

St. Bavo Church and S. Pietro

Week 2 Blog Post



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Heritage and Transformation: St. Bavo Church in Haarlem and S. Pietro



Figure 1: Class students and the experts attending the St. Bavo tour

At De Grote Markt, Haarlem's historic center, you can hear the Damiaatjes chimes every 15 minutes. The source of this sound is St. Bavo Church, a remarkable landmark of the city holding a rich history and architectural beauty (Bavovrienden, n.d).

We entered through a small back door and were greeted by our tour guides Penny Sandford, Yuri van der Linden, Hans Kaan, and Gerrit Bosch, the current conservator of the church's interior. During the church tour, our guides told us how it was built, used, and transformed over the centuries. Although this church was originally built as a Catholic church, the Protestants took over this church in 1579. Therefore, in this church, the histories of Catholicism and Protestantism overlap and intersect. Our tour included the attics, where we could see the inner structures, the carillon, the bells of the church, the famous Müller organ built in 1738 that Mozart played at the age of ten (Bavo, n.d), and the original Catholic altar remains as a painted backing wall, depicting the Spanish siege of Haarlem to commemorate the Dutch revolt.

After touring the church and the tower we gave our presentation based on the week's reading, the article of Michael G. Gromotka: *Transformation Campaigns of Church Interiors and their Impact on the Function and Form of Renaissance Altarpieces the Example of S. Pietro in Perugia and Pietro Perugino's 'Ascension Of Christ' (2015)*. The article traces the journey of the altarpiece "Ascension of Christ" in S. Pietro Church in Perugia through many rearrangements within the church, relocation, dismantling, dispersal, finally attempts at reassembly. Unfortunately, it is not fully intact now; the main altarpiece is housed in the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Lyon, while five panels remain in Perugia. The article examines how the altarpiece's purpose evolved from a central liturgical element to a valued work of art within a developing picture gallery. The artistic quality and importance of Perugino's altarpiece were significant from its creation and became more so with each transformation shaped by religious practices, artistic taste, and museological approaches.



Figure 2: Overview of St. Bavo Church



*Figure 3: Interior of the St. Bavo
clock tower*

The St. Bavo account, grounded in experiential narrative, documents the church's evolution from a Catholic to Protestant space post-1579, emphasizing adaptive reuse through its preserved architectural features—such as the repainted 19th-century pillars and the Müller organ—while maintaining functionality as a concert venue and tourist site. In contrast, Gromotka's analytical study traces the altarpiece's fragmentation and museological dislocation, critiquing its transition from a liturgical centrepiece to a dispersed art commodity, now divided between Lyon and Perugia. St. Bavo's story uses vivid, sensory details to emphasize its role in community identity. At the same time, the altarpiece's analysis traces the artwork's history to examine how social and political forces have shaped its role. Together, they reveal two sides of preserving heritage: adapting it to stay alive versus seeing it become fragmented.

We would like to conclude by highlighting that during our visit, we saw that heritage collections aren't just the one-of-a-kind objects on display in museums. Heritage is also the old buildings and structures; spaces left by the past that tell us about history and the people who lived there and used it before us. This contrast implies that the survival of cultural heritage is influenced not only by its artistic value but also by ideological shifts and changes in human thought over time.

Reference

Bavovrienden, *Historie van het Gebouw*, <https://bavovrienden.nl/de-grote-of-st-bavokerk/het-gebouw/#:~:text=De%20kerk%20werd%20oorspronkelijk%20gebouwd,zowel%20houten%20als%20stenen%20parochiekerken> (accessed 12 February 2025).

Bavo, *orgels*, <https://www.bavo.nl/over-de-bavo-en-de-nieuwe-kerk/grote-of-st-bavokerk/orgels/> (accessed 12 February 2025).

Michael G. Gromotka, *Transformation Campaigns of Church Interiors and their Impact on the Function and Form of Renaissance Altarpieces: The Example of S. Pietro in Perugia and Pietro Perugino's 'Ascension Of Christ'*, *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 42 (2015).