Van Eyck Out of Focus

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On 28 August 1815, Goethe received as a birthday gift from Sulpiz Boisserée, the pioneering collector of medieval art, an engraving after a work by Jan van Eyck (Fig. 1).\(^1\) Boisserée, reverent, concealed a few of his own verses under the print, framing the sheets of paper with sprigs of oak, laurel, and clover. In his diary, Boisserée recorded the great man’s reaction to the poetry but

Fig. 1. Cornelis van Noorde after Jan van Eyck, St. Barbara, 1769, engraving. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
not to the print, unfortunately.2 The engraving replicates with near-perfect fidelity every dash, dot, and stroke of Van Eyck's work, the St. Barbara, now in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp (Fig. 2).3 Although framed and signed, the picture is not in fact an oil painting but a kind of drawing on prepared panel. It measures 41 by 28 centimeters with its frame, the print very nearly the same.4 The engraved facsimile is so successful that on quick inspection one might easily mistake it for a pen drawing, as some contemporaries of Goethe apparently did. Wurzbach reported that the print was long exhibited in Bruges as a drawing.5

The birthday gift marked a shift in European taste, a breakdown of the long dominance of a painterly neoclassicism grounded in the form-world of Raphael and Michelangelo and codified in the writings and engravings generated by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century academies. The print after Van Eyck's St. Barbara documented and recognized a long-obsolete mode of cultic painting. With its obsessively inductive, cumulative approach to form, its static, vertical, indeed tower-like composition, its indifference to ideal canons of human form, and its mysterious, anecdotal fascination with the busy construction site behind the saint's back, Van Eyck's picture violated every possible precept of the academic and neoclassical painting tradition that in many ways still dominated Goethe's Europe. The engraving recovered the panel from oblivion. The institution of the so-called "reproductive" engraving had emerged in the sixteenth century as a means of notating and disseminating a canon of imitation-worthy works and forms.6 To publish a painting was to assert its value. The translation to the medium of engraving signaled a work's exemplarity. The print presented to Goethe symbolically repudiated the academic tradition that had for so long neglected Van Eyck and his contemporaries.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century and first of the nineteenth, the challenge to neoclassical taste was just beginning to take shape in the collecting activity of the Boisserée brothers,7 by Goethe himself,8 and soon enough by the reproductive engravings of Antoine Michel Filhol, Johann Nepomuk Strixner, J.B.I.G. Seroux d'Agincourt, and others.9 Some works by Van Eyck and other Flemish primitives hung in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre already by 1799. Friedrich Schlegel studied these paintings in 1802; shortly afterward, the Boisséreés arrived in Paris and met both Schlegel and Van Eyck.10 Sulpiz's birthday gift to Goethe in 1815 in effect "closed" the neoclassical tradition, creating it as a tradition, and in its place initiated a new tradition, a new concept of art, that would in the end manage to embrace both Raphael and Van Eyck.11

The exceptional interest of this particular engraving is its precocity. For, in fact, it was published already in 1769, when Goethe was only twenty years of age, and only a year after the death of J.J. Winckelmann, the great schol-
early and critical exponent of Hellenophilic neoclassicism. The engraving of the *St. Barbara* predates by more than a generation the German Romantic rediscovery of the *primitifs flamands*.

The engraving was not a German work, but Dutch, the combined product of Haarlem civic patriotism and a more general Netherlandish tradition of reproductive printmaking. It had been commissioned by the owner of the painting, the noted book publisher and collector Johannes Enschedé of Haarlem (1707-1780). At the lower left of the bottom sheet, outside the engraved frame, an inscription names Enschedé as “Possessor hujus Picturæ originalis” and gives the date 1769. The lower right names the Haarlem printmaker Cornelis van Noorde (1731-1795), who engraved it “ex originali.” The print accompanied a pamphlet written by Enschedé, a short monograph on the origins of oil painting in the form of an open letter, *Aan de Beminnaars der Tekenen Schilder-Konst* (Fig. 3). The text is printed on four pages, on a single folded folio. The text looks engraved, but is in fact a calligraphic type font that simulates cursive script. The printed St. Barbara was thus a complex publication comprising three separate sheets of paper: the reproduction of the original wooden frame, signed “IOHANNES DE EYCK ME FECIT” and dated
1437; the reproduction of the painting itself, tipped in (that is, attached to the sheet representing the frame); and the four-page pamphlet on oil painting.\footnote{13}

Enschedé’s text begins by boasting of the technical and scientific ingenuity of the Netherlandish forefathers, exceeding that of far larger nations. As an example, he pointed out that book printing had been invented by Laurens Coster, the shadowy Haarlem alderman who according to local lore invented movable metal type already around 1430, a few years before Gutenberg. Enschedé went on to discuss oil painting, conceding that the Italian Cimabue was the first, around 1240, to throw off the “slavish yoke of Gothic painting” (“het slaafsche Juk der Gotthische Schilderkunst”) and introduce an improved taste for beauty. But these old paintings in tempera colors were pale and weak. It was left to us Netherlanders, Enschedé continued, to invent a way of making paintings “more detailed and durable” (“uitvoeriger en bestendiger”). In the early fifteenth century, Jan van Eyck of Maaseyck and Bruges began painting with oil colors on a white lime ground. According to the
painter and old masters expert Tako Jelgersma, whom Enschedé quoted at length, the method was still used by some painters as late as the seventeenth century, for example, Adriaen Brouwer. The publication of a “getrouwe Afbeelding” of an old and rare panel offered to amateurs (liefhebbers) of the arts of painting and drawing “a true sample and worthy relic” (“een echt Stuk en waardig Overblyfzel”) of this now forgotten anc obsolete method of painting. In effect, Enschedé was pushing back the threshold of the modern era of art, for it was now the pre-Eyckian, not the pre-Raphaelite paintings, which looked poor and rudimentary.

For Van Eyck’s status as inventor of oil painting, Enschedé cited Karel van Mander, the Haarlem artist and author whose Schilder-boeck of 1604 had extended the art-critical and art-historical project of Giorgio Vasari to the northern sphere. Although the legend of Van Eyck’s invention had a local life of its own, Van Mander had, in fact, relied on Vasari for most of his information. No one understood the chemistry of Van Eyck’s technique, but everyone seemed to agree on his priority. The possibility that the Northern Europeans had pioneered oil painting was taken up with renewed enthusiasm by eighteenth-century antiquarians and amateurs looking to contest the absolute superiority of Italian art. In 1720, an anonymous English traveler was shown a painting in Ypres attributed by inscription to Jan van Eyck and, presumably by oral report, “said to be the first made in oil.” Van Mander’s Lives, testimony to a vigorous, non-classical counter-tradition of European painting, were reprinted in 1764. Horace Walpole in these years was provoked by the Wilton Diptych, a splendid panel of around 1400 possibly of English authorship, to question Van Eyck’s absolute priority as painter in oils, and not without reason. Enschedé, finally, submitted to the debate his own elegantly printed pamphlet and faithful reproduction of Van Eyck’s painting, patriotic documents of the two great Netherlandish medial innovations, movable type and oil painting.

The reproduction of the picture, as noted, was tipped in rather than engraved continuously with the frame. The frame is printed in brown ink rather than black. The detachable frame signals the publication’s hesitation between presenting Van Eyck’s panel as a historical document and presenting it as a work of art. For if the St. Barbara was thought of as a document of a bygone culture, then its signed and dated frame had to be included. But if Van Eyck had made a work of art capable of standing alongside the masterpieces of the post-Raphael tradition, then the image ought to stand on its own, unframed, like any other. Reproductive engravings of oil paintings by normative masters such as Correggio, or Carracci, after all, did not normally reproduce frames. Nor did they reproduce paintings in actual size. It would be interesting to know whether Boisserée’s gift to Goethe in 1815 amounted to the entire publication – image, frame, and treatise –, or only the image. But the diary does not tell us.
Enschedé's treatise does not go so far as to present Van Eyck's painting as an aesthetic paragon, for this was still unthinkable in 1769. It presents the work strictly as a document, as if Enschedé had purchased a rude and unsightly but fascinatingly informative archaic Greek vase. The ostensible context for Enschedé's double publication of panel and pamphlet was antiquarian scholarship, not the normative, prescriptive sort practiced by Winckelmann, but a non-evaluative, relativistic scholarship more interested in describing the past than in shaping it to fit modern, neoclassical taste. The pioneering example of such a descriptive project was Les monuments de la monarchie française of the Abbé Bernard de Montfaucon (5 vols., 1729-33), with its remarkably sensitive engravings after works of medieval French art. And yet, despite Enschedé's caution in the treatise, his interest in the picture is clearly more than scientific. His publication represents a transitional phase between Montfaucon's objectivity and the Boisserée's enthusiasm.

The puzzle of the publication is that Van Eyck's St. Barbara, which was not an oil painting at all, would seem to be the least effective illustration of Enschedé's patriotic monograph. Enschedé at first said the painting is painted on a smoothly polished white ground "met Olyverf," but then immediately conceded that it is painted "in a drawing-like manner with hatchings, in grisaille, with no other color than black" ("op eene tekenagtige wyze met Aarceeringen geschilderd in 't graauw, met geene andere Couleur dan zwart") (p. 2). He reported that the paint had turned brown, or yellowish with age, so that the work today looked at first glance like an India-ink drawing (p. 3). (The bluish washes in the sky, Enschedé correctly noted, are later additions and were therefore not registered in the engraving; p. 2, n. 5.) There is thus a blatant and confusing clash between the claims of the pamphlet and the fact of the panel. Why would Enschedé build a pamphlet on early oil painting around this picture, thus asking a non-oil painting to stand for the whole achievement of the medium?

Tako Jelgersma had told Enschedé that the old masters used to draw in fine hatchings on a white ground before applying their oil paint (p. 2, n. 2). When the St. Barbara fell into Enschedé's hands, it seemed to provide a unique insight, some few days before the advent of infrared reflectography; into the lost art of underdrawing and the secret of Eyckian oil painting. He had his engraver reproduce the fine linear network in soft but crisp lines, the necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for the Eyckian painting mode --, or so Enschedé believed. Today we know that extensive underdrawing of this sort was by no means a necessary condition. Indeed, no early Flemish painting had underdrawings as extensive as this. Although the working out of tonal values on the blank painting surface served as a guide for the painter, it was not indispensable to the process of patient layering of oil glazes.

The panel's true function and meaning form a riddle taxing enough for
modern scholarship. Van Eyck’s *St. Barbara* is certainly not an unfinished painting, as the signed and dated frame attests. At one point, Enschedé simply calls it a “Konst-Stuk,” and here he was not wrong. J.R.J. Asperen de Boer has noted that the picture was drawn with both stylus and brush, suggesting perhaps that the work began as an ordinary underdrawing and was only later, for unknown reasons, converted into a display piece, a drawing as finished work of art. 19 Paul Vandenbroeck has pointed out that the taste for grisaille drawings was already well-established among patrons of the finest manuscripts. 20 Van Eyck’s work was a virtuoso *jeu d’esprit* addressed to a sophisticated audience, presumably a particular patron, who would recognize it as the representation of an unfinished painting; as something like a staged glimpse behind the scenes of the painter’s workshop. The unfinished tower, still under construction, is the emblem of its unfinishedness, which is only a virtual unfinishedness, in ironic dissonance with the signature and date on the frame. The modular Gothic architecture, an assemblage of linear compartments, meanwhile, is a figure for the linear, skeletal approach to description that the panel as a whole takes.

Enschedé’s point about movable type is clouded by a similar indirection. He invoked Laurens Coster and the origins of letterpress, but then had his own text printed in a calligraphic font that imitates engraved scripts, like the scripts at the bottom of the reproductive print, rather than in one of the many standard, modern typographic fonts that traced their roots back to the fifteenth century. In fact, any modern printed broadsheet could have easily served as an illustration of the origins of printing, to the point that it would have been transparent and therefore ineffective as an illustration. Enschedé apparently decided that the only way to break out of this circle and point emphatically to the medium was to use a strange typeface that simulated another medium, engraving (which in turn was simulating the handheld pen). Just as the apparent clash between medium and message revealed the essence of the oil painting technique, so too does the calligraphic font that appears to clash with the content of the text reveal the flexibility of movable type.

One might say that seventeenth-century Dutch culture never articulated a theory adequate to its own art. The paintings and prints were obliged to theorize themselves. In this respect, however, Dutch art may not be so special. Theoretical texts of all times and places, from Alberti to Vasari, from Van Mander to Winckelmann, are often the least articulate about what the art of their day is doing. In the premodern period, art theory is habitually indirect, knowing what it wants but not how to say it. Enschedé’s publication also expresses an art theory, a theory that embraces both Raphael and Van Eyck, but without words, or with the wrong words.

By choosing to represent Eyckian oil painting through its linear, monochrome substratum, Enschedé identified a deep-structural principle common
to both the surface and underdrawing: both are compiled by patient, additive processes, calling for devotion and diligence beyond anything modern painters are capable of. And by producing not a mere representation of the Eyckian panel, but rather an exact, one-to-one facsimile of its surface, a perfect analogue in true dimensions, the engraver Van Noorde achieved an absence of coding that an oil painting aiming to replicate the look of the world could only envy. For the original mythic force of oil paint – Enschedè knew this but could not quite say it – lies in its promise to give you the world as it really is, without recourse to schemas, or conventions. The oil painter uses blue to represent blue, and red to represent red. Enschedè’s publication isolates analogicity as the defining power of oil paint. Neoclassical theory, by contrast, had been unwilling to ground a theory of art on color’s genius for matching. Academic theory tended to assign color a merely supplementary and cosmetic status, subordinate to an intellectually generated design principle. Vasari had explained the advantage of oil as a binder in terms that reveal both the power and the limits of color: “Questa maniera di colorire accende più i colori; nè altro bisogna che diligenza ed amore, perché l’olio in sé sì reca il colorito più morbido, più dolce e delicato, e di unione e sfumata maniera più facile che gli altri.” (‘This manner of coloring better kindles the pigments; nothing is required other than diligence and love, because the oil in itself renders the coloring softer, sweeter, more delicate, more easily blended in a smoky manner than do the other methods.’) Oil does the work, in other words, producing ready-to-use colors and freeing the artist to concentrate on the invention and design. Enschedè was, in effect, shifting the focus away from design and back to the analogic power of pure paint. The engraving was uncoded (vis-à-vis Van Eyck’s panel) in exactly the way that the nonexistent notional oil painting that Van Eyck’s brush drawing prepared – standing for the oil painting of Van Eyck in general – was uncoded (vis-à-vis nature). The analogic capacity of oil paint was the basis for the whole project of simulating perception, of unrolling a virtual world before the eyes of the beholder. Enschedè was really saying in his essay, therefore, that the key to modern painting was not the idealizing, or rhetorical model offered by academic theory, a model locked in doomed competition with poetry, but rather the illusionistic doubling of perception.

Van Noorde’s engraving signals its solidarity with the analogic approach by differentiating itself from the traditional reproductive engraving sponsored by the academies. The neoclassical reproductive engraving had represented tonal values by a conventional system of curved and intersecting swirls and hatchings. Van Noorde, by contrast, rendered Van Eyck by reproducing, as if by rote, every single line. His facsimile does not avail itself of the graphic conventions, or codes developed by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century engravers. It returns the art of engraving to a primitive state. Lines may
blend illusionistically in Van Noorde's engraving, but then this blending occurs already in Van Eyck's work. On the panel, shade is generated by accumulation of tiny brush strokes, without application of the flat brush. The picture emerges out of a multitude of graphemes, which either describe real edges, or are arrayed conventionally in rows to simulate solid areas of shade. Some of the lines are to be read literally, as lines in reality, while others are meant to be assembled by the eye in a kind of perceptual calculus, simulating continuous areas of shade. The print does not interpret, or translate the grouping of lines in Van Eyck's panel that "read" as shade. It simply repeats and preserves the graphemes, counting on the facsimile to do whatever it was that the original work did. A line, in Van Noorde's image of Van Eyck's panel, is signified by a line. This is non-conventional, uncoded representation.

Neither Cornelis van Noorde nor Johannes Enschedé invented the analogue reproductive engraving. This approach to the rendering of drawings goes back to the most creative period of printmaking, the first decades of the sixteenth century. The earliest iron etchings were intended as facsimiles of pen drawings. A woodcut by Ugo da Carpi printed from three tone-blocks – black, red-brown, and violet – was meant as a kind of mechanical facsimile, in true dimensions, of a wash drawing by Raphael. The so-called chiaroscuro woodcut had a long career alongside the engraving. Meanwhile, reproductive engravers were striving to develop techniques for rendering tonal values and eventually color itself with greater fidelity. Mezzotint, a semi-analogue technique involving the simulation of continuous surfaces by the use of rockers and other devices for roughening the plate, was developed in the mid-seventeenth century. The French printmaker Jean-Baptiste Le Prince invented aquatint, a true analogue technique, in the late 1760s.

Among the Dutch, the master of the analogue reproductive print was the eighteenth-century amateur Cornelis Ploos' van Amstel (1726-1798). This two-color etching, for instance, replicated a drawing by Hendrick Goltzius in red and black chalks (Fig. 4). The rendering of both lines and indeterminate forms and shading is uncoded; it is perfect mark-to-mark representation. Such a print met an emerging interest in drawings and in the history of art among modern collectors and connoisseurs. The attentiveness to seventeenth-century Dutch art, now a "closed" tradition, was appreciative and not merely documentary. The eighteenth-century amateur, whether he could find old drawings, or only Ploos replicas, was quietly building an alternative canon, unnoticed by the Italians, and laying the groundwork for the revolution in taste of the next century. Enschedé in his pamphlet wrote that Ploos van Amstel particularly encouraged him to introduce the Van Eyck panel to a broader public (p. 3). Ploos van Amstel himself bought the old painting at auction in 1786, six years after Enschedé's death.

The traditional reproductive engraving, which rendered tone by a linear
code, implied that tone, or coloristic effect were accidental and could be rendered with liberty, or even sacrificed without really altering the significance of the work. The traditional reproductive engraving isolated invention and design as the essential features of the work. Such a print was not a copy, but an interpretation, a translation, as even contemporary sources averred. Such a print anticipated and pre-shaped the response to the painted work. The analogue reproductive print, by contrast, was a substitute, or ersatz drawing. It announced a shift of power over to the beholder, inviting independent judgment — just as oil painting had in Van Eyck’s time. Enschedé’s publication, pamphlet and engraving together, asserted Van Eyck’s pre-emptive refutation of the neoclassical orthodoxy. The modern re-engagement with Van Eyck initiated by Enschedé implied a rejection of the rhetorical and communicative theory of art offered by academic doctrine. The publication argued, inarticulately but effectively, that the native painting manners of Northern European painting, although institutionally subordinated to neoclassicism, had a “theory” of their own.

The choice between perception-based and convention-based modes of graphic reproduction is figured by the contrast between Van Noorde’s tipped-in image of St. Barbara and his image of Van Eyck’s frame. Van Noorde could not provide an analogue rendering of the frame, because here he was dealing not with an array of graphemes, but rather with pieces of wood that happen to have lines in them, a grain. The grain of the wood could be rendered
as lines, but to produce a decent illusion of a wooden frame the engraver also needed to employ conventional graphic devices for representing surfaces. Van Noorde had to interpret the frame. The lines in Van Noorde’s frame oscillate back and forth from grain to hatching, from denotation to connotation, as indeed all lines do in a traditional, convention-based engraving. Van Noorde even represented shadow falling on the frame, as if light were hitting it. This is a completely different approach to representation, for in the central pictorial part he reproduces the thing as it is and then lets perception work on it, whereas in this part of the print, the engraver gives us the results of perception.

Van Noorde’s engraving treats the interior image as an integral unit. The split in Van Noorde’s work falls between the image and the frame, whereas in Van Eyck’s original work there had been no such split. The wooden frame with its signature announcing Van Eyck’s authorship was conceptually continuous with the interior image where the exposed handiwork had done the same job, advertising Van Eyck’s virtuosity. In Van Eyck’s work, the true seam is inside the image, between the foreground saint and the background with its tower and landscape. The saint was a conventional figure, an extract from prior paintings, whereas in the background, at least notionally, Van Eyck was transcribing a fresh perception of the world. Van Eyck’s reason for drawing this internal distinction, in this and other works, was to call attention to the optically-based, mimetic conception of art that he was pioneering. Van Eyck inverted the customary relationship between subject and attribute in a religious painting. The tower was a conventional attribute of the third-century amateur theologian Barbara, who had been imprisoned in such a structure by her pagan father. It is usually a miniature tower, at her feet, or held in her hands, to make it instantly clear that it was to be read as a symbol. Instead, in this picture, Van Eyck piled up an excess of description in the background, analyzing and articulating the world into graphic units, with an intensity of effect rivaling what he could have achieved with color. Van Eyck was naturalizing, or “motivating” the symbolic attribute by absorbing it into a plausible fiction of perception.35 The attribute is motivated to such an extent that the background appears more lifelike and credible than the saint herself. The saint comes to look unmotivated, artificial, like an inexplicable supplement to the landscape. Van Eyck in this way created a disjunction between, on the one hand, the background that represents a plausible world and, on the other, a foreground figure, the ostensible subject of the picture, who looks like she has been copied from other works of art. He reversed the expected hierarchy between them. He then pointed to this disjunction by setting up bridges and rhymes between the two parts of the picture, such as the areas of dark focus in the tower above and the drapery below.

The eighteenth-century engraving, as noted, shifts the split in the work
outward to the seam between image and frame. Van Noorde flattened out Van Eyck’s ingenious interplay between world and art. In the engraving, the image has become a seamless unity that Van Eyck never meant it to be. Perhaps this is the reason that eighteenth-century observers “forgot” the subject of the picture. Van Eyck’s motivation, or naturalization of the tower, which a contemporary of his, familiar with images of St. Barbara, would have recognized as a clever joke, prevented the eighteenth-century viewer from seeing it as the martyr saint’s attribute. Enschedé realized she is a saint but guessed that she might be the patron saint of the church under construction in the background.

Enschedé in the text designated himself “possessor” of the painting, thus calling a halt to the endless chain of cult images, liberating the object from its dark historical labyrinth and hauling it into the bright light of public scholarship. With such a print, the academic function of the reproductive engraving, its utility to artists, finally breaks down, and the modern reproduction is born, either as the instrument of dry scholarship, or as the catalyst of bourgeois taste. Enschedé’s publication gives us a sudden glimpse forward to the chromolithograph, the postcard, the color reproductions of paintings sold in museum shops. But it also looks forward to the scholarly study of art history, to modern connoisseurship, which will abandon reproductive engravings and rely instead – short of access to the object itself – on photographs, a superior analogue medium (or digital but sufficiently fine-grained to pass for an analogue medium). This shift away from reliance on the reproductive engraving was begun in these very decades, by Pierre-Jean Mariette, whose notes on the history of art were grounded in his collection of nearly 10,000 drawings. The analogue prints by the French engravers and by Ploos van Amstel were in a sense responding to Mariette’s demand for the original. But they could not compete economically with lithography and photography. In the long run, the reproductive engraving was useless to art-historical scholarship. Only in the last decades has the reproductive engraving re-emerged, not as a tool but as an object of art-historical study in its own right.

Enschedé and Van Noorde’s multiple, hesitant framings of Van Eyck’s panel register the complexities of a new, relativistic approach to historical art. Historical relativism cleared the ground and in effect “called for” a modern art. Modern art, the art of Goethe’s time and beyond, will not look much like Enschedé and Van Noorde’s print, but will nevertheless be governed by a comparable historical perspectivism and by a comparable indecision – indeed persisting to this day – about whether historical art is exemplum, or document, whether it lives in a permanent present tense, or in the past. Neoclassicism, by contrast, had no doubt on this question: historical art was interesting only when beautiful. We can imagine the hesitation of Goethe, whose life bridged two eras of art, on receiving Sulpiz Boisserée’s diffident gift.

For the anecdote, see the autobiographical writings collected under the title Sulpiz Boisseré (Stuttgart, 1862), vol. 1, p. 272; or Eduard Firmenich-Richartz, Sulpiz und Melchior Boisseré als Kunsttcamler (Jena: Diederichs, 1916), p. 410. Boisseré had purchased the print only the day before from a dealer where he had seen it seven years earlier. See also the account of the episode in Sulzberger 1948, pp. 292-93.


The dimensions of the darker of the two Amsterdam impressions are 402 x 268 mm to the edge of the frame. The tipped-in print measures 313 x 180 mm.


See most recently Uwe Heckmann, Die Sammlung Boisseré: Konzeption und Rezeptionsgeschichte einer romantischen Kunstsammlung zwischen 1804 und 1827 (Munich: Fink, 2003).


Reproductions of fifteenth-century works before 1820, or so were exceedingly rare, however; see Sulzberger 1961, pp. 95-97. Karl Joseph Ignaz Mosler made line drawings after works in the Boisseré collection; Friedrich Schlegel recommended them to Goethe in 1808; Firmenich-Richartz 1916, pp. 74-77, 115-16.


13 The engraving attracted some attention in its day. Enschedé sent it to Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, who discussed it in his Journal zur Kunsthistorie 3 (1776), pp. 23-24. Murr thought that Van Eyck's painting must have been intended as a guide for an engraver! Seroux d'Agincourt published a crude, postage-stamp-sized reproduction of the painting, at that time still in private hands, in his Histoire de l'Art par les Monuments depuis sa Décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son Renouvellement au XVle siècle (Paris, 1823), vol. 6, pl. CLXIV.


15 Kees van Strien, Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travellers, 1660-1720 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), p. 217. The so-called Malbeke Madonna is known today only through copies.


17 Wurzbach 1963, p. 241, said that the sheet with the frame is usually missing, thus enabling the nineteenth-century misidentifications of the engraving as a drawing.

18 On Montfauccon, see Haskell 1993, pp. 131-44.


23 This relationship of support between the engraving system and the conceptual aims of oil painting seems not so different from Karel van Mander's paradoxical understanding
of teycken@RunWith (an art practiced by Hendrick Goltzius in the form of reproductive engraving) as the “representation of rendering” itself; see the complex arguments of Walter S. Melion, Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander’s Schilder-Boeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 43-59, esp. 45, and 102-05.

24 See the interesting analysis of Giulio Carlo Argan, “Il valore critico della ‘stampa di traduzione’ (1667), in his Studi e note dal Bramante al Canova (Rome: Bulzoni, 1970), p. 164. Argan argued that the layered networks of the linear system (“tessuto segnico”) reproduced the layering of oil paint and were thus better adapted to Venetian colorism than to Roman disegno. In the late seventeenth century, this system gave way to the totally different “maniera nera.”

25 The classical system offers both alternatives: hatching that “is” shading from one viewing distance, and “stands for” shading at another distance. Analogue reproduction will remove this power of the work to manipulate the viewer; instead, what the viewer sees is what the viewer gets.


27 Compare, for example, the Resurrection by Ugo da Carpi, B. 26, to the drawing by Raphael at Chatsworth; see Konrad Oberhuber, Roma e lo stile classico di Raffaello, exh. cat., Palazzo Te, Mantua, nos. 112-13. Not all chiaroscuro woodcuts directly reproduce drawings, however; I have no interest here in oversimplifying the question. On the early chiaroscuro woodcut, see Landau and Parshall 1994. pp. 150-54, 179-202, 274-83.


30 Ploos van Amstel made facsimiles of drawings (piattekening or actypt) from 1765 to 1787, mostly after seventeenth-century Dutch artists. Hind 1963, p. 302. For a catalogue of his prints, see Laurentius et al. 1980, pp. 125-51.

31 Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, after a drawing in the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. See Laurentius et al. 1980, no. 18.

32 On the reproduction of works by Adriaen Brouwer, for instance, see Horst Scholz, Brouwer Invent; Druckgraphische Reproduktionen des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts nach Gemälden und Zeichnungen Adriaen Brouwers (Marburg: Jonas, 1985).


34 See, for instance, the comments by Malvasia discussed by Argan 1970, pp. 138-60.

35 This motivation of the symbol is the true meaning of what is often called “disguised symbolism.”

36 Even Van Mander did not recognize her as St. Barbara; see note 3 above. Although Enschéden quoted this passage, p. 3, n. 1, it is admittedly not certain that Van Mander was referring to this painting. Some modern scholars, including Hanns Foeke (Van Mander ed. Foeke 1966, p. 408, n. 33), doubt that Van Mander was talking about the Antwerp panel. Miedema (Van Mander ed. Miedema 1994, vol. 2, Commentary, p. 211) left open the possibility that Van Mander did see this panel but misrecognized or forgot its subject. Heineken described the seated figure as the Madonna; Murr correct-
ed him, pointing cut that the palm made her a martyred saint; see notes 12 and 13 above. The first to identify the subject as St. Barbara, as Sulzberger (1948, p. 293) pointed out, was none other than Sulpir Boisserée in his diary! G.F. Waagen, Handbuch der deutschen und niederländischen Malerschulen (Stuttgart, 1862), vol. 1, p. 89, called her St. Ursula.

37 Interesting but puzzling in this context is Goethe’s account of Titian’s Madonna of S Nicolo dei Frari, which he saw at the Vatican Museums on 3 November 1786; a painting frequently reproduced in the eighteenth century. In his published travel diary, Goethe carefully described the six depicted saints but was seemingly unable to identify any of them, even St. Sebastian pierced by arrows and St. Peter holding keys. Possibly he was affecting ignorance of elementary Christian iconography in order to make a deeper point: “Wir sagen uns: hier muss, ein heiliges altes Überliefertes zum Grunde liegen, da, diese verschiedenen, unpassenden Personen zu kunstreichen und bedeutungsvoll zusammengestellt werden konnten. Wir fragen nicht nach wie und warum, wir lassen es geschehen und bewundern die unschätzbare Kunst.” Italienische Reise, Sämtliche Werke (Munich: Hanser, 1992), vol. 15, pp. 149-50.