



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

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‘Constantijn Huygens Jr.: Art advisor to King William III’

The diary of Constantijn Huygens Jr is an important source for the cultural history of the last quarter of the 17th century in the Netherlands and England. Huygens was secretary of William III, stadholder of Orange from 1672 and King of England from 1688. Huygens was a connoisseur and made many notes in his diary about judgements of paintings, art discussions with the king, meetings with painters and art dealers, and his involvement with the decoration of palaces in England and the Netherlands. Huygens's diary, which is not unlike that of his contemporary Samuel Pepys, gives an unusual insight into the art world at this time. This paper will focus on two aspects, the role of Huygens as an advisor to the king and other collectors, and his own role as a collector. After the Glorious Revolution, Huygens had frequent talks with King William and Queen Mary about their collections of paintings and drawings, and was involved in the selection and arranging of hanging paintings in various palaces. He also gave judgements about newly bought or confiscated paintings and often conferred with the official king's restorer and joiner. His role was the same as that of his father, who was the main art advisor to Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange, and who befriended Rembrandt and other painters of the period. It turns out that, like his father, Huygens role was mainly confirming the judgements and tastes of the king and high courtiers than that of a guide in art matters. His role as collector brought Huygens in contact with many art dealers, painters and auctioneers, professions often combined. A high point in his career was to be invited by King William while he was sitting for his portrait by Godfrey Kneller.