

MARTYNA ŁUKASIEWICZ

THOR J. MEDNICK

CANONS AND NETWORKS. 19TH-CENTURY DANISH ART IN PARIS

INTRODUCTION

Among its various, celebrated holdings, the Fondation Custodia – Collection Frits Lugt, in Paris, features a collection of Danish works on paper, paintings and artists' correspondence that is remarkable not only for its quality and scope but also for its simple presence in a prominent old-master collection on the continent. Indeed, Danish painting from the early-mid-nineteenth century has not traditionally been one of those categories systematically and strategically pursued by international collectors outside of Scandinavia. It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to examine how an exception so striking as the Custodia's Danish collection came to be. The answer to this question revolves around the Fondation's longtime director, the art-historian and connoisseur, Carlos van Hasselt (1929–2009). Mentored by Custodia's founding director, Frits Lugt (1884–1970), and his wife, Jacoba Lugt-Klever (1888–1969), van Hasselt had been taught to value and respect the qualities of perceptual finesse and respect for nature that characterized the Dutch/Flemish heart of Custodia's collection.

While it never occurred to van Hasselt to understand the act of collecting from the standpoint of investment strategy, he took very seriously the responsibility of the collector to be fully informed – of market conditions and of the provenance, condition, and stature of any work under consideration. Van Hasselt thus represented a thoroughly pragmatic model of collecting in which the holder of the purse had a single duty: to serve the collection by supplementing it with the best works available on the market. In this respect, it was not necessary for him to be the sole or even prime decision-maker from purchase-to-purchase. On the contrary, it was only necessary for him to make certain that relevant decisions were made by people with the requisite expertise. The Custodia's Danish collection was thus the material result of a broad

and carefully constructed network: one that van Hasselt, as its lynchpin, established gradually and deliberately, gathering together Danish art historians, curators, collectors, dealers, and museologists.

The purpose of this study, then, is to trace certain cases to understand how this network functioned, thereby to consider how its function not merely facilitated but actually shaped a long-standing collection practice. Because of its emphatically Danish make-up, this network in some sense had the effect of refashioning van Hasselt as a cosmopolitan agent of the Danish art establishment, through whom the canonical narrative of nineteenth-century Danish art was projected and disseminated in Paris.

FONDATION CUSTODIA'S COLLECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF DANISH GOLDEN AGE

In the summer of 2007, the National Gallery of Art in Copenhagen opened an exhibition of Danish Golden-Age paintings under the title, *Home for the Holidays*.¹ While there was nothing unusual in works like these gracing the walls of a Danish museum, this exhibition was nonetheless unique. For the objects in this show came from two of the very few substantial collections of Danish art amassed outside of Denmark, and they had never been exhibited together before. Of these approximately 50 objects, a relatively modest fourteen came from the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, having been bequeathed to that institution by the collection of Norwegian shipping magnate Hans Tobiesen (1881–1953). The rest of the works in *Home for the Holidays* came from what is still one of the largest collections of Danish art outside of Scandinavia: the Fondation Custodia – Collection Frits Lugt, in Paris.

It was Carlos van Hasselt who initiated and built Custodia's Danish collection, making his first purchases shortly after taking on the directorship of the foundation in 1970, and continuing steadily through to his retirement in 1994. As such, the Danish collection was and is largely representative of other international collections of Danish art, in that they tend to be private.² It must also be noted, however, that Custodia's collection of Danish works, while significant, is only one part of a permanent collection that comprises nearly 23,000 works on paper: primarily Dutch and Flemish, but also includ-

¹ *Hjemme på ferie. Dansk Guldalder kunst fra udenlandske samlinger*, Statens Museum for Kunst, 23 June – 2 September 2007. All translations are by the authors, unless otherwise noted.

² For instance, Christoph Müllers Sammlung, in Berlin and Greifswald, and the Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr. Danish Art Collection, in New York.

ing smaller samples of French, Italian, German, and English objects.³ Indeed, given the priority of the Dutch and Flemish collection, and the formidable body of old-master works already in place to supplement it, it may seem remarkable that so consistent and enduring an acquisition strategy – one that resulted in the purchase of more than 400 Danish works⁴ – should have been undertaken by an institution that had no prior obligation to the Danish cultural scene.

One contextual explanation for this development could simply lie in the lingering tendency of old master collections to be built and expanded along national lines. For instance, Jan Dirk Baetens and Dries Lyna have demonstrated an apparent paradox in how the European art market developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century: as it became more broadly international, the market was increasingly characterized by promotional strategies that tended to emphasize national particularities, “most conspicuously articulated in the division of art production into separate national ‘schools’.”⁵ It seems, in fact, that this inclination was especially pronounced in connection with Danish art produced during the national-romantic Golden Age (c. 1807–1875). Indeed, while Baetens and Lyna join many others in noting an eventual shift in the twentieth century away from regional and national identities and towards a more cosmopolitan attitude in the global marketplace, there is ample evidence to suggest that Denmark remained committed to a strongly nationalist view of its cultural history.

When the National Gallery in Copenhagen sent an exhibition of nineteenth-century Danish painting to the Los Angeles County and Metropolitan Museums of Art in 1993, it was the first such exhibition in the United States and a landmark, therefore, in the global dissemination of this work. While such an exhibition could easily have featured works by the neoclassical masters Bertel Thorvaldsen and Johannes Wiedewelt, or by luminaries of Danish modernism, such as Vilhelm Hammershøi and L.A. Ring, it did not.

³ The Fondation Custodia collection also includes approximately 450 paintings and 55,000 autographs of old masters.

⁴ Letter from Mária van Berge-Gerbaud to Erik Fischer, 15 June 1993, Paris. Carlos van Hasselt’s Archive at the Fondation Custodia. Van Hasselt had purchased 136 drawings by 1992, and the collection was further developed by subsequent Directors of the Fondation Custodia: Mária van Berge-Gerbaud (1994–2010) and Ger Luijten (2010–2022). Van Hasselt also made various donations of Danish paintings from his private collection.

⁵ J.D. Baetens and D. Lyna, “Introduction: Towards an International History of the Nineteenth-Century Art Trade”, in: Baetens and Lyna, Eds. *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation-States, 1750–1914*. Studies in the History of Collecting & Art Markets, Vol. 6. Leiden: Brill, 2019, 2.

The narrative offered in *The Golden Age of Danish Painting*, as the show was titled, described the nineteenth century in Denmark most fundamentally as the moment of consensus national romanticism, when the collective Danish identity was reified for posterity.⁶

It certainly seems that van Hasselt accepted the assessment of Danish art historians regarding the importance of this period, for Custodia's Danish collection is distinguished not only by its size, but also by its clear emphasis on the Golden Age. Indeed, given the subjects and themes represented in the Danish works purchased by van Hasselt, it appears that his intention was largely to reflect the established canon of early-nineteenth-century Danish art. Chronologically, the collection begins with works by Nicolai Abildgaard (1743–1809) and Jens Juel (1745–1802), two important, early figures at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art. Additionally, van Hasselt managed to acquire a remarkable number of drawings by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783–1853), a hugely-influential professor at the academy who, even in his own lifetime, was considered the nexus of an emerging school of national art and remains a pivotal figure in Golden-Age historiography.⁷ Van Hasselt's acquisitions furthermore included drawings, sketches, and studies by prominent students of Eckersberg, such as Christen Købke (1810–1848) and Martinus Rørbye (1803–1848), and other major representatives of the Golden-Age generation, such as J.T. Lundbye (1818–1848), Wilhelm Marstrand (1810–1873), and P.C. Skovgaard (1817–1875).

Certainly, the tendency noted by Baetens and Lyna for old master collections to follow generally national lines was relevant to van Hasselt's motives, but in order to understand his choice of Danish art, account must be taken of the peculiar and widely-noted affinity between the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age and the nineteenth-century Danish Golden Age.⁸ Van Hasselt's systematic incorporation of Danish art into a collection dominated

⁶ See, especially, H. Vammen, "'A Small, Poor Country': Danish Society during the Golden Age", in: K. Monrad et al., *The Golden Age of Danish Painting*. Exh. Cat. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1993, pp. 20–27. This nationally-oriented perspective was also the principal motivator behind the Loeb Danish Art Collection; see J.L. Loeb Jr., "Foreword", in: S. Ludvigsen et al., *The Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr. Danish Art Collection*, New York: John L. Loeb Jr., 2017.

⁷ See N.L. Høyen, "Udsigt over det Mærkeligste paa Konstudstillingen, 1838", in: J.L. Ussing, *Niels Laurits Høyens Skrifter*. Bind I. København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1871, 85.

⁸ The literature treating the Dutch school's influence on nineteenth-century Danish painting is vast. For an excellent summary, see L. Bøgh Rønberg et al. *Two Golden Ages. Masterpieces of Dutch and Danish Painting*. Exh. Cat. Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2001.

by Golden-Age Dutch and Flemish examples was informed, to some degree, by a sense of inherent resonance between these bodies of work. Although van Hasselt was not the first to be attracted by this pattern of collecting; Gerhard Morell (1710–1771), Keeper of Denmark's Royal collection in the 1750s and 1760s, made substantial purchases of Dutch masterworks, and the Danish collections of Count Adam Gottlob von Moltke (1710–1792) similarly featured prominent examples of Dutch and Flemish Baroque.⁹ Even in the last fifteen years, the German publisher, patron, and philanthropist Christoph Müller has made major, state donations of his extensive collection of Dutch/Flemish and Danish paintings and works on paper.¹⁰

It was probably this emphasis on Golden Ages that resulted in landscapes (generally also including city- and seascapes) becoming the dominant category of work in the Danish collection. In nineteenth-century Denmark, as elsewhere in Europe at that time, landscape reached a new ascendancy.¹¹ One basic reason for this, particularly in Denmark, was a shift in the early nineteenth-century art market away from large history paintings and toward bourgeois subject-matter on a more intimate scale.¹² It is also significant, though, that among the most notable characteristics shared by the two Golden Ages was the emphasis in both on recording daily life as lived in the landscape. As Kasper Monrad has observed, nineteenth-century Danish landscape painters “were without doubt aware of the many related features in the landscape of the two countries and in the Dutch artist's predilection for also portraying the more modest aspects of the landscape they were accustomed to.”¹³ In this

⁹ J. Svenningsen, “En national samling på tegnebrættet. Centre for indsamling af danske tegninger 1810–45”, *Perspective* 2017, available online: <<https://www.perspectivejournal.dk/en-national-samling-paa-tegnebraettet-centre-for-indsamling-af-danske-tegninger-1810-45/>> [accessed: October 20, 2023].

¹⁰ In 2007 and 2014, Müller made large donations of Dutch and Flemish paintings and drawings to the Kupferstichkabinett Berlin and the Schwerin State Museum, respectively. These were followed, in 2016, by another donation to the Schwerin State Museum, this time of 375 Danish paintings and works on paper. This latter gift is now on permanent loan to the Pomeranian State Museum, in Greifswald.

¹¹ T.J. Mednick, “The Transmission of Material Experience in Nineteenth-Century Danish Landscape Painting”, in: R.W. Rix and C. Duffy, Eds. *Nordic Romanticism: Translation, Transmission, and Transformation*. Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print Series. London: Palgrave, 2022, pp. 167–188.

¹² See K. Monrad, “The Nordic contributions to Romanticism in the visual arts”, *European Review* 2000, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 173–183.

¹³ K. Monrad, “The Dutch Dimension in Danish Golden Age Landscape Painting”, in: L. Bøgh Rønberg et al., *Two Golden Ages. Masterpieces of Dutch and Danish Painting*, Exh. Cat., Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2001, 46.

connection, one should also note the importance of Eckersberg's pedagogy, which was the first in Europe to encourage students to paint directly from nature, *en plein air*.¹⁴

Perhaps more significant for the preponderance of landscape painting in Golden-Age Denmark, however, was the growing emphasis on national romanticism in the arts, especially as propounded by Royal Academy Professor and Director of the Royal Collection, Niels Laurits Høyen (1798–1870). Høyen, who exerted a formative influence over several generations of Danish artists, was convinced of the need for a national school to shape the development of art in Denmark, and he asserted that representations of the landscape would be central to its program.¹⁵ In this regard, it is important to understand that Høyen's influence was not mere rhetorical. His emphasis on the national value of landscape painting also motivated his behavior as Director of the Royal Collection. Insofar as these priorities helped to shape, through purchases and commissions, the Royal collection (the basis of the current National Gallery of Art) reinforced and continues to perpetuate the canonical status of landscape in Danish Golden-Age art.

Beyond these contextual influences on van Hasselt's collecting practice, however, is the immeasurable influence of his long-standing, personal and professional association with Erik Fischer (1920–2011), Chief Curator of the Royal Collection of Graphic Art (Den Kongelige Kobberstiksamling) at the National Gallery of Denmark from 1964 to 1990. Their rich and varied correspondence indicates not only their shared appreciation of the old masters, but also Fischer's deep influence on van Hasselt's approach to expanding Frits Lugt's already remarkable collection. Precisely how this influence exerted itself, and how it functioned within the larger network of dealers, collectors, and scholars with whom van Hasselt worked, will be developed, but it is necessary first to understand more about the collection with which he started, and the model it provided for expansion.

THE EYE OF THE CONNOISSEUR. FRITS LUGT AND CARLOS VAN HASSELT

Frits Lugt was a connoisseur and collector of Dutch and Flemish drawings and prints, and one of the leading experts on Rembrandt's works on paper. He and his wife, Jacoba Lugt-Klever, had been acquiring old-master artworks for

¹⁴ Monrad, "The Nordic contributions to Romanticism in the visual arts", pp. 175–176.

¹⁵ N.L. Høyen, "Betingelserne for en skandinavisk Nationalkunsts Udvikling", in *Ussing*, 1871, pp. 351–368.

more than three decades when, in 1947, they established the Fondation Custodia at the Hôtel Turgot in Paris to house their extraordinary collection.¹⁶ While the collection, which focused particularly on Dutch, Flemish, Italian, and French prints and drawings from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, as well as Dutch and Flemish paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and included works by Rembrandt, Ruisdael, van Goyen, Lorrain, Watteau, Boucher and Tiepolo, reflected Lugt's own taste, its development depended on his deep knowledge of the art market and his placement within a broad network of fellow collectors, dealers, and scholars. Lugt ran the foundation on his own, and it was not until 1961 that he hired a young curator from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Carlos van Hasselt. "A catalogue writer and patient ferreter, who is endowed with a very good eye, an exceptional heart and great devotion,"¹⁷ van Hasselt was to help Lugt with maintenance and cataloguing of the collection, organizing exhibitions and advising him on new acquisitions.¹⁸ As *The Times* wrote in a text commemorating van Hasselt in 2009: "It was an attraction of opposites that succeeded brilliantly. Lugt was Protestant, highly disciplined, fastidious and reserved; van Hasselt was Catholic, expansive, excitable and a bon vivant. They shared, however, a surpassing love of works of art, both having an extraordinary eye for quality and an exceptional visual memory. During the nine years they worked together, Lugt taught van Hasselt the art of succinct cataloguing, how to check sources and provenance and, most importantly, he imposed a rigorous training of the eye, learning how to select only the very best work of art from a plethora of choice."¹⁹ Together they continued acquiring works for the collection, buying mostly from auctions or exhibitions prepared at the Fondation Custodia. While selecting new objects for possible purchases, Lugt relied on his contacts in the art market and his knowledge of private collections. He was a very deliberate collector, ever aware not only of the standing of the collection, but also of what it was missing. Indeed, as early as 1946, Lugt had

¹⁶ H. Buijs, ed., "Un cabinet particulier. Les estampes de la Collection Frits Lugt", Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Architectura & Natura, Paris: Fondation Custodia, 2010, 23.

¹⁷ J.E. Heijbroek, "Frits Lugt 1884–1970. Living for Art: A Biography", Bussum: Thoth Publishers, Paris: Fondation Custodia, 2012, p. 386.

¹⁸ As van Hasselt later recalled in a letter to Dirk van Gelder, administrative director at Custodia, he eagerly anticipated "the opportunity to describe and catalogue the collection. This is what I want to do most in my life (I differ little from Lugt in this regard) and now, after waiting for ten years, I'm finally being offered the chance, and I'm planning to make full use of it". See Heijbroek, *Frits Lugt 1884–1970*, p. 410.

¹⁹ "Carlos van Hasselt: art historian and connoisseur", *The Times*, 15 October 2009.

compiled a list of specific drawings that the collection needed, which he then sent to various collectors to inquire about availabilities.²⁰

Van Hasselt, who was appointed Director upon Lugt's death in 1970, similarly relied on market awareness and broad contacts with collectors as he continued to develop the Fondation's holdings. Van Hasselt's first order of business was a general assessment, not only to clarify directions of possible development, but also identify works that required conservation. Although the 40-year period of his leadership largely continued Lugt's program, van Hasselt certainly made his mark. Apart from a rigorous exhibition schedule, his early collection appraisals lead him to innovate a new object-storage system.²¹ According to Mária van Berge-Gerbaud, curator at the Fondation since 1971, "the practices and changes that he introduced were soon emulated in other print rooms, especially in France. [...] he transformed a basically nineteenth-century drawings cabinet into an efficient, modern institution, while maintaining Lugt's unique atmosphere."²²

The nearly 2,500 acquisitions made between 1970 and 2009 included not only prints and drawings by Dutch old masters, chosen in accordance with Lugt's acquisition policy, but also many new motifs and themes, such as portraits and self-portraits, and a broader selection of works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²³ Van Hasselt also significantly developed the Fondation's collection of artists' correspondence, for which Lugt laid the foundations by purchasing two of Rembrandt's surviving letters. It was van Hasselt's belief that such material artefacts of artists' lived experience provided invaluable insights into the life and work of an artist, as well as providing important supplemental information for provenance research. Architect Andrzej Niewęglowski, who was deeply familiar with van Hasselt's working methods, explains that "letters revealing artists' thoughts, and sketches, gave him insight into [the artistic] process. Portraits and self-portraits of artists, which could constitute a certain category of works in the collection, also correspond well with this idea."²⁴ Van Hasselt turned a relatively modest group of letters by artists, collectors, and art dealers into an extensive archive that now includes over 40,000 items, dating from the Renaissance to the present

²⁰ Heijbroek, *Frits Lugt 1884–1970*, p. 332.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² M. van Berge-Gerbaud, "Obituary", *Master Drawings* 2009, Vol. 47, No. 4, p. 528. Van Hasselt was also a co-founder, with Erik Fischer and Karel Gerald Boon (1909–1996), Director of the Print Room at the Rijksmuseum, of the International Advisory Committee of Keepers of Public Collections of Graphic Art (so called 50 Lux Club), established in 1969.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ M. Łukasiewicz, Interview with Andrzej Niewęglowski, 22 November 2022, Paris.

day, and featuring the letters of Michelangelo, Dürer, Gauguin, and Matisse, as well as entire correspondences, such as that between Ingres and his patron Marcotte.²⁵

It was in 1975 that van Hasselt began purchasing Danish nineteenth-century drawings, which marked an entirely new initiative in the collection of Fondation Custodia.²⁶ Finalizing one of the first purchases, a drawing by Johan Thomas Lundbye, van Hasselt expressed his motivations for building a collection of Danish art: "It has long been an ardent wish of mine to have a small collection of drawings by the best of the Danish masters.... It has, in fact, always surprised me how very few people know about the masters of the Danish Golden Age, and their followers, outside Scandinavia and I hope in due course to be able to show at least to the Paris public one day what they should have known so much earlier."²⁷ While the Danish collection broke new ground for Custodia, it did so in quite traditional ways. Van Hasselt's reference to "the masters of the Golden Age" indicates a somewhat unreflective faith in the authority of such masters, of the established canon, a quality of connoisseurship he shared with Lugt. "Van Hasselt was frankly old-fashioned about the role of art history in understanding works of art [...]. He was extremely keen on provenance, he was fascinated by technique and by an artist's response to his surroundings."²⁸ This quote from *The Times* captures not only van Hasselt's sensibilities, but also, to a large extent, his approach to Danish drawings and paintings. Both the drawings he acquired for Custodia and the paintings he collected privately and later donated, reflected his particular interests. "He mainly bought oil sketches, painted *en plein air*, especially those without staffage. The collection of Danish paintings is characterized by small formats, more intimate contact with the work, while at the same time being in line with the tradition of Lugt's house and the mode of displaying small format paintings as if at home."²⁹

While van Hasselt, like Lugt before him, pursued a collection after his own tastes, however, he could not have built it without the impressive network of art historians, collectors, and dealers to which he constantly turned for help and guidance.

²⁵ Berge-Gerbaud, "Obituary", p. 528.

²⁶ "Carlos van Hasselt: art historian and connoisseur".

²⁷ Letter from Carlos van Hasselt to Kai Stage, 11 September 1975, Paris. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.

²⁸ "Carlos van Hasselt: art historian and connoisseur".

²⁹ Łukasiewicz, Interview with Andrzej Niewęglowski.

COLLECTION AND NETWORK

When Mària van Berge-Gerbaud became Custodia's new Director, upon van Hasselt's retirement in 1994, she mounted the Fondation's first exhibition of works from the Danish collection, in his honour.³⁰ Although it was only a small selection of the nearly 140 drawings that van Hasselt had collected by 1992, it was also an opportunity to acknowledge some of those other figures who contributed to the creation of the Danish collection. From the earliest records one may in fact trace the contours of a network of mainly Danish researchers and art dealers around van Hasselt, one of the key figures in which was the aforementioned Erik Fischer.³¹ According to Berge-Gerbaud, it was actually numerous interviews with Erik Fischer, and his knowledge of Danish art-dealer networks, that initially prompted van Hasselt to start collecting nineteenth-century Danish drawings.³² Among the first to be acquired were works by Lundbye, Marstrand, and Skovgaard. Between 1976 and 1978 an important landscape by Købke was added, followed by a group of works by Lorenz Frølich and series of sketches by Eckersberg.³³ Major purchases continued through the 1980s, when acquisitions of high-quality works by leading nineteenth-century Danish artists could be made on a relatively modest budget. Over the next thirty years, van Hasselt managed to collect Danish drawings and paintings of exceptional quality, thereby establishing the only collection of its kind outside of Denmark.

As van Hasselt's meticulously kept records indicate, several, if not most, of the Danish works that entered Custodia's collection were purchased through the Copenhagen-based auction houses of Bruun Rasmussen and Kunsthalle. Although van Hasselt regularly received offers from various galleries and private collectors outside of Denmark, such as the Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel (Hamburg) and Galerie Jean-François Heim (Paris), he availed himself of

³⁰ *Morceaux choisis parmi les acquisitions de la Collection Frits Lugt réalisées sous le directorat de Carlos van Hasselt, 1970–1994*, Fondation Custodia, 1994.

³¹ Erik Fischer joined the Royal Collection of Graphic Art as curator in 1948, and was appointed director in 1964. Fischer held this position until 1990, with a break between 1965–67, when he served as a chairman of the Committee of Fine Arts at the Statens Kunstfond. From 1964, he was also lecturer at the University of Copenhagen. His research focused on Dürer, Abildgaard, Eckersberg, and Melchior Lorck.

³² M. van Berge-Gerbaud, "Avant-propos", in M.B. Nellesmann and P.J. Storsve, *De Abildgaard à Hammershøi: 75 dessins danois*. Exh. Cat. Paris: Fondation Custodia, 2007, 5.

³³ M. van Berge-Gerbaud, "Deense tekeningen in de Collection Frits Lugt", *Kunstschrift* 1996, no. 2, pp. 44–45.

these offers much less often and on a substantially smaller scale. It is thus especially his extensive correspondence with art historians, art dealers, and collectors in Denmark that at once provides insights into van Hasselt's process of acquisitions and importantly also indicates how very seriously he took his responsibilities as a custodian. The Fondation's artwork files include press clippings on specific works and artists, auction records, bills and valuations, bibliographies and comparative literature, and sometimes even an original *passe-partout*, if it had to be removed for the sake of conservation. Preserving such materials in the archive served, for instance, as a source of information about the genuine color scheme of the framework.

Interestingly, a similar priority ran through van Hasselt's communications with his international circle of experts; he was deeply concerned that Custodia's collection not only be grown, but also be meticulously and exhaustively documented. A remarkable example of this imperative emerges from van Hasselt's long-running negotiation with William Gelius, a curator at the Ribe Kunstmuseum, to whom Fischer had referred him. It was van Hasselt's hope that Gelius, under the initial guidance of Fischer, would write a comprehensive catalogue – including complete provenance and descriptions – of Custodia's Danish collection. "I'll very much depend on Erik's and your advice," writes van Hasselt in a letter to Gelius. "I agree with you that general lines of direction [for the catalogue project] must be discussed between us either here, with the originals in front of us, or in Denmark."³⁴

There is a suggestion of extraordinary faith in communications such as this that is generally borne out by the character and mechanics of van Hasselt's collaborations with Danish colleagues. In his role as director and custodian, van Hasselt was not concerned with questions of territory. The first duty was to serve the collection, and if, in certain circumstances, others were better suited to the task, he gladly left it to them. Equally remarkable was the ready willingness of van Hasselt's Danish colleagues essentially to work for a collection to which they were in no official way connected. Van Hasselt's correspondence with Erik Fischer, for instance, is rife with examples of the latter acting effectively as an agent on behalf of Custodia. Van Hasselt's consultations with Fischer regarding possible acquisitions referred as often to works that Fischer had suggested to him as they did to those that he had selected from auction catalogues himself. In many cases, Fischer was tasked – or tasked himself – with the job of viewing and evaluating these works in Copenhagen and giving his opinion to van Hasselt.

³⁴ Letter from Carlos van Hasselt to William Gelius, 11 January 1988, Paris. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.

Beyond this, Fischer would often assess likely market interest in specific works to determine if Custodia would be bidding against other institutions. "I've just talked to [the National Board of Museums]," wrote Fischer in April of 1990, "and learned that up to now no other museum is bidding for the Eckersberg drawing (Bruun Rasmussen, auct. 538, cat. No. 24) and no other for the Dalsgaard drawing (Kunsthallen, auct. 387, 240). In case anybody should turn up in the last moment, I shall be informed."³⁵ One apparent reason for the success of their collaboration was their shared belief that works of a certain quality should be in collections open to the public. Fischer thus often found himself suggesting acquisitions that he might well otherwise have made himself. "We have decided," he wrote to van Hasselt in August of 1983, "that you should acquire the Eckersberg drawing from Genzano (1814) which is up for sale at Bruun Rasmussen tomorrow, no. 364 in the catalogue. It is a handsome drawing which we consider an excellent supplement to the Danish drawings already in the possession of the Fondation Custodia. That we do not buy it ourselves is due to the fact that that kind of drawing is already well represented in our collection."³⁶

On other occasions, Fischer was not advising van Hasselt of potential acquisitions but informing him of acquisitions that he had already made on van Hasselt's behalf. Writing to their mutual colleague Jens Hermann, of the Kunsthalle auction house, van Hasselt noted that "upon return from Holland I learned from Erik that we have acquired a fine Eckersberg drawing from 1814 at last Thursday's sale. I am very glad he took the initiative [...] I would be grateful for any information regarding its provenance if you are allowed to divulge it."³⁷ In such cases, letters from Fischer would follow, with detailed

³⁵ Letter from Erik Fisher to Carlos van Hasselt, 24 April 1990. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.

³⁶ Letter from Erik Fisher to Carlos van Hasselt, 17 August 1983. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia. Even on those occasions when his own institution had not yet decided on a potential purchase, he made sure that van Hasselt was informed. In reference to a drawing by Eckersberg that was being offered at Bruun Rasmussen, for instance, Fischer explained that his collection had not decided "whether or not to go for it. But in case we do not, I wonder if you would be interested. The reproduction does not render it justice: it is quite white and apparently in prime condition. The rapid inward movement of the composition is not without parallels within his work; the foliage lacks perhaps the element of delicacy which appears in other of his Parisian drawings. But altogether I find it charming, but of course expensive." Letter from Erik Fisher to Carlos van Hasselt, 20 April 1990. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.

³⁷ Letter from Carlos van Hasselt to Jens Hermann, 22 August 1983. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia. This was probably the Eckersberg mentioned in Fischer's letter of 17 August 1983 (fn. 30).

inventories of works purchased, at which point van Hasselt's extensive and meticulous process of provenance research would begin.³⁸

While the full extent of Fischer's impact is difficult fully to assess, there is no question that he became integral to the Fondation's mission. Shortly before van Hasselt's retirement, Mária van Berge-Gerbaud wrote to Fischer, ostensibly to provide an assessment of the Danish collection, but also in hopes of his continued association. "I forgot to tell you how many Danish drawings Carlos has collected until now. There are – till 1992 – 136 drawings. [...] As I told you I should love to continue this part of the collection and I need all your help and [advice]."³⁹

DANISH ART IN PARIS: CONCLUSION

Erik Fischer's influence on Custodia's Danish collection naturally resulted in a consistently high level of quality, but it had the interesting, ancillary effect of Custodia becoming a sort of international satellite for Denmark's national collection. This is expressed not only in that fact that the Parisian collection features the same canon of luminaries as do the Royal Collection of Graphic Art and the National Gallery in Copenhagen, but also in the extraordinary degree to which these two collections actually match each other in terms of specific works. Several of the drawings van Hasselt acquired are – or appear to be – sketches for paintings in the National Gallery, as in the case of Christen Købke's drawing [inv. no. 1986-T.43], which is a sketch for the *View of the Bay near the Copenhagen Limekiln Looking North. A Quiet Summer Afternoon* [inv. no. KMS1700].⁴⁰ Alternately, Custodia sketches

³⁸ For example, a letter from Erik Fischer to Carlos van Hasselt, dated 8 October 1987 (Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia), in which Fischer listed recent purchases at Bruun Rasmussen. "Cat. no. 487: Thorald Læssøe: View towards the Temple of Vesta, Rome. Watercolor, signed and dated April 23, 1847. Læssøe (1816–78) was a close friend of Lundbye, Frølich and J.A. Jerichau and was influenced by Købke to a degree that some paintings by Læssøe were erroneously attributed to Købke. His early work is particularly charming. Cat. no. 518 Lundbye's cow head, dated August 1834, when Lundbye was a mere boy of 16, and it is a pencil drawing which in itself makes it rare since Lundbye only used pencil at an early age when influenced by Købke.

³⁹ M. van Berge-Gerbaud, Letter to Erik Fischer, 15 June 1993. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.

⁴⁰ It may be this work to which Erik Fischer refers, in a letter to Mária van Berge-Gerbaud, dated 8 June 1994. (Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.) "The magnificent large, squared landscape drawing by Købke, preparatory to the important painting in SMK – and probably the most expensive single Danish item acquired by the Fonda-

might represent other versions of themes also found in Copenhagen, such as Eckersberg's drawings of *Figures by the Seine, Paris* [inv. no. KKS403, ill. 1] which, in the Parisian collection, is sketchier and shows figures placed differently [inv. no. 1989-T.16, ill. 2].



1. Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *Figures by the Seine, Paris*, drawing, 1812, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Another example, interesting because of its double valency, is an ink drawing by Nicolai Abildgaard in the Fondation's collection [inv. no 1993-T.37, ill. 3], which was bought by van Hasselt at auction at Kunsthallen in 1993 and depicts a naked man with his right arm outstretched. It is a preliminary study for the painting *Apollo charging the Parcae to visit Ceres, who has fled from the Earth* [inv. no. KMS3342, ill. 4], which has been in the National Gallery in Copenhagen since 1916. Curiously, this drawing is also nearly identical to another drawing in Copenhagen, which features the same figure of Apollo [inv. no. KKSgb3639, ill. 5]. Both Erik Fischer and Jens Hermann assumed that the Copenhagen drawing was a copy of Custodia's clearly superior example, and Hermann stated as much in his note for the catalogue of an exhibition of Danish works in 1994.⁴¹

tion. [...] The other being the reclining young man, most probably Lundbye's last drawing, made on the eve of his death."

⁴¹ "In the Royal Printroom in Copenhagen a drawing by Abildgaard on the same theme can be seen. On comparing this drawing with the one acquired by the Fondation Custo-



2. Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *Figures seen from behind on a quay of the Seine*, drawing, 1812, Fondation Custodia – Collection Frits Lugt, Paris

The discovery of that drawing, purchased by Custodia on the advice of Erik Fischer and found later to be superior to the version in Fischer's own collection, suggests something interesting both about the standing of Custodia's collection and about the profound influence potentially exerted on a collector by his network. In the end, Custodia's Danish collection represented not just van Hasselt's appreciation of this art, but also his network's perpetuation of the Danish canon on an international stage.

dia, one's first impression is that the two drawings are almost identical [...]. But a closer examination of the drawing in the Printroom shows clearly that this is a weaker drawing, oddly dry and rigid in composition. For example, the figure's hands seem to be more like claws than hands. [...] One misses the masterly touch. Erik Fischer, who drew my attention to this drawing, considers that this drawing may be a copy made by one of Abildgaard's pupils. Tending to support this theory is the fact that the two figures in the drawings are of exactly the same height. [...] one is tempted to regard that one in the Printroom is a tracing of the one now belonging to the Fondation Custodia – which latter must be regarded as the original." Letter from Jens Hermann to Mária van Berge-Gerbaud, 11 July 1994. Carlos van Hasselt's Archive at the Fondation Custodia.



3. Nicolai Abildgaard, *Naked man, standing towards the left (Apollon)*, drawing, 1743–1809, Fondation Custodia – Collection Frits Lugt, Paris



4. Nicolai Abildgaard, *Apollo charging the Parcae to visit Ceres, who has fled from the Earth*, oil on canvas, 1809, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen



5. Nicolai Abildgaard, *A walking nude man in left profile, with right hand outstretched*, drawing, 1743–1809, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

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Martyna Łukasiewicz

Adam Mickiewicz University / National Museum of Art in Poznań

Thor J. Mednick

University of Toledo, Ohio

CANONS AND NETWORKS. 19TH-CENTURY DANISH ART IN PARIS

Summary

Collections of Danish Golden-Age art are quite rare outside of Scandinavia, especially when it comes to those developed in accordance with a well-thought-out strategy established through the international cooperation of scholars. An important exception is the large group of Danish drawings, oil sketches, and artists' correspondence found in the Fondation Custodia – Collection Frits Lugt in Paris, gathered by art historian and longtime museum director Carlos van Hasselt (1929–2009). As director, van Hasselt provided an interesting model of collecting, as his pursuit was not motivated by a particular investment strategy. His collection may, in a sense, be viewed as the material result of a network, one which he established and which brought together Danish researchers and museologists, as well as international art dealers. The aim of this article is therefore to investigate how a network may inform and help determine a particular collection practice, to trace how van Hasselt became an agent of the Danish art establishment, and to provide a critical overview of this collection, which became a satellite

representation of the canon of 19th-century Danish art in Paris. Analysis of Carlos van Hasselt's archive will provide critical reflections on the ways in which the collection was built and developed, and how it may serve as an example of the international dissemination of canons.

Keywords:

collections, custodia, Danish Art, works-on-paper, van Hasselt, Fischer

