

The Art of Asking.

Strategies of patronage solicitation through the ages in music, literature, visual arts, and intellectual culture.

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Organization

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Programme

<https://mecenaatstudies.sites.uu.nl/call-for-proposals/programme-symposium/>

Abstracts

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Introduction

In many European countries, the cultural sector is working towards establishing a (renewed) tradition of cultural patronage. Across the European Union, individual makers are experimenting with building a community of private donors through crowdfunding projects or membership schemes. At the same time, many different cultural institutions are now working at engaging with their support circles of minor and major donors. National cultural policies have been following suit, by actively encouraging the establishment of a 21st-century ‘culture of asking’ and ‘culture of private giving’ in the arts.

Cultural patronage has a long, colourful, and complex history. Writers, visual artists, composers, and scholars have sought out the support of rich or well-connected private patrons for centuries and have interacted with their private benefactors in a variety of ways. The premise underpinning the conference ‘The art of asking’ is the assumption that historical exchange patterns might serve as useful examples of patronage practices for today’s makers and cultural institutions – and, moreover, that a better understanding of historical patronage patterns may help contextualize modern day practices.

Whereas most existing research puts the efforts and achievements of the patron in the centre of attention, this conference concentrated on mapping the strategies of the (potential) recipients of support. How have artists and thinkers, through the ages, asked their (prospective) private patrons for support? Taking the step to ask a rich or well-connected individual for funding or protection takes courage, tact, strategic thinking, initiative, bravado, and confidence. Even in periods in which patronage was a self-evident part of artistic and academic practice, artists and scholars have always had to think carefully about the best way to approach their benefactors.

At the conference, no less than 10 international speakers offered the participants a glimpse of their research on ‘the art of asking’ throughout the ages. In their presentations, they approached the exchange between artists (or thinkers) and their patrons through three central questions:

- What can historical sources tell us about the way artists and thinkers have asked private benefactors for support?
- How have they approached their patrons? How have they framed and formulated their requests, in which ‘tone of voice’, through which strategies?
- And, crucially, what kind of arguments have they used to persuade their benefactors to step up and donate?

The speaker’s answers to those questions helped the participants explore and discuss the various ‘cultures of asking’ that have taken shape throughout history, up to the present day. The group of conference participants consisted of about 65 people. About half of them were university researchers or students, doing research connected to the central theme of the conference. The other half consisted of intermediaries or agents that help shape part of the ‘culture of asking’ in The Netherlands today: fundraisers working for museums or orchestras, directors of crowdfunding platforms, people working for municipalities, representatives of major cultural foundations. This group has important strategic and practical experience of the dilemmas of asking audiences for support, and attended the conference either in order to learn from the past, or to find inspiration or guidance in historical and present-day examples. A better understanding of historical patterns may help contextualize what they are doing on a day-to-day basis.

The organizers also invited four prominent figures from the contemporary Dutch cultural sector and policy sector to respond to our speakers. They hold important positions as directors, curators or decision makers. At the end of each session they reflected on what has been put forward by the speakers, and provided context for their findings - giving voice, as it were, to what is going on now in the field of public and private cultural funding.

The conference program was divided in four themed sessions, each consisting of two or three presentations followed by the reflection mentioned above and ending with a moderated discussion.

Session 1: Direct Requests

Moderator: Klazina Botke

- **Laurens Ham - Rules of Power: Authors’ Agency in Dutch Literary Grant Proposals, 1966-2017**

Over the past decades, the Dutch Foundation for Literature (Nederlands Letterenfonds) developed into a crucial player in the Dutch field of public funding of literature, especially for individual authors and translators. In his paper, Ham presents the results of an investigation into the application strategies that authors employ in their applications to the foundation, and particularly the interaction between the application process on the one hand, and the aforementioned application strategies.

- **Mats Dijkdrent - Virtues and Greatness. Analysing References to Virtue in Requests to Patrons in 16th -Century North Western Europe**

In his paper Dijkdrent examines how virtues and promises of moral superiority are evoked when asking a potential benefactor for a substantial financial contribution in 16th-Century North Western Europe. Besides showing how an appeal on the presumed duties of a patron (in this case being virtuous) could be a very effective method to create a sense of urgency, this approach offers new insights into how the discourse on patronage related virtues evolved to suit the needs of the artists.

- **Tina Melisova – ‘Love me in London & leave me alone in France’: On Keeping Distance in British Modernist Patronage**

Although Sibyl Colefax and Ottoline Morrell, two major British patronesses of the first half of the twentieth century, never clashed quite openly and largely tried to ignore each other's presence in modernist circles, a comparison of their relationship with their beneficiaries reveals the difference establishing boundaries makes in patronage relationship and raises questions regarding the effectiveness of what could, at least in Morrell's case, be seen as a more involved instance of modern patronage.

Reflection: Klazina Botke (last minute substitute for Kate Rockett, director of Dutch Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century)

The first session of this conference focusses on direct requests and thus deals with direct contact between the maker and the patron or benefactor. This dependent relationship, a certain balance of power, could determine the way requests are formulated, but maybe also what is asked for: a financial contribution, or maybe non-material things, such as time, recognition, protection, or becoming part of a network.

Ham not only looks at the formulation of the request, but also at the form, which is an interesting approach. He showed how little ‘rebellion’ there was against the set form or framework, only by those who already knew their ideas would get funding. In both Ham's and Melisova's research we see that established makers are more bold and dare to rebel against limits set by forms or upholding politeness.

Botke thinks there are parallels and interesting links between these case studies from the 16th and 20th century. Even in the 16th century a sort of standardized form was used, in the sense of using the same language (even the same words and concepts), the same sources, and way of formulating. Furthermore, it is noticeable that it is sometimes unclear if a request is asked directly or via a third party or person. We also see a reversal: the asking comes from the benefactor not the maker. Thirdly, there is the aspect of veiled asking, highlighted in Dijkdrent's research: the maker is asking through a theological and philosophical idea - through a virtue - appealing to the patron's intellect and ego by praising his wealth and properties. Convention seems to be the overarching theme in these cases of direct requests, which is often strongly connected to the dependency of the asking party on the benefactor. In Melisova's research on Morrell, this balance of power, interestingly enough, is challenged and seems to have shifted.

Session 2: Soliciting for Patronage Indirectly

Moderator: Nina Geerdink

- **Annet den Haan - Homer versus Virgil: Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) and his Patronage Relationship with Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447-1455)**

In her paper, den Haan argues that fifteenth-century humanist Lorenzo Valla avoided asking favours from his patron, Pope Nicholas V, directly. Instead, he carefully cultivated the patronage relationship in such a way that he could still claim to be independent. She compares Valla's case with that of other papal protégés, who employed different strategies.

- **Özlem Gülin Dağoğlu - Establishing a Global Network of Patrons: The *Conditio Sine Qua Non* of the Portraitist Mihri Rasim's (1885-1954) Professional Existence**

Ottoman-Turkish painter Mihri Rasim was resourceful and strategic in developing a transnational network of patrons and establishing her professional existence over a career spanning half a century on three continents. Through the exploration of the art of asking, this study aims to provide a new methodology for approaching the narrative of an individual artist, and to offer a renewed reflection on the global circulation of artistic knowledge and practices that connected multiple social, political and cultural contexts.

Reflection: Geert-Jan Janse, managing director of Vereniging Rembrandt

The case studies of Lorenzo Valla and Mihri Rasim may at first seem to have little in common. Not only are their lives separated by over four and a half centuries, they also seem to have had very different characters. Although both solicited for patronage indirectly, there are significant differences in their approach.

Den Haan has illustrated in her paper that Valla was on the one hand always looking for wealthy and influential patrons – a necessity for all humanists who often led an itinerant life, travelling from court to court to earn their living -, while on the other hand taking great efforts to appear to be independent, not only intellectually but also in terms of financial support. In a subtle game of words – Valla after all is one of the most eloquent writers of his time and long afterwards his Latin set the bar – the humanist is slowly trying to position himself ever closer in a privileged position in the pope's inner circle. Rasim was less subtle in her approach as Gülin Dağoğlu has demonstrated in her paper on the artist. Rasim used her reputation and network to secure access to an international audience of potential sitters and patrons.

While both Valla and Rasim both solicited for patronage indirectly, Rasim was bolder in her approach and seems to have had a more commercial mindset while Valla flattered with words. In many ways her approach to patronage was strikingly modern: dare to ask and get the deal done. What Valla and Rasim have in common though is that they were utterly dependent on patronage relationships to survive.

Currently in the Netherlands universities, orchestras and museums face significant budget cuts in their funding by the state. The importance of philanthropy by private individuals will gain importance where the state is in retreat. And so the demand on these private individuals will increase significantly. Which approach might yield better results? Although Rasim's approach might resonate more with contemporary celebrity culture and the predominant market ideology, there is much to be said for Valla's thoughtful approach of his most important patron – an intellectual game of hide and seek. Boldness has its value, but

subtlety and slowly building on a relationship with important patrons might - in Janse's experience as director of an organization with a history of over 140 years in private philanthropy to support acquisitions for Dutch museums - in the end yield better results, especially when approaching pontiffs, emperors or their contemporary counterparts, the major donors so highly sought-after by artist and cultural institutions alike.

Session 3: Early Modern Book Dedications as Requests

Moderator: Arjen Dijkstra

- **Anna-Rose Shack – “Whose powre may raise my sad dejected Muse”: the emotional effects of vulnerability and Aemilia Lanyer's bid for patronage**
Soliciting patronage engenders vulnerability; in seeking support for their artistic endeavours, creators expose themselves to aesthetic value judgements and enter into a complex power dynamic with those who hold the purse strings. This paper takes the emotional effects of vulnerability as its starting point to examine Aemilia Lanyer's bid for patronage, specifically focused on the literary devices that Lanyer deploys to negotiate both her authorial identity as a woman writer and the vulnerability wrought by exposing her text to others.
- **Romane Massart - The Dedicatory Epistles of Vocal Music Books Printed in Antwerp and Leuven in the 16th and 17th Centuries. Some Epistemological Reflections**
During the early modern period, the “rhetoric of the request” notably materializes in the discursive form of the dedicatory epistle. Within a context where musicians were compelled to forge connections with prominent figures or institutions (whether religious or tied to the ruling power) in order to advance their careers and ensure their livelihoods, the dedicatory epistle emerged as a crucial mediatic and economic tool for composers, printers, and their patrons.
- **Valerie Schutte - The Art of Asking Multiple Monarchs: Book Dedications to Tudor Kings and Queens**
Early modern book dedications were given for a variety of reasons, from expressing loyalty, to offering counsel, to seeking patronage. In her study Schutte gives an overview of the commonality of this practice, the different strategies used by these men when asking for patronage from kings or queens, and explores the practices of Thomas Paynell, aiming to identify patronage patterns, as well as the strategies used by dedicators to appeal to each monarch and the current political atmosphere.

Reflection: Sandra Kisters, Head of Collections and Research at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, The Netherlands

To quote Anna Rose Shack: “Even as it purports to offer security and freedom, patronage produces distinct vulnerabilities and range of emotional effects.” Kisters is aware that museums are both in the position of asking for patronage from private individuals, corporations, and public institutions, but, the museum as institution also has an important position itself. By acquiring work by a certain artist for the collection or giving an artist or designer an exhibition it – to some extent – also play a part in the success of their careers. And by paying them fees

for their contribution to an exhibition or by buying their art, museums also are patrons of some sort.

What strikes Kisters about these three lectures, is that the strategies developed in book dedications of the 16th and 17th centuries have many resemblances with contemporary strategies for asking patronage. Although a 17th century poet, the six strategies for patronage that poet Aemelia Lanver used sound familiar from a contemporary museum perspective. The addressing of a group of female patrons as a form of sisterhood, the targeting of wealthy patrons, who hold elite positions in society, the effort to not ask for money directly, the praise for potential patrons, the modesty topos, and the exclusivity of the inner sanctum of the museum circles. A museum can state modestly that it exists thanks to the donations of many important patrons, addressing families that have been related to it or the city in the past, but that also are influential or wealthy today. Museums do not ask for money directly, but first built a relationship before inviting them to join one of their patronage circles. Depending on the amount that they contribute, they become part of more exclusive circles, with more privileges. But the concept of vulnerability is also very relatable in that sense. When the government is withdrawing more and more from the cultural field, and even fiercely criticises it for being too left wing, or woke, museums become more dependent on patronage, and patrons who believe in the relevance of what cultural institutions, and artists mean to society at large.

The dedication as an element of a gift-giving structure, as presented by Massart relates to the strategy some artists use in giving artworks to the museum. When the museum accepts, the value and validation of their work increases, as do their chances of being included in group exhibition or even solo exhibitions. Valerie Schutte's analysis of the Morley's dedications to Tudors kings reminds of the tributes and donations, both in contributions to restore paintings, and in donations of art works, in honour of the farewell of museum directors like Sjarel Ex. With all these patrons, their position in society, their interests and world views, play a role in how museums address them or what kind of projects they propose for them to support. And nowadays, with the request for good governance, ethical partnerships, and questions of diversity and inclusion, museums have to consider who their patrons are, more carefully than ever before.

Session 4: Collectives Soliciting Patronage

Moderator: Floris Meens

- **Mariëlle Ekkelenkamp - Museums in Need: Appealing to the Rembrandt Association (1883- 1914)**
From the format of "friends associations" a new resolution materialized meeting museums' unremitting state of financial need but at a national level: the Rembrandt Association, to Preserve and Multiply Art Treasures in the Netherlands. In this contribution Ekkelenkamp investigates how Dutch public museums navigated the politics of the funding procedures of the Rembrandt Association in the years leading up to the First World War by analysing the tactics they showcased in their letters of application.
- **Colin Outhwaite - Negotiating Cultural Touchstones: Patronage and Identity in the Formation of a Grassroots Arts Collective in Utrecht, the Netherlands**

Drawing from his case study – the Touchstone Atelier, an arts collective that operates outside of government support and existing structures of cultural patronage as a space for creativity – Outhwaite investigates the wide variety of ‘gifts’ that are exchanged to aid the existence of an ‘interdependent’ arts community, and the ways such gifts are donated or framed by both the ‘gifter’ and the ‘receiver’.

Reflection: Robert Verhoogt, senior policy officer at the Heritage and Arts Directorate of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Ekkelenkamp focused her research on the very interesting balancing relationship between museums and the Vereniging Rembrandt. As she mentioned, it is interesting that the Association initially provided loans – and not donations as today – and that these loans were not only distributed to museums but also to other public institutions. She explained that the art of asking played an essential role in the conditions and communication between the Association and the museums. Interestingly, she pointed out that the association is of the opinion that it should not have an opinion on the artistic quality of the particular objects but instead leave this to the judgement of the individual museums. This arm’s length principle is still crucial in cultural politics today, but usually we refer to Thorbecke rather than to the Rembrandt Association.

Outhwaite mentioned the the-pay-what-you-can model that is used in his case study, the Touchstone Atelier in Utrecht, and the feelings of discomfort of the participants about asking for a financial support. This is an interesting dynamic in relation to the morality of the instrument of the Fair Practice Code in the Netherlands, largely based on the norm of fair pay and aimed at cultural institutions to encourage them to fair pay for individual artists. As an independent art space that operates outside the framework of government subsidies, and an alternative project with its own narrative, storytelling, Touchstone fits in with a rich culture and long history of alternative cultural places and artist communities.

What these studies show is that patronage is just as relevant for organizations and institutions as it is for individuals. Organizations like the Vereniging Rembrandt or Touchstone Atelier initiative in Utrecht seem to vary greatly in nature, size and institutional framework. However, from a historical perspective, these differences seem to fade. A lot of museums, cultural institutions and societies founded since the 18th century, started as private initiatives by individual artists, intellectuals or a few socially engaged citizens, and this is what ties the Rembrandt Association and the initiators of Touchstone Atelier.

Conclusion

As the reflections of the four themed sessions show, there are many parallels to be found in the historical case studies of patronage patterns presented during the conference, and practices of today’s individual makers and cultural institutions. Moreover, these examples contextualize contemporary practices of patronage.

A returning topic in the reflections and discussion sessions is the necessity of patronage. All referents emphasize the importance of patronage and philanthropy when it comes to supporting artists, intellectuals and institutions, which is a recurring practice throughout the history of patronage as shown by the historical case studies presented. Power dynamics are an integral part of this. Patronage relations reflect a dynamic of dependence and control, shifting

back and forth between patron and maker and influencing the conducts of the arrangement. In most cases, both parties profit from the mutual exchange. But in all cases, the referents also observe that vulnerability and dependency are recurring aspects of the patronage relation. These relations can be complex due to ethical considerations, whether aesthetically, economically, practically or morally.

This conference has shown that there are many different ways to give form to the art of asking. All these forms influence the patronage relation, be it the conditions, communication or the artistic product itself, in their own way. Therefore, each individual case of patronage should be analysed and thought out carefully. The participants felt that though today's makers and cultural institutions are more than capable of creating original ways of patronage, they can learn from past cases as it helps them to contextualize and analyse the form and results of their own practice.