

A Spectral Spectacle: Dutch Mannerist Portals at Amsterdam's New Philanthropic Sites, 1581-1645

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Abstract

After Amsterdam's late medieval Catholic monasteries were surrendered to the Protestant government in 1578, four of these properties were converted into an orphanage, a mental asylum, and two gender-specific reformatories respectively before the turn of the century. Portals with Dutch Mannerist expressions were installed at the principal entrances as a publicly visible feature of modernisation for the repurposed complexes. This essay is a study of these architectural objects and their socio-political value for the city's philanthropic campaign that affirmed middle-class power. It argues that the portals, completed with narrative relief panels and didactic inscriptions, were a means for Amsterdam's authorities to redefine the spectacle of social marginality. Underclass visibility to the general population, once a concrete sight of panhandlers and vagrants occupying the urban landscape, became an abstract image of civic discipline. Such an image enabled sequestered and disappeared lives to reappear, with a spectral quality integral to Foucault's analysis of modern society's compulsion to stow away indigent bodies. Considering the seventeenth-century Dutch moral geography of moderating wealth through philanthropy, such a 'spectral spectacle' paralleled the Baroque theatricality of Counter-Reformation Rome as a spatial experience that advanced a more secular mode of devotion to the community.

Keywords: public art, Classical architecture, portals, urban spectacle, poor relief, disciplinary power

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In 1585, at the time of Pope Sixtus V's plan to transform Rome into a splendid destination of Counter-Reformation pilgrimage, Amsterdam commenced the first phase of expansion beyond its medieval core. Whereas Rome gained a scenographic layout of piazzas, fountains, obelisks, and connecting avenues to excite the spiritually motivated visitors, Amsterdam became a picturesque setting of canals, towers, and portals where worldly merchants resided. Tree-lined waterways traversed the dense urban fabric. Spires of new Protestant churches and antiquated barbicans dominated the skyline. Ornamental structures with Italian expressions, modern for the time, accentuated the entryways of various buildings, churchyards, and the bastioned city walls. A number of these are credited to the sculptor and architect Hendrick de Keyser, renowned for his bourse at the Dam that was the pride of this global entrepôt during the Dutch 'Golden Age'. Portals of all types and scales were prominent landmarks at this time. Today, the handful that have survived from the early modern period are more or less obscure artefacts.

On the surface, each portal in Amsterdam was a composition of Classical architectural elements, relief panels, and sculptures for identifying the building's purpose. However, the portals gracing the municipal orphanage, the mental asylum, and the two gender-specific reformatories had a more ambivalent dimension worthy of closer examination. Inviting entrances doubled as protective gates that encouraged figurative rather than literal access of the interior. They supported an early modern system of philanthropy, under a secular government's administration, that brought about an increasingly abstract relationship between the general public and the indigent population. This essay is an assessment of six portals installed at four philanthropic sites in Amsterdam: the Burgerweeshuis (burgher orphanage), Dolhuis (mental asylum), Rasphuis (men's reformatory), and Spinhuis (women's reformatory). It questions the existing scholarly reception of these structures as artistic fragments with limited relevance, mainly by consulting graphical and textual representations that convey the historical attention to these civic landmarks. The overarching argument is that the middle-class government was appropriating Dutch Mannerist architecture's theatricality, ground-breaking at the turn of the seventeenth century, to redefine the spectacle of social marginality.

Reflecting neither the portals' connection to De Keyser as a stellar Renaissance figure of the Netherlands, nor the city's dedication to preserving these 'Golden Age' relics over

four centuries, scholarship on this subject remains insubstantial.¹ Since they have survived at their original locations as remembrance of an elaborate municipal system, the principal entry structures of the Burgerweeshuis, Rasphuis, and Spinhuis are mentioned in modern titles on the three philanthropic establishments.² Nevertheless, discussions of these portals tend to be brief and descriptive. Social historians have yet to assess the essential role that these structures play in the building complexes' ideological functions, and architectural historians have yet to situate this development within a larger narrative concerning the Dutch patronage of Classical art under the rising middle-class.³ These points are carefully addressed in this essay. Beyond revisiting the principal portals of the Burgerweeshuis, Rasphuis, and Spinhuis with a more thorough survey of these artefacts' documentation in early modern prints and texts, the analysis delves into three dismantled portals. Two were at the Dolhuis, and the third was past the principal entrance at the Rasphuis.

Central to this study are several rare images of the Amsterdam portals that shed light on how the architecture, what David Summers would call *real spaces*, fostered the public's visually oriented and disembodied engagement with the underclass, or what Summers would call *virtual spaces*.⁴ The function of Mannerist excess and dynamism in the early seventeenth-century production of impressive spaces must also be contextualised in the light of late sixteenth-century Dutch architectural theory. A number of intellectual positions inform the contemplation of a 'spectral spectacle'. As this concerns the development of a new class difference in the early modern period, the discussion is attentive to György Lukács's idea of *false consciousness*, Henri Lefebvre's comments on *alienation*, and their joint contribution to Guy Debord's notion of the *capitalist spectacle* that has remained influential for art historians like Timothy James Clark.⁵ Another framework integral to this essay is Michel Foucault's characterisation of indigent presence in the urban domain as spectral – a point commonly overlooked when architectural historians reference his work *Discipline and Punish*. Finally, the logic of a spectral spectacle – an ideologically founded experience of emblematic and intrinsically abstract images rather than physical bodies

1 Two notable titles on the subject are Boas, 'Rasphuispoort', esp. 123-124; Koot and Hofker, *Amsterdamse poortjes*, esp. 7-8. The former is focussed on the Rasphuis portal inscription from a literary perspective; the latter is a collection of Hofker's drawings of the portals with a short description for each case.

2 Today, the former Burgerweeshuis portal is at Kalverstraat 92, the former Rasphuis portal is at Heiligeweg 19, and the former Spinhuis portal is at Spinhuissteeg 1. The Burgerweeshuis had a secondary portal on the Sint Luciënsteeg, added in 1634, that has survived as one of Amsterdam Museum's functioning egresses. The principal entry portal of the Lazarushuis (lazaret), a late fifteenth-century pest asylum that was repurposed into a home for pensioners and the mentally ill in the seventeenth century, has been preserved. It was relocated approximately two hundred metres northwest to Sint Antoniesluis 22 in 1976.

3 For recent titles containing discussions of the Burgerweeshuis, Dolhuis, Rasphuis, and Spinhuis portals, see Endlich and Van der Zee, *Burger-Weeshuys*, 29; Kromm, 'Domestic Spatial Economies', 112-114; Schmidt, 'Building Discipline', 168-170. Spierenburg's brief account of the Rasphuis and Spinhuis portals is exceptional in recognising their theatrical designs' utility for displaying justice: Spierenburg, *Prison Experience*, 87-88.

4 Summers, *Real Spaces*, 43-45. Disembodiment is spatial presence with the body absent. In other words, space is experienced cerebrally rather than physically. This concept is descended from Merleau-Ponty's existentialist-phenomenological theory on the sentient body's involvement in mental perception and cognition: Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, esp. 3-14. See also Leder, *Absent Body*, esp. 1-8.

5 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, esp. 52-53; Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, I, esp. 164-170; Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, esp. 2-11; Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 9; Boal et al., *Afflicted Powers*, 19-23.

or concrete social conditions – is explained with Jacques Lacan's and Roland Barthes's semiotic theories. Building upon the observation that Amsterdam's philanthropic campaign was manifested architecturally as a secular parallel to Counter-Reformation Rome, the six cases of Dutch Mannerist portals are explored with respect to the Baroque techniques for rendering a spectacle: framing and exposing, simulation and illusion, veiling and unveiling.

Philanthropy in Early Modern Amsterdam

Philanthropy in early modern Amsterdam was distinguishable from medieval charity, even though it was still a civic duty tied to the Church.⁶ Protestant humanists rejected the Catholic notion of donors investing in the afterlife and sought to end the unregulated donations that only brought on more panhandling with many cases of fraud.⁷ Moreover, the decentralised organisation of aid throughout the Dutch Republic, in addition to representing effective government at the municipal level, was a competitive enterprise that celebrated the local elites. For the new influential middle class that attained its wealth from trade, supporting the indigent population with the systematic collection of donations and operation of shelters was a ritual of moderating material excess. As Simon Schama has argued in *The Embarrassment of Riches*, the Dutch were apprehensive of 'drowning in luxury' as much as 'drowning in destitution'.⁸ Households from a range of income brackets donated, but the most generous gifts were the bequests of affluent merchants and their family members.⁹ Further attesting to early modern Dutch philanthropy as a historical case of middle-class power was the fact that the regents who headed the municipal philanthropic establishments were from the well-situated families of merchants, like the other elected government officials in Amsterdam.¹⁰ This distinct phase of poor relief preceded the centrally planned welfare programmes of industrialised nation-states. Instead of 'charity' or 'welfare', the enterprises from such a phase may be described as 'philanthropy' to underline private interests motivating donations to the public, since the term is employed with that connotation today.¹¹

When introduced at the end of the sixteenth century, Dutch philanthropic establishments presented an apparent departure from Catholic charity that was not necessarily

6 Historians agree that Amsterdam had a mixed system of philanthropy that involved secular and ecclesiastical leadership, with the latter raising more funds and serving more inhabitants despite the former's political dominance: Groenveld, 'Social Assistance', 199-204; Kuijpers, 'Migrantenstad', 289-299; Van Leeuwen, 'Giving', 331-332.

7 Parker, *Reformation of Community*, 65.

8 Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 47.

9 Heerma van Voss and Van Leeuwen, 'Charity', 185-186.

10 Burke, *Venice and Amsterdam*, 42; Muller, *Charity*, 9-10.

11 Van Leeuwen also uses the term 'philanthropy' in his account of seventeenth-century Amsterdam: Van Leeuwen, 'Giving', 301.

observable in other Protestant states.¹² Travellers from Germany and England in the second half of the seventeenth century were struck by the degree to which Amsterdam's citizens cooperated with governmental, ecclesiastical, and individual efforts to aid the underclass. They were also fascinated with the successful Dutch system of depositing various indigent groups in their own shelters to promote urban order.¹³ After Henry VIII's dissolution of England's monasteries, small-scale almshouses were built throughout the country as the new charitable institutions. In London, Edward VI founded several hospices for seniors, the infirm, and the mentally disordered. There was also the conversion of his father's Bridewell Palace into a complex for the indigent, with an orphanage and a reformatory.¹⁴ Despite this overlap with the Dutch system, Tudor poor relief was the most innovative in the monarchy's enactment of national laws against panhandling and vagrancy, which did not represent most of England's attachment to locally organised and loosely structured almsgiving.¹⁵

In the German territories, the Protestant Reformation did not revolutionise a philanthropic culture that had historically depended on the guilds more than the Church.¹⁶ Even in Hanseatic cities that preceded Amsterdam as sites of merchant power, there was never a new moral geography of participating in philanthropy to compensate for wealth accumulation. Theological reforms only led to morally guided municipal policies allocating more resources to the blamelessly diseased while showing less forgiveness towards the wilfully idle.¹⁷ Further north in Scandinavia, the transition from monastic to civic supervision of the indigent population was indebted to Dutch and English precedents. Copenhagen's orphanage and reformatory, for instance, were modelled after the exploitation of underclass labour sources in the Dutch Republic. However, in a move more akin to the situation in England, Christian IV steered these publicly funded establishments to validate his anti-vagrancy laws and, in turn, affirm a monarchy escalating to absolutism.¹⁸ Where the Dutch were truly exceptional was in their use of almshouses, asylums, hospices, orphanages, and reformatories to salute the self-governing public.¹⁹ Politically, this did not only encapsulate the Republic's rejection of Habsburg Spain's imperial claims, but also reflected Amsterdam's rivalry with Venice as esteemed port cities under merchant leadership.²⁰

12 For a comparative study that looks at early modern poor relief in Catholic and Protestant Europe, with consideration of centralised versus decentralised systems and formal versus informal aid, see Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance*, 100-142.

13 Brown, *Reysen*, 17-20; Carr, *Travellours Guide*, 28-31; Temple, *United Provinces*, 170-171; Von Zesen, *Amsterdam*, 195-201, 212, 218-221, 284-291, 302-307, 315-317.

14 Grell and Cunningham, 'Reformation', 27.

15 Slack, *English Poor Law*, 17.

16 Kintner, 'Welfare, Reformation, and Dearth', 64-65.

17 Jütte, 'Health Care Provision', 109-111.

18 Israel, 'Dutch Influence', 70-73; Ladewig Petersen, 'Wrath of God', 151-155; Kouri, 'Health Care and Poor Relief', 191-192.

19 The Venetian Republic was another European state with a poor relief system credited to middle-class power. As the Venetians continued to practice Catholic charity, unlike the Dutch, monasteries and ecclesiastically affiliated confraternities remained key sites for supporting the underclass: Nichols, *Art of Poverty*, 116; Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, esp. 1-29.

20 Burke, *Venice and Amsterdam*, esp. 32-51, compares the administrative structures of these two cities.

Upon renouncing its Catholic affiliation to endorse Dutch Calvinism in 1578, Amsterdam's government outlawed public worship for Catholics and seized all monastic properties.²¹ This episode is known as the Alteration. Numerous fourteenth- and fifteenth-century monastic complexes that made up the medieval urban fabric were either torn down or converted into philanthropic establishments to house three distinct groups of socioeconomically disadvantaged citizens. The first and largest category were those incapable of self-support. These 'deserving poor' included orphans, seniors, widows, the chronically ill, the mentally disordered, and the intellectually disabled. The second category were outlaws, sentenced to incarceration and labour as an alternative to capital punishment or exile.²² The final category were pensioners called *proveniers* or *kostkopers*, often widowers, who paid modest sums to secure accommodation and board for their remaining years.²³

Compared to the late medieval monasteries that serviced a spectrum of indigent groups collectively, early modern philanthropic establishments were more specialised. In Amsterdam, there were almonries, almshouses, hospices, mental asylums, orphanages, and reformatories. From the modern perspective, establishments like almonries, almshouses, and orphanages are associated with welfare. Hospices and mental asylums are related to medical facilities. Reformatories are essentially prisons. However, published descriptions of Amsterdam from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries placed all of these within the same category of civic buildings called *godshuizen*. Literally 'God's houses', this now outdated early modern term imparts the contemporary understanding of philanthropy as a Christian virtue, regardless of the Church's involvement.²⁴

Redefining the Spectacle of Social Marginality

Until the 1650s, Amsterdam's philanthropic establishments were located inside former monastic complexes. Although the repurposing of these sites entailed some new construction, the most perceptibly new feature was the portal design that flaunted the Dutch adaptation of Italian architecture. This type of addition to existing urban structures embodied both an opportunity and a challenge for the municipal government to

21 Private worship of Catholicism was tolerated in *schuilkerken*, literally 'hidden churches', but often translated as 'clandestine churches'. Contrary to their generic title, these spaces were known to the authorities and the public. The Begijnhof (béguinage) was Amsterdam's only monastic complex that remained a Catholic site after the turn of the seventeenth century: Spaans, 'Stad van vele geloven', 402-405.

22 Groenveld, 'Social Assistance', 194-199. Groenveld recognises that many outlaws were simply idlers, and the government was relying on incarceration and labour to punish these unproductive members of society.

23 Pensioners were not technically members of the underclass. However, the affordable housing and assisted living upon which they depended were part of Amsterdam's early modern philanthropic system, as the English traveller William Montague acknowledged. He used the term 'Brother's House' to denote this type of accommodation for pensioners: Montague, *Delights of Holland*, 180. See also Van der Vlis, *Leven in armoede*, 284.

24 For the usage of the term *godshuizen* to denote Amsterdam's philanthropic establishments in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, see Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 403; Commelin, *Amsterdam*, IV, 102; Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 241. Foucault refers to the administrative integration of poor relief, health care, and criminal justice during the early modern period as 'The Great Confinement': Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 38-64.

underscore its philanthropic campaign as a supplantation of traditional charity. The project pulled in seemingly opposing directions: it was detaching the city from memories of Catholicism while being physically attached to monasteries; and it sought to maximise a building's visibility with minimal space. Dutch Mannerist portals replaced the introverted character of late medieval sites for indigent support with an expressive quality. As some of Amsterdam's most captivating art objects in public places, they were finished with intricate architectural forms and allegorical images, recalling triumphal archways that fortified allegiance to the sovereign as much as altarpieces that directed the mortal eye to salvation. On the one hand, the portal designs were products of the contemporary preoccupation with Mannerist aesthetics from Northern Italy, which the Dutch began to assimilate in the sixteenth century through Pieter Coecke van Aelst's translation of Sebastiano Serlio's architectural treatises and Hans Vredeman de Vries's interpretative drawings.²⁵ On the other hand, they belonged with an emergent local custom of identifying urban houses with decorative gable stones (*gevelstenen*).²⁶

At the four monastic complexes that became the Burgerweeshuis, Dolhuis, Rasphuis, and Spinhuis, an imperative behind the installation of Dutch Mannerist portals was the desire to redefine the spectacle of social marginality. Historically, the indigent population was not only a dynamic facet of urbanisation because panhandlers, vagrants, and prostitutes wandered the streets. Until the seventeenth century, almsgiving on a Sunday and other holidays in the Dutch Republic was also a festive occasion that attracted large crowds. Alongside the usual distribution of sustenance, clothing, and peat, politicians would sometimes bribe supporters with wine.²⁷ As the art historian Sheila Muller has pointed out, this practice informed Pieter Bruegel and his successor Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot in their portrayal of the seven Catholic works of mercy as fantastically Dionysian scenes.²⁸ Until 1604, an annual procession of Amsterdam's lepers through Dam Square was held on the Monday following Epiphany, in order to solicit donations from spectators (fig. 1). This was an example of the sensational way in which receivers of alms appeared to their givers.²⁹ Punishment of criminals was carried out with equal public gusto, with serious offenders executed on scaffolds and lesser ones shamed in pillories.³⁰

Amsterdam's philanthropic establishments reduced the overall visibility of panhandlers, vagrants, and idlers on the streets.³¹ More importantly, sights of these citizens as a part of the urban experience were progressively more planned and controlled under the

25 Heuer, *The City Rehearsed*, 39-48; Meischke, 'Architectonische ontwerp', 213-217; Ottenheim, 'Classicism', 151-152.

26 Boers, *Gevelstenen*, esp. 7-13.

27 Muller, *Charity*, 268; Blockmans and Prevenier, 'Armoede', 520-521.

28 Muller, *Charity*, 95. See Pieter Bruegel, *Caritas*, 1559, engraving, 22,4 x 29,3 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. N 18 (PK); Joost Cornelisz. Droochsloot, *De zeven werken van barmhartigheid*, 1620-1650, oil on canvas, 99,8 x 147,4 cm, Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 11230.

29 Commelin, *Amsterdam*, IV, 159.

30 Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology*, 14-15, cites instances from the province of Holland. On public punishment in Amsterdam, see Spierenburg, *Spectacle of Suffering*, esp. 43-109. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 32-69, also addresses this history.

31 As Israel notes, compared to other European locations, Dutch cities had the lowest number of panhandlers and vagrants in public view: Israel, 'Dutch Influence', 71.



Fig. 1 Adriaen Nieulandt, *The Dam in 1604 during the last procession of lepers on the Monday after Epiphany, 1633*, oil on canvas, 227 x 322 cm, Amsterdam Museum.

municipal government. Following the renovation of Amsterdam's late medieval Catholic monasteries into the municipal orphanage, mental asylum, and reformatories, the popular conception of poverty in this affluent port city was also renewed. Socioeconomically disadvantaged groups were no longer pitied as God's less fortunate children who warranted the Church's unconditional protection. Instead, they were regarded as either incidentally or intentionally unproductive citizens, posing a social problem that the productive middle class could resolve with its economic power.³² From the introduction of Dutch Mannerist portals at renovated monastic complexes around the turn of the century to the construction of new buildings in the second half of the century, the architectural design of philanthropic establishments promoted a public engagement with the indigent population that was limited to a number of permanent sites. This was more about containing the spectacle than taking it away, which served to recast poverty as spectacular rather than

³² A number of historians have commented on this shifting conception of poverty in sixteenth-century Europe. For titles pertaining to the Dutch Republic, see Teeuwen, *Financing Poor Relief*, 23-31; Parker, *Reformation of Community*, 82-85; Prak, *Armenzorg*, 56-61. Contrasting the medieval perception of charity as honourable, Van der Vlis has argued that almsgiving in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic involved shame for the recipients: Van der Vlis, *Leven in armoede*, 277-279. With his discussion of 'self-help' among the impoverished community between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, Jütte has also suggested that receiving alms was a shameful last resort: Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance*, 83-99.

ordinary. The installation of portals was seized upon as an opportunity to frame, simulate, and unveil the community's view of the underclass. These were techniques with which Baroque architects, sculptors, and painters put on a Counter-Reformation spectacle in Rome, but when applied in Amsterdam, the theatrical effect achieved was for a different kind of public devotion that resembled a new 'religion' under the municipal authority.

Although tax revenues were a source of funding, the extent to which the municipal almshouses, asylums, hospices, orphanages, and reformatories relied on the government was not the same as modern welfare.³³ Donations through bequests, collection boxes around the city, and door-to-door services were vital.³⁴ Proceeds from theatre attendance were also donated to aid orphans and seniors.³⁵ Thus, the prominence of philanthropic establishments in Amsterdam was not only aimed at trumpeting the local authority's success in joining the Church as leaders of organised philanthropy; they also symbolised the inhabitants' direct participation in such a campaign. Prior to renovation, the medieval Catholic monasteries had chapels with tall steeples, designed to be visible from afar rather than at street level. The addition of Dutch Mannerist portals allowed for passers-by to identify the renovated monastic complexes as philanthropic establishments. Furthermore, most of these portals were assembled to be a sensational performance of sculpted figures and scenes that communicated the purpose of their respective sites. This architectural component effectively distilled an entire building to a visually arresting image at a more human scale. It succeeded the steeple as a landmarking object for repurposed monasteries that were no longer part of the ecclesiastical infrastructure.

Framing and Exposing: The Burgerweeshuis Portal

Begun in 1580, the Burgerweeshuis was a renovation of the Saint Lucy's Convent and an adjacent orphanage founded twenty years earlier on the Kalverstraat.³⁶ Previously nestled on a triangular island, formed by the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal canal forking into the perpendicular Spui canal, the renovated and expanded complex was connected to the Kalverstraat by a corridor. In 1581, a portal was installed at the end of this accessway to mark the orphanage's principal entrance and call attention to the philanthropic establishment (fig. 2). While there is still a structure at this location, only the relief panel design is part of the original composition. The Classically inspired frame and the rusticated elliptical archway below were probably added in the first decades of the seventeenth century.

33 See Prak's discussion of organised philanthropy in the Dutch Republic as a locally dependent enterprise that differs from today's state-administered system: Prak, 'Armenzorg', 49-53.

34 Van Leeuwen, 'Giving', 309-320.

35 As Dapper documents, more than 9000 guilders were donated annually to maintain the orphanage and the senior hospice. Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 441. See also Vanhaelen, *Comic Print*, 40.

36 According to Amsterdam Museum, the Saint Lucy's Convent was founded in 1414. Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 412, dates the adjacent orphanage's founding to 1561. The Amsterdam municipal archives consider 1520 to be the founding date of the Burgerweeshuis as an institution. There is a nineteenth-century listing of requisites for the orphanage residents that begins in 1523: Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Burgerweeshuis, 98B, List of regulations and laws regarding the reception of children, 1523-1800.



Fig. 2 Portal of the Burgerweeshuis at Kalverstraat 19, c. 1930, photograph, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.



Fig. 3 Joost Jansz. Bilhamer, Relief of the Kalverstraat portal at the Burgerweeshuis, 1581, limestone, 116,5 x 170,5 x 20 cm, Amsterdam Museum.

Credited to Joost Jansz. Bilhamer, the relief depicts four orphan girls and four orphan boys, dressed in the famed scarlet and sable uniform that echoed the colour scheme of the municipal coat of arms (fig. 3).³⁷ They are gathered around a giant medallion, with a white dove at the centre as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.³⁸

Contrasting with the Dutch Mannerist exercise of Italianate elements in the frame, such as the split pediments, lionheads on keystones, and scallop shell niches, the figures within do not exhibit the idealised proportions and naturalistic quality of Renaissance art. More evocative of Gothic sculptures from the International Gothic period and the late medieval aesthetics that remained popular in the Low Countries during the sixteenth century, the blushing orphans are compactly arranged, without the application of linear perspective, to fit the panel's rectangular border. Contemporaries would recognise the art as characteristic of the Dutch gable stone, a kind of nameplate for houses built between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. At the bottom of the relief panel are the last two lines of Joost van den Vondel's poem 'Op ons weeshuis' ('On our orphanage'). Since the poem was written around 1624 at the earliest, the inscription could not have been part of Bilhamer's design. Speaking on behalf of the orphans, Vondel pleads with donors to take pity and lend

37 The panel seen at the principal entrance of Amsterdam Museum today is a replica of the original, which is kept in the museum.

38 Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 277.

a hand: 'We are growing steadily in number and as a burden, our second [adoptive] fathers bemoan/Oh, do not proceed through this portal, unless you help us bear [the burden] a little.'³⁹

Thus, the Kalverstraat portal was not only a means for the public to identify the Burgerweeshuis as a landmark of Amsterdam. By including an expressive gable stone, the portal was also designed to solicit philanthropic gifts from citizens and visitors. Sized between a fortification entryway and a canal mansion entrance, this sufficiently imposing structure gave the impression that the orphanage was far from a modest home for underprivileged children. The fancy yet robust portal exuded middle-class pomp and military intimidation. Beyond it was a secluded community suggestive of an encampment for disciplining the parentless and vulnerable into respectable adults. Unlike the average orphans of the time, both in Amsterdam and Europe, residents of the Burgerweeshuis did not come from society's lowest stratum. However, without the government's intervention and the public's support, these young citizens were at risk of downward social mobility.⁴⁰

Developments in Netherlandish architectural theory during the late sixteenth century indicate that the portal's Mannerist expression was not simply a matter of fashion. In Antwerp, Coecke's translation of the fourth book in Serlio's *I sette libri dell'architettura* was a source for his pupil Vredeman's conceptual architectural proposals and visionary urban scenes.⁴¹ These drawings, published in the 1560s, championed Serlio's single-point perspective designs for stage sets as an ideal that Dutch builders could emulate to engineer ordered and alluring cities. Moreover, in his *Den eersten Boeck* from the same decade, Vredeman prescribes the experimental and idiosyncratic assembly of Italian ornaments for achieving a spectacular visual effect. After the turn of the century, De Keyser made use of the localised Mannerist language that Vredeman had pioneered to modernise Amsterdam with new churches, canal mansions, towers, and portals. The Kalverstraat portal's configuration is possibly based on an unrealised scheme by De Keyser that is printed in Salomon de Bray's *Architectura moderna* (fig. 4): both designs feature a pair of narrow scallop shell niches and protruding keystone over the archway.

For seventeenth-century Amsterdammers, it was not peculiar to associate an orphanage, or organised philanthropy in general, with the civic activity of attending a stage performance. This is not only because the Burgerweeshuis welcomed visitors to witness the extent to which the prosperous municipality could afford housing, schooling, and raising a brigade of orphans. Theatre provided a reliable stream of funding for the orphanage and the senior hospice in Amsterdam. Even after the shows were relocated to a playhouse

39 'Wij groeien vast in tal en last ons tweede vaders klagen/Ay ga niet voort door deze poort of help een luttel dragen' In the original panel kept in the Amsterdam Museum, spelling and capitalisation differ from the one seen at the entrance today. On the two walls perpendicular to the entrance, two niches face each other with inscribed panels that contain the remaining lines of Vondel's poem. See Commelin, *Amsterdam*, IV, 132.

40 In Anne McCants's study of Amsterdam's orphanages, she argues that the Burgerweeshuis was a space for middle-class rather than underclass children. However, she is specific that the class of citizens benefitting from this establishment is the middling *kleine burgerij*, not the city's elite. She makes this distinction because orphans are generally considered indigent members of the population: McCants, *Civic Charity*, 22-23.

41 See the images and analyses in Heuer, *The City Rehearsed*, 37-38, 64, 71-72; Schmidt, 'Building Artists', 320-322.

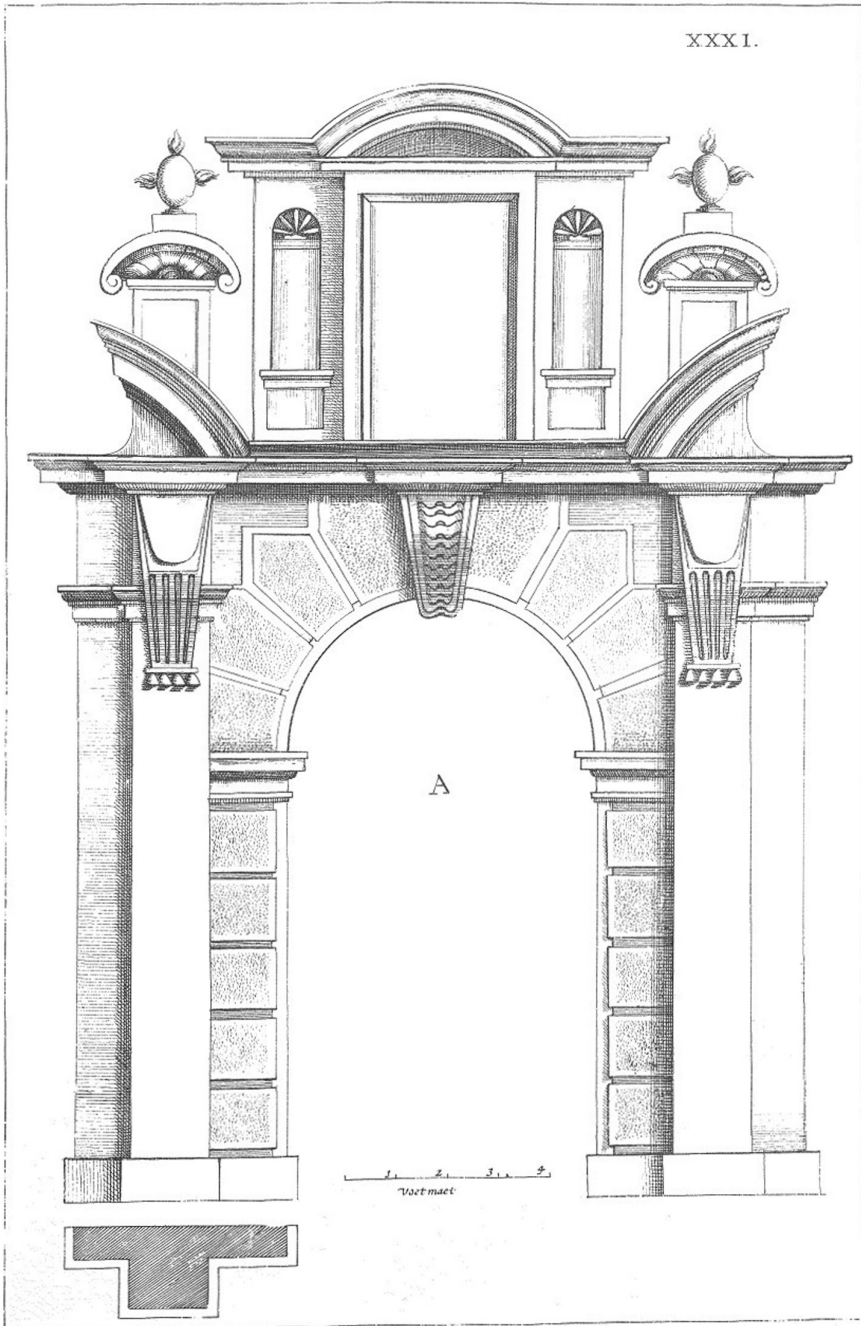


Fig. 4 Hendrick de Keyser, Two unbuilt portals, engraving, in: Salomon de Bray, *Architectura moderna ofte bouwinge van onsen tyt*, Amsterdam 1631, plate 31, The Hague, Royal Library.

in 1617, thespian-rhetoricians known as *rederijkers* continued to entertain crowds on the streets, often through the windows of taverns or from the balconies of inns.⁴² Jan Steen has depicted this practice in many of his paintings from the second half of the century.⁴³ Whether the audience was outdoors or indoors, Dutch theatre was a form of public education and a secular mode of preaching Christian morals that constantly reminded the audience about philanthropy.⁴⁴ As a device to redefine the spectacle of social marginality, the Kalverstraat portal design corresponded to the local conception of theatricality and how rhetorician performances carved out civic spaces in the urban domain. The ornate Dutch Mannerist architecture framed a representational, but inherently fictional, view of the orphans as thriving under God's grace and the people's mercy. Moreover, since the orphanage effectively removed an indigent group's physical presence in the city, the relief panel image functioned as a technique of reconstructing that visibility. In other words, the portal constituted a spectacle by exposing and then spotlighting a hidden segment of the urban population that was increasingly unfamiliar and mysterious to the masses. A similar mechanism can also be seen in the portal designs for the mental asylum and the reformatories.

Simulation and Illusion: The Dolhuis Portals

Despite their utility as highlighting a building's entrance, the Dutch Mannerist portals of repurposed monastic complexes were paradoxically formulated to allow the public to experience the new municipal philanthropic establishments without entering. At the Dolhuis, one of the two portals did not provide access to the interior, demonstrating that these monumental structures' symbolic purpose as markers of isolated communities was more indispensable than their literal function as ornamented gateways. A recurring feature was the theatrical portrayal of the residents inside, which figuratively framed and exposed the government's containment of indigent groups. As Foucault asserts in his theory of disciplinary power, modern incarceration is rooted in the early modern authority's obsession with purging 'contagions' from the urban environment that included outlaws, vagrants, and those 'who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder'.⁴⁵ His recognition of the underclass as possessing an ambivalent presence and incomplete absence, like spectres, further clarifies the kind of spectacle that Amsterdam's government was orchestrating. Simulation and illusion were theatrical tricks employed in the Dutch Mannerist portals to mirror the reality of orphans, mentally disordered persons, and convicts as neither fully kept out of sight nor actually seen. The intimation of physical contact with a visual encounter, of corporeal space with an artificial picture, and of a whole establishment

⁴² In 1617, a municipal property on the Keizersgracht canal was gifted to the playwright Samuel Coster, who founded the Dutch Academy that year for more organised theatrical productions: Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 396. The public and informal settings of rhetorician performances are discussed in Van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten*, 162.

⁴³ Heppner, 'Popular Theatre', esp. 24-25.

⁴⁴ See a discussion of Amsterdam's theatre culture and its didactic value in Vanhaelen, *Comic Print*, 40-43.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

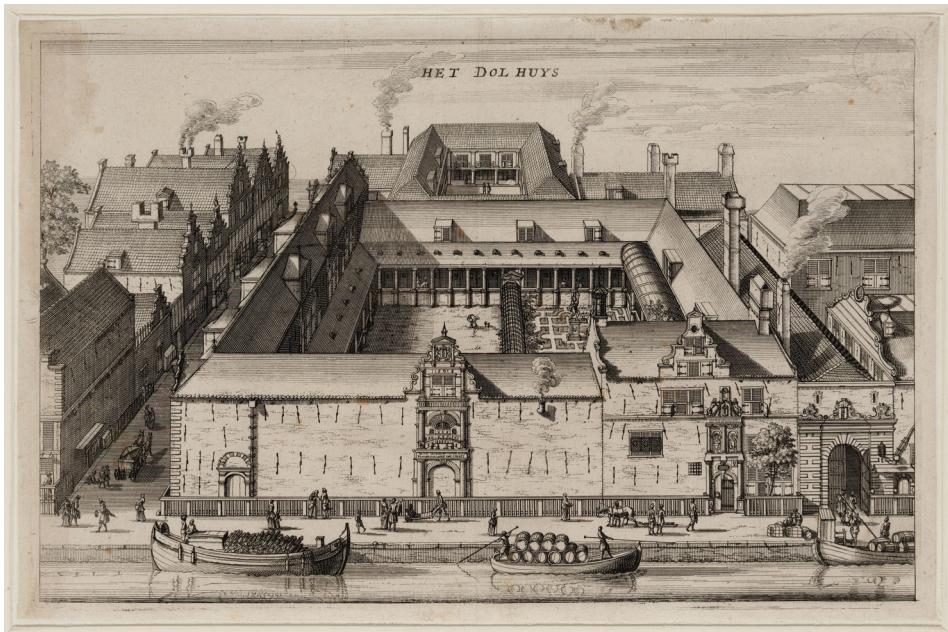


Fig. 5 Workshop of Olfert Dapper, The Dolhuis, c. 1663, engraving, 18,9 x 29,4 cm, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

with an architectural component, generated new images of philanthropy that no longer deferred to explicit Christian icons and references. It was also through a spectacle based on simulation and illusion that the middle-class spectators perpetuated a false sense of engagement with the underclass. Compared to the tradition of directly offering alms and performing the seven acts of mercy, the municipal government's administration of philanthropy was in fact alienating benefactors from their beneficiaries.

The Dolhuis (fig. 5) was founded in 1562, before the Alteration, with a generous bequest of three thousand guilders from the local cloth merchant Hendrick Pouwelsz. van Gisp. He was married into the influential Boelens family and passed away in 1561. Located on the Klovenierburgwal canal near the former Saint Ursula's Convent and Saint Pope Paul's Convent, the original mental asylum had eleven dormitories. In 1592, the government held a public lottery to raise funds for the asylum's expansion into the two monasteries' properties. By 1617, twenty dormitories were added.⁴⁶ Entry into the expanded complex was through a double-tiered Classical frame at the Kloveniersburgwal façade's north end. This structure was decorated with three coats of arms. At the top was the municipal government's crowned triple-cross escutcheon and twin lions. On one side below was the inaugural donor Van Gisp's heraldic crane sporting a helmet around its snake-like neck.

⁴⁶ Pontanus, *Amsterdam*, 125. According to Dapper, the expanded Dolhuis complex had thirty-one dormitories and was completed in 1617: Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 434. Wagenaar mentions that thirteen dormitories were added in 1631, along with a courtyard and an exit on the Dwars Spinhuissteeg: Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 308. Today, this site is located at Kloveniersburgwal 50.



Fig. 6 Bernard Picart, Monument dedicated to posterity to remember the incredible folly of the year 1720, 1720, engraving, 36,9 x 41,5 cm, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

His widow Christina (Stijn) Allertsdr. Boelens’s lozenge was on the other side. A frieze divided Amsterdam’s coat of arms from the couple’s. It was inscribed with a rhyming couplet to remind that the asylum was created out of kindness, since anyone could develop mental disorders at any time: ‘This House of God was founded on Love [which is] mild by nature/And restrains madness, which spares neither self nor others.’⁴⁷ Like the addition of Vondel’s poem at the Burgerweeshuis, the didactic verses on this Dolhuis portal endowed the architecture with a literary appeal for the middle class. Even for the illiterate spectators, Dutch inscriptions complemented the Italianate forms as a fashion of the local elites, while evoking a performance by rhetoricians.

In a 1720 satirical piece on Amsterdam’s speculative ‘wind trade’ and the storming of Kalverstraat’s Quincampoix coffeehouse, the French engraver Bernard Picart depicted this portal as a representation of the Dolhuis (fig. 6). Picart’s image dramatises an actual event in which a frustrated mob reacted to an impending economic crisis by assaulting

47 Cited in Kromm, ‘Domestic Spatial Economies’, 112. For the Dutch text, see Commelin, *Amsterdam*, IV, 150: ‘Dit Godthuys is gesticht uyt liefde milt van aart/En toomt de Dolheyd die zich zelfs, nog niemand spaart.’ Also inscribed on the portal was the year 1562 to commemorate the asylum’s founding.

the culpable investors at their meeting location.⁴⁸ To denote the three types of philanthropic establishments awaiting victims of bankruptcy and unemployment, Picart uses three portals in an ironic arrangement that defies the narrative of misfortune by bringing to mind the triumphal arch of Constantine. At the centre is the mental asylum, on the left is a hospice for the physically unwell, and on the right is an almshouse for the financially devastated. Whereas the hospice portal is based on one of the ornamented entrances at the municipal hospice, the almshouse portal contains the pediment design found at the two municipal almonries. Evidently, Picart is aiming at caricature. His visualisation of these portals as sites of mental disorder, physical illness, and destitution acknowledges the structures' existing value as simulacra of Amsterdam's philanthropic establishments and the indigent residents within.

Aside from the portal that led into the complex, the Dolhuis had a blind portal installed to embellish the Kloveniersburgwal façade's plainly bricked southern portion. Though no longer extant, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records show this work as a four-tier composition with the top two tiers inside a scrolled gable.⁴⁹ There were two components targeted at eliciting the viewer's sympathy and, thus, donations. Inscribed on a frieze at the lowest tier was a couplet: 'Those who are gifted/visited with [hosts for] insanity/Are here fed and their thirst quenched.'⁵⁰ Above the inscription, at the next tier, was a relief portraying two caregivers handing a drink and some food to two partially clothed residents.⁵¹ These figures comprised the foreground. In the background was a trompe-l'oeil scene of the asylum's quadrangle under a coffered barrel vault. Perspectival lines in the coffer and on the ground led the eye to more figures in the back that seemed trapped behind a semi-circular grate, like caged beasts.⁵²

For the 1592 Dolhuis lottery, a scroll with a rare image of the asylum complex was printed and posted throughout the city to publicise the fundraising campaign (fig. 7).⁵³ This oblong document is divided into three sections from top to bottom. Dense paragraphs of text in the bottom section communicate the lottery's purpose, the four grades of

48 Meijer, '1895 Edition of Quincampoix', 245. See also Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 367-370.

49 Notable examples include Workshop of Olfert Dapper, *Het Dolhuys*, c. 1663, print, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, inv. no. 010097003078; Daniël Stoopendaal, *Vuë du Bosjes sluys long du canal des Croceurs vers la Tour de l'Eglise du Sud la maison des Indes, la maison des Enragés, la Brasserie les arme d'Amsterdam, la Tour de l'hotel des Croceurs et l'Amstel interieure*, c. 1720-1740, print, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Collectie Atlas Dreesmann, inv. no. 010094008194; Herman P. Schouten (engraver) and Pierre Fouquet (publisher), *Gezicht van het Oost-Indisch Huys, benevens het Krankzinnigen-huys, te Amsterdam*, c. 1765-1775, print, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, inv. no. 010097011184.

50 Cited in Kromm, 'Domestic Spatial Economies', 113. For the Dutch text, see Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 435: 'Die met krankzinnigheyd zijn begaeft, Die worden hier gespijst en gelaeft'. Kromm's translation recognises that the first verse, playing on the Dutch word *begaafd*, could either mean 'those endowed with mental disorders' or 'those with mental disorders are gifted'. Also inscribed on the portal was the year 1591 to commemorate the launching of the asylum's expansion. The structure was probably completed in 1617 or 1631.

51 Details of this disassembled Dolhuis portal are documented in Herman P. Schouten, *De oude poort van het Dolhuis*, 1792, drawing, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Collectie Atlas Splitgerber, inv. no. 010001000520.

52 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 72-78, discusses the historical relationship between mental disorder and 'animality'.

53 Sophie Raux recognises that the lottery scroll is an anonymous work, but she attributes the engraving and publishing to Harmen Jansz. Muller: Raux, *Lotteries*, 94.

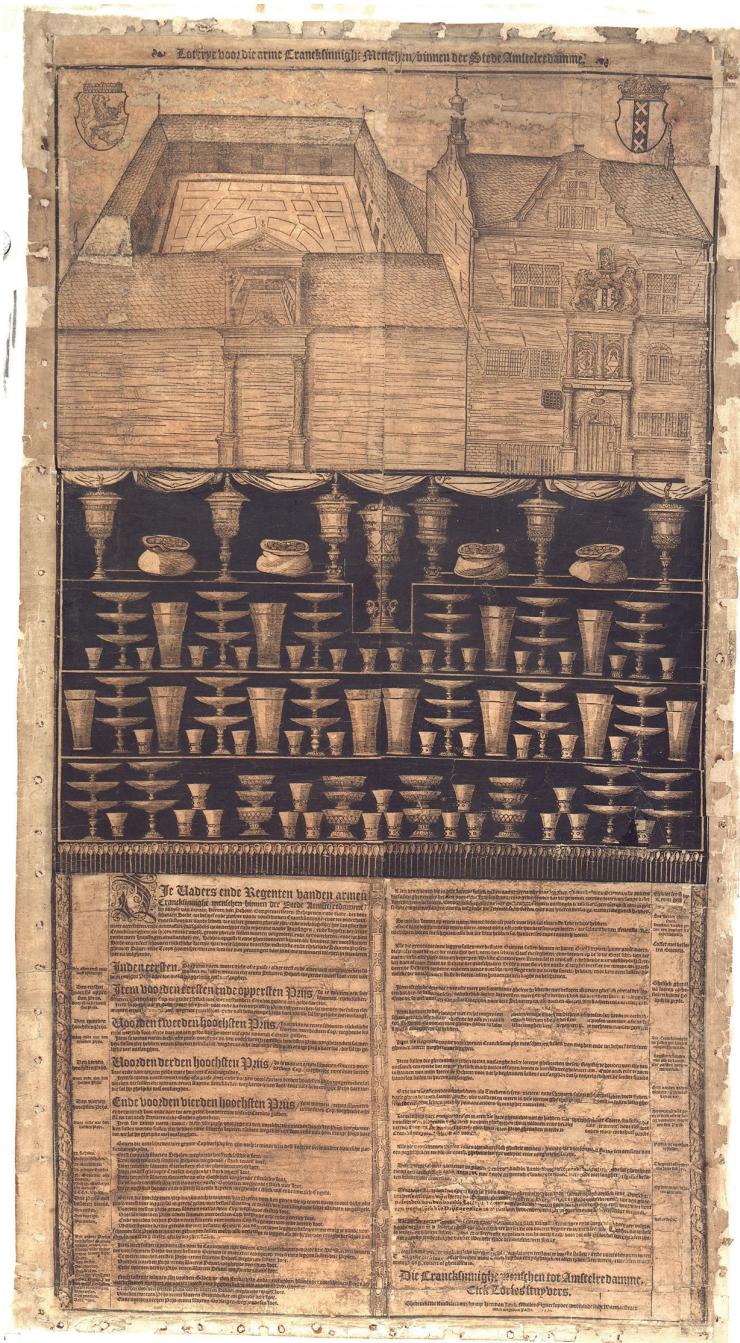


Fig. 7 Lottery for the poor suffering from mental disorders in the city of Amsterdam, 1592, engraving, 72 x 123 cm, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

prizes that ticket purchasers could win, and various salient details. In the middle section, the prizes are illustrated as a sumptuous display of silver receptacles, coins, and spoons, in a manner typical for early modern lottery scrolls.⁵⁴ The top section presents the design for the Dolhuis from a high vantage point, with a single-storey quadrangle on the left and a triple-storey house containing the principal entrance on the right. Although this image is more of an artistic rendition of the project than a precise delineation of the finished product, it confirms that a blind portal was specified in the scheme.

Like the realised portal that was documented in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century graphics, the design presented for the lottery had a relief on the second tier. Contemporary descriptions of the Dolhuis note that the courtyard was furnished with an allegorical statue of Frenzy as a naked woman yanking at her dishevelled hair.⁵⁵ In the lottery scroll, the proposed blind portal relief is different from the built version. It is ornamented with a likeness of Frenzy as an icon of the mentally disordered residents. Behind her is a view of the quadrangle, identical to the scroll's rendering of the physical building with a decorative parterre in the courtyard. This *mise-en-abyme* gesture hints at the portal's implicit function in granting the public a disembodied kind of access to a restricted site that housed a pitied yet dreaded indigent group. Often misunderstood as possessed by some inexplicable force, the mentally disordered were neither docile like orphans nor salvageable like convicts.⁵⁶ Since the Dolhuis admitted visitors, an impenetrable gateway conveyed to the public that society was protected from the asylum's potentially dangerous residents.

Herman Schouten's drawing of the blind portal, commissioned in 1791 as a record of the site before it was replaced with the new Lutheran church the following year, captures how the relief and inscription contributed to a spectrally disembodied access of the asylum (fig. 8). In this late eighteenth-century work, a finely dressed middle-class family of four is standing on the Kloveniersburgwal pavement before the Dolhuis. While facing the lower archway that appears to be sealed with brick, the family marvels at a view of the building's residents and courtyard through the upper archway. On the one hand, the allusion to an obstructed entrance at ground level is a reminder of the literal separation between the benefactors and the beneficiaries. On the other hand, the simulation of a scenic aperture or a dazzling stage at the portal's second tier is figuratively bringing the space inside to the world outside. As Schouten elucidates, the blind portal encouraged the general population to maintain an increasingly abstract relationship with indigent lives that was centred on the donation of money or material possessions to the Church's and the government's philanthropic funds. The middle classes could reach and aid the underclass without directly partaking in almsgiving or physically interacting with the almsmen. This alienation of benefactors and beneficiaries from each other was a departure from the participatory nature of medieval charity. It prefigured the even more detached practices of public welfare and private philanthropy that would later develop in industrialised nation-states.

⁵⁴ Raux, *Lotteries*, 79-92.

⁵⁵ Fokkens, *Beschryvinge*, 285.

⁵⁶ Among a number of seventeenth-century explanations for mental disorders, Hodgkin includes 'affliction with supernatural causes': Hodgkin, *Madness*, 40.



Fig. 8 Herman P. Schouten, Old Dolhuis portal, 1792, coloured ink drawing, 18 x 21,3 cm, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

Determined to distance itself from Christian symbols that articulated the ecclesiastical supervision of charity in the past, Amsterdam's government experimented with new signifiers and signs to assert its secular control over philanthropy. Lacan's notion of *semblance* and Barthes's *connotative sign* provide a theoretical explanation of how the portal designs, by putting on a spectral spectacle of the underclass, contributed to such a middle-class project. While Lacan has a psychoanalytical background and Barthes writes more explicitly about semiotics, both thinkers are concerned with the ontology of representation and

its instrumentality for the exertion of power. They are known for their distinct but similarly Hegelian models, based on the dialectical process of synthesis from sublating the tension between a thesis and an antithesis. In Lacan's Imaginary-Symbolic-Real triad, the Real (*le Réel*) is a state of totality that sublates the fabricated Self and the equally invented Other as contraries. Since this is an authentic state, and representation is by nature inauthentic like the Imaginary and Symbolic states, representing the experience of the Real is limited to semblance.⁵⁷ Barthes's denotation-connotation-myth dialectic propounds that a denotative sign is the sublation of linguistic signifiers and the conditions signified. When such a sign acts as a signifier, it is further sublating with the constructs signified into a connotative sign, which constitutes a myth.⁵⁸

Amsterdam's philanthropic campaign is an undertaking in which the middle class first *imagined* its own being as the Self. It then imposed a *symbolic* binary of presence versus absence, with itself as the affirmation of social order and the underclass as the Other negating that order. The coexistence of the middle class and the underclass in the urban domain was the *Real* that fell outside of the former's representational system. Thus, the mere appearance and virtual space of semblance was the extent to which this coexistence could be approximated in language, art, architecture, and such tools of the master culture. On the Burgerweeshuis and Dolhuis portals, the reliefs of orphaned and mentally disordered lives extended a false interaction with indigent bodies that corresponds to Lacan's semblance. Despite awareness of this falsity, the public internalised it like a myth because of a certain semiotic effect. As signs denoting their respective philanthropic establishments with the art as a signifier and the site as the signified, the relief scenes were also signifiers for secular middle-class leadership that formed the connotative sign of a well-governed municipality. Barthes's theory adds to the understanding of these portals' simulative and illusory features as an ideological spectacle, devised to cultivate the spectator's faith in the philanthropic system under the government.

Veiling and Unveiling: The Rasphuis and Spinhuis Portals

Although it was a more secondary function, the portals of early seventeenth-century philanthropic establishments were also designed to attract visitors to experience the spectacle of social marginality as contained inside buildings. The Burgerweeshuis, Dolhuis, Rasphuis, and Spinhuis all held regular tours that allowed contemporary travellers from England, France, and Germany to document the interior spaces.⁵⁹ As the municipal government's ostensibly more humanitarian response to crime that did not exist elsewhere in Europe, the Rasphuis and Spinhuis also projected an image of social progress to elevate the Dutch Republic.⁶⁰ They were equivalent establishments. One was founded for men in

57 In Lacan's philosophy, the Real (*le Réel*) is different from reality (*réalité*) and true (*vrai*): Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric*, 58-59, 66-69.

58 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 217-224.

59 Aglionby, *Low Countries*, 276-277; Le Jolle, *Amsterdam*, 106-107; Von Zesen, *Amsterdam*, 302-307, 315-317.

60 Sellin has examined Amsterdam's late sixteenth-century penal reform with respect to contemporary developments in humanitarian philosophy: Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology*, 9-22. Spierenburg cites the writings of four reformers from this period to show the progressive intent of Amsterdam's reformatories, including Dirk

1595, at the former site of the Saint Clare's Convent; the other was a renovation of the Saint Ursula's Convent, completed in 1596. Their names are indicative of the inmates' penal labour. At the Rasphuis, men rasped Brazilwood essential to the production of fabric dye. Similarly, women at the Spinhuis were sentenced to spinning and needleworking tasks for the linen, clothing, and lacemaking industries.

As it is still apparent today, the Dutch Mannerist structures that once led into these two reformatories share a number of design features. Dating to 1603 and 1645, respectively, the Rasphuis and Spinhuis portals are extensively ornamented with scrollwork (figs. 9 and 10).⁶¹ There are engaged columns flanking the entryways that reflect each reformatory's gender-specificity. Whereas the Rasphuis had a heavy-set Doric pair corresponding to the masculine body in Renaissance architectural theory, the Spinhuis had two slender Ionic pairs referential of the feminine body. In De Bray's *Architectura moderna*, there is an engraving of an unrealised portal with the same distinctive application of massive vertical scrolls, recessed shadow entablatures, and the authority's insignia as a crowning element (fig. 11). Moreover, a second entablature, stretched vertically to accommodate the Serlian manner of placing an arch over columns, is also seen at the Spinhuis. *Architectura moderna* was published in 1631 to honour the late De Keyser, who had died ten years earlier as a working architect, with his designs for Amsterdam's Noorderkerk and Westerkerk under early phases of construction. It is probable that the creator of the Spinhuis portal had consulted De Bray's publication, in order to continue the Rasphuis portal's utilisation of De Keyser's Dutch Mannerist vocabulary for this type of architectural objects.

Like the Burgerweeshuis and Dolhuis, the portals of the Rasphuis and Spinhuis are inscribed with couplets to appeal to the viewer as a form of didactic Dutch rhetoric. Legible to the learned elites, the Rasphuis couplets are in Latin and taken from the ancient dramatist Seneca's tragedy on Hercules: 'It is valour to subdue that of which everyone goes in dread'. This text clarifies an allegorical low relief above the archway that acted as the building's gable stone.⁶² In the relief, a driver is taming two lions, a bear, a tiger, a wolf, and a boar that draw his lumber waggon.⁶³ The fanciful scene alludes to the bridling of vicious criminals with the penal labour of rasping Brazilwood. On the Spinhuis portal, the inscription presents a message concerning the compassion of punishment, penned by the poet Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft: 'Fear not! I do not exact vengeance for evil, but compel you to be good. My hand is stern, but my heart is kind'.⁶⁴ Before a fire in 1643 necessitated the

Volkertsz. Coornhert, Cornelis Pietersz. Hooft, Jan Laurensz. Spiegel, and Sebastiaan Egberts: Spierenburg, *Prison Experience*, 43-49.

⁶¹ The Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed dates the Rasphuis portal to 1603: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, 'Monumentnummer 1482', <https://monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl/monumenten/1482> (Accessed on 26 March 2021). The Spinhuis portal in Amsterdam today is from the renovation completed in 1645.

⁶² Cited in Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology*, 32. The Latin text reads: 'Virtutis est domare, quæ cvncti paveni'. Sellin notes that the inscription is verse 435 in Seneca's *Hercules furens*. For a Dutch analysis of the inscription, see Boas, 'Rasphuispoort', 121-129.

⁶³ Pontanus, *Amsterdam*, 139.

⁶⁴ Cited in Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology*, 88. The Dutch text is: 'Schrik niet, ik wreek geen quaat, maar dwing tot goet/Straf is myn hand, maar lieflyk myn gemoet.'



Fig. 9 Portal of the former Rasphuis at Heiligeweg 19, 1943, photograph, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.



Fig. 10 Portal of the former Spinhuis at Spinhuissteeg 1, c. 1940, photograph, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

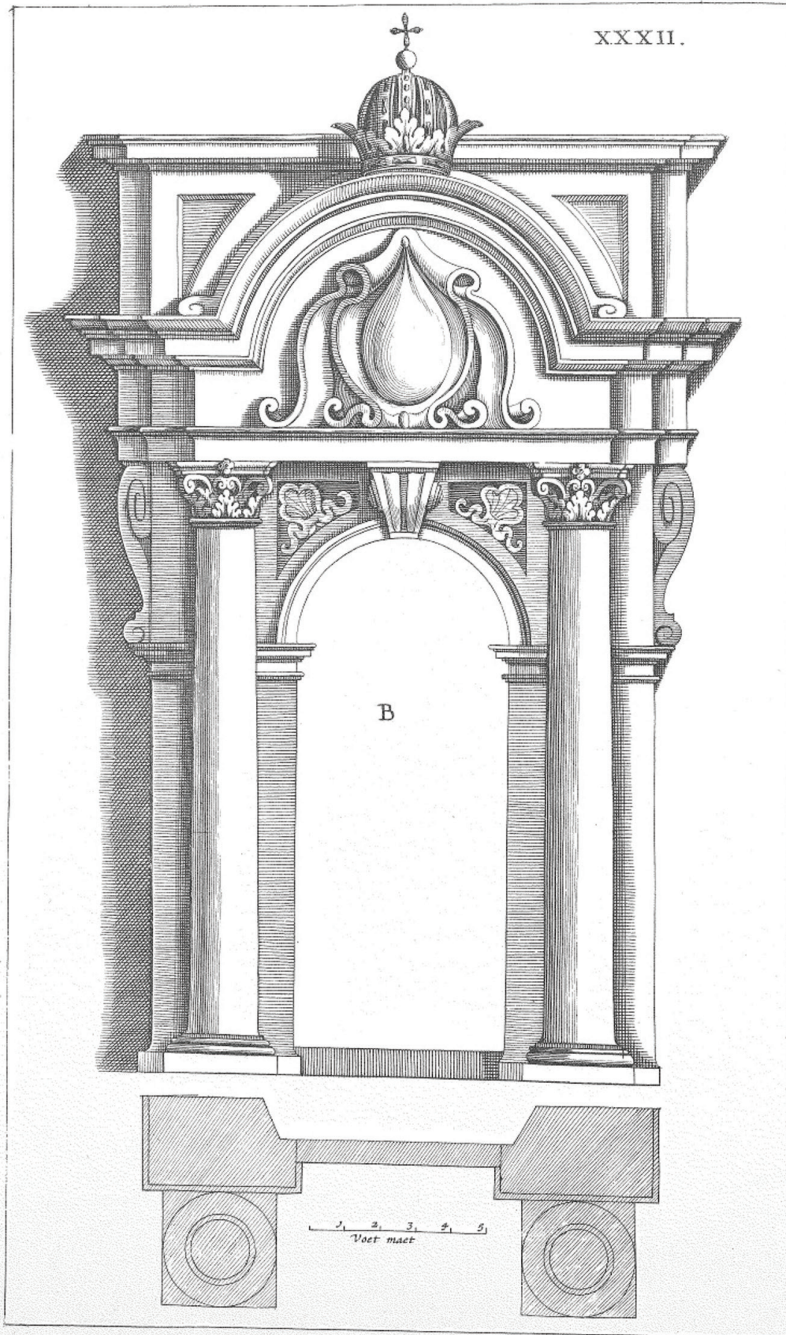


Fig. 11 Hendrick de Keyser, Two unbuilt portals, engraving, in: Salomon de Bray, *Architectural moderna ofte bouwinge van onsen tyt*, Amsterdam 1631, plate 32, The Hague, Royal Library.

restoration of the Spinhuis in 1645, the entrance displayed a different couplet that delivered a similar message of charity inciting the hand that punishes.⁶⁵

Evidently, the portals of these two reformatories show the most overlap in their dramatic centrepieces that present an allegory of discipline with a triangular assembly of three Classically proportioned figures. These are even more sensational than the imagery in front of the Dolhuis, which effectively compared a mental asylum's residents to a menagerie's exotic life forms. Whereas the Spinhuis centrepiece is a high relief panel, first installed in 1607 as an elaborate gable stone before the portal acquired its present design in 1645, the Rasphuis centrepiece is a sculpture, added in 1663 to the portal that has stood since 1603.⁶⁶ Credited to De Keyser, the Spinhuis relief conveys a narrative of submission that is reiterated in the Rasphuis sculpture.⁶⁷ It is a scene of three figures in ancient garb, fitted inside a round arch to accentuate its triangular composition. At the centre is an authoritative matriarch, presumably the reformatory's warden. She is supervising two maidens amid their penal labour of spinning and needleworking. Her animated pose, with her right hand swinging a whip over one shoulder and her left hand seizing the needleworking maiden, implies that she is about to chastise the disobedient inmate. While this inmate flinches, the other one seems pleased that the infuriated warden is enforcing proper conduct. The warden's calm reaction illuminates Hooft's couplet on the stern hand that connects to a kind heart. For visitors of the Spinhuis, this relief above the principal entrance was a preview of the 'attraction' inside. At the same time, the sight of inmates is another disembodied encounter of the indigent population for passers-by, like the portrayals of orphans at the Burgerweeshuis and the mentally disordered at the Dolhuis.

Bartholomeus van der Helst's portrait of the Spinhuis regents illustrates the chastising scene's value as an icon for the establishment (fig. 12). Many group portraits of regents, known as *regentenstukken*, were commissioned during the seventeenth century to honour these elite figures who formed Amsterdam's middle-class government.⁶⁸ Artists often inserted unique clues that linked the regents' standardly neutral countenance and uniformly dressed bodies to the philanthropic establishments they headed. In his portrayal of the Spinhuis regents, Van der Helst paints a curious view of the reformatory's workshop as the clue.⁶⁹ This was where visitors, at the climatic point of their tour, observed the rein-

⁶⁵ Before the fire, the inscription above the entrance read: 'Om Schamele meyskens, Maegden en Vrouwen, T'bedelen, leech gaen en dool-vvech te Schouven, Is dit Spinhuis ghesticht, soo men hier sien mach; Elck laet sich niet verveelen noch rouvven, vvt Charitaet hier aen de handt te houven. vvie vveet vvat hem oft de zijne noch gheschieden mach'. See Pontanus, *Amsterdam*, 137. Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology*, 88, provides an English translation: 'As may be here seen, the Spinhuis has been instituted to lead poor girls, maidens, and women away from begging, idleness and wrong paths; let none fail or regret the lending of a hand here, for who knows what may be in store for himself or his kin?' In the Dutch text, the 'lending of a hand' refers to a striking hand.

⁶⁶ Installation dates for the portal centrepieces are from Moritz, 'Geregistreeerde schoonheid', 104-105; Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 257.

⁶⁷ Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, III, 257, attributes the relief design to De Keyser. Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 418, notes the employment of marble for the relief.

⁶⁸ For discussions of seventeenth-century Dutch group portraits of regents, see Muller, *Charity*, 5-50; Peacock, 'Amsterdam Spinhuis', 465-469.

⁶⁹ Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Twee regenten en twee regentessen van het Spinhuis*, 1650, oil on canvas, 219 x 305 cm, Amsterdam Museum, inv. no. SA 4367.



Fig. 12 Bartholomeus van der Helst, *The regents of the Spinhuis*, 1650, oil on canvas, 219 x 305 cm, Amsterdam Museum.

tegration of prostitutes, adulteresses, thieves, inebriates, and vagrants into a productive merchant society. Although the scene appears to be a painting within a painting, hung in the boardroom to decorate the wall like the Ottoman rug over the table, the plain wooden frame and the pulling back of a curtain are suggestive of an aperture. Echoing the portal centrepiece, a warden is shown with a shoe in her hand, ready to strike a defiant inmate.

When concrete urban experiences are reduced to a visual performance of abstract representations, that condition is precisely the modern spectacle theorised in Debord's and Clark's critiques of middle-class power.⁷⁰ Such a spectacle is reliant on the same impressive picture reappearing, like a religious icon, rather than an impressive event taking place, like the distribution of alms on the street or the carrying out of a sentence on the scaffold. With their spectacular and iconic depictions of sequestered lives, portals of the burgher orphanage, mental asylum, and reformatories were essentially dictating the public's view of the inside from the outside. This control of visual access emphasised the government's control of physical access intrinsic to these nominally public sites. Hence, Van der Helst's use of a heavy stygian curtain to partially conceal, or partially reveal, the warden and inmates

⁷⁰ In his study of nineteenth-century Paris, T.J. Clark quotes Guy Debord: 'The spectacle is *capital* accumulated until it becomes an image.' See Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 9. Clark continues to reference this concept in a more recent text to show its twenty-first century relevance. See Boal et al., *Afflicted Powers*, 19-20.

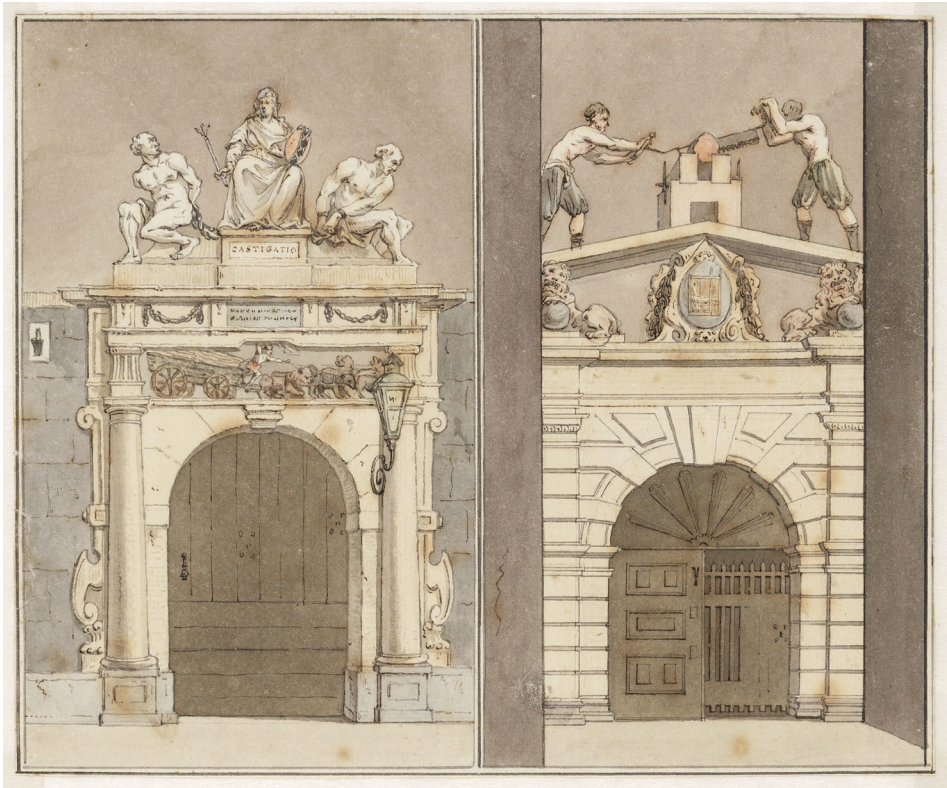


Fig. 13 Reiner Vinckles, The portals of the Rasphuis at Heiligeweg 19, 1764, ink drawing, 21,2 x 17,5 cm, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

‘entertaining’ gentlemanly spectators is not only a signification of theatre. He also recognises the government’s manipulation of criminal women’s visibility in Amsterdam by confining them to the reformatory to labour in front of visitors. Furthermore, the sight he unveils is a reappearance of the portal relief’s castigation scene, which functioned as a sign of the municipal authority enforcing civic order. Related to the framing and exposing of an indigent group’s existence in the community, the act of veiling and unveiling is yet another theatrical effect that the portals exhibited. It is a process of hiding the building’s occupants from view and then selectively allowing the outside to behold aspects of the inside.

Designed to pair with the Spinhuis relief and amplify the portal’s spectacular value, the Rasphuis centrepiece is an ensemble of three sculpted figures that recalls Michelangelo’s allegorical compositions for the Medici sarcophagi in Florence.⁷¹ The sculpture was added to the original Rasphuis portal six decades later to satisfy the mid-seventeenth-century demand for more faithful adaptations of Italian forms. At the centre of the trio is a

71 The sarcophagi of Giuliano di Lorenzo de’ Medici and Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici were begun in 1520s and completed in 1530s.



Fig. 14 Wind vane of the Rasphuis at Heiligeweg 19, date unknown, photograph, Amsterdam, Stadsarchief.

matronly but youthful personification of Castigation. She grips the municipal escutcheon with her left hand and a lashing instrument with her right. Two unshaven convicts of pronounced musculature are held in chains at her sides. As one faces Castigation to acknowledge her command, the other looks away timidly. Unlike the scene of inmates in the Spinhuis relief, neither this sculpture of bound convicts nor the low relief with a beast-drawn lumber waggon was intended as a simulative glimpse of the penal labour inside the reformatory. It was not until visitors arrived before the inner portal, in an unroofed corridor joining the building with the Heiligeweg alley, that they saw a preview of the men rasping wood. Passing the two portals was a spectacle of the reformatory unveiling its content, progressively from the outer portal's framing and exposure of the convicts to the inner portal's simulation and illusion of the inmates' labour.

Now dismantled, the inner portal of Rasphuis is largely forgotten. According to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documentation, this structure was pedimented and had a pair of pilasters flanking the archway. While still a refined work of architecture, it was more severe in appearance than the elaborately ornamented outer portal to remind visitors that they were approaching a fortified site. On top of the pediment was a life-size sculpture, of two bare-chested inmates rasping Brazilwood, that predated the ensemble of Castigation

and her captives.⁷² In Reiner Vinkeles's detailed illustration of the sculpture, the rasping is carried out with a giant serrated blade that the inmates operated by continuously pressing down the two ends like a seesaw (fig. 13). This image of penal labour was reproduced as a metal wind vane atop the steeple on-site. Similar to the repetition of the Spinhuis portal's chastising scene in Van der Helst's portrait of the regents, such a reproduction of the Rasphuis portal's sculptural ornament demonstrates how an art object within an architectural component became an emblem of the entire building and establishment (fig. 14). For Amsterdam's first generation of early modern philanthropic sites that succeeded the charitable monasteries at the same locations, their visibility and legibility as a collection of emblems were crucial to advancing public awareness of the new system, with various depositories for specific indigent groups.

Conclusion

Four years after the Spinhuis was restored, the installation of Dutch Mannerist portals at Amsterdam's repurposed monastic complexes was outmoded. With the opening of a newly constructed almonry in a peripheral neighbourhood in 1649, a second generation of philanthropic establishments was introduced in the city, including another almonry, two orphanages, and two almshouses for women. Foregoing the portal's human scale and recollection of street theatre's sensationalism, the new buildings were designed as increasingly oversized monoliths in the more sober Dutch Palladian expression.⁷³ They continued the spectral spectacle of social marginality by applying a horizontally proportioned architectural language at a monumental scale that contrasted sharply with the existing fabric of narrow vernacular houses. Elsewhere in the Republic, Dutch Mannerist portals were also found at almshouses, hospices, leprosaria, and orphanages that began as early seventeenth-century renovations of monastic complexes. Common to these works were their liberal use of Classical ornaments, narrative reliefs evoking the vernacular gable stone, and poetic inscriptions. Notable examples from the province of Holland are in Gouda, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, and Haarlem.⁷⁴ It is not by chance that these municipalities were major trade centres at the time. While none could rival the globally influential Amsterdam in terms of wealth and prestige, the local enterprise of financing philanthropic establishments gave these smaller municipalities an opportunity to compete with one another.⁷⁵ Success in organising philanthropy signalled the community's prosperity, respectability, and stability. Even when it did not reflect the actual state of poor relief, the impressive architecture of almshouses, asylums, hospices, orphanages, and reformatories was tangible evidence of the middle class investing in an ordered public sphere.

⁷² Dapper, *Amsterdam*, 425.

⁷³ Koen Ottenheim discusses the relationship between civic buildings in the second half of the seventeenth century and a more 'sober' form of Dutch Classicism: Ottenheim, 'Amsterdam 1700', 127-131.

⁷⁴ These include Gouda's leprosarium (1609), Hoorn's almshouse for women (1610), Enkhuizen's orphanage (1616), and Haarlem's hospice for women (1624).

⁷⁵ Teeuwen, *Financing Poor Relief*, 31-33, 151-153, 159-160.

Historians generally agree that seventeenth-century Dutch art was a 'golden age' for early modern European culture as a whole, and not only for the modern-day Netherlands as a nation. Few, however, see past the period's architectural products as imitative of Italian traditions. This study of ornamented portals at Amsterdam's philanthropic establishments has considered how the nascent Dutch Republic utilised the Classical language from Italy for a socio-political effect that paralleled developments in Baroque Rome. Pediments, entablatures, scrollwork, and engaged columns did not merely adorn entrances. They framed scenographic reliefs, sculptures, and inscriptions that propagated the moral of moderating surplus incomes from intercontinental trade with philanthropic donations. Furthermore, this essay has argued that the portals of Amsterdam's burgher orphanage, mental asylum, and reformatories were a means for the authority to redefine urban poverty and underclass presence as a spectacular experience for the public. From the commotion of distributing alms to marginalised lives on the streets as a feature of urbanisation, the experience became a spectral kind of spectacle. Urban 'contagions' disappeared from the public eye and then reappeared, like spectres, through controlled or false views at designated sites. Such a development heralded a modern approach to poor relief, still practised today alongside tax-funded welfare, that maintains a distance between philanthropists and the indigent population. Designed for visibility, the Dutch Mannerist portals of philanthropic establishments were ultimately monuments to the middle class as the builder of a productive trade city, with unproductive members of the community isolated to invisible locations. These objects comprise a moment in which the trans-regional account of Classical art and architecture intersected with a long history of the Dutch as innovators in managing a capitalist society's wealth disparity.

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