

Andrei Matveev: Painting Allegory from Antwerp to Russia*

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Abstract:

In 1725, artist Andrei Matveev sent his *Allegory of Painting* to Catherine I from Antwerp, where Peter the Great had sent him to study. Matveev's *Allegory* remains the earliest known easel painting on an allegorical subject by a Russian painter. This article examines the circumstances surrounding the painting's creation in Antwerp and explores its iconography and sources. It then considers the place of Matveev's work amid the allegorical imagery produced in early eighteenth-century Russia. This study offers a possible new interpretation of the painting and sheds light on the role Antwerp and its artistic legacy played in fostering Russia's emerging artistic culture.

Keywords:

Andrei Matveev, painting, allegory, history painting, portraiture, art academies, hierarchy of genres, study abroad, Minerva, allegory of painting, Peter I, Catherine I, Russia, Netherlands, Antwerp

In March 1725, shortly after the death of Peter the Great, the young painter Andrei Matveev (1702-39) wrote to Catherine I from Antwerp, acknowledging her loss and pledging his enduring loyalty. He also petitioned her to extend his stay in the city, adding: "With this, most merciful empress, I venture to present to Your Majesty some of the fruits of my studies, to demonstrate my endeavors in this art."¹ The work he chose to include with this petition—the one he believed would make a case for allowing him to remain abroad—was his *Allegory of Painting* (Fig. 1), the earliest known easel painting on an allegorical subject by a Russian painter.² Matveev's image personifies the Art of Painting as a semi-nude female figure at an easel, where she paints a woman wearing a crown, as Minerva looks on from above.

The scholarship on Matveev usually dismisses his *Allegory of Painting* as "timid," "weak in draftsmanship," or "experimental," and suggests that it imitates work by several Netherlandish artists.³ It is a peculiar work for the early eighteenth century, both for the elongated proportions

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¹ "Pri sem vsemlostiveishaia imperatritsa derzaiu Vashemu Velichestvu predstavit' nechto ot ploda moego, radi pokazaniia moego racheniiia k semu khudozhestvu." Matveev to Catherine I, 4 March 1725, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (hereafter, RGADA), f. 9, otd. II, no. 68, l. 944, quoted in T. V. Il'ina & S. V. Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984), 259-60; archival reference in T. V. Il'ina, "K voprosu o russkom pensionerstve v petrovskoe vremia," *Problemy razvitiia russkogo iskusstva* 11 (Leningrad: Akademiia khudozhestv, 1979), 3-17, here 17n41.

² No documentation explicitly links Matveev's *Allegory* to his petition, but scholars generally agree that this is the painting he references. It was his most ambitious history painting to date, as well as his only signed work.

³ See Aleksandr Benua [Alexandre Benois], *Russkaia shkola zhivopisi* (St. Petersburg: Golike and Vil'borg, 1904), 14; V. G. Andreeva, "Andrei Matveev," in *Russkoe iskusstvo pervoi chetverti VVIII veka. Materialy i issledovanie*, ed. T. V. Alekseeva (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), 145; N. M. Moleva, *Zhivopisnykh del mastera, Kantselariia ot stroenii i russkaia*

of the main figure and her boneless anatomy. Yet despite its perceived flaws, scholars have emphasized its status as a milestone in the history of Russian art—the first female nude, the first allegorical easel painting, the first and only painting signed by Matveev—which has shaped how we look at both the painting and its creator. In other words, we study it for its historical significance, not for its artistic interest.



Figure 1: Andrei Matveev, *Allegory of Painting*, 1725, oil on panel, 69.5 x 58.5 cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, no. Zh-4912. Source: T. V. Il'ina & S. V. Rimskaya-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984).

Rather than continue to sidestep the issue of quality, however, I would like to look closely at the painting and the circumstances surrounding its creation in order to understand why

zhivopis' pervoi poloviny XVIII veka (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), 94; Il'ina & Rimskaya-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 63, 67.

Matveev believed this painting would best summarize his training in Antwerp and make a case for his continued study there. His choice to send it with his petition to the empress indicates that he considered it an important work, and perhaps hoped it would establish his reputation in Russia's nascent art world. First, I will examine the painting's genesis in Antwerp, then explore its iconography and sources. Finally, I will consider its place amid the allegorical imagery produced in early eighteenth-century Russia. In doing so, I hope to come to terms with the painting's peculiarity, while shedding new light on the role that Antwerp and its artistic legacy played in fostering Russia's emerging artistic culture.

Matveev in Antwerp

The *Allegory of Painting* was the culminating project of the eleven years Matveev spent training in Europe, first in the Dutch Republic, then in the Southern Netherlands. Much has been written about Peter the Great's initiative to send young men abroad—noblemen, tradesmen, artists—to train in various fields and bring the knowledge and skills they gained abroad back to Russia.⁴ After sending dozens of men to the Dutch Republic, Venice, and England to study seamanship and shipbuilding before 1700, in the 1710s he sent a handful of young artists to Rome, Florence, Venice, Copenhagen, and the Dutch Republic to study various branches of arts. Sending a few students to several different cities would enable them to bring the strengths of many diverse artistic centers back to Russia.⁵ Matveev was part of this cohort.

In 1716, Peter the Great initially sent Matveev, then about fourteen years old, to the Dutch Republic to study with the highly regarded Amsterdam portraitist Arnold Boonen (1669-1729).⁶ The young painter was one of six Russians (along with an engraver and four architects) who trained with masters in their respective fields.⁷ His six years in Amsterdam are documented by regular reports from the tsar's agent in Amsterdam, Johannes van den Burgh, who supervised the students sent to the Netherlands, as well as a letter Matveev sent to Catherine in October 1720.⁸ Although none of Matveev's works from this period are known to have survived, his letter indicates that he was sending a portrait of the empress, copied after Boonen's, and a portrait of

⁴ Studies include Il'ina, "K voprosu o russkom pensionerstve;" Max J. Okenfuss, "Russian Students in Europe in the Age of Peter the Great," in *The Eighteenth Century in Russia*, ed. J. G. Garrard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 131-145.

⁵ Because of Peter's nine- to ten-month stay in the Dutch Republic in 1697-98 and his appreciation of Dutch culture, including Dutch painting, more scholarly attention has gone to Russian-Dutch artistic connections. The few days he spent in the Southern Netherlands in 1717 have resulted in less coverage, which has shaped scholarship on the artists who studied in Antwerp. An important exception to this gap in the scholarship is Emmanuel Waegemans, *Puteshestvia Petra I po Iuzhnyim Niderlandam v 1717 godu. Obraz russkogo tsaria v Belgii*, trans. V. K. Ronin (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2020).

⁶ Matveev spent seven years in Amsterdam, but his activities and training during his first year abroad were not documented. He began studying with Boonen in 1717. We have no records of Matveev's early life or training before 1716. See Il'ina & Rimskaia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 13-15.

⁷ Peter's advisor, Iurii Kologrivov, proposed sending at least two architects for every painter, sculptor, and engraver, with the idea that architecture encompassed all the other arts. See James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Imagery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 209-210.

⁸ See Il'ina, "K voprosu o russkom pensionerstve," 6-10, 14; H. Van Koningsbrugge, "The Dutch Republic, Sweden and Russia, 1697-1708, and the Secret Activities of Cornelis Cruys and Johannes van den Burgh," in *Russia and the Low Countries in the XVIIIth Century / Rossiia i Niderlandy v XVIII veke* (Groningen: NOS, 1998), 51-61.

Van den Burgh, presumably an original work.⁹ No documents describe other paintings he executed during the remaining three years of his stay, but records show that in his final year with Boonen, Matveev studied from live models. Van den Burgh's accounts for 1723 include an entry for payment to "two men who sat before him for his study of painting."¹⁰ This experience in working from life, the culmination of European artistic training, would have helped prepare him for entering an academy, where life classes were the backbone of daily practice.

In 1723 Matveev and three of the architecture students moved from Amsterdam to Antwerp in the Southern Netherlands.¹¹ The motivation for this move was likely that Russia needed more than Dutch-trained portraitists; it also required history painters to produce church and palace decorations in the new, European manner. The Catholic Southern Netherlands, with its richly ornamented churches, would provide a better environment for him to study large-scale architectural decoration than the Protestant Dutch Republic, with its simple, whitewashed church interiors. Until now, Matveev's time in Antwerp—if examined at all—has been discussed in this context. But the difference between the Northern and Southern Netherlands was not just one of subject matter. I believe that it was Antwerp's historical reputation, rather than the actual state of its art world in the early eighteenth century, that led Peter the Great to choose to send Matveev there.

From the early sixteenth century, Antwerp had been a thriving commercial metropolis, a major center for banking and global trade. The city's economic fortunes led it to become the largest, most vibrant art market in Europe. As recently as the mid-seventeenth century, it remained the home of internationally recognized artists, including Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, and Frans Snyders. By the late seventeenth century, however, after suffering a blockade of its port during the century of war between the Southern Netherlands and Dutch northern provinces, Antwerp was no longer an economic powerhouse. Its population had plummeted and its art market was decimated. The city's golden age of artistic production had ended. By the time Matveev arrived in Antwerp, some of the city's cultural reputation lingered, but its once flourishing art market had severely declined and it could boast of no artists comparable to its past masters. As we shall see, all of these factors shaped the Antwerp Academy's founding and its operations into the eighteenth century.

It was in this era of faded glory that Matveev enrolled in Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts from December 1723 to May 1727 under the name "Andries Matwjeft." He studied under Peter Sperwer (1662–1727), a history painter and portraitist.¹² Born in Antwerp, Sperwer had

⁹ Il'ina and Rimskaja-Korsakova located Boonen's portrait of Catherine in a U. S. collection at the time of their study in 1984, but I have not been able to confirm this or find more recent information. See their *Andrei Matveev*, 56–58.

¹⁰ Listed as payment to "Dvum chelovekam, kotorye pered nim sideli dlia evo [sic] obucheniia v zhivopisi." Johann Van den Burgh, expenditures for Andrei Matveev, September 1, 1723, RGADA f. 9, otd. II, ed. khr. 68, l. 909–909 ob., reprinted in Il'ina & Rimskaja-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 257.

¹¹ The architects in this cohort were Korobov, Mordvinov, and Michurin, all of whom had been with Matveev in the Dutch Republic. Giovanni Steffano, Peter the Great's agent in Antwerp, oversaw the Russian students there, but funds continued to be disbursed through Van den Burgh, whose accounting records are virtually the only source documenting this period in Matveev's life and career. See Waegemans, *Puteshestvia Petra I*, 51–53, 61.

¹² "Plaetsen van sijne conincklijcke accademie naer het leven geseiugeert door dienenden ende ouden eedt op heden den 6 desember 1723," *Naamboek der leerlingen der Koninklijke Academie, met aanwijzing der plaatsen die zij bekomen hebben in het tekenen naar het leven 1691–1746*, n.p., FelixArchief Antwerpen, 2574#293. On Sperwer, see F. Jos. van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Antwerpsche Schilderschool* (Antwerp: Buschmann, 1883), 1166–1168. Van den

received most of his training at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris. By the time he returned to Antwerp in 1700, he had sent a letter to the city council in which he styled himself as "Signor Pedro Sperwer, born within this city, an expert master of painting, [now] in great repute."¹³ Although few extant works remain by which to judge Sperwer's work, his specialization in history painting and royal portraiture made him a leading figure the city's art world during the early eighteenth century. The titles associated with him—*Christ Healing the Leper*, *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter*, *The Last Supper*, *Allegory of Worldly Vanities*, and a portrait of Philip V—indicate that he dealt in exactly the type of subject matter that Matveev was expected to study.¹⁴ Given his position at the Academy, it is possible that Sperwer was involved in convincing Van den Burgh or Peter the Great that he would be able to impart to Matveev the skills and knowledge he had gained at the Royal Academy in Paris.

According to Van den Burgh's accounting records, Matveev's education also included studying prints, which would include engravings after canonical works of art located in other cities. During his time in Amsterdam, purchases of drawings and individual prints (*friazhskie listy*) appeared among his equipment expenses. His first year in Antwerp, he bought a "large book" or album of prints (*bol'shuiu knigu friazhskikh listov*), an individual line item that cost 11 guildens 4 stuivers.¹⁵ Within two years, Van den Burgh requested that Matveev's stipend be increased by 300 efimok (about 300 rubles) more than was allotted to the architecture students, specifically in order to purchase books and drawings, "because he needs to find more books and drawings than they do."¹⁶ As students copied prints to learn about line, chiaroscuro, and composition, they also committed to memory important works of art that they would later incorporate into their paintings, like a writer alluding to Pliny or the Bible. Acquiring an album of prints set Matveev on the path to possessing this new visual knowledge.

If the scarcity of Russian records on Matveev has obscured our knowledge of his activities at the Antwerp Academy, then the history of the Academy itself can provide some insights. In one account, a former classmate remembered his Russian peer as a "talented young man named Mattweef" who "held second place in life drawing and also became an outstanding history painter."¹⁷ Earning a second place ranking out of thirty-six students was a noteworthy

Branden lists Sperwer first among Antwerp painters of the period, suggesting a degree of prominence, although he is not associated with a particular title or rank in the Academy archives or the city archives.

¹³ Peter Sperwer to Antwerp Magistrate, March 2, 1700, petition to request exemption from personal service (a privilege granted to a limited number of guild artists), quoted in Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Antwerpsche Schilderschool*, 1167. Sperwer wrote this petition to ensure his exemption before committing to move to Antwerp from Brussels, where he had been working since completing his studies in Paris. The Hispanization of his name reflects continued Spanish Habsburg rule of the Southern Netherlands.

¹⁴ Sperwer's work is documented in P.-Amédée Brouillet, *Notice des tableaux, dessins, gravures, statues, objets d'art anciens et modernes, curiosités, etc., composant les collections de la ville de Poitiers* 1 (Poitiers: Marcireau, 1884), 95; A. Couvez, *Inventaire des objets d'art et d'antiquité de la Flandre occidentale, dressé par la commission provinciale* (Bruges: Vandecasteele-Werbrouck, 1847-48), 594; Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Antwerpsche Schilderschool*, 1167; and "Belgian Art Links and Tools," accessed November 26, 2023, <https://balat.kikirpa.be/photo.php?path=C000566&objnr=39320&lang=en-GB&nr=1>.

¹⁵ Johann van den Burgh, expenditures for Andrei Matveev, November 26, 1724, RGADA f. 9, otd. II, ed. khr. 68, l. 909 ob., reprinted in Il'ina and Rimskaya-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 59, 220n76; 258.

¹⁶ "[...] ibo emu pobolee knig i risunkov priiskivat' nadobno, nezhe li inym." Van den Burgh to Catherine I, 1725, RGADA f. 9, otd. II, d. 74, l. 393 ob., quoted in V. G. Andreeva, "Andrei Matveev," 143. An *efimok*, also known as a *Joachimsthaler*, was a silver coin whose approximate value was one ruble.

¹⁷ Joseph Martin Geeraerts, "Observation Historique sur les suites du voyage de Pierre I," October 27, 1782,

achievement. Students at the Academy were evaluated in an annual competition that ranked them from first to last—a status they maintained for six months.¹⁸ A student's rank determined his place in the classroom during life classes, meaning that Matveev would have had a choice seat, close to the model and next to the top-ranked student. This enviable position—which his classmate still remembered six decades later—created optimal conditions for study.

The benefits of Matveev's academic training in Antwerp were undoubtedly tempered by the city's lasting economic plight, which had profound effects on the art world. Founded in 1663 under the auspices of the Guild of Saint Luke, Antwerp's Academy was a free, public institution intended to give artists basic practical skills in life-drawing, painting, engraving, and sculpture, as well as theoretical knowledge through auxiliary courses in geometry and perspective.¹⁹ The Academy and guild maintained close ties, occupying adjacent quarters in Antwerp's historic Stock Exchange building. Unlike the influential institutions in Paris and Rome on which it was modeled, the Academy in Antwerp was not established during a flourishing artistic era, but rather, it represented a belated attempt to recreate a golden age. Its founders' hope was to revitalize the city's artistic production and restore its art world to the "former glory" it had enjoyed in the age of Rubens so that the city would regain its standing as a major artistic center.²⁰

By the time Matveev arrived in 1723, however, the Academy had not lived up to even its most basic founding mission.²¹ In the first decades of the eighteenth century, its offerings were limited to drawing classes—working from live models and from plaster casts after antique sculptures. Instruction in painting, sculpture, and engraving had never materialized, and secondary courses in geometry and perspective remained a distant dream. In fact, the Academy had entered a period of severe decline that would continue until it underwent meaningful reforms in the 1750s and 1760s. The situation reached a new low only a year before Matveev's arrival, when reduced enrollments had caused the Academy to cancel its classes in drawing from antique casts, and they were forced to cede one of their classroom spaces to the East India Company. With this paltry curriculum, Matveev's training at the Academy would have been limited to life drawing classes, supplemented by private instruction from Sperwer.

transcribed in Jacob van der Sanden, *Register der Resoluties, Actes en Archieven over de Opkomst, Voortgang ende Vernieuwing der Vermaarde Koninklijke Academie van de tekenkunst, perspectief, enz. 1749-1808*, FelixArchief Antwerpen, SA 2574#303, folio 178. When Matveev entered the Academy, there were 36 students in the life class and 20 students in the class that worked from plaster casts. See the lists for 1723 in *Naamboek der leerlingen der Koninklijke Academie*, n.p.

¹⁸ The literature on Matveev interprets his award as winning second prize, like the prizes awarded as medals in Russia's Imperial Academy of Arts after its founding in 1757, but the system at the Antwerp Academy was one of class rankings instead of prizes. See Bert De Munck, "Le produit du talent ou la production de talent? La formation des artistes à l'Académie des beaux-arts à Anvers aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Paedagogica Historica* 37:3 (2001): 586-590. According to one history of the Academy, the competition may not have been held at all from 1723 through 1727; if not, the ranking was made by some other means. See, F. Jos. van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie van Antwerpen* (Antwerp: J.-E. Buschmann, 1867), 40.

¹⁹ On the Academy's history, see Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie*. See also Bert De Munck, "Le produit du talent ou la production de talent?," 574-583.

²⁰ David Teniers the Younger to King Philip IV, letter proposing to found the art academy, 1663, transcribed in Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie*, 103-104.

²¹ On the Academy's early eighteenth-century plight, see Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie*, 38-40; and Dries Lyna, "Harbouring Urban Creativity: the Antwerp Art Academy in the Tension between Artistic and Artisanal Training in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Innovation and Creativity in Late Medieval and Early Modern European Cities*, eds. Karel Davids & Bert De Munck (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 300-305.

Although Matveev had opportunities to see monumental ceiling and wall painting while in Antwerp, whether he gained any practical experience in producing it remains an open question. The region's economic difficulties meant that few large-scale paintings were being commissioned at the time. The absence of documents linking Sperwer with decorative painting commissions in Antwerp during the 1720s makes it highly unlikely that Matveev had an opportunity to personally observe or assist with large-scale work while studying under him. This lack of experience was an obstacle that he would have to overcome after returning to Russia.

Given the sorry state of the Academy at the time, the choice to send Matveev to study in Antwerp, rather than Paris or Rome, is somewhat astonishing. Among the Russian students sent to Italy, only architects studied in Rome, while painters went to Venice and Florence; no Russian students went to Paris, whose Royal Academy was poised to become the leading institution in Europe, despite a glowing report about it from the Russian ambassador to the Dutch Republic, Andrei Artamonovich Matveev (1666-1728).²² Russia's complicated diplomatic relations with France at the time—due to Louis XIV's hostilities against the Dutch, as well as the War of Spanish Succession—must have prevented them from sending students to Paris. While we can only speculate about the possible factors that led to these decisions, the strong impression Antwerp's art world made on Peter when he visited the city in 1717 must have played a role in his choice to send Matveev and the architecture students there. The tsar's Grand Embassy to Europe from 1697 to 1698 had focused primarily on acquiring technical knowledge in the Dutch Republic and England, while during his second trip abroad from 1716 to 1717, he traveled more widely and became increasingly interested in the arts.²³ While in Antwerp on this second trip, the tsar and his entourage visited architectural landmarks, private art collections, and sites where art was produced and sold.

The appearance of a thriving art world when Peter visited Antwerp in April 1717 helps to explain why it seemed a good place to send Matveev six years later. One of the first places Peter and his entourage visited was the Antwerp Stock Exchange. Although the Academy as an institution was in a dismal state, the Stock Exchange building that housed it remained an important site in Antwerp's cultural landscape.²⁴ The guild also established a public art gallery on the premises, where it required every painter and sculptor working in the city to display at least one work.²⁵ The result was a permanent public display of contemporary painting and sculpture by Antwerp artists gathered in one place, where visitors could easily see and purchase works—as they were all for sale. When a work was sold, its artist was obligated to replace it in order to maintain the integrity of the display. Such a presentation was intended to demonstrate that Antwerp remained the birthplace of great art. Even if the exhibition space was not intended

²² See Il'ina, "K voprosu o russkom pensionerstve," 3-17; and A. A. Matveev, "Arkhiv, ili stateinyi spisok, moskovskago posol'stva, byvshago vo Frantsii iz Gollandii inkognito v proshlom, 1705 godu, sentiabria v 5 den'," Otdel rukopisi, Russian National Library, f. IV, 552, reprinted in I. S. Sharkova and A. D. Liublinskaia, eds., *Russkii diplomat vo Frantsii (Zapiski Andreia Matveeva)* [hereafter, Matveev, "Arkhiv, ili stateinyi spisok"] (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972), 221-23. The ambassador A. A. Matveev is not related to the artist Andrei Matveev, whose patronymic and family background are unknown.

²³ See, Waegemans, *Puteshestvia Petra I*, 22-27.

²⁴ Built in the Brabantian Gothic style in 1531, the Stock Exchange became a model for exchanges in London and Amsterdam. As it fell into disuse during Antwerp's economic decline, the city assigned some of its wings to serve as quarters for organizations such as the Guild of Saint Luke and the Academy of Fine Arts.

²⁵ See Zirka Zarembo Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 133, 170.

for study and instruction, Academy students in nearby classrooms could benefit from easy access to the works on view. The illusion of a thriving art market created by the guild's display would help convince unsuspecting visitors, such as Peter and his entourage, that the Academy and guild were thriving.

In addition to the Stock Exchange, Peter visited the Jesuit Church of Antwerp, a gem of seventeenth-century architecture and decoration, which featured two altarpiece paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and thirty-nine ceiling paintings executed by Rubens's workshop.²⁶ The Jesuit Church may have been the tsar's first experience of Baroque religious painting on a grand scale. Its lavish interior, filled with richly colored marble and gilded stuccowork, made a tremendous impact on visitors. The curvilinear ornament, abundant sculpture, and florid painting, all displayed amid innovative optical effects, were very different from austere, whitewashed Dutch Reformed churches they had seen earlier. In the tsar's official travel report, his cabinet secretary Aleksei Makarov noted that the church was "extremely rich in architecture and marble decorations, and even more so in paintings of the highest artistry."²⁷ Over a decade earlier, when the Russian ambassador A. A. Matveev visited the Jesuit Church, he wrote: "the interior was all of various Italian marble architecture, on both sides abundantly decorated with altars," and featured paintings "by the most glorious painters of the past century, most especially the praiseworthy Rubens and Van Dyck."²⁸ His reference to Rubens and Van Dyck marks the earliest documented instance of a Russian mentioning artists by name, undoubtedly highlighted by the ambassador's Antwerp hosts. Naming individual artists introduced the concept of connoisseurship to their Russian visitors, underscoring the prestige of displaying works by a recognized master. The Jesuit Church set a high standard, showing Peter and his entourage what was possible for new buildings they were commissioning in St. Petersburg. Sending Matveev and the cohort of architects to study in a city where they could experience this architectural wonder would enable them to emulate this vision in Peter's new capital.

On the same day the tsar went to the Jesuit Church and Stock Exchange, he also spent time in the homes of two art collectors, where his journal notes that he "looked at good pictures" before visiting a third connoisseur who had both a paintings collection and a *kunstkamer*, or a "collection of miscellaneous objects."²⁹ Peter had seen Dutch private art collections two decades earlier during his Great Embassy, and had already started forming his own collection, such as his paintings gallery at Monplaisir palace and the sculpture display in the Summer Garden. In Antwerp, visiting the guild's Academy and art gallery in close succession with private collections and the Jesuit Church would have reinforced in the minds of the visiting Russians connections between artistic training, professional production, and the availability of art on the market. The private collections and splendid Baroque public spaces that resulted from this art market all

²⁶ Most of the church's paintings were destroyed in a fire in 1718. The Jesuit Church was renamed/reconsecrated in 1779 as the Saint Charles Borromeo Church. See Piet Lombarde, "Introduction," and Léon E. Lock, "Rubens and the Sculpture and Marble Decoration," in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombarde (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 15-30, 155-174.

²⁷ "zelo bogatogo zdaniia i ukrasheniia v mramorakh, a pache v zhivopisnykh samykh lutchikh pis'makh," in A. V. Makarov, entry for April 12, 1717 ("V 1-y den") in *Pokhodnyi zhurnal 1717-90 goda* (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1855), 8.

²⁸ "Vnutri ves' razlichnykh mramornykh ital'iansikh arkhitektur s oboikh storon altar'mi po premnogu ukrashen," and, "Pis'ma zhivopisnyia v tserkvakh i nad altariami, i na potolkakh samykh preslavnykh drevniago veku zhivopistsov, osoblivo zh khval'nykh veku togo Robensa i Vandeika." Matveev, "Arkhiv, ili stateinyi spisok," 35.

²⁹ "kunshtkamor, ili sobranie vsiakikh veshchei," Makarov, *Pokhodnyi zhurnal*, 8.

contributed to a sense of greatness and economic power—even if it was now a distant memory. Given the Russian visitors' lack of exposure to other art institutions, they must have believed that the foundation of all this was the education on offer at the Academy.

Peter's itinerary through Antwerp's art world in 1717 evidently enabled his hosts to convince him of the city's reputation as the birthplace of great painters, a suitable place for a Russian student such as Matveev to complete his training. The local artists stood to gain a great deal from having Russian students at the Academy. Presenting the art world as they hoped to revive it, not as it actually was, might help them to forge links with Russia that could start to rebuild their city's international standing. During the city's economic downturn, Antwerp artists actively sought to expand the export market, eventually developing large workshops that churned out mediocre paintings for export to collectors who might be less discerning, both in the region as well as New Spain and Eastern Europe.³⁰ At the most basic level, welcoming students from Russia would prop up the Academy's dwindling enrollments.³¹ If the relationship succeeded in the longer term, Antwerp might become a training ground for Russian artists, at least until a modern academy could be established in Russia. On a larger scale, an ongoing relationship would benefit both countries. The impoverished Southern Netherlands could improve both its finances and its status as artistic center by infusing some of its rich cultural heritage into Russia, a newly powerful state that was eager to absorb European artistic culture. Whether or not the Antwerpenaars were actively promoting themselves to Peter and his entourage, their highlights tour through the city evidently masked the reality that the Academy was in a period of severe decline.

The state of Antwerp's Academy in the 1720s and the training Matveev received there ultimately shaped his *Allegory of Painting*. Sent abroad with the expectation of assimilating current European developments in painting, the young artist found himself in a city that was trying to resuscitate its reputation by clinging to past glories. The practice of academic copying in Antwerp can be seen as not only a method of training, but also a way of recreating the fabled past in new works. Despite the limitations of Matveev's training there, however, it ultimately allowed him to send a painting with a more elevated meaning than his previous work, using the European language of allegory.

Matveev's *Allegory of Painting*

The *Allegory of Painting* is a small-scale work, but its ambitious subject and importance to Matveev's career lend it an outsized importance. Having sent a portrait of Catherine five years earlier from Amsterdam, in 1725 the young artist was now ready to demonstrate his progress from portraitist to history painter. In the hierarchy of genres that governed European art academies, history painting—which comprised classical history, biblical subjects, Greco-Roman mythology, and allegorical imagery—occupied the top rung because it required both the intellectual grasp

³⁰ Lyna, "Harbouring Urban Creativity," 301; Katlijne Van der Stighelen & Filip Vermeylen, "The Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke and the Marketing of Paintings 1400-1711," in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750*, eds. Neil de Marchi & Hans J. Van Miegroet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 194-195.

³¹ Because the Academy provided a free, public education, foreign students would have increased only enrollment, not tuition revenue. Van den Burgh's expense records show that he paid Sperwer ("Masteru za uchenie odnogo godu"), not the Academy. Van den Burgh's accounts, November 1723-November 1724, in Il'ina & Rimskaja-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 258.

of the subject to portray it effectively, and the skill in rendering anatomy to depict the nude form, the highest manifestation of artistic achievement.

Matveev depicted the personification of Painting as a semi-nude female figure seated on a low platform before an easel, working on a canvas as the goddess Minerva looks on from the clouds above. Two cherubs at left pose with attributes of art and civilization—a portfolio, antique sculptural head, and globe inscribed “NIDDELANDESCHE” to underscore the work’s origins—while another cherub in the shadow of the easel industriously grinds pigments. Next to the globe, the inscription “[made] with diligence by Andrei Matveev in 1725 (*tshchaniem Andrea Matveeva 1725 godu*)” appears along the edge of the platform.

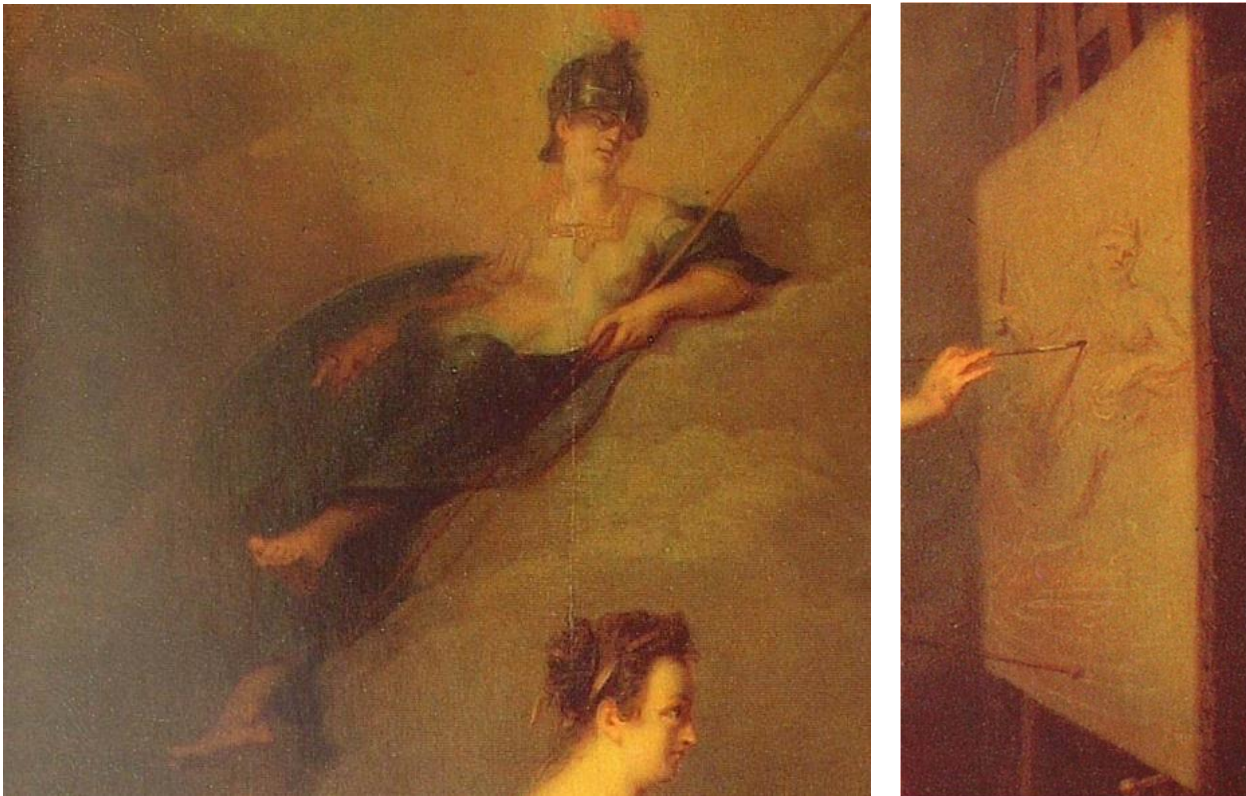


Figure 1a: Andrei Matveev, *The Allegory of Painting*, 1725 (details of Fig. 1).

According to the dominant interpretation, the personification of Painting uses Minerva as a model for portraying an earthly ruler, Catherine I, who is seated in a similar pose, leaning on her left elbow, and gazing slightly to her left (Fig. 1a).³² Rather than depicting the goddess in military dress, with a spear in the crook of her left arm, the allegorical figure paints her wearing a crown and raising a scepter in her right hand—depicting her as a monarch to suggest that the Art of Painting mediates between Minerva and the ruler. In this reading, Matveev’s work creates an explicit connection between the goddess of civilization and Catherine’s patronage, flattering the tsaritsa as an enlightened patron of the arts.

³² Il’ina & Rimaskaia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 61–62.

But the argument for this interpretation is not airtight. First, the round-faced, fair-haired woman on the canvas does not look like Catherine, whose features Matveev would have known well from copying Boonen's portrait of her in Amsterdam. Her rectangular face, strong eyebrows, and dark curls make her easily recognizable, even at small scale (Fig. 9). Second, given Matveev's timing in sending the painting to St. Petersburg, he must have planned the picture while Peter was still alive; only the emperor's death shortly before its completion meant that the *Allegory of Painting* went not to Peter, but to the newly widowed empress.

The dominant interpretation would make sense only if Matveev had composed the painting after learning of Peter's death, for Catherine as queen regnant—which he would not have had time to do in less than a month.³³ It was not customary at the time to portray a queen consort in allegorical or mythological guise without the ruling king. Images of European kings and queens depict them together as Venus and Hercules, or Apollo and Minerva, but allegorical images of a queen consort without the king are all but nonexistent. Given the time required for a student to develop and execute a multi-figure composition, for oil paint to dry between glazes, and for the final varnish to set, it seems unlikely that Matveev intended his painting to depict the widowed Catherine as ruler. He must have started it well before Peter's death a few weeks earlier. When the painting arrived in St. Petersburg after the emperor's death, the men who had surrounded him now supported Catherine as ruler. Her disinterest in statecraft allowed them rule while portraying her as Mother of Russia, with comparisons to Roman goddesses and ancient rulers.³⁴ Matveev's allegorical statement arrived at the perfect time—but what does it depict?

Exploring the iconographic conventions for the Art of Painting indicates the degree to which Matveev followed or deviated from tradition.³⁵ According to Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, the Art of Painting, or *Pictura*, should wear drapery of changing colors to represent the painter's skill, as well a gold chain with a pendant mask to signify imitation, and messy hair to show the passionate artistic temperament (Fig. 2).

³³ According, Il'ina and Rimskaja-Korsakova, "it is hard to find a better subject for a painting intended by the student as a gift for Catherine upon her accession to the throne." Peter died on January 28 by the Julian calendar used in Russia, or February 8 by the Gregorian calendar used in Antwerp. Allowing time for the news of Peter's death to travel from St. Petersburg to Antwerp, if Matveev sent the painting with his letter dated March 4, he would have had less than a month to execute it. This is why I believe he started the painting before January 28/February 8, 1725, while Peter was still alive. See, Il'ina & Rimskaja-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 62.

³⁴ Lindsey Hughes, *Peter the Great: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 209.

³⁵ See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: overo descrittione di diverse imagini cavate dall' antichità, e di propria invention* [1593] (Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 404-405; Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*," *The Art Bulletin* 62:1 (March 1980): 97-112; Eric Jan Sluijter, "Venus, Visus and Pictura," in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993), 87-159, 306-321; Eric Jan Sluijter, "Vermeer, Fame, and Female Beauty: The *Allegory of Painting*," in *Vermeer Studies*, eds. Ivan Gaskell & Michiel Jonker, *Studies in the History of Art* vol. 55 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 265-283.



Figure 2: Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Pictura (An Allegory of Painting)*, 1661, oil on copper, 12.7 x 8.9 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, no. 82.PC.136.

In fact, few artists followed Ripa closely. As many other depictions show, the iconography was extremely flexible. The figure could be male or female, clothed or naked, alone or with Apollo, Minerva, or Hercules, and almost always accompanied by cherubs with attributes of the arts (Figs. 3-5, 13, 17). Nudity would associate a female figure with Venus, or with personifications of Truth or Beauty, which are typically depicted as naked women. She (or he) sits before a blank canvas, or a depiction of Venus, Minerva, the three graces, the Judgment of Paris, or a landscape. But the canvas before Matveev's personification of Painting shows a woman with a crown and scepter.



Figure 3: Unknown artist, *Personification of Painting*, c. 1612-52, engraving on paper, 19.4 x 13.9 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-1886-A-10929.



Figure 4: Cornelis Galle, after Aegidius Sadeler and Peter Paul Rubens, *Pictura (de Schilderkunst)* 1610-50, engraving on paper, 29 x 19.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-OB-6747.

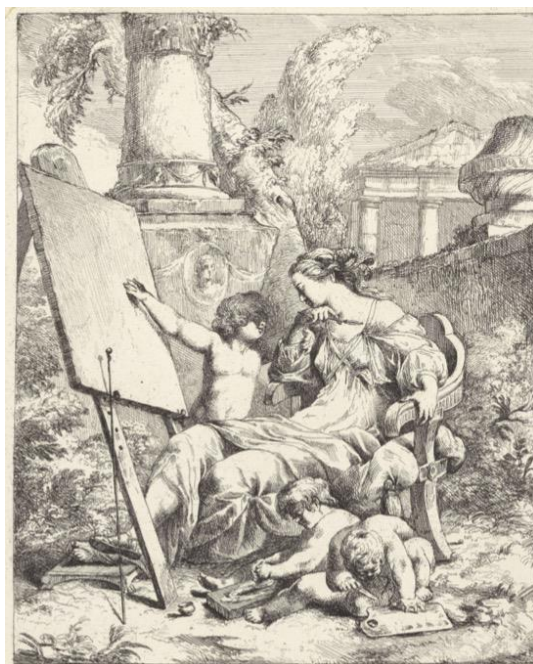


Figure 5: Giovanni David, *Title Print with Allegory of Painting*, c. 1543-90, etching on paper, 48.2 cm × 32 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-2000-471.

Comparisons with contemporaneous European allegorical images suggest a new interpretation. In allegories of France, Britain, and other states, an image of a female ruler, often resembling Minerva, denotes not the queen, but the kingdom or empire itself. For example, Charles Lebrun's ceiling painting in the Salon of Peace at Versailles depicts France as a crowned

woman with a scepter, wearing a blue mantle and shield, both covered in fleurs-de-lys (Fig. 6). Allegories of Britannia were also standard iconography of the period (Fig. 7).



Figure 6: Charles Le Brun, detail from *France Accompanied by Immortality, Peace, Abundance, and Magnificence*, 1681-86, oil on canvas, Salon of Peace, Château de Versailles, no. INV1850(2310). Photo © Grand Palais (Château de Versailles), Benoît Touchard.



Figure 7: James Thornhill, *Britannia Enthroned, with Concord, Learning, and Religion Overcoming Vice*, ca. 1718, oil on panel, 54 x 60 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. W.13-1944.

Artists in Russia had already adopted this usage as early as 1714, when Peter the Great's personal seal portrayed Russia as a crowned female figure with orb and scepter (Fig. 8).³⁶



Figure 8: 20th-century seal imprint from *Peter the Great Sculpting a Statue of the New Russia*, F. Kh. Bekker, ca. 1711-1712. Gypsum, stamped, 2.5 x 2.3 x 0.3 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, no. ЭРХ-2368, photograph © The State Hermitage Museum.

Commemorative medals and engravings disseminated this imagery, for example, Ivan Zubov's engraving of Catherine I's coronation in 1724, with a crowned personification of Russia at lower left asking God's blessing (Fig. 9).



Figure 9: Ivan Zubov, *Conclusion of the Coronation of Empress Catherine I, 6 May 1724*, 1724, etching with line engraving on paper, 60 x 96.2 cm, The State Hermitage, St. Petersburg, no. ЭРГ-16639, photograph © The State Hermitage Museum.

³⁶ Robert Collis, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689-1725* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 370-372.

In this engraving, the generic face of the allegorical figure is easily distinguished from the portrait likeness of Catherine (Fig. 9a).



Figure 9a: Allegory of Russia and likeness of Catherine I (details of figure 9).

Similarly, in a ceiling painting for the second antechamber (*vtoraia priemnaia*) of Peter the Great's Summer Palace, a figure resembling Matveev's appears as the central figure, bearing the imperial crown and scepter. She is now interpreted as either Russia, flanked by Religion at right and a figure of either Wealth or Fertility at left (Fig. 10).³⁷ In the upstairs throne room or reception room of Catherine I, the empress (her face dramatically foreshortened) is joined by figures of Fame, History, Time, and imperial eagles to represent the Triumph of Catherine (Fig. 11). These ceilings exemplify the similar iconography in depictions of Catherine and the allegory of Russia, while underscoring their subtle differences. Allegorical decorations of this kind were the type of commission Matveev would be aiming for after returning home.

³⁷ See N. V. Kaliuzina & G. N. Komelova, *Russkoe iskusstvo petrovskoi epokhi* (Leningrad: Khudozhniki RSFSR, 1990), 19, 42 plate 22; B. F. Borzin, *Rospisi petrovskogo vremeni* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1986), 114. The current interpretation appears in the Russian Virtual Museum. See Georg Gsell, "Plafon 'Triumf Rossii,'" The Russian Virtual, accessed November 26, 2023, https://rusmuseumvrn.ru/data/collections/painting/17_19/1d-1/index.php?lang=en.



Figure 10: Georg Gsell, *Triumph of Russia*, 1719, oil on canvas, 237 x 397 cm. Peter the Great's Summer Palace, St. Petersburg, no. LD-1.³⁸



Figure 11: Georg Gsell, *Triumph of Catherine* 1720s, oil on canvas, 344 x 312 cm. Peter the Great's Summer Palace, St. Petersburg, no. LD-328.³⁹

When seen in this context, it becomes clear that Matveev's personification of Painting depicts on her canvas Russia in the image of Minerva, watched over by the goddess herself. This

³⁸ Georg Gsell, "Plafon 'Triumf Rossii'," The Russian Virtual, accessed November 26, 2023, https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting/17_19/ld-1/index.php?lang=en.

³⁹ See Georg Gsell, "Plafon 'Triumf Rossii'," The Russian Virtual, accessed November 26, 2023, https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting/17_19/ld-1/index.php?lang=en.

new attribution means that the Art of Painting actively participates in the transformation of Russia into a civilized, European society, making a case for the essential role of artists such as Matveev in that transformation. This interpretation could have supported Matveev's petition to remain in Antwerp either before or after Peter's death. Whether Matveev devised this iconography himself, or relied on advice from his mentor, it would have been composed by copying similar subjects, in the original or in reproduction.

Most literature on Matveev's *Allegory* notes that the composition was likely drawn from an unknown Netherlandish source, naming influential artists such as Jacob de Wit (1695-1754) and Adriaen van der Werff (1659-1722), but not specific works.⁴⁰ Instructors in Antwerp undoubtedly promoted the widespread notion that artists should not merely imitate the work of earlier artists, but should instead select motifs from a range of sources, including nature itself, in order to transform them into new works of art.⁴¹ Matveev's *Allegory* exemplifies this strategy. For example, his figure of Painting and the presence of cherubs seem related to Maerten de Vos's *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin* (1602, Fig. 12), which he would have seen in the Chapel of the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp Cathedral, but his composition and message are quite different.



Figure 12: Maerten de Vos, *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin*, 1602, oil on panel, 270 × 217 cm, Royal Museums of Fine Arts Belgium, Brussels, no. 88.

Moreover, a survey of earlier Netherlandish prints shows that depicting the Art of Painting in profile at an easel was a standard compositional formula. Copying from earlier paintings and sculptures was intended to create a basis from which artists could produce original work. By the

⁴⁰ For example, "Matveev's painting [...] with its smooth painting and schematic composition recalls a weak imitation of [Adriaen] van der Werff," Benua, *Russkaia shkola zhivopisi*, 14. See also Andreeva, "Andrei Matveev," 145; Il'ina & Rimskaya-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 63. Stylistically Matveev's work does not recall these two artists any more than other Netherlandish painters, except that both De Wit and Van der Werf depicted many nude and partially draped women.

⁴¹ While these ideas were prevalent across Europe, it is worth noting that they were examined in depth by Antwerp's own Rubens. See Jeffrey M. Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art," *Art Bulletin*, 64:2 (June 1982): 229-247.

standards of early eighteenth-century academic training, Matveev's *Allegory* represented a step along this path to artistic independence.

Among early Russian easel paintings, Matveev's is notable for being not only the first allegorical subject, but also the first female nude. If depicting the undraped human figure demonstrated the highest level of artistic skill, then the female figure was considered the ultimate test. Whether Matveev passed or failed the challenge plays an important role in the painting's later reception. A thick layer of yellowed varnish has blurred the contours and obscured his modeling of the musculature. As a result, the overall impression is a long, C-shaped figure with poorly defined muscles and a disproportionately small head. Her boneless body, elongated neck, and tiny head are hard to square with an artist ranked second for draftsmanship. Advanced students such as Matveev ought to have mastered anatomy and proportion before undertaking an independent composition.

If Matveev had been working from a live female model at the Academy or in Sperwer's studio, then we could agree with the assessment that his draftsmanship is weak. But European state academies at this time—including the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris, where Sperwer had trained—hired only male models. In the Netherlands, in private studios of the mid- to late seventeenth-century, women bared only their legs or torso; rare instances of women posing entirely naked for professional artists, not for students, are known from court documents, which attests to the practice's illicit nature.⁴² In instructional settings, however, concerns over moral dangers discouraged masters from exposing their students to such women. While we lack evidence about modeling practices in 1720s Antwerp, it is safe to say that they were based on practices of other teaching academies in Europe, making it unlikely that Sperwer hired a female model for Matveev and his other pupils.⁴³ For these reasons, I would argue that Matveev's strangely proportioned personification of Painting is not a poorly executed life study, but a copy after a cast, print, or painting of a figure with similar proportions. The stylized anatomy and fluid lines of Matveev's figure recall sixteenth-century work by Northern Mannerists, seen in engravings after Hans Speckaert or Hans van Aachen (Figs. 13-14).⁴⁴ These engravings continued to be published in the early eighteenth century; it would be perfectly normal for a student such as Matveev to explore a wide range of earlier styles, including Mannerist works—which might have been among the prints he purchased in Amsterdam or Antwerp.

⁴² See Eric Jan Sluiter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 319-327; and Erna Kok, "The Female Nude from Life: On Studio Practice and Beholder Fantasy," in *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries*, eds. Karolien De Clippen, Katharina Van Cauteren & Katlijne Van der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 35-50.

⁴³ The earliest documented instances of female models working at art academies occurred in the St. Martin's Lane Academy in London (forerunner of the Royal Academy) in the 1720s, which was an exceptional situation. It was followed by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1833. See Martin Postle, "Naked Civil Servants: The Professional Life Model in British Art and Society," in *Model and Supermodel: The Artist's Model in British Art and Culture*, eds. Jane Desmarais, Martin Postle & William Vaughn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 9; Kasper Monrad, *The Golden Age of Danish Painting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1993), 114.

⁴⁴ See Gert Jan van der Sman, "Dutch and Flemish Printmakers in Rome 1565-1600," *Print Quarterly* 22:3 (September 2005): 256-257; Patrik Reuterswärd, "Drawings by Claude Audran II," *Master Drawings* 2:2 (Summer, 1964): 144-145.



Figure 13: Pieter Perret after Hans Speckaert, *Allegory of Painting*, 1582, engraving on paper, 40.8 × 28.7 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-OB-16.269.



Figure 14: Georg Andreas Wolfgang after Hans von Aachen, *Allegory of the Triumph of Justice and Truth*, ca. late seventeenth-early eighteenth century, engraving on paper, 58.2 × 46.1 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-OB-56.543.

The cherubs posing on the left side of Matveev's canvas further exemplify the process of emulation (Fig. 1b). The standing boy is a mirror image of the Apollo Belvedere, a Hadrianic Roman sculpture in the Vatican collection (Fig. 15), and the seated figure—seen from behind

while twisting and leaning to look up at a male figure—recalls the Venus from Titian's many versions of *Venus and Adonis*, which he first painted in the 1520s (Fig. 16). Both works, known across Europe as key examples of classical sculpture and Renaissance painting, were widely disseminated as copies and prints. They almost certainly appeared among the prints Matveev had acquired in Amsterdam and Antwerp.



Figure 1b: Andrei Matveev, *Allegory of Painting*, 1725 (detail of Figure 1).



Figure 15: Nicolaes de Bruyn, after engraving by Hendrick Goltzius, *Apollo Belvedere*, ca. 1645-ca. 1706, engraving on paper, 26 × 19 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-1881-A-4846.

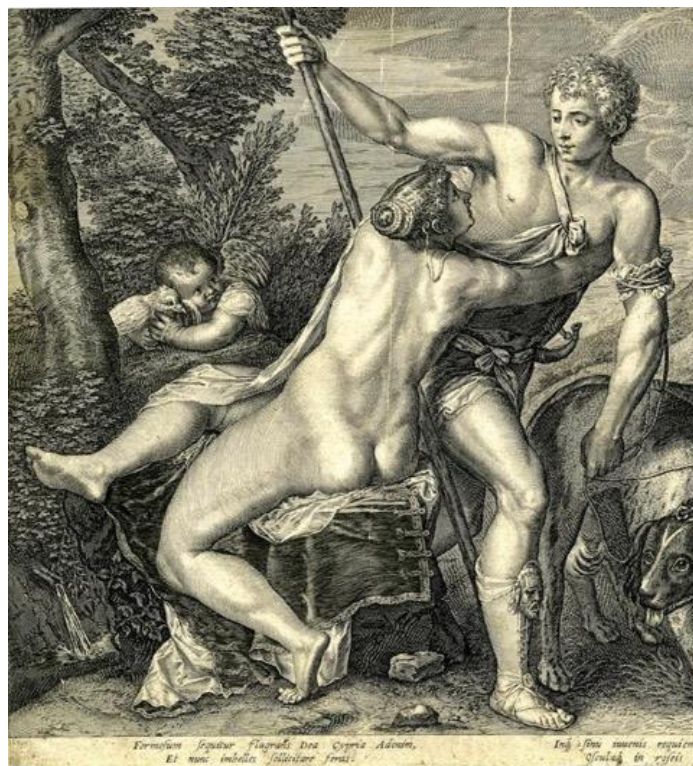


Figure 16: Raphaël Sadeler (II), after Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, 1610, engraving on paper, 195 × 258 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. RP-P-H-H-1244.

By pairing the goddess of love and beauty with the god of arts and leader of the muses, Matveev demonstrates his grasp of the essence of art making, as well as his mastery of the European artistic canon. And yet even this pairing could have been drawn from another work, for example, a print after Claude Audran's *Allegory of Painting* which depicts a cherub at left holding an image of the Apollo and a Venus-posed cherub at right (Fig. 17).



Figure 17: Pieter Sluyter, after Claude Audran II, *Painting*, 1693, etching and engraving on paper 17 × 26.2 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, no. BI-1904-39-45.

Likewise, Matveev's figure of Minerva recalls any number of saints and classical deities sitting aloft, looking down at the mortal sphere. All things considered, numerous possibilities for creative emulation were available to Matveev.

As this analysis demonstrates, and as any connoisseur would have recognized at the time, Matveev's *Allegory of Painting* is a composite image based on several that he had copied as part of his training. It is his eclectic range of sources that accounts for the painting looking so different from most early eighteenth-century academic paintings. The point is that Matveev's painting is not a flawed work that we should discuss only in terms of Russian "firsts," while ignoring problems of quality. Instead, we should see how its problems speak of Matveev's accomplishments while also highlighting the inadequacy of his training in Antwerp—an academy not yet fully developed, despite its ambitions. His painting is a perfect example of the aspirations and limitations of Russian painting at this time.

Although Matveev may have been exposed to allegorical painting while he was studying portraiture in Amsterdam, it was at the center of his activity in Antwerp. It was part of the city's reputation, the main reason the tsar had sent him there to study under a history painter. The Academy's quarters in the Stock Exchange were decorated with allegorical paintings intended to represent the institution's mission and the city's profound connections with the arts. In the Academy's theater hall, students could see Theodor Boeijermans's *Antwerp, Mother of Painters*, and Jacob Jordaens's *Industry and Commerce Protecting the Arts* (1663-1665, Figs. 18-19). Painted soon after the Academy's founding, both large-scale ceiling paintings feature nude and partially draped allegorical and mythological figures nurturing and promoting the arts in Antwerp.⁴⁵ In both works, personifications of painting and poetry, virtues and vices, interact with Greco-Roman deities and historical figures such as Rubens and Van Dyck, all accompanied by cherubs. Seeing complex allegorical images such as these undoubtedly provided ideas that Matveev could employ as he created his own composition.



Figure 18: Theodor Boeijermans, *Antwerp, Mother of Painters*, 1663-1665, oil on canvas 188 × 454 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, Antwerp, no. 23.

⁴⁵ See Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp*, 173-176.



Figure 19: Jacob Jordaens, *Industry and Commerce Protecting the Arts*, 1663-1665, oil on canvas 185 × 486.4 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, Antwerp, no. 219.

Matveev's *Allegory of Painting*, intended to demonstrate his accomplishments and earn him favor with his imperial patron, ultimately allowed him to remain in Antwerp for two more years, until the death of Catherine in 1727. The importance Matveev accorded to this allegorical subject during his period abroad indicates his belief that the significance of such works in Western Europe would resonate back in Russia.⁴⁶ As one of the first Russian artists to travel abroad for training, Matveev served as a channel of communication for artistic ideas from the West. We have no records from his years in Antwerp to suggest that he was keeping up with developments in the Russian art world, where foreign artists and works of art had already introduced these ideas. By displaying his familiarity with the language of allegory and his mastery of past artistic styles, the *Allegory of Painting* helped to establish him as history painter before his return to St. Petersburg. The additional training that he requested in Antwerp would prepare him to take his place painting historical and allegorical works back in Russia.

Allegorical Imagery and Court Culture in Russia

When Matveev's painting reached Catherine in 1725, allegorical imagery had already entered Russian visual culture. From triumphal gates erected for military processions seen by the general public, to garden sculpture and palace decoration accessible only to the elite, Roman deities and personifications became an increasingly frequent sight in Moscow and St. Petersburg starting in the 1690s.⁴⁷ As in Europe, explanatory booklets and commemorative prints were published to help literate spectators understand the complex iconography of the imperial ceremonies and newly introduced forms of art—although apparently few readers purchased

⁴⁶ The other paintings he produced in Antwerp, a *Venus and Cupid* (c. 1726, GRM no. Zh-10) and possibly a *Bacchic Scene* (c. 1723-27, GRM no. 11007, whose attribution to Matveev remains uncertain), further demonstrated his knowledge of mythological imagery, but lacked the symbolic significance of his *Allegory*.

⁴⁷ Borzin, *Rospisi petrovskogo vremeni*, 150-187; E. A. Tiukhmeneva, *Iskusstvo triumfal'nykh vrat v Rossii pervoi poloviny XVIII veka* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2005); Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1 *From Peter the Great to Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 42-78.

these publications.⁴⁸ Reference books, most notably Peter the Great's publication of *Symbols and Emblems* (*Symboly i Emblemata*) in 1705 and 1719, served as sources for heraldry, as well as keys to the new imagery.

Beyond merely explaining its meaning, in Russia it was also essential to defend the use of non-Christian imagery in a court culture that was traditionally imbued with Orthodox symbolism. Scholars from Kyiv played a crucial role in Russia's assimilation of European Baroque imagery. In the late seventeenth century, engravers Oleksandr and Leontii Tarasevych, trained in Catholic Vilnius and Augsburg, had introduced Counter-Reformation iconography and Baroque stylistic elements into Orthodox images produced at the Pecherskaia Lavra in Kyiv. Scholars from the Kyivan Mohyla Academy who knew these images were recruited for the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow. Their knowledge of European iconography made them uniquely suited to navigate between Orthodox tradition and the classical imagery of triumphal events and celebratory fireworks.⁴⁹ For example, in preparation for triumphal celebrations after Russia's victory over Sweden at Narva in 1704, Iosif Turoboiskii, prefect of Moscow's Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy, wrote that the Roman deities on display should be understood as allegories. In a publication intended for the few, literate spectators, he reasoned that the figures originated "not from sacred texts, but from secular histories, not by means of sacred icons, but either historians' legends, or individuals and images [...] invented by poets."⁵⁰ By detaching Roman figures from their ancient religious meaning, Turoboiskii and other scholars sought to reassure Orthodox readers who might be concerned about pagan influences entering Russia. In doing so, he helped to define a civil sphere for elite culture, distinct from and coexistent with the sphere of religious devotion, as part of Russia's civilizing process.⁵¹

In this rapidly changing visual landscape, allegorical depictions of women, such as Matveev's *Minerva and Art of Painting*, took on special significance.⁵² According to scholars of early modern Europe, images of Venus and Minerva went hand in hand with women's participation in court life.⁵³ Europeans upheld the presence of women at court as distinguishing their court culture from that of Asian rulers, who were cast as backwards despots. Depictions of Greco-Roman goddesses stood for the idea that civilization, beauty, and love now reigned,

⁴⁸ Simon Franklin, "Reading the Streets: Encounters with the Public Graphosphere, c. 1700-1950," in *Reading Russia: A History of Reading in Modern Russia*, vol. 1, eds. Damiano Rebecchini & Raffaella Vassena (Milan: Ledizioni, 2020), 260-268.

⁴⁹ See Elena N. Boeck, "Claiming and Acclaiming Peter I: Ukrainian Contributions to the Visual Commemoration of Petrine Victories," in "Poltava 1709: The Battle And The Myth," ed. Serhii Plokhyy, special issue, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 31:1/4 (2009-2010): 271-308.

⁵⁰ "Ne ot bozhestvennykh pisanii, no ot mirskikh istorii, ne sviatymi ikonami, no ili ot istorikov predannymi, ili ot stikhotvortsev vymyshlennymi litsami i podobiiami, ot zverei, gadov, ptits, dreves, i prochikh veshch izobrazuem." Iosif Turoboiskii, *Preslavnoe torzhestvo svoboditelia Livonii* (Moscow, 1704), l. 6 ob., quoted in Tiukhmeneva, *Iskusstvo triumphal'nykh vrat*, 21.

⁵¹ Simon Franklin, "Reading the Streets," 267.

⁵² See Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 55-56. In pre-Petrine Russia, images of women had been largely limited to the Mother of God and a circumscribed cast of saints and biblical figures. Their function was to exemplify Christian love through faith and sacrifice. As female portraiture increased under Peter the Great's reforms, symbolic depictions of women also proliferated.

⁵³ See Kathleen Wellman, *Queens and Mistresses of Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 111-113, 166-67. See also, Jean Starobinski, *L'Invention de la liberté, 1700-1789*, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) 54-61.

serving as pacific counterparts to bellicose imagery of Mars and Hercules.⁵⁴ In other words, the new female imagery of Roman deities and allegorical figures entering Russia helped introduce neo-Platonic concepts to an Orthodox society: ideas such as love inspiring art while subduing strife, love encompassing the beauty of Venus as well as the strength and wisdom of Minerva. These ideas especially resonated in Russia after the Peace of Nystad in September 1721.

Amid the classical deities introduced in Russia, Minerva held special significance for being associated with Catherine, as seen in examples of both palace decoration and engraving.⁵⁵ In Peter's oak study at Peterhof's Grand Palace, a depiction of Catherine as Minerva appeared near Peter in an Apollonian laurel crown on a carved wall panel designed by Nicolas Pineau (1717–20). Georg Gsell's ceiling painting in the throne room at Peter the Great's Summer Palace represents the *Triumph of Catherine* with the central figure holding a statuette of Minerva (Fig. 11). In the engraving discussed earlier, commemorating Catherine's coronation in 1724, Minerva stands at the center of the composition, inviting Catherine up to the dais to receive her crown (Fig. 9). Imagery outside of Russia, by comparison, less frequently associates Minerva with the queen.⁵⁶ In the Dutch Republic, for instance, the sculptural program at Het Loo gardens paired Hercules and Venus to signify the strength and love of the royal couple, William and Mary. The cluster of meanings around Venus—beauty, eroticism, and fertility—represented a queen's primary roles as companion to the king and mother of a legitimate heir. In France under Louis XIV, by contrast, symbolic representations of Maria Teresa virtually never appeared; she was depicted only in portraits. The constellation of female figures surrounding images of the king represented his power, his reign, France itself, other countries, virtues and vices, but not his queen. In Russia, the multivalent image of Minerva suited the ways in which Peter sought to have Catherine accepted as his spouse.⁵⁷ On the one hand, at court she fulfilled the conventional female role of a civilizing influence. On the other, after playing a key role in the Pruth campaign against Turkey in 1711, months after their formal betrothal, she demonstrated her valor in time of war. The ideal image of Catherine could thus draw on Minerva's duality as goddess of military strategy and of wisdom and civilization. Matveev's *Allegory of Painting* with Minerva and a personification of Russia now makes sense. It arrived in a culture receptive to European symbolism, eager for artists who could produce flattering allegorical imagery to highlight the ruler's virtues, and where the connotations of Minerva were already enshrined.

The significance of using European allegorical imagery cannot be overstated. In addition to the symbolic meaning it held in Europe, it took on a further layer of signification upon entering Russia. Allegorical language helped to create a unifying identity among European courts—an identity that Peter the Great and members of the Russian Imperial court sought to adopt. For them, allegorical imagery represented Russia's full participation and equal

⁵⁴ Ludmila Acone, "Between Mars and Venus: The Gender of Dance in Fifteenth-Century Italy," trans. Susan Emanuel, in "Dancing," ed. Elizabeth Claire, special issue, *Clio: Women, Gender, History* 46 (2017): 131–144.

⁵⁵ See Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 67–69.

⁵⁶ Rubens's painting cycle for the Luxembourg Palace (1622–25, Louvre Museum) depicts Marie de Medici as Bellona, the Roman goddess of war who is sometimes mistaken for Minerva; he painted it after she had been ousted as regent, not while she was queen consort.

⁵⁷ Catherine was a commoner—formerly a servant girl from Livonia, possibly a Protestant—whom he married after sending his first wife, Evdokia Lophukhina, to a convent and attempting to divorce her. Because Lophukhina refused the divorce, and because it did not go through a church court, its legality remained questionable. See Hughes, *Peter the Great*, 56–57, 68–69.

membership in European court culture. Matveev's *Allegory of Painting* exemplified the new imperial culture—it was part of what Russia needed in order to be fully European. The artist's time in Antwerp, and his choice of the *Allegory* as his gift to his imperial sponsor, would establish him among the new generation of Russian artists who were adept at creating this visual identity.

While we lack evidence to tell us where Catherine displayed Matveev's *Allegory*, it would have been well suited to a public area of an imperial residence, where members of elite society gathered for business or social events. Although it is a small easel painting like the ones Peter the Great displayed in his gallery at Monplaisir, the statement it made was more ambitious—something closer to the ceiling paintings of palace reception rooms.⁵⁸ For aristocratic viewers now accustomed to allegorical and mythological language, it presents Russia as a state created in the image of the goddess of civilization, an inheritor of Europe's ancient and Renaissance cultures, and a patron of the Art of Painting. The *Allegory of Painting* served as an emblem of Matveev's achievement and demonstrated his ability to produce statements of this kind. It helped prepare the way for his eventual return to Russia, making a case for his participation in Russia's cosmopolitan art scene in this era of transformation.

Becoming the Artist “Who Went Abroad”

When Matveev returned to Russia in August 1727, he had lived abroad for eleven of his twenty-five years. Despite the limitations of his training in Antwerp, his period of study in the Netherlands became part of his professional identity. Both the cachet of having trained abroad in Europe and his knowledge of history painting would play a key role in his later success. For a young artist who had recently arrived on the Petersburg art scene with virtually no experience in monumental decorative painting, Matveev was soon entrusted with significant responsibility in this sphere. Taken onto the staff of the Chancellery of Buildings (*Kantseliariia ot stroenii*), he both executed and oversaw paintings for projects as varied as sacred images in the Peter and Paul Cathedral (1728-33) and allegorical subjects for the Senate Hall of the Twelve Colleges (1730-35), as well as for the coronation of Anna Ioannovna in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, among many other projects.

Matveev's study in Antwerp was key to his promotion in the Chancellery of Buildings because of history painting's preeminent position in the hierarchy of genres. As its name suggests, the chancellery oversaw all aspects of construction, including its decoration and maintenance. Its painters worked alongside architects, sculptors, wood carvers, gilders, and other artisans on a tremendous range of projects. Most commissions for the chancellery painters fell into the category of history painting—allegory, classical mythology, religious subjects, and ancient history—which constituted the most prestigious genre of art. Matveev's training in history painting—particularly the allegorical subjects he studied in Antwerp—set him apart. Unlike other Russian artists in the chancellery who worked as assistants subordinate to European masters, he would become master of a painting team (*zhivopisnaia kommanda*)—the first Russian painter to hold that position. In this position he not only executed original paintings,

⁵⁸ See, for example, Peter the Great's Summer Palace in St. Petersburg, in Borzin, *Rospisi petrovskogo vremeni*, 103-123.

but also created models for assistants to copy, supervised their work, and trained young artists in a workshop environment similar to what he experienced in the Netherlands.⁵⁹

The symbolic value of foreign study at this moment can be seen in the weight given to Matveev's his training in Antwerp as a history painter, relative to his actual skill level. This is evident in the report of Louis Caravaque (1684-1754), the French artist who led the painting team at the Chancellery of Buildings, who evaluated him shortly after his return to St. Petersburg. Caravaque concluded that Matveev was "stronger in painting than in draftsmanship."⁶⁰ For an artist from France, where the emotional expressiveness of color took second place to the the rational clarity of draftsmanship, this critique did much to explain Caravaque's lukewarm assessment of "not bad" (*ne khudo*). Caravaque further noted that "his art is better in portraiture than in history painting."⁶¹ Despite judging him as stronger in both the secondmost technical skill and the second-highest category in the hierarchy of genres, Caravaque concluded that "he, Matveev, was better suited than other Russian painters to be in the service of his imperial highness [Peter II], since he paints both portraits and history."⁶² Four years later, when a committee of artists and professors from the Academy of Sciences evaluated Matveev for promotion, the verdict was the same: his history painting, "although not extremely strong, is nonetheless praiseworthy and possesses considerable merits."⁶³ Despite this caveat, his ability to paint "both history and portrait likenesses with skill" prompted his unprecedented promotion to master of a painting team in June 1731.⁶⁴

In addition to his knowledge of history painting, both Matveev and his superiors drew attention to his time abroad to distinguish him from other artists. For example, in his petition to work with the Chancellery of Buildings in December 1727, Matveev underscored his time in the Netherlands, noting his study in both Amsterdam and Brabant, and signing himself "your most humble servant, painter Andrei Matveev, returned from Amsterdam."⁶⁵ His superiors used a similar epithet: three years later, in a report from the Chancellery documenting Matveev's work with two other artists (Ivan Nikitin, Aleksandr Zakharov) at the Peter and Paul Cathedral, the writer singles out Matveev as the one "who returned from abroad."⁶⁶ Of the artists mentioned, the portraitist Ivan Nikitin had also studied abroad, spending about three years in Venice and

⁵⁹ Il'ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 83-186.

⁶⁰ "imeet on bol'shi silu v kraskakh, nezhe v risunke." Louis Caravaque, October 27, 1727, Russian State Historical Archive (hereafter, RGIA), St. Petersburg, f. 467, op. 4, ed. khr. 46, 1727 g., l. 104-104 ob., quoted in Il'ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 83. For the evaluation, Matveev had to draw, then paint a historical composition of his own invention, *The Angel Leading Saint Peter out of Prison* (unlocated), and a portrait (unlocated).

⁶¹ "v personakh lutche ego iskusstvo, nezhe vo istoriakh," quoted in Il'ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 83.

⁶² Il'ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 83.

⁶³ Protocol of the Chancellery of Buildings, June 14, 1731, quoted in A. I. Uspenskii, *Imperatorskie dvortsy*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Snegirev, 1913), 116. In Uspenskii's day these documents were in the Moskovskoe Otdelenie Obshchago Arkhiva Ministerstva Imperatorskago Dvora, no. 69514, ll. 93-95 ob. Today they would be in RGADA.

⁶⁴ Domenico Trezzini and Mikhail Zemtsov, Architects' report in Protocol of the Chancellery of Buildings, June 14, 1731, quoted in Uspenskii, *Imperatorskie dvortsy*, vol. 2, 116.

⁶⁵ "nizhaishii rab vyekhavshii iz Amsterdama zhivopisets Andrei Matveev," Andrei Matveev to Peter II, December 15, 1727, RGIA f. 467, op. 4, ed. khr. 46, 1727 g., l. 107-107 ob., quoted in Il'ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 84.

⁶⁶ "vyekhavshii iz-za moria." Report on the paintings of Dmitrii Solov'ev, October 1730, quoted in Uspenskii, *Imperatorskie dvortsy*, vol. 2, 115, from Moskovskoe Otdelenie Obshchago Arkhiva Ministerstva Imperatorskago Dvor, no. 69506, l. 128 ob. Today in RGADA.

Florence (1716-1719), but his foreign credentials went unmentioned in the report. Matveev continued to underscore his cosmopolitan identity by signing his name in Roman script, “*Andrej Matvejeff*,” into the 1730s.⁶⁷ As these documents demonstrate, it was both the knowledge of history painting that he gained in Antwerp, and the simple fact of his having trained abroad, that enabled his advancement. Although Matveev’s experience in the Netherlands set him apart from his Russian peers, his reputation would scarcely last beyond his lifetime.

In subsequent generations, portraiture came to overshadow history painting as the early eighteenth century’s most important legacy. This preference can be seen in Sergei Diaghilev’s landmark Historical-Artistic Exhibition of Russian Portraits held at the Tauride Palace in 1905, where portraiture, above other genres, was chosen to represent Russia’s past.⁶⁸ Soviet scholarship perpetuated this emphasis with its focus on realism—a term more applicable to portraits than to allegorical or mythological subjects. Another important factor is survival bias, as until recently scholars have tended to focus on works that remain extant. Church decorations, as well as allegorical and mythological paintings in palaces, underwent disfiguring restoration or disappeared entirely; triumphal gates were temporary wooden structures not intended to last. Meanwhile, portraits remained readily accessible for study, whether in private collections or later in museums. As portraiture came to be seen as the period’s preeminent genre of painting, Ivan Nikitin’s portraits overshadowed Matveev’s historical paintings—which had become virtually inaccessible due to poor restoration or overpainting. Matveev’s *Self-Portrait with Wife* came to be seen as his most significant work, not only because of its striking informality and sense of artistic self-awareness, but also its visibility in a public collection (Fig. 20).⁶⁹ Of all his accomplishments, this double portrait came to exemplify the very best of Petrine painting. Notably, it reflects the artist’s period studying portraiture in Amsterdam, not Antwerp, and conforms to our ideas about the Petrine era being shaped by Dutch culture. In the eighteenth century, however, history painting—not portraiture—was the most prestigious genre.

⁶⁷ He signed a sketch for the composition *Venchanie na tsarstvo*, for the Anichkov triumphal gates erected for the arrival of Anna Ioannovna in St. Petersburg in 1732, “*Andrej Matvejeff pinxit.*” See T. V. Il’ina, “Novoe o monumental’no-dekorativnoi zhivopisi XVIII v. (Triumfal’nye vorota 1732 g.),” in *Otechestvennoe i zarubezhnoe iskusstvo XVIII veka. Osnovnye problemy* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1986), 22, 24n29. The sketch appears in Tiukhmeneva, *Iskusstvo triumfal’nykh vrat*, 376, fig. 60.

⁶⁸ In addition to the Tauride Palace exhibition of 1905, Matveev’s double portrait appeared in exhibitions in 1870, 1902, and in 1906 went to Paris for the *Exposition de l’art russe* at the Salon d’Automne.

⁶⁹ Benois wrote, “Only the unfinished portrait of him with his wife [...] stands out from the indifferent painting of the early eighteenth century for its distinctiveness, lively brushwork, and agreeable greenish-brown tone,” in Benua, *Russkaia shkola zhivopisi*, 14; James Cracraft deems it, “a ‘striking symptom,’ indeed, of the arrival of humanism in Russia if only among a tiny elite,” in *The Petrine Revolution in Imagery*, 213. For similar assessments, see N. N. Kovalenskaia, “I. N. Nikitin i A. M. Matveev,” in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva* vol. 5, *Russkoe iskusstvo pervoi poloviny XVIII veka*, edited by I. E. Grabar’ and V. N. Lazarev (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1960), 332-334; Alekseeva et al., *Portret petrovskogo vremeni*, pp. 58-65; Il’ina & Rimskaiia-Korsakova, *Andrei Matveev*, 112-119.



Figure 20: Andrei Matveev, *Self-Portrait with Wife*, c. 1729, oil on canvas, 75.5 x 90.5 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, no. Zh-4913.⁷⁰

In the late eighteenth century, Matveev's *Allegory* entered the collection of the noted connoisseur Aleksandr Sergeevich Stroganov—the first Russian painting amid over one hundred works by major European artists. Its importance in this prestigious milieu is evidenced in Stroganov's choice to have it engraved for his 1807 illustrated catalogue, which featured the seventy-five paintings he considered the most important in his collection (Fig. 21).⁷¹ Stroganov wrote in the catalogue, “This perfectly preserved piece is especially precious to me because it is by the hand of the first Russian artist who arrived at a certain degree of perfection.”⁷² His qualified assessment suggests that, like modern scholars, Stroganov saw the value of Matveev's

⁷⁰ A. M. Matveev, *Self-Portrait with Wife*, The Virtual Russian Museum, accessed November 26, 2023, https://rusmuseumvrn.ru/data/collections/painting/18_19/zh_4913/index.php?lang=en%20painting.

⁷¹ See Elena Sharnova, “Katalog kollektsii A. S. Stroganova i traditsiia frantsuzskikh auktsionnykh katalogov vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka,” *Iskusstvoznanie* 1 (2019): 223, 244.

⁷² “Ce morceau de la plus parfaite conservation, est surtout précieux pour moi, par ce quil [sic] est de la main du premier artiste russe qui soit parvenu à une certaine perfection.” It is unclear when and how Stroganov acquired the *Allegory*. It may have been omitted from his earlier catalogues of 1793 and 1800 because, as his only Russian painting, it did not fit into their systematic grouping by national school; the 1807 catalogue presented the works as independent plates. A. S. Stroganov, *Collection d'estampes d'après quelques tableaux de la galerie de son exc. mr. le comte A. Stroganoff* (St. Petersburg: Drechsler, 1807), n.p.

Allegory in terms of Russian artistic milestones rather than its aesthetic quality. Indeed, he must have felt the need to justify including a student work by a Russian artist among a select group of European masters.



Figure 21: Egor Skotnikov, after Andrei Matveev and Emilian Korneev, *Allegory of Painting*, engraving on paper, 23 x 15.8 cm. Plate from Aleksandr Sergeevich Stroganov, *Collection d'estampes d'après quelques tableaux de la galerie de son exc. mr. le comte A. Stroganoff* (St. Petersburg: Drechsler, 1807) n. p. Source: The National Gallery of Art Library, Washington, D. C., David K. E. Bruce Fund.

Matveev's *Allegory of Painting* stands apart from other Russian allegories of the Petrine era, with their messages of imperial might and national glory. It stands for the idea that art is important both for its own sake, and for its civilizing influence—an idea that had not yet been allegorized in Russia. Indeed, as we have seen, “returned from abroad” became Matveev’s epithet precisely because “abroad” was where he absorbed these values. As an artistic statement, the *Allegory of Painting* exemplifies both the ambitions and shortcomings of Russian painting in the

early eighteenth century. It represents the mix of ideas Matveev received abroad in Antwerp, and the reception of those ideas back in Russia, seen through the prism of his status as a foreign-trained artist.