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**The ‘Kunst und Wunderkammer’
The library and collection of paintings
of Karel van Mander III (c. 1610-1670) in
Copenhagen***

After the death of the Dutch painter, art dealer and diplomat Pieter Isaacs (1569-1625), his position as Commissioner to the States General at the Sound toll was taken by a professional diplomat, Carel van Cracow. Pieter Isaacs was soon succeeded as court painter by another artist from the Dutch Republic, who also played an important political role. We are talking here about the grandson of the celebrated writer of the *Schilder-Boeck* from 1604, Karel van Mander (1548-1606). While not particularly well known in the Netherlands, in Copenhagen this painter, named after his grandfather, carried on the tradition of the “artist-scholar”, just as his grandfather had intended. His house, which contained a large library, collection of paintings and a “Kunst und Wunderkammer”, was an important centre of knowledge in northern Europe. In fact, his collection was the largest in the region at the time, after those of only the Danish king and the Duke of Gottorp. It enjoyed the privilege of frequent admiration given the fact that Karel van Mander III’s complex of buildings

* With thanks to Prof.Dr. A.A. Sneller and Dr. B. Thijs for their critical reading of the manuscript, and W. Bourke and J. Gonzalez for the translation.

served in those days as hotel for important royal guests, ambassadors, diplomats and admirals as well as prominent writers and scholars visiting the Danish capital.

From Delft to Copenhagen

Karel van Mander III was one of the sons of the eldest son of Karel van Mander.¹ His father, Karel van Mander II, initially worked as painter in the tapestry manufactory of Francois Spiering in Delft, but later went into business for him self. At one point he received a commission from the Danish king Christian IV (1588-1648) to make a series of tapestries commemorating the high-points of the Kalmar War (1611-1613), to serve as decoration for the ballroom of the almost entirely newly constructed castle of Frederiksborg, north of the capital Copenhagen. These tapestries, for which Karel van Mander II travelled to Sweden to make *in situ* sketches, were unfortunately lost in the big fire in the castle in 1859. After this large commission the tapestry industry went into serious decline and in 1623 Karel van Mander II died. Shortly thereafter, his widow, Cornelia Rooswijck, with the help of her brother, the painter Engel Rooswijck, perhaps to evade her creditors, moved to Denmark where she was still owed money by King Christian. Here Cornelia Rooswijck set up business as druggist. She soon became chief purveyor to the court, supplying amongst others the court alchemist Peder Payngk, and business flourished. One of her sons, Rafael, started up his own shop in the well-known Copenhagen Bourse in 1634, while another son, Cornelis, became stonemason to the Duke of Gottorp. In 1637 Cornelia bought a grave for herself and her children in the Sankt Petrikirke, the German church where Dutch people also attended services.

¹ Eller, *Kongelige portrætmalere*, 1971, pp. 165-194, and: Eller, Grandjean, Colding, *Dansk Kunst Historie*, 1973, pp. 165-193.



Karel van Mander III, Selfportrait with wife and mother-in-law, 1660's, oil on canvas, 137x112 cm, Kopenhagen (Statens Museum for Kunst).

Karel van Mander III was thirteen years old when he arrived in Copenhagen. It is thought that he may have worked for a while in the studio of Pieter Isaacs, who died in 1625, given the fact that there had long been close ties between the two families². After that, he probably was in service to at least one other painter for some time as well. In 1630 Karel made his first royal portrait and other commissions soon followed. In 1634 he designed the decors and costumes with their complex symbolism for the allegorical performances, court ballets and other festivities on the occasion of the grand celebration of the marriage of the “elected” successor to the throne, Crown Prince Christian to Princess Magdalene Sybille of Saxony.³

In 1635 the painter received a bursary from the king to go to Italy where he stayed for four years, mainly in Rome. He agreed to repay the bursary in the form of paintings, but did not commit himself to returning to royal service upon his return.

Return from Italy

After his return from Italy, Karel van Mander went back into the service of the Danish King, Christian IV. He married Maria Fern, daughter of a merchant and purveyor to the court, who ran an inn in Copenhagen for prominent travellers. The couple had two children. Starting in 1640 he produced many full-length state portraits of the king which played an important rhetorical role in diplomatic missions.⁴ He also carried out commissions for Crown Prince Christian and his wife Magdalene Sybille, who held court at Nykøbing and were very interested in art. Besides this he also painted other members of the royal family and immortalised Danish nobles, scholars and wealthy merchants. Van Mander painted

² Roding, Stompé, *Pieter Isaacs*, 1997, pp. 20-27.

³ Wade, *Triumphus Nuptialis Danicus*, 1996.

⁴ Larsen, ‘Rhetoric and Authenticity’, 2003.

biblical scenes and historical pieces as well. In 1647 he requested that Christian IV exempt him from taxation and civic duties, a request which was granted him in return for the production of two paintings annually.

Very significant at the time were van Mander's anatomical representations in "natural colours"; these were painted life size for a tract by the professor of anatomy, Thomas Bartolin, the *Anatome Augusta*, using corpses of executed prisoners provided by the king which were dissected in the Copenhagen *Theatrum Anatomicum*. Albert Haelwegh (died 1673), another fellow painter from the Dutch Republic at the Danish court, was commissioned to produce prints of these images.⁵ These anatomical pieces, which had originally hung in van Mander's art room, were acquired by the king for his own museum after van Mander's death and are mentioned in the inventory of his belongings; they were lost over the course of time. Shortly before his death Christian V appointed Karel van Mander III keeper of the royal collections. Together with a number of Danish nobles he was closely involved in the reorganisation of the collections in the new Royal Museum, a process which started in 1665 with respect to both organisation and content. In connection with this project he was commissioned to choose old artefacts from the cathedral of Roskilde which were worth adding to the museum's collection.

As early as the 1640's it was already widely known that a very special collection was to be found in van Mander's house. At that time he was renting a house from the Dutchman Roland Crappe, one of the directors of the Danish East India Company. Van Mander was in contact with affluent Dutch merchants and the prestigious resident of the States General at the Sound toll, Carel van Cra-cow. He clearly belonged to the local intelligentsia, which indulged in scholarly discussions, music and literature, occasional writing lit-

⁵ Weimarck, "Först med sin hud", 1997, pp. 321-322.

erary pieces, odes and epigrams in the classical style. Van Mander did this in his mother tongue, Dutch. The most notable example of this is the Dutch-language “painted ode” – a painting depicting only a poem, which is now in the Nationalmuseum: the “Ode op den Grooten Gulden Standaert den Turkschen Admirael Afgehwonnen Anno 1658 Door den Eed. Admirael Coert Adelaer. Op syn Con. Maytt Const Cammer t Syner Eere Opghangen”. It is an ode to the (partly fictive) heroic deeds of Coert Adelaer (1622-1675), who fought the Turks in 1654 and 1657 in the service of the Venetian Republic. He was knighted in the Order of St. Mark in 1659 for this exceptional service and in 1663 became admiral in the Danish navy. Van Mander was personally acquainted with Adelaer, who resurrected the Danish East India Company, and painted him in full length and regalia.⁶

A new dwelling

In the 1650's Van Mander bought a large complex with an inner courtyard on the Østergade in Copenhagen, which also included some rented accommodation on the Kongensgade. The house, within a stone's throw from the royal palace, was far and away the most expensive on the street, as can be seen from the tax levy. Van Mander housed his studio and collection here. In his *Encomion Regni Daniae* Jens Lauritzøn Wolf lavishes praise on van Mander's collection, reporting that the collection is open to public viewing and furthermore that foreigners, who are used to admiring the treasures available throughout Europe, also rave about it. Importantly, van Mander's house functioned as a sort of “cultural hotel” for a vast and colourful array of foreign diplomats and their courts, admirals of the fleet, as well as artists and poets who came and went, staying in Copenhagen for varying periods. The King generously paid all

⁶ Flindt, ‘Cort Adlers krigsbytte – sandhed eller myte?’, in: Lundbæk, Dehn-Nielsen, *Den Indianske Kammer*, 1979, pp. 17-25.

accommodation costs for high foreign visitors, as well as the costs required for a suitable furnishing of the guest quarters.⁷ From the lists of portraits which van Mander provided for the court it appears that he had commissions to paint his guests for a portrait gallery at Frederiksborg. Amongst these are also portraits of the Dutch admirals Opdam, De Ruyter, De With, Florisz and Tromp. A large group portrait of a “Tartar” ambassador and his retinue, who had given an impressive demonstration of their exceptional skills in archery during their stay in 1655, was also painted.⁸

The auctioning of van Mander’s collection

Karel van Mander died in the spring of 1670, just one year after the death of his only son and a few weeks after the death of King Frederik III (king from 1648 to 1670), for whom he carried out commissions to the very end and even portrayed on his death bed. On July 15, 1670, in the inner courtyard of the property on the Østergade, an auction of van Mander’s inventory took place, consisting of “books, print books, copper engravings, tooled copper plates, furnishings, guns, paintings and the complete art room”. The catalogue was printed by the royal book printer.⁹ Although this catalogue is mentioned a number of times and Poul Eller refers to the books and prints acquired by the king at the auction, it has never really been properly researched, nor has any effort been made to reconstruct the library on the basis of its often summary title descriptions. The catalogue begins with van Mander’s collection of guns, blunderbusses and pistols (28 numbers), swords and other hand weapons (55). At the time it was the first private weapon collection of any size in Denmark. These items are fol-

⁷ Bobé, *Karel van Mander’s Gaard*, 1919, pp. 24-33.

⁸ Eller, Grandjean, Colding, *Dansk Kunst Historie*, 1973, pp. 185-186; Eller, *Kongelige portrætmalere*, 1971, p. 227.

⁹ *Fortegnelse paa Gl. Carl von Manders Bøger...*[1670].

lowed by the clocks and pendulum clocks (7), then by the art room proper (184, 101 and 308 respectively), the furnishings (44), the paintings (99, 12), the tapestries (13), the folio books (73), the books with engravings and drawings as well as separate drawings and prints (25), tooled copper plates and finally books in quarto (127), octavo (178) and in duodecimo (144).

The numbers given are catalogue numbers, which are often a classification of several items under one single number, whether this encompasses three chairs or “246 landscapes by Merian”. In the case of the contents of a black “Cantoor” or art cabinet with nine drawers each drawer is auctioned as a separate piece. This means that while one catalogue number may concern two painted miniatures, another may refer to “four East Indian birds and a yellow feather”. Whoever made the list certainly went through van Mander’s rooms very systematically. Here and there he comments on the places where certain objects were found. For instance, we are told that on shelves next to the chimney and on the ground around it there are a variety of shells, including mother of pearl and snails’ shells; elsewhere he mentions “four fish above the stove” or small paintings hanging above a mirror. However detailed in that regard, these notes are far too summary to allow us to comment on the actual layout of the Kunst und Wunderkammer. Because the usual utilitarian furniture is mentioned on a separate list between, on the one hand, typical art room objects and, on the other hand, the paintings, tapestries and books, one is inclined to assume a division has been made designating separate areas for typical naturalia and artificialia and a rich collection of ethnographic objects as well as areas for the art collection and library. The décor and layout of the art room may have been highly similar to that of van Mander’s Danish contemporary and good friend, Ole Worm (1588-1654), which we know from the title page of his *Museum Wormianum* from 1655. A year after his death in 1655 Worm’s collection came into the possession of Frederik III and has been part of the royal collec-

tion ever since.¹⁰ Here too we find shallow shelves with an arrangement of, amongst other things, shells, some arranged loosely on a box with other “Conchiliata” (shells) on the ground below. It is very likely that, just as Ole Worm, van Mander employed a clear system in arranging his art room which gave the visitor insight into the world as it was known in those days and as into its exploration, including everything the four elements of water, earth, wind and fire brought fourth and how this was then interpreted. Thus we see a wide array of dried fish, coral, shells, turtles, stuffed birds, blown eggs, horns and prepared parts of all sorts of mammals, nuts, objects made of gold, silver, copper and brass, (semi-) precious stones, ivory and glass; there are artefacts made out of various materials from all four corners of the globe, bottles containing valuable liquids etc.

Plentiful in the collection are items of clothing, tools, weapons, artistic and utilitarian objects from the nations of East and West; amongst these are, for example, a number of items of Indian clothing made of feathers. It was perhaps together with these that hung eight small images of Indian men and women which are mentioned in the catalogue. These objects bring immediately to mind the collection of Johan Maurits van Nassau in the Mauritshuis in The Hague. Maurits donated a part of his collection to Frederik III in 1654, not only the famous paintings by Van Eeckhout but probably also a number of objects made of feathers.¹¹ It is not known how van Mander himself acquired his Indian collection - it was possibly a gift from the King himself.

¹⁰ Dam-Mikkelsen, ‘Kunstammeret’, in: Lundbæk, Dehn-Nielsen, *Den Indianske Kammer*, 1979, pp. 7-16.

¹¹ Van den Boogaart, ‘De bevolking van Nederlands Brazilië’, in: exh.cat. *Zo nijd de wereld strekt*, 1979, pp. 120-127; Due, ‘De røde fjer og Moritz af Brasilien’, in: Lundæk-Dehn-Nielsen, *Den Indianske Kammer*, 1979, pp. 48-54.



Title-engraving from *Museum Wormianum*, 1655.

Also noteworthy are the ethnographica from typically Northern lands which van Mander possessed, such as tools, sledges, skis and skates. The highlight of these ethnographica was certainly the kayak from Greenland. In the summers of 1652, 1653 and 1654 the first expeditions since 1605 and 1606 took place by order of Frederik III which - despite a thirty year monopoly - would be the last for the time being. A kayak as part of an art room was something that very few could boast on in those days. Christian IV owned one and made a gift of another to his brother in law, the Grand Elector of Saxony, in 1605. The physician Ole Worm, who regularly received gifts for his art room from the King, had also owned a kayak and Eskimo tools. It is not known how the kayak came in to Karel van

Mander's possession but in view of the royal monopoly it seems reasonable to assume that it was also a royal gift. Whatever the case, this kayak definitely gave van Mander's art room royal allure.¹²

The art room also contained the ten anatomic paintings he had produced in 1651 for Bartholin's tract as well as a skeleton, a skull and a "dried" hand of an "Egyptian king".

Paintings, drawings and prints

Van Mander's collection of paintings contained historical pieces, religious imagery, still lives, maritime pieces, landscapes, a number of "night pieces", townscapes, portraits, *trompe l'oeil*, and a battle field or "bataille". Amongst these portraits were three paintings of Christian IV, one of which was incomplete, two paintings of his son, Duke Ulrik, two paintings of Frederik III and Sophia Amalia together and four of Christian V (king from 1670 to 1699). There were also portraits of several noblemen, a portrait of Melanchton and the "Portrait of a man who killed the King of Sweden without his arm". The paintings of a "man's head", "an old man", "piece with a nude man" and "a painting of an Amager farmer and a girl" deal with characters, faces, which were regarded as anatomical studies. As Weimarck notes, Jens Lauritzøn Wolf also considered van Mander's paintings as "anatomical art", hereby clearly upgrading this genre to a branch of painting based on science.¹³

Besides the "small painting with the Resurrection of Christ" amongst the religious paintings we find, for instance, a portrayal of Christ's Passion and a depiction of Zachary, being held in Jesus' arms, various pieces of the Magi as well as a number of depictions of Mary. Notably there were a number of crucifixes in the art room. It is not clear to what extent this may have reflected van

¹² Meldgaard, 'Da grønlændere kom på Kunstkammer', in: Lundbæk, Dehn-Nielsen, *Den Indianske Kammer*, 1979, pp. 42-47.

¹³ Weimarck, "Först med sin hud", 1997, p. 321.

Mander's own religious beliefs, his possible desire to be "complete" regarding religions or whether this may have simply been a friendly gesture to emissaries from non-protestant countries.

In many cases it is not clear whether the work is van Mander's own work or that of other artists. Sometimes the notes indicate that a particular work is "an old painting" or "an old landscape" and there is also mention of "a large painting from the inventory of Carl van Mander's father", who would likely have left the most tapestries in the collection to his son in his inheritance.

Numbered separately is a group of paintings including images of the castle in Copenhagen, Frederiksborg Castle and Rosenborg Castle. The reason for this separate numbering may be that the paintings were hung in a separate cabinet with a number of other works including some hunting scenes, a Norwegian and a Swiss landscape and also one of St.-Jerome in his study. It may also be that works were added to the auction list, though the first option seems more likely. The legacy of Karel van Mander's predecessor and teacher, Pieter Isaacs, which was auctioned in Amsterdam, contained two paintings of Rosenborg, at least one of which remained in the family.¹⁴ It is in precisely these castles that many of Isaacs' and Van Mander's commissions came to be hung. Moreover, it is clear that the artists had a say in the décor and layout of the castle. For instance, we find van Mander has written on a bill: "1657 ady 10 Juni Bin ich gereyst auff Ihr Ko.Ma: gnadigste Befehl nach Friederichsburg, die Gesandten Conterfey auff zue hangen auff die Galerey...".¹⁵ It is possible that the depictions of these buildings, arranged in a separate cabinet, were a way for the artists to have underscored their own fame to their visitors, having thus been an important element in the artists' self-representation.

Most of the drawings and prints, often bound in book form,

¹⁴ Roding, Stompé, *Pieter Isaacs*, 1979, pp. 74-76.

¹⁵ Eller, *Kongelige portrætmalere*, 1971, pp. 227-228.

though also rolled up, are not further described. Mention is made of: 26 small perspectives, 55 maritime pieces, 84 landscapes, 16 sketches of funerals and horses, two ground plans and another two perspectives. Of Karel van Mander III himself there are 38 drawings and 246 landscapes by Merian. Highlights of the collection were no doubt the 15 pieces by Goltzius, a book with 118 pieces by “Abraham Blommert (sic) bound in white parchment” and a large book with 38 copper engravings by Rubens. Along with the copper engravings by Rubens and van Mander’s drawings was a third book with copper engravings in the possession of the Danish king. At auctions the king had the exclusive and free-of-charge privilege of making the first selection. He made use of this right at the auctioning of the library (522 numbers) and later paid van Mander’s widow for the paintings he chose, amongst which were human anatomical figures.¹⁶

The library

The oldest of Karel van Mander’s books, number one in the list of folio works, is a Chronicle of Holstein from 1452; besides this there are many books from the mid-sixteenth century and the period around 1600. There are titles here which clearly come from the library of his grandfather, Karel van Mander. For instance, we find under number 170 “Den Neederdeuyts Helicon” from 1610, a collection of literary works by van Mander and his contemporaries with classical themes from antiquity and mythology.¹⁷ Octavo number 78, “Zewse Nachtegal”, is very likely a reference to the collection called *De Zeenwse Nachtegal* which appeared in 1623, possibly at the prompting of Jacob Cats. Another author who wrote in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon*, Abraham van der Mijle, also contributed

¹⁶ Eller, *Kongelige portratmalere*, 1971, pp. 337-338.

¹⁷ Thijs could not trace any copy of this book in private libraries. Thijs, *De boefslag van Pegasus*, 2004.

to this collection.¹⁸ A large number of the books clearly date from after 1630, when Karel van Mander III became a self-supporting painter and could thus start his collection. Besides works in the field of art and architecture we find titles regarding classical and Biblical antiquity, mythology and theology as well as books on modern history, the art of war, numismatics, the history of lands and peoples, descriptions of cities, travelogues, tracts in the field of astronomy, mathematics, and physics, books on animals, publications of classical writers, emblematical works and modern French, Dutch and Danish literature. The writer who took the inventory did this very succinctly, almost phonetically (perhaps someone else read the titles to him) although the year is not always mentioned.¹⁹

In the copy of the auction catalogue owned by the Royal Library in Copenhagen the books which the king sent a servant to fetch for him have been “marked”.²⁰ He was apparently quite modest in his selections: ten folio volumes, three books with prints, ten books in quarto and seven in octavo. His first choice consisted primarily of tracts on architecture, painting and sculpture, including the *Regola de Cinque Ordini d'Architettura* by Vincenzo Scamozzi (Amsterdam 1642) containing van Mander's initials and Vincenzo Carducho's *Dialogos de la Pintura*. Following these selections were two different publications of the tract *Historia Anatomica Humani Corporis illustrata* by André du Laurens (Frankfurt 1599, Paris 1600), several theological, historical and topographical works and works by well-known Dutch writers, including Joost van den Vondel and Jan Vos. Van den Vondel visited Copenhagen in 1657, whereupon he wrote a collection of poems, largely about van Mander. Vos wrote about the siege of Copenhagen in 1658, with a large supplement

¹⁸ See Thijs, 'Nachtegaal in nevelen', 1999.

¹⁹ Research in progress by the author, Dr. H.H.M. van Lieshout and P. Keijsers.

²⁰ Eller, *Kongelige portrætmalere*, 1971, pp. 336-337.

dedicated to van Mander.²¹

Judging from his selections it seems that Christian V was more interested in works which reflected the life of Karel van Mander III himself than in rare or valuable items. This is in itself not so strange. In an article on the “Perspective Room” of Fredric III and Christian V, such as the one that became known between 1668 and 1672, I have demonstrated how this room, which served as entry to the new royal art museum, in fact underscored the personal relationship between the artist, in this case Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, and the king. The programme of images suggests that they spent time in the room together considering scholarly questions which were spurred by the various objects from all over the world. This intimacy between artists and king was further emphasized by the personal possessions of both men that were depicted throughout the room.²² It is likely that the programme for this perspective room was designed by Karel van Mander III in collaboration with Willum Worm. It is my opinion that the selections made by Christian V from the library of Karel van Mander III can be understood in terms of a similar sort of attitude towards the king-artist relationship.

During his lifetime Karel van Mander III served two kings, each of whom manifested himself as the “highest scientist” of the land. There was a continuous exchange on art and science between king and court painter which was fed by the extensive collections of both. The “Perspective Room” which represents a collective *studiolo* of both monarch and artist is a complete representation of this ideal.

²¹ Eller, Grandjean, Colding, *Danske Kunst Historie*, 1973, pp. 192-194. Further research has to be done on the contacts between Van Mander and these writers. Diederik Grit has written quite extensively about this in his thesis *Drieverfzalig Noorden* (1994).

²² Roding, ‘Tekst en beeld’, 2001.

Afterword

Within his abode, it would not have been difficult for van Mander to obtain, in addition to the most up-to-date cultural and scientific information, important political information. This must have been of great interest to his patron. As far as we know, the role which Karel van Mander played at the Danish court was never again filled by any other Dutch artist after his death.

As early as the seventeenth century artist's biographers such as Cornelis de Bie and Joachim Sandrart sang Karel van Mander III effusive praise, but he was later on forgotten and there was even some confusion regarding the identities of father and son.²³ Using Paul Eller's thorough research on his court portraits it would be very worthwhile to write a monograph on Karel van Mander III drawing interesting cross-connections between his library, collection and the paintings he produced. On the basis of the large oeuvre which he left behind, the archive material and references by biographers and illustrious contemporaries both in Denmark, the Republic and elsewhere in Europe, it seems it should be possible to sketch a moving and comprehensive picture of this artist; an artist who, despite the international nature of his circle of acquaintances, maintained the link with his fatherland, continued to write his works and poetry in Dutch and worked at the Danish court with other artists, almost all of whom originated from the Republic.

²³ Eller, Grandjean, Colding, *Dansk Kunst Historie*, 1973, p. 194.

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www.dkinst-rom.dk/nemi/scand/siitm.htm (= Scandinavians in Italy).
www.kunstkammer.dk