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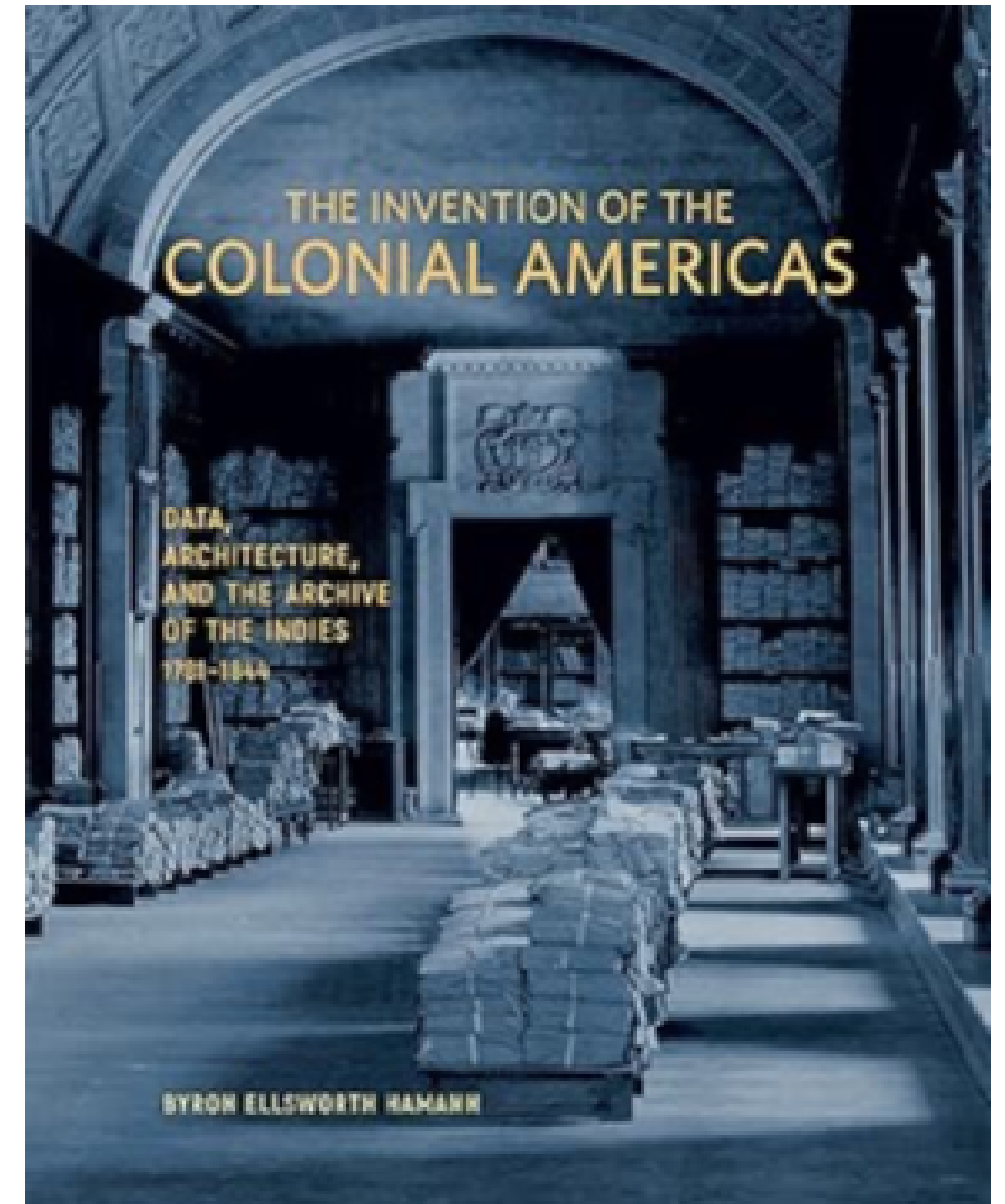
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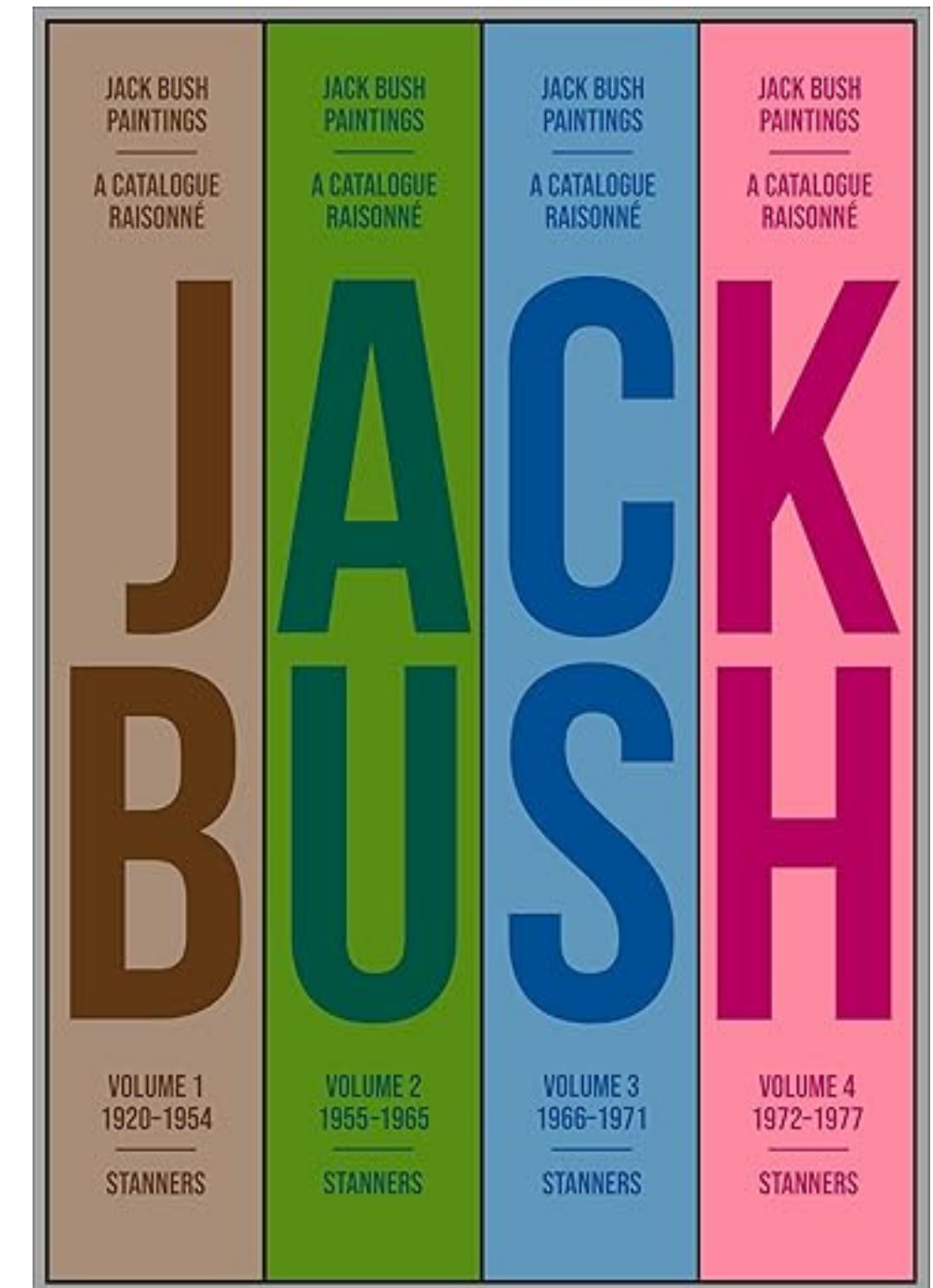


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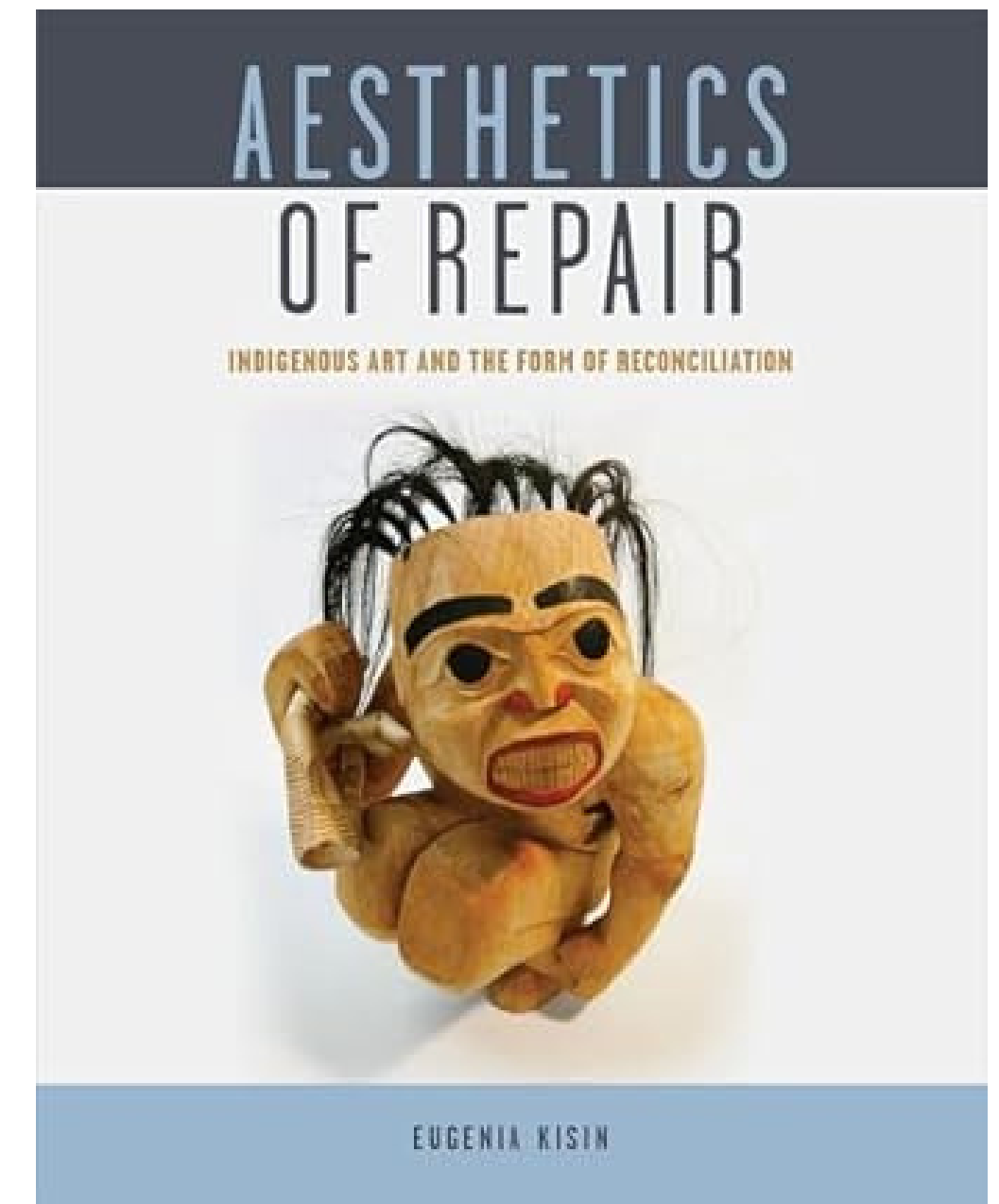
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MELVA J. DWYER AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

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BY ROBERT SCHINDLER, BERND EBERT, & ANNA C.
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MFA PUBLICATIONS, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON,
2024.





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Rachel Ruysch: A (Re)introduction

Robert Schindler

In her lifetime, Rachel Ruysch was widely known and appreciated as one of the foremost flower still-life painters. Certainly, her life and work were shaped by her gender in a culture that severely limited professional opportunities for women. Undoubtedly, her talent allowed her to overcome the many obstacles female artists experienced at the time.¹ In addition, her family—educated, prosperous, and well-connected—was instrumental in giving her access to a career as a painter. Ruysch grew up in an exceptionally learned environment at a time that saw tremendous advances in knowledge and understanding of the natural world, human anatomy, reproductive processes, botany, and zoology. Her work shows that she was keenly aware of many of these new discoveries, as well as situated firmly at the intersection of art, nature, and science.

Only one book has been published on her work, almost seventy-five years ago.² Although it continues to be indispensable for any student of Ruysch, Maurice Grentz's catalogue is limited to a list of her paintings, including many attributions that are no longer tenable, together with a brief introduction that is steeped in misogynistic prejudice. Its relevance still today speaks to the relative paucity of research on the artist. Marinne Berard's dissertation, the groundbreaking study of her early work, remains unpublished.³ Besides, there is very little dedicated scholarship on her life and work.⁴

Fortunately, many of her paintings survive, and the majority are signed and dated, testifying to the extraordinarily long arc of her career—she painted from the young age of sixteen or seventeen until she was eighty-three. Her life is comparatively well-documented thanks to surviving correspondence, an illuminating contemporary account, archival records, poems written about her, and Jan van Goyen's biography published in 1700, the year of her death. However, despite the relative wealth of information about her fascinating story, it has never been properly told.

An Auspicious Beginning

Artistic talent ran in Ruysch's family. Her maternal grandfather was the architect Pieter Post, who designed, among other buildings, the Huis ten Bosch for Amalia von Solms, the widow of Stadtholder Frederick Hendrik, together with Jacob van Campen, the Mauritshuis in The Hague for Johan Maurits, the Prince of Nassau-Siegen and Governor of the colony Dutch Brazil, and the town hall in Maastricht. Pieter's brother, and Ruysch's great-uncle, was Frans Post, a well-known landscape painter who accompanied Johan Maurits to Brazil. In 1681, Maria Post, Ruysch's mother, married Frederick Ruysch, a renowned scholar, doctor, teacher, collector, artist, who later became a member of the Academia Leopoldina-Carolina then in Nuremberg.



98 Rachel Rupach, *Flowers*, 1998, Musée Thomas-More, Châteaufort-en-Cois



99 Rachel Rupach, *Life with Flowers in a Vase on a Ledge with a Dragonfly, Caterpillar, and Butterfly*, 1998, private collection

ament (see fig. 27). She is no longer presented as only a skilled professional artisan, brush and palette in hand, but as an inspired, brilliant, creative mind. Her husband proudly points to the easel with the fruit of her labors: a floral still life that quite obviously reproduces the bouquet on the table. Little Joan Wilhelm is trying to show his mother a medallion, attached to a red ribbon, that bears a portrait of the elector (fig. 103). Records reveal that the boy had received the medallion on his last visit to Düsseldorf in 1713. This is an explicit reference to the elector, but there is another, less obvious one in the form of the bouquet of flowers on the left, painted once on the left and again as a picture within a picture on the right. As Robert Schindler observed, the still life dated 1715 is strikingly similar to this particular bouquet on the table (fig. 105). Since the provenance of the 1715 painting cannot be traced back that far, it cannot be ruled out that it was also originally painted for Johann Wilhelm. One explanation as to why its pendant *Fruit Still Life with Dog, Beetle and Nier* is dated 1717 could be that it was only completed after the elector's unexpected death in 1716 (fig. 107).

It is possible that the electoral couple used paintings from their court artists as exchange objects or gifts, as was customary between members of the family.¹⁷ It is therefore likely that more paintings by Ruych than hitherto known found their way into other collections either through swaps or as gifts.

Mannheim

Both of Johann Wilhelm's marriages remained childless, and so after his death in 1716, he was succeeded by his brother Karl III Philipp. In 1720, Karl Philipp moved his residence to Mannheim. From 1730 onwards, as construction work on the grand palace in Mannheim was nearing completion, some of the Düsseldorf furnishings were transferred to Mannheim, among them numerous paintings from Johann Wilhelm's former private apartments. This included Ruych's large, landscape-format *Still Life with Fruit and Flowers*, from 1714, and the lower still life dated 1715 (figs. 101 & 102). Both paintings were captured by Jan Philip van der Schieffen, whose drawings of 1721 record the Mannheim cabinets (figs. 108 & 109).¹⁸ In addition, they are listed in the inventory of 1728 as: "30. A vase of flowers, very well painted, by Rachel Reisch" and "214. A piece filled with fruit & flowers painted by R. Ruych."¹⁹

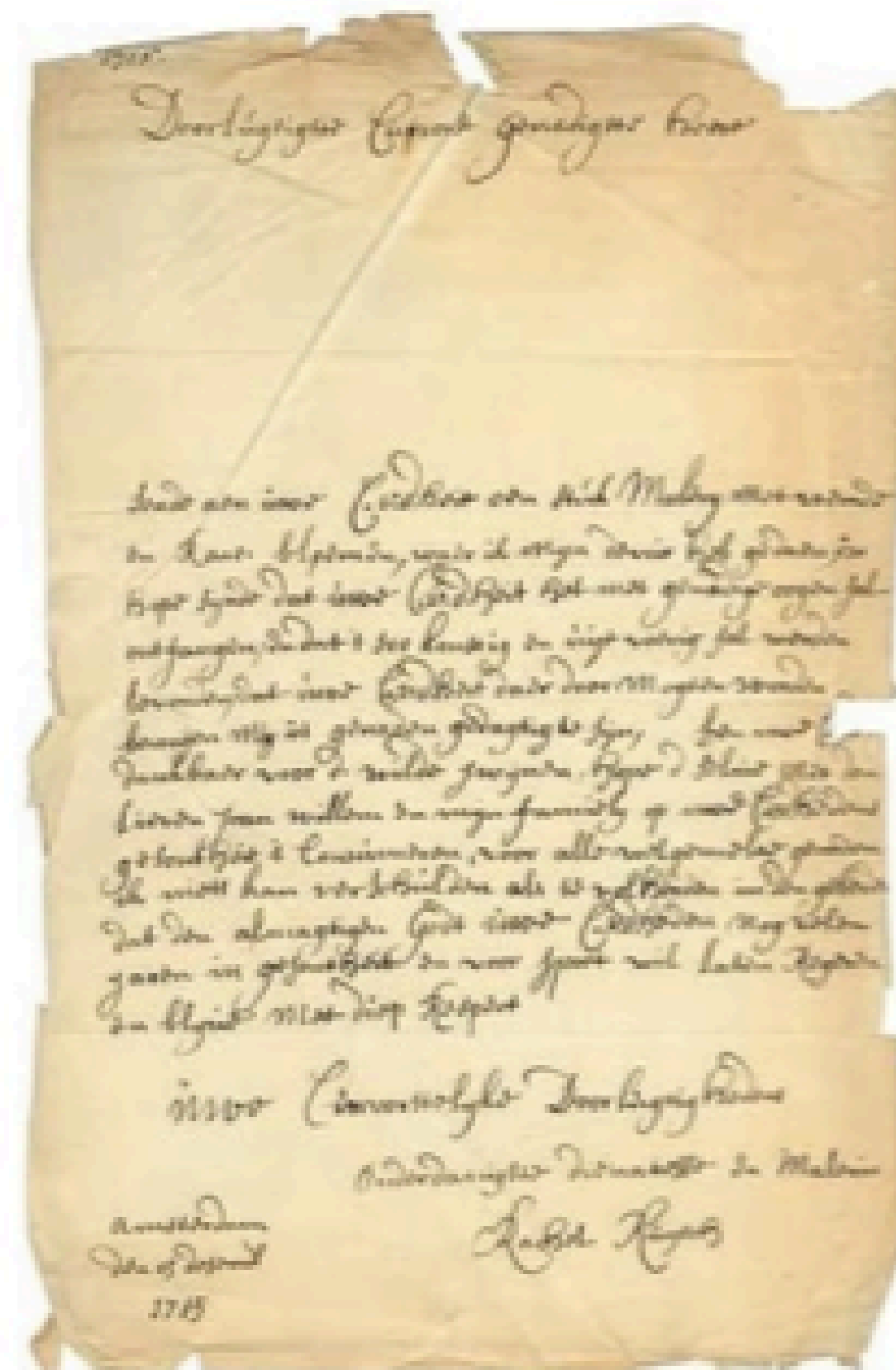
In 1763, Karl Philipp was succeeded by his nephew Karl Theodor von Pfalz-Sulzbach, an established patron of the arts and sciences. Karl Theodor was particularly



103 Medallion of Johann Wilhelm, Electoral Palatine, 1709–17

fond of Dutch painting and was responsible for the substantial expansion of Mannheim's art collection. The collection was presented in the newly built east wing of the Mannheim Palace, and was accessible to the public free of charge. The Mannheim inventory of 1756 lists four works by Ruych as being on display in the first and second cabinet. Judging from the descriptions of these paintings, it is clear that the inventory refers to the two paintings from Johann Wilhelm's bedchambers in Düsseldorf (transferred to Mannheim by Karl Philipp) as well as the two pendant paintings from the Düsseldorf gallery, which had been temporarily sent to Mannheim on account of encroaching military activity (figs. 109 & 110).²⁰

In 1760, the Electoral Palatine-Marshal (councillor) Johann Clossmann compiled a further inventory at the request of Karl Theodor, itemizing works of art that had originally come from Düsseldorf. It lists a further floral still life by Ruych in the seventh room, which had not previously been mentioned: "360. Original by Ruych. A sumptuous arrangement of flowers in a glass vase, in a carved, well-gilded frame."²¹ By drawing on inventories, it was possible to reconstruct the provenance and match the stated dimensions. This particular painting can be identified with the still life dated 1709, which was held by the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung in Munich until 1937, and is now promised to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 121).²² Although this painting had not previously been documented in either Mannheim or Düsseldorf, the entry in the inventory of 1760 makes it plausible that the still life originally came



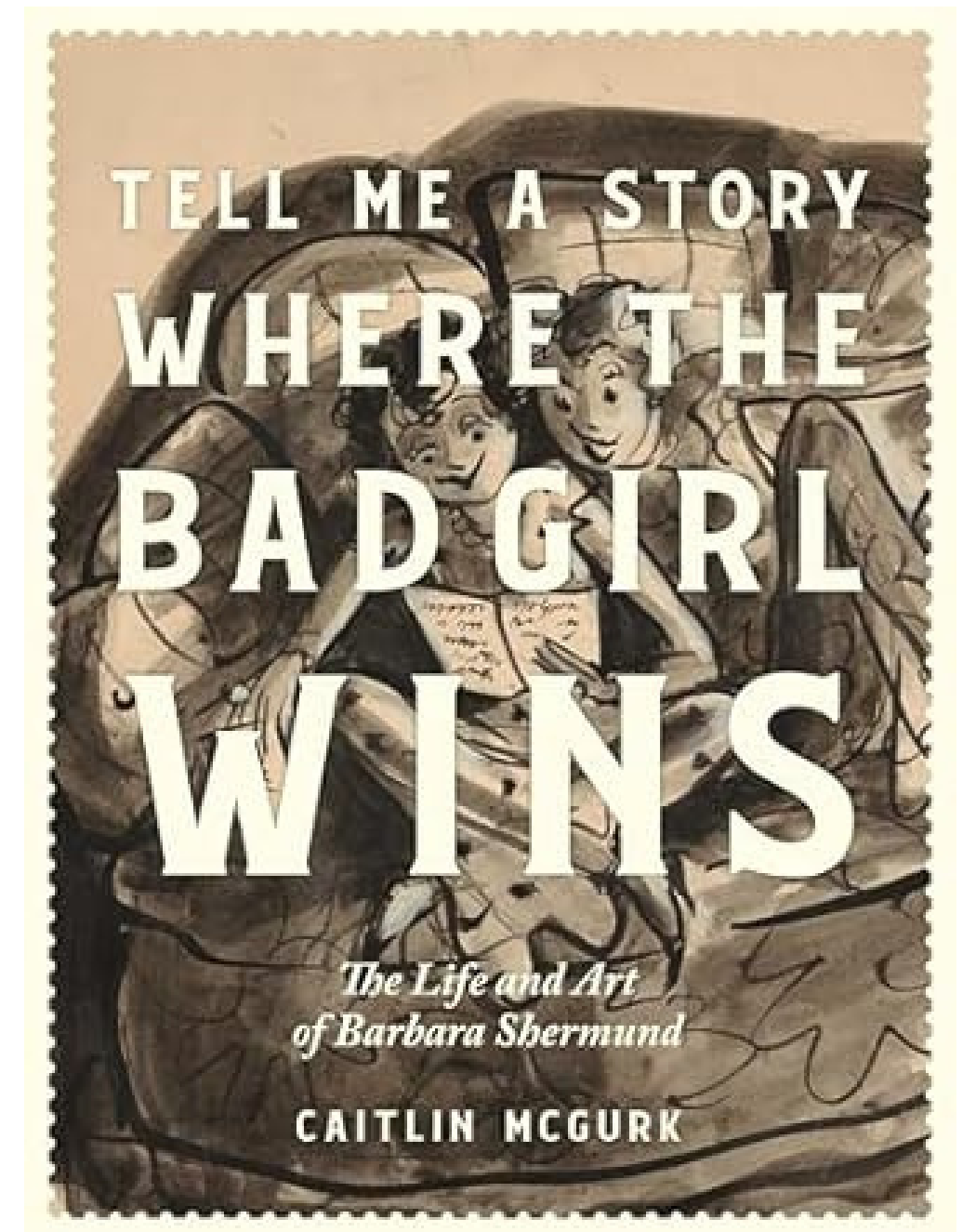
104, December 13, 1715, letter from Rachel Ruych to Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm

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TELL ME A STORY WHERE THE BAD GIRL WINS:
THE LIFE AND ART OF BARBARA SHERMUND

CAITLIN MCGURK

FANTAGRAPHICS, 2024



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THE SHAPE OF POWER: STORIES OF RACE AND AMERICAN SCULPTURE

KAREN LEMMEY, TOBIAS WOFFORD, & GRACE YASUMUR

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM IN ASSOCIATION
WITH PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024.

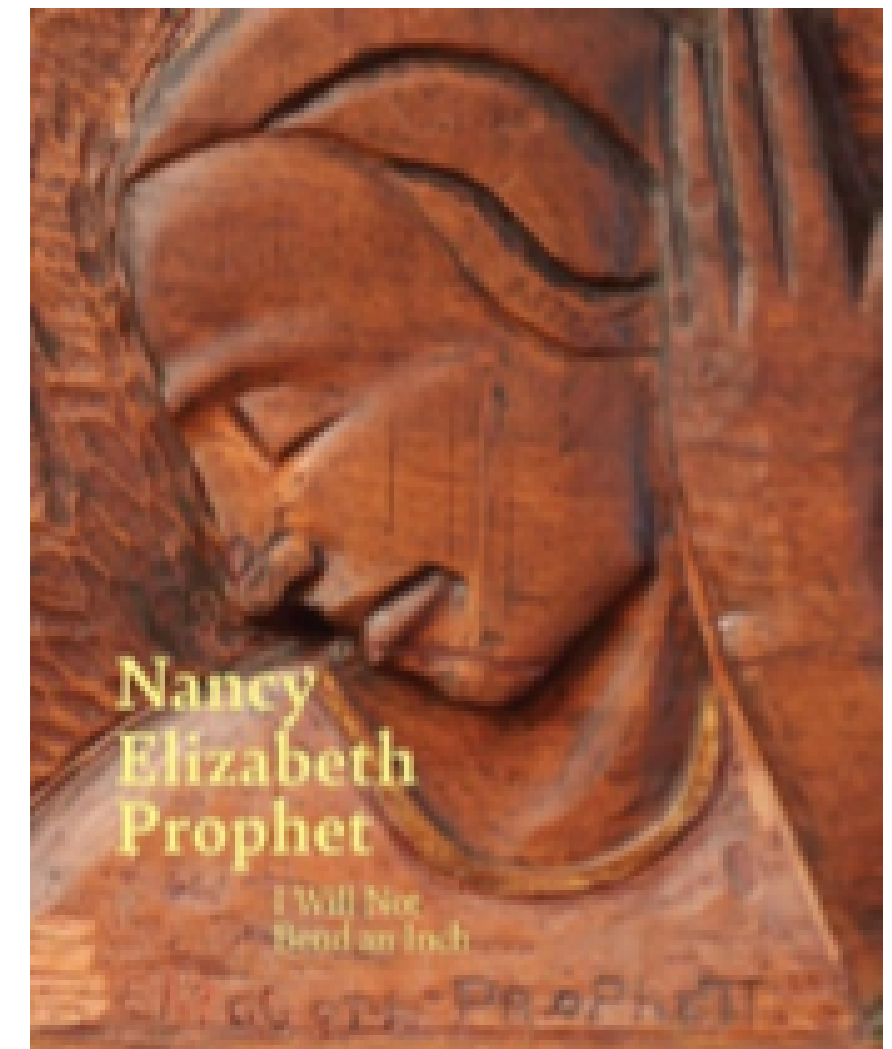


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NANCY ELIZABETH PROPHET: I WILL NOT
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EDITED BY SARAH GANZ BLYTHE, DOMINIC MOLON, &
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