Artists everywhere and across all time periods have collaborated with one another. Yet in the early modern Low Countries, collaboration was particularly widespread, resulting in a number of distinctive visual forms that have become strongly associated with artistic – and especially painterly – practice in this region. While art historians long glossed over this phenomenon, which appeared to discomfitingly counter nineteenth-century notions of authorship and artistic genius that have long shaped the field, the past few decades have seen increased attention to this rich and complicated subject. The essays in this book together constitute a current state of the question, while at once pointing the way forward. In broadening the art historical lens on this subject, they draw upon economic and social history, current interests in immigration and mobility, print studies, and technical analysis, embracing a range of literary and archival sources along the way. Interdisciplinary in their perspectives and methodologically diverse, these essays present both theoretical reflections on artistic collaboration and in-depth studies of particular artist-partnerships and collaboratively made objects.

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This volume embraces the complex and often messy reality of pictorial genres in seventeenth-century Dutch art, by examining how they were defined by artists, theorists, audiences and art historians, how they were part of artistic practices and developed within a specific societal and economic context. Church interiors, cortegaerdjes, scenes of everyday life, tronies, landscapes, spoockerijen, group portraits, bambocciate, hunting scenes, history paintings, sottoboschi, still lives and many other subjects: the wide variety of pictorial genres and sub-genres in which Dutch artists specialized is a key component in our perception of Dutch seventeenth-century art. Yet the epistemological framework constituted by genre definitions, conventions and hierarchies is far from self-evident, nor does it necessarily reflect how people in the seventeenth-century thought about artworks. In fact, art literature of the period is largely silent on these matters and artists do not appear to have followed an established set of principles.

This volume examines the way pictorial genres can be, and have been, defined by artists, theorists, audiences and art historians; how individual artists conceived the subject matter of their artworks; and how society and the art market contributed to the development of certain subjects. As such, it embraces the complex and often messy reality of pictorial genres in seventeenth-century Dutch art.

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