



Editorial

When looking at an object, one of the first questions an art historian asks is: Who made this? Knowing the answer to this question allows one to bring order to the vast quantity of art objects held in private collections, museums and other institutions around the world. With this in mind, the identity of an object's maker is an important, if not the most relevant, question in art history. In this issue of *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin*, the authors of the three main contributions attempt to assign an item in the Rijksmuseum to one specific maker, each in a very different way.

While perusing the online collection database of the Rijksmuseum, Jan Peter Verhave recently came across a wrongly attributed papercut diorama of a boy standing in an interior. Upon physically inspecting the piece, the paper-cut signature was properly read as that of the papercut artist Elisabeth Rijbergh (1672-1721), a name heretofore passed down only in written sources. With curator Joyce Zelen and conservator Juliet Baines, the signed diorama was analysed and restored. On the basis of observed similarities in material, technique, construction and narrative style, two additional dioramas in the museum's collection – a landscape and a country estate, both inhabited by human figures and animals – could now also be attributed to Rijbergh. Assigned to the same maker, three objects – one with an incorrect maker name and two anonymous – have now been grouped and correctly attributed, with a seminal figure of the largely forgotten art of papercutting now represented in the Rijksmuseum.

An art historian can also ascertain who was involved in an object's creation on the basis of an existing paper trail. For Alexander Dencher, the piece in question is an unsigned design drawing for an eighteenth-century epitaph today kept in Kasteel Hardenbroek (Utrecht), a memorial for one of the Hardenbroek barons. Extant financial records in the castle's archive specifically state the names of those who contributed to the epitaph's creation: the carpenter who constructed the framed panel; the sculptor responsible for the decorative elements and the letters of the inscription; and lastly, the painter charged with the gilding and silvering of the carvings and letters. The design drawing can reasonably be attributed to sculptor David Mulder (1746-1826): contracted before the others and remitted the largest sum, Mulder likely had the greatest creative say. Over the years, epitaphs have all but disappeared from public sites. The correct attribution and context offers insight not only into the art of their making, but also reveals these objects commonly formed a substantial share of a sculptor's production, artists chiefly known for their figurative sculptures and portraits.

When such a paper trail is lacking altogether, attributing an object to a certain maker unquestionably poses the greatest challenge. This is often the case for items non-European in origin, such as a carved wooden statuette of a European woman and toddler, with the mother dressed in fashionable attire (datable to 1770-80) and the child in a loincloth. On the basis of stylistic traits, the work was originally attributed to the Chinese woodcarver Chitqua (c. 1730-1796), a so-called 'face-maker' active in the harbour town of Canton (present-day Guangzhou), whose notoriety is derived from a two-year sojourn in England from 1769 onwards. As women were not allowed in Canton and Chitqua is not known to have worked in wood, this attribution proved untenable. Instead, Lydia Randt localizes the statuette in the Dutch settlement Batavia (now Jakarta), where both Chinese makers and European women were present. Here, teak wood was readily available and a highly diverse group of carvers worked and collaborated in its artisans' district. Non-Western makers of art objects generally did not sign their creations and are scarcely mentioned in written sources, which is why the statuette of the mother and child cannot be assigned to one specific maker. Research into this object and others like it, however, will shed light on an art history that equally deserves telling.