

Dr. Richard Johns, curator of prints and drawings, National Maritime Museum

This year's congress began, for me, when I boarded the ferry at Harwich late on Saturday evening bound for the Hoek van Holland. The North Sea is often surprisingly calm, and on a good night the ferry is by far the best way reach the Continent from England. The *Stena Hollandica* is a new passenger ship, offering a comfortable and brightly lit, if fairly banal experience. Nonetheless, the crossing itself does evoke a sense (in my imagination at least) of the long journeys made by so many Netherlandish artists during the seventeenth century, whose endeavours helped to transform the look of British art. Continuing my journey by train to Apeldoorn, I joined a growing crowd of Codart colleagues at the railway station for an enjoyable and, for me, much anticipated visit to Het Loo Palace.

Highlights of the first full day of the congress included Peter Hecht's overview of the periodic rehang of the permanent collection at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, which he has curated. Peter's approach to the daunting task of marshalling more than five centuries of western art raised a few eyebrows around the hall – not because of the seemingly conservative approach to the new displays he described, but because of the apparently minor role played by the Museum's own curators in such a major rehang. I very much look forward to seeing the new display when I am next in Rotterdam. Esmée Quodbach and Paul Knolle then began to explore the congress theme; followed by a very good talk by Everhard Korthals Altes, co-curator of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe's illuminating exhibition showcasing the artistic career of Nicolaas Verkolje. Both the exhibition and the curator's overview were a great introduction to a painter and printmaker about whom I previously knew nothing.

The day was punctuated by crusty rolls and spring sunshine in the Museum courtyard, before discussions moved at the Market of Ideas. In previous years I have found these short, small group discussions a little disappointing – if only because the time allotted to each session was rarely enough for anything more than the briefest exchange of ideas. This year, however, it seems that CODART members are more familiar with the format and the opportunities it brings for concise, focused discussion. The first session on my itinerary considered the difficult balance between the growing need for museums and galleries to stage crowd-pulling, moneymaking shows, with the curatorial desire for research-led projects that may attract fewer visitors. This relatively modern phenomenon has a greater impact, it seems, on the programming decisions of larger institutions, and it was agreed that the problems and opportunities associated with the modern museum 'blockbuster' will be with us for some time to come. Next stop was a session convened by Karen Hearn, focusing on the migration of Netherlandish artists. The ensuing discussion could easily have continued long into the night. Thankfully it didn't though, as the congress dinner was, as always, a treat for all who attended. The highlights and twilights of Dutch art were once again the subject of much discussion on Tuesday morning, which also signalled the end of my congress. As others headed for the region's castles, I set off the Hoek, and home.

With thanks to the hosts and organisers of another successful CODART.