



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

**The institutional context of art
production in the Southern Low
Countries during the early modern
period: the Ghent craft guild of gold and
silversmiths in relation to the Ghent
academy in the second half of the
eighteenth century**

De Doncker, Tim

Ghent University

2011

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/35786/>

MPRA Paper No. 35786, posted 06 Jan 2012 23:13 UTC

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF ART PRODUCTION IN THE SOUTHERN LOW COUNTRIES DURING THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD: THE GHENT CRAFT GUILD OF GOLD AND SILVERSMITHS IN RELATION TO THE GHENT ACADEMY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By Tim De Doncker, Ghent University

Abstract

In local, as well as in national and international contexts, the relationships between the different craft guilds and the academies were intricate. The different institutions engaged in dialogues as well as in conflicts and determined the state of the art world in the middle, early modern and modern ages. Questions about the foundation, the organization, and the membership of the craft guilds and academies, about rules, regulations, and flexibility, about artistic practices and representation, about continuity and discontinuity, will be examined in this article. Not merely art production as such will constitute the central theme of this paper, but principally the institutional context which gave rise to it.

This article focuses on the institutional context of art production in the Southern Low Countries during the early modern period. A case study on goldsmiths and silversmiths in the city of Ghent during the second half of the eighteenth century, will constitute the focal point of a study on the relationship between the “traditional” crafts guilds and the “new” academy. The ensuing will clarify that precisely the academy will become the heart of actual refinement of design skills for craftsmen.

Introduction

During the ancien régime, the pre-capitalist industrial system in Western Europe was organized in city-based craft guilds. Already since the middle ages, art production was controlled by such organizations. Among other things, the education of professional masters was to happen according to their rules and regulations. On the 13th of November 1773, however, empress Maria Theresia decreed an ordinance which exempted all artists residing in the Southern Low Countries from craft membership and insofar as they did not apply themselves to mechanical arts, which remained the exclusive domain of the crafts. The edict freed the visual artists from craft commitments and reinforced the fact that craft guilds had lost their participation in the art education.¹ The 1773 decree seems to have put a definite wedge between liberal and mechanical arts. Nevertheless, during the 18th century, the discourse of the academic institutions underwent a change. Under the pressures of Mercantilism and the Enlightenment, which advocated a new educational system, with strong, practice-oriented methods, the academies reached out to the crafts. The change in attitude from the academies rises to prominence starting from 1750. Earlier, the “medieval” technical training of the craftsman remained essential and the academy was solely interested in Fine Arts. During the second half of the eighteenth century, however, it became clear that art education was not merely of service, or should be of service to the sculptor and painter, but also to the craftsman. In general, it resulted in a

¹ Poriau, M.A., “Over enig wel en wee van de academies”, in: Werbrouck-Cools, M. (ed.), 1751-1988: van Marissal tot Vlerick, Gent, 1998, pp. 24, 26; Van de Vijver, D., De Jonge, K., *Ingenieurs en architecten op de drempel van een nieuwe tijd (1750-1830)*, Leuven, 2003, pp. 151-153; De Wilde, G.A., *Geschiedenis onzer Academiën van Beeldende Kunsten*, Leuven, 1941, p. 123.

coexistence of art and craft in the academy, around 1800, by virtue of elementary classes for craftsmen on the one hand, and specialized classes for genuine artists on the other.²

How art and craft went hand in hand, remains a pivotal research question, especially in the 18th century which saw a large-scale change in consumption patterns in different social strata. The foundations for this transformation were already present in the 17th century and the shift is characterized by enormous growth of new luxury items and various other products, as well as a wider variety and a structural and larger impact of fashion.³ This change was not exclusively a Southern Low Countries phenomenon. The same pattern applies to other countries.⁴ Fashion phenomena certainly impinged on production: the customer is always right. De Munck refers to the large problems facing craftsmen since the second half of the 17th century, most of which are tied to the demand for cheaper and more objects à la mode. This tended to subordinate the traditional production to new inventions, which gave rise to a whole host of new problems. Many craftsmen were chiefly and only skilled in the execution of a design, but not the actual design itself.⁵ This article will show that the academy provided in the craft guild's needs and that the academy enabled craft guild members to develop their skills, in turn reinforcing their economic position, and, in other words, increasing their chances on the market.

1. The Craft Guilds

The craft guilds were one of the pillars of the early modern urban economy, which has always made them a keen point of research interest among historians. They comprised organizations of professional peers, aimed primarily at protecting shared economic interests.⁶ Local governments granted these professional peers a monopoly under the guise of a craft guild.⁷ They governed work within their craft, they set quality standards and they provided protection against possible forms of competition. Since the 1980s, renewed interest from historians for the crafts has caused fundamental changes to the traditional views on these institutions. As a result, historians presently rightfully do not cling to the image of an immutable institution. Current historic research consequently does not consider “a craft” diametrically opposed to economic modernization. Craft guilds were much more than “a conspiracy against the public” (to paraphrase Adam Smith) to protect sectional economic interests. They produced a rich cultural life and participated in politics. Craft guilds helped to build and to sustain social identities.⁸ They were professional organizations, as well as collective holders of a monopoly. They

² Pevsner, N., *Academies of Art: past and present*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 158-161, 165.

³ Van Damme, I., “Changing consumer preferences and evolutions in retailing. Buying and selling consumer durables in Antwerp (c. 1648-c. 1748)”, in: Blondé, B., Stabel, P., Stobart, J., Van Damme, I. (ed.), *Buyers and Sellers. Retail circuits and practices in medieval and early modern Europe*, Turnhout, 2006, p. 202.

⁴ E.g. Garnot, B., “La culture matérielle dans les villes françaises au XVIIIe siècle”, in: Schuurman, A.J., Walsh, L.S. (ed.), *Material culture: consumption, life-style, standard of living, 1500-1900/Culture matérielle: consommation, style de vie, niveau de vie, 1500-1900*, Milaan, 1994, pp. 21-29 (France); Nijboer, H.T., *De fatsoenering van het bestaan. Consumptie in Leeuwarden tijdens de Gouden Eeuw*, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Doctoraatsverhandeling, Groningen, 2007, see <http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/faculties/arts/2007/h.t.nijboer/> (The Netherlands); Weatherill, L., *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain, 1660-1760*, Londen-New York, 1988 (England).

⁵ De Munck, B., “Construction and reproduction. The training and skills of Antwerp cabinetmakers in the 16th and 17th centuries”, in: De Munck, B., Kaplan S.L., Soly, H. (ed.), *Learning on the Shop Floor. Historical Perspectives on Apprenticeship*, Londen-New York, 2007, pp. 85-110.

⁶ Lourens, P., Lucassen, J., “De oprichting en ontwikkeling van ambachtsgilden in Nederland (13de-19de eeuw)”, in: Lis, C., Soly, H. (red.), *Werelden van verschil. Ambachtsgilden in de Lage Landen*, Brussel, 1997, p. 59.

⁷ Farr, J.R., *Artisans in Europe 1300-1914*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 21.

⁸ Lucassen, J., Prak, M., “Conclusion”, in: Prak, M. (red.), *Craft guilds in the early modern Low Countries*, Aldershot, 2006, p. 224.

functioned as insurance funds, courts, political pressure groups, and the heart of secular and religious rituals, networks of sociability and much more.⁹ This wide spectrum of functions in society distinguished the crafts from other corporations, such as a brotherhood, a chamber of rhetoric, a *schutterij*, or a neighborhood militia.¹⁰

Crafts were therefore primarily professional organizations possessing one or more local privileges. These constituted that solely craft members were allowed to produce and/or sell a certain product.¹¹ To function as an active professional painter or a sculptor, as a bricklayer or a stonemason, as a carpenter or a cabinet maker, as a goldsmith or a silversmith, as a tin smith or a plumber, as a locksmith or a coppersmith: every craftsman was required to be a member of a corporation. As a result, an apprenticeship had to be completed successfully, under the watchful eye of a master craftsman, before one could actively perform a profession, organized in a corporation. As a matter of fact, apprenticeship was the most common educational system in preindustrial Europe.¹² These years of apprenticeship, under the craft guild's wings, would grant one the possibility to "meer en meer in conste ... excelleren"¹³ [excel even further in the craft]. The education of new members was a top priority, since a craft's fame was built first and foremost on competent craftsmen.¹⁴ After completion of the apprenticeship, the required career skills were indeed acquired, but an independent position as a craftsman was not yet a viable option. Mastership was a prerequisite for an autonomous position and for developing a professional career.

2. The Academy

The origins of the academy cannot be separated from the origins of the crafts: their histories are intertwined. One of the earliest critical accounts of the craft members' previously mentioned dependence, can be read in Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) theory on art. Da Vinci called for a key role for painting among the *artes liberales*, because of the vital importance of *disegno*¹⁵. This new perspective necessitated the separation of painting from both manual craftsmanship, as well as the accompanying, well-defined social system which had enabled painting to flourish since the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Da Vinci's theory is subsequently at the heart of modern art education and his ideas were the foundations for various forms of academic education up until the nineteenth century. Da Vinci himself has never realized his ideas and has never supported another educational system.¹⁷ Ultimately, a first step towards a

⁹ Lis, C., Soly, H., "Inleiding", in: Lis, C., Soly, H. (ed.), *Werken volgens de regels. Ambachten in Brabant en Vlaanderen, 1500-1800*, Brussel, 1994, p. 11.

¹⁰ Dambruyne, J., "Rijkdom, materiële cultuur en sociaal aanzien. De bezitspatronen en investeringsstrategieën van de Gentse ambachten omstreeks 1540", in: Lis, C., Soly, H. (ed.), *Werelden van verschil. Ambachtsgilden in de Lage Landen*, Brussel, 1997, p.151.

¹¹ Cerutti, S., *La ville et les métiers. Naissance d'un langage corporatif (Turin, 17^e-18^e siècle)*, Parijs, 1990, p. 33.

¹² De Munck, B., *Technologies of Learning. Apprenticeship in Antwerp Guilds from the 15th Century to the End of the Ancien Régime*, Turnhout, 2007, p. 5.

¹³ CAG (City Archive Ghent), 156bis 32, Stadsarchief betreffende de neringen; Smeden, wapenmakers, zwartwerkers, slotmakers en peerdebeslaggers; Rekwesten aan schepenen van der keure (1541-1789).

¹⁴ Dambruyne, J., "De Gentse bouwvakambachten in sociaal-economisch perspectief (1540-1795)", in: Lis, C., Soly, H. (red.), *Werken volgens de regels. Ambachten in Brabant en Vlaanderen, 1500-1800*, Brussel, 1994, p. 62.

¹⁵ "Disegno" ("tekenen", i.e. lit. to draw) is considered the foundation of the arts and it cannot be separated from the study. Not talent, but practice is the key to drawing. The "teyckeninghe" [drawing] refers to the creation and execution of ordinances, the design. (Miedema, H., *Karel van Manders Leven der moderne, oft dees-tijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders en hun bron: een vergelijking tussen van Mander en Vasari*, Alphen aan den Rijn, 1984, p. 70.)

¹⁶ Pevsner, N., *Academies of Art: past and present*, Cambridge, 1940, p. 31.

¹⁷ Pevsner, N., *Academies of Art*, p. 37.

new educational system finds its origin in Florence. Under Lorenzo the Magnificent's (1449-1492) patronage, a small, informal school was founded in 1490, aimed at aspiring painters and sculptors. The new educational system involved a twofold change. Firstly, students were not bound to one specific master craftsman, in other words, they were not strictly a master's pupil. Secondly, their education did not consist of mere manual aid to a master's assignments, but they were to study the works from the de Medici collection.¹⁸

The claim that painters were not ordinary craftsmen seems to become accepted by some people who were not artists themselves. For the status of sculptors and architects, there is similar evidence; there was a gradual rise in the social status of artists.¹⁹ This new perspective on the artist's position became fairly commonplace during the Italian Renaissance. In Rome and in Florence especially, artists became disgruntled because their status was merely the equivalent of that of a craftsman. The process ultimately resulted in the artists' successful separation of craft guilds and the emergence of proper, separate and more prestigious professional organizations, viz. the academies, at the end of the sixteenth century both in Florence (1563/1571) and in Rome (1593).²⁰ The academy in Florence, the Accademia del Disegno under Giorgio Vasari's aegis, is at the heart of the development of the modern art academy. Its goal was twofold. On the one hand, this new institution sought to establish a community of leading Florentine artists, under the special protectorate of the Grand Duke. The 1571 decree exempting painters and sculptors from taking part in a craft guild certainly bears mentioning here. Painters and sculptors were as such a separate entity, represented by the academy. On the other hand, the institution provided for the education of students. By no means, however, did this imply a structured hierarchy of students or a similar surrogate for workshop-based education. But there were, among other things, lectures on geometry and anatomy.²¹

The rise of the academy did not remain an exclusively Italian phenomenon, but it expanded beyond the Alps, under various guises. Frequent exchanges with the Italian peninsula, e.g. journeys into Italy, accelerated this process. The Dutchman Karel van Mander was the first to undertake such an enterprise in the Low Countries. As a painter, he lamented the sorry state of painting back home and as a result, he founded an academy in Harlem in 1583 with the help of Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem and Hendrick Goltzius. It was a strictly private effort with the sole purpose of life drawing.²²

Paris however, was a different story. Like in many other large European cities, artists were traditionally united in the Guild of Saint-Luke. The structure of the corporation could differ from city to city and from time to time, but the presence of painters and often sculptors among its members was a mainstay. The name is derived from Luke the Evangelist, who lived in Antioch in the first century. He was active as a doctor and a painter. He acted as the patron saint of the corporation, because as a former and privileged, the story goes that he painted the first portrait of the Virgin Mary, votary of the trade he stressed the virtue of the profession (Er ontbreekt een woord in de zin?).²³ In the seventeenth century, the Parisian Guild of Saint-

¹⁸ Pevsner, N., *Academies of Art*, p. 38.

¹⁹ Burke, P., *The Italian Renaissance. Culture and Society in Italy*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 75-76, 238.

²⁰ Filipczak, Z.Z., *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550-1700*, Princeton, 1987, pp. 18-19.

²¹ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, pp. 42-49.

²² Goldstein, C., *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 37; Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, pp. 80-81.

²³ North, M., *Art and commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven, 1997, p. 68; Thijs, A.K.L., *Religieuze rituelen in het emancipatieproces van Vlaamse en Brabantse handwerksgezellen (zestiende-negentiende eeuw)*

Luke pleaded for a significant reduction of the number of court artists, since they were exempt from craft regulations. Furthermore, the corporation demanded that court artists, precisely because of their craft independence, could not accept any assignments from private persons or religious institutions. Their customers were to be restricted to the court. Sculptor Jacques Sarazin and painters Joost van Egmont and Charles Lebrun reacted immediately. They wanted to establish (and reinforce) the higher social status of the court artist by founding an academy. They declared that an academy was urgently needed to provide for the teaching of art as a liberal discipline. The foundation of the academy in 1648 marked the true separation between the liberal and the mechanical arts.²⁴ Similar to Italian academies, theoretic lectures were coupled with the practice of drawing. Especially the possibility to work with a nude model seemed to draw many artists in, primarily because it was an expensive undertaking not affordable to the workshop environment. The newly-founded academy was eventually granted support of the court in 1655, which made it a Royal undertaking. Even more importantly: the academy was also granted a monopoly for life drawing the very same year. A nude model was not to pose outside the walls of the academy from then on, which reemphasized the split with the craft guilds. But even in Paris it was not the goal to replace the craft education.²⁵

Henceforth, the institutional context of art production in the Southern Low Countries will be at the forefront, and this for two different reasons. Firstly, the corporative work system in this region had a long tradition. Already since the middle ages there existed a strong craft guild organization. It is true that the golden age of the craft guilds belonged to the middle ages, but they enjoyed a long life and had exceptional vitality.²⁶ Secondly, art works from Southern Low Countries workmanship, were well-known and sought-after in almost the entire world. During the early modern period, Antwerp, the city of Peter Paul Rubens, was the absolute centre of this highly esteemed production. As early as 1480, the Guild of Saint-Luke in Antwerp had attempted to tower over the other crafts with regard to the liberal arts by fusing with the “Violieren”, the city’s most prominent chamber of rhetoric.²⁷ Similar to Italy and France, artists viewed themselves as clearly distinct from practitioners of the mechanical arts and they wanted to be respected as such. A dispute in Antwerp in 1600 between sculptors and stonecutters and masons provides an apt illustration. Sculptors clearly distinguished between their own “conste” [art] and the inferior handiwork of masons and their peers.²⁸ The foundation of the academy is to be understood within this context. On the sixth of July 1663, an academy was founded in Antwerp at the request of David Teniers the Younger, apprentice to Rubens, and with the consent of King Phillip IV.²⁹ Teniers was very much aware of the success of French art and attributed it to the academy. He therefore deemed it worthwhile to found a similar institution in Antwerp to enhance the fame of his birthplace and the Guild of Saint-Luke. His plans called for young apprentices to be educated in geometry, architecture and perspective, as well as the foundations of painting, engraving and sculpting and life

in: Lis, C., Soly, H. (ed.), *Werken volgens de regels. Ambachten in Brabant en Vlaanderen, 1500-1800*, Brussel, 1994, p. 239.

²⁴ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, pp. 82-84; Goldstein, *Teaching Art*, p. 41.

²⁵ Goldstein, *Teaching Art*, pp. 41-42.

²⁶ Gustafsson, B., “The rise and economic behaviour of medieval craft guilds”, in: Gustafsson, B. (ed.), *Power and Economic Institutions. Reinterpretations in Economic History*, Aldershot, 1991, p. 69.

²⁷ Van den Branden, F.J., *Geschiedenis der Antwerpsche schilderschool*, Antwerpen, 1883, p. 32; Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, p. 126.

²⁸ De Munck, B., “Corpses, Live Models, and Nature. Assessing Skills and Knowledge before the Industrial Revolution (Case: Antwerp)”, in: *Technology and Culture*, LI, 2010, p. 346.

²⁹ Van der Straelen, J.B., *Jaerboek der vermaerde en kunstryke gilde van Sint Lucas binnen de stad Antwerpen*, Antwerpen, 1855, p. 116.

drawing.³⁰ Bert De Munck rightfully described the emergence of the academy in terms of a rise in quality.³¹ Similarly in Antwerp, it was not at all the intent to replace the craft education. The traditional learning period under the auspices of the craft guild remained a mainstay. Furthermore, everyone who wanted to attend the lessons of the academy, was required to show a proof of their master, who declared that the pupil was fit to attend lessons to life draw. If a pupil was deemed insufficiently skilled, he was required to refine his skills before being allowed entrance to the academy. The students were also required to possess a certificate of good conduct.³² Both Van den Branden (1867) and De Munck (2001) conclude that the academy's most innovative aspect lay in the collective life drawing by the students of the Guild of Saint-Luke's masters, at the guild's expense.³³ Pevsner added that this was eventually a mere official reinforcement of a longstanding practice. Pevsner also warns that any equalization of the academy of Antwerp and Paris is rather precarious. The Académie Royale in Paris was founded as an attack against the guild, whereas in Antwerp, the academy remained part of it.³⁴ Only in the eighteenth century would the academy become exempt from the Guild of Saint-Luke's control.³⁵

Comparable developments to Antwerp are found in Mechelen, a medium-sized city within the sphere of influence of Antwerp, in the 17th century. Originally in the 14th century, painters in Mechelen were part of the craft of cabinet makers and sculptors were part of the masonry corporation. Just as in other cities, artists in Mechelen voiced their discontent about their status in society. A first distinction between the artists and the craftsmen arose with the foundation of a "company of painters", within the craft of cabinet makers. In other words, there is a clear attempt here by painters to discard the label of cabinet maker. At a later stage, in 1539, sculptors address a petition to the magistrate to request a coalition with the painters, since their artistic ties with the latter are considered stronger than their craft ties with the masons. Initially, the magistrate overturned the proposal. Shortly afterwards however, both painters and sculptors had united nonetheless. Subsequently, Mechelen was met with fierce competition from Antwerp during the seventeenth century. The latter city was known as a leading art centre and attracted talent from Mechelen. Moreover, infractions on the craft regulations increased. The "fine" artists could consequently no longer associate with the crafts. They refused to let their stature and prestige flounder at the hands of petty arguments by small masters who applied themselves to the serial work of strictly decorative painting and sculpting, at least, so their discourse goes. They wanted to distance themselves from other groups in the painter's trade, viz. gilders, toy makers, upholsterers, sign painters and more. A number of masters consequently addressed a petition to the magistrate of Mechelen to request an institutional distinction between painters and sculptors on the one hand, and craftsmen who also earned their living with a brush or a chisel on the other hand. After a positive advice by the magistrate, an academy would be founded in Antwerp's example. Additionally, a number of artists from outside Mechelen requested exemptions from craft regulations, if they would settle in the city and support the academy. The deans of the Guild of Saint-Luke however, sided with and supporting their corporation, causing the magistrate to disapprove of the foundation of a new institution. However, neither the divide, nor the academy became a

³⁰ Van den Branden, F.J., *Geschiedenis der Academie van Antwerpen*, Antwerpen, 1867, pp. 16-19.

³¹ De Munck, B., "Le produit du talent ou la production de talent? La formation des artistes à l'Académie des beaux-arts à Anvers aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles", in: *Paedagogica Historica*, XXXVII, 2001, 3, p. 577.

³² Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie van Antwerpen*, p. 30.

³³ Van den Branden, *Geschiedenis der Academie van Antwerpen*, p. 20, De Munck, *Le produit du talent ou la production de talent*, p. 577.

³⁴ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, pp. 127-128.

³⁵ Van der Straelen, *Jaerboek der vermaerde en kunstryke gilde van Sint Lucas*, p. 168.

reality and everything remained status-quo.³⁶ An academy for the visual arts would only be founded in 1771-1772.³⁷

The number of academies in the Southern Low countries was consequently limited to a single one at the end of the 17th century: the Antwerp art school. The 18th century however, sees a significant rise in the number of academies, both in Europe as well as in the Southern Low Countries. Nineteen academies can be found in Europe in 1720, but the number rises to over 100 in 1790.³⁸ On the territory that would later be designated Belgium, no less than 11 art academies rise to prominence: Brussels (1711), Bruges (1717), Ghent (1751), Tournai (1757), Kortrijk (1760), Mechelen (1771), Ath (1773), Oudenaarde (1773), Liège (1775), Ypres (1778), Mons (1781).³⁹ A number of shared characteristics merit attention. One clear strategy reemerges time and again in the foundation of these art institutions. Firstly, each academy races to acquire the protection of the King, in particular the head of the Austrian Netherlands, which is expressed in the “Royal” part of an academy’s title. This had a twofold purpose. On the one hand, royal protection increased the prestige of the institution, and on the other hand, because the financial strength of such schools was often a problem, the central government hoped, by giving the example of royal support, to convince the amateurs des beaux arts to support the academy as well.⁴⁰ Secondly, the local magistrate is asked to provide housing and facilities like lightning and heating. Both strategies share the same purpose: independence of the crafts.⁴¹ The desire to break away from the crafts aligns these institutions with the 17th century tradition. Furthermore, Rome is regarded as an artistic paragon, with classical art education at its core, and Paris as an organizational one.⁴²

During the 18th century, under the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy, the quest for the academies’ independence in the Southern Low Countries would subsequently gain a new success. Like in many other European countries, the central government was convinced of the value and the profit of a liberal economic policy. Therefore, the House of Habsburg collected information about the crafts by conducting surveys with the eventual intent to reform them.⁴³ After André Lens (1739-1822), head of the Antwerp academy, returned from a study trip from Italy, tensions mounted. Lens advocated a serious reform of the academy, but since he was not a member of the Guild of Saint-Luke, his plans were thwarted. It prompted Lens to submit a petition to governor Charles of Lorraine to “affranchir des corps de métiers de la ville d’Anvers les personnes qui se distinguent dans la peinture, etc.”⁴⁴ Charles of Lorraine immediately identified with the distinction between liberal arts and mechanical arts and seized the opportunity to reduce the power of the crafts significantly. In March of 1773, empress Maria-Theresia decreed an ordinance which exempted artists from Brabant from craft membership. The large cities in Brabant immediately voiced their discontent, while the Academy of Ghent demanded an expansion of the original ordinance. From the 13th of November 1773 onwards, the decree applied to all artists residing in the Southern Low Countries and insofar as they did not apply themselves to mechanical arts, which remained

³⁶ Andries, P., *Geschiedenis van de Akademie voor Beeldende Kunsten 1771-1925 en van l’Institut des Beaux-Arts 1838-1892 te Mechelen, Gent, 1973, Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling, pp. 23-26.*

³⁷ Andries, P., *Geschiedenis van de Akademie voor Beeldende Kunsten, p. 2.*

³⁸ Pevsner, *Academies of Art, pp. 140-141.*

³⁹ De Wilde, G.A., *Geschiedenis onzer Academiën van Beeldende Kunsten, pp. 57, 65, 143, 160-161.*

⁴⁰ CAG, ASK 546, *Register van de steunleden van de Academie 1751-1766.*

⁴¹ Poriau, *Over enig wel en wee van de academies, p. 24.*

⁴² Poriau, *Over enig wel en wee van de academies, p. 19.*

⁴³ Van de Vijver, De Jonge, *Ingenieurs en architecten, p. 151.*

⁴⁴ Van de Vijver, De Jonge, *Ingenieurs en architecten, p. 152.*

the exclusive domain of the crafts. The edict freed the visual artists from craft commitments and reinforced the fact that craft guilds had lost their participation in the art education.⁴⁵

3. Ghent and his Academy

In what follows, the situation in the city of Ghent, although only a provincial town with a regional impact during the 17th and 18th century⁴⁶, will be further examined, and this for two important reasons. Firstly, already since the end of the 13th century, a wide variety of economic activities was organized into different crafts in the city.⁴⁷ These corporations often played a decisive role in city's life until the end of the 18th century. Secondly, as previously mentioned in the introduction, the 18th century is the pre-eminent century for a thorough research of the relationship between the craft guilds and the academy, for two reasons. The discourse of the academy changed, just as the consumption patterns, during the 18th century. Precisely because the academy of Ghent was established in the middle of the eighteenth century, it provides a good case for investigating how a new institution associated with these trends.

The founding father of the academy of Ghent was Philippe Charles Marissal (Gent, 1698—Gent, 1770). Marissal was taught by painter Gillis le Plat and acquired the title of master in the Guild of Saint-Luke in Ghent in 1729. Both during 1737-1739 and again during 1759-1762, he acted as a board member in this corporation, as a sworn man [gezworene]. He stayed in Italy for a short while and studied in Paris at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (1743-1747). After his return, he was convinced of the importance of an academy for the city's artistic prestige and quality, and he consequently decided to open a “vrije partikuliere tekenschool” [free private drawing school] in his own home in 1748.⁴⁸ It was an ideal arrangement for Marissal since he was, according to later biographers, more suited to teach other people about art than to practice it himself.⁴⁹ The private school provided students with a drawing and painting education on weekdays, in exchange for an annual donation of a small sum [120 groten]. Due to space concerns, Marissal could only provide housing for 10 students but he was quickly granted approval to use the first floor of the home of the shooting Guild of Saint-Anthony. The entire operation was very modest in character. In 1751, the local city government granted Marissal the right to open an “algemeene Akademie” [general academy]. The academy of Ghent was now an official institution.⁵⁰ The history of the institution during its formative years is unfortunately severely lacking, due to a scarcity of source materials. Fortunately, the large reorganization of the Academy after Marissal's passing in 1770 had a most beneficial effect. Up until 1770, the institution “n'aiaint que mediocrement repondu a l'objet de son institution” and it became imperative to the academy's survival to acquire “une forme plus solide et plus durable”. This was ensured by appointing a

⁴⁵ Poriau, *Over enig wel en wee van de academies*, pp. 24, 26; Van de Vijver, *De Jonge, Ingenieurs en architecten*, pp. 151-153; De Wilde, *Geschiedenis onzer Academiën*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ Duverger, J., *Kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden: Deel III: van het einde van de zestiende eeuw tot onze tijd in Zuid-Nederland, Utrecht-Antwerpen*, 1956, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Boone, M., “A medieval metropolis”, in: Boone, M., Deneckere, G. (ed.), *Ghent. A City of All Times*, Gent, 2010, p. 63.

⁴⁸ De Doncker, T., *Gentse kunstenaars – Eenheid en diversiteit. Sociaaleconomische studie op basis van een prosopografisch onderzoek*, Gent, 2007, *Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling*, III, pp. 52-54; CAG, ASK 286, Edm. de Vriendt: *Krantenuitknipsels met de geschiedenis van de academie, 1751-1924*.

⁴⁹ Immerzeel Jr., J., *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters van het begin der vijftiende eeuw tot heden*, Amsterdam, 1843, II, p. 204.

⁵⁰ Van de Vivere, E. K. J., Spruyt, P. L., *Historie en inrichting der Koninglyke akademie van teeken-, schilder- en bouw-kunden, opgerecht binnen de stad Gent*, Gent, 1794, p. 3; CAG, ASK 287, *Koninklijke academie: aantekeningen verzameld door Edm. de Vriendt*.

new board and providing new regulations and rules. The appointment of a clerk was a further aid to the survival of source material during the last three decades of the 18th century.⁵¹ Moreover, the academy was split up into 3 schools in 1770, each consisting of 2 classes. In the first school, students were taught the fundamentals of the human figure, in the second school life drawing or model drawing, and modeling and clay modeling was educated, and the third school, finally, focussed on architecture in general and the five architectural styles in particular.⁵² Finally, the institution was allowed to add “koninklijk” [Royal] to its title: the academy was henceforth known as l’Académie Royale de Dessin, Peinture et Architecture.⁵³

4. The Academy of Ghent: Composition of the Student Population

The principal question rises whether individuals from the craft guilds, in particular the art crafts, frequented the academy. Marissal certainly did not disapprove of their presence. At the foundation of the academy he mentioned the target audience of the new institution. Marissal argued that [it is favorable in all places and cities when people can learn to draw, figure-drawing as well as drawing architectural elements and compositions, because not only members of the craft guilds, e.g. bricklayers, carpenters, sculptors, cabinet-makers, goldsmiths and silversmiths, but also a lot of other people have the opportunity to learn the science of architecture and the knowledge of the art of painting].⁵⁴ In short: Marissal opened the doors to the academy to both craft guild members and amateurs.

A detailed and comprehensive register containing the student population is not available, yet it is possible to gain insight into this population of the academy during the period 1770-1798. The 1770 reforms dictated that every two years a drawing contest was to be held. It was hoped these contests would encourage students in their drive to perfect their art skills. Additionally, it was stipulated that students who refused to enter the drawing contest, would be refused admission to the academy.⁵⁵ The contest results for 1772-1798 are still available.⁵⁶ 1798 is defensible as deadline of the research, because the corporative period in the Southern Low Countries came to an end in 1795. With the annexation of the former Austrian Netherlands to the French Republic in 1795, the Law of Le Chapelier (1791), which contained a prohibition of professional corporations, came in effect in our regions.⁵⁷ The contests however, were only held every two years, which made it possible for students who only frequented the academy for a single year to slip under the radar and not appear in the register. The contest registers were consequently supplemented with additional material to get a more detailed picture of the student population of the academy after the 1770 reforms. Two

⁵¹ CAG, ASK4, 1770, A: Gewone briefwisseling, nr 3 (28 mei 1770), Reglement voor de Academie van Gent.

⁵² CAG, ASK 4, 1770, D: Gewone zittingen, nr 2 (16 juni 1770), Verslag van de generale vergadering van de Academie.

⁵³ CAG, ASK 286, Edm. de Vriendt: krantenuitknipsels met de geschiedenis van de academie, 1751-1924.

⁵⁴ CAG, ASK 546, Register van de steunleden van de Academie 1751-176; “in alle plaetsen en steden favorable is als wanneer men aldaer publiquelijck en voor eenijder gaeding hebbende leert ende aenwijst het teekenen soo in figuren als in architecture voor soo veele daer dan niet alleene gheinstrueert en worden differente ambachten als bij exempel metsers, timmerlieden, beelthauders, schrijwerckers, gaut ende silversmeden, nemaer oock voor veel persoonen de ocasie hebbende van hun besigh te hauden en allenxkens in te boesemen de wetenschap van architecture ende kennisse van de schilderconst”.

⁵⁵ CAG, ASK 4, 1770, A: Gewone briefwisseling, nr 4 (16 juni 1770), Reglement van de Academie van schilderen bouwkunde van Gent.

⁵⁶ CAG, ASK 327, Register van de prijsuitreikingen 1772-1792; CAG, ASK 449, Wedstrijden van de Academie van Gent, 1772-1800.

⁵⁷ Roegijs, J., Van Sas, N.C.F., “Revoluties in Noord en Zuid (1780-1830)”, in: Blom, J.C.H., Lamberts, E. (red.), *Geschiedenis van de Nederlanden*, Baarn, 2004, p. 241; Dambruyne, De Gentse bouwvakambachten, p. 52.

registers are essential. The first comprises an alphabetical index of the disciples in the period 1770-1781, in addition to the names of a number of sponsors, associates, and board members of the academy.⁵⁸ Many names from the register cannot be found in the contest results, and vice versa. The second register contains the names of the sponsors of the academy up until and including 1776. In addition to their name, the register also provides the name of the student who could refine his art skills thanks to the financial support of the sponsors. Students who frequented the academy after 1776 were listed, if their sponsor deposited his contribution to the academy before 1776. The last entries date from 1784.⁵⁹ Similar registers for the last decade and a half of the 18th century are unfortunately unavailable. Ultimately, 1957 students can be retrieved.

Furthermore, the socio-economic profile of the students was determined by going through the membership lists of several craft guilds.⁶⁰ The selected craft guilds are: carpenters and cabinet makers, goldsmiths and silversmiths, masons and stonecutters, tin smiths and lead smiths, house painters, fine painters, smiths and “small” merchants. Of course, save the merchants, these are all potential artistic crafts. Table 1 displays the results of the data. Only those candidates were selected where there is absolute certainty that both in the academy and in the craft guild, the same person is involved. As a result, these are minimal numbers, since both the craft guild registers, as well as the registers of the academy often provide no additional details, save the name. The table also provides a numerical representation of the craft (masters, journeymen and apprentices) based on the survey of 1738. It goes without saying this is merely a snapshot, in contrast to column 2, which comprises the entire period of 1770-1798. Column 5 does however provide an indication of the size of the craft, which makes for a better interpretation of column 2. The first table supports the conclusion that craft guild members were part of the academy’s student population. In the next section, the craft guild of silversmiths and goldsmiths, as one of the art crafts, will be more closely examined.

Category	Number	Number relative to the total amount of students (%)	Number relative to the known amount of students (%)	Craft’s strength in numbers after the survey in 1738
Total number of students	1957	100	-	-
Unknown	1627	83,14	-	-

⁵⁸ CAG, ASK 319, Index alphabeticq behelsende de naemen van dheeren president ende directeurs van de coninglijcke academie van de teecken, bouw, ende schilderconst in Gend, van alle de gheassocieerde ende contrubuanten der selve academie, alsmede van alle de discipelen bij hem respectvelijck tot het frequenteren de gratuite lessen der voorseide academie gherecommandeert, ende gheadmitteert. Gheformeert bij den onderschreven secretaris ten jaere 1772, notaris De Meersman.

⁵⁹ CAG, ASK 321, Handtboeck voor de conincklijcke academie in Gend behelsende alle de naemen der heeren president, directeurs geassocieerde ende contribuanten der voorseide academie met alle de discipelen bij hun respectvelijck gerecommandeert ende geadmitteert, geformeert ten jaere 1772 door den onderschreven in qualiteijt van secretaris der selve academie (De Meersman, notaris).

⁶⁰ CAG, Maryns, Gentse ambachtsgilden 1-3.

Known	330	16,86	100	-
Carpenters and cabinet makers	229	11,70	69,39	261
Goldsmiths and silversmiths	44	2,25	13,33	-
Masons and stonecutters	24	1,23	7,27	166 (+ 160 onvrije werkkrachten)
Tinsmiths and lead smiths	17 (6+11)	0,87	5,15	41
House painters	9	0,46	2,73	-
Smiths	4	0,20	1,21	245
Small merchants	2	0,10	0,61	-
Wax candle makers	1	0,05	0,30	-
Fine painters	1	0,05	0,30	24

Table 1: Craft Profile of the Academy Students (1770-1798)

5. The Academy of Ghent versus the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths

The craft guild of goldsmiths and silversmiths had traditionally obtained a monopoly on the production of gold and silver objects within the city's jurisdiction. Even the marking and selling of gold and silver objects was part and parcel of their exclusive rights.⁶¹ Before one could practice the craft of smith, an apprenticeship was to be completed with a fully skilled craft master, which took 4 years in the 18th century. Furthermore, a student was required to have his name inscribed in the craft register of gold smiths and silver smiths.⁶² In the 18th century (1700-1796), no less than 277 pupils met this requirement.⁶³ Additionally, these students were cross-referenced with those who studied at the academy in Ghent. The result is a surprisingly high number. Well over 40% of the pupils of the craft guild of gold smiths and silver smiths frequented the academy in the period 1767-1796. The count takes 1767 as a starting point because the first individual to be inscribed in both registers (academy and craft guild) was inscribed in the craft guild in 1767. The academic education seemed to be more than a convenient phase in the career of a goldsmith or silversmith. The next section will look into the professional and academic career of these pupils.

Prints Class 2	19
Prints Class 2, attended by Prints Class 1	9
Unknown	7

⁶¹ CAG, 156-7, Register beantwoordingen van de neringen over hunnen oorsprong (decreet van 30 september, 1784).

⁶² CAG, 156-7, Register beantwoordingen van de neringen over hunnen oorsprong.

⁶³ CAG, Maryns, Gentse ambachtsgilden, 1: goud- & zilversmeden (1400-1796).

Prints Class 1	2
Prints Class 1, attended by Plaster Class	2
Prints Class 2, attended by Architecture Class	1
Plaster Class, attended by Life Drawing Class	1

Table 2: Classes Attended by Pupils of the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Craft Guilds

Contests	Number
No contests	7
One contest	18
Two contests	13
Three contest	2
Four contests	1

Table 3: Number of Contests at the Academy with Participating Apprentices of the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Craft Guilds

The acquisition of drawing skills at the Academy was incremental. During the initial stage, students were required to draw on the basis of illustrations and drawings. The central aim of the process was to master light and darkness. Subsequently, students were allowed to practice with the aid of paintings. The predominant goals here were the mastering of the elements of scale and perfecting the more realistic depiction of elements. The most talented students could consequently further enhance their skills by drawing with the aid of sculptures. In addition to an introduction to life drawing, this stage offered students the possibility to become skilled in different ways of looking at a specific work of art. The final stage of this incremental education consisted of life drawing.⁶⁴ Tables 2 & 3 showcase the academic education for goldsmiths and silversmiths. The majority chose to start their lessons in [“Prints Class 2”] during their stay at the academy. This class was the equivalent of the first stage in a drawing education. i.e. a basic level education. Students were taught basic concepts of figure drawing, a skill which would prove to be an advantage in creating new designs. This quality proved to be a prerequisite to achieve a career in the craft guild. After the revolt against emperor Charles V in Ghent in 1539-1540, three different prerequisites were imposed to become a master gold or silver smith. The candidate was to obtain citizenship of Ghent and to have a good reputation, a predetermined fee was to be paid, and an aspiring master was to produce a testament to his skills: a master piece. This entrance exam consisted of producing a utility,

⁶⁴ Spruyt, P., *De Beginselen der Teeken-konst, Behelzende de maniere om te teekenen na Printen, Teekeningen, Schilderyen, Plaester ende het Leven ofte Model. Aengewezen door de Geometria ofte Meet-Kunde. Zeer nut voor de jeugd. Met twintig plaeten.*, Gent, s.a., pp. 37-38.

which “het welcke daegelycx in usantie is” [can be used daily]. Prior to the exam, the candidate himself was to work out a sketch or a drawing, on the basis of which his utility was produced.⁶⁵ The academy would ensure that the students could succeed in this task (Figures 1a & 1b). These skills would of course pay off throughout one’s entire career (Figures 2a & 2b).

⁶⁵ CAG, 156-7, Register beantwoordingen van de neringen over hunnen oorsprong; CAG, 183-1, Schildersboeck, fol. 16v^o.



Figure 1a — Sketch of a can

(Spruyt, P., *De Beginselen der Teeken-konst, Behelzende de maniere om te teekenen na Printen, Teekeningen, Schilderyen, Plaester ende het Leven ofte Model. Aengewezen door de Geometria ofte Meet-Kunde. Zeer nut voor de jeugd. Met twintig plaeten.*, Gent, s.a., tab. II.)



Figure 1b — Model for a coffeepot (1767, pen drawing on paper, h: 47.6 cm, w: 27.8 cm)

(STAM, Stadsmuseum Gent, Inv. 645.)

Figures 1a and 2a are found in a drawing coursebook “*De Beginselen der Teeken-konst, Behelzende de maniere om te teekenen na Printen, Teekeningen, Schilderyen, Plaester ende het Leven ofte Model*” by Philippe Lambert Joseph Spruyt (1727-1801). Spruyt was born and raised in Ghent and studied at the Academy of Paris before being initiated as a fine art painter in the Guild of Saint-Luke in Ghent. On the 23rd of April 1770, he was appointed professor of drawing at the Academy of Ghent.⁶⁶ Figure 1a demonstrates that drawing everyday objects was part of the basic education in drawing classes at the Academy of Ghent at the end of the 18th century. This training was helpful to produce a sufficient master piece in the craft guild.

⁶⁶ De Doncker, T., *Gentse kunstenaars – Eenheid en diversiteit*, III, pp. 220-223.

Figure 1b displays the model of a curved rococo coffeepot, used to produce a master piece in the Ghent craft guild of goldsmiths and silversmiths. The cursive under the drawing, which was later crossed out, reads “Dese teeckeninghe is geordonneert door de geswoorene vande neeringe van de goudt ende silver smeeden aen P.J. Dupret tot maecken van sijne preuve Dezen 19 (novem)bre 1767. Carel de rynec t’alf ougsten geswooren”. The essential characteristics of Figure 1a are also found in 1b. This particular drawing is of course more elaborate, since a master piece was to be produced from it. During the lessons, Spruyt also paid attention to drawing flowers, frequently starting from a perfect circle. Flower ornaments were an oft-used decoration technique in, for example, brooches and medallions, as you can see on figure 2b. This illustration shows a stark high-relief with a flower vase on a stand, background with mountains and possibly depicting Rome. The inscription reads TIBERGHIE IN(VENIT) F(ECIT) 1787. It is probably a master piece by silver smith Pierre Joseph Jacques Tiberghien, who was inscribed in the craft guild of Ghent on the 31st of May 1787. Eight years earlier, in 1779, his name can be found in the academy registers.



Figure 2a — Sketchings of flower ornaments

(Spruyt, P., *De Beginselen der Teekenkonst, Behelzende de maniere om te teekenen na Printen, Teekeningen, Schilderyen, Plaester ende het Leven o□e Model. Aengewezen door de Geometria o□e Meet-Kunde. Zeer nut voor de jeugd. Met twintig plaeten., Gent, s.a., tab. X.*)



Figure 2b — Medallion P.J.J. Tiberghien (1787, silver, oval, h: 18 cm, w: 13 cm)

(STAM, Inv. 1009)

After the drawing contest, most traces of a student vanish, however. The more talented goldsmiths and silversmiths preferred the more advanced education [“Prints Class 1”] and decided to take part in the contest. This can be considered a continuation of their prior activities at the academy. In exceptional cases, students immediately started in the first class. Since the contest results were essential documents to the academy, because the contests were a foundation of their workings, the explanation cannot be found in the academy’s haphazard administration. If one assumes the documents are indeed detailed and correct, students who participated directly in the first class, merely filled the vacancies, a common practice.⁶⁷ Competence was not an issue here. The overwhelming majority (88,2%) of the goldsmiths and silversmiths ended their academic education here. Only very rarely did they continue practicing life drawing and [plastering]. The competences necessary for a professional career

⁶⁷ CAG, ASK 4, 1772, D: Zittingen, nr 45 (11 juni 1772), Verslag van de algemene vergadering van de Academie.

were as such acquired in the first stages of the drawing education. Further, more advanced formal art training was largely ignored.

In the next phase, the starting year of an individual's apprenticeship is compared to the year he started an academic education (Table 4). If the admission year is unknown, the year of the first contest participation is used as a reference (category 4 and 5). Under normal circumstances, the maximum period between the moment of admission and the first contest year is two years. Ten students show a difference of one or two years. It is consequently very likely that the number of individuals who started both educations simultaneously is higher than the present number.

Category	Number	Difference (in years)
Start apprenticeship before start academic education	4	1, 2, 10, 12
Start apprenticeship simultaneous with start academic education	5	-
Start academic education before start apprenticeship	6	1, 1, 3, 3, 4, 9
Start apprenticeship before first contest year	18	1,1,1,1,1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 11, 11, 12, 13, 13, 16, 16, 19
First contest before start apprenticeship	7	1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 4, 10
No data	1	-

Table 4: Comparison of the Start of the Apprenticeship in the Craft Guild and the Start of the Academic Education of the Apprentices of the Goldsmith and Silversmith Craft Guilds

The start of an academic education simultaneously with, or after the apprenticeship appears to be the normal, logical pattern. The statutes of 1770 even mentions that frequenting the academy is reserved to persons who could present a certificate of good conduct to the board of the Academy. This certificate was to be signed by a pastor or a pupil's master.⁶⁸ The practice suggests that apprentices, and more than likely, journeymen or assistants were a part of the academy's audience. The education on the work floor by guild masters chiefly consisted of gradually taking over more and more complex and differentiated tasks, which the master was to perform for the task he had received or for the object he was producing. The craftsman was to be self-sufficient and the teaching of drawing skills was probably an all too

⁶⁸ CAG, ASK 4, 1770, A: Gewone briefwisseling, nr 4 (16 juni 1770).

time-consuming occupation, since it added little to nothing to the immediate production numbers of the workshop. To acquire new designs and to learn how to produce design, the academy seemed to be the perfect location. Furthermore, it only rarely happened that the guild master was required to pay the academy's costs himself. Often, one could retain the help of an affluent member of the nobility or of religious citizens who covered the costs.⁶⁹ Frequenting the academy was as such not only beneficial to the workshop's assistants, but also to the masters themselves. Without any effort, even financial, he could be kept up to date of the latest trends by his aids.

Almost a third of the research population resided at the academy first, before taking the step to the craft guild. This highly irregular pattern is inexplicable based on the imposed minimum age by the institutions. One was to be at least twelve years of age to be allowed to frequent the academy.⁷⁰ The minimum age for apprentices in the gold smith craft guilds was not legally determined, but when the aspiring goldsmith approached the age of twelve, he was deemed fit to learn a craft.⁷¹ In short, at the age of twelve one was free to join either the academy or the craft guild. In most cases, the choice for the academy occurs only a few years before the choice for the craft guild. Upon enrolling at the academy, one was already fairly certain which professional career one would take. This hypothesis is backed up by the fact that pupils who first emerged at the academy and only later in the craft guild for gold or silver smith, did not take another education at the academy than individuals who had first arrived at the guild and who later moved on to the academy. This is further reinforced by the fact that different students who first arrived at the academy in the ensuing years, were registered in the craft guild as an apprentice to their own father. Their professional path had already been paved before they set foot in the academy. Part of the population saw the academy as a possible introduction to the trade. One got acquainted with one's own talents, qualities and skills, one learned how to work under strict working conditions, one was forced to accept authority, one learned to improve and handle competition. In addition to acquiring drawing skills and keeping up to date with trends, these skills were most beneficial to aspiring apprentices and the academy proved to be an ideal breeding ground. One could prepare for future aspects of the trade, often for free. If, furthermore, the master had a choice between different pupils and a selection was required, the (successful) academic background of one of the candidates might well provide an increase in chances. In summary, frequenting the academy was a possible guarantee for more success in the future professional career.

The case was made here that the time one spent at the academy, could be both before, in conjunction with, and after the apprenticeship in the craft guild. One essential consequence is that the student's profile at the academy could differ greatly. The crafts were traditionally hierarchically very strictly organized. Within each craft guild, it was possible to discern four possible social and judicial levels, each with their specific rights and duties. In ascending order: apprentice, aid or journeyman, the master and the board member.⁷² Within the walls of the academy, however, the fourfold hierarchy of the guild occupied a place in the background. Masters would sit next to apprentices of the craft, or even future apprentices. In the drawing contest of 1786, for example, Joannes Barthel achieved the 70th position. Petrus de Meyer is ranked barely eight places lower. Their drawing skills were almost equally judged, however,

⁶⁹ CAG, ASK 321, Handtboeck voor de conincklijke academie in Gend.

⁷⁰ CAG, ASK 4, 1777, A: Gewone briefwisseling, nr 122 (3 november 1777), Reglementen van de Koninklijke Academie van de stad Gent.

⁷¹ De Jager, R., "Meester, leerjongen, leertijd. Een analyse van zeventiende-eeuwse Noord-Nederlandse leerlingencontracten van kunstschilders, goud- en zilversmeden", in: Oud Holland, CIV, 1990, 2, p. 70.

⁷² Dambruyne, De Gentse bouwvakambachten, p. 62.

on the level of the craft, there was a big difference between both. Since 1780, Barthel was recognized as master gold and silversmith. On the contrary, Petrus de Meyer was inscribed in the craft register as pupil in 1788. As a result, on the one hand, the academy supported the craft system, but at the other hand and at the same time, the academy broke the craft's hierarchy. The case of Florentinus de Rinck is even more striking. He was ranked 10th in the highly regarded model drawing contest of 1786. As journeyman in the craft guild of the gold and silver smiths, he performed much better than master Barthel. For those masters, the academy was not a sort of school for skills which were required in a professional setting, but a place for additional schooling. A fully trained craft master could be introduced to new ornaments, models, and decorative techniques there to further refine their skills. Studies concerning Ghent's material culture strongly emphasize the fashion factor in the second half of the 18th century.⁷³ A smith was equally subject to the whims of fashion. Changing tastes resulted in the production of relatively cheap items, often far too small to notice (snuff boxes, earrings, etc.).⁷⁴ Additionally, decorative ornamentations were subject to the regence, rococo and classicist styles. Especially in the civil silverware in the 18th century, these embellishments were adapted with great virtuosity and taste.⁷⁵ Altering jewelry to the changing fashions was another widespread practice.⁷⁶ If goldsmiths wanted to stand a chance on the market, they were forced to stay up to date with the newest developments. In a period when the crafts could not adequately respond to the task, the academy provided an answer. The institution kept up to date with the newest changes in style. Two important aspects factor in here, viz. the specialized teaching staff and the academy's purchasing policy. Professors at the academy possessed a large database of books, aimed at architecture, engineering, and the applied arts.⁷⁷ Education was provided by genuine experts. Furthermore, the academy was continually expanding their study materials and keeping it up to date (books, plaster models, drawings). In the first year after the 1770 reforms, the collection was expanded with figures from Bruges and Antwerp. The next year, a collection of plaster figures was acquired from Amsterdam. What's more, the academy even paid for several works of Jean-François de Neufforge.⁷⁸ His *Recueil élémentaire d'architecture* (1757) played a pivotal role in the definitive acceptance of the classical culture of architecture in the Southern Low Countries. The work ensured the education of a full generation of craftsmen and architects and it simultaneously allowed an established generation to keep up to date.⁷⁹ In summary, frequenting the academy meant access to a virtually unlimited supply of new decorative elements.

6. Conclusion

⁷³ For example: Pisters, J., *Eenvoud en luxe binnenshuis: studie van Gentse interieurs uit de 18e eeuw*, Universiteit Gent, Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling, Gent, 1983, 3 dln; Bourgeois, I., *Sfeer of pracht en praal: een kwantitatieve benadering van decoratieve voorwerpen en binnenshuisversiering in achttiende-eeuwse Gentse interieurs*, Universiteit Gent, Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling, Gent, 1986, 2dln.

⁷⁴ De Munck, B., "Skills, Trust, and Changing Consumer Preferences: The Decline of Antwerp's Craft Guilds from the Perspective of the Product Market, c. 1500-c.1800", in: *International Review of Social History*, LIII (2), 2008, p. 224.

⁷⁵ Dhanens, E., "Edelsmeedkunst", in: *Catalogus. Gent, duizend jaar kunst en cultuur. Catalogus van het Museum voor Schone Kunsten te Gent, 19 april-29 juni 1975*, Gent, 1975, II, p. 258.

⁷⁶ De Bie, A., *Voor eigen winkel? Producers, winkel houden en afhankelijkheidsrelaties bij de Antwerpse edelsmeden, ca. 1648-ca. 1748*, Antwerpen, 2009, Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling, p. 25.

⁷⁷ Coppejans-Desmedt, H., Huyghebaert, J., "Het departement van de Schelde", in: Hasquin, H. (ed.), *Het culturele leven in onze provincies onder Frans Bewind*, Brussel, 1989, p. 124.

⁷⁸ CAG, 2004-2, *Académie de dessin, peinture et architecture/Academie van de teeken-, schilder- en de bouwkunst, Rekeningen (1771-1793)*.

⁷⁹ Van de Vijver, De Jonge, *Ingenieurs en architecten*, p. 55.

The case study of goldsmiths and silversmiths in Ghent at the end of the early modern period clearly shows that economic success was not exclusively tied to membership of the craft guild. One did have to be a member of the corporation, which required the creation of a master piece, the sketches of which were to be drawn beforehand. The academy in turn offered apprentices of the craft an opportunity to develop their drawing skills with a view to the master piece. Additionally, the aspect of fashion in the material culture played an increasingly important role. Crafts were sometimes accused of not being up to date with new trends. And even individual masters had difficulties keeping up to date of all important changes. Here too, the academy bridged the gap. Expert education and a comprehensive collection of study aids allowed craftsmen to further school themselves. Finally, the creation of products à la mode was essential if a gold or silver smith was to stand a chance on the market. In short, an institution which was founded to rebel against the craft guild, allowed individuals in the second half of the 18th century to reach the status of master within the craft and to establish or reinforce their position.