

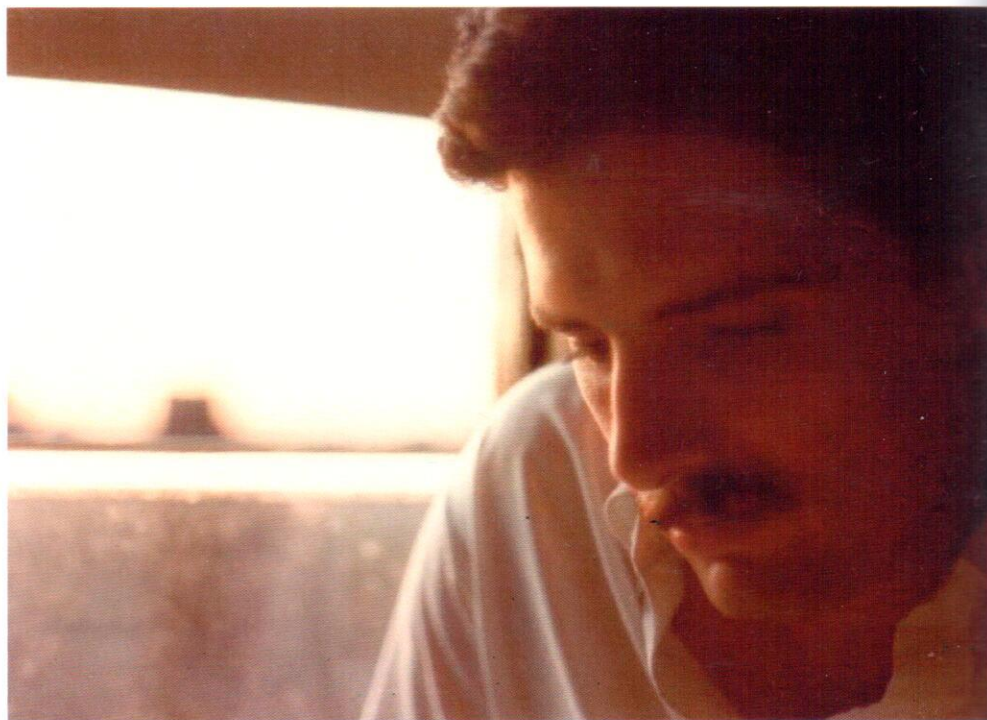
Navigating my Student Years at the Institute in Preparation for an Academic Career

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I officially entered the Institute for the Fall 1981 semester, after having received an M.A. degree in art history from Queens College (CUNY) the prior February. I say “officially” because I had actually begun taking classes there in 1979. My advisor at Queens College, Leonard Slatkes, spent the 1979-80 academic year in the Netherlands and had suggested that I contact Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann in order to inquire whether I could study with him during Slatkes’s absence. I was terrified at the prospect of having to telephone Haverkamp-Begemann yet I did what I was instructed to do. He was kind on the phone and amenable to my attending his lectures but he insisted on first interviewing me in person. So this twenty-two year old kid from Long Island with big hair and an ill-fitting suit somehow managed to make a positive impression upon this world-famous professor and thus entered into his tutelage for what would eventually extend to eight full years.

I have many fond memories of my time at the Institute and, if I am to be honest, some less than fond ones as well. Most of the latter occurred during my initial months there. Hitherto, in my art history programs on the undergraduate and M.A. level, I had been a proverbial big fish in a small pond. Now I suddenly discovered that I was a medium-size fish in a very large lake, surrounded by lots of very brilliant people, some of whom were needlessly and unpleasantly competitive. Obviously, adjustments had to be made to varying degrees on my part. Sooner or later, we all find our niche and I am happy to report that I found mine as well though this obviously took some time.

Naturally, academic matters lay at the heart of my many wonderful experiences during those years. Haverkamp-Begemann had attracted a sizeable cohort of students—some twelve to fifteen if I recall correctly. We all participated in the same lecture courses and seminars and so much more because Haverkamp-Begemann was actually grooming



Wayne Franits Studying for Institute Orals, 1983

us for our future careers. I remember several dinner parties at his Park Avenue apartment. These typically involved beef bourguignon made in a crockpot and lots of wine as we sat in his crowded living room (whose walls were graced with seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish drawings) while he held court with whatever eminent scholar in our field from around the world happened to be visiting him at that moment. Many of these same eminent scholars gathered in impressive numbers at the Institute one Saturday in early March of 1983 to celebrate the official publication of a *festschrift* in honor of Haverkamp-Begemann, marking his sixtieth birthday. All of his students were invited and needless to say, the proceedings made a tremendous and lasting impression upon everyone who attended. In addition, there were outings with our mentor to exhibitions at museums and related institutions—especially The Metropolitan Museum of Art—as well as to auction houses to view important art works coming up for sale. Perhaps the ultimate excursion of this sort was our “art tour”

of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in August of 1982. During this trip, we saw some truly spectacular collections that few westerners have had the privilege of viewing. Nevertheless, traveling in Soviet-bloc countries was an education in and of itself on so many other levels. For example, the exceptionally long lines of people at stores in Moscow trying to buy even the most basic household goods is forever seared into my brain.

I learned so much from Haverkamp-Begemann during those formative years. He instilled in me not only a sound knowledge of my field of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish art but also the importance of mastering foreign languages—he was always dazzling in this regard—of visiting major (and even minor) collections throughout the world, of connecting with colleagues, and even the need of assembling a good research library, something that would become critical for me as I would wind up teaching at a university in a provincial location.

Beyond academics, there were many social occasions that I distinctly recall with great fondness. A group of us would sometimes periodically meet to have breakfast at the Nectar Diner on Madison Ave. Back then there were two of them: one on the corner of 78th St. and the other, on the corner of 79th St. (only the latter remains today). Dinners were sometimes taken or fetched at the same locales, along with Three Guys, still standing and situated a few blocks further south on Madison Ave. In those years, the main hall of the Institute was filled with long tables and chairs and served as a place for students to congregate and have coffee or lunch. (The current room serving this purpose at the Institute used to house the Academic Office, before it was relocated to the building's basement.) Unbeknownst to many students, a group of us also played touch football on Saturday mornings in Central Park; one time we even had an "away" game at Columbia University. There were also more "official" social occasions, such as the annual Halloween Party. Over the years, students (and even faculty) donned some incredibly creative costumes for this fantastic event, which was also filled with dancing, eating, imbibing,

and all-around general mirth. Haverkamp-Begemann would invariably dress as one of the Dutch "masters" from the iconic cigar box, itself a clever appropriation of Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Draper's Guild*. One year, my fellow student, Cindy Mack, dressed as one of the court attendants from Velazquez's famous *Las Meninas*. She wore a mask and voluminous gown in the seventeenth-century style. But what was exceptionally clever about her costume was the large doll (presumably the Spanish infanta), wearing the very same outfit, that moved about with her via remote control!

Alas, all good times must come to end and for me, that happened with my successful dissertation defense in May of 1987. As I told Donald Posner a few months after I received my PhD degree, my years at the Institute were a time of my life that seemed in many ways to be larger than life itself. In early June of 1987, my wife and I departed the metropolitan New York area for Syracuse, NY, where I had been offered a tenure-track position as an assistant professor of art history at Syracuse University. Among others, Haverkamp-Begemann played a pivotal role in helping me to procure this

post. Thirty-one years later, I am still a faculty member at Syracuse University, something that I would not have predicted back in 1987. The educational quality of the university itself, the sheer novelty of affordable housing, the surrounding countryside—the Finger Lakes region—and, of course, the relative proximity to New York have succeeded in keeping us here. Even as I have remained tethered to the same academic institution for so long, over the decades the nature of my scholarship has changed. My earliest publications were devoted to what I might call iconological studies of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Such work was quite fashionable in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the years before postmodernism fully exerted its impact upon the field of art history. Gradually, my attention turned to the production of monographic studies of Dutch artists, that is, to the preparation of traditional catalogues raisonnés. I was able to make this transition a smooth one thanks to the training I had received at the Institute where we were taught that the object was just as important as contextual considerations.



Wayne Franits with Students at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2017