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Leiden
The Netherlands

Eigen aan de natie: de Nederlandse zeeschilderkunst in de 19de eeuw.
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Citation

Bosman, C. M. (2021, October 13). *Eigen aan de natie: de Nederlandse zeeschilderkunst in de 19de eeuw*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3217130>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Summary and conclusion

With the dissertation *Proper to the nation. Dutch Sea Painting in the 19th Century*, the aim was to fill a gap in the current knowledge and research of the genre of sea painting, which until now has been mainly limited to the 17th century. The purpose of this study was to understand 19th century sea painting in the context of the time in which the paintings were created. The central question was how sea painting was perceived in the Netherlands in the 19th century.

Within the art historical context of the 19th century, the status of sea painting in art theory as a specialism of the traditional 17th-century Dutch school of painting was studied, as well as the scope of the genre, its practitioners, and its stylistic developments. Three perspectives have been used for the views on the genre in the contemporary art world: the perspective of the sea painters, of their professional peers in the painting profession at the artists' associations *Pictura*, *Arti et Amicitiae* and *Pulchri Studio*, in Dordrecht, Amsterdam and The Hague respectively, and of the art critics of the *Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters* which took place in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, between 1808 and 1900. With respect to 19th-century sea painting, artists' associations and art criticism are new areas of research.

This research has also compiled for the first time a representative overview of the names of specialized sea painters in the period. This resulted in a corpus of 110 painters who worked in the Netherlands between 1800 and 1900 and almost exclusively had the subjects of the sea and/or ships in their oeuvre (Appendix 1). The number of simultaneously working sea painters made a wave-like movement during the 19th century. Expressed in percentages over the total number of working painters, it began at 3.6% in 1800, climbed to its peak of 4.5% in 1860, and fell back to 1.2% in 1900. In absolute numbers, nineteen sea painters were simultaneously active in 1800, at its peak there were 64 in 1860, and at the end of the century there were 28 sea painters.

By placing the research findings in a broader cultural-historical context, the study examined for the first time whether and in what ways sea painting had significance within the national thinking of the 19th century. Using the theoretical framework of cultural nationalism (Leerssen 2007), the role of the genre in this respect has been further analyzed. The combination of painting and nationalism is a subject that was focussed on in Dutch art historical research in the late 20th century, but which did not receive much attention afterwards. In the course of this research, this subject came up for discussion again when it turned out that in the views of art theorists, sea painters, their colleagues and in art criticism during the late 18th and the entire 19th century, a unanimous idea of sea painting as a bearer of national pride was identifiable. Within the framework of 19th-century European nationalism, this was exceptional, for in the other countries history painting was mainly used to

create an awareness of one's own history. Sea painting as a vehicle for patriotism can be seen as a specifically Dutch form of cultivating the past in the service of national thinking.

By relating the research results to the 19th century maritime-cultural heritage, it became clear how important the maritime past was in the construction of the Golden Age. The attention to this particular heritage, as evidenced in historical editions, historical works, commemorative objects, statues, songs, speeches and also in the production of sea painters, art theoretical literature and art criticism, was characterized by a glorification of the Netherlands as a seafaring nation and a deep attachment to the sea. Within this national thinking, sea painting literally functioned as an image bearer in several respects. Both the predominantly conservative, historicizing painting style of the sea pieces, and the hallmark of a fully-fledged traditional Dutch genre, but above all the depiction of the sea with ships, provided a support for a national (historical) awareness.

In all phases of the development of cultural nationalism the genre of sea painting played a role. In the inventory phase, first art theorists and later art critics looked back at the paintings of the 17th-century sea painters and these were held up as examples from nationalist motives. In the production phase, contemporary sea painting was stimulated and judged from the same motives, using the work of the 17th-century masters as the artistic benchmark. In the mobilization phase, the paintings of sea painters were concretely influential as a support for collective identity, through exhibition at the publicly accessible and large-scale Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters and presence in contemporary museums. It was thus an admittedly small, but highly relevant genre within national thought. Sea painters, the specialized painters of Dutch shipping, must have been aware of this, simply because this view was ubiquitous, thanks in part to the great interest in maritime cultural heritage. It is therefore plausible that a nationalistic element will have been part of the sea painter's intentions in the production of the paintings.

In the art theoretical circuits of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the position of sea painting was very strong. Sea painting was not regarded as (a part of) landscape painting, but as a separate and characteristic Dutch painting genre that required specialist (nautical) expertise from the painter. The genre had a history of development going back to the late 16th century and flourished at the highest painting level in the 17th century. The paintings were seen as a symbol of the growth of the economic prosperity and political power of the Republic at the time, and as such they were closely linked to the culture and identity of the Dutch people. The high status of sea painting in art theory was reflected in the proposal to employ the genre as "history painting of the second kind." Indeed, some of the sea painters presented paintings depicting factual representations of historical and contemporary naval disasters and actions as history painting. When producing images with a (historical) maritime-documentary character, nationalistic motivations unmistakably played a role. This history painting of the second kind was practiced by a few sea painters until the 1880s.

The sea painter of around 1800 was self-taught. He acquired the specialized knowledge of shipping and shipbuilding from a profound, possibly professional, interest in ships. The composition and style of a sea piece were learned by studying and copying the work of the 17th-century sea painters, who were seen as their true teachers. By choosing sea painting, a painter was able to distinguish himself within the large pool of landscape painters that emerged from the wallpaper market. The deciding factor in choosing sea painting at the end of the 18th century, was a connection to the shipping world through work or family, combined with living on a busy waterfront.

In the middle of the 19th century, as in about 1800, sea painters still liked to keep themselves in the immediate vicinity of ships and they boasted of the practical experience of staying on board. The suggested expertise on ships and shipping was linked to the perception of a number of 17th-century sea painters. The special interest in ships among sea painters was also evidenced by the presence of ship portraits in the oeuvre of many of them and the ship models in the studios.

A thematic analysis of the submissions by sea painters for the *Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters* in Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam revealed that a distinction could be made between the subjects of modern steam navigation (1%), the maritime history piece (1%) and the reportage piece (1.5%). The type of representations without a substantively specified title, such as *Still water with ships*, *Roaring water with ships* or *Seascape*, was by far the largest category with 96.5%. These included the calm-looking, not too conspicuous, sea pieces inspired by a 17th-century composition and painting style. Art critics sometimes found the paintings boring, but for the sea painters the variety lay in the depiction of the various types of ships, the ship's reaction to weather conditions and the actions of the crew. The ship occupied an at least equal place alongside the natural elements and the effect of light and weather conditions in the sky, clouds and waves. Mainly this type of paintings sufficed to maintain the nationalistic charge of the genre throughout the 19th century, even at the time of the stylistic changes in the last decades.

Out of the total stock of entries, shipwrecks constituted about 5.5% of the paintings of sea painters. Production in this category was at its peak in the years 1835-1855. The influence of the Romantic movement and the popularity of French and German sea painters, had a stimulating effect on the increase in the number of paintings with stormy scenes and ships in distress. With these works, however, the Dutch sea painters placed themselves first and foremost in a genre-specific Dutch tradition, in which they could present themselves as the true specialists. Art critics would unite behind them as one, provided the requirement of impeccable painterly execution was met. Nevertheless, the influence of the Romantic movement was eminently visible in the Netherlands in the way sea painting was treated. Both among admiring 18th-century art theorists and critical 19th-century art critics, there was an undisguised interest in the maritime cultural and art historical heritage. In addition, no one was insensitive to the intense, exalted, emotion that a natural element

such as the sea could induce. By creatively dealing with "aberration" and innovation in sea painting, they managed to keep sea painting alive as a traditional Dutch genre.

At least 31 of the 110 sea painters were members of one or more of the three main artists' associations *Pictura*, *Arti et Amicitiae* and *Pulchri Studio*. Sea painting in general, and a number of sea painters in particular, enjoyed a certain artistic respect among fellow painters in various ways within the circle of artists' associations. However, as could be seen from the submissions to the member exhibitions, this situation did not last. During the last decades of the 19th century, a tendency of a decrease in the number of submitted marines (as a genre) by sea painters, and an increase in the submission of this type of paintings by other painters, emerged among the three artists' associations. This blurring of boundaries between the practice of genres, stemmed in part from the influence of the Barbizon School on painting.

With this new approach to nature and working *en plein air*, the coastal area and its inhabitants, the sea and ships literally reopened a field to which many domestic and foreign painters were attracted. These painters were not necessarily nautically interested. Although, just as for the sea painters, the 17th-century school of painting was to some extent a source of inspiration for them, it was a totally different form of sea painting. The conservative and traditional orientation of many sea painters toward their specialty, in which ships were the main theme, contributed to the decline in their market share. Because the work of most sea painters no longer met the wishes of the art-buying public, they were no longer eligible for a place in the member exhibitions. By the end of the 19th century, the nautical expertise of the specialized sea painters at the artists' association was only of marginal significance and their artistic status and position were minimized.

Most of the 19th century sea painters (77 out of 110) participated in the exhibition circuit of the *Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters*. In the period from 1810 to 1899, the average proportion of their work was 4.5% of the total entries in the three major cities. Despite this small percentage, art criticism always paid attention to sea painting, thanks to its strong position as a characteristic Dutch genre, which moreover recalled glorious times of the 17th century.

In the reviews in the first decades of the 19th century an extensive system of style criteria for the sea pieces unfolded. Leading in this was the similarity to 17th-century sea painting in the treatment of the natural elements, with the work of the great masters Ludolf Bakhuizen and Willem van de Velde (II) as benchmarks. In addition to the transparency of the water's surface, the colors of the sky, horizon and clouds, the shape of the waves, and the harmonious connection between air and water were the subjects of contemplation. Although the art critics' primary interest was in the style of the sea pieces and not in the nautical details, the correct depiction and a sufficient number of ships in the paintings were also important. The reviews expressed a sense of affiliation with ships and the sea, and the genre was perceived as "proper to the nation". The patriotic feeling with the sea

piece was reinforced by the historicizing effect of the stylistic imitation of 17th-century sea painting. During this period the genre was recognized and appreciated in art criticism as history painting of the second kind, provided the criteria were met.

This changed around the 1840s under the impact of developments in painting as a whole. To some extent, contemporary painting began to be accepted. Contemporary influences and personal invention were allowed to play a role. In sea painting this was evident in several ways. Because of an excessive uniformity in composition, the zealous imitation of the 17th-century masters was no longer appreciated and after 1850 the naturalistic style was no longer the absolute standard. It was only around this time that the steamship was also accepted in art criticism as one of the usual types of ship in the paintings of sea painters.

In the 1860s, a blending of old and new criteria continued and admiration was expressed for a more realistic treatment of the natural elements by some sea painters. In the last decades of the 19th century, however, they could no longer meet the highly personal expression of nature desired by critical and expert painter-art critics. Specialized sea painting was then considered by art critics to be a suitable genre for conservative art buyers and hardly any attention was paid to it. Nevertheless, the sea painter managed to survive, precisely because of his specific knowledge of the depiction of ships and, not least, thanks to the Dutch national identification with shipping and the sea.

During this study an insight into the interaction between art and society came to the fore. The role of sea painting within nationalism was an important and striking aspect of this, but the effect that the stamp of national genre had on its practice and appreciation also stood out. It appears that sea painters started working towards it (despite foreign influences, as was visible with Meijer, Van Deventer and Mesdag, the majority stuck to the conventions) and that art critics included it in their judgments (for a long time they used the traditional Dutch criteria for the genre and shunned innovation). Significant was the prolonged absence and disregard of contemporary modern life in the form of steamships in the paintings. As we have seen, the 17th century was constantly present in several ways. As a result, there was a certain framing of sea painting in an artistic tradition, which resulted in a form of inability to keep up with innovations, especially among the practitioners of the genre. The love of the ship and the specialist nautical knowledge of sea painters were long a unique quality, but they ultimately proved to be their Achilles' heel. Consequently, when the artistic tradition of the 17th-century Dutch school was finally broken open at the end of the 19th century, sea painting disappeared from the canon of the visual arts.

This research concentrated on the study of the genre within its own national borders. In addition to this, the gaze can be turned outwards. A study of sea painting and its significance within 19th century nationalism in the other seafaring countries of Europe with a rich maritime history is an example of this. In the same way, the position of Dutch 19th-century sea painting in the international

art world, such as the participation of sea painters in exhibitions outside the Netherlands, deserves more attention. This also applies to the market and collectors of the genre, nationally and internationally, both of which have received limited attention in this dissertation. Finally, Dutch sea painting of the 18th century also awaits further systematic research.