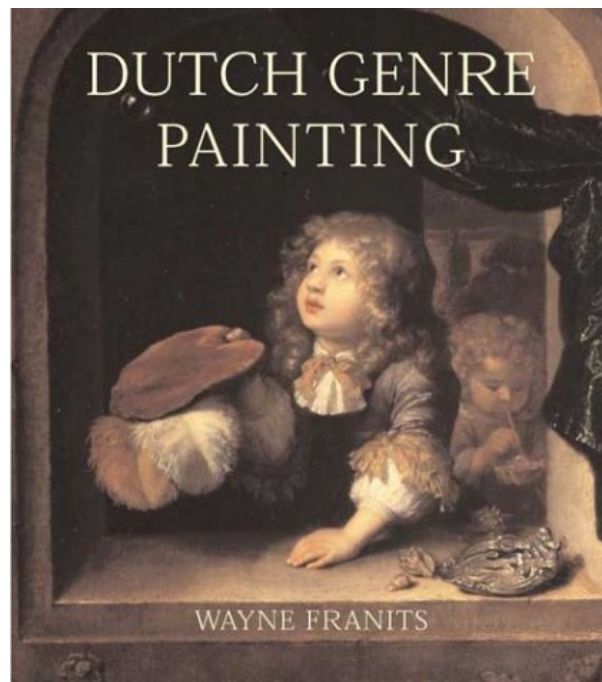
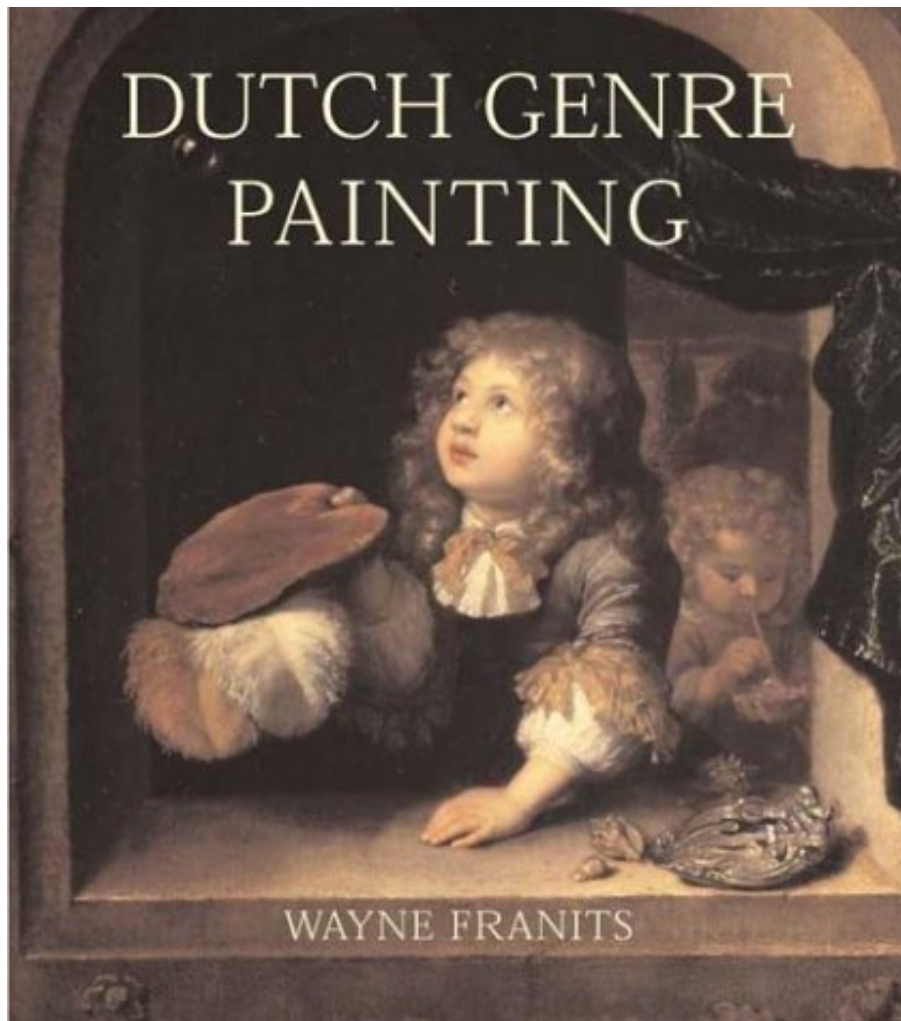


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From Publishers Weekly

This lavishly produced book attempts to explicate the mysterious allure of 17th-century Dutch genre pictures, which were painted most famously by Johannes Vermeer. Syracuse professor Franits frames these works in a historical context to demonstrate how audiences of the period would have interpreted them. The author explains how many of the objects portrayed in these works had coded meanings that are lost on modern audiences. For example, birds, oyster shells and cats were widely recognized as symbols of sex, while subject poses that look awkward to contemporary eyes were actually considered the height of dignified comportment by Dutch art patrons. Franits also traces the history of Holland and the development of its art, arguing that the two are closely linked. His argument is that, as the country became wealthier, the subject matter of its paintings became increasingly refined, changing from satirical portraits of raucous, lazy peasants to elegant images of upper classes at play. In Franits's opinion, both portrayals are constructed types, and neither reflects the reality of Dutch life in the 17th century. To back up his thesis, Franits has done impressive research into the culture of the period, examining its literature, songs, guides of behavior and poems. At the same time, he doesn't neglect the paintings' formal elements, deftly analyzing the artists' influences, color schemes and use of tools like camera obscura. As convincing as Franits's interpretation is, it breaks down when applied to the work of two masters, Jan Steen and Vermeer. To Franits's credit, he acknowledges this discrepancy, giving the inexplicability of artistic genius its due. 230 b/w & 100 color illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

A lavishly illustrated study of the evolution of genre painting throughout the Dutch Golden Age, this book features exquisite works by Vermeer, Steen, de Hooch, Dou, and others.

About the Author

Wayne Franits is professor of fine arts at Syracuse University. He is the author of several books and many articles and reviews on Dutch art of the Golden Age.

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The appealing genre paintings of great seventeenth-century Dutch artists - Vermeer, Steen, de Hooch, Dou and others - have long enjoyed tremendous popularity. This comprehensive book explores the evolution of genre painting throughout the Dutch Golden Age, beginning in the early 1600s and continuing through the opening years of the next century. Wayne Franits, a well-known scholar of Dutch genre painting, offers a wealth of information about these works as well as about seventeenth-century Dutch culture, its predilections and its prejudices. The author approaches genre paintings from a variety of perspectives, examining their reception among contemporary audiences and setting the works in their political, cultural and economic contexts. The works emerge as distinctly conventional images, Franits shows, as genre artists continually replicated specific styles, motifs and a surprisingly restricted number of themes over the course of several generations. Luxuriously illustrated and with a full representation of the major artists and the cities where genre painting flourished, this book will delight students, scholars and general readers alike.

- Sales Rank: #2668297 in Books
- Published on: 2004-07-11
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 1.18" h x 9.92" w x 11.50" l, 4.73 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 320 pages

From Publishers Weekly

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