"TO SEE OURSELVES GREATLY MISLED": THE LAUGHING DECEPTIONS OF JAN MIENSE MOLENAER'S *FIVE SENSES* (1637)

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In 1637, Jan Miense Molenaer (c. 1610-1668) completed a series of diminutive panels representing the *Five Senses* today found in the collection of the Mauritshuis in The Hague.[1] The five images depict lower-class figures in tavern-like settings engaged in activities associated with one of the five senses. *Sight* (fig. 1) features a man and woman staring longingly into the bottom of a ceramic pitcher by the light of a single lamp. In *Hearing* (fig. 2) three figures sing and laugh; one youth in the center foreground raises his stein of beer as he slaps his thigh, beating out the rhythm. In the panel representing *Smell* (fig. 3), a man plugs his nose and waves his jug of beer dramatically as if attempting to dissipate the odor of a baby's bottom which is being cleaned by a woman at the right. In *Taste* (fig. 4), a peasant guzzles a pitcher of beer as his younger companion lights his pipe from a dish of coals. Finally, in *Touch* (fig. 5) a man gazes impishly out at the viewer as he reaches his hand up a woman's skirts. Another figure makes a sexual gesture as he looks on, seeing the woman about to avenge herself by striking her assailant on the head with a slipper.

Among numerous versions of the Five Senses produced by artists in the Northern Netherlands during the early decades of the seventeenth century, Molenaer's *Five Senses* engage the beholder in a particularly farcical manner. This is not simply due to the artist's effective deployment of the peasant figures which populate his images, nor the fact that they behave outlandishly. Rather, as I will demonstrate in this article, Molenaer's panels attempt to counterfeit for the beholder's senses the very sensory stimuli to which the painted figures are depicted as reacting so vividly. Molenaer's pictorial strategy for representing the Five Senses in a comic manner can best be understood, I shall argue, if we recognize that what was considered worthy of laughter in the early modern period was

often ultimately related to the senses themselves. In the ludic model of viewing that I propose, gazing at a painting is a multi-sensory experience: vision becomes the medium for accessing smells, sounds, tastes, and (illicit) touch, because through the external sense of sight the inner senses of imagination and memory are stimulated.

Representing the (Farcical) Five Senses

While many early modern artists produced paintings or prints representing the Five Senses, Molenaer's panels stand out among depictions of this theme because of their vivid interpolation of the viewer. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, artists in Haarlem and Amsterdam began to favor depicting middle- or lower-class figures enacting the sense perception narratively, rather than suggesting the subject symbolically.[2] Indeed, Molenaer's paintings resemble neither the classicizing female allegories surrounded by their symbolic attributes popularized by Frans Floris (c. 1516-1570) in Antwerp in 1561, nor the painted single-figure personifications like those from the circle of Jan van Bijlert (c. 1597/98-1671) produced in the 1620s.[3] The young Rembrandt was among the artistic innovators who painted a series of small panels depicting the Five Senses (c. 1624-1625). In Rembrandt's case, groups of three primary figures representing lower-class social types are portrayed engaged in a sense-related activity—figures sing in *Hearing*, undergo a procedure to remove the proverbial 'stone of Folly' in *Touch*, and purchase spectacles in *Sight*.[4] Unlike the peasants in Molenaer's series, however, Rembrandt's figures are absorbed in their actions and take little notice of the viewer. Unsurprisingly, Molenaer's figural types are instead frequently compared to the comic misbehaving peasants in the genre paintings of Adriaen Brouwer (c. 1605-38) who gaze out of the image and gesture at the beholder as they shout in pain, laugh, or sing.[5] Ultimately though, Molenaer's panels bear the closest thematic and formal resemblance to Adriaen van Ostade's (1610-1685) series of the Five Senses (1635) today in the Hermitage.[6] Molenaer's panels are nearly the same size as those of Van Ostade and share a horizontal format and similar themes: wiping a baby's bottom in *Smell*, guzzling beer in *Taste*, singing in *Hearing.* In contrast to Van Ostade's series however, Molenaer's

figures engage the beholder more directly because they are represented intently looking out of the images, half-length, closer to the picture plane, and in much more summarily described surroundings.[7]

Previous discussions of Jan Miense Molenaer's *Five Senses* have focused on reconciling their bawdy, low treatment of the subject matter with the perceived moral-ethical dangers that the senses posed to the individual.[8] Molenaer, so the argument goes, has represented members of the lower classes who, forsaking all reason and polite behavior, have abandoned themselves to the pleasures of their senses. These images, it is argued, were intended to not only amuse their middle-class viewers but also to offer negative exempla of good behavior. It is assumed that the beholder came to the image predisposed to judging the actions of the figures according to contemporary social mores, and in psychoanalytic terms, yielded to the vicarious pleasure of laughing at behaviors and corporeal "drives" that needed to be increasingly suppressed in polite society.[9] Hence, within this interpretive framework the practice of looking at paintings is synonymous with a rational process of deciding how to react to these small, comic images—the viewer vaguely disapproved of the peasant guzzling his beer in Molenaer's *Taste* (fig. 4), for example, yet managed to temper his mirth in seeing the figures' actions captured in such a lively and engaging manner. The danger of equating the act of interpretation with the beholder's moral judgment is that it suggests that the depicted figures are equivalent to actual peasants in civil society. Yet the peasants in Molenaer's paintings patently inhabit the realm of *art*, not real life. Another approach to understanding the viewing practices of seventeenth-century beholders is possible—one that considers the depiction of the Five Senses thematic as part of the growing interest in the experiential status of knowledge gained via the senses, while at the same time treating the viewing of paintings as an essentially ludic, rather than rational, didactic affair.

Looking with all Five Senses: Engaging the Beholder with Sensory Deceptions

In each panel of his *Five Senses* series, Jan Miense Molenaer's compositions cleverly emphasize a single figure or pair of figures that are most visibly engaged with a

specific sense perception—or with the beholder. As a group the paintings exhibit certain cohesiveness, each painting relying on the others to intensify or comment upon the rest. The five panels each contain three figures situated around a table in a vague, tavern-like setting in which the primary figure who is performing the action linked to the sense sits to the side of the table "closest" to the beholder.[10] If the images had been hung in a row following the traditional hierarchy of the senses, then the primary figures would be displayed, for the most part, seated with their backs to one another.[11] The protagonists of *Hearing*, *Smell*, and *Touch* conspicuously gaze out at the viewer, while the figures of *Sight* and *Taste* do not. Hence, there is a rhythmic oscillation within the series of emphatically looking at the viewer or a depiction of the figures being so absorbed in an activity associated with one of the senses that they take no notice of the viewer at all. The secondary figures in the paintings often emphasize or react to the performance of the primary figure, gazing out of the image if the primary figure does not.

For example, in the case of *Hearing* (fig. 2) the young man who laughs or sings as he raises his beer stein at the left is the largest figure and the only one in the image who gazes out at the viewer. He does so over his shoulder, in an awkward posture with his torso in profile and his head in three-quarter view. The loose, yet meticulously painted face with its individually highlighted teeth is masterfully depicted. The figure's costume is painted in brighter colors and is more carefully modeled than those of his companions: an older woman who also laughs and a bewildered-looking peasant seated to her right who seems to be 'playing' a pair of sticks. The lime green of the youth's tunic and complementary red slouched hat creates colorful dissonance, while the figure's facial expression functions as a 'laughing prompt' for the beholder.[12] The raised hands of both the young man and the peasant woman in the background, their open mouths, and the temporary 'toast' create a frozen spontaneity that awaits the beholder's response.

The jubilant resounding song and laughter of *Hearing* must be seen in relation to another painting in the series, that of *Sight* (fig. 1). This is an image of protracted stillness and melancholy longing, where gazing into the depths of an empty vessel thematizes desire as the object of sight.[13] In the painting a man and a woman are seated at a table looking into a pitcher of beer by the light of a small oil lamp on the table. The man

hunched over in his seat has forgotten the pipe in his left hand which rests heavily on his thigh; the glowing embers on the table remain unused. His right hand grasps the white clay and pewter pitcher his thumb pressing the lever to open the lid. Molenaer carefully transcribed the landscape of the man's face, rosy from drink in the lamplight. The tilt of his face in the direction of the pitcher, the sigh that seems to escape the figure's parted lips and the slightly raised left eyebrow with its arch of attention all communicate the fixedness of the man's thirsty, mournful gaze. The man's female companion intensifies and multiplies the quiet nostalgia of the vignette. She has grasped the bottom of the pitcher as if to tilt it up for the man to get a better view. Likewise, she could be swinging it towards her own probing eyes, her lips parted in concentration. In addition, in the left background the viewer can just make out a bulky figure that seems to be urinating.[14] If this is the case then he would also be engaged in looking, 'aiming' his urine away from himself and multiplying the references to the sense of sight in the image. Hung next to each other, *Hearing* pierces the quiet stillness of its frame with a shattering laugh of joy. Unlike the empty mug of the two *kannekijkers*, the youth's mug is full and he raises it triumphantly, gazing at the viewer with a relaxed familiarity that anticipates the beholder's understanding of his pleasure.

The sum effect of the primary figures in each of Molenaer's *Five Senses* panels is that they viscerally engage the beholder. This outcome would have been heightened, if these paintings were examined not only hanging on the walls, but held in the beholders' hands. We can see this kind of viewing practice depicted in *The Archduke Albert and Isabella visiting a collector's cabinet* (c. 1621-23) by Frans Francken II (1581-1642) and workshop with Jan Brueghel II.[15] Two richly dressed men are represented looking intently at a panel painting in the bright light afforded by large leaded windows at the left of a well-appointed curiosity and art cabinet. One man leans casually against a table strewn with a Turkish carpet grasping the panel with both hands, while the other holds the corner of the panel as if to tilt it for a better view or point out a detail under discussion. This, I suggest, is the kind of viewing we might imagine for Molenaer's *Five Senses* panels. If the images were originally hung on the wall, they were just as likely

taken down occasionally by their owner and host to provide his guests with a better view of the panels' details.

How might beholders have looked at the Mauritshuis *Five Senses*?[16] In each of the panels Molenaer has surmounted the challenge of depicting what is inherently invisible—smells, sounds, tactile sensations, and internal desires—by depicting not symbolic objects, but the visceral *reactions* of the peasants to perceived stimuli. At close range, the viewer would be confronted with the aggressive familiarity of the figures that inhabit the works of art. That is to say, I propose that the viewer would have had to bring the image near to the face in order to inspect the artist's careful transcription of facial features, gestures, and social interaction due to the small size of the panels.

In the painting representing *Smell* (fig. 3), for example, it is not a laughing old crone (as in *Taste*), but a young mother who gazes at the beholder and awkwardly acknowledges her task: cleaning a young child's bottom. Unlike the pleasant odor of tobacco suggested by the pipe leaning against the brazier on the table, which functions as a link to *Taste*, the baby's bottom calls foul odors to mind. The male figure in *Smell*, plugs his nose, sticks out his tongue, leans away, and seems to be waving his pitcher of beer to dissipate the fetid stench of the baby's dirty diaper, miming the reaction that the viewer might have had if the artist has succeeded in depicting an odor which emanates from the baby's prominently described buttocks in the foreground of the image. A young child in the background seems to be laughing at the man's elaborate display of disgust. In Adriaen van Ostade's *Smell* (fig. 6), the male figure silently plugs his nose, while the baby is smaller and depicted further from the picture plane than in Molenaer's version. In contrast, a beholder who held Molenaer's panel up to his or her face would have been confronted with a dirty baby's bottom at an indecorously close range!

The beholder might inadvertently smile or smirk at the nearly audible jesting, song, or laughter in *Hearing* (fig. 2), wrinkle his or her nose at the pictorial 'stench' of a dirty diaper in *Smell*, or imagine what the coarse peasant's fingertips encounter under the woman's skirts in *Touch* (fig. 5). In other words, viewing Molenaer's paintings entailed an engagement of two of the viewer's 'inner senses': the imagination and memory. These faculties of the soul enabled the individual to recreate in his mind's eye the memory of an

odor or sound, or to imagine what the figure's hand encounters in *Touch.* While the operation of the outer senses could be depicted through figures in action, the inner senses could only be referenced indirectly and were dependant upon the beholder's participation.

A Healthy Dose of Laughter: Jan Miense Molenaer's Comic Deceptions

Above I have suggested how Molenaer's panels visually engaged the viewer by stimulating the inner senses of the beholder and involving the imagination or memory in the beholding process. Yet how should we explain Molenaer's particularly farcical treatment of the Five Senses? Certainly, according to contemporary poetic theory, the depiction of peasants misbehaving uproariously would have been an unmistakable clue that we should see the paintings as operating within the comic mode.[17] We should not be surprised that the Five Senses trope was particularly ripe for Molenaer's witty treatment in 1637. The capacity to provoke laughter had long been related to sensory experiences. For example, it was specifically the comic deceptions of the Five Senses that the well-known French physician Laurent Joubert (1529-1582) described as the fodder for laughter in his *Treatise on Laughter* [*Traité du ris*] of 1579.[18] When he set out to investigate what made individuals laugh, he observed that,

> Now, this object, subject, occasion, or matter of laughter is related to two senses, namely sight and hearing, for all that is laughable is found in actions or in words, and is something ugly or improper, yet unworthy of pity or compassion.[19]

Certainly Molenaer's boozing peasants, who are depicted squandering their earnings on drink and tobacco in the inn, were "ugly or improper, yet unworthy of pity or compassion" according to the social norms and mores of the day.[20]

Joubert followed the traditional Aristotelian separation between that which was *laughable in deed*, or "the comic as it is witnessed" from that which was *laughable in word*, or in other words, "the comic as it is recounted."[21] In this manner, laughable matter was divided up according to the sense that received the comic stimuli and transferred it to the brain. Joubert believed that even when the senses recognized the

perceptible object, laughter was often a result of the deception of cognitive expectations. He offered his reader a series of examples of practical jokes, tricks, deceptions, and snubs and explained,

> Now these tricks are commonly played on all the senses, and cause us to laugh because it is unbecoming, due to a lack of attention or judgment, to see ourselves greatly mislead since, if we had been thinking the least bit, they could have been avoided: such as if somebody wanted to touch an iron he does not know is hot, and burns himself; or if ice breaks under the feet of one who foolishly thought it was thick; if one takes shit for honey. All these things are laughable because it is easy to test and find out if our senses judge correctly.[22]

Joubert's list of examples of sensory deceptions and practical jokes are interesting to us because they offer categories of comic subject matter that have parallels in the low-life genre paintings of Molenaer and his contemporaries, and because they allow us to think about how artists set out not (only) to moralize, but to amuse their viewers.[23]

Adriaen Brouwer's *Bitter Drink* (fig. 7), for example, has frequently been described as a *tronie*, or character head, that demonstrated the artist's ability to capture life-like facial expressions. Indeed, the painting skillfully depicts a half-length figure of a peasant whose face is dramatically contorted as a result of a bitter or distasteful beverage that he has just consumed. The figure's eyes are squeezed tightly shut, his eyebrows and forehead wrinkled from the convulsive force of the bad taste which has caused the man to open his mouth. The peasant indecorously reveals his teeth, as if to exhale the evil-tasting vapors of the liquid. We might wonder if Brouwer's painting was regarded by contemporaries not only as a show of skill, but as a comic image if we bear in mind another of the sensory deceptions that comprise laughable matter in Joubert's treatise: "Taste is also misled when one has somebody else eat something bitter, or of equally bad quality, yet having the appearance or covering of sweetness and goodness."[24] Brouwer's painting need not literally depict the outcome of a practical joke, in order to succeed in representing the peasant's visceral corporeal reaction to something tasted. The seventeenth-century beholder would have likely deemed this quite humorous.

Similarly, on a print depicting the sense of *Smell* (fig. 8) from a series engraved by Cornelis van Kittensteyn after Dirck Hals an inscription soberly observed that,

"Nostrils are pleasant things when cultivating ambrosial flowers; but underneath these smells are foul odors, that often conceal deception."[25] We have no reason to believe that the young *vrijer* offering his sweetheart a flower in the image is about to commit a practical joke on his lady, however the "deception" referenced in the inscription gains a certain ironic resonance when considered in light of Joubert's description of practical jokes played on the sense of smell:

> The sense of smell is abused, properly speaking, if stinking odors are presented to it as being sweet, and less strictly speaking also, when a bouquet is given to smell perfumed with euphorbia or hellebore as if it were with powdered violet or cypress. For from the odor we begin to sneeze so hard and so long that it is funny. One is also deceived in this matter of flowers when hidden in them is something pointed that comes and pricks the nose upon approaching, at which we laugh very hard.[26]

Such counter readings of the Van Kittensteyn prints are justified by the sarcastic innuendo of inscriptions on other images in the series such as *Touch* (fig. 9), where for example a young man is depicted fondling a maiden's breast before a blazing fire as an old maid readies a bed in the background. In this case the inscription concludes, "it is impossible to touch anyone [thing] without coming near to them [it], thus making way for enthusiastic familiarity. To what extent the adored disapproves is observed in the way touch is refused."[27] Certainly, the viewer of the print understands that touch is in no way being "refused" in the image. Whether or not Molenaer did know Van Kittensteyn's prints and could decipher their Latin inscriptions, as art historical comparisons between the two artists' *Five Senses* series assume, Molenaer's painting of *Touch* (fig. 5) offers a closer illustration of the inscription discussed above than the Van Kittensteyn print.

It should be noted that Molenaer's panels and those of his contemporaries do not suggest direct familiarity with Joubert's text. The peasants in Molenaer's *Taste* (fig. 4), for example, are not shown laughing as a figure burns his tongue on hot soup and spits it out, an example of a deception of Taste and Touch offered by Joubert.[28] Likewise, I know of no genre scenes in which a visitor to a brothel is surprised by the appearance of an old *vrijster* instead of a young maiden he expected. Joubert emphasized not deceptions that befall the lower classes in paintings, but those of his own educated contemporaries. For

example, the reason that burning one's tongue was laughable is ultimately because, "it seems improper to us not to test the heat beforehand…and to pounce boldly on the food and devour it thoughtlessly in the manner of a glutton."[29] Molenaer's panels depict gluttonous behavior, sexual impropriety, and the occasional exposed (infant) buttocks, but this was the behavior that was proverbially expected of the lower social echelons. Such images, I suggest, would have neither surprised an educated viewer, nor instructed him on how to comport himself in politer circles. Who then were Molenaer's beholders and how might they have interpreted his comic deceptions?

The art collection of the Leiden physician and professor of practical medicine Franciscus de la Boë Sylvius (1614-1672), offers some potential answers.[30] An inventory of Sylvius's possessions after his death in 1673 suggests that his taste in art demonstrated an interest in images that wittily thematized the relationship between the senses and the passions. In addition to an image of a quacksalver by Adriaen Brouwer in his entryway and *snaeckse tronies* ("droll character studies") in the corridor of the ground floor,[31] Sylvius owned a series of the Five Senses by Molenaer which were hung in the dining room.[32] This series is not likely to be the one preserved in the Mauritshuis, because Sylvius's panels hung in octagonal frames.[33] Instead, we can assume that Sylvius owned another series by Molenaer which today partially survives and is divided among private collections.[34] Its themes, however, are similar in their comic tenor to the Mauritshuis series and include an image of a man who has broken wind while his companions laugh and plug their noses (*Smell*) and a scene of peasants singing (*Hearing*).

Historian Pamela H. Smith has argued that Sylvius's collection offers evidence of the contemporary "controversy about the epistemological status of knowledge gained through the senses and about the practices by which that knowledge was gathered."[35] Indeed, while empirical investigation was increasingly important for the practice of science in the seventeenth century, practitioners of the new philosophy in the Netherlands nevertheless had to grapple with centuries of inherited wisdom which taught that man's senses were inherently fallible and prone to errors in judgment. Scientists such as Sylvius thus attempted to find the mathematical underpinnings of various physiological processes to bolster their experimental observations. Despite the farcical nature of the Five Senses

panels in Sylvius's collection, Smith understands them primarily in serious terms, suggesting that they visualized the physician's "deep suspicion of the senses as seductive snares."[36] Yet if we understand Sylvius's dining room decoration in light of Laurent Joubert's treatise, we come to a more nuanced understanding of potential seventeenth-century responses to representations of the Five Senses.

Franciscus de la Boë doubtlessly considered images which represented sensory perceptions appropriate for a palatial home which contained three laboratories where experiments were conducted, and he likely appreciated how the peasants represented in Molenaer's panels demonstrated the deceptiveness of the senses.[37] Among the many possessions inventoried in Sylvius's modern home on the Rapenburg in Leiden was a large library.[38] As both Joubert and Sylvius were prominent physicians, it is highly likely that Sylvius was familiar with Joubert's writings, and perhaps even owned a copy of his treatise on laughter. That Joubert was known in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century is evinced by the fact that Sylvius's contemporary, the Dordrecht physician Johan van Beverwijck (1594-1647) quoted another treatise by Joubert in his *Treasury of Health* [*Schat der Gesontheyt*] of 1637.[39]

The discussion above does not suggest, however, why a physician might have hung the Molenaer's bawdy *Five Senses* in his dining room.[40] We might explain this choice by looking back on humanist practice which recommended decorating the dining room with humorous works of art and engaging in witty conversation over meals.[41] Many humanists such as Erasmus, Erycius Puteanus (1574-1646) and Robert Burton as well as physicians such Joubert and Van Beverwijck agreed that laughter aided digestion and that moderate jesting at the dining table lifted the spirits, provided recreation and prevented melancholy.[42] Thus Sylvius's dining room decorations announced his self-consciousness as a discerning and learned host offering imagery that delighted his guests' senses even as it depicted corporeal pleasures that they themselves enjoyed. If we extrapolate and generalize from the series of Five Senses owned by Sylvius, we can surmise that the audience for the Mauritshuis *Five Senses* was likely an urban burgher, his family, and guests.

Conclusion

We need not look to Sylvius and the second half of the seventeenth century in order to find evidence of scientists and physicians grappling with the seeming disjunctions between the necessity of experiential knowledge, the authority of received wisdom, and the fallibility of the individual's senses. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, in his discussion of the deceptions which caused laughter, Laurent Joubert was careful to explain that in fact one did not deceive the external senses of others, but rather their patience and expectations. In this manner, Joubert ultimately professes his confidence in the individual's perceptual apparatus: "For our senses do not fail in recognizing their object: we laugh only over the imagination's being falsely convinced."[43] Perhaps the appeal of Molenaer's *Five Senses* was their capacity to amuse the beholder by fooling the imagination.

Molenaer did not depict the peasants in his paintings as the butt of the kind of practical jokes outlined in Joubert's treatise, yet the artist's *Five Senses* convincingly display the corporeal pleasures of the figures that populate his small panels. Far from being simply socially freighted representations of the uneducated Dutch peasantry, Molenaer amused his viewers by creating a "loud" painting in *Hearing* or an odiferous one in *Smell*. Molenaer's images do not simply appeal to the beholder's eyes, but attempt to counterfeit the very sensory experiences in which the figures are engaged. When the beholder looks today at the panel representing *Sight*, for example, the stillness and the absorption of the figures—so distracted that they take no notice of the viewer's gaze—doubly invites our eyes to linger over physiognomic details of the faces and creates a certain yearning to "see" for ourselves what could be so desirable at the bottom of the pitcher of beer. We catch ourselves replicating the very sensory act in which the figures are engaged: we look long and hard at the image. In other panels such as *Touch* and *Taste*, the viewing dynamic is slightly different. In these images the protagonists of the scenes are busy guzzling beer or groping beneath voluminous skirts, and the viewer is left to imagine the sensations experienced by the figures.

In light of contemporary notions of the relationship between the body and the soul, Molenaer's panels stimulated not only the viewer's sense of sight, but his or her inner senses such as the imagination, which would be stimulated to "hear" the singing peasants or "smell" the baby's bottom. This show of skill tested the representational limits of the art of painting. Ultimately, my analysis does not attempt to make a natural philosopher of Jan Miense Molenaer or other artists of the seventeenth century who produced multiple versions of the Five Senses theme. Rather, I argue that one cannot begin to appreciate how beholders interpreted Molenaer's images without bearing in mind the active relationship in the seventeenth-century between cognitive processes that today inhabit the realm of psychology—judging, imagining, and remembering—and the act of looking at art.

List of Illustrations

1. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Five Senses: Sight*, 1637, oil on panel, 19.5 x 24 cm., Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague.

2. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Five Senses: Hearing*, 1637, oil on panel, 19.5 x 24 cm., Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague.

3. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Five Senses: Smell*, 1637, oil on panel, 19.5 x 24 cm., Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague.

4. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Five Senses: Taste*, 1637, oil on panel, 19.5 x 24 cm., Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague.

5. Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Five Senses: Touch*, 1637, oil on panel, 19.5 x 24 cm., Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague.

6. Adriaen van Ostade, *The Five Senses: Smell*, 1635, oil on panel, 20 x 24.5 cm., Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

7. Adriaen Brouwer, *The Bitter Drink*, oil on panel, 47.3 x 35.3 cm., Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main.

8. Cornelis van Kittensteyn after Dirck Hals, *Smell*, engraving, 22.5 x 25.8 cm. Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

9. Cornelis van Kittensteyn after Dirck Hals, *Touch*, engraving, 22.5 x 25.8 cm. Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Notes

[1] The panels measure only 7 11/16 x 9 7/16 in. (19.5 x 24 cm.), that is to say, smaller than a sheet of notebook paper!

[2] It is not my intention in this article to trace the development of the Five Senses theme in Dutch art. This has been accomplished in a series of studies: Hans Kauffmann, "Die Fünf Sinne in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts," in: *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien für Dagobert Frey*, Breslau 1943, 133-57; Carl Nordenfalk, "The Five Senses in Flemish Art before 1600," in: *Netherlandish Mannerism*, Görel Cavalli-Björkman (ed.), Stockholm (Nationalmuseum) 1984, pp. 135-54; Idem, "The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985), pp. 1-22; Idem, "The Sense of Touch in Art," in: Karl-Ludwig Selig and Elizabeth Sears (eds.), *The Verbal and the Visual. Essays in Honor of William Sebastian Heckscher*, New York 1990, pp. 109-32; Claudia Schipper, *Mit Lust unter den Händen. Darstellungen der fünf Sinne in der bildenden Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Ph.D. dissertation, Universiteit Utrecht, 2000).

[3] The paintings are oil on canvas and measure 72 x 59.5 cm. *Taste* does not survive; for reproductions see: Sotheby's (London) 10 Dec. 2001, pp. 108-09.

[4] Rembrandt's panels are among the earliest paintings assigned to the young artist and are roughly the size of the Mauritshuis images: *The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt*, E. van de Wetering and B. Schnackenburg (eds.), exh. cat. Kassel (Staatliche Museen Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister)/ Amsterdam (Museum het Rembrandthuis) 2001, cat. nrs. 9-11, pp. 150-59.

[5] See the catalogue entry on Molenaer's *Five Senses* by Cynthia Kortenhorst-von Bogendorf Rupprath in: James A. Welu and Pieter Biesboer (eds.), *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*, cat. exh. Worcester (Worcester Art Museum)/ Haarlem (Frans Halsmuseum) 1993, 328-331.

[6] *Touch* is missing from the series, not *Sight* which is mislabeled in the RKD files as *Touch*. In *Sight* a woman searches for lice in her child's hair, while a man looks on and a

child strikes a *kannekijker* pose looking into an earthenware pitcher. The panels (Hermitage, St. Petersburg, inv. nr. 998-1001) measure 20 x 25 cm except for *Smell* which measures 20 x 24.5 cm. *Smell* and *Hearing* are signed and dated, although the date of 1635 is only fully legible in the former. *Sight* has only the remains of a signature, while *Taste* is unsigned and undated.

[7] Molenaer's *Sight* is an exception. The primary figures conspicuously do not look out of the image, but instead into an empty pitcher.

[8] While in recent years scholars have acknowledged the comic aspects of Molenaer's *Five Senses*, research has tended to interpret the paintings in moralizing fashion: Kortenhorst-von Bogendorf Rupprath in: Welu and Biesboer 1993, *op. cit.* (n. 5), pp. 322-333; Schipper 2000, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 157ff; Dennis P. Weller (ed.), *Jan Miense Molenaer. Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, cat. exh. Raleigh (North Carolina Museum of Art)/ New York/ Manchester, VT 2002, pp. 142-47. In her essay, "Jan Miense Molenaer in the Comic Mode," Mariët Westermann has sensitively reframed this interpretive issue by referring to formative discussions of Pieter Bruegel's peasant images, "Given that comic representations were by classical and Renaissance definition always the amusing or witty repository of current moral truth, the heated art historical debate of the 1970s as to whether Bruegel's paintings and seventeenth-century genre paintings were comic *or* moralizing was impossible to resolve on historical terms": Weller 2002, *ibid.*, note 10, p. 59.

[9] Westermann in: Weller 2002, *ibid.*, p. 47.

[10] Smell is an exception to this. It contains four figures if one includes the baby.

[11] Sight and Hearing were traditionally considered more noble senses because they enabled the individual to access spiritual truths by reading the Bible and hearing God's Word. Smell, Taste, and Touch were considered lower corporeal senses necessary for man's survival. The 'hierarchy of the senses' refers to the ascending or descending order in which they were discussed in literature or represented in art according to the moral-ethical norms of the day. For a more thorough discussion see: Louise Vinge, "The Five Senses. Studies in a Literary Tradition," *Royal Society of Letters at Lund*, vol. 72, (1975), pp. 5-193.

[12] On the use of a laughing face as a comic prompt, see: Mariët Westermann, *The Amusements of Jan Steen. Comic Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, Zwolle 1997, esp. pp. 113-115 and Noël Schiller, "The Art of Laughter: Society, Civility, and Viewing Practices in the Netherlands, 1600-1640" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2006), esp. Chap. 1.

[13] See Eric Jan Sluijter, "Venus, Visus and Pictura" in: *Seductress of Sight. Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age*, Zwolle 2000, 86-159; Schiller 2006, *op. cit.* (n. 13), pp. 148ff.

[14] Many peasant inn scenes by Adriaen Brouwer and Adriaen van Ostade feature a figure in the background that urinates into a corner of the room or into the fire. We cannot be sure this is the case in Molenaer's *Sight*, although the man is hunched over and his hands are positioned in front of his torso.

[15] I am not suggesting that this painting is a documentary record of an actual collection, physical space, or royal visit. Nevertheless, it does seem possible that viewing practices like holding small paintings in the hands are consistent with other visual evidence of how people looked at art. The panel painting is located in the collection of The Walters Art Museum (Baltimore, MD) and measures 37 x 48 9/16 in. (94 x 123.3 cm.). Another example of holding small paintings in the hands in order to view them appears in a painting (c. 1620, panel, 95 x 123.5 cm) attributed to Hans Jordaens III (?) (c. 1595-1643) and conserved in The National Gallery of Art, London. At the lower left, a man holds a small panel furnished with a door and seems to be showing it and speaking to the beholder. See Eric Jan Sluijter, "'All striving to adorne their houses with costly peeces' Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors" in: Mariët Westermann (ed.), *Art & Home. Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, Denver, CO (Denver Art Museum)/ Newark, NJ (The Newark Museum)/ Zwolle 2001, pp. 103-128, fig. 162, p. 118.

[16] Here I am specifically questioning the viewing process as an illusive moment just prior to interpretation.

[17] Peasants and members of the lower classes were the standard vehicles of comic action which should represent everyday life as, or worse than it was according to Renaissance interpretations of classical poetics. See Westermann in: Weller 2002, *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 44-45.

[18] Laurent Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, Gregory David de Rocher (trans.), University, AL 1980.

[19] All translations of Joubert are by De Rocher: *ibid*, 19.

[20] See for example, Herman Roodenburg, *The Eloquence of the Body. Perspectives on Gesture in the Dutch Republic*, Zwolle 2004.

[21] De Rocher 1980, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. xi.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[23] Joubert's account of various sensory deceptions does not follow the tradition of using of the Five Senses as an ordering principle that is usually employed in literary discussions. Instead he relates the laughable deceptions caused by the 'lower' senses, taste and touch, before proceeding to those associated with sight—such as the humorous upsetting of expectations in the brothel: in that instance "we are promised the sight of a beautiful young woman, and just as we are aroused, we are shown a wrinkled old lady" (22). After sight he discusses smell, and ultimately explores hearing last—a rhetorical maneuver that introduces the following section which concerns laughable remarks that one hears and then visualizes as 'laughable deeds' in the imagination: De Rocher 1980, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 22-23.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[25] Kortenhorst-von Bogendorf Rupprath in: Welu and Biesboer 1993, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 332.

[26] De Rocher 1980, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 23.

[27] Kortenhorst-von Bogendorf Rupprath in: Welu and Biesboer 1993, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 332.

[28] Joos van Craesbeeck is recorded by Cornelis de Bie to have depicted himself "uglier than he really was, being painted now yawning then spewing or pulling faces and grimacing from the anise [liquor] biting his tongue": Karolien de Clippel, "Adriaen Brouwer, portrait painter: new identifications and an iconographic novelty," *Simiolus* 30 (2003) no. 3/4, pp. 196-216, esp. note 73, p. 212. I have amended De Clippel's translation which read, "grimacing by biting his tongue from the aniseed." The Dutch reads: "*meer mismaeckt schilderde als hy in sijn selven was, sijnde somwijl gheschildert gapende, andermael spouwende oft maeckende eenighe grillen en treckinghen in 't aensicht door het tongh-bijten vanden annijs*."

[29] De Rocher 1980, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 22.

[30] See Sluijter 2001 *op. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 103ff; Pamela H. Smith, "Science and Taste: Painting, Passions, and the New Philosophy in Seventeenth-Century Leiden," *Isis*, vol. 90 (1999), nr. 3: 421-61. Sluijter does not cite Smith's study.

[31] We might think here of Brouwer's *Bitter Drink*, which could easily depict a man taking his medicine.

[32] Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), p. 426.

[33] I agree with Smith that it is unlikely that rectangular panels were once put into octagonal frames: *Ibid.*, note 33, p. 440. It has been suggested that the panels for the Mauritshuis *Hearing* and *Touch* were cut from a single, larger grounded panel: Weller 2002, *op. cit.* (n. 9), note 1, p. 147. Molenaer depicted several series of the Five Senses throughout his career besides these two farcical series. These include a series of panels depicting half-length children (c. 1628-29) which owe much to examples produced by Frans and Dirck Hals in Haarlem: Weller 2002, *op. cit.* (n. 4), cat. nr. 3, pp. 69-74; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, exh. cat. London (Royal Academy of Arts) 1989, cat. nr. 15, esp. fig. 15e, pp. 172-75 and cat nrs. 25-28, pp. 202-07.

[34] The surviving panels are reproduced in the following auction catalogues: Christie's East, 17 Dec. 1981 (*Smell*); Bonhams, 13 Dec. 1979, no. 139 (*Taste*); and Sotheby's Parke Benet, New York, 13 Dec. 1978, no. 45 (*Hearing*). Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), note 33, p. 440. These panels were also quite small. *Smell*, for example, measures 20 cm (7 ¾ in.) in diameter.

[35] Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), p. 421. Similarly, Sluijter noted that Sylvius began his tenure at the University of Leiden "with a speech emphasizing the primacy of knowledge based on first-hand observation and experience. Sylvius became a well-known representative of the new experimental school that rejected the once infallible authority of the physicians of classical antiquity": Sluijter 2001, *op. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 106.

[36] Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), p. 441.

[37] See floor plan of Sylvius's home reproduced in: Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 425, 444.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

[39] Van Beverwijck cites Joubert's *Erreurs* at the end of his chapters on sleep and sex: Joh. van Beverwijck, *Schat der Gesontheyt*, Dordrecht 1637, p. 512.

[40] Smith suggested that the choice of paintings hanging in Sylvius's collection anticipated Gerard de Lairesse's ideas about accommodating the paintings hung in a room to their particular function: Smith 1999, *op. cit.* (n. 31), pp. 439-40. In Book 8, Chapter VIII entitled, "Of the pictures proper to various apartments" De Lairesse wrote that, "The *Nature*, *Property*, and *Use* of pictures in general, is, to keep the Senses…in a continual Employ and Contemplation" and advised, "Over the *Dining-room-Chimney* place *Comus*, God of Meals, accompanied by Taste and Smell; and on the *Door*, *Laetitia*, or Joy: Gérard de Lairesse, *The art of painting, in all its branches, methodically demonstrated by discourses and plates, and exemplified by remarks on the paintings of the best masters*, translated by John Frederick Fritsch, London 1738, p. 394, 396.

[41] See Johan Verberckmoes, *Schertsen, schimpen en schateren. Geschiedenis van het lachen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, zestiende en zeventiende eeuw*, Nijmegen 1998, esp. Chapter 3 "Het bitterzoete recept," p. 70ff.

[42] As many historians have noted in the last decade, witty conversation was an important aspect of civility in the early modern period: Peter Burke, *The Art of Conversation*, Ithaca/New York 1993; Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire*, Paris 1995, especially Chapter 5, "Le savoir-rire," pp. 149-186; and Herman Roodenburg, "To Converse Agreeably: Civility and the Telling of Jokes in Seventeenth-Century Holland" in: *A Cultural History of Humour*, Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, (*eds*.), Cambridge 1997, pp. 112-33. On Puteanus in particular, see Schiller 2006, *op. cit.* (n. 13), pp. 257ff.

[43] De Rocher 1980, *op. cit.* (n. 19), p. 23.

Schiller, Fig. 1

Schiller, Fig. 2

Schiller, Fig. 3

Schiller, Fig. 4

Schiller, Fig. 5

Schiller, Fig. 6

Schiller, Fig. 7

Schiller, Fig. 8

Schiller, Fig. 9