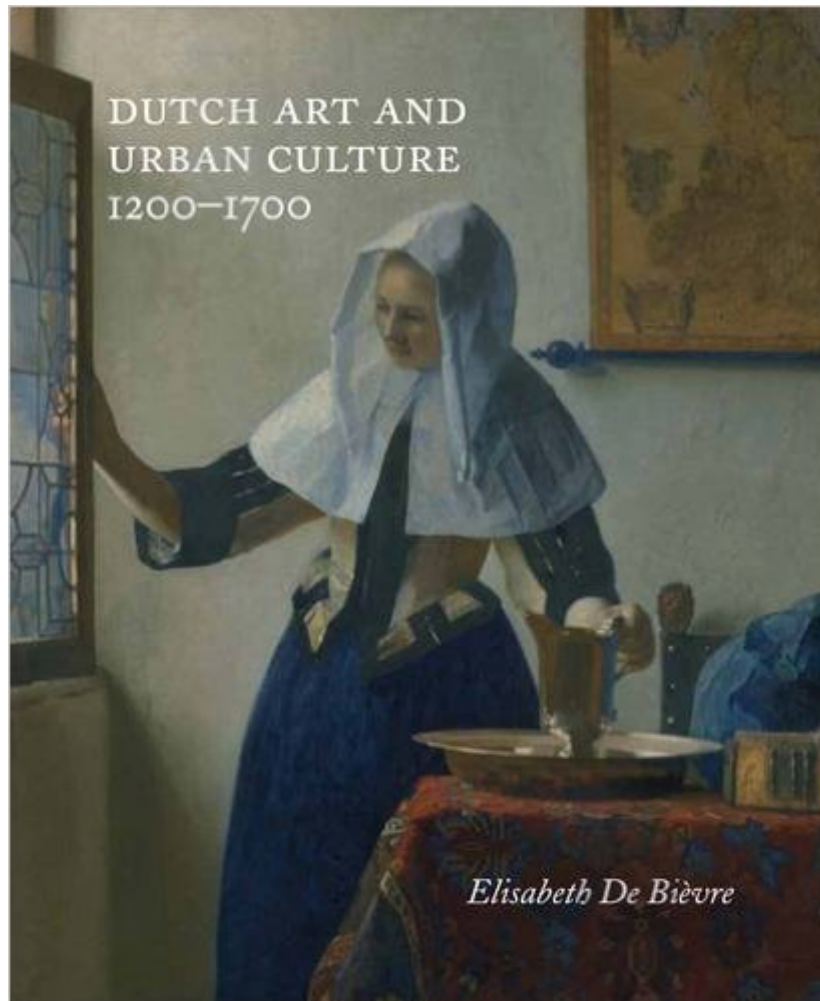


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Dutch Art And Urban Cultures, 1200–1700



Synopsis

Traditionally Dutch art is seen and presented as a coherent phenomenonâthe product of state formation in the late 16th century. Elisabeth de Bi vre challenges this view and its assumptions in a radical new account. Arguing that the Dutch Golden Age was far from unified, de Bi vre exposes how distinct geographical circumstances and histories shaped each urban development and, in turn, fundamentally informed the art and visual culture of individual cities.   In seven chapters, each devoted to a single city, the book follows the growth of Amsterdam, Delft, Dordrecht, Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague, and Utrecht over the course of five centuries. By embracing the full gamut of art and architecture and by drawing on the records of town histories and the writings of contemporary travelers, de Bi vre traces the process by which the visual culture of the Netherlands emerged to become the richest, most complex material expression in Europe, capturing the values of individuals, corporate entities, and whole cities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a wonderfully rich book, a triumph of contextual art history. Rather than treating history and society as incidental background to an autonomous history of art, Elisabeth de Bi vre puts things into proper perspective, with geography, ecology, history, city-building, commerce, politics, warfare, religion and society up front where they belong. This approach is wonderfully illuminating for understanding how and why art came to flourish in the cities of the northern Netherlands and what it meant for Dutch humanity. The period covered gives the book additional distinction: 1200-1700. This is a signal improvement in itself on the conventional divisions into which so much writing on Dutch

art falls, with the emphasis on the Golden Age. This often entails rather forced characterizations of the preceding periods as preludes to that climax and apologetic remarks about the decades of decline. Elisabeth de Bièvre bypasses this conceptual trap, treating every period with respect for its own qualities, circumstances and self-regard. She cultivates a unique sensitivity to the localities, emblems and symbols that constituted the identity of the places – seven Dutch towns – and times she studies. She is always on the lookout for abiding values and interests and the way they impacted on the art produced in each place. For example, she finds in The Hague an art informed by princely and courtly status and privilege, and in Haarlem a constant return to the – sandy dunes, woods, lakes, river and sea – that gave the place the attraction that – enabled it to emerge as the most important medieval city north of the great rivers.

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