and texts through the lens of social history to analyze the production of and market for Flemish portraiture (Chapter One), still life (Chapter Two), and landscape (Chapter Three) in seventeenth-century Spain, and particularly around the court in Madrid. The author refines well-known, but often essentializing, associations between Flemish art and naturalism in ways that resonate more broadly with critical reassessments of Dutch and Flemish painting. She also shows how the relationship between Spanish and Flemish art was constantly evolving, as immigrants and artists with Flemish heritage found their way in Spanish society, choosing when to emphasize or downplay their cultural identities. She argues that painters working for the Spanish market in the Southern Netherlands and Flemish painters in Madrid shared an artistic identity through familial, cultural, and social associations with Flanders. Newman demonstrates how such artists marketed their skills to patrons around the Spanish court and analyzes the reception of their art. Sources include inventories, testaments, art theoretical treatises, and the paintings themselves.

Newman uses the capacious term “Flemishness” as an alternative to the limiting terminology that came into use in the early twentieth century with the rise of nationalism. Thus, in the book, “Flanders, Flemish, and Flemishness are sometimes used a bit more loosely, in their early modern Spanish sense, to conjure a region broader than the province of Flanders, the Southern Netherlands (also called the Spanish Netherlands) or even the seventeen provinces” (24). The book shows that Flemish identity was something that many painters of Flemish descent working at the Spanish court approached with a certain level of ambivalence. Viewers, on the other hand, had more concrete ideas about Flemish paintings. Newman demonstrates how these ideas shaped Spanish taste, collecting, and painting production in significant ways.

Madrid attracted Flemish painters leaving the Low Countries in search of more stable political and economic prospects in the seventeenth century. Chapter One probes the public identities of such Flemish immigrants and Spanish painters with Flemish heritage, many of whom, like Diriksen, are little-known today. Newman argues that Flemish painters and their children living in Madrid benefited from the perception that they had access to geography-specific artistic knowledge, allowing them to cultivate specialized roles, including as appraisers of Flemish art. Many of those painters were also part of the king’s royal Burgundian bodyguard (*Noble Guardia de Arqueros de Corps*), composed of archers who were nominally Flemish. Andries Smidt (1625/32-1690/91), is a notable exception, making the section of this chapter dedicated to that artist of particular interest (63-68). His activities are known almost exclusively through archival records rather than through extant works of art. Newman describes his one surviving signed painting, *The Virgin of Atocha* at the Museo Lázaro Galdiano, as appearing more Spanish than Flemish in its color, brushwork, and composition. Nevertheless, Smidt profited from Flemish networks as an appraiser of collections containing Flemish paintings and as an agent for Flemish painters. Smidt, like Diriksen, appears to have been able to work with a certain level of fluidity between Spanish and Hispano-Flemish artistic contexts.

Chapter One sets up an argument that constitutes a through line in the book: namely, that Spanish painting in the seventeenth century developed in dynamic relation to its Flemish counterpart, particularly with

regards to naturalism. Newman demonstrates how painters in Spain favored Spanish or Flemish conventions in their portraits while still working within the tradition established by Titian (c. 1490-1576) and reinvented by Anthonis Mor (1516/21-1576/77) and Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). A particularly strong comparison between two portraits of Infanta María Ana of Austria (1606-1646) [called Infanta Mariana of Austria in the text], painted by Diriksen in 1630 and court painter Rodrigo de Villandrando (1588-1622) around 1622 respectively, brings to light subtle but important differences between Flemish and Spanish approaches (50-53). The portraits are strikingly similar in composition and form, but their treatment of surfaces and modeling is distinct. Large portions of Diriksen's painting are without pattern, and the artist used a single light source to create high-contrast modeling. Whereas Dirksen embraced the longer Flemish tradition of chromatic simplicity associated with Mor and developed by Velázquez, Villandrando evenly illuminated the painting, creating a flat chromatic effect. He also covered the floor, table, and curtain in pattern, following the example of later court portraitists. It is instructive to understand how these two models, with their differing relationships to Flemish painting, coexisted at the Spanish court.

In Chapter Two, dedicated to still life, Newman argues that early modern Spanish viewers associated Flemishness with qualities beyond fine brushwork and attention to naturalistic detail typically associated with the genre. For those viewers, Flemishness also included “a particular subject matter, a manner of organizing an image, a production technique or an artist's cultural background, assertively marketed” (149). In this way, Newman pries open the sticky space between style and artistic geography, demonstrating the multivalence of the descriptor *flamenco*, which often appears in period inventories. While revealing something like a Baxandalian period eye for identifying the qualities of Flemish painting in Spain, Newman explores how viewers recognized Flemishness in early modern Madrid, where that evidence might not appear significant or even visible today. For example, Newman characterizes a pair of vertical still lifes at the Museo Nacional del Prado painted by Juan van der Hamen y León (1596-1631), a Madrid-born painter-archer of Netherlandish ancestry, as owing more in composition and perspective to Spanish painters like Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560-1627) than to Flemish models. Yet, the paintings were recorded as “de flandes” and “*flamenco*” in inventories throughout the seventeenth century. Understanding that the paintings were commissioned by a Flemish patron living in Madrid, it becomes clear that social context played an important role in shaping the reception of art.

Chapter Three argues that landscape painting remained the domain of Flemish painters, rather than developing into a local tradition in Spain, because ideas of distance and travel were too closely associated with the medium to allow for its local production. This argument relies primarily on analysis of art theoretical treatises, contracts, inventories, and contemporary literature. For example, a 1574 contract records the request made of two Flemish immigrants in Guadalajara to paint some distances [i.e. landscapes] of blue and green and other colors (“pintar de unos lexos de azul y verde e los mas colores”) (154-155). Newman situates this directive within a larger tradition that equates landscape with distance: “In Spain the term *lexos* (far off), in combination with the increasing use of the terms *pais* and *paisaje*, and their variant spellings, indicates a particular attention to distance when describing painted landscape” (154). She also argues that these paintings were valued for the distances they had traversed as imported objects of art, meaning that, ideally, they would not be painted locally. When landscapes appear in early seventeenth-century religious paintings of the Madrid school –comprised mostly of Spanish and Italian painters– they are usually subordinate to the figures. This balance highlights the primary subject of devotion in line with the writings of Vicente Carducho (1570/76-1638) and Cardinal Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), Archbishop of Spanish Milan. Newman shows how Spanish painters not of Flemish descent, including Fray Juan Bautista Maíno (1581-1641), Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), and Velázquez, worked to create an appropriate balance between the figure and the landscape while still incorporating the broad vistas and blue-green palette of Flemish landscape masters like Joachim Patinir (1475/80-1524).

The Coda positions Rubens (1577-1640), the artist most associated with Flemishness today, as an outlier in the art history charted throughout the rest of the book. Newman argues that Rubens was successful in

Spain less because of his origins than because of his status as an international artist. Despite earlier proposing that the transition from the Habsburg reign to the house of Bourbon at the beginning of eighteenth century ushered in a new taste for French painting over Flemish art (75-76), here Newman positions Rubens as an earlier “signal break in how early modern Spaniards thought about and responded to style and geography” (202). Rather than associating Rubens with a rupture in the perception of Flemish art in Spain, it could have been more effective to position the artist as a foil to other immigrant painters, who, unlike the famous artist, worked hard to assert their connections to Flemish painting traditions and artistic knowledge. If Rubens was not perceived as Flemish by his contemporaries in Spain, it seems likely that he was profiting from the ambiguity of Flemish cultural identity assumed by enterprising artists, as convincingly described in earlier sections of this book. Describing Rubens in the final line of the book, Newman claims: “The work of this Flemish painter had become a fully independent art form, ready to be prized and embraced in Spain and no longer posing any threat to the hegemony of ‘Spanish’ painting” (214). Such a stark pronouncement risks misrepresenting the work of the book, which tells a story of a local Spanish painting tradition gaining popularity despite the preference at court for Italian and Flemish art. Moreover, following the Gramscian idea of cultural hegemony, Rubens might be better understood as upending the hegemony of Flemish painting in Spain rather than the reverse.

Several times throughout the text, Newman characterizes Flemish painting as a threat to Spanish art. This idea seems overstated given the complex exchange between the two artistic traditions that the author otherwise describes. A section in Chapter Two titled “Appeal and Danger of the Flemish Balance” (101-109) draws heavily on Spanish artistic theory. Yet the quotations express concerns of impropriety and even feelings of disgust with the profane focus on surroundings over figures rather than danger. In kitchen scenes, for example, the imbalance of figures and surroundings typical of painting produced in the circles of Pieter Aertsen (1507/8-1575) and his nephew Joachim Beuckelaer (c. 1534-c.1574) caused problems for audiences in Spain and Italy because they shifted attention away from the narrative. In addition to describing the Flemish compositional balances as posing a “threat,” Newman argues that “such a balance seemed an assault on Italian Renaissance inspired, figurally focused artistic values; post-Tridentine conditions of image production and use; and Spanish values concerning a painting’s ideal legibility and the beholder’s process of viewing it” (107). The language of violence characterizing such passages contradicts the innovative approaches used by Spanish artists grappling with clashes between theory and taste. While such solutions sometimes caused discomfort and censure, they also became a font of style, composition, and narrative constructions formulated for Spanish audiences.

Painting Flanders Abroad is beautifully produced with 119 vibrant color images printed on glossy paper. The images are gathered from an impressive variety of sources, including art galleries, private collections, parish churches, and regional museums in Europe and North America. At times, the argument would have benefited from more engagement with the pictures. Often, paintings are described but not illustrated. Others are illustrated but hardly discussed. Tighter editing, too, would have helped the flow of ideas (on p. 125, for example, three sentences in a row begin with the construction “while”). And one wonders why Newman places the term “Golden Age” in quotation marks throughout the Introduction without further elaboration. Considering recent critiques of the term, as noted in a footnote, this could have been an important opportunity to understand the author’s own critical reflections. Likewise, Newman states that the adaptation of Flemish style by local painters working in the Iberian Peninsula “has come to be called—albeit somewhat reductively—the “Hispano-Flemish” mode” (4). Although the book very clearly demonstrates the dynamism and complexity of that term, and elaborates on the multiplicity of artistic identities that it can accommodate, it remains unclear whether or not Newman believes that we should find an alternative to that descriptor.

The book provides exciting new models for understanding the reception of Hispano-Flemish painting in Madrid while also laying the groundwork for looking at related questions beyond the Iberian Peninsula. Using *Painting in Flanders* as a launching pad, future studies might reassess the geographic parameters

within which Hispano-Flemish artists and their works were perceived outside of the Iberian Peninsula, both in Europe and in transoceanic contexts. Hendrick Vroom (1566-1640), discussed in Chapter Three, might be one opportunity for future research. Originally from the Low Countries, Vroom spent time in Spain and Italy. While Pacheco described him as “Enrique Vrom, flamenco,” he was known as Lo Spagnolo or Enrico de Spagna in Rome. Newman’s methods could be followed by other scholars interested in understanding how itinerant artists constructed varying cultural identities over the course of a single career.

In contrast to the well-known story that Spanish art progressed from a preference for Flemish art in the fifteenth century, to Italian art in the sixteenth century, until finally coming into its own in the seventeenth century, *Painting Flanders Abroad* reveals multiple temporalities and epochs of Flemish painting in Madrid. It clearly demonstrates how Flemish painting, and the work of Spanish painters who identified as Flemish, became increasingly entwined with local painting traditions, allowing us to see those paintings with fresh eyes. The story is all the richer for drawing on paintings by lesser-known artists. By focusing in large part on Flemish immigrants to Spain and on Spanish painters of Flemish ancestry who successfully positioned themselves as Flemish, the book describes how Flemish painting could be produced at the Spanish court. In this way, it contributes a new perspective to the deep historiography on Flemish art imported from abroad, breaking down distinctions between local and foreign that previously seemed straightforward.

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