

is supplemented by an intriguing catalogue and stimulating symposium that remains available online. Still, this does not exhaust our interest, leaving General Idea open to inquiry.

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Angela Vanhaelen
The Moving Statues of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam: Automata, Waxworks, Fountains, Labyrinths
University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2022

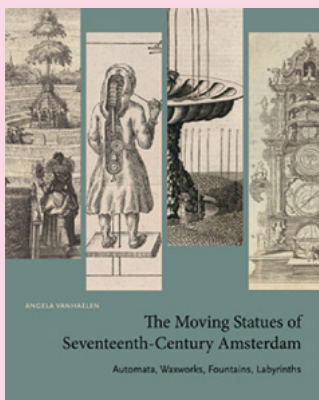
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Stephanie Dickey

In 1625, the engraver Balthasar Florisz van Berckenrode published a detailed map of the growing metropolis of Amsterdam. Comprising nine sheets, it offers an accurate bird's-eye view of the city's expanding ring of canals, providing a glimpse into enclosed courtyards hidden from the street. At the corner of the Prinsengracht and the Looiersgracht can be seen the layout of the Oude Doolhof, a public attraction that might be described in today's terms as a combination of beer garden, theme park, and proto-Madame Tussaud's. Opened around 1620, the Oude Doolhof was one of five such complexes developed in Amsterdam. While many of their features (fountains, gardens, sculptures in stone and wax, and automata) had long adorned noble estates,

this constellation of urban public sites, open to all for a modest fee, was unique in seventeenth-century Europe.

By the nineteenth century, the *doolhoven* had fallen into obscurity, ignored by all but folklorists who interpreted their contrived amusements as quaint popular entertain-



ment. In *The Moving Statues of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*, Angela Vanhaelen recovers their significance for seventeenth-century social and intellectual life. Zooming in from Berckenrode's map, her analysis situates these pleasure gardens in the specific spatial and cultural milieu of Amsterdam, mercantile capital of the Dutch Republic, where "learned merchants" (the object of Caspar Barlaeus' famous lecture, *Mercator sapiens*, in 1632) were the dominant tastemakers and global commerce brought unprecedented access to foreign visitors, goods, and curiosities. From their splashing fountains to their stage plays enacted by statues that moved and spoke, the *doolhoven* in their heyday were modern marvels that offered

an experience of wonder to intellectuals and seasoned travelers as well as common folk.

Vanhaelen takes the Oude Doolhof as her central example—it was the largest and most famous of the five complexes, established in 1648. With its adjunct, the Nieuwe Doolhof, it was situated in the Jordaan district, then on the outskirts of the expanding city. (Amsterdam's most renowned artist, Rembrandt van Rijn, settled across the street on the Rozengracht in 1658, but whether he ever visited the *doolhof* is unknown.) Calling on a surprisingly rich array of illustrated city guides, travelers' accounts, and other sources, Vanhaelen structures the book according to a visitor's path through the Oude Doolhof, stopping along the way to plumb the social, religious, and philosophical implications of the experience. Chapters take us from the tavern to the garden, designed around an elaborate fountain dedicated to Bacchus and Ariadne. We then wind our way through a labyrinthine hedge maze ("doolhof" is Dutch for "maze") and enter the exhibition hall, where automata perform moralizing tales watched over by waxwork statues of political heroes past and present. Vanhaelen describes the mix of classical and biblical imagery, presented with humor for a broad audience, in terms such as "vernacular classicism" and "Christian paganism," inspired by the Ciceronian dictum that entertainment should teach, delight, and move its audience. (This principle was also central to Dutch art theory, a connection Vanhaelen could have explored further.)

While ordinary visitors to these attractions might settle for pure amazement, Vanhaelen shows that learned visitors such as René Descartes and John Evelyn cultivated their responses (recorded in letters and other sources) in accord with the Neo-Stoic ideal of restrained emotion, replacing wonder with controlled appraisal and curiosity about the technology behind the effects. Apart from the Oude Doolhof, a focal point of Vanhaelen's analysis is the tavern called *D'Os in de Bruiloft* (The Ox at the Wedding), where the Mennonite scholar, printer, inventor, and publican Jan Theunisz gathered with friends to study Arabic and Hebrew while delighting customers with mechanical waterworks, talking animals, and trick drinking vessels (109–117). Vanhaelen is less interested in how such marvels were achieved (she mentions hydraulics and compressed air) than in how they prompted philosophical engagement with deep questions about the nature of human existence (95). A figure crafted by human hands may move and even speak, but it cannot think or feel.

Approached with contemplative intent, a visit to the doolhof became a journey of self-discovery. As Jan Amos Comenius wrote, life is like a labyrinth in which the traveler without a guide will surely lose his way; the only true guide, of course, is Christian faith (55). Calvinist moralists greeted the deceptive realism of the moving statues as a dangerous form of secularized idol worship (20). Pagan mythological imagery, centered at the Oude Doolhof around the legendary excesses of Bacchus and his followers, did

little to dispel this perception, but performances of biblical parables offered moral instruction. Vanhaelen connects this imagery with the apocalyptic and millenarian goals of Dutch Protestant ideology. Among the few remaining physical traces of the Oude Doolhof are the colourful painted statues of David and Goliath (the latter 486 cm tall), now in the Amsterdam Museum, that once starred in a mechanical stage play celebrating the giant's downfall (78–79, 165–168).

As Vanhaelen notes, the responses of “women, non-Europeans and lower class visitors” were seldom recorded, but she argues that the doolhovens' central purpose was “to make inventive and exclusive forms of art and technology accessible to a broad mix of people, in the process attempting to transform them into civil, informed amateurs” (15). That said, not all visitors were treated with equal respect. Elite viewers scoffed at the ignorant reactions of gawking commoners, and concealed jets of water were designed to spray upward under women's skirts, causing them, as the city historian Tobias van Domselaer wrote, to shriek and “hop about like new-born calves” (47). Foreign culture, particularly that of the Ottoman Turks, was satirized by dressing automata in exoticized clothing, a feature Vanhaelen compares with the colourful character types painted by Rembrandt and his contemporaries, even as she shows that the doolhovens' inventive technology owed much to Arabic precedents. This paradox hints at the complex tensions at play in the entrepreneurial culture

of Amsterdam, where citizens faced daily challenges to reconcile the foreign with the familiar.

Like its subject, *The Moving Statues of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* offers a journey of discovery and delight, bringing new attention to a long-overlooked feature of material culture in the Dutch Republic. Deeply researched and engagingly written, this book will be of interest not only for specialists in Dutch cultural history but for anyone concerned with sculpture, ephemera, and other forms of public art, as well as the history of politics, religion, philosophy, technology, urban design, and popular culture. This reader could not help feeling a connection to contemporary circumstances: as we confront global competition for technological innovation and the rise of artificial intelligence, the instinctual wonder evoked by “moving statues” takes on uncanny relevance for today.

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Boris Groys

Philosophy of Care

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Mirra-Margarita Ianeva

Philosophy of Care is a timely meditation on the presence and role of care in contemporary society. According to art critic, media theorist, and