

MURILLO AND THE NORTH: THE CASE OF MICHAEL SWEERTS*

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RONNI BAER

Princeton University Art Museum

rmbaer@princeton.edu

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ABSTRACT

Based on a number of visual consonances, it seems apparent that the Spanish painter, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, somehow knew the work of the Brussels-born artist, Michael Sweerts¹. Murillo only left his native Seville once, in 1658 for a brief trip to Madrid. Sweerts is not recorded as ever having traveled to Spain. Although there is as yet no definitive proof, this essay traces ways in which the Spanish artist could have come into contact with Sweerts's work.

RESUMEN

En base a una serie de similitudes visuales, parece posible que el pintor español Bartolomé Esteban Murillo conoció de alguna manera la obra del artista belga Michael Sweerts. Murillo solo salió de su Sevilla natal en 1658 para realizar un breve viaje a Madrid y no hay constancia de que Sweerts viajase nunca a España. Aunque aún no existen pruebas definitivas, este artículo analiza las formas en que el artista español podría haber entrado en contacto con la obra de Sweerts.

* A good deal of this essay is based on Baer, 2022, which includes a fuller discussion of Murillo's patrons and his connections to the art of the North. For their help in furthering my research, I would like to thank Peter Fox, Richard Kagan, Carla Rahn Philips, Raphael Duro Garrido, Nicole Legnani, Amanda Wunder, Fernando Quiles, Mark Ponte, Ramona Negrón, and Miguel Ángel Cerquera Hurtado. Brown, 1982, p. 38, observed that while 'no one is closer to Murillo than Michael Sweerts... there is no reason to suppose that Murillo knew Sweerts' painting.' This article attempts to prove otherwise. For example, Navarrete Prieto, 1996; Navarrete Prieto, 1997; Navarrete Prieto, 1998.

KEYWORDS: Murillo, Sweerts, 17th Century Painting.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Murillo, Sweerts, pintura del siglo XVII.

1. MURILLO'S SEVILLE

Murillo's use of northern print sources is well documented. His inclusion of carefully observed still life details in his portraits and religious pictures further allies his production to the art of the North. Three of the artist's most important patrons were either from The Netherlands or had northern parentage. Murillo's genre scenes, a type of painting associated with northern art, were collected by these patrons. Of the 18 paintings acquired from Murillo by Justino de Neve (1625-1685), canon of the Cathedral of Seville who descended from a family of Flemish origin, two were genre subjects: *primavera* (spring) and *berano* (summer).¹ Nicolás Omazur (c.1630-1698), who came from an old, prestigious Antwerp family and was resident in Seville by July 1669, owned seven genre pictures by Murillo among the forty originals and copies after the artist's work he had in his collection.² Josua van Belle (c.1636-1710), a Dutch shipping merchant from Rotterdam, lived first in Cádiz and then in Seville until returning to Holland in about 1673.³ At the time of his death in 1710, Van Belle had a collection of about 250 paintings by Netherlandish, Italian, and Spanish masters.⁴ When a portion of his collection was put up for sale by his son in Rotterdam in 1730, five paintings by Murillo were listed, two of which were of genre subjects.⁵ Given his evident enthusiasm for Murillo, it seems that Van Belle might have invited the Spanish artist to see his collection while he was resident in Seville.

Several paintings associated with the Bamboccianti, a group of mostly northern artists specializing in peasant genre scenes and working in Rome, figured in the 1730 Van

¹ Inventario de los bienes de Justino de Neve: '[8-9] Yten dos quadros yguales el uno de la primavera y el otro el berano con sus moduras doradas de mano de morillo...', cited in *Murillo & Justino de Neve: El arte de la Amistad*, 2012, p. 163. These have been identified as the paintings by Murillo in Dulwich (*The Flower Girl*) and Edinburgh (*Young Man with a Basket of Fruit*).

² Kinkad, 1986, p. 137.

³ Antunes and Negrón, 2022, p. 34.

⁴ This according to Von Uffenbach, 1754, p. 314, although no list of these works survives nor is it known how much of the collection was acquired during Van Belle's sojourn in Spain.

⁵ These genre subjects are described as 'pictures of a *Spanish beggar* and his female counterpart;' Sale Josua van Belle, Rotterdam, 6 September 1730 in Hoet, 1752, pp. 353-355, lot numbers 47: 'Een Spaanse Bedelaer door Morillo' and 48: 'Een Spaanse Bedelaers, door denzelve.' The sale of Van Belle's collection comprised 106 lots, leaving about 144 paintings seen by Von Uffenbach unaccounted for.

Belle sale.⁶ In fact, although the consignor's name is not listed, a couple of the works might have appeared in an earlier 1719 Rotterdam sale: 'A l'amour-Speelders, door P. van Laer, alias Bamboots, van zyn besten trant' and 'Een dito, de Goedergelukzegsters van denzelven [Andries Both].'⁷ In that sale also appeared 'A Persian, by Chevalier Zwarts.'⁸ If the paintings by the Bamboccianti described in the 1719 sale belonged to Van Belle, one might assume that they didn't sell so reappeared in the 1730 sale. Perhaps Van Belle also owned the painting by Michael Sweerts, which, because it doesn't figure in the 1730 sale, might have sold in 1719. If these conjectures are correct, Murillo could have seen a painting by Sweerts in Van Belle's collection in Seville.

2. THE GENRE PAINTINGS

Michael Sweerts (1618-1664), son of a Brussels silk merchant, was associated with the Bamboccianti while he was living and working in Rome. However, he painted more diverse subject matter than his northern colleagues, and the elegiac quality that imbues his work is quite different from the rough-and-tumble nature of their subjects. We know his art was valued, since the Pope bestowed upon him the title of *cavaliere*, and his paintings are recorded in important and prestigious collections in Italy by an early date, including that of Prince Camillo Pamphilj, the nephew of Pope Innocent X. He also enjoyed the patronage of gentlemen on the Grand Tour. However, he (and his art) fell

⁶ Among the paintings in the 1730 Rotterdam sale of Josua van Belle's collection were lot 72: Een stuk verbeeldende goede Geluk Zegsters, door Andries Bot ['A piece representing...fortune tellers by Andries Bot(h)']; lot 73: Een stuk zynde à la Mour Speelders door Pieter van Laer, anders Bamboots ['A piece being mora players by Pieter van Laer, otherwise (known as) Bamboots']; and lot 84: Een Landschapje daer een Man Koeijen Dryft, door Asselin, anders Krabbetje ['A little landscape in which a man drives cattle by Asselin, otherwise (known as) Krabbetje']. The elite Spanish community in Rome were enthusiastic patrons of the Bamboccianti and works by these artists also figured in Spanish collections at home. It is therefore very likely (and has long been assumed) that Murillo knew genre paintings by the Bamboccianti. Cherry, 2001, places Murillo's genre paintings in a broad context and includes a brief discussion of the Bamboccianti.

⁷ They are described in almost the same words as they are in the 1730 sale; see Sale Quiryn van Biesum, Rotterdam, 18th October 1719 in Hoet, 1752, pp. 232-133, lot 105 and 122.

⁸ The painting by Michael Sweerts now in the Thyssen Collection, Madrid (dated by Jansen, 2002, c.1655-1656 and by the Thyssen Collection online catalogue, c. 1658-1661), roughly corresponds to the cursory description but it has no known early provenance, and turban-like headdresses like this appear in other of Sweerts's paintings. According to Jansen, 2002, p. 144, 'Turban-like headdresses appear to have fascinated Sweerts throughout his career.'



Fig. 1. Michael Sweerts, *An Old Woman Spinning*, c.1646-1648, oil on canvas, 43 x 34 cm. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
Photog. Andrew Norman.



Fig. 2. Murillo, *Old Woman holding a Distaff and a Spindle*, c.1650-1660, oil on canvas, 87.8 x 76.5 cm. National Trust, Stourhead, Wiltshire.
Photog. Matthew Hollow.

into obscurity, and efforts to reconstitute his oeuvre were only undertaken in the last century.⁹

Only three of Sweerts's extant paintings are dated, which makes establishing a chronology of his work uncertain. Nor is there unanimity in the dating of Murillo's early paintings. The disparity in size between the work of the two artists is notable: Sweert's paintings are quite a bit smaller than Murillo's. Furthermore, the two artists painted in entirely different manners. Nevertheless, in Sweerts's *An Old Woman Spinning*, c.1646-1648 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; fig. 1) and Murillo's *Old Woman holding Distaff and Spindle*, c.1650 (Stourhead, Wiltshire; fig. 2), the choice of theme and the way it is represented is strikingly similar. In both, an elderly woman depicted in half-length with a white head covering is placed close to the picture plane before a dark background. Under her left arm, she holds a distaff and, with her right hand, a spindle. Their direct address to the viewer is arresting. While there are numerous northern depictions of women spinning, they inevitably focus on the "act" of spinning rather than on the spinner.

⁹ On Sweerts, see Kultzen, 1996, Jansen, 2002, Yeager-Crasselt, 2015, and De Marchi, 2024.

In trying to understand where Murillo's anomalous genre paintings might have originated, scholars have posited the model of Gerard ter Borch, an influential 17th-century Dutch painter of domestic genre scenes, who painted both spinners and women searching their child's head for lice. But, if one compares Ter Borch's painting of a woman combing her child's hair (c.1652-1653, Mauritshuis; fig. 3) to Murillo's *The Toilette*, (c. 1655-1660, Munich; fig. 4), Murillo's composition is more similar to Sweerts's *Woman Searching a Child's Head for Lice* (c.1650, Musées de Strasbourg; fig. 5) than to the Ter Borch.¹⁰ Sweerts's painting is probably among those that were brought back from Rome to Amsterdam in about 1650 by one of his Dutch patrons: it is described in the March 7, 1731



Fig. 3. Gerard ter Borch, *Mother Combing her Child's Hair*, c.1652-1653, oil on panel, 33.2 x 28.7 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.



Fig. 4. Murillo, *The Toilette*, c.1655-1660, oil on canvas, 143.7 x 109 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen-Alte Pinakothek München¹¹.



Fig. 5. Michael Sweerts, *Woman Searching a Child's Head for Lice*, c.1650, oil on canvas, 42 x 34 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg.

¹⁰ As noted in Wheelock, 2004, p. 11, paintings by Sweerts of women spinning or searching their child's hair for lice, which Ter Borch could have seen in Amsterdam, might have inspired Ter Borch's paintings of similar subjects, as I believe they inspired Murillo, but to different effect.

Like Sweerts, the scale of Ter Borch's paintings is much smaller than Murillo's. As far as I can tell, no genre paintings by Ter Borch—or any painting by him for that matter, including those of Spanish subjects—has an early Spanish provenance.

According to Kultzen, 1996, p. 23, the Sweerts painting dates 'to the artist's early days in Rome.' He arrived in the city around 1646. It could be that Ter Borch and Murillo were both inspired by Sweerts who, as his four extant paintings of the subject show, clearly liked the theme of 'searching for lice.' Brown, 1982, p. 38, suggested that Murillo extracted a detail from Sweerts's *Street Scene* (1644-1646, oil on canvas, 67.2 x 50 cm, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome) for his painting of *The Toilette*, but to this writer, the Sweerts painting in Strasbourg is much closer.

¹¹ <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/en/artwork/ZKGPJE0xgA>

Amsterdam inventory of the estate of Anthony Deutz (a descendant of the patron) as ‘A woman combing a girl, masterfully artful by Cavalier Swartz’.¹²

The boy in Murillo’s *The Young Beggar* (c.1645-1650, Louvre; fig. 6) is almost a mirror-image of the man in Sweerts’s *A Sleeping Boy and a Man Removing Fleas from Himself* c.1650-1652 (fig. 7). And there is something about the posture of the sleeping boy next to him—in the positioning of his legs and depiction of his dirty bare feet—that finds echoes in Murillo’s painting. The strong, glancing light is another shared feature of the two works. According to the chronologies constructed for the two artists, these works were painted close in time.¹³ While it is difficult to say which takes precedence, both Murillo and Sweerts depicted the same simple subjects in a dignified, profoundly human way.



Fig. 6. Murillo, *The Young Beggar*, c.1645-1650, oil on canvas, 137 x 115 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photog. Stéphane Maréchalle.



Fig. 7 Michael Sweerts, *A Sleeping Boy and a Man Removing Fleas from Himself*, c.1650-1654, oil on canvas, 71 x 78.5 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

¹² ‘Een vrouwtje dat een Meisje kamt, overheerlyk van konst, door Cavellier Swartz’ [no. 8] in Kultzen, 1996, p. 94.

¹³ Kultzen 1996, p. 36, dates Sweerts’s painting to the early years of his late Roman period, i.e., c.1650-1652, while the Mauritshuis online catalogue dates it to c. 1650-1654. It is therefore conceivable that both the Murillo and Sweerts pictures were painted c.1650. Kultzen posited that Sweerts was inspired by the Murillo, without indicating how the painting could have been known to him. No provenance for the Louvre Murillo is known before the mid-eighteenth century.



Fig. 8. Murillo, *Laughing Boy*, c.1655-1660, oil on canvas, 54 x 40.4 cm. Abelló collection, Madrid.



Fig. 9. Michael Sweerts, *Smiling Youth*, from the series *Diversae Facies in usum juvenum et alionum*, 1656, etching, 8.8 x 8.4 cm. Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 10. Murillo, *Urchin mocking Old Woman eating Migas*, c.1660-1665, oil on canvas, 147.3 x 106.7 cm. Dyrham Park © National Trust.



Fig. 11. Michael Sweerts, title page from the *Diversae facies in usum juvenum et alionum*, 1656, etching, 9 x 8.1 cm, Rijksmuseum.

In addition to his paintings, Murillo could have known Sweerts's etched series entitled *Diversae facies in usum juvenum et aliorum* (Different faces for the use of young people and others), published in 1656. These individualized head studies are related to Sweerts's paintings of single figures from the mid-to late 1650s.¹⁴ Murillo painted several works that feature smiling or laughing youths, a relatively unusual motif; Murillo's *Laughing Boy* c.1655-1660, (fig. 8), though more exuberant, is not far from Sweerts's *Smiling Youth* from his print series (fig. 9). In Murillo's *Urchin Mocking an Old Woman eating Migas* c.1660-1665 (fig. 10), a young man smiles at the viewer while pointing to the woman guarding her gruel. Murillo here seems to have combined Sweerts's print with the title page image, in which a young man addresses the viewer by pointing to the name, date, and maker of the etchings (fig. 11).

3. THE DOCUMENTS AND MURILLO'S SOCIAL NETWORKS

There are no known copies of the genre scenes by Sweerts under discussion nor is there evidence that any of his paintings appeared in 17th-century Spanish collections (although his works were often attributed to other artists until quite recently). Further, there is no record of any painting by Sweerts with a Spanish provenance in the catalogue raisonné of his work.¹⁵ Aside from his visit to Madrid in 1658, Murillo didn't travel. So how could he have known Sweerts's work?

The key may lie in the family and social networks of Murillo's patron, Josua van Belle. After his return from Spain to the Netherlands, Josua continued to have ties to Seville, not least through his brother, Pedro. Pedro had moved to the city in 1664 to assist Josua in his business of shipping goods to the Spanish Americas. A document dated September 3rd, 1686, partially published in 1936 by W. R. Menkman, records that Josua van Belle appeared before the Rotterdam notary Gomaro van Bortel claiming a ¼ interest in monies owed to him by Balthasar Coymans—to be received by the Seville residents Joseph Morales and Christoval Garcia de Segovia—if Pedro van Belle had no recompense from the galleons expected to arrive under Admiral Gonzale Chaxon.¹⁶

¹⁴ For example, *Head of an Old Woman* (Getty) and *Head of a Boy* (Groninger Museum, Groningen).

¹⁵ Kultzen, 1996. The only painting by Sweerts in Spain, aside from the Thyssen *Boy in a Turban*, is in the Museo Cerralbo in Madrid (where it was, until recently, attributed to the Dutch artist Nicolaes Berchem). The curators there have—as yet—discovered no provenance for it.

¹⁶ Menkman, 1936, pp. 12-13. 'Om terug te komen op Josua van Belle, de reden voor zijn compareeren voor notaris Van Bortel was dat hij voor een vierde geïnteresseerd was in een vordering van 50.000

Balthasar Coymans (1652-1686), who happened to be the uncle of Sweerts's most important patrons, was a business partner of Pedro van Belle. Coymans came from a venerable Amsterdam merchant family and had apprenticed with Josua van Belle in Seville in 1671, thanks to the long-standing relationship between the Coymans and Van Belle families.¹⁷ When Josua left Seville in 1673, Coymans and Pedro took over the merchant house. They then relocated to Cádiz, which had supplanted Seville in the 1670s as the entrepôt to Spain's transatlantic commercial activities.

Coymans bankrolled the *asiento* system—the contract granted by the Spanish crown that gave the holder exclusive rights to the slave trade with Spanish America. The *asiento* generated revenues for the Spanish royal treasury, in addition to supplying the colonists with slave labor. At the same time, it supposedly protected the closed economic system of the Spanish colonial empire; but, because of smuggling and illicit trade, it was ultimately unsuccessful in that regard.¹⁸ Coymans became *asentista* (controller) in 1685, after making a large cash payment to the Spanish treasury and promising to construct frigates for the Spanish armada.¹⁹

The 1686 document concerns the payment for the *asiento* contract, which was 200,000 escudos. Coymans paid 150,000 of that sum in twelve monthly installments. For the remaining 50,000, Coymans drew a bill of exchange on his brother in Amsterdam, which had to be paid immediately for the construction of the warships. It turns out

daalders van 50 stuivers en hij verklaarde de Heeren Joseph Morales en Christoval Garcia de Segovia, beiden inwoners van Sevilla, te hebben gemachtigd het hem komende in te vorderen en te ontvangen van den Heer Balthazar Coymans, wanneer Pedro van Belle (broeder van Josua) geen remise mocht hebben gemaakt met de galjoenen welke verwacht warden onder den admiral Gonzale Chaxon.'

Gonzalo Chacón y Treviño also known as Gonzalo Chacón de Medina y Salazar (1627-1705), was Captain General of the armada de la guardia de Indias, a convoy system that went to and returned from Tierra Firme (that is, Panama and northern South America). We know from records of fines paid that Chacón's outgoing fleet of September 24, 1684 included 'illicit' shipments of ropa (clothing). According to Carla Rahn Phillips in an email to this author of 14 Nov 2002, smuggled merchandise and goods barred from export to Spanish America were defined as 'illicit,' but from time to time they would be permitted if the exporter paid a fee. Researchers in the Archivo General de Indias and the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Sevilla have as yet been unable to come up either with the names of the consignors and their goods, or a bill of lading that would indicate what else was in this outgoing shipment.

¹⁷ Van Belle had helped Balthasar's mother, Sophia Trip (1615-1679), in managing the Coymans Amsterdam firm after her husband Joan died in 1657. See Antunes and Negrón, 2022, p. 33.

¹⁸ Postma, 1990, p. 30.

¹⁹ Rout, 2003, p. 45. In 1681, Pedro van Belle was mentioned along with Coymans as the principal contractors with the Dutch (West India) Company to deliver 6,000 slaves annually and that, without their capital of f40,000, the West India Company would be 'totally ruined;' see Hazewinkel, 1932, p. 38.

that Josua van Belle funded part of this cash outlay: the notarial deed confirms that he paid $\frac{1}{4}$ of the 50,000 escudos, which is the money he was claiming from Coymans. Pedro, who had relocated to Curaçao as Coymans's factor-general in 1681, loaded the money onto the Spanish fleet to be delivered to the aforementioned Morales and Garcia in Seville, who held power of attorney for Josua.²⁰ This serves to underline how closely Coymans and the brothers Van Belle were connected, even after Josua's return to The Netherlands.

Balthasar unexpectedly died in Cádiz on November 8th, 1686, soon after Josua van Belle's visit to the Rotterdam notary. An inventory of Coymans's possessions made after his death indicates that he had a house full of furniture, maps, and paintings. In addition to religious subjects and works related to his maritime interests, the paintings included landscapes, battle scenes, fruit pieces, 'fables' and musicians. Although we know that the Bamboccianti painted battle scenes and Sweerts may have depicted musicians, no artists' names are mentioned in the inventory, making it impossible to identify exactly what works of art Coymans had in Spain.²¹

Art collecting was very much in Coymans's blood. His eponymous grandfather Balthasar (1555-1634) founded a trading company in Amsterdam and was active as an international banker, making him one of the three wealthiest citizens of the city. He used part of his wealth to acquire an impressive collection of Italian paintings, one of the first Dutchmen to do so.²² Like the older Balthasar, his son Joan (1601-1657)—husband of Sophia Trip, whom we know Josua helped after Joan's death—had extensive business dealings in Italy and was probably responsible for adding paintings by the Bamboccianti to the collection.²³ Apparently, Joan and Josua van Belle shared a taste for this popular kind of art.

Joan's sister, Elizabeth Coymans, had three sons—Jean [Jan] (1618-1673), Jeronimus (1622-1670), and Joseph (1624-1684) Deutz, the younger Balthasar's first cousins. They, too, took an active interest in art, including—possibly at the encouragement of their uncle Joan—the work of the Bamboccianti.²⁴ The boys embarked on a Grand Tour

²⁰ Stadsarchief Rotterdam, access nr. 18, inv. nr. 1473, fo. 110, September 3, 1686. My great thanks to Ramona Negrón, who generously tracked down the original of the document that had only partially been published by Menkman and explained to me how the *asiento* contract worked.

²¹ Inventory of Balthasar Coymans (1652-1686). General Archives of the Indies at Seville (section V: Indiferente General, Asiento de Negros): A. de I., 153-7-9, dated Cádiz, November 8, 1686. Wright, 1924, p. 50, n.5 gives a basic overview of Coymans's estate but does not publish the inventory.

²² See Bikker, 2004, pp. 27-33.

²³ Bikker, 2004, p. 28; Bikker, 1998, p. 291.

²⁴ Bikker, 1998, p. 291.

to Italy, France, and Spain from 1646 until 1650. While their primary goal was to build up business contacts (in addition to gaining language proficiency and exposure to foreign cultures), they were also active in the art trade, collecting, among other things, Italian paintings and antique sculpture.

Elizabeth Coymans's journal indicates that Sweerts painted portraits of all three brothers while they were in Rome. In 1648, the artist was documented as an agent in the purchasing of art for the Deutzes. Furthermore, Sweerts, whose father was a silk merchant, acted as their intermediary in the textile trade; in 1651 Jean Deutz in Amsterdam authorized 'Signore Cavagliere Michielle Suerts' to act on his behalf to negotiate with Roman customs officials in a transaction involving seven lengths of Leiden silk.²⁵

When the Deutz boys returned to Amsterdam from Rome around 1650, they brought several of Sweerts's paintings with them. (This was a decade before Sweerts himself settled in the city, where he was documented from at least mid-1660 to the autumn of 1661.) Sweerts's paintings of the *Seven Acts of Mercy*, a *Painters' Academy*, and *A Roman Woman Sewing* held pride of place in the presentation room of Joseph Deutz's grand residence on Amsterdam's Herengracht.²⁶ By the time their cousin Balthasar Coymans moved from Amsterdam to Seville, then, he would have been more than familiar with Sweerts's paintings. Through Coymans, his partner Pedro van Belle might have also encountered Sweerts's work, if he didn't already know it from his brother's collection. And both Coymans and Pedro van Belle—closely connected as they were to such major art collectors—likely knew Murillo personally, the most famous painter in Andalusía (who was working in Cádiz during Coymans's residency there).

Like Sweerts, Murillo was also linked to people mentioned in the *asiento* document, if only indirectly. Admiral Gonzalo Chacón, Captain-General of the fleet between 1684 and 1686 and gentleman of the Order of Calatrava, died on 29 November 1705 and was buried in the Church of the Hospital de la Caridad in Seville. The Brotherhood of the Hospital, an organization devoted to the burial of the dead at a time when Seville was afflicted by plague and famine, was headed by Miguel Mañara (1627-1679), who had been appointed *hermano mayor* of the Brotherhood in late December 1663. He, like Chacón, was a member of the exclusive military order of Calatrava. Mañara was godfather to two

²⁵ Bikker, 1998, pp. 292-293. The first mention of portraits by Sweerts of members of the Deutz family, made in Rome at the expense of the three boys, appears in Elisabeth Coymans's *Journal* entry dated 22 December 1650: 'Conterfeijtsel na t' leven van Michiel Sweerts met haer vergulde lijsten f140:-'; see Bikker 1998, p. 307. For a discussion of the identification of these paintings, see Jansen, 2002, pp. 100-105.

²⁶ Bikker, 1998, p. 299.

of Murillo's children (José Esteban, born in 1650 and Francisco Miguel, born in 1651)²⁷ and was responsible for commissioning the artist, who became a member of the prestigious brotherhood in 1665, to paint a series of six works of mercy for the church. These included the *Return of the Prodigal Son* (c.1668, NGA, DC) and *Christ Healing the Paralytic* (c.1668, NG London), which were installed in the newly expanded church by July 1670. To be buried there, Gonzalo Chacón must have also been a member of the Brotherhood, although the dates of his membership are unknown. If he had been a member before Murillo's death in April 1682 (Chacón would have been 55), they certainly would have known one another.²⁸

The Flemish textile merchant, Miguel de Usarte, was godfather to another of Murillo's sons (Gaspar Esteban, born in 1661).²⁹ Usarte was recorded in Seville by 1656 and eventually became treasurer of the Hospital de la Caridad in 1678. He was among the Flemish merchants of the city who are documented as quarreling with businessmen living in nearby Osuna; Josua van Belle led the complaint. Earlier, a promissory note worth 1,200 ducats that was to be collected from Manuel López de Ulloa and company, residents of Antwerp, by José de los Ríos and the widow and heirs of Joan Coymans, all residents of Amsterdam, was transferred from Miguel de Usarte and Pedro de Querle (the first individuals assigned to collect the note) to Josua van Belle, resident of Seville.³⁰ This is yet another document linking Van Belle and the Coymans family, now through the Fleming Usarte, who was a friend of Murillo.

Another godfather to one of Murillo's children—his son, Francisco Gaspar (born in 1653)³¹—was José de Veitia Linage (1623-1688), the husband of Murillo's niece, Tomasa Josefa. Veitia was the powerful secretary of the *Consejo de Indias* in the Casa de Contratación (which governed trade with the Indies). Veitia had been instrumental in arranging contacts between Murillo and the well-off merchants in the secretary's orbit. The year after Coymans was appointed *asentista*, the Spanish king established a special board (*la junta particular del Asiento de negros*) to advise him with respect to the problematic involvement of the Dutch in the Indies. Despite his elevated position, Veitia was not appointed to serve on it, as it 'was known' that he was a good friend of Balthasar Coymans.³² This

²⁷ Angulo Íñiguez, 1981, p. 149: Cronología 1650.IV.7; 1651.IX.20. See, too, Cruz Valdovinos, 2017 and Cruz Valdovinos, 2019.

²⁸ On the Hospital de la Caridad, see Brown, 1978, pp. 128-146 and Wunder, 2017, pp. 97-124.

²⁹ Angulo Íñiguez, 1981, p. 152: Cronología 1661.X.22.

³⁰ Cerquera Hurtado, 2019, pp. 85-86, n. 212. The note was transferred on October 14, 1664.

³¹ Angulo Íñiguez, 1981, p. 150: Cronología 1953.IV.8.

³² On Veitia, see Navarrete Prieto, 2020, pp. 154-235; Brown, 2019, pp. 49-54; and Wright, 1924, pp. 37-41. Brown, 2019, p. 52, posits that it could have been through Veitia that Murillo met Mañara.

is another apparently close connection between Murillo, via his niece's husband, and Coymans, uncle of Sweerts's patrons.

At least as early as the mid-eighteenth century, the close connection between the two artists was made manifest when Sweerts's *Woman Grooming her Child's Hair* c.1656, (fig. 12) was reproduced in a print by Louis Michel Habou as after a work by Murillo (fig. 13). While there is apparently no documentary evidence linking Sweerts and Murillo directly, there "was" widespread appreciation of the Bamboccianti (with whom Sweerts was affiliated) both in Spain and Holland, and there are several tantalizing ties among members of the prominent Flemish community in Seville, the Coymans family, and Murillo that provide hypothetical ways through which the Spanish artist could have been familiar with Sweerts's paintings.



Fig. 12. Michael Sweerts, *Woman Grooming her Child's Hair*, c.1656, oil on canvas, 43.8 x 33.7 cm. Musée Crozatier, Puy-en-Velay.



Fig. 13. Louis Michel Habou, *La Toilette du Savoyard*, 1763, etching and engraving, 39.9 x 29.2 cm. Rijksprentenkabinet-Rijksmuseum³³.

³³ <https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200200819>

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