

Dutch and Belgian cultural rivalry in interwar London

Ulrich Tiedau

Introduction

Like all cultural production, art can function as ‘cultural capital’, to use a term by Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher.¹ At various times in history it has been instrumental in gaining influence and (soft) power, politicising and commodifying the artistic heritage of a nation. This paper will present a little-known case in point, namely the intellectual and artistic rivalry between London-based Dutch and Belgian organisations in the 1920s, embedded in the wider international climate of the time.

In order to situate this extraordinary competition, one needs to recall the immense *political* rivalry between the Belgian and Dutch governments in the early interwar period, which is hardly conceivable today. In contrast to the common Benelux-idea, developed during and implemented after World War II (and since complemented and superseded by joint membership of the European institutions), Dutch-Belgian relations in the period immediately following World War I and throughout the early 1920s were characterised by intense competition, centred around conflicting territorial, economic and security claims around the River Scheldt estuary.²

This rivalry was also reflected amongst expat communities in the British Capital, where Dutch business interests were well established, not least around the big Anglo-Dutch corporations, of which Royal Dutch Shell was the most prominent, whereas the Belgian presence was largely due to the influx of huge numbers of refugees to the UK during the War. Binational friendship associations were vying for influence on British academic, government and public opinion, which mattered no little deal for both nations as Belgian claims on Dutch territory were discussed on the Paris Peace Conference and London, then, was still the centre of the political world system.

Anglo-Dutch and Anglo-Belgian organisations

Who were these organisations and who was involved? Firstly, the Anglo-Belgian Union of 1918, a bilateral association with premises in Mayfair, that in form of the Anglo-Belgian Society, the result of a merger in 1983 with the *Cercle Royal Belge de Londres* of 1922 with similar aims, is still in existence to the present day. The Union was born out of the “brotherhood in arms” of World War I, as its Constitution from April 1918 points out right at the beginning, and its object was “to maintain and develop feelings of friendship between the British and Belgian peoples, to promote more intimate relations between the two nations, and to commemorate the brotherhood in arms which arose from their mutual loyalty to the treaty of 1839.”³

Its patrons were nobody less than the two monarchs, King George and King Albert, its initial president the Liberal politician, and later party leader, Herbert Samuel (followed by newspaper baron Viscount Burnham, the Belgian Ambassador Paul Hymans, and again Burnham), supported by a provisional committee that on the British side was headed by Gladstone and on the Belgian side by Comte Goblet d’Alviella. The organisation’s honorary vice-presidents included Asquith, Balfour, Cecil, Austen Chamberlain, Bonar Law and Lloyd George on the British, and Charles de Brocqueville, Paul Hymans, Carton de Wiart, Émile Vandervelde, Maurice Maeterlinck and Émile Cammaerts on the Belgian side. The Union had offices in Burlington House, 6 Burlington Gardens, off Piccadilly Street, sharing premises with the Royal Academy of Art, and later moved to close-by Albemarle Street.

In practical terms, Algernon Maudsley, a prominent yachtsman and philanthropist of independent means, who during the 1900 Summer Olympics in Meulan, France, had won two gold medals for the UK racing sailing yachts, and during the War had been Honorary Secretary of the Belgian War Refugees Committee,⁴ and Viscomte Henri Davignon, who had run the semi-official *Bureau de propagande et de documentation* in London for the Le Havre-based Belgian government-in-exile, acted as general secretaries.⁵

On the Dutch side, the business community was centred around the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging te London* ('Dutch Association in London'), a gentlemen's club for Dutch expats with offices first on Regent Street, then on Sackville Street, Piccadilly, also close to the Royal Academy. Founded in 1873 by E. H. Crone, the driving force behind it was very much Frederick ('Freek') Cornelius Stoop (1854–1933), who only two years after the association's foundation was elected into its committee and since 1886 continuously served as its chairman until 1932. A banker, stock broker and financier by profession, from an old family of patricians in Dordrecht, who in 1873 had moved to England, became naturalised in 1878 and was settled in West Hall near Byfleet, Surrey, he used his considerable wealth to build up a growing art collection (Van Gogh and Picasso were among his acquaintances) as well as for philanthropic activities.⁶

According to the vignette in the biography of Stoop's son Adrian,⁷ a much revered gentleman-rugby union player for the Harlequins, whose training ground in Twickenham still bears the name Stoop,⁸ and captain of the English national team, Frederick had made his fortune in the early days of oil exploration, as London based managing director of the *Dortse Petroleum Maatschappij* set up by his elder brother Adriaan on Java in 1887. Shrewd investment in equipment, including building their own refinery, had allowed the Stoop brothers to remain the last independent oil producer in the East Indies, before in 1911, through an exchange of stock, being merged into Royal Dutch Shell, itself the result of the 1907 merger between two rival Dutch (*Koninklijke Olie maatschappij*/Royal Dutch) and British (Shell) companies.

The *Nederlandsche Vereeniging* preceded and remained separate from the Anglo-Batavian Society (today's Anglo-Netherlands Society, founded in 1920 and renamed in 1944) that was not primarily catering for the expat community like the Dutch Club – actually its membership consisted mainly of Britons – but had the aim of "promot[ing] good fellowship between the English and Dutch races."⁹ There was a large overlap in membership between the two organisations though. The Dutch Ambassador in London, Jonkheer René de Marees van Swinderen was honorary member of both associations and Stoop as well as his fellow *Vereeniging* members H. S. J. Maas and H. van den Bergh also served as vice-presidents of the Anglo-Batavian Society.

Both the Anglo-Belgian and Anglo-Dutch organisations aimed at promoting bilateral ties of friendship between their respective countries and Britain, particularly in the fields of culture and education. The most prominent outcome of their respective campaigns regarding education was the foundation of the first Chairs for Dutch and Belgian Studies at the University of London that I have published about in detail elsewhere.¹⁰ As a result of the widespread concern in Anglo-Dutch business circles about the reputation of the Netherlands, whose neutrality during the war, against the backdrop of Dutch exile provided to the German Kaiser by Queen Wilhelmina, was widely, if not necessarily correctly, perceived as having been more favourable to Germany, in 1919 a joint University and *Nederlandsche Vereeniging* committee led by Stoop (and presided by Ambassador van Swinderen) appointed Pieter Geyl, until then London correspondent of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* newspaper, as first Professor for Dutch Studies at the University of London, the first such university chair ever created in the Anglophone world and the origin of the UCL Department of Dutch that celebrates its centenary this autumn.¹¹

While establishing himself quickly as an eminent and highly original historian in British academia, the former journalist's continued political support for the Flemish movement and the *Grootnederlandse* (Greater Netherlands) idea, the Anglo-Belgian Union saw as so deleterious to Belgian interests that in 1920 it started a fundraising campaign with a view to containing the Dutch Chair's influence on British academic, government and public opinion of the Low Countries with a Chair for Belgian Studies, which with a decade delay due to the organisation's lack of funds as well as Geyl's behind-the-scene manipulations of the university bodies, in 1931 could finally be filled with Émile Cammaerts, the Anglo-Belgian poet whose patriotic war poems had been set to music by Elgar, and a collaborator of Davignon's *Bureau* (both newly appointed professors had been long-standing and prominent members of the Dutch Club and the Anglo-Belgian Union respectively).

Public diplomacy

But the ‘academic proxy war’ between Dutch and Belgian interests, as I like to call this conflict, was only one aspect of the interwar rivalry between the two organisations, for its public-facing side was even more important. Outside of academia, directed at the wider population, the two associations sought to capitalise on both countries’ rich artistic traditions, supported by their (newly appointed or designated) professors. The start was made by the Anglo-Belgian Union, who since 1923 were working towards staging a high-profile loan exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art from the 14th to the 19th centuries, that in January 1927 opened in the Royal Academy of Arts, one of London’s finest addresses for high culture, co-organised with the Belgian government and with the Royal couples of both countries as patrons, doubtlessly the organisation’s most prominent enterprise in the interwar period. Only two years after, in 1929, the Anglo-Batavian Society followed suit, with a landmark exhibition of Dutch art in the same venue, likewise with dual Royal patronage. Both hugely successful, the two events established the format of many high-profile Royal Academy exhibitions to follow, with loans from international galleries, governments, heads of state and private collectors, a tradition that lasted until World War II and beyond. It is the aim of this article to show how Dutch-Belgian competition for the favour of British public opinion inaugurated this tradition and became one of the driving forces for the development of interwar internationalism in London.

As has been pointed out before, in T. P. Cowdell’s study of the role of the Royal Academy in English Art and in Ilaria Scaglia’s investigation of the series of interwar exhibitions as a whole, including large exhibitions of Italian (1930), Persian (1931), French (1932) and Chinese (1935–1936) art along the lines of the Flemish/Belgian and Dutch models (both largely focussing on the Royal Academy’s institutional perspective), it was in the spirit of peaceful international cooperation that these pioneering exhibitions were organised,¹² an atmosphere characteristic of the time that Geyl, with regard to education, remembered in his memoirs, penned down in German captivity during World War II, as follows: “After the war the climate was very much in favour of international cultural exchange between the peoples, and London back then tried to become a large international centre in this respect. University chair after university chair was founded for the language, literature and history of one country after another. We [i. e. the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging*] did not want to miss out and formed a committee to raise funds: at that time money was easily available and we managed to raise substantial funds.”¹³ While after the devastation of 1914/18, international understanding and cultural exchange between the peoples of Europe (‘*rapprochement des peuples*’) was clearly a dominant desire, it tended to be organised on bilateral levels, the newly formed League of Nations notwithstanding. International understanding thus we have here indeed, or rather competitive bilateral understanding, and the existence of active Anglo-Belgian and Anglo-Dutch organisations as competing non-governmental actors driving the agenda, helps explain why Belgium and the Netherlands lead the development.

An Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art in London had long been one of the Anglo-Belgian Union’s favourite projects.¹⁴ There had been earlier successes for Belgian public diplomacy with smaller-scale, if already impressive, exhibitions of Belgian art in Paris (1923)¹⁵ and Bern (1926)¹⁶ and extending the series to London, the Capital of Belgium’s traditional ally and exile for hundreds of thousands refugees during the war, was a logical consequence, also with a view to perpetuating the close and beneficial relationship for the future, especially given that the intensity of the alliance had started to ebb off after Belgian demands on Dutch territory at the end of the War, the Franco-Belgian military accord of 1920 and Belgian participation in the Ruhr occupation in 1923–25, all of which the British government disapproved of.

The initiative had originated, in early 1923, from Paul Lambotte, the Director of Fine Arts in the Belgian Ministry of Science and Arts and Honorary Secretary of the Union’s Belgian Section.¹⁷ The idea was warmly welcomed by its newly appointed President, Viscount Burnham, the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, the British newspaper that during the war had most prominently supported Belgian refugees.¹⁸ Algernon Maudslay, the British Section’s Honorary Secretary, was sent to

Brussels and managed to enlist the support of the Belgian government, helped by the fact that the just appointed Foreign Secretary, Paul Hymans, had previously been Ambassador in London and Burnham's predecessor as president of the Anglo-Belgian Union.¹⁹

With such government aid secured, the challenge became finding a suitable and appropriate venue and, although the Anglo-Belgian Union was occupying premises in Burlington House, the Royal Academy's Council for several years saw itself unable to grant the use of their galleries. Other London museums also kept declining until eventually Burnham's and Maudslay's perseverance paid off when Sir Frank Dicksee was elected new Academy director and convinced the Council to permit the Union to rent their galleries for two months in January and February of 1927.

Like in the case of the professorial appointments, joint committees between the association and the institution were formed, including in various roles Viscount Burnham, Lord Emmott, Sir Robert Kindersley and Sir Cecil Hertslet for the Anglo-Belgian Union and Sir Frank Dicksee, Sir Lionel Earle, Sir Cecil Harcourt-Smith, Sir George Frampton, Sir Robert Witt, Sir Martin Conway, Sir Charles Walston, Sir Joseph Duveen, Mr. Campbell Dodgson, Mrs. Anning-Bell and Miss A. Alma Tadema for the Royal Academy. The overall organisation was entrusted to the Union's honorary secretaries, Maudslay on the British and to Lambotte on the Belgian side.²⁰ Importantly, as the financial success of the enterprise was in no way guaranteed and considerable risk taken – the *Anglo-Belgian Notes* of January 1927 expressed the hope that “all members will not only try to attend themselves but will urge all their friends to do likewise, so that the Exhibition may be not only an artistic but also a financial success”²¹ –, the finance committee had managed to raise a guarantee fund of £10,000 (almost £600,000 in today's worth) in case the receipts did not come up to expenditure.²²

For Dicksee the Union's proposal offered an opportunity to take up the tradition of the Royal Academy's winter exhibitions of old masters that from 1870 until World War I had been held annually at Burlington House. Yet it was also much more ambitious than the pre-war series. Not only did it set out to represent the whole range of medieval and early-modern Flemish painting, for the first time since the 1902 *Exposition des Primitifs Flamands* in Bruges, but also to set forth the evolution of Southern Netherlandish painting until the turn of the century, by including works by in Britain unknown painters from the period after Belgium's independence (1830). The longitudinal character of the exhibition, stretching from the 14th to the 19th century, projected Belgian nationhood, not incorrectly, back a couple of centuries before independence but also, somewhat more contentiously, established a 'national' claim on late-medieval and early-sixteenth century Netherlandish primitive painters, when there had been no sign of partition in the Low Countries. The dual descriptor in the exhibition's title (“Flemish and Belgian”) also already pointed at problems of 'national' delineation.

While originally it was planned to only loan pictures from Belgian museums and churches, like for the exhibitions at Paris and Bern (although not the Van Eyck brothers' famous Ghent altarpiece, the rumour of whose lending to London had caused outcry in the Belgian Press),²³ the enterprise soon grew into the largest international loan exhibition undertaken to that date, with loans being “sent in not merely from England and Belgium but from France, Holland and even the United States”.²⁴ As such it was a ground-breaking enterprise for internationalist collaboration in the field of art, irrespective of the fact that the exhibition's conception also undoubtedly displayed a nationalist undertone. It was rightfully considered the “greatest triumph” of the Anglo-Belgian Union in the first two decennia of its existence.²⁵ As its organ, the *Anglo-Belgian Notes*, proudly noted: “It has often been the fate of parents to be overshadowed by their brilliant children. This has been the situation of the Anglo-Belgian Union and the Flemish Exhibition. A few friends of Belgium pay a pound a year for the privilege of membership, for reading the 'Notes' and making or receiving an occasional visit from fellow members. Suddenly they are responsible for what has been described as the most important event in the artistic world in modern times. The Anglo-Belgian Union is greater than it appeared to be.”²⁶

Netherlandomania

Now the Dutch, who in 1919 had beaten the Belgians in establishing the first ‘foreign’ University Chair, an occasion on which Ambassador van Swinderen had not hidden his country’s satisfaction at being put in the limelight by the University of London, had to make amends. Preparations for a winter exhibition of Dutch art along similar lines began shortly after the Belgian exhibition opened, “as an aid to the cultural relations between the two countries.” Organised under Swinderen’s (honorary) presidency, the auspices of the Anglo-Batavian Society, and the Chairmanship of the Earl of Albemarle,²⁷ while the Dutch Club hosted the committees and organising staff, it ran from 4 January to 9 March 1929 and broke all records previously set by the Flemish-Belgian exhibition.²⁸

As Sir Robert Witt, trustee of the National Gallery and one of the co-founders of the Courtauld Gallery of Art, points out in the introduction to the lavishly produced souvenir catalogue,²⁹ the last major display of Dutch art in Britain had taken place more than a quarter of a century ago (1903), in the Guildhall, and although “some International Exhibitions have been held [in the meantime], the Rembrandt exhibitions in Amsterdam in 1898 and in London in 1899, the Rembrandt *Tercentenaire* in Leyden in 1906, the Dutch Exhibitions in Paris in 1911 and 1921 and in Rome in 1928, none of these has been comparable in extent with the present.” And indeed the scope of the exhibition was breath-taking; lenders included all important Dutch and British museums, as well as private collections including the Royal households of both countries plus overseas collections from “no less than twelve other European countries, with the warm co-operation of their respective Governments; while, through Sir Joseph Duveen, help of the most liberal scale was given by America.”³⁰ Many curators and art historians of distinction were involved, including the directors of the Rijksmuseum (Frederick Schmidt-Degener), the Mauritshuis (Wilhelm Martin) and Rotterdam’s Bozmann-Museum (Dirk Hannema) as well as William George Constable from the National Gallery, Campbell Dodgson from the British Museum and others.³¹

Recalling the hope that was expressed in the introduction to the Flemish Exhibition’s catalogue, “that such a remarkable collection of works of art might be the precursor of many others”, Witt adds: “[o]nly two years have passed and the Galleries of the Royal Academy are once again opened to the masterpieces, great and small, of a friend and neighbour nation. Nor, for all the distinguished success of its predecessor, does the present Exhibition fall short of it either in quality or scope, and in some features, may not unjustly claim to surpass it.”³² Even if this can be read as primarily being an expression of curatorial pride about having outperformed a previous success (he also had authored the introduction to the Flemish exhibition catalogue), a language of comparatives and superlatives pervades the catalogue’s text, inevitably invoking comparison with the predecessor exhibition. The term “friendly rivalry” is even used explicitly, albeit with reference to the loans of third-country governments. Still, on more than one occasion Dutch-Belgian ‘friendly rivalry’, or competitive international understanding, is implied between the lines. As Witt continues: “The outstanding feature of the exhibition is the contribution made by the Dutch Government, exceeding anything that any State has made before beyond its own frontiers.”³³ Similarly C. J. Holmes in the more extensive commemorative catalogue published in the year after as a means of permanent documentation: “One of its outstanding features was the magnificent part played by the Dutch Galleries and private owners in Holland, who together contributed 445 out of a total of 963 exhibits. (...) Never before has a State lent so freely of its finest and rarest works of art beyond its own frontiers.”³⁴ A similar kind of language characterises the rest of the catalogue’s text (and that of ancillary publications) and the competitiveness was also picked up by the Press, reporting about the artistic and financial success of the enterprise. *The Times*, for example, reported two weeks into the Dutch exhibition, using the traditional success measure for exhibitions: “In the fortnight since it was opened the exhibition has been visited by 57,000 people. The total number of visitors to the Flemish Exhibition of two years ago, which ran for eight weeks, was 150,000.”³⁵

As these figures show, the Royal Academy’s announcement [had] led to a real ‘Netherlandomania’ in London’s art world, for which the ground, of course, had been paved by the preceding Flemish-Belgian exhibition. During the preparation phase, galleries across Britain competed to have their

Dutch paintings included in the exhibition and on more than one occasion protested against non-inclusion decisions by the selection and hanging committees not to exhibit their pictures.³⁶ Other public and private London galleries scheduled concurrent Dutch-themed exhibitions, e. g. the National Gallery that displayed “some 50 of [their] Dutch paintings normally hung in the Reference Section of the Gallery or lent to other galleries”,³⁷ or the Westend antiquarian Messrs. Bumpus who put the Dutch tradition of printing, as exemplified by books, postage stamps, and paper money printed at the office of Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, Haarlem, on display at their premises on Oxford Street, a printing tradition that, in the words of *The Times*, indeed recalled “the quality of Vermeer”.³⁸ Visits by the Royal Couples of both countries to Burlington House prominently reported in the Press, added to the public appeal, as did the visit by Emma, the Queen Mother of the Netherlands, who when led around the exhibition, did not approve of the arrangement to shut off each room in turn to afford her a private view of the pictures and insisted on mingling with the public instead.³⁹ A well-attended lecture programme, as in the case of the Flemish-Belgian predecessor, accompanied the exhibition, with both Geyl and Cammaerts prominently among the speakers.⁴⁰ Following the Burlington house exhibition’s closure in March, a smaller exhibition of Dutch art was also held at the Manchester City Art Gallery.⁴¹

Not just in terms of collaboration between galleries and governments the Dutch exhibition, like its Belgian predecessor, was an expression of emerging interwar internationalism, but also in terms of its public audience, an international spectacle with global attraction. As the art critic of *The Times* pointed out in a major review, “this is an exhibition not only for London but for the world. (...) [N]ever before, in any country – not excluding Holland itself – has the art of Holland been so triumphantly displayed under one roof.”⁴² Calling Burlington House “the international lodestone of connoisseurs of painting”, the *Los Angeles Times*, on 3 January predicted that “[t]housands of Americans will make journeys to London for the express purpose of visiting the great exhibition of masterpieces of Dutch art gathered there from many countries.”⁴³ The emphasis was put upon great masters from the “Dutch Golden Age”, Rembrandt, Hals, Vermeer, Jan Steen, Cuyp, Ruisdael and Hobbema in particular, each of which representing ‘the culmination of a school or tendency’, which of course added greatly to the exhibition’s public appeal. Vermeer and Rembrandt, to both of whom separate galleries were dedicated, constituted the “great moments” of the exhibition, so *The Times*’ art critic, “of emotional depth and pictorial order respectively”, before coming to the inevitable comparison: “Taking in the exhibition as a whole it is impossible to avoid a mental comparison with the Flemish exhibition of 1927. Allowing for broader style, a more human and less decorative appeal, and the concentrated absence of the small brightness of the Primitives, which inevitably concentrated attention in the first rooms, there can be no doubt that the organizers of this exhibition have benefited from the experience of that one. It is much better arranged – a smaller reach in time assisting in the effect of homogeneity – and more easily seen. Easily as it can be seen, however, it would be idle to promise even the person accustomed habitually to ‘read’ exhibitions anything like a proper impression at one visit, and a season ticket is a necessity (...)”.⁴⁴ At the end of the show, visitor numbers would total 225,000 (including student and season-ticket holders and school visits even “upwards of 255,000”), exceeding the box-office sales of the Flemish and Belgian exhibition, of roughly equal duration, by 50 percent.⁴⁵

Whatever the criticisms were that could also be found in the specialist art historical press, it should not be forgotten that the enterprise’s main purpose was one of public diplomacy. And as such it definitely was a resounding success. As the *New Statesman* commented, “The object of the exhibition, we are told, is the promotion of friendly relations between Holland and this country, and no better gesture towards such an end could be conceived than this generous loan of what is in no small part of Holland’s wealth. (...) The exhibition has a significance which should not be lost as an international event. As peace-propaganda, whether implicit or not, it has a very definitive value.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

Right, what remains to be said about of the two, in spite of their initial underlying rivalry, largely complementary cultural enterprises? Both exhibitions surpassed the keenest expectations of their

organisers, as can be seen in the fact that two catalogues were published for each, illustrated souvenir catalogues for a general public and specialist art historical volumes, with high-quality reproductions, creating a permanent record.⁴⁷ In the Belgian case it looks like the organisers were taken by surprise at the scale of their exhibition's critical and public success, so that this improved second publication was only produced later. As Mary Chamot writes in the *Anglo-Belgian Notes*: "Seldom has a publication been awaited with such eagerness as the Memorial Volume of the Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art. The manifest imperfections of the catalogue sold at the turnstiles, and the enormous demand for reproductions in any shape or form, to say nothing of the phenomenal success of the exhibition itself, clearly called for such a task to be undertaken, and it is a pleasure to record at last that it has been most handsomely performed. The general editor, Sir Martin Conway, his collaborators, and the publishers, The Anglo-Belgian Union and Country Life are alike to be congratulated on the sumptuous volume they have produced."⁴⁸ The Dutch exhibition aimed even higher and planned both a popular and a specialist catalogue publication from the outset, using the same publisher as the Belgians, *Country Life* magazine, but for the popular catalogue and managed to place the specialist, "stately",⁴⁹ commemorative one with Oxford University Press, at the top of respected academic publishing.⁵⁰

In terms of the development of interwar internationalism, the initial Dutch-Belgian 'friendly rivalry' instigated a series of highly popular large-scale loan exhibitions of the artistic heritage of foreign nations in the Royal Academy.⁵¹ They were international spectacles because, or in spite of, the tension between the internationalist collaboration in making them happen and displaying one nation's artistic heritage in a longitudinal way, which inherently conveys a nationalist and teleological message – an assessment not just from today's perspective but also one made by contemporaries, e. g. by the art critic Walter Bayes in *The Saturday Review*:⁵² "Of a body of artists who bring together a picture show for the delectation of the general public we might reasonably ask (...) that it should be made up of pictures artistically comparable, thus incidentally offering to the unfortunate critic a limited theme adapted to his very limited space and getting the public into that mood of appreciation which even the best of painting needs. I do not want to see Hals or Rembrandt – still less Van Gogh – on the same afternoon as I am occupied with De Hoogh and Vermeer, de Witte and Ter Borgh: I should very much like to see the last quartette along with Chardin, with Canaletto, with Hogarth (...)"

From a different angle, Geyl in *The Contemporary Review* admonished both exhibitions for artificially claiming primitive painters for their respective nations, at a time when there was largely still cultural unity in the Low Countries: "Of this first Netherlands school of painting, as of mediæval Netherlands literature, the great centres were in the south, and they attracted some of their best artists from Holland. Bouts and David, who were represented by some fine works at the Flemish Exhibition, were both Hollanders. I do not, of course, mention this because I grudge their glory to the Flemings. On the contrary, my point is that the Flemish and Dutch Primitive schools form a unity, so that it does not much matter whether a particular painter is included in one or other of the two: the most rational thing to do would be to show them together as Netherlands Primitives," before adding that this seemed to be evidence for him that "art critics no less than historians or whatever category of scholars or laymen you like find it difficult, when looking at the past, to free their minds from the conceptions suggested by the present."⁵³

Then again, these exhibitions were "easy to criticize, but it should be borne in mind that displays like the present one are arranged for the general public, which is eager for knowledge, but still more eager for æsthetic sensations, and that the result obtained here is a richer, more complete, more homogenous collection of Dutch art has never been seen before", Leo van Puyvelde from the Royal Museum in Brussels pointed out conciliatory in *Apollo* magazine.⁵⁴ And this is what their primary purpose was, using the artistic heritage of both nations (complicated by their joint origins and contested claims as to national 'ownership' of certain painters and artistic traditions) as cultural capital for public diplomacy or, to use a more contemporary term, cultural propaganda.⁵⁵ The value of such bilateral cultural work also did not go unnoticed by the authorities and was e. g. pointed out

by the Belgian *Commission permanente des Affaires Etrangères*, proudly cited in the Union's organ *Anglo-Belgian Notes* of July 1926.⁵⁶

Both exhibitions were early examples of interwar cultural exchange by way of staging exhibitions, an increasingly popular public space in which internationalism took shape. While the tradition of world fairs and exhibitions, mainly related to manufacturing and technological progress, had been established since the mid-nineteenth century (1851), in the interwar period, after the catastrophic experience of World War I, international exhibitions also took on the role of a primary vehicle for international communication and cultural exchange. About the same time that the Belgians devised their art exhibition, the British Empire Exhibition was held at Wembley (1924–25), aimed at promoting the coherence of the British Empire. One of the largest international exhibitions held to that date and ever, it is well possible that its scale might have influenced the Belgian (and subsequently the Dutch) plans, as it was regularly reported about, in great detail, in the *Anglo-Belgian Notes*.⁵⁷ Exhibitions as a means of choice for public diplomacy abroad had a tradition in Belgium as the preceding examples in France and Switzerland show.⁵⁸ In the spirit of true reciprocity the Anglo-Belgian Union also co-organised an exhibition of British art in Brussels,⁵⁹ and last but not least, Belgium in 1927 was already gearing up for the 1930 centenary exhibitions, celebrating her independence from the Netherlands, as Paul Hymans pointed out in the *Anglo-Belgian Notes*.⁶⁰ The Anglo-Batavian Society could follow the successful model established by the Anglo-Belgian Union, and, with generous government support, take it to another level, whereas for the Royal Academy, a previously very conservative organisation, whose winter exhibition “[f]or about half a century (...) were of old masters, very largely of the English school”, these ventures offered a means to re-establish its leadership in the art sector. As the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out, it was “a striking development of the Royal Academy's ideas of the use of its beautiful gallery that it should now be given so frequently to exhibitions of the art of other countries. We are all becoming internationally minded.”⁶¹

In summary, by competing with each other the Dutch and Belgian bilateral friendship organisations, in conjunction with the Royal Academy, established an extremely successful model for internationalist collaboration in the field of art, in spite of, or just because of the organisation's initial ‘friendly rivalry’, this both in the academic-intellectual, and, as presented here, artistic field. Nationalism and internationalism did not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive at this point in time. Lastly, together with the two organisations' parallel efforts in higher education, these cultural enterprises also helped establish London as a primary centre for Dutch and Belgian Studies in the Anglophone world.⁶² It is to no small extent due to the Anglo-Belgian Union, the Anglo-Batavian Society (today's Anglo-Netherlands Society) and the former *Nederlandsche Vereeniging*, and their continued cultural and educational work, that this autumn we can celebrate the centenary of interdisciplinary Low Countries Studies in the UK (and by extension in the whole Anglophone world).

Note on contributor

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Illustrations

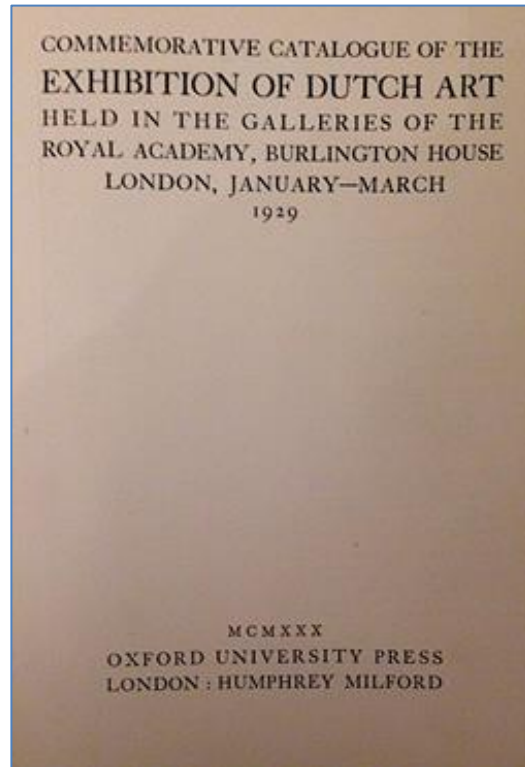
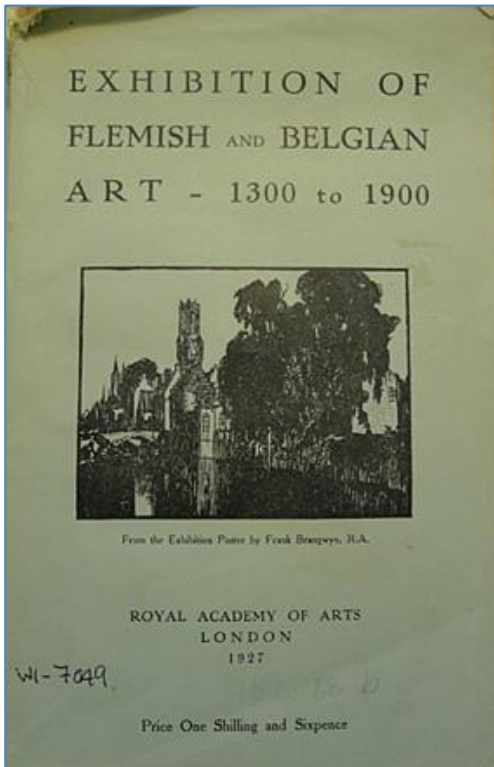


Fig. 1a, b: Exhibition Catalogues.

THE DUTCH ART EXHIBITION



Visitors at the Dutch Exhibiti on in Burlington House, which was opened to the public yesterday.

Fig. 2: Impression from: *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 January 1929, p. 9.



Fig. 3: Club House of the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging te Londen* on Sackville Street, from: *Eigen haard: Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift*, no. 10 (5 maart 1898), p. 157.

Notes

- ¹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 46–58.
- ² See e. g. Mary-Ann Middelkoop, 'A Wilsonian Moment? Dutch Nationalism and Belgian Territorial Claims in the Aftermath of World War I', in *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (November 2010), 195–214.
- ³ Anglo-Belgian Union/Union Anglo-Belge, *Constitution/Statuts*, London/Brussels, 1918.
- ⁴ *The London Gazette* (Supplement), no. 30250 (24 August 1917), 8796.
- ⁵ For a history and overview of the Anglo-Belgian Union's activities, see: 'Vingt Ans Après', *Anglo-Belgian Union: Report for the year 1936*, London/Bruxelles, 1936, 16–21.
- ⁶ Willem Vrijhoff, *Stoop* <<https://www.regionaalarchiefdordrecht.nl/biografisch-woordenboek/familie-stoop/>> [accessed: 01/09/2019]; Byfleet Heritage Society, *Stoop Memorial Blue Plaque* <<http://www.byfleetheritage.org.uk/Stooplch.htm>> [accessed: 01/06/2019]; Iain Wakeford, *The Death of Frederick Cornelius Stoop in 1933 (or 1934)* <<http://wokinghistory.org/onewebmedia/161014.pdf>> [accessed: 01/06/2019].
- ⁷ Jacob Reyneke van Struwe, *De Nederlandsche Vereeniging te Londen, 1873–1923: Aangeboden door den president van de Nederlandsche Vereeniging te Londen bij gelegenheid van haar vijftigjaar bestaan*, Amsterdam: Roeloffzen-Huebner & Van Santen en Geb. Binger, 1923, 13.
- ⁸ Ian Cooper, *Immortal Harlequin: The story of Adriaan Stoop*, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004; *Rugby Stadiums: The Twickenham Stoop* <<http://www.rugbystadiums.co.uk/stadium/thestoop.php>> [accessed: 01/09/2019].
- ⁹ Jacob Reyneke van Stuwe, *De Nederlandsche Vereeniging te Londen, 1873–1923*, 47–48.
- ¹⁰ See Stijn van Rossem and Ulrich Tiedau (eds.), *Geyl and Britain: Encounters, Controversies, Impact*, London: Institute for Historical Research, 2019 (forthcoming).
- ¹¹ See *UCL Dutch 100: Centenary of Dutch Studies in the UK* <<http://www.dutch100.com>> [accessed 01/06/2019].
- ¹² Theophilus Paul Cowdell, *The Role of the Royal Academy in English Art 1918–1930* (Sheffield Hallam PhD, 1980), 19; Ilaria Scaglia, *The Diplomacy of Display: Art and International Cooperation in the 1920s and 1930s* (SUNY Buffalo PhD, 2011), 34 and *passim*.
- ¹³ Pieter Geyl, 'Ik die ik zo weinig in mijn verleden leef ...': *Autobiografie 1887–1940*, ed. by Wim Berkelaar, Leen Dorsman, Pieter van Hees, Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2007, 85.
- ¹⁴ 'Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art. 1350 to 1900. Royal Academy of Arts, London. January–February, 1927', *Anglo-Belgian Notes* (henceforth: *ABN*), vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1927), 3–5 (3 f.).
- ¹⁵ Hippolyte Fiérens-Gevaert (Conservateur en chef des Musées royaux de Bruxelles), *L'art belge ancien et moderne*, Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1923; *Exposition de l'art belge, ancien et moderne. Organisée par monsieur Léonce Bénédicté (...) sous les auspices des gouvernements français et belge avec le concours de Cercle artistique et littéraire de Bruxelles. Musée du jeu de paume, Paris*, Bruxelles: G. van Oest, 1923; Maurice W. Brockwell, 'Exhibitions of Flemish Art', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October 1926), 102–103 (103).
- ¹⁶ *Exposition de l'art belge ancien et moderne au Musée des beaux-arts et à la Kunsthalle de Berne, 27 mars–7 juin 1926*, organisée par le Gouvernement Belge avec le concours des autorités Fédérales et de la Ville de Berne sous les auspices des Amitiés Belgo-Suisses, [Bern]: Publicitas/Schweizerische Annoncen-Expedition [1926] (a copy in the National Gallery Library). The Bern exhibition inspired Robert Walser to compose the text 'Belgische Kunstausstellung'; Robert Walser, *Das Gesamtwerk in 12 Bänden*, ed. by Jochen Greven, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975, vol. 10, 273–278.
- ¹⁷ Paul Lambotte, 'The Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art, 1350–1900. Burlington House, 1927', *Apollo: Journal of the Arts*, vol. 8 (1928), 1–8 (1).
- ¹⁸ See e. g. the hugely popular anthology edited by Hall Caine, *King Albert's Book, a Tribute to the Belgian King and People from representative men and women throughout the World* (*The Daily Telegraph*, in conjunction with *The Daily Sketch*, *The Glasgow Herald* and Hodder & Stoughton, Christmas 1914): "Sold in aid of the Daily Telegraph Belgian Fund."
- ¹⁹ 'Annual General Meeting', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 1927), 59–61 (59).
- ²⁰ 'Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian art in London', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 3 (July 1926), 82–83.
- ²¹ 'Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art. 1350 to 1900. Royal Academy of Arts, London. January–February, 1927', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1927), 3–5 (4 f.).
- ²² 'Annual General Meeting', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 1927), 59–61 (3 f). While I could not trace the origin of this fund there is ground to assume it originated from Belgian government sources. Currency calculation after <<http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare/relativevalue.php>> [accessed 01/06/2019].
- ²³ 'Some comments from the Belgian Press: Will the "Mystic Lamb" be seen in London?', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 4, 101.
- ²⁴ 'Exhibitions of Flemish Art', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October 1926), 102–103.
- ²⁵ 'Vingt Ans Après', *Anglo-Belgian Union: Report for the year 1936*, London/Bruxelles, 1936, 16–21 (19).
- ²⁶ 'End of the Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 1927), 57–58.
- ²⁷ Arnold van Keppel, of Anglo-Dutch nobility. His predecessor, a companion of William III of Orange's, from Guelders, had been ennobled during the Glorious Revolution.
- ²⁸ A report on the private view preceding the public opening, hosted by Ambassador van Swinderen and his family and attended i. a. by George Bernard Shaw, in: 'Dutch Art Exhibition: The Private View. Mr. Shaw's Green Trilby', *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1929, 5.
- ²⁹ *Dutch Art: An illustrated souvenir of the exhibition of Dutch art at Burlington House, London*, London: The Anglo-Batavian Society and Country Life Ltd., 1929.
- ³⁰ C. J. Holmes, 'Introduction', *Dutch Art: An illustrated souvenir of the exhibition of Dutch art at Burlington House, London*, [Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 1930, xvii–xxviii (xxvii).
- ³¹ 'Dutch Art. Burlington House Exhibition. A Notable Display. (From Our Art Critic.)', *The Times*, 3 January 1929, 13.

- ³² Robert Witt, *Introduction*, in: *Dutch Art: An illustrated souvenir of the exhibition of Dutch art at Burlington House, London*, London: The Anglo-Batavian Society and Country Life Ltd., 1929, 5–7 (1).
- ³³ *ibid.*, 7.
- ³⁴ C. J. Holmes, 'Introduction', *Dutch Art: An illustrated souvenir of the exhibition of Dutch art at Burlington House, London*, [Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 1930, xvii–xxviii (xxvii).
- ³⁵ 'The Glasgow "Hobbema": Inclusion in Dutch Art Exhibition', *The Times*, 19 January 1929, 10.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*
- ³⁷ 'Holland in Piccadilly', *The Times*, 2 January 1929, 10.
- ³⁸ 'Art Exhibitions: Examples of Dutch Printing', *The Times*, 3 January 1929, 14. To some extent this had already been the case during the Flemish exhibition too, e. g. a special exhibition of Flemish miniatures, mostly of the 15th and 16th centuries, in the British Museum's Grenville Library; 'Art Exhibitions. Flemish Miniatures', *The Times*, 22 January 1927, 10.
- ³⁹ For example 'Royalty at Dutch Exhibition: The Queen's Keen Interest', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1929, 9; 'Queen-Mother of the Netherlands. Visit to Exhibition of Dutch Art', *The Times*, 8 March 1929, 19; 'Queen Emma Sees Dutch Art Show', *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 March 1929, 6.
- ⁴⁰ For example Émile Cammaerts on 'The Spirit of Belgian Art' in the Victoria and Albert Museum on 27 January, and on 14 February in the Lyceum Club; 'Landscape in Art: M. Cammaerts' historical survey', in *The Observer*, 27 January 1929, 21; Pieter Geyl, 'The historical background to the Dutch exhibition', *The Contemporary Review*, no. 135 (1 January 1929), 323–330.
- ⁴¹ See 'Exhibition of Dutch Art: How it was obtained. Opening Ceremony in Manchester', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1929, 13; 'Dutch Paintings in Manchester. City Art Gallery', *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 March 1929, 13.
- ⁴² 'Dutch Art. Burlington House Exhibition. A Notable Display', *The Times*, 3 January 1929, 13.
- ⁴³ Arthur Millier, 'Dutch art in London: Pace Set by 1927 Flemish Show Upheld', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 1929, C15.
- ⁴⁴ 'Dutch Art. Burlington House Exhibition. A Notable Display', *The Times*, 3 January 1929, 13.
- ⁴⁵ C. J. Holmes, 'Introduction', *Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition of Dutch Art held in the Galleries of the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London, January–March 1929*, [Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 1930, xvii–xxviii.
- ⁴⁶ T. W. Earp, 'The Dutch Exhibition', *New Statesman*, vol. 32, no. 821 (19 January 1929), 466.
- ⁴⁷ *Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art 1300–1900*. Organized by the Anglo-Belgian Union, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1927; *Dutch Art: An illustrated souvenir of the exhibition of Dutch art at Burlington House, London*, London: The Anglo-Batavian Society and Country Life Ltd., 1929; *Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition of Dutch Art held in the Galleries of the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London, January–March 1929*, [Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 1930.
- ⁴⁸ Mary Chamot, 'A record of the great Flemish Exhibition at Burlington House, 1927', *ABN*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1928), 5–6.
- ⁴⁹ So a review in *The Observer* from 20 July 1930, 7.
- ⁵⁰ *Apollo: Journal of the Arts* and other art historical journals also printed a great number of reproductions from both exhibitions, e. g. Paul Lambotte, 'The Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art, 1350–1900. Burlington House, 1927', vol. 8 (1928), 1–8 (1); William Gibson, 'The Dutch Exhibition at Burlington House', *Apollo*, vol. 8 (1928), 319–322; 'The Dutch Exhibition at Burlington House', *Apollo*, vol. 9 (1929), 1–12; 'The Dutch Exhibition at Burlington House', *Apollo*, vol. 9 (1929), 81–94; Leo van Puyvelde, 'The Dutch Exhibition at the Royal Academy', *Apollo*, vol. 9 (1929), 139–147.
- ⁵¹ See e. g. Ilaria Scaglia, 'The Aesthetics of Internationalism: Culture and Politics on Display at the 1935–1936 International Exhibition of Chinese Art', *Journal of World History*, vol. 26, no. 1 (March 2015), 105–137.
- ⁵² Walter Bayes, Dutch Art, in *The Saturday Review*, 12 January 1929, 147.
- ⁵³ Pieter Geyl, 'The historical background to the Dutch exhibition', *The Contemporary Review*, no. 135 (1 January 1929), 323–330 (324).
- ⁵⁴ Leo van Puyvelde, 'The Dutch Exhibition at the Royal Academy', *Apollo: Journal of the Arts*, vol. 9 (1929), 139–147.
- ⁵⁵ It needs to be borne in mind that this term then had not yet acquired the negative connotation that it has today.
- ⁵⁶ "La question de nos relations intellectuelles et artistiques avec les autres pays sont de celles qui doivent avoir une répercussion heureuse sur nos amitiés à l'extérieur et éveiller l'intérêt et les sympathies des peuples à l'endroit de la Belgique. (...) Mais ici l'initiative privée peut beaucoup, et on ne saurait assez faire appel à son action pour vivifier au dehors cette propagande. (...) Citons à titre d'exemple, l'activité de L'UNION ANGLO-BELGE qui, depuis la guerre n'a cessé d'entretenir avec les Britanniques des relations qui ont abouti à de nombreuses conférences anglaises en Belgique." 'Les relations anglo-belges', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1926), 74.
- ⁵⁷ James Stevenson, 'British Empire Exhibition', *ABN*, vol. 2, no. 12 (April 1924), 244–248.
- ⁵⁸ Maurice Brockwell, 'Previous Exhibitions of Flemish Art', *ABN*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October 1926), 102–103.
- ⁵⁹ 'Exhibition of British Art in Brussels (Daily Mail)', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 3 (July 1927), 87.
- ⁶⁰ Outgoing president Paul Hymans drew the attention to the upcoming Centenary of Belgian Independence in 1930; 'Annual General Meeting', *ABN*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 1927), 59–61.
- ⁶¹ 'The Great Dutch Art Show: "Holland in Piccadilly". The arrival of the Masterpieces (From our London Correspondent)', *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1929, 4.
- ⁶² Reinier Salverda, 'Dutch Books in London Libraries', *The Low Countries*, vol. 5 (1997/98), 271–272 (272), also available online: <http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_low001199701_01/_low001199701_01_0040.php> [accessed: 01/06/2019].