Chapter 3

Style to Order, the Customer is King

A Vast Oeuvre

According to a cautious estimate by the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* in 1919, Schwartze produced about a thousand works of art.[1] This is an impressive number, even bearing in mind that her career spanned forty-odd years, from 1876 until her death in 1918. Since this translates into an average of more than twenty works a year, we can assume that each commission took her about one or two weeks to complete. Clearly, she not only worked hard, but also at great speed. This huge output appears to have been driven in part by her unflagging concern to provide for herself and her family. But even when she had long since achieved the status of a millionaire, she continued working with undiminished energy. The philosophy of life underlying this relentless industry may have been determined in part by her family history, which was rooted in migrant entrepreneurship, as we saw in chapter 1. A strong will to succeed, in business as well as art, and a clear awareness of the full spectrum of possibilities – from success to failure and indeed bankruptcy – were among the determining factors. This makes it easier to understand why Schwartze focused primarily on commissioned portraits, the sale and price of which were fixed in advance. The uncertain art trade, in which artists offered their independent work for sale, provided less security. Schwartze did produce genre pieces (scenes from daily life) and still lifes for the art trade, but portraits constituted the lion's share of her oeuvre. Portrait paintings were still much in demand around 1880, when Schwartze was developing her career in this field. Although photography – invented in 1839 – was starting to come into its own, it did not yet pose an essential threat..

Portraiture in the Netherlands

The modest tradition of portraiture in the Netherlands exuded solid craftsmanship, simplicity, and a certain domesticity. It did not include ceremonial portraits or 'portraits représentatifs', such as those popular in French courtly culture,[2] the elegance and grandeur of which were designed to emphasize the sitter's status. In the 16th and 17th century the protestant Dutch republic of the Northern Netherlands had never developed a full-fledged aristocracy or a courtly culture, and hence was without a breeding ground for the emergence of a tradition of elegant (ceremonial) portraits. Martin illustrates this by noting that when Prince Willem II and his wife Mary Stuart decided to commission a portrait in 1641, they did not turn to Rembrandt or Frans Hals, but to a man from the catholic (Southern Netherlands) Flanders, with a more finely-tuned sense of outward show, the Antwerp baroque painter Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641): *In the second half of the 17th, in the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries our own painters began making efforts on elegant portraiture. But they were almost without exception failures, though they were highly praised by contemporaries, even above Rembrandt.*[3] In fact, any Dutchman who wanted a portrait to proclaim and affirm status was likely to look abroad. In the eighteenth century, it was the growing patriciate, with ties to the court of the House of Orange, which wanted more than the subdued, modest portraits produced by the country's own painters. Local portraitists could scarcely compete with the band of internationally famous itinerant portraitists, many of them French. The Swiss artist Jean Etienne Liotard (1702-1789) was one of those who found a ready market in the Netherlands. And the portraits of Charles Howard Hodges (1764-1837) were in such great demand that he left England and settled in the Netherlands in 1788.

The economic and cultural passivity that gripped the early nineteenth-century Netherlands was reflected in the paintings produced in this period. *The renewed middle-class emphasis of the nineteenth century, with its atmosphere of domesticity [...] and its lack of fresh air, did not give rise to any fascinating new esthetics.*[4] The demand for portraits could be fulfilled by Dutch artists. People were content with the thoughtful, skilfully-painted images produced by the likes of Cornelis Kruseman (1797-1857) or his second cousin Jan Adam Kruseman (1804-1862), or by Jan Willem Pieneman (1810-1860). These were Schwartze's precursors in the Netherlands.

Economic Recovery and Outward Show

In the 1860's the Netherlands entered an era of economic recovery, with a rapid expansion of trade and industry, banking, and the transport network. The country started to recover some of its lost international prestige. The 'nouveau riche' that sprang up in this period sought to affirm its new status in the same ways as those with 'old money' had done – by commissioning portrait paintings. The time was ripe for an artist with Schwartze's talents. Her international background, combined with a sense of elegance and outward show, produced a new element in Dutch portraiture. In this context it is telling to note the mixture of irony and awe with which the Dutch painter Jozef Israels (1824-1911) distanced himself from the Spanish court portraitist Velázquez (1599-1660), whom Schwartze too studied and admired. *And we stand there, trying to understand how such a man, moving in such circles, must have felt, we painters without daring, without models, without court, king, or emperor to give us a sense of grandeur. A little painting measuring scarcely a few meters strikes fear into us, and the king chuckles a little, at what we show him at an exhibition of living masters, and we crawl into our shells, and are painters of an age of doubt and joyless deeds.*[5] Doubt and joylessness are certainly not features of Schwartze's work. *As Thérèse Schwartze saw it, having one's portrait painted should be a joyful event, a tribute to beauty, to the sense of family, to one's position or merits: it should be a moment of recognition – a festive occasion!*[6]

In Schwartze's portraits, the sitter almost always gazes straight at the viewer. The frontal perspective was generally deemed appropriate for grand, prestigious portraits. Its psychological impact – especially where the sitter meets the viewer's eyes – compels a certain respect.[7] When Schwartze made pendants, however – depicting two figures who were either related or connected in some other way – the sitters' expressions are not directed at the viewer. Examples include the likenesses of *Anton Dreesmann* and *Willem Vroom* (pp.158, 159), joint founders of Vroom & Dreesmann, right until the 21st century Netherlands' largest chain of department stores.

German and French Influences

Schwartze's early portraits are fairly subdued. Her stylistic development can be described, in general terms, as progressing from a meticulous style of painting with dark colors to a lighter tone and more vigorous brushstrokes, displaying the influence of French and Dutch Impressionism. Until 1885 she worked exclusively in oils, but then she gravitated more and more to pastels. The earliest work depicted here is the *Portrait of Henriëtte Sillem-Hielbig*, dating from 1870 (p. 17). It is a delicately painted, well-crafted, rather stiff portrait in dark colors and the facial expression is earnest. When she produced this painting, at nineteen years of age, Schwartze was collaborating

Poppies (Klaprozen), n.d. (c. 1916)
Oil on canvas on panel. 57.8 x 41.3 cm
Private collection; formerly collection Simonis & Buunk,
The Netherlands

Portrait of Aleida Gijsberta Maria van Ogtrop-Hanlo with her five children, 1906
Oil on canvas, 176 x 197 cm
Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Aleida van Ogtrop-Hanlo (1870-1944) was the wife of the stockbroker Henricus Joannes van Ogtrop, a member of the Provinciale Staten van Noord- en Zuid-Holland and a member of the board of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. The light colors and loose brushstrokes give this enormous portrait a modern appearance. Schwartze has indulged herself here in her love of clothing. The big black hat of one of the girls and the dresses of the others are in 18th century style. The mother's hairstyle and headgear are dominated by contemporary Jugendstil.

The Six Boissevain Daughters, 1916
Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 146 cm
Collection Amsterdam Museum

The economist and manufacturer Ernst Henri Boissevain and his wife, Maria Barbara Pijnappel, had four sons and six daughters. Charles Boissevain (1868-1940), the director of an ammonia factory who served on the board of the Concertgebouw, was a member of Amsterdam city council and the provincial executive of North Holland between 1905 and 1919. His wife chaired the Nederlandsche Bond voor Vrouwenkiesrecht (Women's Suffrage Federation). ('De Amsterdamse familie Boissevain', *Ons Amsterdam*, October 1996).