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This Was Tomorrow: Pieter Aertsen's *Meat Stall* as Contemporary Art

Charlotte Houghton

How can the individual work, which positivistic . . . history has determined in a chronological series and thereby reduced to the status of a "fact," be brought back into its historical-sequential relationship and thereby once again be understood as an "event"?—Hans Robert Jauss¹

Art history books are filled with images that were novel in their day, and one perennial activity of scholarship has been to describe what constituted the new in a given image or era. Newness described, however, is not newness experienced. How can we reenter imaginatively the mental frame in which an old master painting was the latest salvo of contemporary art? The attempt to re-create an image's original viewing context through historical research can provide crucial information but must inevitably be incomplete. To catch a glimpse of what a now-venerable work looked like on its first day requires both a willful forgetting of what came next and a conscious letting go of the search for definitive answers. One great pleasure of confronting contemporary art is the awareness that the work is not yet burdened by consensus—its present is fluid, its future unknown, its implications still unformed. It is not clear which elements "mean" and which do not; everything (potentially) signifies. Each viewer faces the contemporary artifact alone, without a safety net, intrigued or offended or exhilarated according to individual predisposition and tolerance for the uncircumscribed. In approaching a contemporary picture, few would question that the effort necessary to construct meaning from it is part of the pleasure of experiencing it. The task I set myself as a historian is to render the interpretative limits of artwork of the past similarly unpredictable—to return to an old chestnut something of its original capacity to startle.

In this article, I undertake to convey the sense of newness, of sixteenth-century contemporaneity, that informed the reception of Pieter Aertsen's *Meat Stall*, painted in Antwerp in 1551 (Fig. 1).² In this image, Aertsen turned a millennium of artistic convention inside out by bringing objects forward to dominate human actors: the picture's vivid display of freshly butchered meat (a subject unthinkable previously in panel painting) all but obscures a tiny background scene of the Flight into Egypt (Fig. 2), and the largest person on view is smaller than a sausage. Art historians have granted *The Meat Stall* canonical status as the initiating work in not just one but several genres: market paintings, "inverted" morality pictures, paradoxical encomiums, and—ultimately—the entire field of modern still life, in which role it enjoys a half page (color) in H. W. Janson's *History of Art*.³ This notoriety, however, carries disadvantages. The image is complimented as ordinary but tamed. Indeed, it is impossible for a specialist to approach *The Meat Stall* today without an awareness of its niche in the tradition and the formal trajectories that proceed from it. As a consequence, it is routinely treated as the first installment

in one or another artistic genealogy.⁴ But, like the rogue outsider at the head of many a now-distinguished family tree, *The Meat Stall* has a story far more colorful than that of its offspring. Accordingly, I will consider this picture when it was—emphatically—alone of its kind.

Aertsen's painting has generated many (often conflicting) art historical interpretations. Some have contended that its subject matter is resolutely secular, while others have read in it a sacred, indeed, Eucharistic message.⁵ While many have argued that its tone is moralizing, a few have described it as unabashedly festive, even Rabelaisian.⁶ Scholars have found sources for its imagery in authors as diverse as Pliny, Desiderius Erasmus, Saint Augustine, Martial, Juvenal, and Saint Luke.⁷ One reason that *The Meat Stall* can support such varying interpretations may be the total absence of surviving documentation concerning its original function or meaning. No records have come to light concerning its patronage. No inventories or eyewitness accounts offer the slightest clue about its initial location. On the other hand, visual evidence attests to the painting's immediate success: at least four virtually identical versions are extant, located today in Raleigh, North Carolina (Fig. 1), Uppsala (Fig. 3), Amsterdam (Fig. 4), and Maastricht (Fig. 5).⁸ While comparative scientific analysis may one day further clarify their relationship, visual examination indicates a similarity of facture suggesting near-contemporaneous production for at least three.⁹ *The Meat Stall* thus appears to have generated additional orders for Aertsen; in any case, it coincided with a turning point in his career. When he painted it, Aertsen was over forty and had been a guild member for sixteen years.¹⁰ Yet only four works can be securely situated in his oeuvre before *The Meat Stall*, while close to fifty are recorded or extant from after it.¹¹

The Meat Stall represented more than a new initiative in Aertsen's career; it was a radical departure in art making altogether. In an era when an artwork's valuation often hinged on the subtlety of its dialogue with convention, *The Meat Stall's* reception was predicated instead on the way it broke the rules, confounded expectation, even irreverently thumbed its nose at social and artistic pieties. At a time when artworks fulfilled a relatively definable array of functions, this picture correlated comfortably with none of them. For a work of its importance (a large-scale panel painting), its reference system appears singularly and explicitly topical. I will explore each of these facets of *The Meat Stall* in historical context below.

Historical analysis, however, is an extended, painstaking, and primarily verbal process. Its incremental nature is inadequate to my primary purpose: to convey a visceral experience of *The Meat Stall's* sixteenth-century impact. My strategy, therefore, is to disrupt the models that ordinarily structure its viewing and substitute for them one that can lend more immediate insight into how *The Meat Stall* affected its first



1 Pieter Aertsen, *A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms*, 1551. Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from Wendell and Linda Murphy and various donors, by exchange



2 Detail of Fig. 1 with the Flight into Egypt



3 Aertsen, *Butcher's Stall*, 1551.
Uppsala University Art Collections



4 Aertsen, *The Meat Stall*, 1551? Amsterdam, private collection (photo: courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art)



5 Aertsen, *Meat Stall with Flight into Egypt, 1551?* Maastricht, Bonnefantenmuseum (photo: courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art)

audience in 1551. To accomplish this, I will employ as an analogue an aggressively novel work from a very different era: Richard Hamilton's Pop icon, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (Fig. 6).¹² I will argue below that *The Meat Stall*, much like Hamilton's collage, combined formal transgression with radical displacement of polite subject matter to satirize the prevailing condition of elite art production. Like the later collage, Aertsen's image made liberal use of topical reference to evoke the disconcerting pace of change in its society. Like Hamilton's picture, *The Meat Stall* is structured, through a profusion of oddly juxtaposed objects and an ironic tone, deliberately to frustrate unitary reading. To understand these aspects of Aertsen's image, however, requires a level of cultural and social competence concerning Antwerp in 1551 comparable to the knowledge of twentieth-century England and North America that informed reception of Hamilton's collage. Such competence is thickly layered, as a look at Hamilton's work will demonstrate.

Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing? was created for the poster and catalogue that accompanied *This Is Tomorrow*, an exhibition of mixed-media artwork held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in August and September of 1956.¹³ Initially regarded by some as a "flaunting of the coarsest, most despicable aspects of American-influenced culture, the very antithesis of fine art,"¹⁴ by 1989 it had assumed its own honored position in Janson as the inaugurating work of Pop art.¹⁵ Future catalogues of the canon will routinely cite the importance of Hamilton's achievement. But how much of this collage's impact will remain perceptible when the cultural valence of its subject matter is lost and when the preoccupations it responded to no longer matter? Hamilton's image drew on sophisticated—yet highly contingent—realms of knowledge. His audience knew that the Ford emblem belonged on cars, not lampshades; that *Young Romance* was a comic book cover,

not an artwork suitable for enlargement or framing; and that the display of these things in this fashion was a deliberate artistic malapropism. Hamilton's viewers understood that the Tootsie Roll Pop and the comment "ordinary cleaners reach only this far" slyly evoked Freudian psychology. They lived with an accelerating technology that put television in their living rooms and made *The Jazz Singer* of 1927, on the movie marquee outside, already an anachronism. These accretive subject matters coexisted in the image without direct or sequential relationship—Hamilton himself called his composition "tabular"—yet their juxtaposition revealed them as interconnected strands of a larger semiotic web.¹⁶

The Hamilton collage was equally and inseparably innovative in its form. Its disjointed and miscellaneous assembly of mass-produced magazine advertising cutouts mocked the personal signature gesture (the raw contact of psyche and canvas) that defined high art in 1956. Indeed, the only seemingly gestural imagery in it appears (as Jackson Pollock's drip paintings began) on the ground—but here only as a floor covering to be trampled on.¹⁷ *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* thus proposed an impudent alternative to angst-ridden American Abstract Expressionism. London art viewers recognized that this diminutive collage both illuminated the condition of consumer capitalism and challenged the dominant discourse of Western art.¹⁸

If an image's significations, however, are thoroughly embedded in its immediate cultural milieu and moment, what happens to it as a work of art as its resonances fade? What critical mass of cultural knowledge enables *Just What Is It . . .* to work at all? To look at Hamilton's collage from a distance of forty-eight years is already to sense the world's—and one's own—grasp of its allusions faltering. Yet in this early stage of obsolescence, its qualities of radical modernity and surprise remain accessible.

As I discuss individual aspects of Aertsen's work below, I ask



6 Richard Hamilton, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* 1956. Tübingen, Kunsthalle, Collection G. F. Zundel (© 2003 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York / DACS, London)

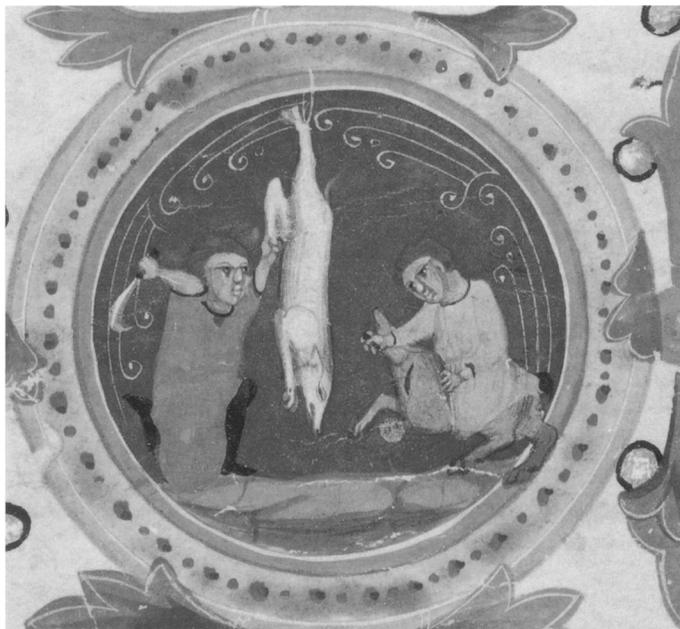
the reader to borrow the viewing mode in which Hamilton's collage makes sense and approach *The Meat Stall* with it. Take no component of the picture for granted. Allow its seemingly disconnected, even mismatched parts to coexist without forcing them into tidy resolution. Aertsen's image is filled with references to specific persons, events, and artworks, whose cultural resonances (as those in the collage) are densely matted. My narrative will address the picture's visual shock; its references to butchers, shady real estate deals, and local Antwerp figures; and its own intentional breaches of then-prevailing artistic practice. Throughout, I will attempt to show how these diverse subjects inform and illuminate each other. I must state at the outset, however, that my account will be fragmentary. I have tracked down some of *The Meat Stall*'s many referents, but others have eluded me. Still, the implications of these individual elements are far-reaching and interconnected. Within *The Meat Stall* each carries something of the significance, for example, of Hamilton's Ford logo. An explication of his collage based largely on research into this one motif would necessarily be lopsided and incomplete, but it would also be revealing. It would touch (among other things) upon the centrality of the automobile in mid-twentieth century Western society; corporate strategies of yearly obsolescence propelling style change and increased revenues; the general speeding up of modern life; the imbrication of the

petroleum industry in a global economy; and the infiltration of Europe by American brand-name goods. While none of these defines the collage's meaning, all nevertheless figure as implicit subject matters whose resonances, in turn, overlap with those of other elements in the image. Similarly, my discussion of individual motifs in Aertsen's picture will shed light on larger issues that informed its reception.

Moreover, as in *Just What Is It . . .*, *The Meat Stall*'s multiple semiotic units reside together in a manner that is anything but seamless. There is an additive quality to their arrangement (and to their treatment in this essay) that parallels Hamilton's "tabular" pictorial strategy. This compositional patchwork allowed for myriad possibilities of overall interpretation and placed the task of assembling meaning from *The Meat Stall*'s disparate parts squarely on the viewer.¹⁹ Yet for those who opened themselves to the encounter, it offered wide-ranging and unexpected insights into many aspects of (then) modern life. In my discussion below, I will approach the picture in the order in which I suspect, for the sixteenth-century viewer, its surprises unfolded.

Meat

What first arrests attention in Aertsen's image is the meat. Great bloody hunks of it press outward from the picture plane, impinging on audience space with carcass parts and



7 *December*, from a missal, 14th century. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library ms M. 511, fol. 6v, detail

dripping viscera—a pig’s body, cleaved in half and gutted; a marbled haunch; a lung strung up by a ragged windpipe. Just below, a freshly skinned ox head, looking chillingly alive, stares reproachfully at the viewer. The effect of abundant raw flesh is intensified by Aertsen’s repeated use of red around the image: the painted post, the roof tiles and brick walls, the cloak on the bending figure’s torso (itself eerily liver-shaped)—all conspire to heighten the presence of meat, even where it is absent. Aertsen portrayed the properties of the animal flesh itself in exquisite sensory detail: the translucence of tripe extruding slime; the soft, bloody muscle of a severed joint; the silken shimmer of cooling, just congealing animal fat, contrasted with the chalkiness of rendered suet.

It would seem that any account of *The Meat Stall* must first confront this emphatic subject matter—both the astonishing attention to its handling and its specific associations in historical context. Yet, curiously, scholars discussing the picture have tended to sidestep the “meatness” of this image.²⁰ Rather than confront the insistent materiality to which Aertsen devoted so much of his time and skill, writers typically offer a minimal description of the overall scene, then quickly move into subtextual realms. In effect, they treat the entire visual aspect of the painting as mere allegorical veneer. The result has been to focus art historical analysis on hermeneutic transactions taking place offstage, outside the picture. I, too, will proceed soon enough to discuss associative material beyond the borders of the panel, but first it seems appropriate to honor its sensory level, which clearly was so important to the artist.

The Meat Stall is a synesthetic banquet that invokes not just vision but also taste, smell, and touch. To keep one’s eyes on the picture is to feel one’s skin implicated in the process as well, which may be why some viewers—professional as well as lay—are inclined so swiftly to look away. In savoring painting, it is one affair to submit oneself imaginatively to the tactile

values of Gerard Terborch’s satins and silks, to the velvety petals of Jan Brueghel’s irises, or to the downy ermine that edges a van Eyck cloak. It is quite another to probe the surfaces of Aertsen’s display—the rubbery furrows and protuberances of gelatinous guts and organs, the clamminess (or worse, lingering warmth) of freshly butchered meat. These are not sensations that are normally aestheticized, or on which viewers would ordinarily linger. The longer one dwells on them, the more discomforts they evoke, moving beyond the physical to the psychological—from that unblinking oxen eye, which seems to accuse the viewer (me, you) of complicity in its dismemberment, into an anthropomorphic territory of disturbing identification. It is far less threatening to study the memento mori in all manner of arcane languages than to be reminded, somatically, of the death of the flesh before one’s eyes.

Admittedly, meat stuffs in this form and profusion would have been a familiar sight in sixteenth-century Antwerp, one of the northern epicenters of what nutritional historians call “carnivorous Europe” to describe a two-hundred-year period of highly elevated (and virtually universal) urban meat consumption.²¹ Forthright display of body parts was common practice in the stalls of early modern butchers, who placed heads, entrails, and trotters on open view, for purchase by consenting consumers.²² In the butchers’ hall, such objects would be viewed without a second thought. It was neither this subject matter per se nor the frankness of its exhibition that would have shocked an audience in 1551. Rather, it was its utterly anomalous—indeed, unthinkable—locus: within a picture frame.

Before *The Meat Stall*, raw meat had never appeared in panel painting. To be sure, seasonal slaughtering received some attention in the calendar pages of missals and books of hours (Fig. 7),²³ and the occasional secular manuscript illustrated butchers at work (Figs. 8, 9).²⁴ In these images, however, meat in itself is of little interest to the artists. Schematic and reduced in scale, it appears merely as an occupational attribute. Until Aertsen’s picture debuted in 1551, raw meat had not received even this cursory attention in panel painting, an elite medium devoted primarily to the human figure.²⁵ Panel paintings of the size and quality of *The Meat Stall* were expensive objects commissioned by wealthy individuals or corporate bodies, either religious or secular. These high-end artworks usually depicted religious or historical scenes and portraits, although increasingly in the mid-sixteenth century they might also be vertiginous, imaginary world-landscape views or moral satires (of, for example, unequal lovers). Material objects in all these works appeared as props or attributes subordinate to human activity—and even then, raw meat was not among them.

For Aertsen’s audience, therefore, the foregrounding of colossal butchered parts constituted a jarring artistic disconnect—a breach of propriety equivalent to that of Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup cans in 1962. In both cases, the objects at issue were mundane and inoffensive in themselves, but their sudden appropriation of the picture field within elite media proved disturbing. Today, of course, meat has appeared, famously, from the work of Rembrandt and the Carracci to that of Chaim Soutine, Francis Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Hermann Nitsch. Each new represen-



8 *Butcher at Work*, from Rabanus Maurus, *De rerum natura*, 1023. Montecassino, Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale MS Cod. Casin. 132, fol. 352, detail

tation, whether or not the artist consciously so intends, becomes a commentary on the tradition of meat's imaging and a *paragone* with important artists of the past. A long and distinguished line of artworks authorizes and naturalizes the subject matter.

In 1551, however, there was nothing to prepare Aertsen's audience for his exuberant, large-scale portrayal of meat in all its bloody materiality. Moreover, Aertsen's viewers had never seen an image that so relentlessly privileged *things*, while it so diminished the prominence of human figures. For all the subsequent art histories that have proclaimed *The Meat Stall* the first still life of modern times, this genre simply did not exist—was not a concept—in 1551, and this picture wasn't one.²⁶

It is important to note, too, that because the picture was not a still life, the items in it retained their fullest specificity—in other words, they had not yet become generic “objects,” a class of inanimate articles that would become the subject matter for a definable branch of painting. It was not “a meat picture.” The resonances that Aertsen's meat evoked in his audience came not from the realm of art—as, for instance, Francis Bacon's *Head Surrounded by Sides of Beef* resonates at least as strongly with Rembrandt as with the packinghouse—but rather from other areas of life. And in 1551, one set of associations this image offered Aertsen's viewers was extremely topical. Meat was then at the center of a heated legal and economic contest, which, in turn, exemplified broader civic tensions. These social and political resonances therefore provided at least one starting point for the audience in parsing meaning from the picture.



9 The butcher Hans Lengenfelder at work, from Hausbuch der Mendelschen Zwölfbrüderstiftung, 2nd half of the 15th century. Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek, Amb. 317.2°, fol. 59v

Butchers

In Antwerp in 1551, meat products could be obtained only through face-to-face negotiation with a member of the city's butchers' guild, the *Vleeschouwers Ambacht*. One of them appears at the right in Aertsen's image, wearing the red tunic and knife block that identified his trade.²⁷ The *Vleeschouwers Ambacht* was one of the oldest and most respected of the city's organizations.²⁸ Its wealth and status depended on three things: its monopoly on the sale of meat, its limited membership (by law, to only sixty-two butchers), and its unusually close relation to the Habsburg central government. The guild's exclusive right to sell meat in Antwerp had been granted by the dukes of Brabant before 1250,²⁹ and their 1354 charter from Duke Jan III put this traditional monopoly in writing.³⁰ It also extended to the butchers the extraordinary right to close their corporation, rendering membership strictly hereditary.³¹ The internal statute mandating this was couched in fitting terms: the trade passed literally “by the blood.”³² Butcher wealth was thus concentrated within a small number of families that frequently intermarried.³³ Land transfers attest to the affluent homes of butchers,³⁴ many of whom amassed sizable pasture tracts in Oosterwaele, a low-lying area shielded by dikes just outside the city walls, along the Schelde River.³⁵ The butchers' status was elevated,

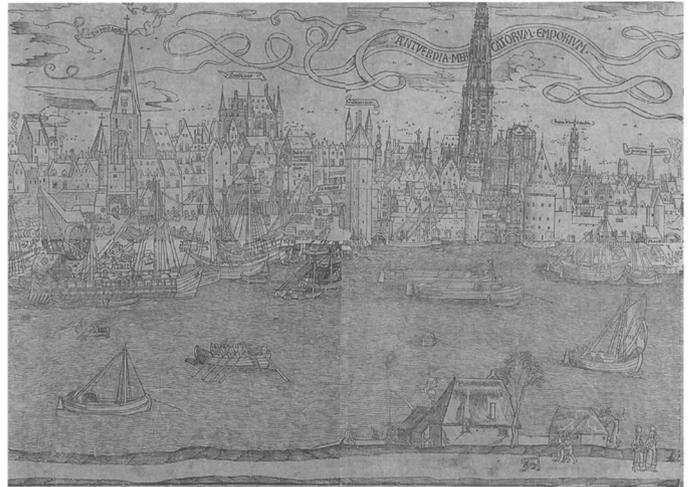


10 Vleeshuis, Antwerp (photo: Stadsarchief Antwerpen)

furthermore, because of their protection by the Habsburg court. While the operations of most guilds were subject to municipal oversight, the Vleeschouwers' charter made them liege to the dukes of Brabant, whose title, by 1551, had devolved on the Holy Roman emperor, Charles V of Spain.³⁶

The Vleeschouwers' prominence in Antwerp was most palpable in their extraordinary hall, the Vleeshuis (Fig. 10). Opened in 1503 to meet the needs of a growing city, its four-plus-story height was accentuated by slender corner towers, while its footprint (154 by 69 feet) was five times that of the hall that preceded it.³⁷ In hiring the region's most eminent architect, Herman de Waghemakere de Oude, the guild clearly aimed to construct a modern architectural landmark, one that could both confirm and advance its civic status.³⁸ Until the new city hall was built in 1565, the Vleeshuis was Antwerp's largest and most magnificent secular building, an urban reference point second only to the Onze Lieve Vrouw Kerk (now the cathedral). In a 1515 city view (Fig. 11), it soars above the skyline (at center left).³⁹ The hall, moreover, served a variety of populations. Its sumptuously appointed upper stories accommodated guild business and social functions.⁴⁰ Because of its stylish interior and large wall areas, it was also for a half century a central space for Antwerp's international luxury trade in tapestries.⁴¹ Most importantly and publicly, it was the city's single venue for the sale of meat.

From 1503 to 1551, while Antwerp's population doubled to 100,000, the number of butchers' stalls remained fixed.⁴² The Vleeschouwers' connection to the emperor lent them prestige, and their modern hall advertised their success. With a closed membership feeding a rapidly increasing (and meat-



11 *Harbor View of Antwerp*, 1515. Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus / Stedelijk Prentenkabinet, collection Prentenkabinet

hungry) population, the butchers might have anticipated a healthy share in Antwerp's growing prosperity. Instead, they encountered unexpected problems. Floods in 1530, 1542, and 1551 devastated their pastures, resulting in heavy imposts for reclamation and dike repair.⁴³ In 1542, the city's massive rewalling project precipitated a new tax on meat, payable per head of livestock by the butcher, who was left to recoup it in the marketplace.⁴⁴ The war declared between the Habsburg central government and France in 1551 only heightened anxiety and augured still higher taxes.

These problems were eclipsed, however, by another that escalated to a crisis in 1551: a direct attack on the Vleeschouwers' ancient monopoly on meat. For generations, meat sellers from outlying towns had agitated to penetrate the city's market.⁴⁵ In the late 1540s, emboldened by Antwerp's growth, a group of these "outside butchers" (*buitenbeenhouwers*) organized to pursue their goals formally. In December 1549, they filed suit in city court to force an opening of the trade.⁴⁶ For the Vleeschouwers, facing the threat of lower prices, reduced business, and the rendering of their ducal privileges and status virtually meaningless, this was a matter of commercial life or death. They vigorously contested the suit. After many months, they secured a favorable judgment from the city.⁴⁷

But to the guild's chagrin, the affair did not end there. The outside butchers took an appeal to Charles V.⁴⁸ At first glance this might seem a safe venue for the Vleeschouwers, who traded, after all, under ducal charter. As guild members were all too aware, however, the appeal increased their peril. Eighty years earlier a prior duke—Charles the Bold—had briefly allowed increased access for the *buitenbeenhouwers* in the city.⁴⁹ Though this was reversed after just three years, the outside butchers in the current suit claimed this ducal initiative from 1469 as precedent. As it happened, rather than rule in the Vleeschouwers' favor, the current duke called for an official inquest into the matter, with a hearing in September 1551.⁵⁰ Pieter Aertsen must have been acutely aware of the Vleeschouwers' plight, for his home and studio opened directly onto the Ossenmarkt, where the butchers traded their cattle.⁵¹ The guild's state of anxiety was destined to be pro-

tracted; litigation on the issue remained pending until 1554, leaving the corporation's future in limbo for years.⁵²

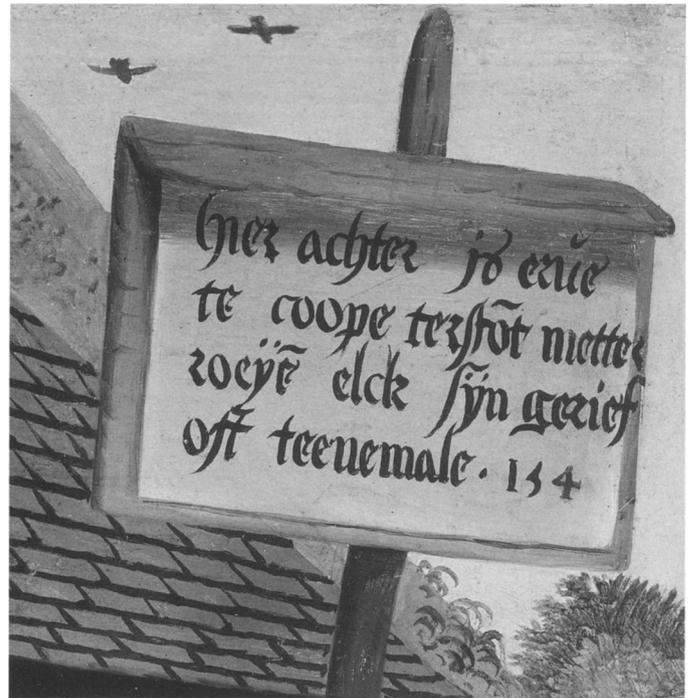
The Vleeschouwers' most implacable adversary, however, was not a cartel of suburban meat cutters, nor even a potentially fickle ducal court. It was the deeper metamorphosis at work in Antwerp's urban economy. This raised their predicament from the particular to the emblematic.

In the decades following 1501, when the first Portuguese spice ships arrived in Antwerp from the Indies, the city had been rapidly transformed from a regional trading center to the leading northern port in global exchange—a hub especially of wool, spice, and metal traffic.⁵³ By the 1540s, massive immigration in response to economic growth had led to a cycle of real estate and public works development—including a full set of new defensive walls—that drove land prices up sharply, yet benefited few.⁵⁴ To finance its projects the city had to raise money by all available means or face bankruptcy.⁵⁵ It sold municipal property, took enormous loans, and raised taxes.⁵⁶ To make matters worse, the developer in charge of these projects, Gilbert van Schoonbeke, bargained with Habsburg authorities to run his own materials and supply industries outside the territory of Antwerp, and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of its trade guilds.⁵⁷ These traditional bastions of craft production therefore suffered enormous urban tax burdens while being deprived of the direct economic benefits of growth.

Increasingly, the interests of individuals and groups with significant local investments, such as retail merchants and food producers (brewers, butchers, fat traders), diverged from those of financiers and international merchants.⁵⁸ The Vleeschouwers marketed goods for local consumption, based in an agrarian economy. The meat and animal byproducts they produced were perishables, unfit for long-distance trade; they were not among the items bought low and sold high in international markets.⁵⁹ Moreover, despite the butchers' sizable landholdings, the sixteenth-century speculative real estate boom in Antwerp passed them by. Besides being situated outside the city walls, their tracts in Oosterwaele were subject to frequent flooding, and therefore unsuitable for urban building.⁶⁰ These, then, did not figure in the creation of wealth from metropolitan growth that made developers rich. Finally, the suit to break the Vleeschouwers' monopoly fit into a pattern of assaults on traditional guild prerogatives, which appeared to be ever more expendable within a system of shifting economic and social values. The very growth that once had promised the Vleeschouwers increased prosperity gradually undermined their traditional civic status.

Real Estate

Trade guilds were not the only interest groups threatened by modern developments in Antwerp.⁶¹ Many sectors of the population shared the anxiety generated by the alarming pace of urban land speculation, and Aertsen took on this issue in *The Meat Stall* as well. In its upper right corner appears a wooden placard to which is affixed a handwritten sign (Fig. 12). Translated from the Flemish, its text reads: "behind here are 154 rods of land for sale immediately, either by the rod or all at once, according to your convenience."⁶² Represented on the land behind the sign is a tiny scene of the Virgin Mary giving alms of bread to a beggar boy during the



12 Detail of Fig. 1 with the sign at upper right

Flight into Egypt (Fig. 2). This modest act of Christian charity is dwarfed by the profusion of rich foodstuffs that fills the foreground frame. Scholars discussing the sign have agreed, for the most part, that it functioned as a metaphoric commentary on this scene: the placard warns that a society that places too much value on material gain sacrifices its spiritual wealth.⁶³ In 1989 Matt Kavalier offered a local variant on such readings: that the sign referred to the rapid pace of land development in Antwerp, and its moral turned upon a contrast between real estate profiteering and the charitable work of the Virgin.⁶⁴ No scholar, however, has yet suggested that Aertsen's placard referred to an identifiable land transfer.

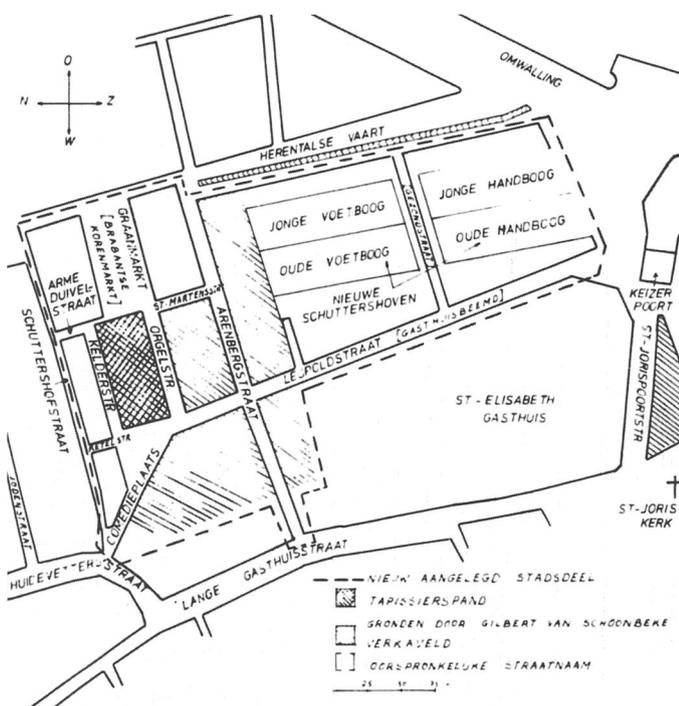
There exists, however, in the Antwerp Stadsarchief, a land sale document from 1551 that corresponds with striking precision to the transaction solicited in *The Meat Stall's* sign. The city's *Collegiale Actenboek* of 1551–53 records an act of the magistracy whose pertinent sections read as follows:

Decreed today . . . by my lords the burgomasters, aldermen and council of the city of Antwerp, together with the treasurers and rentmasters of the same city . . . that they . . . transfer, give over ownership and convey . . . to Gilbert van Schoonbeke . . . a piece of land with ground and appurtenances containing *one hundred fifty-four rods and one half* . . . coming southward toward the aforesaid [St. Elizabeth] Gasthuis land and the new Bowmen's Guild Houses of the Young and Old Crossbowmen, in which parcel is included one part of the land that this city on the last day of September this year has received from the aforesaid Gasthuis . . . so done this Friday, the 23rd day in the month of October, 1551.⁶⁵

Despite its boiler-plate legal language, this was anything but a routine land transfer. It represented the culmination of a hard-fought condemnation proceeding that exemplified the



13 St. Elizabeth Gasthuis, Antwerp, aerial view (photo: courtesy of EUROSENSE, Wemmel, Belgium. All copying prohibited)



14 Diagram showing urbanization around St. Elizabeth Gasthuis in the early 1550s (from Soly, fig. x, 233, with permission from Éditions Dexia Banque and Hugo Soly)

moral expediency attending economic growth in mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp.

In 1551, Antwerp's aldermen had begun a campaign to develop and commercialize their city's southeastern quadrant. The anchor for this development was to be a spacious market hall (*pand*) for the sale of tapestries, to replace and consolidate this luxury trade's somewhat incongruous venues in the Vleeshuis and the nearby Dominican cloister.⁶⁶ The site was to be just south of the Meir, an active business thoroughfare.⁶⁷ This parcel had long been occupied by the

Schuttershof, the building and courtyards shared by the city's archers' guilds for shooting practice and social activity. After considerable negotiation, the archers consented to cede their site if the city would finance four new houses—one for each guild—with ample adjoining land. The archers further demanded that the new quarters be located in the same part of town as the old.⁶⁸ The city at last agreed. It then named Gilbert van Schoonbeke, the rapacious but highly productive entrepreneur already in charge of the rewalling, to develop these projects.⁶⁹

The undertaking ran into immediate problems. No parcel of land large enough to accommodate the archers' relocation was on the market. The only appropriate tract in the neighborhood was owned by one of the city's oldest and most respected charitable institutions, the St. Elizabeth Gasthuis. This was the city's main hospital, where a small cloister of nuns tended to the sick.⁷⁰ Early in 1551, the city approached the Gasthuis with an offer to purchase a considerable portion of its land. The prioress refused.⁷¹

Prolonged discussions ensued. The Gasthuis sisters advanced three arguments. First, they needed this land as pasture for their animals. Second, it was unthinkable that the city would force them to accept—next door to a house of prayer—shooting clubs where drinking and carousing went on day and night and “men were always making a terrible racket with their drums and pipes.”⁷² Third, the city's offer of twenty guilders per rod was only half what the land would be worth once the tapestry *pand* brought more business to the area.⁷³ Intent on pursuing its commercial goals, the city refused to yield. It condemned the land. The sisters appealed to Charles V, to no avail.⁷⁴ On September 30, 1551, the Gasthuis was forced to transfer to the city 675 rods of ground at twenty guilders each (Figs. 13, 14).⁷⁵

What transpired next amplified the transaction's moral drama. The city had taken considerably more land than it actually needed. It set aside the larger part for the Schuttershoven. Three weeks later, it sold most of the remainder

(nearly one-quarter of the total appropriated) to Gilbert van Schoonbeke, placing him in a position to reap personal financial benefit from the commercialization of the Gasthuis area. This sale included the 154½ rods that was recorded in the *Actenboek* quoted above.⁷⁶

Van Schoonbeke was one of the most visible figures in mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp. The illegitimate son of a moderately successful businessman, he parlayed a midlevel civic post as weigh master into lucrative partnerships with some of Antwerp's most powerful and unscrupulous individuals, such as Burgomaster Michiel van der Heyden.⁷⁷ Van Schoonbeke began by developing new commercial streets, moved on to commercial centers and finally to entire neighborhoods. Through good timing, acumen, and ruthlessness, he achieved a hegemonic position in private land development in Antwerp. He then turned to public works, contracting with the city to build new market neighborhoods, a modern weigh house, and finally its fabulously expensive new defensive walls.⁷⁸ Between 1554 and 1556, when he became the major provisioner of Habsburg troops, he made a second fortune profiteering from the war with France.⁷⁹

Van Schoonbeke profoundly reshaped the urban face of Antwerp. In the process, he made a host of enemies.⁸⁰ His transactions touched virtually all propertied families, many to their detriment. He was continually suspected of graft, and the corruption of his cronies was well known: the burgomaster van der Heyden, for instance, skimmed huge amounts from civic funds, and his suburban pleasure house was built with materials originally requisitioned for the city walls.⁸¹ With the help of such men, van Schoonbeke appeared to be aiming at control of the entire urban economy.⁸² It was within this atmosphere that municipal officials put the development of the tapestry *pand* and the Schuttershoven in van Schoonbeke's hands.

Pieter Aertsen dated his *Meat Stall* with surprising specificity: "1551 10 martius" (1551 10 March) (Fig. 15).⁸³ In the Brabantine calendar, the year began not on January 1 but on Good Friday, and official documents were dated accordingly.⁸⁴ In Brabantine reckoning, therefore, March followed October—the month of the Gasthuis deed. *The Meat Stall* appeared less than five months after Antwerp's magistrates transferred 154½ rods of land confiscated from the city's most venerable charitable institution to its most notorious speculator. In Aertsen's image, a sign offering 154 rods for sale surmounts a scene in which poverty and charity are dwarfed by a display of worldly bounty. Art historians have been correct in thinking that Aertsen's little sign functioned as moral commentary. This was aimed, however, not primarily at the universal struggle between Christian charity and greed, nor even at the generalized cupidity that drove Antwerp's overheated real estate market. Rather, it referred to a specific local scandal. The odor of public corruption that surrounded the Gasthuis land affair lent it particular force as a moral exemplum.

Local Knowledge

Both this Gasthuis scandal and the Vleeschouwers' suit represented specific instances of larger forces at work in sixteenth-century society; yet they remained profoundly local issues, dependent for their resonance on local knowledge.⁸⁵

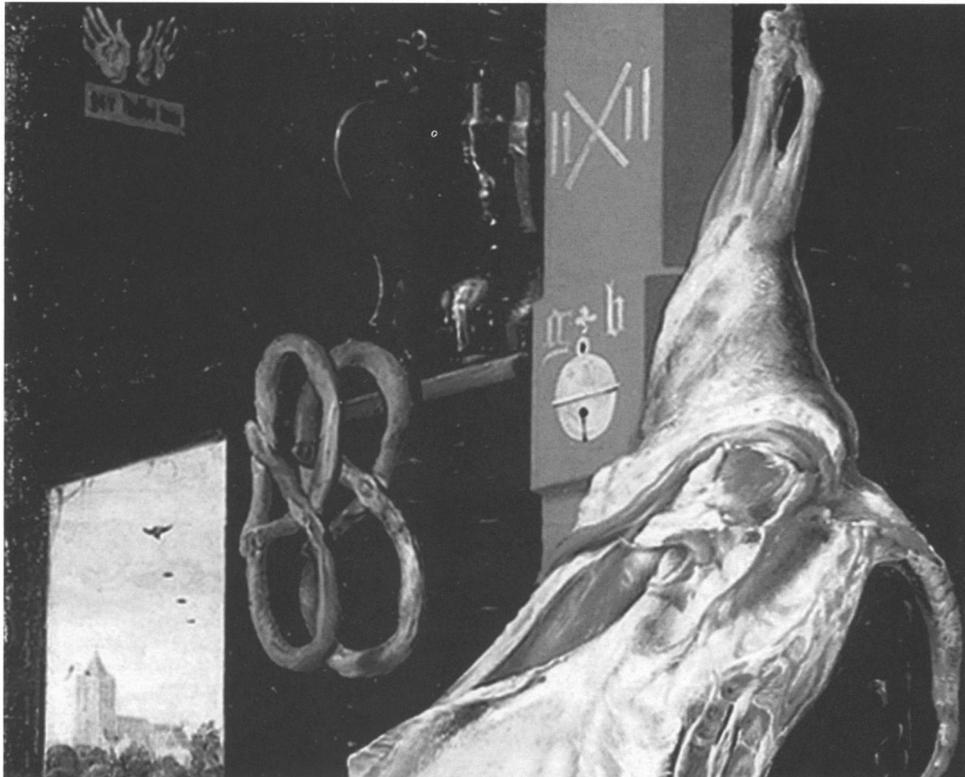


15 Detail of Fig. 1 with the date, at right

Many additional elements in *The Meat Stall* confirm the picture's explicit and thoroughgoing appeal to Antwerp insider information. The small pair of hands in the upper left (Fig. 16) were a component of the municipal seal (Fig. 17) and referred to the city's foundation myth: in ancient times the knight Brabo (for whom the surrounding province of Brabant is named) punished the evil giant Antigoon by cutting off the latter's hand and flinging it in the Schelde River (thus the city's name, Antwerpen, from *hand werpen*, Flemish for "to throw a hand").⁸⁶ These hands appeared on official documents and as quality control marks stamped on most goods produced in the city (Fig. 18).⁸⁷ Pervasive in local visual culture, they were an emblem of both civic pride and guarantee, invoking the viewer's native awareness not only of place but also of society, politics, and government.

Tied as well to local context is *The Meat Stall*'s distinctive portrayal of the Flight into Egypt: as Joseph leads the donkey carrying Mary and the Christ Child, Mary reaches back to give alms of bread to a mendicant boy (Fig. 2). No textual source has been identified for this extrabiblical act of charity, but it does appear in three—and perhaps only three—other images. All of these were painted by Antwerp artists within a few years of Aertsen's picture; two are attributed to the Braunschweiger Monogrammist, and one, dated 1569, is by Joachim Beuckelaer.⁸⁸ The visual repetition of this scene specifically in Antwerp suggests that it portrays a bit of local apocrypha, perhaps acted out in festival activity. Such a local variant could easily develop in a city whose main church was dedicated to the Virgin and in which the Flight into Egypt, as one of her Seven Sorrows, was reenacted in the streets during Assumption Day festivities.⁸⁹

Other details evoke additional local referents, though their exact identities remain obscure. A hallmark visible on a plate (Fig. 19) incorporates the flower-and-crown motif reminiscent of a number of Antwerp silversmith's stamps (Fig. 20)



16 Detail of Fig. 1 with the hands of Antwerp, at upper left



17 Antwerp *Rekenpenning* displaying the city seal with the hands of Antigoon, 1556. Antwerp, Museum Vleeshuis



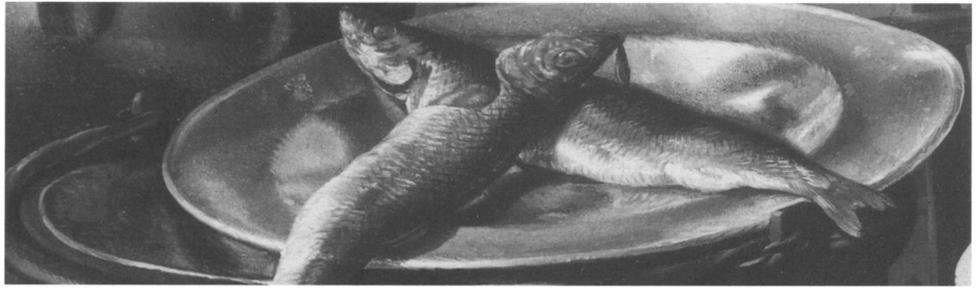
18 St. Luke's Guild, Antwerp, hand marks on verso of early-17th-century painted panel. Turnhout, Begijnhofmuseum (photo: © IRPA-KIK, Brussels)

and may have belonged to a particular maker. The motto below the hands of Antwerp in the upper left (Fig. 16) is illegible as painted yet may well have been a locally familiar combination of icon and text, recognizable from its shape alone. The most tantalizing of *The Meat Stall's* local signs are the brightly highlighted emblems that appear on the red wooden post (Fig. 16)—an X with two lines on either side (IIXII) and, below it, a lowercase g and b with a bell and clover leaf between them. For me, these are also the most frustrating elements in the painting. On the one hand, I am convinced they were pivotal in its larger scheme of meaning; on the other, despite years of research, I am unable to identify them precisely.

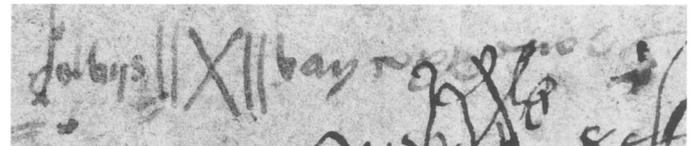
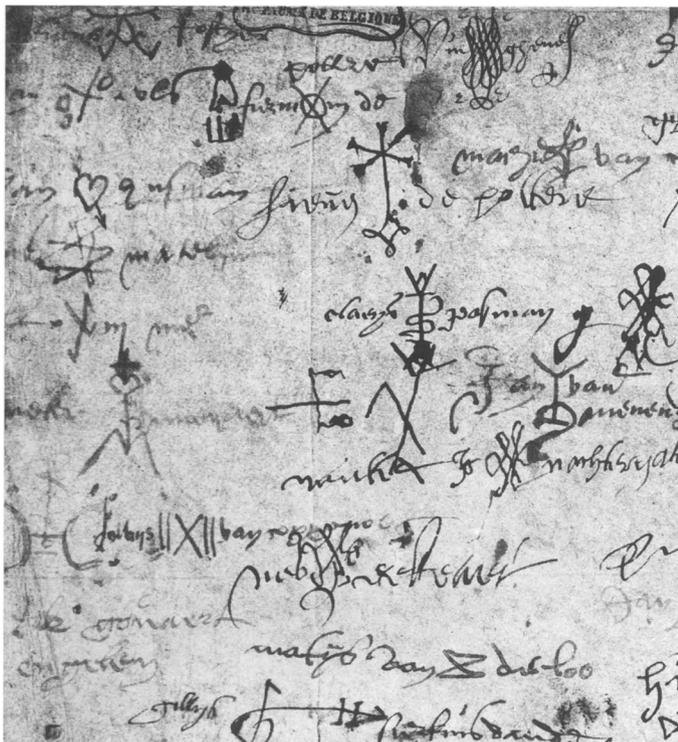
It is always tempting, as scholars, simply to ignore in our accounts the things we cannot explain. The same questions that are so welcome, even alluring, at the beginning of our inquiries become embarrassments if they remain unanswered at the end.⁹⁰ The more successful we are in repressing such elements, however, and the more seamless and convincing our arguments appear, the more powerfully they condition others' viewing of an artwork. In this process, the resistant details we have elided become increasingly invisible, their erasure from the image more permanent—even though these signs once had plain meanings that were vital to reception.

So it is with these markings, the embellished X and the “g. b.,” which have figured negligibly in discussions of *The Meat Stall* yet in Antwerp in 1551 would have been instantly recognizable as tradesmen's marks belonging to an identifiable person.⁹¹ The upper set takes the form of the *huismerk*, the device that merchants and craftsmen used to sign contracts and mark their goods.⁹² These emblems were highly individualized and designed for public recognition; in one family, several members might use the same basic mark with slight

19 Detail of Fig. 1 with a hallmarked plate



20 Antwerp silversmith marks on plate, 16th century. Antwerp, Museum Vleeshuis



22 Detail of Fig. 21

21 Signature page, Ronse document of 1566, with similar *huismerk* faintly visible at lower left. Brussels, Archives Générales du Royaume, Fonds Raad van Beroerten, acc. no. 158 (photo: Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

variations. Consider, for example, a mark closely mirroring this one in *The Meat Stall* that appears on a 1566 document from Ronse, in southwestern Belgium (Figs. 21, 22).⁹³ I do not mean to imply that a Ronsean family had any connection whatsoever to Aertsen's painting. To the contrary—these devices were meaningful only within the most local of civic contexts. The "IIXII" of *The Meat Stall* had its own user in Antwerp; seen then and there it would have readily signified that individual. The lower emblem, as well, adheres to a known heraldic type. When a burgher was elected to office or granted a civic post, it was customary for him to create a seal for himself.⁹⁴ This often took the form of his initials flanking one or two personally meaningful symbols. Examples include the seal of a meat cutter named De Hee who was a master in the Arras butchers' guild (Fig. 23).⁹⁵

The person referred to by the particular marks in Aertsen's painting, whether a patron, dedicatee, or subject of the image's commentary, was a central figure in the picture, as



23 Seal of master butcher De Hee of Arras, 15th–17th century. Location unknown, formerly collection Félix de Vigne

palpably present as in a portrait; *The Meat Stall*'s first viewers interpreted this image in light of its relation to and their knowledge of this individual. Sadly, time and distance have rendered him invisible.

If such topical references diminish *The Meat Stall*'s universality as a work of art, they in equal measure increase the aura of ingenuity that must have attended it in Antwerp in 1551. For the savvy viewer, the image's implications in its time and place offered multiple levels of pleasure. Aertsen presented in the work a series of signs requiring the application of esoteric (in this case, local) knowledge, each providing an occasion for the "aha" of recognition, with its attendant sense of power. By invoking special knowledge, Aertsen also created and exploited a split between two potential viewing publics—one informed, the other not—thereby forging a sense of conspiracy between the artist and a knowing subculture of insiders, who, in turn, could enjoy their privileged position vis-à-vis the uninitiated.⁹⁶ Finally, for those who reflected on its larger implications for artistic practice, the painting could transcend topical specificity to foster meditation on the ultimate contingency of all artistic reception: it was a "pull-dated" picture that analogized itself to the perishables it represents—an artwork that advertised its own ephemerality.⁹⁷

The Meat Stall and Art Making

Thus far, I have concentrated on *The Meat Stall*'s social history, reforging topical associations that have been unavailable to its audiences for several centuries. I have emphasized not only the specificity of its reference system but also the surprising involvement of the work in issues of contemporary urban change. Here, however, I shift to a second (although ultimately closely related) line of argument: that *The Meat Stall*'s explicit subject matters—no matter how much I have segregated them for the purpose of discussion—were inseparable from its unprecedented form, and it was in combination that these invoked and commented on modernity in Antwerp in 1551.

I want to revisit, at least briefly, Aertsen's illusionism, so central to his pictorial strategy. Not only *The Meat Stall*'s animal flesh, but its entire foreground area is a tour de force of painterly description. The fine fuzz of the bovine muzzle; the rough graining of weathered wood; the velvety down on a chicken's breast—Aertsen painstakingly rendered these and a dozen other surface textures. In the best Renaissance tradition, he employed variety itself to display his prodigious technique at the height of its powers.⁹⁸ In one brief passage he juxtaposed four distinct types of burnished metal (Fig. 2), broadcasting his mastery of those specifically Netherlandish specialties, reflection and counterreflection.⁹⁹ Beyond this, Aertsen skillfully foreshortened objects never before hon-

ored with such attention: sausages, fish, a skinned ox head, a recumbent haunch. Achievements such as these led Karel van Mander to portray Aertsen in 1604 as "a great, deft, crafty deceiver," who "caught the colours so naturally that things appear to be real," a painter whose images of objects were so palpable, so convincing, that the viewer would almost "feel like grasping [them] with his hands."¹⁰⁰ Van Mander praised Aertsen, above all, for his masterly illusionism and unerring use of color.

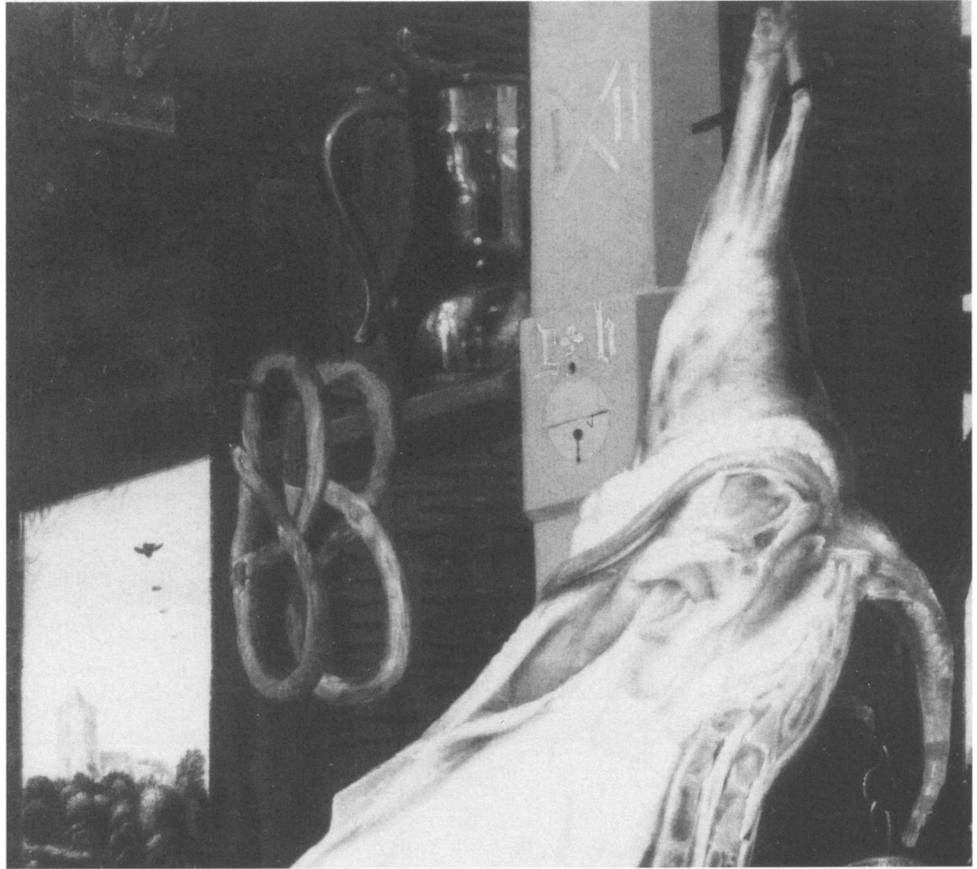
But perhaps not so unerring. Consider again the "land for sale" sign at upper right (Fig. 12)—not the signification of its text but the way it is painted. The lettering is cramped and pushed so far to the right that it runs off the paper onto the board behind. It is a classic example of unplanned execution—distinctly, and surprisingly, amateurish. On closer inspection, this is not *The Meat Stall*'s only elementary error. The deep, Mediterranean blue of one patch of sky (outside the little room to the right) clashes unrealistically with the otherwise drab Brabantine atmosphere. Entire slabs of meat, as well as pretzels, defy gravity by hanging without any hooks (Fig. 16). In *The Meat Stall*'s upper left, the text below the hands, while large enough to read, as painted is illegible. And then there is the picture's most illustrious error, its complete upending of pictorial priorities: raw meat thrust in the viewer's face, overwhelming an image of the Virgin Mary. In modern scholarship this last—the compositional inversion—is the focal issue. No account has attended to these other "mistakes." But were they accidental?

Strong evidence suggests the opposite. For over a century the tradition of microscopic realism had trained Netherlandish eyes to be exceptionally alert to detail, and nowhere did viewers employ this facility more self-consciously than in sixteenth-century Antwerp.¹⁰¹ Van Mander repeatedly describes how obsessive looking manifested itself in practice, even taking on the quality of sport before the works of Antwerp painters. He presents Herri met de Bles, for instance, as:

the master of the owl who put into all his works a little owl, which is sometimes so hidden away that people allow each other a lot of time to look for it, wagering that they will not find it anyway, and thus pass their time, looking for the owl.¹⁰²

He further recounts how before a certain panel by Quentin Metsys there were "always disputes" among spectators over the number of horses' heads to be seen in it.¹⁰³ And one of the more explicit—and humorous—challenges to close viewing was Joachim Patinir's practice of placing his tiny signature figure, "the cacker," squatting somewhere in the landscape with his britches down; as van Mander says, "you had to search for this little shitter."¹⁰⁴ These anecdotes define an audience attentive to every millimeter of a painting's surface, aware that even the smallest details carried potential significance. In this viewing environment, the "mistakes" in *The Meat Stall* were too obvious to escape audience scrutiny, much less Aertsen's own or that of his assistants.

All four versions of the painting, moreover, faithfully repeat nearly every "error." Three of the four paintings are missing essential hooks; only the Amsterdam version (Fig. 24) includes spikes to hold up its pretzels and side of pork. Even



24 Detail of Fig. 4 with the hooks at upper left (photo: courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art)

there, the pretzels levitate unrealistically above their hook, belying its function. Its appearance in this version only underscores its absence in the other three. In just one is the “for sale” sign better organized (Maastricht, Fig. 25), but the numbers in this version have clearly been overpainted, and the original status of the whole area is questionable. In all four versions, the sky outside the open window is equally too blue and the motto beneath the hands indecipherable. The “lapses” were evidently carefully planned and executed.

What could Aertsen’s purpose have been in perpetrating this visual tomfoolery? Virtually no period literature directly addresses the subject of authorial intention, but in this case one written clue survives. It appears in Aertsen’s own reported praise for another artist who had employed comparably deliberate mistakes for comic effect. Aertsen’s comments are found in Pieter Opmeer’s *Martelaars boek*, a history of prominent Netherlandish Catholics, in which the author describes the work of a painter named Jan Einout, who was active in the 1520s. Opmeer recounts a conversation about Einout that he shared with Pieter Aertsen in 1575:

Seeing that his countryman Desiderius Erasmus had spread the glory of his name far and wide through his satire *The Praise of Folly*, so he [Einout] painted a History of the *Passion of Christ* with many colors and in a clever way, and embellished it with witty figures and with images from earlier Masters, and this way so clearly laid bare their mistakes that he seemed to make a public spectacle of Art.

This work was pleasing and delighted the most dignified and grave. Which Petrus Longus (that is Tall Peter [Aert-

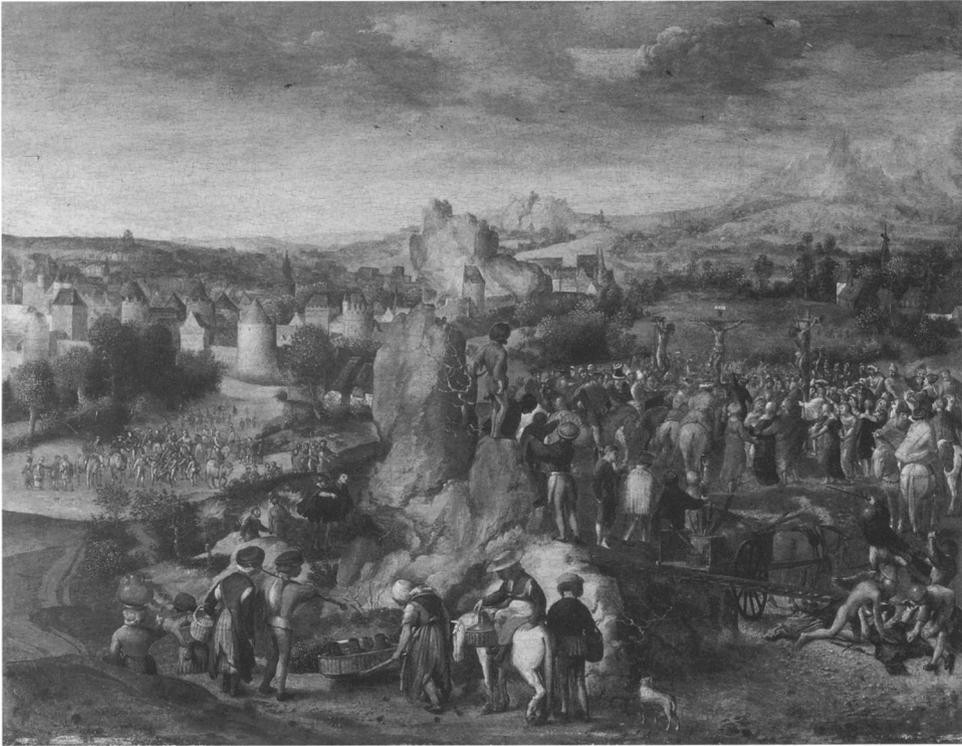


25 Detail of Fig. 5 with the sign at upper right (photo: courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art)

sen]), another Apelles of his Century, used to esteem so highly that he said on his deathbed, in my presence, that this piece could not be valued in money.¹⁰⁵

This last was the highest possible praise.¹⁰⁶ Einout’s witty pastiche of artistic errors made such an indelible impression on Pieter Aertsen that its memory still gave him pleasure in the last hours of his life.

This passage has frequently been quoted in the literature on Aertsen, but only Reindert Falkenburg has undertaken to apply it to specific aspects of the artist’s painting practice.¹⁰⁷ Falkenburg explores its relation to two fundamental and



26 Braunschweiger Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel?), *Golgotha*, 2nd quarter of the 16th century. Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum (photo: © Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Martin Bühler)

interrelated conceptual threads in Aertsen's kitchen, market, and peasant pictures: their embrace of Erasmian paradoxical encomium and their parodic transgression of Albertian compositional precepts.

The paradoxical encomium, a rhetorical form adapted from classical oratory, proved highly popular among sixteenth-century Netherlandish humanists.¹⁰⁸ In it, high praise is lavished ironically on low subject matter for the dual purposes of demonstrating the skill and extending the fame of the author.¹⁰⁹ Noted ancient examples include Lucian's "Praise of the Fly" and Synesius's "Eulogy of Baldness."¹¹⁰ Desiderius Erasmus was the most famous of its Renaissance practitioners. The title of his first popular work, *The Praise of Folly*, is itself a statement of the paradoxical encomium's central, satirical contradiction, while its text constitutes an extended exercise in this rhetorical device.¹¹¹ As Opmeer's passage indicates, Jan Einout recognized that *The Praise of Folly* did for Erasmus exactly what the classical paradoxical encomium was designed to do: spread the author's glory far and wide.

Reindert Falkenburg has made clear, however, that Erasmus employed this ironic trope for more than mere self-aggrandizement. He turned it to moral purpose: to implicate his readers in the folly he describes and—with appealing humor rather than offensive righteousness—to bring them to self-awareness.¹¹² Falkenburg argues that many works in Aertsen's oeuvre correspond in form and purpose to Erasmian paradoxical encomium. The peasant and market images, for example, render boorish figures (low subjects) in large scale, and classicizing poses (high form) in a manner designed to make viewers perceive their own vices and pretensions.¹¹³ For Falkenburg, reading *The Meat Stall* as paradoxical encomium, its foregrounded foodstuffs comprise its "low" subject matter, while Aertsen's virtuosity in their handling and his monu-

mental presentation of them comprise "high" form and praise.¹¹⁴

Falkenburg's second important set of insights involves Pieter Aertsen's witty assault on then-fashionable artistic principles—in particular, on Leon Battista Alberti's prescriptions for pictorial decorum and genre hierarchy. It was Alberti who, in 1435, had codified as the preeminent genre of painting the *historia*: depiction of the ideal human form in narrative representations, coherently presented and designed to encourage high standards of behavior.¹¹⁵ Recognizing the violations of Albertian convention in Aertsen's work, Falkenburg proposes that the artist's intention may have been radical and unprecedented: to create imagery utterly outside—indeed, against—all genre conventions.¹¹⁶ Falkenburg furthermore reads the carefully executed chaos of Aertsen's kitchen and market scenes as parodies of Alberti's exhortations to compositional gravity, moderation, and dignity.¹¹⁷ Aertsen's execution, in Falkenburg's words, "shows exactly the mistakes against which Alberti warns."¹¹⁸ By concentrating on Aertsen's breaches of Albertian decorum, Falkenburg implicitly casts the artist's project as responsive to a set of pictorial norms current in 1551—norms explicitly of Italian origin. His conclusions strike me as utterly convincing. In regard to *The Meat Stall*, however, they tell only half the story, for they do not address the second order of "mistakes" that I have described above.

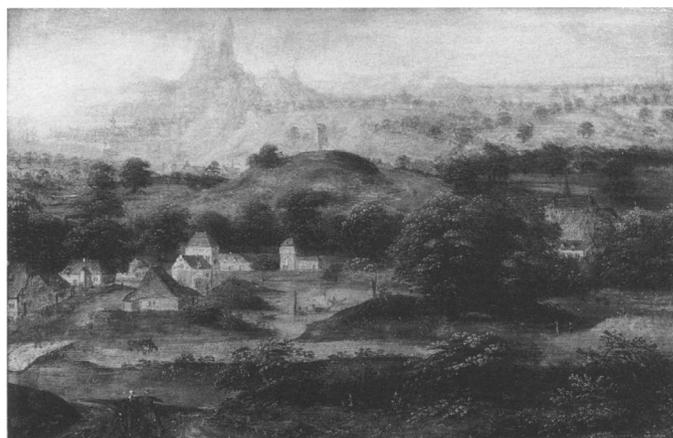
Aertsen's minute painterly lapses in *The Meat Stall* satirize not so much a class of learned, Italianate theoretical precepts as they do a set of distinctly homegrown (and practice-oriented) artistic pieties. Since the time of Jan van Eyck, the special pride of Flemish painters had revolved around exacting standards of skill and precision. As Karel van Mander later catalogued them, these included *patientie* and *aendacht*—patience and meticulous attention to the smallest detail;

netticheyt, or the “neatness” that informed perfect execution; and *naer leven* (“according to life”), which referred both to the sense that the phenomena the artist recorded had been acutely observed and to the illusion in viewers that they perceived these phenomena firsthand.¹¹⁹ In the context of these chauvinistically Netherlandish principles, Aertsen’s seemingly casual lapses of the brush—the forgotten hooks, the too-blue sky, the amateurish lettering—cut deeply against the grain. His errors acknowledged—and then defied—the most cherished conventions of Netherlandish painting: its perfect illusionism and its obsession with detail. Paradoxically, of course, Aertsen’s errors also served as the measure of his mastery, for, as literary critic Susan Stewart points out, mistakes of such a nature demonstrate “a flaunted, a *skillful*, incompetence . . . that implies competence and the limits of competence with its every gesture.”¹²⁰

Here, too, Erasmus provided Aertsen with a model: a skillful “error” that in fact flaunted the author’s wit and erudition. Its irony was aimed, moreover, at northern Europe’s most celebrated artist, Albrecht Dürer. Erasmus and Dürer maintained contact for many years, at times directly, at times through a mutual friend, Nuremberg humanist Willibald Pirckheimer.¹²¹ In 1520, Dürer made a portrait drawing from life of Erasmus that pleased the writer so much that he pressed for the artist to develop it into a formal engraving.¹²² If Erasmus had hoped for a speedy execution of his request, however, he was to be disappointed. Dürer, notorious for his extended length of preparation and perfectionism, did not deliver the belated product until six years later.¹²³

Soon thereafter, at Pirckheimer’s urging, Erasmus published a living eulogy to Dürer.¹²⁴ This panegyric is replete with elegant (if highly conventional) Plinian comparisons linking Dürer to the greatest artist of the ancient world, Apelles. He is first heralded as the “Apelles of our age,” then raised in dignity even above the earlier artist, for (Erasmus explains) the painterly effects that the Greek could achieve only with the help of colors, Dürer accomplishes sublimely in his engravings through mere black lines on white paper.¹²⁵

As Erwin Panofsky pointed out, however, this panegyric is marked by one puzzling “error” on Erasmus’s part.¹²⁶ In likening Dürer to his ancient counterpart, he describes Apelles as “the prince of this art upon whom no reproach could be cast except that he did not know when to take his hand off the panel [*manum tollere de tabula*]. . . .”¹²⁷ What Panofsky registered immediately—as did surely Dürer and Pirckheimer, as well as humanists and artists generally—was that Pliny had named Protogenes, a different artist altogether (in explicit and emphatic contrast to Apelles), as the one who knew not when to remove his hand from the panel.¹²⁸ As Panofsky observed, it is difficult to conceive that Erasmus’s lapse was unconscious. He had not only published his own edition of Pliny shortly before (1525), but also, even more to the point, had included “*manum de tabula*,” with reference to Protogenes and appropriate moral commentary, in the latest edition of his *Adages*.¹²⁹ Interrogating Erasmus’s “remarkable inversion” of Pliny, Panofsky concludes that it could only have been intentional.¹³⁰ Disguising his criticism as an apparent “mistake,” Erasmus took revenge on Dürer’s obsessiveness and tardiness, but did so through a form of ironic praise, which he himself called “*speciosa reprehensio*”



27 Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with the Banishment of Hagar*, ca. 1540s? Maastricht, Bonnefantenmuseum

(splendid blame).¹³¹ This is splendid blame indeed, which celebrates even as it scolds.

The specificity and sophistication of Erasmus’s Plinian “error” find an echo in *The Meat Stall*. Aertsen’s “mistakes,” like Erasmus’s, reveal their full brilliance only to those audience members who are visually erudite, connoisseurs of artistic perfection, and—equally important—familiar enough with Aertsen’s skill to comprehend that he is toying with them. The similarity does not stop there, however, for *The Meat Stall* contains its own example of “splendid blame,” directed at a cohort of noted painters. Its central inversion, the foregrounding of inanimate subject matter and diminishment of human activity, functions as an insider parody of contemporary Netherlandish painting practice. This satire was aimed at distinctly local developments in the artistic laboratory of sixteenth-century Antwerp, where many new forms were stretching the boundaries of tradition.

The Meat Stall took several of these to their extremes. Its diminutive Flight into Egypt suggests the distant background position of sacred events in the Braunschweiger Monogrammist’s crowded Passion pictures (Fig. 26).¹³² Its differential treatment of inanimate objects and human figures—the former so illusionistically detailed, the latter so unindividuated and sketchy—recalls how Joachim Patinir and Herri met de Bles (Fig. 27) lavished attention on their landscapes at the expense of people.¹³³ Its menacing animal entrails mimic the monstrous scale and proximity of foreground objects in the satirical portraits of tax collectors and lawyers by Marinus van Reymerswaele (Fig. 28).¹³⁴ In making fun of the exaggerations he perceived in his fellow artists’ compositions (particularly the rapid diminution in scale and importance of the human subject), Aertsen was parodying the outrageousness of (then) modern art. In Einoutian terms, he laid bare the “mistakes” of other artists (by himself indulging in them), while making “a public spectacle of Art” in what was, itself, a spectacular painting.

This, in effect, is the inverse of the paradoxical encomium: not high praise for lowly subject matter, but mock disparagement of the praiseworthy or eminent. Parody, in such a case, becomes an act of homage. Poking fun at the way Antwerp artists pushed the conventional envelopes of the time, Aert-



28 Marinus van Reymerswaele, *The Tax Collectors*, 16th century. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY)

sen's picture actually celebrated the city's stature as the producer of the finest artists and most progressive art in northern Europe.

In this commentary on art making, form and content in *The Meat Stall* come full circle. Aertsen understood that Antwerp's artistic dynamism was itself a function of the city's rapid growth and transformation. Changing social and religious structures and an increasingly open market encouraged artistic experimentation and the development of new types of imagery. Capital accumulation, rapid circulation of wealth, the surge in population with its consequent home construction—all fueled painting consumption. The disruptive economic and social climate on which *The Meat Stall* commented also, in large measure, created the license for its own transgressive form and the precondition of its existence. Pushing the artistic envelope, Aertsen admitted full complicity in this process. And this, too, was an Erasmian strategy: that the author unblinkingly implicates himself in the activity upon which he looks askance.

***The Meat Stall* and Contemporaneity**

The Meat Stall was created in a time and place in which works of art, for the most part, served definable and customary functions. Some were explicitly religious, meant for liturgical or devotional use; others were clearly secular, designed to underscore authority, memorialize individuals, or model ideal action. Certainly the concerns that motivated artistic production were largely temporal, even emergent: seeking

social and political advancement, beseeching childbirth, advertising piety, or bargaining with God for one last chance. Whatever the immediacy of the needs they served, however, the explicit subjects of the great majority of pictures—usually, but not always, excepting portraits—were rooted in the biblical or classical past or in the heavenly or infernal future. Images that were cast in contemporary surroundings tended actually to address either eternal human situations (ill-matched lovers, clerical abuses, dreams of the fountain of youth, the labors of the seasons) or allegorical themes (vices, virtues, the five senses, or the four humors). For all such generalizations, of course, there are exceptions. Events of recent natural or human history occasionally entered the visual record: shooting stars, monstrous pigs, or scenes from notable modern battles.

The Meat Stall presented an exception of a different order. Faced with its multiple transgressions, its first viewers must have been hard put even to conceive what kind of picture it was or whose purposes it was meant to suit. The image resisted any attempt to stabilize it within available sixteenth-century pictorial paradigms. Surely you, who are reading this article, have encountered a contemporary artwork that confounds; I ask you to transfer that sense of conundrum back onto Aertsen's picture. Then consider how, for *The Meat Stall*'s viewers, this very sensation itself was new.

I began this study by exploring the shock to its audience of this picture's unprecedented and utterly unexpected depiction of raw meat. I close by observing that this was by no means *The Meat Stall*'s only, or its most important, departure from traditional subject matter; it treated also a larger theme whose visual representation was similarly uncommon. For in this overcrowded, inside-out, and taboo-bending image, the Antwerp viewer saw *today*—its frenetic pace, prosperity, conflicts, compromises, and absurdities—in much the way that the spectator of *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* came face-to-face with 1956. Like Hamilton's collage, *The Meat Stall* gathered references to wide-ranging aspects of contemporary life and assembled them into an unanticipated and revelatory pattern. In a time of flux and contention, it rendered its audience's material preoccupations visible and urged reflection on them, but did so with a leavening of irony.

In this process, it spared no one's motives. The Gasthuis sisters had, under pressure, lost portions of both their pasture and their peace and quiet—but remember that they, too, kept their eyes on the bottom line: before the condemnation was even certain, they argued that they should be compensated for their land not at its present value, but according to the increase it would accrue after the neighborhood's development. The Vleeschouwers Ambacht was a venerable body that faced the loss of treasured ancient prerogatives, and in this it was emblematic of many traditional social groups threatened by changing economic conditions. However, as everyone knew, their prosperity ultimately depended on the privilege of sixty-two men to sell meat to a population of 100,000 without competition, at artificially maintained prices. In this light, it is interesting to note that while *The Meat Stall*'s patron remains unknown, the two identifiable sixteenth-century Antwerp viewers of Aertsen's oeuvre about whom I have found empirical evidence—Jacques Walraven and Frans

Schot—were both business associates of Gilbert van Schoonbeke who profited handsomely from their dealings with him.¹³⁵ Even men such as these may have been capable of self-examination and a laugh at their own expense.

Among *The Meat Stall's* many innovations, perhaps none was more remarkable than this: no image in memory had taken on the here and now with so clear an eye for its decidedly mixed blessings. Like Hamilton's collage, it challenged its viewers not only to acknowledge the change that surrounded them, but also to consider their complicity in it. In urging contemplation of these themes, it allowed for complex responses of celebration and regret, of conviction and openness of meaning. It unnerved, it challenged, and, ultimately, it forced its viewers to construct a revised, more trenchant perception of the contemporary reality that surrounded them.

Charles Baudelaire, definer of the modern for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was himself careful to recognize that "every old master has had his own modernity."¹³⁶ Closely considered, *The Meat Stall* belies later assumptions that visual representations of and confrontations with "modernity" are of recent origin. Aertsen's picture fulfilled, already in 1551, a function not ordinarily ascribed to artwork for another three hundred years: the painting of modern life. In doing so, it illuminated a phenomenon unique in every moment, yet affecting in all: the human predicament in the face of change.

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Frequently Cited Sources

- SAA: Stadsarchief Antwerpen
 GA: Gilden en Ambachten
 SR: Schepenkamer, Schepenregister
 AA: *Antwerpsch Archievenblad*, vol. 1 (Antwerp: Guillaume van Merlen, 1864).
 Craig, Kenneth, "Pieter Aertsen's Inverted Still Lifes," Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1979.
 Falkenburg, Reindert, 1989, "'Alter Einoutus': Over de aard en herkomst van Pieter Aertsens stilleven-conceptie," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40: 41–66.
 ———, 1995, "Pieter Aertsen, Rhyarographeer," in *Rhetoric-Rhétoriqueurs-Rederijkers*, ed. Jelle Koopmans et al., Verhandeling, Afdeling Letterkunde, n.s., 162 (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen), 197–217.
 ———, 1996, "Matters of Taste: Pieter Aertsen's Market Scenes, Eating Habits, and Pictorial Rhetoric in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Object as Subject: Studies in the Interpretation of Still Life*, ed. Anne W. Lowenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 13–27.
 Honig, Elizabeth Alice, *Painting and the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
 Kavalier, Ethan Matt, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall: Divers Aspects of the Market Piece," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40 (1989): 67–92.
 Poffé, Edouard, *De Antwerpsche beenhouwers van de vroegste tijden tot heden* (Antwerp: H. en L. Kennes, 1894).
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Uitgaven Pro Civitate, vol. 8, no. 47 (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1977).

Van Mander, Karel, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, ed. Hessel Miedema, trans. Derry Cook-Radmore, 6 vols. (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994–97).

Notes

I have presented aspects of this study at the College Art Association Annual Conference in Chicago, 2001; the Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference in Toronto, 1998; and the National Gallery of Art, Middle Atlantic Symposium in the History of Art, Washington, D.C., 1995. It is based on research for my dissertation, "Meat, Social Status and Spatial Politics in Pieter Aertsen's *Meat Stall*," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1999. Some parts of the material on the Gasthuis affair have appeared in the *Burlington Magazine*. My research was made possible by a 1996–97 Fulbright Fellowship to Belgium, a 2000 Research Grant from the Institute for the Arts and Humanities of the Pennsylvania State University, and a Dissertation Travel Grant from Duke University. The article is published with support from the George Dewey and Mary L. Krumrine Endowment. My special thanks to Hans J. Van Miegroet for his advice and encouragement, and to Hugo Soly for his assistance in Antwerp. For assistance at various stages of this project, I owe thanks to Benedict Fullalove, Anthony Cutler, Joost vander Auwera, Paul Verbracken, Anne Wollett, Gilbert Friedman, my research assistant, Gabriella Szalay, and the editor and readers at *The Art Bulletin*.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

1. Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 32.

2. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, acc. no. 93.2, oil on panel, 45½ by 66½ in. (115.5 by 169 cm). Unless otherwise noted, all details are of this Raleigh panel. Aertsen's composition has been referred to by a variety of titles, including *The Butcher's Stall*, *A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms* (the Raleigh title for it), and, more simply, *The Meat Stall*. I refer to it herein by the latter.

3. H. W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art*, 5th ed., rev. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 541–42. For *The Meat Stall* as a progenitor of market pictures, see Honig, 29–42; of inverted morality paintings, Craig, 113–59; of paradoxical encomiums, Falkenburg, 1989, 41–66; idem, 1995, 214–16; and Margaret Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen and Market Scenes: Audience and Innovation in Northern Art," *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 236–66; for still life, many authors, beginning with Leo Baldass, "Sittenbild und Stilleben im Rahmen des niederländischen Romanismus," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 36 (1923): 15; and Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. 13, trans. Heinz Norden (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1975), 58–59.

4. One notable exception is Kavalier, who recognizes *The Meat Stall* as "a discontinuous point on the smooth curve of traditional art history" (67) and addresses it individually as an ethical exploration of the "conflict between material and spiritual values" (70) couched in terms of the battle between carnival and Lent. Kavalier also notes that reception of Aertsen's market paintings ranged from the moralistic to the erotic, depending on the values of the viewer (see 70–77). Two other scholars, though discussing *The Meat Stall* primarily in relation to the subsequent development of Aertsen's imagery, take note of its strangeness. Honig, 29, remarks that this "is a unique painting: no precedent can be found for it, nor are there any directly comparable later works." Falkenburg, 1996, 13, emphasizes how shocking the artist's kitchen and market pieces generally would have been to their initial viewers; I will discuss this in more detail below.

5. For concise summaries of the literature on Aertsen's work through 1988, see Keith Moxey, "Interpreting Pieter Aertsen: The Problem of 'Hidden Symbolism,'" *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40 (1989): 29–39, as well as the bibliography of the entire volume, 281–96, which is devoted to Aertsen. A summary that addresses more recent scholarship appears in Sergiusz Michalski, "Fleisch und Geist: Zur Bildsymbolik bei Pieter Aertsen," *Artibus et Historiae: An Art Anthology* 44 (2001): 167–72, 183–84. For discussions of the secular nature of *The Meat Stall*, see Friedländer (as in n. 3), 58–59; and Moxey, "Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer, and the Rise of Secular Painting in the Context of the Reformation," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974, 32, 235, and throughout. For the sacred, even Eucharistic, dimensions of the work, see Craig, 122–25; and Michalski.

6. Many read Aertsen's kitchen and market imagery generally, and this work specifically, as primarily moralizing. Notable among them are Georges Marlier, "Het Stilleven in de Vlaamse schilderkunst der XVIIe eeuw," *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunst te Antwerpen*, 1939–41: 89–100; J. A. Renckens, "Een ikonografische aanvulling op *Christus bij Martha en Maria* van Pieter Aertsen," *Kunsthistorische Mededelingen van het Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie* 4 (1949): 30–32; Detlev Kreidl, "Die Religiöse Malerei Pieter Aertsen als Grundlage seine Künstlerischen Entwicklung," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 68 (1972): 43–108; J. A. Emmens, "Eins aber is nötig"—Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Album Amicorum J. G. van Gelder*, ed. J. Bruyn

et al. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 93–101; Walter Melion, "Pieter Aertsen: Inversion in the Religious-Secular Works," M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1978; and Kavalier. Those who cast the work as festive or Rabelaisian include Robert Genaille, "D'Aertsen à Snyder: Manièrisme et baroque," *Bulletin, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België* 6 (1967): 79–88; idem, "Réflexions sur le maintien des sujets religieux dans les tableaux de genre et de natures mortes au XVII^e siècle," *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen*, 1989: 263–301; and Craig Harbison, "Why Did Pieter Aertsen Paint Still Lifes?" *CAA Abstracts* (1993), 158. Kavalier, while emphasizing the work's moral aspects, relates it heavily to carnival lore and practice.

7. For Pliny, see Charles Sterling, *Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Present Time* (New York: Universe Books, 1959), 42; Rosalie Colic, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 276–77; and Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), throughout, but esp. 136–47. For Erasmus, see in particular Melion (as in n. 6); Falkenburg, 1989, 54–59; and idem, 1996, 22–25. For Augustine, see Emmens (as in n. 6); and Günter Irmscher, "Ministriae voluptatum: Stoicizing Ethics in the Market and Kitchen Scenes of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer," trans. Elizabeth Clegg, *Simiolus* 16, no. 4 (1986): 222, 232. For Martial, see Sullivan (as in n. 3), 248–50. For Saint Luke, see Michalski (as in n. 5), 181–83.

8. University of Uppsala, inv. no. L. 1 (also referred to as UU1), oil on panel, 48½ by 65¾ in. (123 by 167 cm); private collection, Amsterdam, oil on panel, 48½ by 66¾ in. (123.5 by 169.5 cm); Bonnefontenmuseum, Maastricht, oil on panel, 48½ by 69 in. (123 by 175 cm).

9. The basic composition of all four is the same. Their sizes are nearly so. (The Raleigh version has been cut down along the bottom edge.) Certain elements among them are so similar—the pig's head, for instance, or the side of pork—that it would not be surprising to find that they were created by means of tracing devices or grid patterns. Scientific examination has shown that Aertsen used such techniques in other works. On tracings in Aertsen's objects, see Yvette Bruijnen, "Fruits and Vegetables: New Information on the Workshop Practice of Pieter Aertsen," *Oud Holland* 109, no. 3 (1994): 120–26, esp. 120, 124–25. On his graphing and use of cartoons more generally, see *Pieter Aertsen: Vier schilderijen doorgelicht*, exh. cat., Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1990, 40, in which Bruijnen publishes the results of a physical examination by herself, Dr. J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, and P. van den Brink; also *Van Eyck to Bruegel 1400–1550: Dutch and Flemish Painting in the Collection of the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994), 377; Jacqueline M. C. Boreel and Francis W. H. van Zon-Christoffels, "Enkele aspecten van de schilderspraktijk in het atelier van Pieter Aertsen natuurwetenschappelijk nader bekeken," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40 (1989): 167–96; and Wouter Kloek, "Pieter Aertsen en het probleem van het samenstellen van zijn oeuvre," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40 (1989): 1–27. One aspect of workshop production of the time was the creation of "multiple originals." In producing a new invention, the studio at times worked on at least two panels simultaneously, producing one for the patron or market and a second to maintain in the workshop as a *principaal*, from which to make faithful replicas in the future. See Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Pricing Invention: 'Originals,' 'Copies,' and Their Relative Value in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish Art," in *Economics of the Arts: Selected Essays* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1996), 27–70. This situation could be further complicated when an artist maintained more than one studio in different cities—as Aertsen seems to have done from about 1555 on. In such a case, the workshop may even have produced multiple *principales*, so that a prototype for reproduction could be kept in each studio. At least two versions, therefore, may by any definition have been "originals." Such practices were not confined to the Netherlands. For a discussion of the simultaneous production of more than one "original" in an Italian milieu, see Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mystery of the "Madonna of the Yarnwinder"* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1992).

10. Aertsen was born in Amsterdam in 1508 or 1509. In a notarial document of June 20, 1541, he declares that he is thirty-four years old. SAA, Protocollen van den notaris Zeger sHertoghen, 1540–43, cited in F. Jos. van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Antwerpse Schilderschool* (Antwerp: J.-E. Buschmann, 1883), 159–60. He joined the Antwerp painters' guild in 1535. P. Rombouts and T. van Lierus, *De Liggere en Andere Historische Archieven der Antwerpse Sint Lucasgilde* (Amsterdam: Baggerman, 1864–76; reprint, Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1961), vol. 1, 124.

11. These figures are extremely conservative and in no way meant as definitive. They are based on a variety of sources. I include the four extant compositions dated before *The Meat Stall* and the thirty-four after it attributed definitively to Aertsen in Mary Buchan, "The Paintings of Pieter Aertsen," Ph.D. diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1975, 191–222. I add, as well, the four of the five altarpieces specifically identified by van Mander, vol. 1, 234–37, as having been destroyed in the iconoclasm (a piece of one survives and is catalogued by Buchan, 210, no. 27), as well as an *Emmaus* and a kitchen picture with portrait of Aert Pietersz., which have disappeared. Finally, I include about a dozen images ascribed to Aertsen in inventories whose attributions seem most secure—specifically, those of individuals whose death dates and locations (or subjects, such as portraits) suggest that these works were purchased from the artist. These appear in N. de Roever, "Pieter

Aertsz: Gezegd Lange Pier, Vermaard Schilder," *Oud Holland* 7 (1989): 18; J. Denucé, *De Antwerpse "Konstkamers": Inventarissen van kunstverzamelingen te Antwerpen in de 16 en 17e eeuwen* (Antwerp: De Spiegel, 1932), 49, 90, 108, 119; and Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse Kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1984), 73.

12. Kunsthalle, Tübingen, G. F. Zundel Collection, collage, 10¼ by 10 in. (26 by 25 cm). *The Art Bulletin's* publishing policy requires the capitalization here of words that Richard Hamilton left in lowercase when he titled this image. In the 1956 catalogue for *This Is Tomorrow*, only the initial letter of "Just" was printed in uppercase, even though titles for all other artworks in the exhibition appeared in block capitals. Hamilton reiterated the intentionality of his use of the lowercase by repeating it each time the title occurred in his *Collected Words, 1953–1982* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982). In this artwork, the title is an integral part of the whole. The casual, un-"Title"-like interrogative sentence "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?" functions as another element in the image's challenge to reigning artistic conventions. On Hamilton and this work, see Stephen Bann, "Pop Art and Genre," *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 115–24; Jacqueline Darby, Richard Hamilton, and Richard Morphet, *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery, London, 1992; Richard Morphet, "Richard Hamilton: The Longer View," in *ibid.*, 11–26; and idem, *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery, London, 1970. On the ways in which artwork of one's own era can intelligently inform one's reading of that of the past, see Leo Steinberg's account of receiving new insight into the trecento polyptych on viewing multi- and split-screen video informational displays at Montreal's Expo '67. Steinberg, "Objectivity and the Shrinking Self," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 318–19.

13. *This Is Tomorrow*, held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, from August 9 to September 9, 1956, was a cooperative exhibition of thirty-six artists organized into twelve teams of three; each of these teams chose one among them to create a poster for its exhibit area and for the catalogue. Alastair Grieve, "'This Is Tomorrow,' a Remarkable Exhibition Born from Contention," *Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1085 (1993): 232; Hamilton (as in n. 12), 22; and Morphet, 1970 (as in n. 12), 29–30.

14. Morphet, 1970 (as in n. 12), 28.

15. Janson (as in n. 3), 832. "The first work that can be called an unequivocal statement of Pop Art was a small collage made in 1956 by Richard Hamilton. . . ." Further, Marco Livingstone has suggested that it stands in relation to Pop as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* does in relation to Cubism. Livingstone, "In Glorious Techniculture," in *Pop Art*, exh. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1991, 12–19.

16. Hamilton (as in n. 12), 24.

17. Making this misappropriation of an Abstract Expressionist pattern more ironic still was the fact that what looks like gestural abstraction here is actually a photographic image—a distant view of bathers on a beach—and therefore itself a mechanically reproduced rather than a handmade artifact. Darby et al. (as in n. 12), 149.

18. Hamilton also paid ample homage to old master artwork in a way then out of fashion with the avant-garde. Hamilton (as in n. 12), 62, 264, has said that Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait* (which was on view just two miles west of the Whitechapel Gallery) "does embody all that I most admire in art. . . ." and that it inspired at least one other of his works. There are certainly strong generic echoes of the Netherlandish interior and the marriage portrait in the collage, as well of the still life tradition. For a discussion of the debt owed van Eyck in the collage, see Graham Smith, "Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 9, no. 4 (1990): 30–34.

19. The work done by the viewer/reader in the artistic encounter has been the subject of considerable reception and reader-response literature. Besides Jauss (as in n. 1), see Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader," in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 21–67; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993); and Wolfgang Kemp, "Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionästhetik," in *Der Betrachter ist im Bild* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 7–27.

20. Again, the exception is Kavalier, whose discussion of the picture in terms of carnival is dependent on the meat depicted in it. Craig subsumes the meat to sacrifice. Falkenburg, 1989 and 1995, and Sullivan (as in n. 3) treat it as a kind of generic "low" subject matter whose high praise in paint turns the exercise into a paradoxical encomium. In a similar vein, see Bryson (as in n. 7), 145–46.

21. On the exceptional levels of meat consumption in the cities of the Low Countries and Germany in the 15th and 16th centuries, see Herman van der Wee, *The Low Countries in the Early Modern World*, trans. Elizabeth Fackelman (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1993), 284–85; Massimo Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 74, 104, 110, 112; and Hans Jürgen Teuteberg and Jean-Louis Flandrin, "The Transformation of the European Diet," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Flandrin, Massimo Montanari, and Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 447–49. As these sources indicate, such elevated meat consumption was common, especially in northern European cities, from the mid-14th through at least the mid-16th centuries, at which point it began a decline that reached its lowest levels in the 19th century.

22. On the anthropological dimensions of "meat" being linguistically and ritualistically laundered of its origin in animal flesh, and of slaughtering and discrete body parts being increasingly distanced from public view, see Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, trans. J. A. Underwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

23. December roundel, detail, bas de page, from a 14th-century missal, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, ms M. 511, fol. 6v. See Olga Koseleff Gordon, "Two Unusual Calendar Cycles of the Fourteenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 45 (1963): 245–53. The *Meat Stall's* lineage from such calendar pages is mentioned in J. P. Filedt Kok et al., eds., *Kunst voor de beeldenstorm: Noordnederlandse kunst 1525–1580*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1986, 343–44.

24. The illustration from *De rerum natura*, Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale, Montecassino, ms Cod. Casin. 132 (1023), fol. 352, depicts a butcher slaughtering a goat, while a decapitated animal hangs overhead. The illustration of Hans Lengfelder salutes a monk who acted as his order's butcher. See Kurt Nagel and Benno P. Schlipf, *Das Fleischerhandwerk in der bildenden Kunst: Kunstgeschichte des Fleischerhandwerks* (Heidenheim: C. F. Rees, 1984), 75, pl. 150.

25. The exception is landscape painting; artists such as Joachim Patinir and Herri met de Bles were painting panels in which the landscape dwarfed human activity. Even so, most retained a religious subject.

26. See Lydia de Pauw-de Veen, *De begrippen "schilder," "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Schone Kunsten, 31, no. 22 (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1969), 141–57; and Honig, 190.

27. Such red tunics are the dress worn by the butchers trading cattle in Peeter van Bredael, *De Oude Ossenmarkt te Antwerpen*, ca. 1670, oil on canvas, 52¾ by 74¾ in. (133 by 190 cm), Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp; a knife block virtually identical to that worn in *The Meat Stall* is illustrated among the paraphernalia of the butcher's trade in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rona d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers* (Paris, 1751), vol. 1, pl. 1.

28. On the Vleeschouwers, see Poffé. There were approximately one hundred *ambachten* in 16th-century Antwerp. Each regulated all aspects of the practice of a given trade in the city and functioned as a professional, religious, and social-service institution for members and their families. Price regulation, production oversight, chapel decoration, funeral benefits, wedding banquets, and group participation in festival activity were integrated aspects of their corporate life. In late medieval Netherlandish cities, guild membership was the primary source of civic identity and power for tradesmen and producers. On guilds generally, see A. J. M. Brouwer-Ancher, *De Gilden* (The Hague: Loman en Funcke, 1895); and Sylvia Thrupp, "The Gilds," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 3, ed. M. M. Postan, E. E. Rich, and Edward Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 230–80. On guilds in Antwerp, see Rafaël Lauwaert, "Ambachten en nieuwe nijverheden," in *Antwerpen in de XVIIe eeuw* (Antwerp: Mercurius-Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis, 1975), 143–60.

29. SAA, Charters, no. xxviii; and Frédéric Verachter, *Inventaire des anciens chartres et privilèges* (Antwerp: n.p., 1860), 8. The Butchers Guild was one of the city's earliest recognized trade organizations.

30. SAA, Charters, no. cxxxix; and Verachter (as in n. 29), 47.

31. Verachter (as in n. 29); see also Leon Voet, *Antwerp: The Golden Age* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1973), 281; Poffé, 13; and *Luister van het Antwerps Vleeshouwersambacht*, exh. cat., Museum Vleeshuis, Antwerp, 1963, 8–12. Only the fishmongers and some *Turfdraggers* (peat carriers) had similar privileges of closed corporations. Voet, 281–82; and Lauwaert (as in n. 28), 149.

32. SAA, GA, 4378, *Eedt en Costuymboeck*, fol. 2r.

33. This is most clearly evident in the Vleeschouwers' extensive "Lineage Book," which certified legitimacy. SAA, GA, 4378, partially transcribed by Alfons K. L. Thijs, *Het Boom- of Linieboek der Antwerpse Vleeschouwers (1495–1774)* (Handzame: Familia et Patria, 1968).

34. A number of butchers owned not merely a house (*huys*) but a grander *huysinge* (substantial property), costing 800 guilders or more. Huybrecht Bordincx, for instance, owned a *huysinge* comprising two lower rooms, lofts, yard, well access, slaughtering house, cowshed, an additional smaller yard, and a cistern with running water. SAA, SR, 192, fols. 158r–158v ("een huysinge met twee neercameren, solders, plaetse, derden vander bovenputte, slachuyse, stalle, met noch eenen cleyden plaetsen, regenbacke, metten waterloopen. . ."). Butcher homes frequently bore names linked to the profession: De Ribbe (the Rib); De Ijseren Verckens (the Iron Pigs); Dlammeken (the Little Lamb); and, with resonance for Aertsen's *Meat Stall*, 't Ossenhoofd (the Ox Head). These appear in title and transfer documents and in *Wijkboeken*, which list homes by street.

35. Real estate records show that the most prominent and powerful butcher families were all heavily represented there. For example, SAA, SR, 263, fol. 272v (de Laet); SR, 209, fol. 101v (Dyckstraet); SR, 204, fol. 221r (Moelenaer); SR, 204, fol. 223v (Vervloet). These names are frequently linked to guild leadership in 16th-century documents. See SAA, GA, 4379, *Inkomst boek*, passim.

36. Voet, 1973 (as in n. 31), 278–86. The dukes had granted the city the right to health and sanitary regulation of the guild, carried out through its *cuermesters* (overseers). Poffé, 13–14. An additional mark of butcher prestige was that the Vleeschouwers were one of only eighteen guilds that sat on both

advisory councils to the magistracy, the Broad and Monday Councils. Voet, 285–86; and Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*, trans. J. C. Grayson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 17. On the relevant dual genealogy, see *Prisma Kalendarium: Geschiedenis van de lage Landen in jaartallen* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1995), 58–59. Consonant with such imperial connections, the Vleeschouwers would remain staunchly Catholic and conservative through and beyond the Reformation era.

37. The Vleeschouwers petitioned the duke to rebuild and enlarge (SAA, Privilegiekamer, 78, *Privilegieboeken*, C): "The Butchers' Hall is very old and unsightly and the City of Antwerp, by the grace of God, has recently so filled up with folk that it needs a larger hall. . . [het vleeshuis zeer oud en onsierlijk is en de stad Antwerpen onlangs bij de gratie gods zeer van volk gemenigvuldigd, zodat er van node was een groter huis. . .]." It stood on the same site as the original meat hall of 1250. On the history of the hall, see Jan van Herck, "Het Vleeschhuis te Antwerpen," *Jaarboek van Antwerpen's Oudheidkundige Kring* 15 (1939): 4–7; Floris Prims, "Hoe kwam er ons Vleeschhuis?" *Antwerpiensia* 12 (1938): 279–84; and *Luister* (as in n. 31), 5–20. On the present physical structure, see *Stad Antwerpen, Inventaris van het cultuurbezit in België*, vol. 3na (Ghent: Cultuurbezit in België, 1979), 409–10.

38. On de Wagemakere as architect of the Vleeshuis, see J. Van den Branden, "Aanteek over 't Vleeschhuis," June 4, 1921, Archief van het Vleeshuis, no. 65; Herck (as in n. 37), 7; and *Stad Antwerpen, Inventaris* (as in n. 37), 411. On de Wagemakere's career, see Pierre Génard, "Notice sur les architectes Herman (le Vieux) et Dominique de Wagemakere," *Bulletin des Commissions Royales d'Art et d'Archéologie* 9 (1870): 429–94; and Rita Steyaert et al., *Architectuurgids Antwerpen* (Antwerp: Brepols, 1993), 2–9.

39. Its height was further accentuated by its site; in a city whose topography is remarkably flat, it stood on a slight rise. Antwerp residents at the time referred to the site mordantly as *Bloedberg* (Blood Mountain). Herck (as in n. 37), 9.

40. Vleeshuis inventories indicate such functions through the names of rooms and the types of furnishings in them. Among the hall's rooms were a lavishly decorated *bruyts camer* (bride's chamber) for wedding banquets and guild meetings, furnished with fifty-four Spanish leather chairs embossed with the guild's patron, Saint John, flanked by oxen and sheep; a *sy cammer* (side room) that housed a stunning amount of tableware for feasting (including 300 plates and 300 one-and-a-half-pound platters); a kitchen; and a chapel. SAA, GA, 4390, *Inventaris Vleeschouwers* (1641), fols. 2r, 2v, 3v.

41. J. Denucé, *Antwerpsche Tapijkunst en Handel*, Bronnen voor de Geschiedenis van de Vlaamsche Kunst, 4 (Antwerp: De Sikkell, 1936), xi, xxiii–xxiv.

42. Jan van Roey, "De Bevolking," in *Antwerpen in de XVIde eeuw* (Antwerp: Mercurius-Genootschap voor Antwerp Geschiedenis, 1975), 99.

43. All of Oosterwaele was flooded in 1530, killing many cattle. AA, vol. 1 (1864), 192–202, 211. Next, in 1542 Oosterwaele and other low-lying lands were intentionally flooded, creating a defensive moat around the city to deflect the attack of Marten van Rossum. Each incident demanded extensive repairs and imposts on landholders in the area. *Ibid.*, 216–19. Then in 1551 another devastating flood occurred: "1551 15 February, on Monday at 10 o'clock, the fifth high flood occurred in Antwerp, which did much more damage than the fourth, because the dike protecting Oosterwaele broke again in the same place, for the dike was not built high enough. . . [1551 15 februari, 's maendaghs ten 10 uren, is geweest tot Antwerpen die vijffde hooge vloed, die veel meer schaede dededan die vierde, want den dijk tegenover Austruweel brack weder door op de selve plaetse, omdat den dijk niet hoogh genoeg gedijckt en was. . .]." G. van Havre, ed., *Chronijk der stad Antwerpen toegeschreven aan den notaris Gerard Bertrijn* (Antwerp: P. Kockx, 1879), 92. Also reported in *Chronycke van Antwerpene sedert het jaar 1500 tot 1575* (Antwerp: J. P. van Dieren, 1843), 47.

44. First imposed in 1542 for a period of only two years, it was in fact renewed year after year because of escalating costs of the rewalling. AA, vol. 1, 219, 223, 239. Each penny of impost passed on to the consumer raised meat's price, tending to drive sales down. As discussed in n. 21 above, however, meat was a regular part of most people's diets. See also Herman van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy (Fourteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 158. It was costly, but within reach. A master bricklayer in Antwerp in 1550 earned 7 stuivers per day (20 stuivers equaled 1 guilder) and his laborer earned 4, while meat cost an average of 1 stuiver, or a little more, per pound. On the cost of meat, see Adriaan Linters and Paul Verbraeken, eds., *Jubileumuitgave van de Antwerpse verenigingen voor vee en vlees*, exh. cat., KB-Toren, Antwerp, 1988, 69.

45. Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1927–49; reprint, Brussels: Kultur en Beschaving, 1985), vol. 5, 106, 267; and Linters and Verbraeken (as in n. 44), 69.

46. Records of the suit appear in two compendiums of Vleeschouwers material: SAA, GA, 4402 ("dyt is den boek ende copye van stuck tot stucke aengaende het beleyens vanden prosesse tussen Mercelis Clasen cum suis buytenvleeschouwers Reformanten ter [winne] ende dekens . . . van het ambacht vanden vleeschouwers. . .") and in the guild's *Privilegieboek*, SAA, GA, 4377.

47. SAA, GA, 4377, fols. 207–11.

48. *Ibid.*, fols. 225–26; and Linters and Verbraeken (as in n. 44), 69.

49. Recounted in SAA, GA, 4377, fol. 207; and Linters and Verbraeken (as in n. 44), 69. In 1469 the city magistracy had granted the *buitenbehouwers*

license to sell meat in certain market squares (not the Vleeshuis) on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays—basically, half the sales week.

50. Prims (as in n. 45), 106, 267. The Vleeschouwers Ambacht appealed the city's action to then-Duke Charles the Bold. He intervened on their behalf, cutting outsider sales to Saturdays only, and then during just a part of the year. On claiming the precedent, see SAA, GA, 4377, fol. 207. Hearings and requests for information from the guild on June 25 and Sept. 23, 1551, are recorded in a handwritten copy of the final decree in the case, handed down on Dec. 24, 1554 (in the Vleeschouwers favor). SAA, GA, 4377, fols. 225–26.

51. Aertsen and his wife purchased the adjoining Ossenmarkt properties Schilt van Vlaanderen and Wapen van Brabant in 1547 and 1549, respectively. SAA, SR, 227, fol. 29v; SAA, SR, 235, fol. 108r. A 1539 pen and ink drawing records structures then on the square; Aertsen's would appear to be two of the several private properties lining it, most likely on the southwest corner. SAA, Fonds Iconografie, P 13/3.

52. The conclusion of the case is recorded in SAA, GA, 4377, fols. 225–26.

53. J. A. van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries 800–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977), 175–77; and van der Wee (as in n. 21), 91–97; for Antwerp's economic development, see idem (as in n. 44).

54. The most comprehensive study of this cycle is Soly's.

55. *Ibid.*, 203–4.

56. *Ibid.*; and *Chronijk (van) Bertrijn* (as in n. 43), 85.

57. Soly, 243–67.

58. Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 365–66. While the authors focus primarily on this division of interests in Amsterdam, the model is applicable to developments in the late phase of Antwerp's greatest prosperity. See also Herman van der Wee, "Structural Changes and Specialization in the Industry of the Southern Netherlands, 1100–1600," *Economic History Review* 28, no. 2 (1975): 203–21. Interestingly, van Schoonbeke would himself become involved in contracts with the Vleeschouwers when he and several others formed a corporation to provision troops fighting the French-Habsburg war. This company was not formed, however, until 1554, three years after *The Meat Stall* was painted. See Hugo Soly, "Een Antwerpse Compagnie voor de levensmiddelenbevoorrading van het leger in de Nederlanden in de zestiende eeuw," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 86, no. 3 (1971): 350–62.

59. The Vleeschouwers' investments, moreover, consisted primarily of local land and cattle. I have found no example of a Vleeschouwer participating, alone or in partnership, in trade ventures dealing with commodities other than those related to animal products.

60. On flooding, see n. 43 above.

61. Material in this section has appeared in a somewhat different form in Charlotte Houghton, "A Topical Reference to Urban Controversy in Pieter Aertsen's *Meat Stall*," *Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1176 (2001): 158–60.

62. In the original Flemish: "hier achter is erva te coope tersto(n)t metter roeye(n) elck syn gerief oft teenemale 154." Within *The Meat Stall*, this sign functions as what Nelson Goodman would term a "dense" or "replete" symbol—one in which every property of representation counts toward its overall significance. Goodman, *The Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976). In discussing Goodman's work, W. J. T. Mitchell observes, "The differences between sign-types are matters of use, habit and convention. The boundary line between texts and images, pictures and paragraphs, is drawn by a history of practical differences in the use of different sorts of symbolic marks, not by a metaphysical divide." Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 69.

63. On the moralizing aspects of the sign, see, for example, Buchan (as in n. 11), 89–90; and Kenneth Craig, "Pieter Aertsen and *The Meat Stall*," *Oud Holland* 96, no. 1 (1982): 1–15.

64. Kavalier, 69–70.

65. SAA, Tresorij, 16, *Collegiale Actenboek*, 1551–53, fols. 29r, 29v (emphasis added): "Geordoneert op heden datum voirsz desen by / myn heeren burgermeesteren ende scepenen ende raedt de / stadt van Antwerpen, collegialicken vergadert zynde / ende mits desen den tresoriers ende rentmeesteren der / selve stadt . . . dat sy Gilleberten / van Schoenbeke, . . . opdragen: rederen: ende transporteeren . . . een / stuck erven metten gronde ende toebehoirten houdende / een hondert vierenvyftich roeden ende een halve . . . comende zuytwaert aen des voirsz Gasthuys / erefve ende de nieuwe schutters hoven vanden ouden / ende jonghen voetboghe, In welck stuck erven / mede gecomprenheerde ende geapliceert is een deel / vander erven die dese stadt den lesten Septembris / lestleden van die vander voirsz Gasthuys gecreghen heeft / . . . aldus gedaen dis Vrydaechs / xxiii daeghen inder maent van octobri xvc / ende Li onderteekent politis."

66. Soly, 221–23; and Denucé (as in n. 41), xi, xxiii–xxiv.

67. Soly, 223.

68. *Ibid.*, 234.

69. *Ibid.*, 221–23, 234–38.

70. E. Pais-Minne, "Weldadigheidsinstellingen en ondersteunden," in *Antwerpen in de XVIde eeuw* (Antwerp: Mercurius-Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis, 1975), 185; and Floris Prims, "St. Elizabeth's Gasthuis over seven honderd jaren," *Antwerpiensia* 12 (1939): 12–17.

71. Soly, 234.

72. SAA, GA, 4621, no. 2: "men met trommelen ende pijpen compt groot gerucht maken."

73. To be precise, the city's offer was for a yearly payment (*erfrente*) of 25 stuivers per rod, and *erfrenten* were calculated at one-sixteenth of the sale value of land. Soly, 51–57. The stuiver was equal to one-twentieth of a guilder, so in this case, $25 \times 16 \div 20 = 20$ guilders per rod.

74. Soly, 234–38; and Pais-Minne (as in n. 70), 185.

75. SAA, Kerken en Kloosters, 2153, no. 2.

76. The size of the tract was unusual in mid-16th-century Antwerp. 154 square rods (1.25 acres, or half a hectare) constituted a substantial urban parcel, enough for up to ten grand homes, or twice as many modest ones. By 1551, few undeveloped parcels of such size remained within the city. Among the hundreds of land transactions I have reviewed from the decade surrounding Aertsen's painting, I have found reference to no other of 154 rods.

77. Soly, 150–55.

78. *Ibid.*, generally, but esp. 441–43.

79. The French-Habsburg war broke out on September 26, 1551. Beginning in 1554, van Schoonbeke was granted lucrative contracts for provisioning the Habsburg troops with textiles and food, in some instances turning usurious profits. See Soly, 321–36; and idem (as in n. 58), 350–62.

80. Hatred for van Schoonbeke climaxed in 1554 when he seized a monopoly in the brewing industry. Antwerp's population rose up against him in public outrage. The mob was so large and unruly, and sentiment so virulent, that the civic militias refused to intervene (Soly, 440–47). Perhaps one fact above all reveals the measure of van Schoonbeke's character. Despite the millions of guilders that passed through his hands, in his lifetime he made only one charitable pledge: to give 3½ guilders a year to the poorhouse fund (the *Armenkamer*). This was the equivalent of a few kegs of beer, or about one-eighth the price of a single head of cattle. Moreover, he had won the yearly payment of this sum in a lottery and merely signed it over to the poorhouse (*ibid.*, 439). Only at his death did van Schoonbeke give anything more to charity, and it amounted to no more than 100 guilders. *Ibid.*, 439–40; and SAA, Insolvente Boedelskamer, Fonds Gilbert van Schoonbeke, 2174, no. 8.

81. Van der Heyden, with fellow Burgemeester Lancelot van Ursel, was charged with skimming 57,000 guilders from the city rewalling fund. Soly, 204, 384; on public awareness of the corruption surrounding van Schoonbeke, see *ibid.*, 443.

82. *Ibid.*, 445.

83. Two of the four versions are undated. The other two (Raleigh and Uppsala) bear an identical date in an identical location. The land for sale sign in the Maastricht panel appears to bear a date, but this area had been overpainted, the "154" changed to "1568" in an attempt to turn it into a date.

84. The Antwerp calendar followed the so-called Easter Style, in which the New Year began not on January 1 but rather on Good Friday. The first day of 1551 in Antwerp, then, was March 27 (Good Friday), and the last was April 14—Maundy Thursday of what one today would call 1552. Because of this system, as Easter moved, a year might easily have two sets of late March and early April dates. In a year that had (for example) two March 29s, the first was noted in documents as "March 29" and the second as "March 29 before Easter [*voor paeschen*]." March 10 was too early in the liturgical calendar to present this problem; it fell only once in every year, but near that year's end. In 1551, March 10 thus occurred barely a month before the end of the year (April 14), and Aertsen's image could relate to the entire year's activity. Egied Strubbe and Leon Voet, *De Chronologie van de Middeleeuwen en de moderne tijden in de Nederlanden* (Antwerp: Standaard, 1960), 51–58; and Floris Prims, "Onze Nieuwjaarsdatum," *Antwerpiensia* 9 (1936): 377–83.

85. For a lucid and provocative discussion of topical and local reference as a central strategy in 16th-century cultural production, see Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. 1–50. A variety of scholars have enriched the interpretation of canonical works by exploring their topical engagements. See, for instance, Charles Burroughs, "Michelangelo at the Campidoglio: Artistic Identity, Patronage, and Manufacture," *Artibus et Historiae: An Art Anthology* 28, no. 14 (1993): 85–111; Thomas Crow, "Codes of Silence: Historical Interpretation and the Art of Watteau," *Representations* 12 (1985): 2–14; and Annabel Jane Wharton, *Refiguring the Post-Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

86. For the legend of Brabo and Antigoon, see *Van Brabant die excellente Cronike* (Antwerp: Jan van Doesborch for Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraten, 1530), 320ff. See also discussions in Floris Prims, "De handen in Antwerpen's zegel en wapen," *Antwerpiensia* 19 (1948): 25–26; and Jan Van der Stock, ed., *Antwerp: Story of a Metropolis, 16th–17th Century*, exh. cat., Hessenhuis, Antwerp, 1993, 176. Although the story is apocryphal, the hands today remain an important symbol of the city, appearing on chocolates and cookies, on T-shirts, and in the logo of Antwerp's most popular beer, De Konink. A copper coin from 1556 shows the hands in the city seal (Fig. 17).

87. The hands appeared, for instance, as quality assurance stamps on the wooden barrels produced by Antwerp's coopers and most silversmiths' goods and were branded by the Saint Luke's Guild on the verso of altarpiece panels (Fig. 18, from verso, *Portico with Evangelists and the Triumph of the Church*, 1620, Begijnhofmuseum, Turnhout). The city's *aalmoezeniers* (charitable overseers) placed the hand on their *broetteiken*—the coins the poor could redeem for bread. Prims (as in n. 86), 24–25. In this regard it is interesting to note an

additional use of the hands. An ordinance of the Magistraat enacted March 19, 1551 (*The Meat Stall* is dated March 10, 1551), specified that vagabonds and beggars forced to labor in the city's public works projects had to wear an iron ring "marked with the hand [*geteekend metter hand*]" until their period of service had ended, so that they could be identified and apprehended if they fled to another jurisdiction. "Index der gebodboeken (1489–1794)," in AA, vol. 1 (1864), 244.

88. The images I refer to are Braunschweiger Monogrammist, *Flight into Egypt*, ca. 1545, 16½ by 23 in. (42 by 59 cm), formerly Thyssen Collection, Lugano; Braunschweiger Monogrammist or follower, *Flight into Egypt*, 1543, 15¾ by 21½ in. (40 by 55 cm), Thieme Collection, Berlin (in 1924); and Joachim Beuckelaer, *Groentemarkt*, 1569, oil on canvas, 62 by 84¾ in. (157.3 by 214.2 cm), Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, inv. no. 1986-AD. Beuckelaer's shows a distant Holy Family just approaching the beggar; the audience is left to anticipate the next moment's act of charity. Each of these images also shares another unusual feature: the Holy Family is depicted passing one or more distinctively cross-shaped trees. For discussions of the anomalous nature of the portrayal these share, see Walter Mellion (as in n. 6), 27–28; and (with images) Craig (as in n. 63), 4–7, figs. 6, 7. Today, the Braunschweiger Monogrammist is often identified with Jan van Amstel, who some have speculated was Pieter Aertsen's brother. See G. J. Hoogewerff, *De Noord-Nederlandse Schilderkunst*, vol. 4 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1941–42).

89. Albrecht Dürer described seeing it there (not necessarily the almsgiving scene) when he visited in 1520: "I saw on the Sunday after Assumption (August 19) the great procession of Our Lady's Church in Antwerp. . . . In this procession were wonderful things . . . [a]mong which were . . . the Three Kings on great camels and on other fantastic animals, very pleasingly devised, and our Lady on the Flight into Egypt—very devotion inspiring. . . ." Albrecht Dürer, *Tagebücher und Briefe* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1927), 33–34. On devotion to the Seven Sorrows, see Hippolyte Delehaye, "La Vierge aux sept glaives," *Analecta Bollandiana* 12 (1893): 338–44. Antwerp's Chamber of Rhetoric, the Goudbloem, began performing a play of the Seven Sorrows there as early as 1495. Freddy Puts, "Geschiedenis van de Antwerpse rederijkerskamer De Goudbloem," *Jaarboek "de Fonteyne"* 23–24, 2nd ser., 15–16 (1973–74): 7–8.

90. For a discussion of the scholarly tendency not to admit uncertainty, see Walter J. Slatoff, "Some of My Best Friends Are Interpreters," *New Literary History* 4 (1972–73): 377–78.

91. These marks also could have belonged to two different people. They have been mentioned by a few scholars, but only in passing. Craig, 125, noted that they were reminiscent of the merchant marks on packages in Pieter Bruegel's *Elck* but did not pursue the issue, interpreting them rather as Eucharistic symbols of the cross, the trefoil (Trinity), and the bell rung at the moment of transubstantiation in the Mass. Buchan (as in n. 11), 90, noted that bells and clover leaves were used as playing card suits and hypothesized that the upper set of marks represents the tally for a game of cards.

92. On *huismerken*, see Eugène Verstraete, *Huismerken en Sibbetekens in Vlaanderen* (Brussels: Uitgeverij de Burcht, 1943; reprint, Handzame: Familia et Patria, 1979). H. Reydon, *De Huismerken* (Naarden: Bibliotheek voor Geslacht- en Wapenkunde, n.d.).

93. The *merken* appear in Brussels, Archives Générales du Royaume, Fonds Raad van Beroerten, no. 158. They and other Ronse *huismerken* are discussed and illustrated in P. Van Butsele, "Handmerken en lotgevallen van hervormingsgezinde Ronsenaars uit de XVIe eeuw," *Annalen van de Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Ronse en het Tenement van Inde* 23 (1974): 71–90; and idem, "Handmerken van katholieke Ronsenaars uit de XVIe eeuw," *Annalen van de Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Ronse en het Tenement van Inde* 22 (1973): 103–32.

94. Félix de Vigne, *Moeurs et usages des corporations de métiers de la Belgique et du nord de la France* (Ghent: De Busscher Frères, 1857), 133–34, 144.

95. *Ibid.*, 134, 144, pl. 29, no. 14, pl. 32, no. 8. Collection information is that published in 1857.

96. On the creation of "inside" and "outside" audiences, see Alan Sinfield, "Private Lives/Public Theater: Noel Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation," *Representations* 36 (fall 1991): 43–63.

97. At least one scholar has recently argued that the "self-aware" image—the artwork whose theme is its own artistic functioning—debuted in Antwerp in the 1550s and was found primarily in the work of Pieter Aertsen. Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–16. While he does not cite *The Meat Stall*, I would fully agree with Stoichita that part of this image's fascination in 1551 lay in the way it called attention to its own functioning, thereby forcing an awareness of the viewing act on its audience.

98. *Varietas* was advocated famously by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De pictura* of 1435. Alberti, *On Painting and Sculpture: The Latin Texts of "De Pictura" and "De Statua,"* ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 78–81, bk. 2, sec. 40. Aertsen's own mastery of *varietas* was remarked on as early as 1588. See Hadrius Junius, *Bavaria* (Leiden: F. Raphelengium pro Officina Plantina, 1588), 239–40: "in addition to the greatest pleasure, his pictures because of their endless variety, never bore. . . ."

99. The art of the faithful portrayal of reflection and counterreflection was of particular importance to early Netherlandish painters and their audiences. On the centrality of *reflexy-const* and its component parts (such as *spiegeling* [mirroring], *glans* [polish], *tegenglans* [counterreflection]) in both Nether-

landish painting and in Karel van Mander's codification of a vocabulary of its distinctive properties, see the chapter "Local Usages" in Walter Mellion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70–77. Van Mander awarded special praise to Aertsen for his mastery of counterreflection. See n. 100 below.

100. Van Mander, vol. 1, 233, on the lifelike quality of Aertsen's work and his mastery of color: "He had devoted himself to making kitchen pieces, with all kinds of goods and victuals from life [*nae leven*] in which he caught the colours so naturally that things appear to be real; and by doing this a great deal he became the surest master in the mixing or tempering of his colours ever to be found." He describes, 234–35, Aertsen's execution of the cartoon for the high altarpiece of Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk as "aendachtich"—precise, careful, attentive—and said of it that he did not think one could find more competent handling of color. (The finished painting had been destroyed during the iconoclasm.) In van Mander's long poem on artistic practice, *Den grondt*, he praises Aertsen's mastery of *reflexy-const* (here, specifically, *tegenglans*) and his extraordinary illusionism: "Men soude schier meenen met handen grijpeneenighe taillioeren in 't doncker staende' / Daer soo eenen tegen-glans in is slaende / Ghelijc men mach sien met jonstigher vlamme / By eenen Const-lievenden t'Amsterdamme. / Summa in Const was hy een overvliegher / Om de Reflexy aerdich by te bringhen / Iae een groot behendich listisch bedriegher / Vans' Menschen oogen oock een cluchtich liegher / Want men meent te sien alderhande dinghen / Doch ist maer verwe die hy wist te minghen / Dat t'effen schijnt rondt en t'platte verheven / T'stomme te spreken en t'doode te leven." (One could almost feel like grasping with his hands / A vessel standing in the dark / Where such a countergleam [*tegenglans*] is laid in / As can be made visible with an accommodating flame / In an art lover's home in Amsterdam. / In sum, he was a highflier in art / In order to produce lovely Reflections. / A great, deft, crafty deceiver / Of people's eyes, and also a comical liar / Because one seems to see all sorts of things / But it is only paint, which he knew how to mix / So that the flat seems round and the level raised up, / The mute to speak and the dead to live.) Karel van Mander, *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, ed. with commentary by Hessel Miedema, 2 vols., (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker en Gumbert, 1973), vol. 1, 200–201.

101. On the concept of the "period eye," see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); idem, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); and Allan Langdale, "Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall's Concept of the Period Eye," *Art History* 21, no. 4 (1998): 479–97.

102. Van Mander, vol. 1, 136–37.

103. *Ibid.*, 122–23.

104. *Ibid.*, 122, 134–35.

105. Pieter Opmeer, *Martelaars boek ofte Historie der Hollandse Martelaren* (Antwerp: Pieter vander Meersche, 1702), 249–50: "Dese siende, dat sijn Landgenoot Desiderius Erasmus door sijn heeckelschrift *Lof der Sotheid*, de luister van sijn naam wijd en sijds had verbreid, soo had hy de Geschiedenis van het *lijden onses Heere* met veel verwen soodanig op een vernuftige wijze afgemaald, en aardige beeldekens vercierd, en de afbeelden der voorige Meesters, en derselver gebreeken soo naakt ontdekt, dat hy selfs schoone de konst opendlijk ten toon te stellen. Dit werk was behaagelijck en aangenaam de deftigste, en statigste Menschen. t'Geen Petrus Longus (anders Lange Pier) een ander Apelles sijner Eeuw, soodanig pleegte te agten, dat hy op sijn doods-bedde in mijn bywesen seide, dat dit stuk voor geen geld kon gewaardeerd worden." The same work was published originally in Latin as *Historia martyrum* (Cologne: Bernard Gualther, 1625). Van Mander, vol. 1, 232–33, explains that Aertsen "on account of his tall figure was generally known as Langhen Pier" (Tall Pete). This nickname followed him into both Italian and Latin (Pietro Lungo, Petrus Longus), and he was often identified as such (without the "Aertsen") in period inventories.

A slightly different version of the Einout story appears in another of Opmeer's Latin works, *Opus chronographicum orbis universi* (Antwerp: Hieronymus Verdussius, 1611), 470. I date Einout's period of activity from the *Opus chronographicum*, where his story appears in accounts of the years 1525 through 1527. This version of the passage reads: "Florebat hac tum tempestate Roterodami Ioannes Einoutus, insignis quoque pictor, qui exemplo Moriae civis sui D. Erasmi provocatus pinxit tabulam ex albo CHRISTI affigendi cruci: in quo varij coloris atque diversae formulae deformium hominum figurae conspiciabantur. Ita ut artifices in ea viderent errata omnium celeberrimorum pictorum: videretur[que]; ipse non modo artificibus, sed etiam illuisse arti. Hanc tanti aestimabat Petrus Longus pictor, ut mihi diceret eam non posse aestimari auro, sed insigni aliqua provincia" (There flourished at this time another famous painter, Jan Einout of Rotterdam, who—challenged by the example of his fellow citizen D. Erasmus's [*Praise of*] *Folly*—painted on white a Christ fastened to the cross, in which could be seen the figures of misshapen men of different colors and contrary appearance. Thus artists might see in it the errors of all the famous painters, and he [Einout] might be seen to poke fun not only at artists but also at art itself. This picture the painter Tall Pieter [Aertsen] valued so highly that he told me that it could not be valued in gold coin but only in some public office of distinction). My thanks to Tony Cutler and Louise Rice for assistance with English translation of the Latin.

106. It is Zeuxis, as related by Pliny, who gave away his works because he believed that no price was adequate to their value. Pliny, *Natural History* 35.62,

ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 308–9.

107. Honig, 22, also used this passage to good purpose in exploring Aertsen's self-reflexivity as an artist.

108. A central text on this rhetorical form and its popularity in the Renaissance is Colie (as in n. 7). On this point, see also Falkenburg, 1995, 214–15.

109. Colie (as in n. 7), 3.

110. *Ibid.*, 3–5. These famous examples of classical paradoxical encomium are cited by Desiderius Erasmus in his preface to *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Leonard F. Dean (New York: Hendricks House, 1983), 38.

111. Colie (as in n. 7), 15–22.

112. Falkenburg, 1989, 55–56.

113. *Ibid.*, 57.

114. Falkenburg, 1995, 202–4.

115. Alberti (as in n. 98), 73ff., bk. 2, sec. 35ff.

116. Falkenburg, 1995, 214. Stoichita (as in n. 97), 3–18, has gone farther, concluding that the unconventionality of subject matter and handling in some of Aertsen's works gave them the status of "anti-painting." He does not, however, mention *The Meat Stall* in his discussion.

117. Falkenburg, 1996, 21; he refers to Alberti (as in n. 98), 78–79, bk. 2, sec. 40.

118. Falkenburg, 1996, 21.

119. Melion (as in n. 99), 139–41, 60–77. *Aendacht* had a particularly distinguished heritage in van Mander's critical vocabulary. It is just this quality in Jan van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece that led to the lifelike presence of its figures, and that van Mander said proved Pliny wrong when he placed limits on the possibilities of realistic representation. Van Mander, vol. 1, 60–61.

120. Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 88.

121. Recounted in Erwin Panofsky, "Erasmus and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969): 220–23.

122. *Ibid.*, 223–24. See also Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. Hans Rupprich (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1956–69), vol. 1, 156.

123. Panofsky (as in n. 121), 223–24.

124. *Ibid.*, 223–24. The eulogy appeared in Erasmus's *Dialogus de recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione*, first published in 1528. For the text, see *Desiderii Erasmi opera omnia*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Leclerc (Leiden: P. vander Aa, 1703), col. 928.

125. Panofsky (as in n. 121), 224–25.

126. *Ibid.*, 226.

127. Erasmus (as in n. 124), col. 928, quoted in Panofsky (as in n. 122), 225: "Fateor Apellem fuisse eius artis principem, cui nihil objici potuit a caeteris artificibus, nisi quod nesciret manum tollere de tabula. Speciosa reprehensio."

128. *Ibid.*, 226–27. Pliny's passage reads: "[Apelles] also asserted another claim to distinction when he expressed his admiration for the immensely laborious and infinitely meticulous work of Protogenes; for he said that in all respects his achievements and those of Protogenes were on a level, or those of Protogenes were superior, but that in one respect he [Apelles] stood higher, that he knew when to take his hand away from a picture." Pliny (as in n. 106), 35.318–21.

129. Panofsky (as in n. 121), 226. The definitive edition of Erasmus's *Adages* was published in 1517 in Basel by John Froben, although the author added at least one adage to an edition that appeared in 1526. Margaret Mann Phillips, *The "Adages" of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 96. An epitome of the adages appeared in translation in Dutch, published by Jan Knaep (Joannes Servilius) in 1544. Frans Claes, "Studie van de eigen Nederlandse taal," in *Antwerpen in de XVIde eeuw*, Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis (Antwerp: Mercurius, 1975), 305.

130. Panofsky (as in n. 121), 227.

131. Erasmus, quoted in *ibid.*, 224–25.

132. Braunschweiger Monogrammist, tempera on panel, 11½ by 15¼ in. (29.5 by 39 cm), Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum, acc. no. 1343.

133. Herri met de Bles, panel, 9¼ by 14 in. (23.5 by 35.5 cm), Bonnefantemuseum, Maastricht, inv. no. 179.

134. Marinus van Reymerswaele, oil on wood, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 89EE1866/RF 1989-6.

135. Aertsen left behind just one documented Antwerp commission, for an altarpiece for the Alms House of Jan van der Biest, who died in 1505. Buchan (as in n. 11), 36. Beyond this I have found information on only two members of his earliest Antwerp audience. The first appears in van Mander's *Schilderboek*, where he cites a *Martha* by Aertsen in the home of "one Jacques Walraven" in Amsterdam. Van Mander, vol. 1, 234–35. Walraven was a well-connected businessman, a sizable initial investor in the Dutch East India Company in 1602 and related by marriage to its largest stockholder. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 60. He had, however, moved to Amsterdam from Antwerp only in 1591, at sixty, and after Aertsen had been dead for sixteen years. It is likely that he brought the picture with him. A second contemporary of Aertsen's, who verifiably saw the artist's work in Antwerp, was the rich textile merchant and tax farmer Frans Schot. When Schot's widow died in 1602, their home inventory included "een Fruytaigie van Langhen Peer op panneel in lysten" (a fruit piece by Tall Peter [Aertsen] on panel in a frame)—almost certainly one of his market pictures. Duverger (as in n. 11), vol. 1, 73.

Both had profited handsomely from dealings with Gilbert van Schoonbeke. Walraven, with partner Jan de Bois, had parceled land they acquired in connection with van Schoonbeke's New Weigh House project of 1548. Soly, 363–64. Frans Schot was a direct partner of van Schoonbeke in profit-taking opportunities presented by the French-Habsburg war when they joined in contracts to provision the Habsburg armies. Soly, 70–71, 332–33; and Soly (as in n. 58), 355–60.

136. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1994), 13. Discussions of "modernity" often place its roots in the Enlightenment of the 18th century but treat Baudelaire's 1863 essay as its seminal text. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," trans. Nicholas Walker, in *Habermas and the Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on "The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity"*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 38–55; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), esp. 10–38; and T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1–13.