On spectacles and magnifying glasses: the connoisseur in action

Valérie Kobi

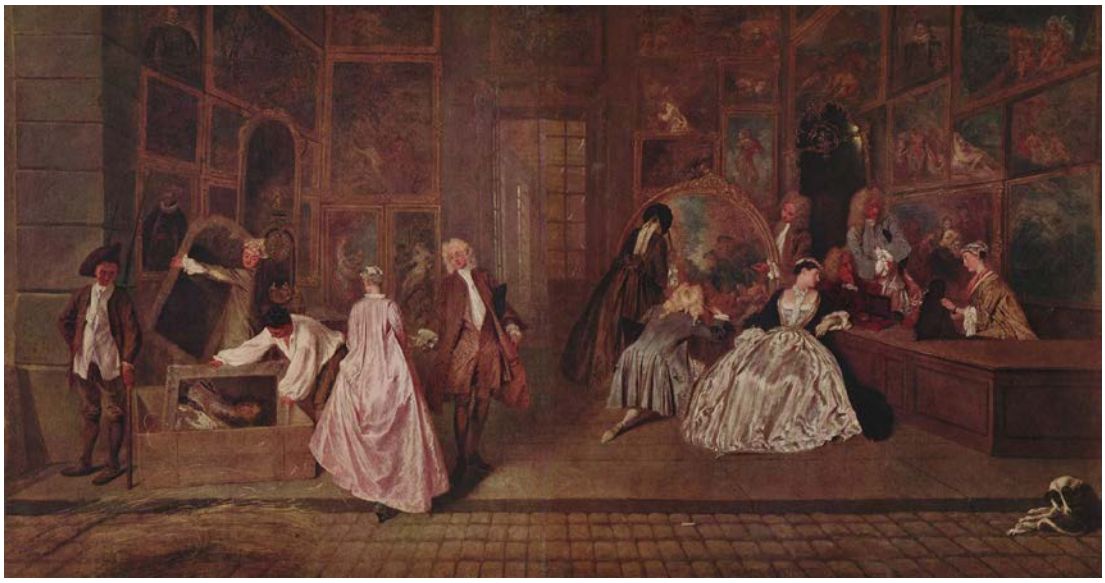

Figure 1 Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Shopsign of Gersaint*, 1720, oil on canvas, 163 x 306 cm, Berlin, Charlottenburg Palace, Inv. nº GK I 1200/1201. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The painting *The Shopsign of Gersaint* (fig. 1), kept at Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin today, is probably the most emblematic work of French artist Jean-Antoine Watteau. Painted shortly before the artist's death, the artwork has often been regarded as Watteau's artistic legacy. It was originally destined to hang on the Pont Notre-Dame outside the boutique of Edme-François Gersaint, a Parisian art dealer and close friend of Watteau's.[1] Serving as an advertisement for Gersaint's business, the canvas shows a wealthy clientele interacting with staff and examining various art objects. As such, it not only conveys an idealised depiction of Gersaint's establishment, but also fashions an image of the contemporary rituals of connoisseurship.[2] At the

I am tremendously grateful to Bettina Gockel and Joris Corin Heyder for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this article. I also would like to thank the participants in the workshop *Doing Connoisseurship: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* for the fruitful exchanges and discussions.

[1] On Gersaint, see: Émile Dacier, Albert Vuaflart, *Jean de Jullienne et les graveurs de Watteau au 18e siècle*, Paris: Rousseau, 1929, vol. 1, 106ff; Guillaume Glorieux, *À l'Enseigne de Gersaint. Edme-François Gersaint, marchand d'art sur le Pont Notre-Dame (1694–1750)*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2002.

[2] On *The Shopsign* as marketing device, see: Andrew McClellan, 'Gersaint's Shopsign and the World of Art Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in Mary D. Sheriff dir., *Antoine Watteau. Perspectives on the Artist and the Culture of his Time*, Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2006, 150–160; Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984.

centre of the composition is a couple focusing its attention on a large mythological scene. Whereas the woman is scrutinising the background of the artwork with a lorgnette, her companion is kneeling down in order to better appreciate the outlines of the nude figures situated at the front bottom. While the behaviours of the two art lovers are clearly tinged with humour—a common feature in the representation of connoisseurs throughout the eighteenth century—, the scene also emphasizes the couple's eagerness for in-depth observation. Indeed, they absorb the art at the very surface of the painting, a detail accentuated further by the use of the lorgnette.

Far from being a commonplace behaviour, this form of contemplation goes, in fact, against the classical conventions of pictorial composition, which stipulates that the beholder be situated at a certain distance.[3] Early modern art theory, with advocates such as Giorgio Vasari or Karel van Mander, therefore largely refuted this practice. In reality, the up-close investigation of artwork gained significance only slowly during the seventeenth century—in parallel to the considerable improvement of optical devices[4]—and served the necessity to define reliable protocols for the attribution and authentication of paintings in a growing art market.[5] It then widely spread over the course of the eighteenth century, at a time when a broader public started to access art exhibitions, and grew in importance to the point of becoming a satirical trope of the Enlightenment culture.[6]

[3] Thomas Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400–1800*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000.
[4] On the topic, see, for instance: Ulrike Hick, *Geschichte der optischen Medien*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999.
[5] For first reflections on this matter, see: Daniel Arasse, *Le détail: pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture*, Paris: Flammarion, 2008; Bettina Gockel, 'Gemalte Sehweisen. Sehen in Kunst, Ästhetik und Naturwissenschaft der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Gabriele Dürbeck et al. dir., *Wahrnehmung der Natur, Natur der Wahrnehmung. Studien zur Geschichte visueller Kultur um 1800*, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 2001, 199–219; Bettina Gockel, 'Bilder für Blinde – Sehen und handeln in Malerei, Fotografie und Film', in Horst Bredekamp et al. dir., *Sehen und Handeln*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011, 65–98; Harry Mount, 'The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass: Constructions of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Oxford Art Journal*, 29:2, 2006, 167–184; Donald Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth-Century France', *The Art Bulletin*, 75:4, 1993, 583–598 and Martin Warnke, 'Nah und Fern zum Bilde', in Michael Diers dir., *Nah und Fern zum Bilde. Beiträge zu Kunst und Kunsttheorie*, Cologne: Dumont, 1997, 6–15. Furthermore, on the growing importance of attribution and authentication during the seventeenth century, see among others: Enrico Castelnuovo, 'Attribution (Histoire de l'Art)', *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 3, 1996, 411–415. Finally, Jeffrey M. Muller showed that in other domains, like numismatics, questions of authenticity were already theorized over the sixteenth century: Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Measures of Authenticity: The Detection of Copies in the Early Literature on Connoisseurship', *Studies in the History of Art*, 20, 1989, 141–149.
[6] For an analysis of this topos, see: Katalin Bartha-Kovács, 'Loupe à la main: la construction médiatique de l'amateur, littérateur d'un genre nouveau au 18e siècle', in Florence Boulerie dir., *La médiatisation du littéraire dans l'Europe des 17e et 18e siècles*, Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2013, 187–202; Heinrich Becker, *Studien zur Ikonographie des Kunstbetrachters im 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen, 2005; Eva Kernbauer, *Der Platz des Publikums: Modelle für Kunstöffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*, Cologne: Böhlau, 2011; Heinz Herbert Mann, *Augenglas und Perspektiv. Studien*

It is in this particular context that we must see art theorists' and art lovers' interest in optical devices, such as the lorgnette. The technological innovations that profoundly transformed optical science since the end of the sixteenth century were directly appropriated by the artworld as a new way of looking at, and ultimately, theorising artworks. Yet, while the scientific revolution generated by these emerging technologies has been thoroughly analysed,[7] their impact in the field of art history has thus far received little academic attention.[8] This article proposes some initial thoughts on the topic. It focuses on the beginning of this tradition, aiming to examine the changes it produced in the reception of artworks, as well as to explore its repercussions on early modern art theory.

Connoisseurship and optical devices

Aside from magnification technologies, which seem to have existed in various variants since Antiquity, spectacles are one of the oldest optical tools conceived to improve human vision. Even though the exact context in which spectacles were invented remains relatively vague, this vision aid has definitely been employed since the thirteenth century, at first, principally by scribes and scholars. Their use extended to a broader spectrum of social classes over the course of the fifteenth century as the printing press revolutionized reading habits.[9] These early eyeglasses

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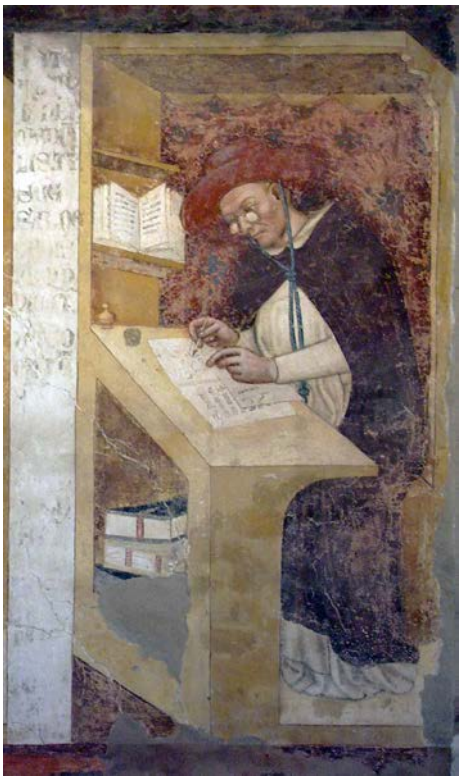
zur Ikonographie zweier Bildmotive, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1992; Mount, 'The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass' and Anja Weisenseel, *Bildbetrachtung in Bewegung. Der Rezipient in Texten und Bildern zur Pariser Salonausstellung des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.

[7] A large body of literature, which cannot be fully listed here, has been published on the topic. For a few examples, see however: Lorraine Daston, Elizabeth Lunbeck dir., *Histories of Scientific Observation*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011; Christoph Hoffmann, *Unter Beobachtung: Naturforschung in der Zeit der Sinnesapparate*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006; Jutta Schickore, *The Microscope and the Eye. A History of Reflections 1740–1870*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007; Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World. Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

[8] While brief considerations on the matter can be found in different publications, only Harry Mount has—to my knowledge—directly outlined the correlation between connoisseurship and optical devices in his article: Mount, 'The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass'. Jonathan Crary and Arnaud Maillet further approach the topic for a later period in their respective books: *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990; *Le miroir noir. Enquête sur le côté obscur du reflet*, Paris: Kargo & L'éclat, 2005. Finally, the volume edited by Alina Payne, *Vision and its Instruments. Art, Science and Technology in Early Modern Europe*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015 raises central questions for our topic but does not address the field of connoisseurship.

[9] The literature on the history of spectacles and other vision aids is astonishingly vast. Some of it is the result of research led by passionate collectors. Among the scientific literature on the topic, see for instance: Hick, *Geschichte der optischen Medien*; Vincent Ilardi, *Renaissance Vision from Spectacles to Telescopes*, Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2007; Museo civico di storia naturale G. Doria dir., *La Lente. Storia, Scienza, Curiosità, attraverso la collezione di Fritz Rathschüler*, Genoa: Ecig, 1988; Judith S. Neaman, 'The Mystery of the Ghent Bird and the Invention of the Spectacles', *Viator*, 24, 1993, 189–214; Edward Rosen, 'The

had convex (converging) lenses, which only corrected presbyopia, or farsightedness, whereas the apparition of concave (diverging) lenses for myopes—an invention of decisive importance for the development of the telescope at the end of the sixteenth century—can be traced back to the fifteenth century.



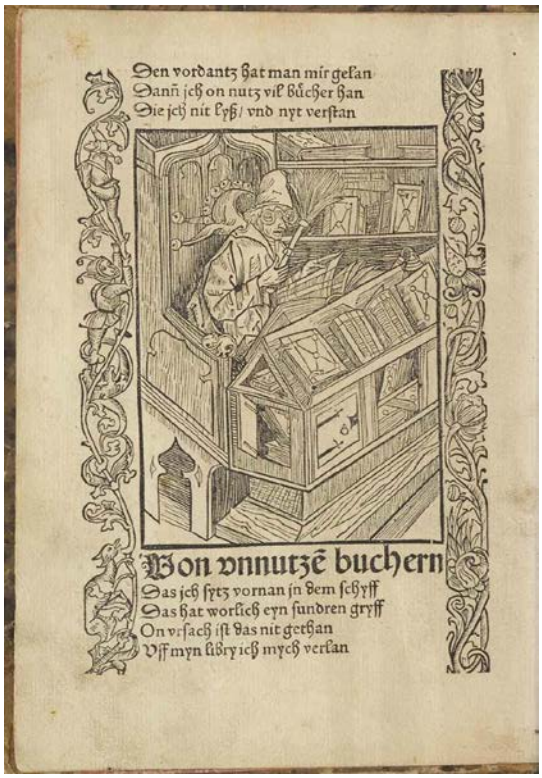


Figure 2 Tommaso da Modena, *The Cardinal Hugo of Provence*, 1351–1352, fresco, Treviso, San Nicolò, Chapter House. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 3 Master of the Bergmann workshop (attr.), *The Bookfool*, woodcut, in Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschyff*, Basel: Johann Bergmann von Olpe, 1494, Kapitel 1: 'Von unnützen Büchern'. Source: Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden.

This historical framework explains why, in the arts, spectacles became one of the attributes of a scholar at work very early on (fig. 2). Satirical illustrations soon picked up the accessory to portray scholars as fools who possess books without reading or understanding them, as suggested by the woodcut *The Bookfool*, attributed to the Master of the Bergmann workshop (today often identified with a young Albrecht Dürer), bearing the subtitle 'Of useless books' (fig. 3).[10] Obviously in this case, eyeglasses are reduced to a superfluous instrument, as the fool remains blind to knowledge and culture despite their substantial help.

This iconographical tradition found an equivalent in the field of connoisseurship, where art lovers were, at least since the sixteenth century,

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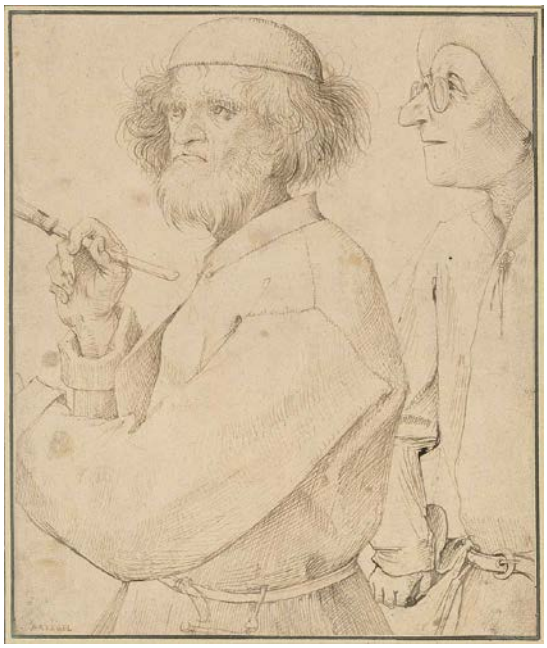
Invention of Eyeglasses', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science*, 11:1, January 1956, 13–46, and 11:2, April 1956, 183–218.

[10] 'Von unnützen Büchern'. On this iconography, see: Mann, *Augenglas und Perspektiv*; Giuliana Biavati, 'Gli occhiali: una storia attraverso l'ottica delle ambivalenze iconografiche', in Museo civico di storia naturale G. Doria dir., *La Lente. Storia, Scienza, Curiosità, attraverso la collezione di Fritz Rathschüler*, Genoa: Ecig, 1988, 11–31.



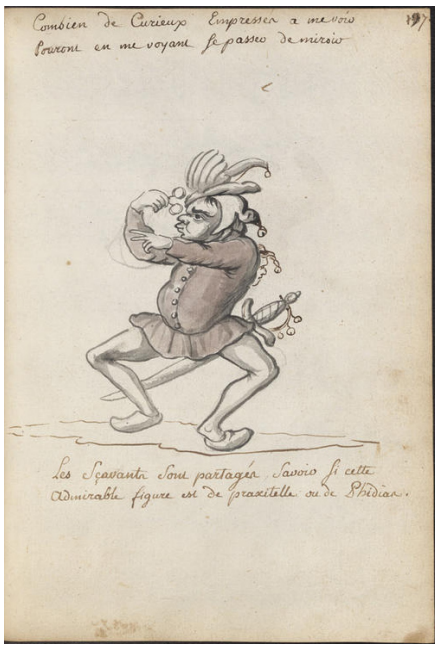


Figure 4 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Painter and the Buyer*, c. 1565, pen and brown ink, 25,5 x 21,5 cm, Vienna, Albertina Museum, Inv. nº 7500. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 5 Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Les sçavants sont partagés savoir si cette admirable figure est de Praxitelle ou de Phidias*, in *Livre de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises*, c. 1740–1775, ink, watercolour and graphite on paper, 18,7 x 13,2 cm, Aylesbury, Waddesdon (National Trust) Bequest of James de Rothschild, 1957, Inv. nº 675.197. Photo: Waddesdon Image Library, Bodleian Imaging Services..

lampooned for their inability to see despite their spectacles. The first known work illustrating this theme is a drawing by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Painter and the Buyer* (fig. 4). In it, Bruegel shows a client standing behind an artist who seems to have just finished his work and is sceptically scrutinising his own achievement. Squinting short-sightedly at the result through his glasses, the client feels no such sense of hesitation and is already complacently reaching for his purse, eager to snatch up the painting.[11] This criticism is even clearer in a later caricature by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin that directly recalls the young Dürer's woodcut in its comparison between fool and amateur (fig. 5). The drawing bears two separate, though complementary, inscriptions: 'How many curious folk, eager to see me, won't need a mirror when they see me' (top) and 'Savants are divided over whether this admirable figure is by Praxiteles or by Phidias' (bottom). The witty interplay between captions and image turns the beholder into the very fool who is depicted. As Charlotte Guichard aptly noted, Saint-Aubin's goal was to criticise the collectors' constant preoccupation with attribution, and openly questioned the soundness of this activity.[12]

[11] See: Mann, *Augenglas und Perspektiv*, 115–116.
[12] 'Combien de curieux empresses a me voir pouront en me voyant se passer de miroir', and 'Les sçavants sont partagés savoir si cette admirable figure est de Praxitelle ou de Phidias', Charlotte Guichard, 'Connoisseurship: Art and Antiquities', in Colin Jones et al. dir., *The Saint-Aubin Livre de caricatures: Drawing Satire in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Oxford: SVEC, 2012, 283–300.

While, beyond their criticism, these satires testify to the actual use of optical devices among connoisseurs' circles, the origin of these practices is, in fact, difficult to pin down. The association of eyeglasses with the evolution of printing technologies—briefly mentioned above—may, however, suggest that optical tools, such as spectacles and magnifying glasses (the lorgnette being a later invention), were initially utilised for the study of prints and drawings. In a famous letter to Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna confessed, for instance, having scrutinised a drawing made for her by the great master, a *Crucifixion* kept at the British Museum today,[13] 'with the aid of a lamp, a glass and a mirror', finally admitting that she had never seen 'a more perfect image'.[14] The visual experience of the marchioness of Pescara undeniably attests to a close contact with the drawing as well as to a deep interest in the artist's technique. Nonetheless, it also resembles another technique recommended to painters by scholars such as Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci. In the second book of his treatise *De pictura*, Alberti indeed suggests using a mirror in order to put a certain visual distance—thanks to the image's lateral inversion—between the beholder and the piece under inspection; hence enhancing one's capacity to judge the qualities and flaws of the artwork.[15] In other words, this dialectical vision is meant to compensate for the subjectivity of the human eye and afford the viewer a fresh perspective on the artwork under new, and maybe more controlled, circumstances.[16] The principle underwent various variations over time: Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, for example, used Claude glasses[17] and Denis Diderot a lorgnon[18] in order to achieve the very same goal.

When it comes to paintings, using optical devices for close scrutiny seems to have established itself as a practice over the course of the seventeenth century. Representations of connoisseurs in action, like Willem van Haecht's *Gallery of*

[13] Michelangelo Buonarrotti, *The Crucifixion for Vittoria Colonna* or *Christ on the Cross*, 1540s, black chalk drawing, 37,1 x 27 cm, London, The British Museum, Inv. n° 1895–9–15–504.
[14] 'al lume et col vetro et col specchio', and 'più finita cosa', quoted after: Maria Forcellino, 'Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo: Drawings and Paintings', in Abigail Brundin et al. dir., *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016, 270–313, here 291.
[15] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: the Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, ed. with transl., introd. and notes by Cecil Grayson, London: Phaidon, 1972, book 2, § 46. For Leonardo's advice, see furthermore among other quotes: 'I say that when you are painting you ought to have by you a flat mirror in which you should often look at your work. The work will appear to you in reverse and will seem to be by the hand of another master and thereby you will better judge its fault', in Martin Kemp, Margaret Walker eds., *Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci with a Selection of Documents Relating to His Career as an Artist*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989, 203.
[16] On the idea of 'mechanical objectivity', see: Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, New York: Zone Books, 2010.
[17] Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage du cavalier Bernin en France*, Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1885, for example 19 and 98. On the distinction between the Claude mirror and Claude glasses, see furthermore: Maillet, *Le miroir noir*, chapter 1.
[18] Denis Diderot, 'Salon de 1763', in Jacques Chouillet dir., *Essais sur la peinture, Salons de 1759, 1761, 1763*, Paris: Hermann, 1984, 228–229 (Vernet, n° 90: *Vue du Port de La Rochelle, prise de la petite rive*). On Diderot's use of optical devices, see: Anita Hosseini, *Die Experimentalkultur in einer Seifenblase. Das epistemische Potenzial in Chardins Malerei*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2017, 252–259.

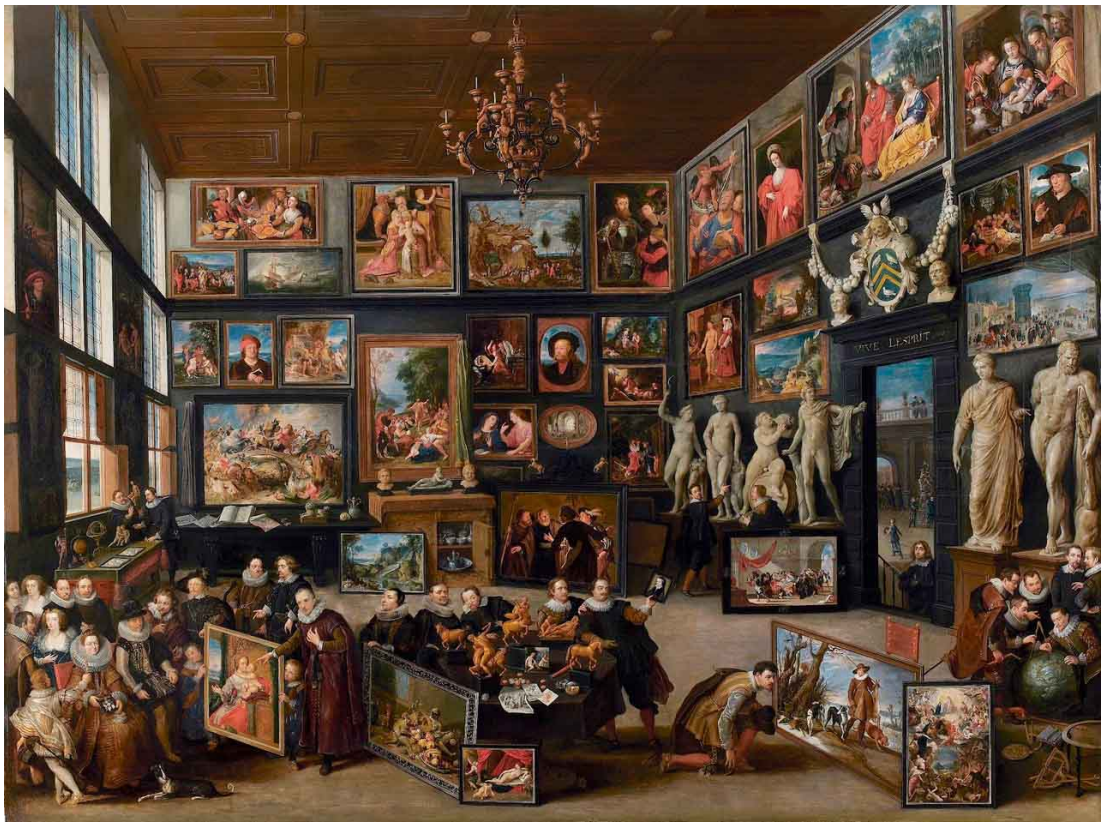


Figure 6 Willem van Haecht, *The Picture Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest*, 1628, oil on panel, 100 x 130 cm, Antwerp, Rubenshuis, Inv. nº R.H.S. 171. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Cornelis van der Geest (1628) (fig. 6), slowly begin to document the phenomenon at the beginning of the eighteenth century; Watteau's *Shopsign of Gersaint* (1720) (fig. 1) being—as far as we know—one of the earliest testimonies thereof.[19] Written sources reporting connoisseurs equipped with vision aids are, however, already available for the seventeenth century and appear to be constantly increasing, probably following the technical development of the instruments themselves. A good illustration of this trend can be found at the court of King Charles I of England. The Papal agent Gregorio Panzani gave a detailed, not to mention sarcastic, account of Inigo Jones's behaviour, as the English architect was asked to assess a collection of paintings received in 1636 by King Charles I from Cardinal Francisco Barberini on behalf of his uncle, Pope Urban VIII. Panzani relates that: 'The very moment Jones saw the pictures, he greatly approved of them, and in order to be able to study them better threw off his coat, put on his eyeglasses, took a candle and, together with the King, began to examine them very closely.'[20]

[19] On the matter, see: Becker, *Studien zur Ikonographie des Kunstbetrachters*.
[20] 'Il Gions subito che li vidde approvandoli molto, per meglio considerarli buttò giù il suo Feraiuolo, si accomodò li Occhiali, e prese una Candela in mano e volse considerarli tutti minutamente insieme col Rè', transcription and translation reproduced from: Rudolph Wittkower, 'Inigo Jones – 'Puritanismo Fiero'', *The Burlington Magazine*, 90:539, 1948, 50–51, here 51. On this event, see also: Jeremy Wood, 'Inigo Jones, Italian Art, and the Practice of Drawing', *The Art Bulletin*, 74:2, 1992, 247–270.

A few days later, Panzani explains that the King 'had removed the names of the painters, which I had fixed to each picture'[21] giving Inigo Jones the opportunity to demonstrate his skills in the identification and authentication of artworks. The anecdote not only shows how connoisseurship was, in this case, turned into a playful competition at the court of Charles I, but also bears witness to a different type of attitude towards artworks. Whereas Vittoria Colonna's mechanical observation of Michelangelo's drawing was primarily meant to evaluate the aesthetic merit of his production, the focus is here on a preoccupation with attribution—a procedure deeply grounded in the painting's materiality. In this context, candlelight, appropriate display conditions, and especially, optical devices served to facilitate the viewer's access to the nuances of the artist's hand.

The rapid development of the art market and private collections during the seventeenth century may account for this growing craze. As Donald Posner rightly underlined, this situation induced an unprecedented interest in the 'evidence of the artist's hand at work'; an emphasis that led art lovers to 'discover the value […] of a near viewing position'.[22] Back then, nothing was more obvious than to turn to optical instruments in order to support this quest for minute details. The new opportunities that these tools opened up do, however, merit further consideration. Passing from viewing a painting from a distance to literally scraping its canvas is, indeed, quite a change in perspective.[23] In his *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, published in 1662, French art theorist Roland Fréart de Chambray provides an idea of this visual revolution as he critically describes the 'novel beauties, very fashionable today' unveiled by this extremely close viewpoint. According to Chambray, it even drove the 'modern curieux' to invent a jargon, explicitly tailored for these freshly made discoveries, including expressions such as 'Freedom of brush, […] bold Touches, […] Colors thickly impasted and well nourished', and so on.[24] In that regard, if the sense of fascination and wonder generated by this visual shift will probably forever elude us, the art literature of the time may offer us a glimpse into the mutations it precipitated. I will now consider some of the strategies deployed to translate this new visual practice into words and images.

Towards new ways of writing about art

As a matter of fact, one of the specificities of seventeenth-century art theory lies in its rising attention to the materiality of the artwork and to the minute elements of its execution. The beholder's viewpoint consequently began to assume a larger place in

[21] '[ha] levato la nota delli Autori, che io havevo messo à ciaschedun Quadro', transcription and translation reproduced from: Wittkower, 'Inigo Jones', 51.
[22] Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting', respectively 592 and 595.
[23] See, in particular: Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting'; Warnke, 'Nah und Fern zum Bilde'.
[24] 'beautez nouvelles, et à la mode du temps qui court', 'Franchise du pinceau, […] Touches hardies, […] Couleurs bien empastées et bien nourries, […] Detachement des Masses', Roland Fréart de Chambray, *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, Le Mans: Jacques Ysambart, 1662, 61–62. Translation: Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting', 583.

the discourse on painting. As Jacqueline Lichtenstein argued, the notions related to the sense of sight, usually connected to the appreciation of painting, underwent a radical transformation during that time: art theory increasingly equated vision with a tactile experience, constantly oscillating between two contradictory movements, distance and proximity.[25] In short, the spectator's gaze is at the same time attracted to the surface of the artwork, as if wanting to touch it, and pushed away from it by the conventions of the visual experience.

The first symptoms of this evolution are to be found in Italy, more precisely in the publications of authors like Giulio Mancini, Marco Boschini, or Filippo Baldinucci.[26] The latter clearly articulated the importance of the painting's material particularities that he defined as 'signs […] that help as far as possible to identify the master who painted'.[27] In 1660, scholar Samuel de Sorbière complained that this vogue arrived in France from the Peninsula and it is, indeed, around that time that the reception of early Italian literature on connoisseurship may be detected in the writings of Abraham Bosse, André Félibien, and Roger de Piles, to name only a few.[28]

In continuity of Giulio Mancini's approach, Bosse, for example, advised focusing on characteristic details of the painting like 'eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hands, feet, & other such parts'[29]—elements where the artist's brushstrokes are

[25] Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Blind Spot. An Essay on the Relations between Painting and Sculpture in the Modern Age*, trans by Chris Miller, Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2008. See also: Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *Les raisons de l'art. Essai sur les théories de la peinture*, Paris: Gallimard, 2014; Markus Rath et al. dir., *Das haptische Bild. Körperhafte Bilderfahrung in der Neuzeit*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013; Weisenseel, *Bildbetrachtung in Bewegung.*

[26] For more details, see among others: Carol Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli*, New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1988; Muller, 'Measures of Authenticity'; Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting'. Jérôme Delaplanche argues for a later dating of this phenomenon in his book: *Un tableau n'est pas qu'une image. La reconnaissance de la matière de la peinture en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016. Furthermore, for the eighteenth-century development of this tradition in England, see: Mount, 'The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass'.

[27] 'segnali […] che aiutano tanto quanto a dar giudizio del maestro che dipinse', Filippo Baldinucci, 'Filippo Baldinucci al signor Marchese Senator Vincenzio Capponi, luogotenente del Granduca nell'accademia del disegno (28 April 1681)', in Giovanni Bottari et al. ed., *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI e XVII*, Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1822–1825, vol. 2, letter CXXVI, 494–534, here 523. In this context, one is easily reminded of Ginzburg's evidential paradigm: Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues. Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, 96–125.

[28] Samuel de Sorbière, *Relations, lettres, et discours de Mr de Sorbiere sur diverses matieres curieuses*, Paris: Robert de Ninville, 252–254. On the reception of the Italian theory in France, see among others: Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship*; Posner, 'Concerning the 'Mechanical' Parts of Painting'.

[29] 'sourcils, yeux, nez, bouche, oreilles, mains, pieds, & autres telles parties', Abraham Bosse, *Sentimens sur la distinction des diverses manieres de peinture, dessein & graveure, & des originaux*

believed to be the most distinctive—to uncover the related master. Interestingly enough, the art theory of the period thus introduced its readers to a sort of literary 'magnifying effect', regularly passing from a general description of the artwork to one of extreme proximity, thereby mimicking the behaviour a connoisseur should adopt when approaching a painting: '[…] the connoisseurs after having seen the paintings at a reasonable distance, want to get closer in order to see their artifice.'[30]

Once theorised, this way of contemplating artworks mutated into an observational protocol that separated the true connoisseurs from other types of viewers since, as de Piles himself recognised, 'a sophisticated painting will only please ignorants at a distance'.[31] In short, the difference made here between the expert and the ignorant gaze made connoisseurs methodical observers, able to make sense of the mosaic of information present at the surface of the painting. In this context, simulating the interaction between the observer and its objects through the text operates, not only to direct the reader's attention, but also to school as well as calibrate his or her[32] perception. It guides the subject into the immersive effect of close observation—enabling the reader to repeat the exercise without the help of the book—but also indirectly imposes procedures to follow and elements to look for. However, despite this normative dimension, the mechanism most certainly contributed to the diffusion of the practice as well as to reducing a bit further the distance between the learned beholder and the artwork.

Another impact of this growing appreciation of a painting's details is an ambition to produce extremely precise reproduction engravings.[33] This is particularly palpable in the course of the eighteenth century, as art historical writings began to be more frequently accompanied by illustrations. An excellent example of this effort are the two volumes of the *Recueil d'estampes d'après les plus beaux tableaux et d'après les plus beaux dessins qui sont en France* published in Paris,

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d'avec leurs copies. Ensemble du choix des sujets, & des chemins pour arriver facilement & promptement à bien pourtraire, Paris: Chez l'Autheur, 1649, 61.

[30] '[…] les Connoisseurs aprés les [les peintures] avoir veus d'une distance raisonnable, [veulent] s'en approcher ensuite pour en voir l'artifice', Roger de Piles, *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture, et sur le jugement qu'on doit faire des Tableaux*, Paris: Nicolas Langlois, 1677, 300. See also his *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris: Jacques Étienne, 1708, 263.

[31] 'Un Tableau savant ne plaira aux ignorans que dans sa distance', de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, 263.

[32] At the time, the field of connoisseurship was still mainly dominated by men. Yet, as Watteau's *The Shopsign of Gersaint* testifies, women's expertise should not be disregarded. Even though the role of women as collectors and connoisseurs remains largely understudied so far, some recent research tried to shed some light on this particular aspect of connoisseurship. See for instance: Meaghan Clarke, Francesco Ventrella dir., *Women's Expertise and the Culture of Connoisseurship*. Special Issue of *Visual Resources: an International Journal on Images and Their Uses*, 33:1–2, 2017.

[33] On this topic, see among others: Norberto Gramaccini, Hans Jakob Meier, *Die Kunst der Interpretation. Französische Reproduktionsgraphik 1648–1792*, Munich/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2003; Charlotte Guichard, *La griffe du peintre: La valeur de l'art (1730–1820)*, Paris: Le Seuil, 2018.

respectively in 1729 and 1742.[34] This editorial undertaking was led by three major eighteenth-century French connoisseurs—the Comte de Caylus, Pierre Crozat, and Pierre-Jean Mariette—resulting in one of the most influential publication of the period. This success partially relied on the fact that the three men went out of their way to 'produce faithful records of the paintings chosen for reproductions'.[35] In the publication's preface, Mariette stated that:

> […] while there are, indeed, some excellent copies, it is also true that most of them are mediocre; they are only copies from copies, altering original's drawing & colour to the point that its author, if he were to come back to the world, would have difficulty recognising his own thoughts in such an unfaithful imitation.[36]

To prevent such a problematic outcome, the engravers involved in the production of the compilation were asked to work directly from the originals. In consequence, almost all the illustrations respect the essence of the pictures that they reproduce (figs. 7 and 8). The same system of accuracy was followed for two paintings held in foreign collections, but still selected by the publishers because of their importance. In both cases, French artists were sent abroad to either draw from the original, or verify a proof impression.[37] Moreover, engraving techniques were adapted to and especially chosen for the artworks these engravings were to duplicate.

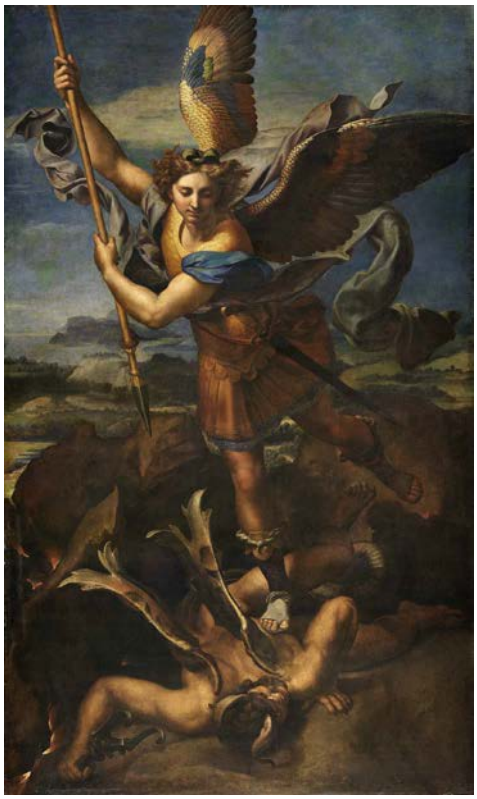
It seems that the great care taken by Caylus, Crozat, and Mariette proved worthwhile. In a letter to Pierre-Jean Mariette dated October 4, 1732, Italian art collector Niccolò Gabburri suggested reattributing a small landscape, thought to be a Raphael in the *Recueil d'estampes*, to Andrea del Sarto. He based his argument on

[34] Comte de Caylus, Pierre Crozat, Pierre-Jean Mariette, *Recueil d'estampes d'après les plus beaux tableaux et d'après les plus beaux dessins qui sont en France dans le Cabinet du Roy, dans celui de Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, & dans d'autres Cabinets divisé suivant les différentes écoles; avec un abrégé de la vie des peintres, & une description historique de chaque tableau*, Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1729–1742.

[35] Francis Haskell, *The Painful Birth of the Art Book*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1987, 32. On the *Recueil*, see also: Astrid Bähr, *Repräsentieren, bewahren, belehren: Galeriewerke (1660–1800). Von der Darstellung herrschaftlicher Gemäldesammlungen zum populären Bildband*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2009; Gabriele Bickendorf, 'Schule des Sehens. Die künstlerischen Schulen und der kunsthistorische Blick', in Katharina Krause, Klaus Niehr eds., *Kunstwerk–Abbild–Buch. Das illustrierte Kunstbuch 1730 bis 1930*, Munich/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007, 33–52; Benedict Leca, 'An Art Book and its Viewers: the *Recueil Crozat* and the Uses of Reproductive Engravings', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38:4, 2005, 623–649; Claudia-Alexandra Schwaighofer, *Von der Kennerschaft zur Wissenschaft. Reproduktionsgraphische Mappenwerke nach Zeichnungen in Europa 1726–1857*, Munich/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009.

[36] '[…] s'il est vray qu'il y a des Copies excellentes, il est aussi veritable que la pluspart sont mediocres; elles ne sont que des copies de copies, où le dessein & le coloris de l'Original se trouvent tellement alterez que son Autheur, s'il revenoit au monde, auroit peine à reconnoistre ses propres pensées dans une imitation si peu fidelle', Caylus, Crozat, Mariette, *Recueil d'estampes*, i.

[37] See Haskell, *The Painful Birth of the Art Book*, 28–32.



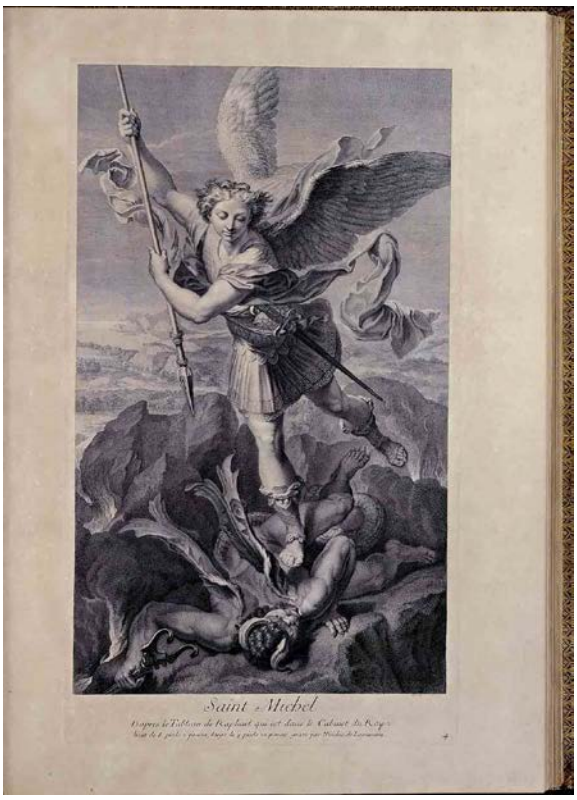


Figure 7 Raffaello Santi, *Archangel Michael Vanquishing Satan* or *The Grand Saint Michael*, 1518, oil transferred from wood to canvas, 268 x 160 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. nº 610. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 8 Nicolas de Larmessin (after Raffaello Santi), *Archangel Michael Vanquishing Satan* or *The Grand Saint Michael*, in Comte de Caylus, Pierre Crozat, Pierre-Jean Mariette, *Recueil d'estampes d'après les plus beaux tableaux et d'après les plus beaux dessins qui sont en France dans le Cabinet du Roy, dans celui de Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, & dans d'autres Cabinets divisé suivant les différentes écoles; avec un abrégé de la vie des peintres, & une description historique de chaque tableau*, Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1729–1742, vol. 1, plate 4. Source: Archive.org/Getty Research Institute.

stylistic parallels between this work and a *libro* of sixty drawings by del Sarto, which he kept in his own collection.[38] Even though this attribution has since been refuted, Gabburri's reaction nonetheless hints at the central role reproduction engravings played for the European community of connoisseurs. Thorough illustrations became a key instrument for the exchange of knowledge among this long-distance network. They offered a common ground for discussion and judgment, allowing for a comparison, validation, or rejection of the meticulous observations made by colleagues.

But this contemporary attention to detail also generated another type of images in which close-up views take a predominant position. Today, the modus operandi is probably best known through the publications of Giovanni Morelli, which introduce the reader to enlarged reproductions of ears and hands taken from

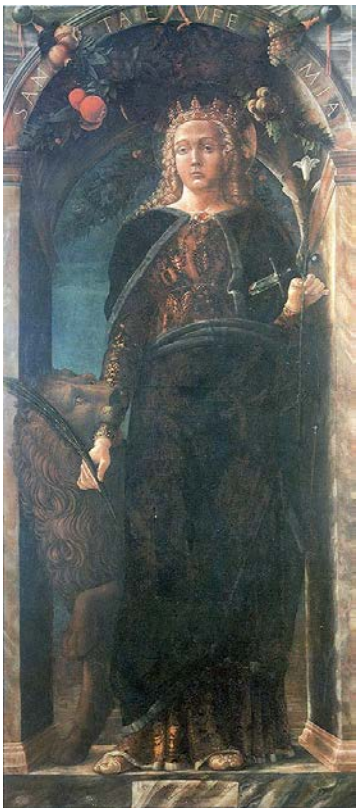
[38] Niccolò Gabburri, 'Niccolò Gabburri al sig. Pietro Mariette (October 4, 1732)', in Giovanni Bottari et al. ed., *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI e XVII*, Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1822–1825, vol. 2, letter XCIX, 333–371, here 342–343. For Mariette's response, see: Giovanni Bottari et al. ed., *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da' più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI e XVII*, Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1822–1825, vol. 2, letter XCII, 277–295, especially 290.

the most famous Renaissance paintings for the purpose of attribution. The process is, nevertheless, also found in younger art literature, like Adam Bartsch's *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les estampes qui forment l'œuvre de Rembrandt, et ceux de ses principaux imitateurs* published in 1797,[39] or Jean Baptiste Séroux d'Agincourt's *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*, on which the author worked for over thirty years before finally printing it in six volumes between 1810 and 1823.[40] The goal of this latter book was to continue Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*[41] by retracing the history of art from the end of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance. While the treatise contains significant amounts of text, Séroux' major contribution lies in the illustrations. As he claimed himself at the beginning of the *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*: 'Engraved under my eyes by the most skilful artists, they [the plates] are executed with an accuracy of which there are few examples […] very often they will offer, by themselves, a sufficiently clear and complete history.'[42]

In short, the plates are expected to speak for themselves and present the attentive reader with a visual art history that is almost independent from the text. Readers ought to be able to reconstruct the chronological development of the arts through immediate observation and comparison. In order to facilitate this, Séroux d'Agincourt regularly composed his plates with general and particular views of the object under consideration (figs. 9 and 10). While the magnified elements focus the reader's gaze on the artworks' most characteristic components, they simultaneously contribute evidence for Séroux's evolutionary survey. In that respect, the images visually incarnate the author's way of looking at his material. More than mere illustrations, they are actors in the 'theatre of proof'[43] deployed by the expert observer, elevating a minor detail to a fragment of truth.

The journey from Roland Fréart de Chambray's 'novel beauties' to Séroux d'Agincourt's manufacture of images clearly shows how close contact with artworks progressively entered the observational habits of the early modern connoisseurs. Optical devices, such as spectacles and magnifying glasses, played a

[39] Adam Bartsch, *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les estampes qui forment l'œuvre de Rembrandt, et ceux de ses principaux imitateurs*, Vienna: Blumauer, 1797. On Bartsch, see among others: Rudolf Rieger, *Adam von Bartsch (1757–1821): Leben und Werk des Wiener Kunsthistorikers und Kupferstechers unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Reproduktionsgraphik nach Handzeichnungen*, Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 2014; Stephan Brakensiek et al. dir., *Copy.Right Adam von Bartsch. Kunst, Kommerz, Kennerschaft*, Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 2016. I would like to thank Joris Corin Heyder for drawing my attention to Bartsch's *Catalogue raisonné*.
[40] Jean Baptiste Séroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*, Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1810–1823. On this publication and its illustrations, see especially: Daniela Mondini, *Mittelalter im Bild. Séroux d'Agincourt und die Kunsthistoriographie um 1800*, Zurich: Zurich Interpublishers, 2005.
[41] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Dresden: Walther, 1764.
[42] 'Gravées sous mes yeux par les plus habiles artistes, elles [les planches] sont exécutées avec une fidélité dont il y a peu d'exemples […] très souvent elles offriront, à elles seules, une histoire suffisamment claire et complète', Séroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*, ii.
[43] I am using the notion of 'theatre of proof' here according to the definition of Bruno Latour: 'Théâtre de la preuve', in Claire Salomon-Bayet dir., *Pasteur et la révolution pastorienne*, Paris: Payot, 1986, 335–384.



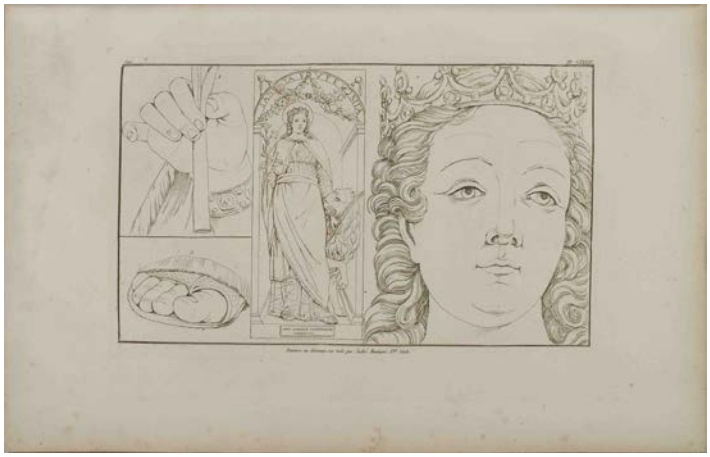


Figure 9 Andrea Mantegna, *Saint Euphemia*, 1454, tempera on canvas, 171 x 78 cm, Naples, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Inv. n° Q 6. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 10 After Andrea Mantegna, *Peinture en détrempe sur toile, par André Mantégne, XV^e Siècle*, in Jean Baptiste Séroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*, Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1810–1823, vol. 6, plate CXXXIX. Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

prominent role in this process as they not only supported this longing for proximity, but also helped conceptualise previously unknown viewing conventions. Interestingly enough, over the course of the eighteenth century, these optical devices became the common focal point of criticism about the connoisseurly activity. Henceforth considered the art lover's characteristic attributes, they decisively fuelled the satirical depiction of the connoisseur in action (fig. 5). This situation may explain why some connoisseurs of the next generation started to distance themselves from this type of technical observation. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, for instance, who was not only one of the major German writers of the second half of the eighteenth century, but also a passionate art collector,[44] increasingly condemned the use of vision aids for the contemplation of artworks. He considered the instrumentalised perception a sort of blindness—causing the beholder to lose sight of the whole picture—and decisively argued for an emancipation of the viewer's gaze.[45] Simultaneously, as Peter Utz convincingly

[44] On his collections, see especially: Johannes Grave, *Der 'ideale Kunstkörper'. Johann Wolfgang Goethe als Sammler von Druckgraphiken und Zeichnungen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.
[45] On this topic, see among others: Peter Utz, *Das Auge und das Ohr im Text literarische Sinneswahrnehmung in der Goethezeit*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1990, 146–161.

noted, Goethe replaced the literary 'magnifying effects' that were still to be found in his early works, like *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/1796), by more general views and descriptions.[46] Even though Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's position should not be interpreted as a general paradigm shift, it nonetheless testifies to the fact that there was a variety of perceptual regimes that shaped the reception of artworks between the early seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this sense, a closer look at the impact of optical devices on connoisseurly practices and on the accompanying art theory provides a stimulating insight into the rich debates that nourished the development of art expertise during the early modern period.

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[46] Utz, *Das Auge und das Ohr*, 151–152. On these two phenomena, see also: Erdmut Jost, 'Wie die Aufklärung Übersicht gewann. Basrelief und Vue d'oiseau', in Frauke Berndt, Daniel Fulda dir., *Die Sachen der Aufklärung. Beiträge zur DGEJ-Jahrestagung 2010 in Halle a. d. Saale*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2012, 505–517; August Langen, *Anschauungsformen in der deutschen Dichtung des 18. Jahrhunderts. Rahmenschau und Rationalismus*, Jena: Diederichs, 1934.