

Italo-flammingo art: the assimilation and integration of two aesthetic styles

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The artistic influence of Italy on the art of painting in the Southern Netherlands runs like a red thread through art history. But the assimilation and integration of Italian style seldom reached the level where the Flemish character was no longer distinguishable. In the consideration of Italian and Flemish art the difference in aesthetic ideals is salient, mirroring a fundamental difference of mentality. Artists of the Southern Netherlands, who are deeply interested in and influenced by the Italian great masters, reached at best a personal mix of both aesthetics.

The influence of Italian art ranges from slavish imitations to a personal style. In the 17th century the slavish imitation is, for example, found in the so-called Caravaggisti, epigons not so much of Caravaggio as of Bartolomeo Manfredi.

On the other hand, there is the case of Theodor van Loon (1582-1649), one of many artists thus far little considered in the history of art of the Southern Netherlands. Leaving aside the dominant influence of his renowned contemporary Peter Paul Rubens, Van Loon's major source of inspiration is Italian art from the late 16th and early 17th century: Federico Barocci, Cavalier d'Arpino, Annibale and Ludovico Carracci, Caravaggio, Guido Reni and Domenichino. With these influences he created a characteristic and personal style, which combines Italian and Flemish aesthetic ideals. It is remarkable to see the similarity between his style and that of some contemporary Italian painters such as Tanzio da Varallo and Bartolomeo Cavarozzi.