

## Vera Lutter's Museum Pictures

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Let me begin with a description of a picture: a perspectival view into a long gallery space. The walls of the gallery are lined with paintings, the space punctuated here and there by sculptures on pedestals and platforms. In the left foreground stands a large classical figure whose head is turned slightly away from the viewer, as if looking back toward the interior of the space. If we follow the figure's gaze, the other artworks in its line of sight appear progressively smaller as they recede in distance. Like a textbook illustration of one-point perspective, the architectural lines of the ceiling, walls, and floor all converge toward a vanishing point near the center of the composition. The deep perspective pulls us into the composition, as we strain to make out the objects at the back of the gallery.

This description is something of a coy exercise, because I am referring to not one but two pictures that share these visual traits—images separated in their making by over two hundred years. One is a large-scale photograph by German-born, New York-based contemporary artist Vera Lutter, *European Old Masters: December 7, 2018–January 9, 2019* (pp. 12–13); the other is a painting by eighteenth-century French artist Hubert Robert, *Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist's Studio* (1789).<sup>1</sup> The formal correspondences between the photograph and Robert's painting were not deliberate on Lutter's part (in fact, this specific painting may have been unknown to Lutter when she made the work), but the affinity between these images is not coincidental, either. I say this because the



Hubert Robert, *Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist's Studio*, 1789. Oil on canvas; 25 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 31 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (65 × 81 cm). Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris, RF1938-69

conceptual starting point for what I am calling Lutter's "museum pictures" was her ambition to record, with a camera obscura, something akin to the painted scenes of gallery interiors popularized during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a genre developed by Flemish painters such as David Teniers the Younger, and later reimagined by artists including Italian painter Giovanni Paolo Panini, Robert's teacher at the French Academy in Rome.

I begin with the comparison to Robert's canvas because of its apt title, *Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist's Studio*. Beyond its formal similarities to Lutter's photograph, Robert's painting speaks to the unique situation that enabled Lutter to make her interior scene: her use of a gallery (or in her case, an entire museum) as a functioning studio. During a two-year residency at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the museum's galleries became not only places to be represented, but also sites of creation. In this essay I will trace how Lutter's museum pictures belong to a long

and important tradition of artists representing gallery spaces and the artworks within them. Yet these photographs also upend that tradition through their paradoxical combination of truthfulness and unknowability.

### *Picture Galleries*

In 1651, David Teniers the Younger, court painter in Brussels to Archduke Leopold Wilhelm (at the time Habsburg governor of the Spanish Netherlands), painted numerous scenes of gallery interiors showing Leopold Wilhelm surrounded by important works in his collection. Although examples of gallery scenes existed previously, Teniers's paintings were among the first depicting an identifiable collection. One of these, *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his Picture Gallery in Brussels* (c. 1651), now in the collection of the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, shows a large room in which every wall surface is covered with paintings, each one rendered in painstaking detail so as to be easily recognizable. In the right foreground, next to the painted figure of Leopold Wilhelm, Teniers depicts the archduke's prized *Saint Margaret* by Raphael, while at the top center of the gallery, hanging directly above the standing figures, is *Diana and Callisto* by Titian and his studio.<sup>2</sup> These scenes of Leopold Wilhelm's picture gallery were used to spread knowledge of his art collection, with versions sent to his brother, Emperor Ferdinand III; his cousin, King Philip IV of Spain; and the Bishop of Ghent, Anton Triest. Significantly, Teniers's gallery views of Leopold Wilhelm's collection were an artistic combination of fact and fiction. Whereas the depicted paintings were real artworks owned by the archduke, the interior spaces and arrangement of artworks were either partially or entirely invented, as evidenced by variations across Teniers's paintings in the types of interiors and the arrangement of works, not to mention improbable hanging configurations that sometimes defied the logic of gravity, perspective, or scale.<sup>5</sup>

If Teniers's views of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm's picture gallery served to disseminate information about the artworks in his collection, Lutter's *European Old Masters* refuses such easy identifications, forestalling the documentary claims often ascribed to analog photography. Like all of Lutter's works, the photograph was made using



David Teniers the Younger,  
*Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his  
Picture Gallery in Brussels*,  
c. 1651. Oil on copperplate;  
41¼ × 51¾ in. (104.8 × 130.4 cm).  
Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid, P001813

a camera obscura (a dark room with a pinhole opening)—in this case, one built directly into the gallery. Constructed by the museum to Lutter's technical specifications, the camera's exterior walls extended up to the gallery's high ceiling, allowing the camera box to integrate seamlessly with the architecture of the space. Once the newly constructed walls were painted and decorative floor molding applied to match the existing finishes of the gallery, the camera became more or less invisible to unsuspecting museum visitors (see p. 112). The imperative to make Lutter's camera as inconspicuous as possible was motivated by the long exposure time she knew would be necessary for sufficient light to pass through the pinhole and inscribe an image of the gallery onto the large sheets of photo paper installed inside the camera.<sup>4</sup> Whereas two or three hours are typically needed to photograph an outdoor scene illuminated by bright sunlight, the exposure time for Lutter's gallery photograph was calculated in months, rather than hours or days, due to the dark conditions in the gallery, with its black ceiling, dark wood floors, and low levels of artificial light.

Although cleverly camouflaged, Lutter's camera box represented a substantial physical intrusion into the gallery space, obstructing the previously uninterrupted gallery vista for museum visitors approaching from the east side—the ideal perspectival view now being accorded to the camera, rather than the viewer. The reason such an

installation was deemed acceptable was the timing of Lutter’s residency. By early 2017, when the camera was constructed, the museum’s Ahmanson Building, home to its European painting and sculpture galleries, was one of four structures slated for future demolition to make way for a new permanent collection building designed by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. The construction of Lutter’s camera, therefore, was an intervention in a gallery already scheduled for closure. Moreover, Lutter’s idea to photograph a classic “picture gallery” scene coincided with the reevaluation of this very type of display at LACMA. For these reasons, her residency at the museum was framed rhetorically—even by the museum itself—as an archival project to commemorate the buildings and galleries designated for demolition. The *New York Times* reported on her residency under the headline “Artist to Photograph Doomed Structures at Los Angeles County Museum,” noting, “Mr. Govan has commissioned the artist Vera Lutter ‘to confront these sites that have meaning and preserve them through her work.’”<sup>5</sup>

Earlier, I described Teniers’s picture gallery views as combining historical fact and architectural fiction: whereas the paintings represented within them were meticulous renderings of actual artworks owned by Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, the galleries he depicted were fictive spaces.<sup>6</sup> Lutter’s picture gallery, by contrast, is a “true” representation of an actual architectural space, but one in which the historical identification of artworks ranges from difficult to impossible. The paradox here is that Lutter’s photograph bears an unmediated indexical relationship to the gallery space it reproduces. Created without a lens or intervening negative, the image was made by light rays that reflected directly off the walls, ceiling, floor, and artworks in the gallery, and onto the surface of the photographic paper, disallowing any fictitious invention as to how the physical space and artworks within it are represented. Yet despite its indexical claims to facticity, Lutter’s picture gallery is so alluring precisely because it frustrates the dissemination of knowledge we have come to expect from photography—and, for that matter, from art museums in the modern era.

One remarkable quality of Lutter’s works is the infinite depth of field that is possible because her pinhole cameras do not use lenses. Accordingly, a photograph can retain a crystalline-sharp focus throughout its enormous image field. In *Campo San Moisè*,



Vera Lutter, *Campo San Moisè*,  
*Venice, VII: March 3, 2006*,  
2006. Unique gelatin silver print;  
56 × 86 in. (142 × 218 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist

*Venice, VII: March 3, 2006*, for example, the roof tiles, bricks, and church spires stretching from the foreground into the far distance are all articulated in equally sharp, almost hyperreal detail. Yet, curiously, the density of visual information that registers in Lutter’s photographs does not necessarily translate into understandable knowledge, due to her exposure process, in which positive and negative tones are reversed.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the breathtaking beauty of so many of Lutter’s images is the dreamlike translation of the color world we know into white outlines and tones of gray, which leaves the eyes and mind struggling to make sense of what they see. Even with foreknowledge of Lutter’s process, it is hard not to read her cityscapes as luminous night scenes, though logic dictates that the flat black expanses are indicative of bright daytime skies. In *Campo San Moisè, Venice, VII*, the roof tiles lose their physical and material specificity despite—or perhaps because of—the hyper-articulation of their shapes and outlines. Seen in real life, the terracotta tiles carry with them sensory associations of texture, weight, even sound. Yet in Lutter’s photograph they read less as material forms than as a captivating array of patterns and lines.

This material flattening also comes into play in Lutter’s *European Old Masters*. It is hard to discern, for example, if the busts on pedestals at the back of the gallery are carved from marble or cast from bronze; whether the shimmering, reflective floor is wood, concrete,



Hubert Robert, *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie*, 1796. Oil on canvas; 44½ × 56¼ in. (112 × 143 cm). Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris, RF1975-10

or stone; if the textured wall surfaces are fabric, plaster, or paint. This material abstraction is heightened by a softer focus than is typical for Lutter's large photographs—a chance outcome dictated by necessity, due to the limited time she had to make the image. Whereas Lutter had calculated the ideal exposure time to be a staggeringly long six months, she was left near the end of the residency (after two failed six-month exposures) with only five weeks to photograph the gallery before it was closed to the public and deinstalled as part of the gradual shutdown of the museum's permanent collection spaces.<sup>8</sup> This time constraint required Lutter to use a larger-than-normal pinhole aperture to accelerate the exposure time, which resulted in a corresponding reduction in the photograph's sharpness of focus.<sup>9</sup>

In Lutter's picture gallery, the paintings on the walls hover between legibility and abstraction. In a large painting in the right foreground, we can just make out the gestural shapes of several figures, including that of a woman looking downward at an infant whose arms reach upward. Similarly, on the back wall of the gallery, one can discern the

head and torso of two figures facing each other, seemingly engaged in conversation. Other paintings, though, are impossible to decipher. Abstract suggestions of forms are visible in these works, but their precise motifs remain elusive. The gestalt recognition that normally helps us bridge the gap between what we know and what we see is confounded in Lutter's tone-reversed image.

What does the unknowability inherent in *European Old Masters* accomplish? To answer this question, I turn to a crucial antecedent to Lutter's photograph, Hubert Robert's *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie* (1796), the painter's imagined vision for the renovation and reinstallation of the Musée du Louvre's famous gallery space. Even more than Teniers's paintings of a private collection, Robert's painting epitomizes the type of classic gallery view Lutter had in mind when conceptualizing her museum residency. Exhibited at the Salon of 1796 (shortly after the real Grande Galerie closed for renovation), Robert's painting is notable for how he proposed the arrangement of paintings: namely, in a nationality-based presentation that reflected an Enlightenment-era philosophical shift regarding the categorization and display of artworks—a departure from the gallery's inaugural display in 1793, which was arranged without regard to such considerations.<sup>10</sup> Like Teniers's seventeenth-century picture gallery paintings, Robert's fictive scene is an architectural invention (skylights would not be installed in the Grande Galerie until the nineteenth century), yet it depicts real and identifiable artworks. In the right foreground, the artist pictured himself copying Raphael's *Holy Family*; other recognizable works from the museum's collection include paintings by Guido Reni, Andrea del Sarto, and Pier Francesco Mola, among others.<sup>11</sup>

Lutter's engagement with the picture gallery typology is significant because paintings such as *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie* (and subsequent paintings following in this tradition) documented the very origins and evolution of the encyclopedic museum as we know it today. As numerous art historians have noted, the Louvre's Grande Galerie established a gallery typology that is now "enshrined in both museum organization and art history worldwide."<sup>12</sup> We should recall here that when the Louvre opened to the public in 1793, it was charged with representing the ideals

of the newly formed French Republic. Prior to the eighteenth century, art collections had been amassed for private consumption, and the French royal collection was mostly inaccessible to the public. Even before the Revolution, critics had begun calling for public display of the royal collection; by the late 1770s, plans were already underway, under the regime of Louis XVI, to convert the Grande Galerie (a structure built in the sixteenth century to connect the Palais du Louvre with the Palais des Tuileries) into a magnificent picture gallery.<sup>15</sup> After the Revolution, the Republican government, having claimed the royal collection as national property, sought to realize the museum as a national institution and a powerful symbol of the new regime.<sup>14</sup> The decision to display art chronologically, and by national schools (grouping Italian, Northern, and French paintings in progressive succession), signaled a pedagogical intention to use the nation's collection to illustrate the developmental history of art, in keeping with the rise of modern classification systems and scientific reasoning. This was a marked shift from the conventions of display in private collections, where paintings and luxury objects were arranged according to considerations of taste, connoisseurship, and prestige. With the founding of the Louvre, in other words, came a model of museum displays as conduits for imparting knowledge.

Given the lineage of picture gallery images in which it follows, Lutter's *European Old Masters* serves as a rumination on the centuries-long tradition of the encyclopedic art museum, precisely by making illegible the curatorial logic driving the gallery's installation. The unidentifiable paintings in her photograph subtly hint at the demise of a teleological version of art history that has underwritten museums since the founding of the Louvre in the eighteenth century. Created in dialogue with historical paintings like Robert's *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie*, Lutter's classic perspectival gallery view encapsulates, through its suggestive combination of documentation and abstraction, the quandary facing encyclopedic museums in the twenty-first century: how to present the history of art in light of changing intellectual attitudes about evolutionary narratives of historical development. Here, the timing and circumstances under which Lutter recorded her image are especially relevant. Resulting from a commission to photograph the museum before its demolition, her work speaks to the open question of how art will be installed in the museum's future galleries.

### *Ways of Seeing*

I want to shift for a moment to the other large-scale gallery interior Lutter photographed while at LACMA, *Art of the Pacific, II: September 21, 2017–January 5, 2018* (pp. 70–71). For this photograph, objects and artifacts from the Pacific Islands were positioned in a gallery arrangement that Lutter herself, with the blessing of the curator in charge of the Pacific art collections, “curated” specifically for her camera (see p. 123). Unlike *European Old Masters*, which was made with a camouflaged camera while the European art gallery was open to the public, the Pacific art photograph required closing the gallery it recorded. Made with a large (and very conspicuous) movable camera on wheels, the image would have been compromised by any accidental jostling of the camera or the artworks in front of it during the long (more than three-month) exposure.

The first thing one notices in *Art of the Pacific, II* is that the artworks are all facing outward toward the viewer, as if directly engaging us as spectators. Because the Art of Pacific gallery was closed to the public, Lutter was able to configure its objects specifically for the compositional needs of her photograph, free from curatorial considerations such as the regional or chronological relationships among the objects. As the artist has reflected on the making of the photograph, “I was allowed to pick all my favorite pieces.... I brought all these characters together that aren't from the same tribe, and aren't from the same island, and might not really speak the same language, but I wanted them all to talk to one another.”<sup>15</sup>

In the resulting image, the placement of works appears perfectly calibrated: no figure overlaps another, and there is a dynamic interplay between the objects and their different formal qualities—their shapes, textures, patterns, and scale. In the left foreground, the carved triangles running down the front of a memorial figure from the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea play off the painted triangles of a Papua New Guinea ceremonial board from the Eastern Highlands Province. In the center of the composition, the intricate fiber texture on the dark form of a dance headdress from New Britain, Papua New Guinea, contrasts with the flat, bright glow of a food platter from Vanuatu at the far left. Despite these satisfying visual relationships within Lutter's composition, however, a perceptive viewer might realize that the artist's seemingly perfect arrangement

could never exist in an actual gallery display. On closer inspection, for example, one can see that the objects in the foreground are so densely arranged as to disallow physical circulation between them: their pedestals bump up against one another, colliding at awkward angles. At the same time, the back of the gallery is sparse, even empty in places—as if the artworks were encroaching on the camera’s pinhole, and, by extension, on us as viewers.

As a pendant to Lutter’s European gallery photograph, *Art of the Pacific, II* is in many ways the opposite of the picture gallery image. Taken together, the two photographs represent Lutter’s intuitive understanding of two very different models of museum experience. If *European Old Masters* engages with a centuries-old tradition of encyclopedic display in which artworks are intended to be understood within a larger historical context, *Art of the Pacific, II* speaks to what literary critic Stephen Greenblatt has labeled a “wonder” model of museum exhibitions, in which objects—independent of any reference to the historical conditions of their making—have the power “to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention.”<sup>16</sup>

What sets *Art of the Pacific, II* apart from Lutter’s European gallery photograph is that for the Pacific gallery image, Lutter played a dual role, serving not only as photographer of the image, but also as curator of the installation she photographed. Accordingly, the photograph becomes a stand-in for the gallery display itself, staging what art historian Svetlana Alpers has called “the museum as a way of seeing.”<sup>17</sup> For if the curatorial arrangement in Lutter’s image diverges sharply from a traditional encyclopedic model (in its mixing of works from different regions and time periods, and its lack of concern with historical narrative or dissemination of knowledge), it instead subscribes to a different kind of presentation, one akin to what Alpers and Greenblatt similarly describe as fostering “attentive” or “enchanted” looking.<sup>18</sup> In this model of display, the viewer enjoys a certain freedom to pay more attention “to the possibilities of installation” than “to the information about what is being installed.”<sup>19</sup> A compelling installation, in other words, can do more to encourage close looking than an abundance of contextual information. And indeed, one need only stand in front of *Art of the Pacific, II* to be absorbed into a direct engagement with its sharply rendered, solemn-faced figures. Again, Lutter upends our expectations about what kinds of knowledge museums (or photographs, for that matter) impart to their viewers.



Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome*, 1757. Oil on canvas; 67¼ × 90½ in. (172.1 × 229.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gwynne Andrews Fund, 1952, 52.63.1

Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome*, 1757. Oil on canvas; 67 × 96¼ in. (170.2 × 244.5 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund, 1975.805



### *Original Copies*

Here I want to return to Robert’s *Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist’s Studio*. This work, as I suggested previously, is a fitting allegory for Lutter’s museum residency, for it pictures what one art historian has described as “a utopian space in which a studio of true creation and a place for art appreciation might somehow be combined.”<sup>20</sup> In Robert’s painting, we see an artist working on a large canvas of the Pantheon while surrounded by paintings of Roman monuments and examples of antique sculptures. Robert’s gallery scene was itself an homage to a pair of paintings by his teacher Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome* (1757) and *Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome* (1757), both of which show figures sketching in magnificent (if imaginary) picture galleries filled with iconic scenes of Rome and its most famous monuments.

The art-making depicted in these images of classical-art-galleries-turned-artist-studios anticipates Lutter’s own early forays into making museum pictures.<sup>21</sup> In 2012 and 2013, Lutter brought her portable box cameras (luggage-type trunks adapted into pinhole cameras) to the Greek and Roman art galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she experimented with making small-scale photographs of artworks—a departure, at the time, from her more well-known subjects, such as cityscapes, transportation

hubs, and industrial sites. Some of these photographs no doubt laid the groundwork for Lutter's later ambition to make large-scale photographs of gallery interiors; in images such as *Marble Statues of Aphrodite and Hercules: January 7, 2013* and *Marble Statues of the so-called Apollo Lykeios: October 21, 2012*, we see not only the marble statues but also glimpses of their elegant gallery settings—the spectacular colonnade of a sculpture court or a luxurious wall backdrop of French limestone. Other works from Lutter's Metropolitan series, however, such as *Marble Statue of Pan: November 5, 2012* and *Marble Statue of Aphrodite Crouching: October 21, 2012*, appear to float against a horizonless blank background, as if removed from any specific setting. In the latter works, the placelessness of these fragmented forms allows them to take on a surreal quality, to become almost new, unfamiliar objects.

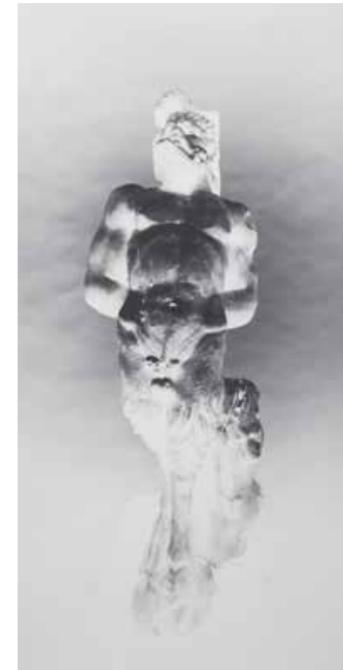
By the time she reached Los Angeles, Lutter had in mind the idea to photograph individual works of art in isolation, but on a much larger scale—using a full-size camera obscura rather than her trunk-sized box cameras. To realize this goal, she was able, with assistance from LACMA, to have two room-size cameras constructed inside the museum specifically for this purpose—a set-up that allowed her unprecedented access to the museum's collections, as well as the operational support (security guards, art handlers, conservators, lighting electricians) necessary for such an endeavor. With her “copy cameras”—so nicknamed in reference to the pre-digital copy-stand equipment once so familiar to artists and art historians for making slides and image reproductions—Lutter embarked on an important shift in her practice, one that her Met photos with blank backgrounds had already anticipated: namely, a shift from photographing subjects in situ to making images entirely disconnected from place. This distinction is important, because it situates Lutter's copy-camera photography even further away from “straight” photography, and evolves it into something more interpretive—something more akin, ironically, to the original copy work of printmakers before the advent of photography made reproductive prints after paintings more or less obsolete.

Clockwise from top left:  
Vera Lutter, *Marble Statues of Aphrodite and Hercules: January 7, 2013*, 2013. Unique gelatin silver print; 21¼ × 14 in. (54 × 36 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Vera Lutter, *Marble Statues of the so-called Apollo Lykeios: October 21, 2012*, 2012. Unique gelatin silver print; 20½ × 13¼ in. (55 × 35 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Vera Lutter, *Marble Statue of Aphrodite Crouching: October 21, 2012*, 2012. Unique gelatin silver print; 14 × 8¾ in. (55 × 35 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Vera Lutter, *Marble Statue of Pan: November 5, 2012*, 2012. Unique gelatin silver print; 25½ × 13¼ in. (65 × 34 cm). Courtesy of the artist





The very first artwork Lutter photographed in her copy cameras was Ludovico Mazzanti's *The Death of Lucretia* (c. 1735–37). The painting draws on an episode from ancient Roman history in which Lucretia, the wife of a consul to the Roman Republic, was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, son of the tyrannical King of Rome. To redeem her honor, Lucretia killed herself with a dagger, but not before appealing to her husband and father to avenge her death. In the public outrage over her suicide, the royal family was driven out of Rome, leading to the overthrow of the monarchy and rise of the Roman Republic. In Mazzanti's painting, we see Lucretia at the very moment she plunges a knife into her chest. She sits perched at the edge of her bed, the dark drapery of her bedroom serving as the backdrop for the dramatic scene. The dagger, Lucretia's raised arm, and her upturned head form the focal point of the composition.

Lutter's photograph of the painting, *Ludovico Mazzanti, The Death of Lucretia, c. 1735–37: February 10–March 16, 2017* (p. 45), holds the distinction of being the artist's first large-scale photograph of a two-dimensional subject. Prior to this piece, Lutter had worked for more than two decades photographing the three-dimensional world, but had never

Ludovico Mazzanti, *The Death of Lucretia*, c. 1735–37. Oil on canvas; 71 × 56 in. (180.3 × 142.2 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation, M.82.75

before attempted to copy a two-dimensional image.<sup>22</sup> I use the word “copy” lightly here, because despite their oblique reference to copy-stand photographs, Lutter's images of paintings are anything but faithful reproductions. Her version of *The Death of Lucretia*, for example, channels an entirely different visual energy than its source painting. In Lutter's work, the drapery all but dissolves away as the background—no longer a dark bedroom setting—is transformed into a bright, ethereal glow from which the shadowy figure of Lucretia emerges. The most stunning aspect of the photograph, however, is the dark, billowing fabric of Lucretia's dress. In the photograph's transposition of the painting's light and dark tones, the folds around Lucretia's hips and upper legs become accentuated, giving the fabric the appearance of being lifted upward, as if Lucretia's body were caught in a swirling vortex of wind. As Patrice Marandel, former chief curator of LACMA's European Painting and Sculpture Department, perceptively observed after the photograph was developed, Lutter's process had the effect of taking one Baroque painting motif, the suicide of Lucretia, and transforming it to resemble another standard Baroque subject, an assumption of the Virgin.<sup>23</sup>

Lutter's version of Lucretia—and her other photographs of paintings—have important implications for the very discipline of photography itself. I return here to Teniers's iconic views of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm's picture gallery. In 1660, Teniers published a volume called the *Theatrum Pictorium* (*Theatre of Painting*), a compendium of over two hundred etchings after the archduke's most important Italian paintings. By the time of Teniers's undertaking, reproductive printmaking was already a familiar phenomenon: starting in the Renaissance, artists such as Marcantonio Raimondi dedicated themselves exclusively to prints after famous works of art (in Raimondi's case, the paintings of Raphael and Dürer, as well as iconic objects from antiquity), thus playing an important role in spreading knowledge about visual motifs, artistic innovation, and the masterpieces of celebrated artists. In the case of the *Theatrum Pictorium*, the publication comprised the work of fourteen different printmakers, each of whom worked from small painted copies (executed by Teniers himself) of the archduke's finest Italian holdings.

Though I could reference any number of prints after paintings to use as examples of reproductive copying, I call attention to Teniers's publication because almost all of the prints in the *Theatrum Pictorium* are reversed left-right from their original sources—a mirroring



Raphael, *Saint Margaret*, c. 1518. Oil on poplar; 75¼ × 40¾ in. (191.3 × 123 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie

Jan van Troyen, etching of Raphael's *Saint Margaret* for the *Theatrum Pictorium*, c. 1656–60. Etching; 11¼ × 7¼ in. (28.4 × 19.6 cm). Slovak National Gallery, G 11965/3

that uncannily foreshadows the same left-right reversal in Lutter's photographs of paintings. A characteristic example is Jan van Troyen's etching after the painting *Saint Margaret* by Raphael and studio, the same painting Teniers depicted in a prominent position in *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his Picture Gallery in Brussels*. In Van Troyen's print, all the elements of the composition—Saint Margaret's turned head and body, the dragon at her feet, the crucifix in her hand—are reversed in orientation. Like Lutter's photograph of Mazzanti's Lucretia, the print also displays a very different sense of space than the painted original. Where Raphael's painting employs a sfumato effect to surround the figure of Saint Margaret with a dark atmosphere of undefined depth, in Van Troyen's version the backdrop is clearly rendered, lending the space a tight, shallow appearance.

Despite the parallels I am drawing here between reproductive prints and Lutter's photographs of paintings, my point is not to liken Lutter's artworks to this genre of printmaking, but to make an argument specific to the medium of photography. Between the Renaissance and the early nineteenth century, as reproductive copying developed

as an independent form of artistry, some prints after paintings were considered to be their own masterpieces—sophisticated translations rather than slavish copies. In some instances, these innovative prints were even judged to be superior to the original paintings on which they were based. But with the advent of photography in the mid-1800s, reproductive printmaking was superseded by the speed and economy of the new medium. By the late nineteenth century, photographic albums were already beginning to take the place of copy prints, leading to the gradual decline of the once thriving practice. The irony of this situation is that photography, for all its technical facility, spelled the death of the copy as an art form in its own right (at least until its conceptual returns in the late twentieth century). Whereas printmakers could gain renown for their creativity, artistry, and innovation when reproducing works of art by others, the same could not be said of photographers playing an equivalent role. The discretionary eye of the individual etcher or engraver, who could make aesthetic judgments about how to evolve a painting into print, was supplanted by the mechanical eye of the camera.

Lutter's copy photographs restore agency to photography as an interpretive medium for reproducing works of art. Like her Pacific gallery image, Lutter's photographs of paintings induce a way of seeing that both stops us in our tracks (to borrow Greenblatt's phrase) and is recognizably Lutter's own. These "copies" are often revelatory: in *Jackson Pollock, No. 15, 1950: October 25–November 20, 2017* (p. 47), for example, there is a striking reversal of materiality—the thick accretion of black paint on Pollock's canvas becomes a fine web of white swirls that read as exuberant erasures. In *Jan van Huysum, Bouquet of Flowers in an Urn, 1724: September 18–25, 2017* (p. 49), the curlicues of the painting's ornate frame are of a piece with the unruliness of the bouquet's drooping blooms and wayward tendrils, yet the conjunction of these elements under the umbrella of Lutter's photograph also confounds our perceptual expectations. After translation into Lutter's gray-toned world, the (actually sculptural) frame of the painting appears flattened as a result of its subdued tonal range; at the same time, the dark blooms of the (actually flat) painted panel seem to burst forth from the paper.

In closing, I return one last time to Robert's *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie*. Among the figures in the foreground of Robert's scene, three of them are deeply engaged in painting or sketching—or more precisely, copying—in the gallery.

Indeed, from the Louvre’s very inception, the museum’s ability to allow for the copying of artworks was touted as one of its great virtues: the encyclopedic museum as the ultimate studio teacher. As museum historian Andrew McClellan recounts, “the activity of copying in the Grand Gallery testified to the useful purpose of the museum: more than a repository of past art, it was instrumental in *producing* art in the present. By the middle of [the 1790s] just about anyone was allowed to set up an easel in the Grand Gallery, but so popular did copying become (by year III over 500 people had been given permits) that before long restrictions had to be introduced.”<sup>24</sup> Lutter does not just revisit the trope of using past art to make art in the present; she returns to it with a vengeance. The connection in her work between past and present is made quite literal in the titles of photographs after paintings or sculptures in which the original date of the artwork is incorporated along with the exact date of her exposure. This moving through time is significant. In Lutter’s photographs, we are given cause to think about what the museum (and its collection) has been, what it is now, and what it can be.

1 According to the 2016 catalogue for the exhibition *Hubert Robert*, mounted by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the painting I am describing is most likely one that was exhibited at the Salon of 1791, where it was titled simply *Museum* in the widely used alternative brochure published by “free artists,” and listed in the official brochure published by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture with the description “Large Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist’s Studio. Each of the Paintings Illustrates Monuments of Ancient Rome.” See Guillaume Faroult, catalogue entry for *Painting Gallery Being Used as an Artist’s Studio*, in *Hubert Robert*, ed. Margaret Morgan Grasselli and Yuriko Jackall (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2016), 254.

2 The works by Raphael and Titian, along with many other paintings from Leopold Wilhelm’s collection, are now in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. For an expansive discussion of Teniers’s gallery views and his masterful publication *Theatrum Pictorium*, see Ernst Vegelin Van Claerbergen, ed., *David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting* (London: Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, 2006).

3 For example, art historian Margret Klinge notes of the painting now in the collection of the Egremont Collection, Petworth House, the National Trust, “the arrangement of the pictures is clearly fictive; it does not correspond to the actual disposition of works in any one room of any of the archduke’s residences. It is dictated by pictorial needs. Similarly, Teniers changed the proportions and dimensions of the originals he produced to permit their organisation in regular rows, the better to convey the impression of a magnificent collection.” Klinge, catalogue entry for *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his Picture Gallery*, in *David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting*, 72.

4 The optical science at work in Lutter’s practice has been discussed elsewhere by other art historians, so I will not elaborate on the technical history or theoretical implications of the camera obscura here. To rehearse the general concept of a camera obscura for readers who may be unfamiliar with how one works, however: light rays reflect off objects in the outside world, carry optical information about these objects as they pass through the pinhole opening of the camera, and re-form as an image, upside-down and reversed left-right, inside the darkened space on the surface opposite the pinhole.

5 Hilarie Sheets, “Artist to Photograph Doomed Structures at Los Angeles County Museum,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/arts/design/artist-to-photograph-doomed-structures-at-los-angeles-county-museum.html>.

6 Teniers aided in the identification by subtly inscribing the artists’ names into the frames of the depicted paintings. Interestingly, today the gallery paintings are used by art historians as de facto provenance records for the works depicted; as scholar Margaret Klinge notes, “They are proof—the only proof we have—that these important pictures formed part of Leopold Wilhelm’s collection by 1651 at the latest” Klinge, “David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting,” in *David Teniers and the Theatre of Painting*, 15.

7 Unlike film-based photography, in which positive prints are made by sending light through a film negative, Lutter’s photo paper is exposed directly to the positive image, resulting in a positive-negative reversal (the more light the paper receives, the darker it becomes when developed).

8 In both failed attempts, the works were compromised due to accidental exposure of the photo paper to light by someone not involved in the project.

9 The degree of focus is inversely correlated to the size of the pinhole: the smaller the pinhole, the greater the focus.

10 Robert’s full description of the work was “*project pour éclairer la galerie du musée par la voûte et pour la diviser sans ôter la vue de la prolongation du local*” (project to illuminate the gallery of the museum from the vault and to divide it without sacrificing the view of the prolongation of the space). According to art historian Andrew McClellan, “the paintings in the initial display had been installed without regard to history or the nationality of artists.” McClellan, “Musée du Louvre, Paris: Palace of the People, Art for All,” in *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe*, ed. Carole Paul (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012), 245.

11 See Nina L. Dubin, *Futures and Ruins: Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 151.

12 Mark Ledbury, “Art versus Life: A Dissenting Voice in the Grande Galerie,” *Journal18* 2, *Louvre Local* (Fall 2016): <http://www.journal18.org/866>.

13 For more about the history and founding of the Louvre, see McClellan, “Musée du Louvre, Paris,” 254–57, which draws heavily on his book *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

14 The museum opened to the public on August 10, 1795, a date that was highly symbolic as it marked the one-year anniversary of the storming of the Tuileries.

15 Michael Govan and Vera Lutter, “The Director’s Series: Michael Govan and Vera Lutter” (interview, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, March 12, 2018).

16 Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42. Greenblatt opposes the “wonder” model to what he labels “a “resonance” model, defined as “the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand.”

17 See Svetlana Alpers, “The Museum as a Way of Seeing,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 25–32.

18 See Alpers, 26–27, and Greenblatt, 49.

19 Alpers, 31.

20 Faroult, *Hubert Robert*, 254.

21 Although Lutter photographed the Nabisco Factory site that would become Dia:Beacon in 1999, and the empty interior of Dia’s West 22nd Street building in 2005, no artworks appear in any of the images.

22 In some of Lutter’s work prior to her LACMA residency, she experimented with rephotographing her own photographs, but the photographs were treated as objects in space. I discuss one series of these works in “Objective Fictions: Vera Lutter’s Studio Photographs,” *Art on Paper* 10, no. 5 (January–February 2006): 58–65.

23 In a short film about Lutter’s residency produced by Sotheby’s, Marandel remarks of Mazzanti’s painting, “After Vera photographed it, it came out as a completely different Baroque object. And it turned out, in my mind, to look like *another* staple subject of Baroque painting, the Virgin Mary ascending to heaven.” Quoted in “LACMA Reimagined: Vera Lutter’s Transformative Photographs,” Sotheby’s, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/videos/lacma-reimagined-vera-lutters-transformative-photographs>.

24 McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 101.