

The wilderness of Allaert van Everdingen

*Experience and representation
of the north in the age of the baroque*

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In the year 1644, a young and up-coming Dutch artist, Allaert van Everdingen, was shipwrecked off the south coast of Norway. According to Arnold Houbraken's retelling of the incident in *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (The Great Theatre of Dutch Painters) from 1718,¹ the young man was saved, supposedly with his drawing materials, and for a few months he travelled in this part of the world, depicting the nature and landscapes of southern Norway and western Sweden. The anecdote of the shipwreck and the subsequent whereabouts of the artist have never been fully clarified. Navigation fraught with danger and risk-taking—not to mention potential fortune—was of course one of the many thrilling tales of adventurers and entrepreneurs of the time, but unfortunately, no travel diary has been found and supporting sources have been generally faulty.² All the same, the assumption among scholars today is that Allaert van Everdingen, born in Alkmaar in 1621 and trained as a marine artist in Utrecht and Haarlem, at the age of twenty-three hopped on one of the many Dutch timber traders bound for Scandinavian and Baltic coastal towns.³ Shipwrecked or not, there is now little doubt that he visited Risør and Langesund in Norway, important staple towns for timber, as well as the mountainous Telemark region nearby. Furthermore, he found his way to the newly constructed port city of Gothenburg in Sweden. He explored the city's immediate surroundings, including the waterfall and mills at Mölndal, and likely followed the course of the nearby river Göta älv, reaching at least as far as the waterfalls at Trollhättan.

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From a Swedish perspective, the prevailing opinion has long been that van Everdingen was a pioneer in Swedish landscape painting. The artist was consequently of special interest in the height of the National-Romantic movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Olof Granberg, then curator of the Swedish national museum of art, brought attention to Allaert van Everdingen as “the Salvatore Rosa of the North [who] in colour knew how to interpret our magnificent nature, so foreign to the Dutch people of the plains”.⁴ Granberg encouraged all Swedes to express gratitude to the artist for his discovery of the aesthetic values of Swedish nature, values they had not appreciated when he visited the northern country. Indeed, in the 1960s, the art historian Gunnar Berefelt maintained that Swedes of the seventeenth century did not “document any noticeable will to either understand or depict the quality of Swedish nature. On the contrary, in many respects, one senses a certain disdain for the Swedish landscape and with satisfaction does [the seventeenth-century Swedish poet Haquin] Spegel declare that ‘where pines and spruces once grew on the harsh rock, is now orangery...’.”⁵ The picture of the orangery highlights the notion of a refined civilised nature where “delicate fruits can be reared where the climate does not allow them to be cultivated in the open”.⁶ Berefelt continued by stating that it is thus not surprising that it was a foreigner who recognized “the desolate, wild nature in the sparsely populated Sweden of the time”.⁷ More recently, Karin Sidén, Mikael Ahlund and other art historians have nuanced the picture of the ground-breaking artist by considering the role of European visual traditions in van Everdingen’s achievements, along with the wider political, commercial and scientific interests of the age, from both Dutch and Swedish perspectives.⁸ Their studies are truly valuable for a richer understanding of the artist’s work and his context. Acknowledging these aspects, it is nevertheless still worthwhile to reflect upon the fact that the type of nature that van Everdingen encountered during his trip was new to him, and that he observed and represented this nature with a foreigner’s gaze—something that no one had done before him.

In this article, I will take a closer look at the representation of nature in van Everdingen’s drawings and etchings related to his Scandinavian trip. I wonder what, as a newcomer to the north, did he see? How did he perceive these northern territories that “during the seventeenth century were assimilated to wild spaces and located on the border of the civilized world”?⁹ These questions have been asked before, not the least by art historian Alice I. Davies in her comprehensive research on the artist.¹⁰ I am very much indebted to Davies’s rich accounts on the life and work of van Everdingen. The following pages are also indebted to art historian Jan Blanc who has made the case that van Everdingen’s the wild sceneries “defy the

qualities and the properties of beauty, according to a theme very present in the sublime imaginary, especially in Longinus's treatise "Peri hypsous, on the sublime—a treatise that was at least partly known in the artistic milieu of the Dutch Republic.¹¹ Blanc convincingly shows that there existed a "true sublime sensitivity" among artists during the age—certainly among Dutch painters of marine landscapes—and he claims that "[w]hat we might call a 'sublime generation' emerged at the same time as van Everdingen's formation as an artist".¹² Inspired by Blanc's line of reasoning, I would however like to consider van Everdingen's encounter with northern nature in a context seldom mentioned in the literature—a baroque worldview. Needless to say, neither the baroque as a concept nor as a historiographic category was something van Everdingen and his contemporaries were aware of. Yet, since the late nineteenth century, the baroque has served as both a fruitful and contested notion to talk about the particular *zeitgeist* that marked the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. As John D. Lyons explains in *The Oxford handbook of the baroque* (2019): "the Baroque is a massive success [...] but a success that is also a perpetual crisis, a constant questioning about the meaning of this term and about what purpose it serves."¹³ My argument in this context is guided by the consideration, however vague, that the baroque points to diverse expressions of an ongoing cultural crisis that challenged traditional views of reality, which include both artistic and philosophical articulations, as well as geographical and scientific discoveries. This situation entailed, as Peter Burke argues, a crisis of representation where new philosophical distinctions between "'primary qualities,' things as they really are, and 'secondary qualities,' things as they seem to human senses, is surely related to a recurrent theme in baroque art and literature—the gap between appearance and reality, *être* and *paraître*, *ser* and *parecer*, *Sein* and *Schein*."¹⁴ In hindsight, certain traits stand out as baroque: a susceptibility to the transience and the fragility of life, the mass and dynamism of nature, the performativity of society and human self-reflection. Among these characteristics is also a particular willingness to see and acknowledge, as Lyons writes, "the qualities of *newness* and *unfamiliarity* and *strangeness*. The Baroque is the encounter with the strange, with the unknown. If we think even briefly about all that was new and astonishing in the early modern world, we can see that there was much that astonished"—new worlds, new discoveries, new technologies, among others.¹⁵ As a philosophical witness to the age, René Descartes, claims in *Les Passions de l'âme* (Passions of the soul, 1649) that astonishment (*l'admiration*), is a fundamental passion at the foundation of human emotional and intellectual experience, before any other passion.¹⁶ With this in mind, I would argue that the so called "Scandinavian reports" of

van Everdingen fall within the aesthetic and philosophical frames of the baroque.¹⁷

The northern nature that van Everdingen first set eyes on had the quality to astonish, though he had undoubtedly heard about it from traders and travellers. Perhaps he had also come across Olaus Magnus's *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (A description of the Nordic peoples, 1555), which was already translated into Dutch in 1562.¹⁸ In this wide-ranging book, which at the time served as the main source of knowledge about Scandinavia, the reader finds renderings of northern landscapes that could have appealed to an artist's amazed gaze. Magnus describes, for example, the beauty of the "great masses of stone which are so naturally fashioned in a variety of shapes", the northern forests with their "great abundance of firs and pines, junipers and larch [are] so tall that they can reach the level of high towers", and how a Swedish river "flowing down from the topmost peaks of the mountains, passes through the rugged steeps and is dashed against the rocks which stand in its way, until it tumbles into the deep valleys with a redoubled roar of its waters."¹⁹ As will be shown below, these are the natural elements of the landscape—rock, wood, water—that van Everdingen was receptive to.²⁰ In pondering over his representations as baroque, I have found it fruitful to think of "that peculiar complicity of baroque with style, together with its instability with regard to period and periodization", which Helen Hills underlines in *Rethinking the baroque* (2011).²¹ If van Everdingen's wilderness style is to be considered baroque, why is that so? In answering, I follow Anthony J. Cascardi who in the article "Experience and knowledge in the baroque" (2019) argues that in a philosophical sense the baroque functions as something essential, not ornamental: "The essential nature of style in the baroque speaks directly to matters of ontology—to the importance of mode and manner, figuration and configuration, in determining what any given thing *is*."²² In the final part of the article, I will show how three baroque figurations—wonder, vanitas, ways of seeing—are present in van Everdingen's representation of northern nature, not just as stylistic features but as essential articulations of the North.

On the spot and after nature

In the international literature van Everdingen does not come across as a typical baroque artist. He is interpreted rather in the context of a burgeoning realism movement, as part of a generation of productive Dutch painters whose careers were set in motion during that particular aesthetic engagement, and for which the most recognizable works were in genre and landscape painting.²³ He was influenced and encouraged by the new

artistic convention to draw “on the spot” (*aen de oort fec*) and “after life” (*naer het leven*). This procedure, generally understood to have been initiated by Pieter Bruegel the Elder on his travels over the Alps to Italy, was further emphasized by Karel van Mander in his seminal *Schilderboek* (The Book on Picturing, 1604), and was later developed by artists like Hendrick Goltzius who is considered to be “the first one to go out and draw what he saw”.²⁴

But what did van Everdingen see “on the spot” during his visit to Scandinavia? What did “after life” mean to him? There are indications that he did his travel drawings *in situ*, here and there, since annotations like “*Een gesicht buiten Gottenburg*” (a view close to Gothenburg), or “*molendael bujten gothenburgh na t’leven*” (Mölnadal close to Gothenburg, after life), are found on the back of some of his work.²⁵ Even so, Davies warns that the drawings are notoriously difficult to place and are “virtually impossible to date”.²⁶ Her complete catalogue of van Everdingen’s drawings contains 656 authentic watercolours, ink drawings, and oil sketches on paper—most of which were effectuated after the artist’s return to the Netherlands.²⁷ Nevertheless, through careful analyses of his drawing techniques she makes a qualified guess about which drawings were made on the spot.²⁸ Regarding van Everdingen’s etchings, she writes: “His landscape prints are devoted almost exclusively to Scandinavian subjects, and most appear on stylistic grounds to have been executed in the decade between 1645 and 1655.”²⁹

That said, is it necessarily a problem that some of the depictions may have been sketched in a studio far away from Norway and Sweden? Svetlana Alpers’ studies on the art of describing in Dutch art in the seventeenth century, suggests not. Her book draws attention to Karel van Mander’s pairing of the terms “after life” (*naer het leven*) and “from the mind or spirit” (*uyt den geest*): “While *naer het leven* refers to everything visible in the world, *uyt den geest* refers to images of the world as they are stored mnemonically in the mind.”³⁰ She takes the example of Goltzius, who, according to van Mander, did not leave Rome with drawings of the great Italian painters, “but instead with the paintings ‘*in his memory as in a mirror always before his eyes*’”.³¹ Relating this kind of artistic expression to Johannes Kepler’s studies of the eye in this age of observation and new optical instrumentation, Alpers concludes that the self of the artist is thus identified with the image of the world.³² Meaning, different experiences could be painted from memory and still be considered “after life”. Therefore, it is not surprising that van Everdingen reused his stash of drawings, his “Scandinavian reports”, throughout his career and could still be acknowledged as a true witness, as someone who had been there, “on the spot”.³³ His name was carved in the rock. (Fig. 1)

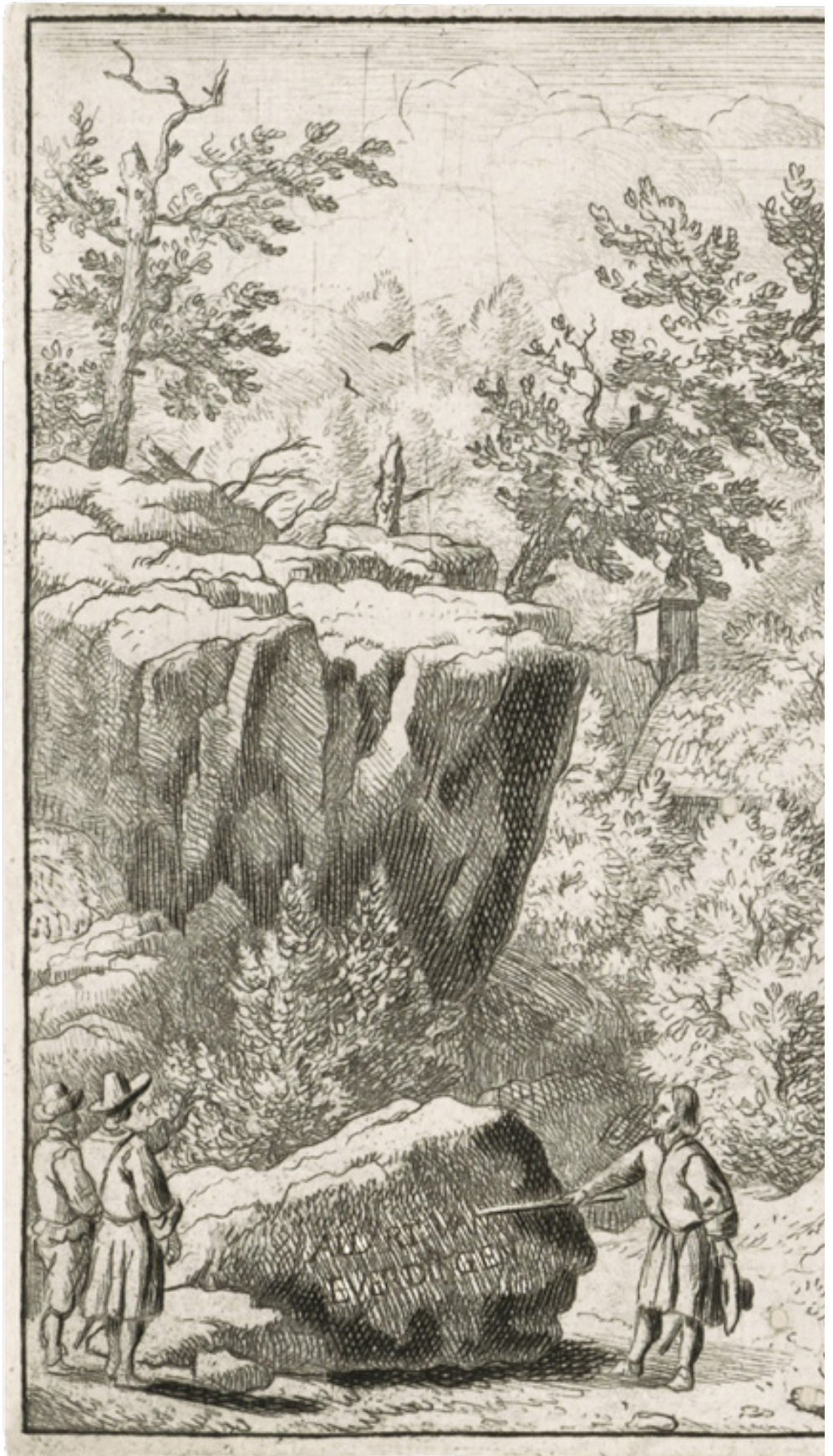


Fig. 1. Landscape with man with pointer (Landschap met man met aanwijsstok). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.



As the seventeenth century advanced, to draw “after life” (or *from nature*) was taken as an important step in the genesis of works of art, but the practice also played a part in the search for “truth-to-nature” by scientists and naturalists of the time. Indeed, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have pointed out that to draw after nature often implied that for “naturalists who sought truth-to-nature, a faithful image was empathically not one that depicted exactly what was seen. Rather, it was a reasoned image, achieved by the imposition of reason upon sensation and imagination *and* by the imposition of the naturalist’s will upon the eyes and hands of the artist. [---] But the artists had no need of learned treaties to make sense of their own lived experience.”³⁴ Of course, artists were aware of pictorial conventions and expectations, and they knew that “there is no escape from representation”.³⁵ Yet, the truth-to-nature that the early modern naturalist sought to represent was not visible to the eye, so the artist had to have an inner picture of the perfect specimen in mind: “Seeing—and, above all, drawing—was simultaneously an act of aesthetic appreciation, selection, and accentuation.”³⁶ In a similar way, van Everdingen could not have depicted without preconceived notions, though his gaze was surely different than the naturalist’s. His landscape renderings were not made for scientific purposes. Different categories of rocks and various species of trees are nonetheless possible to distinguish in his drawings and etchings, but they are depicted with something else in mind than scientific or topographic precision, even if, as Davies says, the drawings “datable to his 1644 trip may be of greater interest as documentation of a foreign environment than the refined native landscapes he executed later in his career.”³⁷ So, they are realistic, but not realistic in a mimetic sense.³⁸ To play with the illusion of reality could of course be regarded as a baroque strong point, with its fondness of the effects of a *trompe-l’œil* or an *anamorphosis*. But representing something new, his drawings and etchings above all evoke emotions that are typical of a baroque discourse—surprise, wonder, admiration, awe and other affects “inseparable from [baroque] ways of perceiving and knowing the self and world”, as Christopher D. Johnson has phrased it.³⁹ In this sense, the baroque features in van Everdingen’s representations of Nordic nature can be seen as early interventions in a slowly changing attitude toward the wilderness, not least toward the barren nature of the North, for which sublime romantic values were not generally perceived until the late eighteenth century.⁴⁰

Going abroad and coming home

Although van Everdingen’s motives for taking the route north remain unknown, it is clear that his relatively short visit to Scandinavia and his

encounter with the nature of the North was pivotal for his development as an artist. Going abroad to earn a living was common for young European artists in the seventeenth century. However, from what we know, van Everdingen was not sent on commission, which would have been normal, but travelled on his own accord. If the trip was aimed to cultivate and inspire, one can only guess why did he not head south towards Italy, as was the likely direction for a rising artist. Maybe the northern trip was a cheaper alternative to a grand tour to Rome; perhaps the frequent trade between the Netherlands and Scandinavia ensured help from compatriots abroad, as well as an easy passage home if needed.

One of the places van Everdingen visited, the town of Gothenburg, was practically a Dutch settlement in 1644. Dutch architects and craftsmen had been recently hired by the Swedish King, Gustavus Adolphus, to build a strong port city in the small passage facing the west. As a result, the city's planning was similar to that of Dutch colonies like Batavia and New Amsterdam. Its defence fortifications were Dutch. Even the first formal citizen of Gothenburg was Dutch.⁴¹ Some figures indicate that around five hundred Dutch people lived in the city, with Dutch being an official language until 1670. When the city was founded in 1621, it was squeezed between the Danish region of Halland in the south and Norwegian Bohuslän (also part Danish) in the north. War between the Nordic countries was on-going, but by the time van Everdingen visited Gothenburg, the Danes were soon to lose both Halland and Bohuslän to Sweden. The city's function as a border fortress thus diminished while its role as a hub for export, import and shipping grew with Swedish hopes of connecting to Dutch traders of the world.

Taking this situation into account, it is possible that van Everdingen was attracted to the new territories open to Dutch businessmen and investors. The idea is not farfetched, since he was likely aware of the painter Frans Post, who after a prolonged stay in Brazil had just returned to the Netherlands together with lucrative landscape visions of an idealized Dutch colonial enterprise.⁴² Indeed, van Everdingen was later commissioned to paint the estate of a successful Dutch industrialist family in Sweden—the arms dealer Hendrik Trip's cannon foundry in Julita, Södermanland—from both his memory of the Swedish landscape and available maps in Amsterdam at the time. Karin Sidén has suggested that the Julita painting and others of the kind may have functioned as marketing for Dutch interests in Sweden, which is very plausible.⁴³ The Rijksmuseum description of the large painting further implies that Sweden was regarded as a sort of colonial opportunity: "It [Sweden] was a perfect location: iron ore was mined there, and there was ample waterpower, inexpensive labour and fuel (wood)."⁴⁴ The painting displays what Dutch entrepreneurs could

gain in Sweden, profiting from its natural resources. It is unlikely, however, that van Everdingen ever visited the Trip establishment in Julita. The portrayed landscape does not fit the area's real topography, even if the buildings are accurate, and the river and lake are correctly situated. What we see is a creation of an imagined landscape of power and wealth from his memory of Swedish scenery.⁴⁵ All the same, van Everdingen's trustworthiness came from his own concrete encounter with Swedish nature, which ensured the picture was "after life" (*naer het leven*), albeit drawn "from the mind or spirit" (*uyt den geest*).

Alternatively, van Everdingen may have chosen the northern route looking for less exploited landscapes to meet the growing interest in wild nature and exotic sceneries among his countrymen. Blanc supports this idea. He writes that the Dutch seventeenth-century art scene implied "a true sublime sensitivity, implemented by artists and experienced as such by the audience, even if it is unlikely, again, that either could have been directly and explicitly aware of the categories they put into play."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, we have no evidence from van Everdingen to confirm this hypothesis: "No piece of writing by Everdingen is extant, beyond his signature on various documents", as Davies states.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the artist's habitus was marked by the Dutch intellectual and artistic milieu of the early seventeenth century that encouraged not just a realistic approach but also that kind of sublime sensitivity Blanc is referring to. To mention only two landscape painters: van Everdingen's presumed master, Roelandt Savery, in Utrecht excelled in depictions of spectacular and dangerous mountainous settings, and Jan Porcelli, produced paintings of dramatic ocean storms and ships in peril.⁴⁸ In fact, van Everdingen started his career depicting marine settings, and seems to have been spurred by Savery to widen his objective beyond seascapes. According to Houbraken, Savery had a penchant for Nordic views, even though he never travelled to these parts of the world.⁴⁹ Instead, Savery is known as the first to portray the wild mountainous Alpine region of Tyrol after life, and for which he had made his trademark.⁵⁰ The motifs of wilderness, mountains, river valleys and waterfalls as such were thus not unknown in the age. Accordingly, since the rendering of the northern wilderness in van Everdingen's oil paintings sometimes looks suspiciously imaginative and exotic, it is justifiable to ask, as Görel Cavalli-Björkman does, "whether it is not primarily a matter of a superimposition of the Scandinavian element onto other pictorial conventions".⁵¹ She does have a point. Yet, Davies has argued that the imaginative elements in van Everdingen's Nordic landscapes are much more distinct in his mature work, while the drawings and the etchings from the Scandinavian visit in 1644 are "surprisingly devoid of *flamissant* convention".⁵² Frans Post offers a similar case

in point as he too let his visual rendering of the Brazilian landscape become increasingly exotic as the years went by.

“The discovery of nature as a subject for art is connected with the evolution of an urban life-style and the capitalistic division of labour”, as art historian Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf put it in her study on ideal landscapes in early modern Italy and France, a statement relevant for the context of the Netherlands too.⁵³ Indeed, it is worthwhile to note that the taste for wild nature was spreading into other areas than the arts during this time. For instance, the ambassador, poet and intellectual Constantijn Huygens introduced rough spruces and pines in his garden Hofwijck in The Hague with the explicit purpose to create a diverse, yet picturesque, wilderness.⁵⁴ The planted conifers (most likely *Picea abies*, Norway spruce, and *Pinus sylvestris*, Scots pine) generated an “opportunity for a wider imagination, recalling remote scenery far beyond the cultivated landscape of the Netherlands”, as Wybe Kuitert declares in his analysis of spruces, pines and the picturesque in seventeenth-century Dutch culture.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, this new taste for wilderness seems to have contributed to van Everdingen’s successful career as an artist. After his return from Scandinavia in early 1645 he soon exhibited his full repertoire of Nordic motifs, and his work sold well.⁵⁶ In 1652 he set up shop in Amsterdam and stayed there until his death in 1675, steadily supplying the art market with paintings, etchings and drawings of gnarled oak trees, pines and spruces, rock formations and steep cliffs, rapids and waterfalls, rickety bridges and sawmills, forest huts and log cabins—a wilderness in contrast to the highly cultivated and flat Dutch landscape.

Rock, wood, and water

So, what could have been new, unfamiliar and strange to the eyes of van Everdingen? Browsing through his Scandinavian depictions it is impossible to not recognize the prominent place of stone. The encounter with the rocky landscape must have been striking, since there are hardly any pictures without rock formations and boulders of different sorts. Quite often these weighted elements dominate the compositions, which generate the sensation of both closeness and a landscape full of obstacles. (Fig. 2–3) In his book on picturing, Karel van Mander took for granted that a close composition suited northern sceneries best, while southern landscapes were better in a transparent style.⁵⁷ It could be that van Everdingen followed this advice, or perhaps the encounter with the rocky environment inspired a certain way of seeing.⁵⁸ How do you move, visually and physically, in this landscape, when sight and light are hindered by rocks? What bearings are possible?⁵⁹ In the representations you catch the sight



Fig. 2. Rocky landscape (Rotslandschap). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.





Fig. 3. Big rock formation by river (Grote rotspartij bij rivier). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.

of huts and cabins, hidden behind the rocks. As a traveller, unfamiliar with the landscape, you would have to look carefully to find your way. Some depictions give the impression that the large and solid stone formations, like old giants, are moving with the landscape. Leaning heavily, ready to take a step, yet firmly rooted in their gneiss and granite identity. This is not a nature to be cultivated, for how could you order such a landscape? The human figures in the pictures are small and placed in the background, or in the corner of the composition, as to indicate their subordination to the stone. This impression of burdensome weight in motion also comes through in the way van Everdingen makes use of the slanting Nordic light, assuming his drawings were made during summer and early autumn. The late light hits the rocks, casting long shades and covering the nature in darkness. These are dramatic settings. Still, and strangely enough, the landscape does not convey a sense of danger in the way that van Everdingen's earlier marine drawings of ships in stormy weather did. The stone



Fig. 4. Landscape with riders close to hamlet (Landschap met ruiter nabij behucht). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.

communicates something soothing in its massive presence.⁶⁰ In the depictions a group of three travellers are often seen as staffage with walking sticks in hands. They are small and difficult to approach, but they give the impression of tranquillity in the sparse and barren landscape. No doubt, the travellers could be seen as a sort of autobiographical testimony, even if we do not know if van Everdingen travelled in a group or alone.⁶¹ (Fig. 4) The figures do not reveal their mission, but they do not look as though they are searching for natural resources to exploit, as would the Dutch industrialists. Rather, they look as though they are exploring views to aesthetically contemplate—streams, waterfalls and especially the open landscape sceneries after having climbed a rock—to draw after life and on the spot.

The natural landscape might have surprised van Everdingen in another way, in particular its Nordic vegetation. In some of the works, trees are seen growing on bare stone, against all odds. The roots are visible, clutching along the boulder's surface. Twisted trunks and distorted branches bear witness to harsh weather conditions. The Scandinavian trees that van Everdingen depicts are thus seldom the tall trees Olaus Magnus spoke about, the trees destined for mast timber, but rather those that set root in the crevices of exposed rock. The trees look very much like the sessile oaks (*Quercus petraea*) that are still common along the Bohuslän coastline



Fig. 5. Landscape with hunter by big tree (Landschap met jager bij grote boom). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.

that van Everdingen visited. Other species are pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) and spruces (*Picea abies*) that pop straight up or crooked from the rock, sometimes alone as to mirror the sturdiness of the landscape against persistent winds, rain and freezing temperatures. The woods, with their mixture of spontaneous and dispersed growth of mostly conifers and weather-beaten deciduous trees, do not dominate the compositions as the rock formations do, but they add an uncultivated impression of the landscape where people and their dwellings are secondary. In some drawings, the trees appear to camouflage huts, so as to show the power relations between human and nature. Compared to the stone, the gnarled sessile oaks seem to come alive. The twisted forms of this type of wood generates an imaginative impulse, as in the landscape with hunter, where the tree leads the hunter's way among boulders and coastal forests. (Fig. 5)

The third type of depicted nature is water, the favourite element of the baroque with its "ambivalent materiality [...] its mutability, its movement, its transparency, and its reflective quality", as Stephanie Hanke writes in "Water in the baroque garden" (2019).⁶² Thus water became the



Fig. 6. Mölndal close to Gothenburg after life (“molendael buyten gothenburgh na t’leven”). Mölndal’s city hall, by permission of Mölndal city.

leading dramatic element in the gardens of the age, where carefully placed fountains and ponds created amazing jets and mirrors which evoked contrast, surprise, and dissolution of form and boundaries. Water was of course not new to van Everdingen; as a marine painter he had depicted it in different conditions. The Nordic waterfalls were new to his eyes, however, and they became the most popular motif in his paintings—a motif that appealed greatly to art buyers in the Netherlands. In contrast to the artificial effect of giant pumps in baroque gardens, van Everdingen visualized water that dropped rapidly from a high altitude by its own accord. If the stone and trees were depicted with a touch of domesticity, the rushing water had a more sublime quality. In the fine drawing of Mölndal’s waterfall, for instance, the drop is near and the water could crush the artist if he were not protected by the rock in front. (Fig. 6) The human constructions nearby look fragile and on the verge of breaking. In another drawing of a



Fig. 7. Mölndal's water-fall, etching by Johannes van den Aveelen (1703) for *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*. Kungliga biblioteket, Public domain.

MOENDAHL'S FALL





Fig. 8. Landscape with four spruces by a cabin (Landschap met vier sparren bij een hut). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.



waterfall, a big spruce keeps the painter safe from the cascade. And, in a drawing of what is supposed to be the Trollhättan waterfalls, human figures are handling some kind of mill mechanism, but they are just staffage at the margin. The rushing water is in focus, and you can almost hear the ear-splitting noise. It is as if, using Hanke's words, van Everdingen wanted to communicate the sensual close-up experience of "this ambivalent [natural] element which can be a life-giving source or menacing deluge".⁶³ Drawing these falls the artist does not provide overviews or topographical illustrations that would meet the demands of political or industrial interests. In comparison to Johannes van den Aveleen's depiction of the Mölndal falls in Erik Dahlbergh's *Suecia antiqua et hodierna* (1703), van Everdingen says nothing of the capacity and grandeur of the place. (Fig. 7) His portrait of Swedish nature obviously does not manifest the magnificence and power of the Swedish state in the way that David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl did in the painting *Black grouse courting* from 1675.⁶⁴ But, perhaps, as a parallel to the different functions of water in the baroque garden, Nordic wilderness had its natural *parterres d'eau* with the potential to reflect the grandeur of its landscape.⁶⁵ (Fig. 8) Considering the supposedly windy and unsteady northern weather, this may have been something van Everdingen had in mind when he let the northern seaside, the ponds and the rivers show unusually calm water, and thereby open up the rendering of northern nature by reflecting the sky and landscape.

Wonder, vanitas, and ways of seeing —the wilderness of Allaert van Everdingen

In the age of the baroque, the matter of newness, unfamiliarity and strangeness was approached with a novel interest. Allaert van Everdingen's experience and representations of northern nature tap into this tendency. Supported by it, he could build a career as an artist by developing an experience of the landscape that was unfamiliar and strange to his contemporaries in the Netherlands and in other parts of Europe. In a way, he was presenting exotic things, just as the popular baroque "rooms of wonders" (*Wunderkammer*) displayed all sorts of exotic and strange artefacts and natural specimens. Van Everdingen's Scandinavian depictions, marked by rocks and boulders, vegetation on bare stone and natural cascades, appealed to the curiosity of his countrymen and to a new sublime sensitivity, using the phrasing of Jan Blanc, that could be related to a feeling of vertigo in the face of an expanding world. His discoveries were not made from far away, but could still be considered as occurring at the margins of civilization—a notion that seventeenth-century Dutch men and women were becoming used to as a nation of global traders, colonialists and in-



Fig. 9. Seascape through the opening in the rocks (*Zeegezicht door een opening in de rotsen*). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.

dustrialists.⁶⁶ These and other pictures of wonder from the north complemented those from the far east and west.

In this world of new riches and changing social orders, the importance of life's transience and fragility were reflected in the popularity of *vanitas* in still life and other genre paintings of the baroque. Does a *vanitas* motif shine through in the representations of northern nature that van Everdingen encountered on his trip? The art historian Wolfgang Stechow was sceptical toward such an interpretation. In regard to Dutch landscape painting in general, he wrote: "To think of nature as a realm reflecting the inconstancy of human life and endeavour was utterly outside the scope of Dutch thought."⁶⁷ Considering that van Everdingen gave the human figures in his depictions insignificant roles in relation to the dominance of the weight of rock and the force of rushing water, I would nevertheless argue that there are elements of *vanitas* in the artist's conception of northern nature that the public would have deciphered in his times.

Allaert van Everdingen was the first artist who depicted northern wilderness with an aesthetic ambition. Typical baroque stylistic features challenge geometrical forms, point to the dynamics of matter, and intro-



Fig. 10. Big boulder in the forest (Grote Kei in het woud). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Public domain.

duce the unavoidability of illusion. In this sense, van Everdingen's wilderness is baroque. In his conception of Nordic nature, the orientation is not clear and the perspectives are not given, he introduces new ways of seeing and knowing the world. The interconnections between feeling and knowing, seeing and understanding are thus active in his pictures. New visions can emerge from alternative perspectives, like lying in the grass and drawing a glade in the Nordic woods, or peeping through an opening of a rock by the sea. (Fig. 9–10) By changing perspectives he incorporates the experience of the observation, and in a baroque gesture shows that we can “truly know only what we feel”.⁶⁸

Noter

1. Here and elsewhere in this article, I rely on the biographical information from the books by Alice I. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen. A complete catalogue, including the studies for Reynard the Fox* (Doornspijk, 2007); *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675, first painter of Scandinavian landscape* (Doornspijk, 2001); *Allart Van Everdingen* (New York & London, 1978). I have also consulted the RKD–Netherlands Institute for Art History website <https://rkd.nl/explore/artists/26851> (May 11, 2020). I would like to thank Dr. Christi M. Klinkert, curator at Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar,

for her generosity in sharing her knowledge and thoughts about van Everdingen. I am also thankful to all the critical and fruitful comments on my presentation of the topic at the Swedish Baroque Academy's symposium at RKD in the Hague, 22 November 2019.

2. Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 26 f.; Anders Hedvall: *Bohuslän i konsten. Från Allaert van Everdingen till Carl Wilhelmsson. En översikt* (Stockholm, 1956), 14. In the literature there are still conflicting opinions upon when, how and where he travelled in Scandinavia. I have looked into the Gothenburg city archive material from 1644–1645 at Riksarkivet (Landsarkivet in Gothenburg), without finding any trace of the Dutch artist by the name van Everdingen.

3. There were plenty of opportunities to board the traders to Scandinavia, often empty on their way to the North, see: Jaap R. Bruijn: “The timbertrade. The case of Dutch-Norwegian relations in the 17th century” in Arne Bang-Andersen et al. (eds.): *The North Sea. A highway of economic and cultural exchange. Character-history* (Stavanger-Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø, 1985), 127 ff.; R. Th. H. Willemsen, “Dutch sea trade with Norway in the seventeenth century” in W. G. Heeres et al. (eds.): *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping and trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, 1350–1850* (Hilversum, 1988), 471 f.

4. Olof Granberg: *Allart van Everdingen och hans ”norska” landskap. Det gamla Julita och Wurmbrandts kanoner. Ett par undersökningar* (Stockholm, 1902), 46: ”Ile SALVATOR ROSA Du Nord’, som man kallat honom – förstått att med färger tolka vår storslagna, för den holländske slättbon främmande natur.” On Granberg, see Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 163–168.

5. Gunnar Berefelt: *Svensk landskapskonst, från renässans till romantik* (Stockholm, 1965), 65: ”I stort sett måste man emellertid säga, att tiden [1600-talet] inte dokumenterat någon påtaglig vilja att vare sig förstå eller återge den svenska naturens särdrag. Tvärtom tycker man sig i mångt och mycket ana ett visst förakt för det svenska landskapet; med tillfredsställelse konstaterar Spegel, att där ’fordom tall och gran på skarpa bergen vuxo, där är organgerie...’” For a similar opinion, see the chapter “Upptäckten av den nordiska naturen” (The discovery of the Nordic nature) in Erik Steneberg: *Kristinatidens måleri* (Malmö, 1955), 117–125.

6. “orangery, n.”. OED Online. June 2020. Oxford University Press. [https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/132176](https://www.oed-com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/132176) (accessed August 2, 2020).

7. Berefelt: *Svensk landskapskonst*, 66.

8. Karin Sidén: “Dutch art in seventeenth-century Sweden. A history of Dutch industrialists, travelling artists and collectors” in *Geest en gratie. Essays presented to Ildikó Ember on her seventieth birthday* (Budapest, 2012), 94–110; Karin Sidén: “Kulturförbindelser mellan Holland och Sverige” and “Bilderna av den svenska naturen – från exotism till realism”, in Görel Cavalli-Björkman, Karin Sidén & Märten Snickare (eds.): *Holländsk guldålder. Rembrandt, Frans Hals och deras samtida* (Stockholm, 2005), 235–241; Mikael Ahlund: “The wilderness inside Drottningholm. David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl and the northern nature at the court of Hedwig Eleonora” in Kristoffer Neville & Lisa Skogh (eds.): *Queen Hedwig Eleonora and the arts. Court culture in the seventeenth-century Northern Europe* (London & New York, 2017), 94 f.

9. Jan Blanc: “Sensible natures. Allart Van Everdingen and the tradition of sublime landscape in seventeenth-century Dutch painting” in *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8:2 (2016), 2.

10. See footnote 1 for full references to Davies's work.

11. Blanc: "Sensible natures", 2.
12. Blanc: "Sensible natures", 16.
13. John D. Lyons: "Introduction. The crisis of the baroque" in John D. Lyons (ed.): *The Oxford handbook of the baroque* (Oxford, 2019), 1.
14. Peter Burke: "The crisis in the arts of the seventeenth century: a crisis of representation?" in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40:2 (2009), 250.
15. Lyons: "Introduction. The crisis of the baroque", 3.
16. René Descartes: *Les Passions de l'âme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990 [1649]), 78.
17. The phrasing "Scandinavian reports" comes from Wolfgang Stechow: *Dutch landscape painting of the seventeenth century* (London, 1966), 145.
18. Peter Foote: "Introduction" in Olaus Magnus: *A description of the Nordic peoples, 1555*, vol. I (London, 1996), lxxi.
19. Olaus Magnus: *A description of the Nordic peoples, 1555*, vol. II (London, 1998), 585 (12:1 "On stonemasons and the variety and shapes of stones"), and 589 (12:4 "On the very large number and size of trees in the northern countries"); Olaus Magnus: *A description of the Nordic peoples, 1555*, vol. I, 114 (1:18 "On the overflowing and assault of waters"). Furious speeds of water, treacherous coastlines and strange rock formations are also highlighted in other chapters (for example in 2:28 "On the narrow in rock-bound ports"; 2:30 "On swift torrents"; 2:31 "On the various shapes of rocks along the shore"). The terrifying aspects of nature are enhanced here.
20. I am of course aware that this specific combination of nature structures Simon Schama's book *Landscape and memory* (London, 1995). Schama reflects upon the fact that the specific concept of landscape and the representations it developed in early modern Dutch culture were "site[s] of formidable human engineering" (10).
21. Helen Hills: "Introduction. Rethinking the baroque" in Helen Hills (ed.): *Rethinking the baroque* (Farnham & Burlington, 2011), 4.
22. Anthony J. Cascardi: "Experience and knowledge in the baroque" in Lyons (ed.): *The Oxford handbook of the baroque*, 450.
23. Lyckle de Vries: "The changing face of realism" in David Freedberg & Jan de Vries (eds.): *Art in history/History in art. Studies in seventeenth-century Dutch culture* (Chicago IL, 1991), 231; Seymore Slive: *Dutch painting 1600–1800* (New Haven CT & London, 1995), 177 ff.; Wolfgang Stechow: *Dutch landscape painting of the seventeenth century* (London, 1966), 143 f.
24. Svetlana Alpers: *The art of describing. Dutch art in the seventeenth century* (Chicago IL, 1983), 40 f., 139; Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 79.
25. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 63, 48. About the Mölndal drawing, see also Julius S. Held: "Ett bidrag till kännedomen om Everdingens skandinaviska resa" in *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* (Stockholm, 1937), 41: "Teckningen är signerad med konstnärens bekanta monogram vilket tyvärr av en främmande hand blivit ifyllt med rödkrita. Viktigare är emellertid inskriften på baksidan, vilket i 1600-talets karakteristiska stil meddelar oss följande: 'molendael buyten gothenburgh na t'leven'. Eftersatsen 'na t'leven', som är så bekant från Brueghels bondestudier, låter förmoda, att vi ha att göra med en anteckning av konstnären, som han själv kanske redan på ort och ställe skrivit på bladet."
26. Davies: *The Drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 17. "Everdingen produced paintings, etchings and drawings with Scandinavian subjects from the time of his trip to the end of his career. It is more difficult to determine the chronology of the works on

paper than the painted ones. The largest distinct group of Scandinavian landscapes extant—twenty or so brown ink drawings [cat. 254–285], fairly close in size to the grey ink ones done on the spot—are more certainly reminiscences of his trademark subject. Broader in handling and more decorative than the trip sketches, they date after his move to Amsterdam but it is impossible to know how long he continued to produce them.” (16). Davies states that a catalogue of the drawings in chronological order is not possible to create (15). She maintains that the drawings are all authentic and whole compositions, and not sketches of details for later work.

27. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 10. Davies notes that more drawings exist, not yet reproduced.

28. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 15.

29. Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 76.

30. Alpers: *The art of describing*, 40.

31. Alpers: *The art of describing*, 40.

32. Alpers: *The art of describing*, 26 ff.

33. Stechow: *Dutch landscape painting*, 144–145. Stechow who is not convinced by the aesthetic quality of van Everdingen’s landscapes (he prefers Jacob van Ruisdael), still says that his “Scandinavian ‘reports’” are handled “with considerable skill and a good deal of ‘local colour’, geographically speaking”.

34. Lorraine Daston & Peter Galison: *Objectivity* (New York, 2007), 98.

35. Alpers: *The art of describing*, 35.

36. Daston & Galison: *Objectivity*, 104.

37. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 48.

38. Davies cites Granberg on the matter, who from an early twentieth-century Nordic perspective said: “We do not find anything immediately real in his art, but we Northerners recognize the *spirit* in it as our own and as something dear to us.” Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 167.

39. Christopher D. Johnson: “Baroque discourse” in Lyons (ed.): *The Oxford handbook of the baroque*, 563.

40. Karin Johannisson: “Det sköna i det vilda. En aspekt på naturen som mänsklig resurs” in Tore Frängsmyr (ed.): *Paradiset och vildmarken. Studier kring synen på naturen och naturresurserna* (Stockholm, 1984), 15–18.

41. Ola Nylander: “Hur byggde man staden?” in Bo Lindberg (ed.): *Göteborg de första 100 åren* (Göteborg, 2018), 34. The Dutch was Johan van Lingen, first citizen of Gothenburg, 13 June 1621.

42. Slive: *Dutch painting 1600–1800*, 192 f. Slive makes a connection between Post’s experience and representation of foreign nature and that of van Everdingen, but he does not develop the comparison.

43. Sidén, “Dutch art in seventeenth-century Sweden”, 97 f.

44. For the painting and the description, see the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam website: <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.7406>.

45. Sidén: “Dutch art in seventeenth-century Sweden”, 97; Sidén: “Kulturförbindelser mellan Holland och Sverige”, 235.

46. Blanc: “Sensible natures”, 16.

47. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 10.

48. On the work of Savery see for example Stechow: *Dutch landscape painting*, 142 f.; Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 78 f. For the connection Savery and Porcelli, see Blanc: “Sensible natures”, 11–17.

49. Blanc: “Sensible natures”, 13.

50. Andrea Lutz: “Die Alpen durch die Augen der Niederländer. Landschaftlicher Realismus im Barock als Vorbild für Schweizer Künstler” in *Dutch Mountains. Vom holländischen Flachland in die Alpen* (München, 2018), 21: “Wie kein Künstler vor ihm [Savery] stiess er in die Wildnis der alpinen Bergwelt vor und bezeugte mit der Figur des Zeichners vor dem Wasserfall oder mit rückseitigem Vermerk ‘nach dem Leben’ auf den Blättern, dass die Ansichten getraut nach der Natur festhalten war er selbst sah.”

51. Görel Cavalli-Björkman: *Nationalmuseum Catalogue*, Allaert van Everdingen (NM 421, NM 2087, NM4495), 185–189, quote from 187; Blanc: “Sensible natures”, 36. Blanc talks about “the visual grammar of his Scandinavian landscapes upon the models of his predecessors.”

52. Davies: *The drawings of Allart van Everdingen*, 12.

53. Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf: *Ideal landscape. Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorraine* (New Haven CT & London, 1990), 29.

54. Wybe Kuitert: “Spruces, pines, and the picturesque in seventeenth-century Netherlands” in *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 38:1 (2018), 75 ff.

55. Kuitert: “Spruces, pines, and the picturesque in seventeenth-century Netherlands”, 73.

56. Blanc: “Sensible natures”, 31; Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 37.

57. Ahlund: “The wilderness inside Drottningholm”, 84.

58. Allan Ellenius: “Exploring the Country. Visual Imaginary as a Patriotic Resource” in Allan Ellenius (ed.): *Baroque dreams. Art and vision in Sweden in the era of greatness* (Uppsala, 2003), 20: “Everdingen remained faithful to the methods of composition he had learned in the Netherlands; the basically realistic approach was conditioned, in the same way as the landscape paintings in his native country.”

59. Anyone who has walked the rocky islands of Bohuslän will recognize the feeling of getting lost.

60. This is something Davies also notes about his earliest Scandinavian oil painting, that despite “foaming falls and precipitous drop into dark pines [it] exudes domesticity.” Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 80.

61. Here again there are pictorial conventions that van Everdingen might have followed, since the motif of allegorical pilgrimage was a reoccurring element in previous landscape painting. Davies stresses however that van Everdingen actually was a traveller himself and that he probably was more inclined to follow van Mander’s more secular advice to show the world as it appears, with people working the lands and walking the paths. Davies: *Allart van Everdingen, 1621–1675*, 84.

62. Stephanie Hanke: “Water in the baroque garden” in Lyons (ed.): *The Oxford handbook of the baroque*, 88, 96 f.

63. Hanke: “Water in the baroque garden”, 98.

64. See Ahlund, “The wilderness inside Drottningholm”, for a fascinating account on the promotion of northern nature by the Swedish royalty, by the means of David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl’s painting. Ahlund points out that Ehrenstrahl choose a more open model for his Swedish landscape, that related more to Italian and French baroque, than van Everdingen’s close composition, and thereby giving the Swedish nature a more elegant and sophisticated status.

65. Hanke: “Water in the baroque garden”, 94 f.

66. Benjamin Schmidt: *Inventing exoticism. Geography, globalism, and Europe's early modern world* (Philadelphia PA, 2015).

67. Stechow: *Dutch landscape painting*, 139.

68. Cascardi: "Experience and knowledge in the baroque", 459.

Abstract

The wilderness of Allaert van Everdingen: experience and representation of the north in the age of the baroque. Cecilia Rosengren, Associate professor in History of ideas, Department of literature, history of ideas, and religion, University of Gothenburg, cecilia.rosengren@lir.gu.se

In 1644, a young Dutch artist, Allaert van Everdingen, was traveling parts of Scandinavia, which by that time was generally considered wild and on the border of the civilized world. His encounter with the nature in southern Norway and western Sweden was pivotal for his coming career as a popular painter of Nordic wilderness. A wilderness rendered more exotic as time went by, his perceived trustworthiness of its depiction came from his own concrete encounter with northern nature, which guaranteed a picture *naer het leven* (after life). This article takes a closer look at the drawings related to the actual trip. As a newcomer to the North, what did he see? The artist is usually considered in relation to the new realistic Dutch landscape painting, but could van Everdingen's encounter with northern nature also be positioned within a context seldom mentioned in the literature—the baroque worldview? The argument is guided by the idea that the baroque points to the diverse expressions of an ongoing cultural crisis that challenged traditional views of reality, which include both artistic and philosophical articulations, as well as geographical and scientific discoveries. In hindsight certain traits stand out, such as a fascination for transience of life, dynamism of nature, unavoidability of illusion, performativity of society, and not least the willingness to see the qualities of newness and the strange. The baroque is the encounter with the strange, with the unknown. In this way, van Everdingen's experience and representation of northern nature, especially in relation to rock, wood, and water, could be an early intervention in the slowly changing attitudes towards the wilderness, not least towards the barren nature of the north, which sublime romantic values were not generally perceived of until late eighteenth century.

Key words: Allaert van Everdingen, Nordic nature, wilderness, baroque, sublime, realism, perception, experience, knowledge