

**Slide 1** *The Polish King, the Royal Academy and John Ruskin.*

*Dutch and Flemish pictures in Dulwich Picture Gallery*

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Thank you CODART for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to try out a draft of the introduction to our catalogue of Dutch & Flemish paintings at Dulwich Picture Gallery.

**Slide 2.** As you see here, there will be 4 parts to my lecture. The central theme is the place of Dutch & Flemish pictures in the collection of this Gallery in South London, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Slide 3** Here is another overview of my lecture, now presented in images:

After an introduction with facts & figures, firstly I'll discuss the relation between the Polish King and Dulwich Picture Gallery.

Secondly I'll talk about the Gallery's links with the Royal Academy. Each year pictures from the Dulwich Collection were sent to the Academy in Central London to be copied by pupils, exemplified here by two copies by John Constable; the first after a painting by Jacob van Ruisdael and the second after Aert de Gelder.

Thirdly I'll discuss the remarks that were made about the collection during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially what was written about the Dutch and Flemish pictures at Dulwich, for which the art critic John Ruskin will be used as an example.

(slide 4) As Dulwich Picture is not especially well-known internationally, I'll give you a very short introduction to the collection. Nowadays it has some six hundred and sixty (660) pictures, of which some two hundred and twenty (220), are made by Netherlandish artists. Despite being a rather small collection, the Gallery possesses numerous masterpieces (Slide 5) Here you can see some Dutch and Flemish paintings, made by Rubens, Van Dyck, Pynacker and Rembrandt. And (slide 6)

here some of the masterpieces made in other countries. (slide 7) here are some more facts. This slide shows the growth of the Dulwich collection. It was privately founded in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays the Gallery is a charity, and it is still privately funded. The founder Edward Alleyn gave a collection to Dulwich College, of which we still can identify thirty seven (37) paintings,

and of the later Cartwright bequest, almost 80. As you can see Desenfans and Bourgeois were the most important collectors with their three hundred and seventy (370) pieces. The Bourgeois Bequest to Dulwich College was the start of the gallery as it is now, as Bourgeois not only bequeathed the pictures, but he also gave money to build the gallery. **Slide 8** Here we have the founder. The actor Edward Alleyn founded a chapel, a school, 12 almshouses, and a small gallery with several series of pictures, for instance of portraits of English kings, and of Sibyls.

**Slide 9** the next benefactor was William Cartwright, another actor, who left two hundred and thirty nine (239) pictures, of which only a part is still recognisable. Very few of those pictures were Netherlandish. **Slide 10**. As examples you see here on the left a portrait of Anna of Saksen, one of the wives of William of Orange, and 3 still-lives we have attributed to Jan Frans van Son, who worked in England. **Slide 11**. And here on the right are two interiors by the painter François Ryckhals and on the left a painting by Karel Slabbaert, both from Zeeland. Were they in Cartwright's collection, because Zeeland was very near the British isles? In any case, the Cartwright pictures give us a very rare, and therefore precious insight into a modest picture collection of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in London.

**Slide 12.** Now we come to the most important collectors of the Dulwich Gallery, the painter Sir Francis Bourgeois on the left and the art dealer Noel Desenfans on the right. They were foreigners living in London, and they were not really accepted by the London high society, as they would have liked. Bourgeois came from Switzerland and Desenfans was born in Douai, France. Through art they endeavoured to improve their status in different ways. Desenfans took the young Bourgeois under his wing, and wanted him to become a painter. Indeed Bourgeois became a painter. He was even elected as a member of the Royal Academy. Moreover he was appointed as a landscape painter to king George the Third. Notwithstanding those honours Bourgeois was not really a good painter. The pair's real claim to fame however was the formation of their picture collection. **Slide 13.** In 1790 the Polish king charged Desenfans with the formation of a picture collection for Poland. In return Desenfans was made Consul-General of Poland, while Bourgeois received a Polish knighthood, hence Sir Francis Bourgeois. The archival material for these events is partly missing, and what is present is not clear for several reasons: only fragments of Desenfans' and Bourgeois' archive has survived. Moreover Poland became a part of Russia in 1795 and king Stanislaus died three years later. **Slide 14.** This really is a problem: what sort of collection did the Polish King want Desenfans to create? We do know that the

King himself had pictures hanging in his palaces and castles. Here are three such examples, one now in New York and two now in Warsaw. We also know that the king had agents working for him in several European cities. It seems that Desenfans was a special kind of agent. While the others purchased for the King separate works of art, Desenfans was to form a 'complete' collection, with pictures by all kinds of European masters. Desenfans was in an excellent position to do so in London as, at the time, just after the French Revolution, many French aristocratic collections were sent to London and sold there. However: did the King want Desenfans to form a royal collection, in addition to the existing one, or a national collection in a special, new building? Nothing is known of a special building. **Slide 15.** The only snippets of information we have so far, are from Desenfans, who says that the King wanted him '*To form a collection ... of the works of the best masters .. To promote the progress of the fine arts in Poland*'. This sounds like the collection was meant for artists to copy – to become better painters - and for the public to be elevated. Desenfans had to stop picture dealing to concentrate on the Polish collection. He spent a lot of money on the pictures, for which he never was reimbursed. It is possible that more research in Polish archives can provide answers to our questions, but I doubt it. **Slide 16.** The material left by Desenfans and Bourgeois is rather unclear, although there are at least 14 auction and other sale catalogues, at least two Inventories of their home in London and other material. So it seems that a lot is present, but it is seldom conclusive on the level of individual pictures.

From this material however three things can be concluded: 1 (First). pictures were coming and going in the Desenfans and Bourgeois house at least until 1804. That was also the case when Desenfans was supposed to have collected for the King of Poland only . 2 (Second). The pictures that were offered for sale at auction often did not sell and stayed in the collection. It seems that the same pictures were offered for sale again and again, but as dimensions were never given, we cannot be sure. 3 (Third). Until 1802 Desenfans and Bourgeois were still hoping to sell their collection as a whole, to the Russian Czar for instance. The Czar was the successor of Stanislaus August as the ruler of Poland. After 1802 they probably decided to form a new collection, now for England.

I'll show you some of the material: **Slide 17.** This is the title page of a sale catalogue of Christie's; here Dutch and Flemish painters are mentioned: Berchem, Teniers, Rubens, Van Dyck, Wouwerman and Dou, but the most famous was the Claude Lorrain with the Seaport (nowadays in the National

Gallery, London). **Slide 18** But here for the first time we also recognise a picture that is most probably the one that is still at Dulwich: *the Sampson and Dalilah* by Van Dyck, which until 1900 was considered to have been made by Rubens.

**Slide 19** Some years later, here in the *Evening Mail*, a kind of inventory was published. It seems that this newspaper wanted to advertise the private collections in London that had been recently formed. And they started with the collection of Desenfans. It is quite possible however that this publication was an initiative by Desenfans himself. Two things are striking here: 1. Firstly Bourgeois isn't mentioned at all, neither 2. is the King of Poland, while during this period Desenfans was supposed to collect for Poland only. Here in the *Evening Mail* the Desenfans collection (or was it also his stock?) is presented as that of him alone.

**Slide 20** Interestingly in the Desenfans home were several rooms dedicated to Dutch and Flemish artists. Here is the Berchem room with 15 pictures and here we have **slide 21** the Wouwerman's room with eight, the Cuyp room with twelve (12), and the Teniers room with even thirty two (32) pictures.<sup>1</sup> It is a pity that the descriptions are very vague, just as they were in the earlier sale catalogues. Very seldom can we recognise a subject, but we cannot be sure that it is the same picture as that is now at Dulwich. We do know that many people came to visit the collection, especially artists, writers and actors, but no aristocrats.

**Slide 22.** This is the title page of the so-called 'Polish' Sale in 1802, an exhibition catalogue that some months later was used as a sale catalogue. It says that it contains: 'pictures of the different schools purchased for His Majesty the Late King of Poland'. The auction was not very successful, a lot of the pictures stayed in the collection. In the introduction of this catalogue Desenfans says something very interesting, and I quote: '**every one of us is more conversant in, and better acquainted with those two schools.**' That is: everybody in London knows more about the Dutch and Flemish Schools than the Italian schools of painting. Now, in 2013, I would say, it is the other way

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<sup>1</sup> And two more Teniers pictures in the drawing-room. There was also a Vernet room, with 14 Vernets. it is very difficult to identify any picture. Is *The Stealing of the Blessing*, a composition with four figures by Vanharp DPG214, nowadays by Horst? Is *Samson betrayed by Dalila*, a composition of ten figures Rubens DPG127, now by Van Dyck? Is *A young Woman* Gerard Dow, DPG56? Is *The Fountain* by Berchem DPG166? Is the *View of Scheveling* by Wouwerman DPG? Is the *Farrier's shop* by Berchem DPG88? Is *The Frost Piece* by Teniers, DPG112?

around, and connoisseurs in London know more about Italy, France and Spain than about the Netherlandish masters. **slide 23** Notwithstanding the very lengthy descriptions in this catalogue, only 32 pictures can be identified as being in the Dulwich collection today. **Slide 24** here are the Flemish ones, with Rubens and Van Dyck and **slide 25** here the Dutch landscapes: by Cuyp, Lapp, Both and Wouwerman. **Slide 26**. And the other Dutch pictures: Aert de Gelder, Van der Werff, Ostade, and three pictures by Dou, of which one is now a Brekelenkam and one attributed to Godfried Schalcken. Anyhow, after 1802 there seems to have been a change of plan. Desenfans stopped trying to sell the pictures and started anew, this time with Bourgeois, to form a collection for England. So how Polish – and how royal - is the Dulwich Collection? As far as we know there are also pictures that were in the Desenfans collection since the 1780s, but they were not offered in the Polish sale.

That was for instance the case with the *Samson and Delilah* by Van Dyck. So the so-called Polish sale was not really the Polish sale, but also a way to get rid of unwanted pictures. **Slide 27** And also many pictures were acquired *after* 1802; they were most certainly not meant for Poland. For instance most of the pictures of Rubens, including the sketches, were purchased after 1802.

One can say that Dulwich has indeed some link with Poland and the Polish Royal Collection, but what we see now in the Dulwich Gallery was only very partly purchased for the Polish King in the 1790s.

**Slide 28.** In any case Desenfans and Bourgeois wanted to be remembered, as you see here in their mausoleum, which is part of Dulwich Picture Gallery. Their coffins are there. Their bodies are there. But what should they do with their collection? To whom or to what institution should it be left? They considered the British Museum, but they thought that to be too posh, too aristocratic. In the end they chose Dulwich College, the school in South London, probably because it already had a gallery with the pictures of Alleyn and Cartwright. They wanted the Royal Academy to supervise the care of the collection. I think that was a sensible thing to do, because: what did Dulwich College know about pictures? **Slide 29** Members of the Royal Academy had to come each year to the Gallery to look at the condition of the paintings. In return they received a dinner, or a lunch. Here you see the seating arrangement of one of these lunches. On those occasions they also selected each year the pictures that were to be copied in the Royal Academy schools. It seems even that the Bourgeois Bequest inspired the Royal Academy to start such a painting school for their pupils.

**Slide 30** In 1816 the Academy chose these pictures, on the right the Netherlandish ones and on the left the Southern schools. **Slide 31** In 1830 we know that the landscape painter John Constable was among the artists who selected the pictures to be copied. Clearly he copied the paintings as well, as can be seen in his copy after Ruisdael. **Slide 32.** Constable also studied the Aert de Gelder. He must have done that at Dulwich, as this picture never was sent to the Royal Academy (as far as we know).

**Slide 33** It is striking that the Rubens sketches were never chosen for the academy, nor the Dutch Italianate landscapists Both and Berchem.

**Slide 34.** This is a list of the pictures chosen by the independent copyists at Dulwich. You see the contrast with the Royal Academy selection. For the copyists who came to Dulwich themselves at first Murillo is the top favourite, but later Rembrandt's *Girl* takes over. It was only in the last period that Poussin was chosen, but Claude Lorrain was never studied, as the pupils of the academy had to do.

**Slide 35.** The copyists at Dulwich selected *Dutch* and Dutch Italianate landscapes by Cuyp, Hobbema, Pynacker, Both and Willem van de Velde. So there was a difference between the choice of the academic painters and the self-employed ones at Dulwich. The copyists at Dulwich had to take into account the taste of the public. **Slide 36** In any case: a lot of copies must have been made both inside the gallery itself and at the Royal Academy. Here you see a scene in the Royal academy painting school with Rembrandt's *Girl* and on the right a painting in which *Jacob's Dream* figures in Rembrandt's studio.

**Slide 37** Now we come to the writers who discuss the Dulwich Gallery. You have to realise that the Dulwich Gallery was open before there was a National Gallery on Trafalgar Square. That gallery started with only 38 pictures. As a consequence many people wrote about the Dulwich gallery and its pictures. **Slide 38.** Here are the types of publications that were written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a lot of people wrote catalogues, next to the ones that were published by the gallery staff themselves, sometimes the writers added appreciative remarks. Some people like the Berlin museum director Gustav Waagen wrote overviews of all galleries and museums in different countries, as did Johann Passavant, who was the curator of the Frankfurt gallery. Poets and painters wrote letters in abundance about the pictures in Dulwich Gallery, mostly very favourably. **Slide 39** These are the favourites of the writers, *Jacob's Dream* especially: many, many pages were written about the angels

hovering in the sky. At the time everybody assumed that it was painted by Rembrandt. Here, again a contrast: most writers were carried away by *Jacob's dream*, but it never was copied at the Royal Academy, and not many copyists did study it at Dulwich, except for Constable.

**Slide 40.** The art critic John Ruskin however was different. In contrast to the other writers he did not like the old masters, whether they were French, Italian or Dutch, and he was prepared to give his reasons. He lived near Dulwich, on Denmark Hill, so he knew the collection very well. **Slide 41** Ruskin wrote a completely different kind of publication than the other writers did: in his book *Modern Painters* he wanted to defend the painter Joseph Turner, who nowadays is considered to be one of the greatest British artists of all time, at least of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But at the time it was necessary to defend Turner. And that is what Ruskin did. **Slide 42** Here you see one of the seascapes of Joseph Turner, *The Slave Ship*, which was one of Ruskin's favourites. Conservative critics compared Turner unfavourably with the Old masters, because their pictures were more 'true to nature'. Ruskin turned the argument around. His whole book was against the Old masters, time and again he analyzed their compositions, their use of colour, their way of painting clouds or their way of making trees and shrubbery. Each time the modern painters, especially Turner, were the better painter (s) in the comparison, because the modern painters were more 'true to nature'<sup>2</sup> and because they did not use standard compositions. As examples of the work of the Old Masters Ruskin uses pictures that had been critically acclaimed, **slide 43** as this one by Aelbert Cuyp. Here is a part of the eulogy by William Hazlitt, who really let himself get carried away by the subtle colours of Cuyp; he compares the colours in the sky with the down on an unripe nectarine, **Slide 44** Ruskin however says that the sky indeed is like an unripe nectarine, and he adds: '**it is exceedingly unlike a sky**'. And that is how Ruskin works: each time he turns the previous arguments around, in favour of Turner. **Slide 45** Interestingly in his earlier work Turner himself had looked very, very carefully at the old masters of all European schools. I show you here his inspiration after some Dutch masters. This was a commission to form a pair with this Willem van de Velde picture; **Slide 46** here Turner had looked at Aelbert Cuyp and David Teniers **Slide 47** here at Rembrandt. Now we go to a possible **Slide 49** Dulwich inspiration, maybe Turner's *Jessica* has something to do with Rembrandt's *Girl*, but perhaps a better, more convincing case can

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<sup>2</sup> Clearly what Ruskin considered to be 'true to nature' was different from what the other critics thought.

be made for this **Slide 49** Dulwich Bakhuizen as an inspiration for Turner. Again, it seems that there are differences in the ways authors react and how artists are inspired by Netherlandish paintings

**Slide 50** What I have told you here is a part of my introduction to the catalogue of Dutch and Flemish Pictures, on which I am working with Michiel Jonker, and which will be discussed in the beginning of December at Dulwich at another CODART meeting. **Slide 51** Here are some of the bones of contention and here are **slide 52** some other pictures we would like to discuss there.

#### **Publications:**

Abbreviations

DPG = Dulwich Picture Gallery

exh. = exhibition

-K. Bomford and G. Waterfield (eds.), *Treasures of a Polish King. Stanislaus Augustus as Patron and Collector*, London 1992 [exh. DPG]

-I.A.C. Dejardin, D. Juszczak & H. Małachowicz, *Dulwich Picture Gallery: The Polish Connection*, London 2009 [exh. DPG]

-N. Desenfans, *A Descriptive Catalogue (with remarks and anecdotes never before published in English) of some Pictures, Of the different schools, Purchased For His Majesty The late King of Poland; Which will be exhibited early in 1802*, (...), 2 vols., London 1802 (2<sup>d</sup> edition, revised and corrected)

-[W. Hazlitt,] *Sketches of the principal picture- galleries in England. With a criticism on "Marriage a-la-mode"*, London 1824

-N. Kalinsky and G. Waterfield a.o., *Mr. Cartwright's Pictures. A Seventeenth Century Collection* [exh. DPG 1987-8]

-A. Reid and R. Maniura (eds.), *Edward Alleyn. Elizabethan Actor, Jacobean Gentleman*, London 1994 [exh. DPG 1994-5]

-A graduate of Oxford [J. Ruskin], *Modern Painters: their superiority in the art of Landscape painting to all the ancient masters proved by examples of the True, the Beautiful, and the Intellectual from the works of Modern artists, especially from those of J.M.W. Turner, Esq. RA*, London 1843

-D. Solkin (ed.), with contributions from G. Faroult a.o., *Turner and the Masters*, London 2009 [exh. Tate Britain, London / Galeries nationales (Grand Palais), Paris / Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid 2009-2010]

-G. Waterfield, *Rich summer of art: a Regency picture collection seen through Victorian eyes*, London 1988 [exh. DPG]

-G. Waterfield, "That White-Faced Man": Sir Francis Bourgeois, 1756-1811', *Turner Studies. His Art & Epoch* 9/2 (1989), pp. 36-48

-G. Waterfield and Chr. Brown, *Collection for a King: Old Master Paintings from the Dulwich Picture Gallery*, London 1985 [exh. DPG/National Gallery of Art, Washington / County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1985-6; see also Waterfield/Brown 1994]

-G. Waterfield and Chr. Brown, *Kolekcja dla Króla. Treasures of a Polish King: Stanislaus Augustus as Patron and Collector*, Warsaw 1992 [exh. Warsaw, Royal Castle]

-G. Waterfield and Chr. Brown, *Collection for a King: Old Master Paintings from the Dulwich Picture Gallery*, London 1994<sup>2</sup> [see Waterfield/Brown 1985<sup>1</sup>]