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Dutch Masters

From the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Introduction

Dutch painting of the seventeenth century is often referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of Dutch art. It was the age of Rembrandt van Rijn, Frans Hals and Johannes Vermeer. These great artists are household names, but behind them is an extraordinary number of artists of exceptional quality, painting in such diverse areas as portraiture, landscape, seascape, genre, still life, flower pieces and architectural interiors. This varied and energetic artistic tradition flourished in the particular political, economic and religious conditions that defined the unique phenomenon of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.

The Netherlands freed itself from Spanish domination in 1588 after a long period of religious tension. Philip II (1527–1598), the king of Spain and head of the empire, was a strong Catholic and he resisted the growth of Protestantism in the northern part of the Netherlands. Tensions led to a revolt against Spanish rule and marked the beginning of the Eighty Years’ War in 1568, resulting in the separation of the Northern and the Southern Netherlands. The South chose to stay with the Catholic monarchy, while the North formed an independent republic in 1588. The government of the North was formed by representatives of the seven provinces – Friesland, Gelderland, Groningen, Holland, Overijssel, Utrecht and Zeeland. Rather than the aristocratic power structure that was typical of the rest of Europe, the Republic of the United Netherlands was governed according to relatively modern democratic principles, by merchants, traders and civic officials representing the provinces. Military authority was vested in a ‘stadholder’ (deputy), and for most of the century, princes from the royal house of Orange took this role. The year 1648 saw the end of the Eighty Years’ War and the formal recognition of the Republic.

By the seventeenth century the Dutch economy was already flourishing. The centre of commerce had shifted north from Antwerp to Amsterdam, and trade with the West and East Indies brought spices, gold, ivory, silk, porcelain and sugar to the lively port city. The hugely successful East India Company (VOC), established in 1602 and with markets in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and America, employed a significant proportion of the population. Closer to home the Dutch relied on industries such as fishing, the processing and export of herring, and the production of fine textiles and ceramics. The Dutch economy, based on trade and industry, gave rise to a modern, mostly urban society in contrast with the predominantly rural social structure of the rest of Europe.

The merchants, burghers, traders and government officials – the middle classes – of this modern society developed a seemingly insatiable demand for paintings and decorative arts to fill their homes, often as status symbols. An English visitor to Amsterdam observed in 1640, “As for the art off Painting and the affection off the People to Pictures, none other goe beyond them ... all in general striving to adorne their houses, especially the outer or street roome, with costly pieces ... Such is the generall Notion, enclination and delight that these Countrie Natives have for paintings”.

Whilst the Dutch society generated an environment that encouraged a thriving arts industry, Dutch painting of the seventeenth century reflects that society with an accuracy rarely equalled in any other period. The people, the interiors, the country and the city sights are recorded so completely that the paintings provide us with a window to a world that existed over 300 years ago.

The loan of this comprehensive collection of significant paintings, silver and glassware, porcelain and delftware from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam has been made possible by the Rijksmuseum’s partial closure for renovations. Works from several Australian collections have also been included in the exhibition, providing an opportunity for us to see them in the broader context of seventeenth-century Dutch art.



Johannes VERMEER 1632–1675
The love letter 1669–72
oil on canvas
44.0 x 38.5 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Purchased
with the aid of the Rembrandt Society
(Sk-A-1595)

TIMELINE

Artists in the Netherlands

- 1606 Birth of Rembrandt, in Leiden.
- 1629 Rembrandt paints *Self-portrait at an early age*.
- 1632 Vermeer is born in Delft.
- 1633 Frans Hals paints *Portrait of a man, possibly Nicolaes Hasselaer, brewer and captain-major of a military body in Amsterdam*.
- 1637 Aelbert Cuyp paints *Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter*.
- 1642 Rembrandt completes *The night watch*.
- 1666 Death of Frans Hals in Haarlem.
- 1669 Vermeer paints *The love letter*.
- 1670 Jacob van Ruisdael paints *View of Haarlem from the north-west, with the bleaching fields in the foreground*.

The Netherlands

- 1602 Dutch East India Company (VOC) is founded.
- 1609 Twelve-year truce between the United Republic of the Netherlands and Spain begins.
Dutch optician Hans Lippershey produces an early form of telescope.
- 1619 City of Batavia founded in Indonesia on the island of Java.
- 1621 War with Spain resumes.
- 1635 Pact with France against Spain.
- 1635 Economic crash precipitated by collapse of the tulip market.
- 1642 Abel Tasman sights New Zealand and Van Dieman’s Land (Tasmania).
- 1648 Peace of Münster ends Eighty Years’ War with Spain.
- 1672 William III of Orange appointed *stadholder*, after 22 years without a *stadholder* during which the regents set the political agenda.

The World

- 1600 Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* first performed on stage.
- 1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth I of England.
- 1610 Galileo Galilei increases the magnifying power of Lippershey’s telescope by 32, and uses the telescope to make astronomical discoveries.
- 1620 100 pilgrims on the *Mayflower* arrive in New Plymouth, America.
- 1633 Galileo placed under house arrest for the rest of his life and forced to recant his belief that the earth moves around the sun.
- 1643 Louis XIV, the ‘Sun King’, becomes king of France.
- 1644 Li Zi Chang overthrows the Ming Dynasty in China, and the Manchu Dynasty begins.
- 1665 Great Plague of London.
- 1667 John Milton writes *Paradise Lost*.
- 1690 John Locke writes *Essay on Human Understanding*.

Colour

During the 1660s Vermeer favoured the blue and yellow accord seen in the servant's skirt and the lady's dress. The intensity of his colours was achieved by the fineness of his ground pigments and by the juxtaposition of one colour against another.

The Delft School

Other painters in the Delft School include Pieter de Hooch (1629–1684), Emanuel de Witte (1616/18–1692) and Carel Fabritius (1622–1654). Johannes Vermeer, who entered the Guild of St Luke in Delft in 1653, cannot be said to be merely typical of the Delft School. Like Rembrandt, he stands apart as a great, individual painter.

Composition

As well as the framing device of the door and the hanging tapestry, Vermeer was very particular about the placement of every element in the composition. Note the positioning of the two paintings in relation to the women. The lady in yellow is locked in to the composition by the basket, the servant and the mantelpiece. It is the geometry of the composition which gives the figures a sense of monumentality and presence, and the painting a sense of timelessness. (You may need to see the complete picture on the front cover.)

The Setting

This room was the setting for many of Vermeer's compositions. Objects such as the papers and the chair in the foreground, and the lady's ermine-trimmed yellow jacket, appear in other scenes painted by Vermeer.

Patronage

Vermeer's works were highly priced in his lifetime. Even so, he was frequently in need of money because he worked very slowly and produced few paintings. His main patron was the Delft collector Pieter Claesz van Ruijven (1624–1674). There is no evidence that van Ruijven owned *The love letter*, but he acquired many paintings by Vermeer. After his death in 1674, van Ruijven's estate included twenty-one paintings by Vermeer.



Genre

Paintings of domestic interiors, such as this one, belong to the category of paintings of everyday subjects known as 'genre painting'.

Did Vermeer use a Camera Obscura?

It is likely that Vermeer used a device called a *camera obscura* for this composition. This apparatus projected the image of a scene onto a sheet of paper or glass, so that the outlines could be traced (see Glossary). It was an aid for accurately recording the form of three-dimensional objects, such as a lute, in perspective. The *camera obscura* was most effective when directed towards a sunlit scene from a darkened room, as is the case here. One side effect of its use was the 'halo' or out-of-focus effect of points of light in the immediate foreground, as here where light falls on the studs of the chair in the foreground. If Vermeer did make use of a *camera obscura*, it was only as an aid to realise his own artistic vision.

Vermeer probably knew the Delft scientist Antony van Leeuwenhoek, who carried out pioneering work with lenses and the microscope, and who was the executor of Vermeer's estate.

Vermeer and Religion

Vermeer converted to Catholicism around 1653 when he married a Catholic woman, Catherine Bolnes. They had eleven children.

Light

Vermeer's interiors are filled with cool, clear, even light of day. Here the light enters the room from a single source, a window on the left. Note the dark, sharp shadows cast by the paintings on the wall. The intensity of the light is exaggerated by the contrast with the darker foreground. The illumination of the space inside the dark framing doorway draws our eye into the depth of the composition.

Oeuvre

There are only about thirty-six paintings known with certainty to have been painted by Vermeer.

Meaning

The lady seems to have been interrupted from her lute-playing to receive a letter brought to her by her servant. The servant's shoes, hurriedly taken off as she entered the room, convey the haste with which she delivered the letter. The painting of the ship at sea on the wall behind the two women suggests the content of the letter, since it sails calmly. A ship was often a metaphor for a lover and the sea stood for love, suggesting that the note is a love letter, perhaps from an absent suitor. The lute, too, was a symbol of love. An abandoned work basket sits nearby.



Jan de BRAY
c. 1627–1697
*The Haarlem printer
Abraham Casteleyn and
his wife Margarieta van
Bancken* (detail) 1663
oil on canvas
84.0 x 108.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-3280)

Jacob Gerritsz CUYP
(attributed to)
1594–c. 1651
*Portrait of Abel Tasman, his
wife and daughter* 1637
oil on canvas
106.7 x 132.1 cm
Courtesy of National
Library of Australia
and National Gallery of
Australia, Canberra.
Rex Nan Kivell
Collection (NK3)

Regents and Patricians

The specific political and economic conditions of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century created an art market and conditions of patronage unique in Europe at that time. Living in a republic, the citizens and not the nobility were in charge. In contrast to the rest of Europe, where the church, wealthy cardinals and the aristocracy were the major patrons of the arts, in the Netherlands the growing upper and middle classes bought paintings on an unprecedented scale. In particular the urban governing class of each city – the mayor, city councillors, leading merchants and manufacturers, known as the ‘regents’ – commissioned works and were the subject of a great many portraits.

The importance of Dutch exploration and trade emerges from portraits celebrating individuals involved in these fields, while the organisation of urban society in the United Republic of the Netherlands is reflected in portraits of groups or individuals in connection with their position or work. Portraits of silversmiths, ship builders, preachers and doctors were produced alongside portraits of the more powerful magistrates, signalling the uniquely democratic nature of this society. So the nature of seventeenth-century Dutch society is found in portraits of the very people who created it – the burghers, local government officials, the explorers and the traders, expressing both their individual and corporate identity.

Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter, 1637, attributed to Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–c. 1651),

shows the thirty-four-year-old Abel Tasman just prior to his journey to Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia). He was bound to the East India service for ten years. On a voyage from Batavia in 1642, he sighted and took possession of Van Dieman's Land (now Tasmania) and New Zealand. Tasman holds navigational dividers against the globe, referring to his forthcoming journey. His daughter from his first marriage, Claesgen, reaches out for an apple offered by her stepmother, Janetjie. The apple, symbolising the passing of knowledge from adult to child, could also refer to the knowledge of new lands which Tasman will bring back to the Netherlands. Janetjie and Claesgen each hold a decorated cane purse; Janetjie wears the black overskirt and white ruff collar typical of the time. Although the style of dress was subdued, indications of status can be read in subtle details such as the fineness of fabrics or lace. The arrangement of the figures almost in a line across the picture plane was typical of family portraiture, allowing for the addition of future members of the family at a later date.

In Govert Flinck's *Portrait of Gerard Pietersz Hulft, director of the East India Company*, 1654, the subject is defined by his activities and achievements. Rather than following the direction of his master, Rembrandt, of revealing the inner character of his subject through composition and his use of light, Flinck (1615–1660) surrounds the oval portrait of Hulft with a selection of objects and symbols that illuminate the subject's life. At the time the portrait was painted, Hulft had recently resigned, on a point



of principle, from his position as town secretary of Amsterdam – a role referred to in the bound volumes, loose documents and inkwell on the top right of the composition. His career at sea is recalled by the maps and navigational instruments, as well as the backdrop of the sea within the oval portrait. His character and his reputation for honesty and as a conciliator led to his appointment to a challenging position in the Dutch East Indies. His role as a peace maker is symbolised by the dove hovering over the oval. His transformation from a bookworm into a man of action is alluded to poetically in the drawings of a caterpillar and a butterfly.

By contrast, Frans Hals (1581/85–1666) captures his sitter with great immediacy and directness, relying on the pose, the fall of light and the energetic brushstrokes to convey personality. *Portrait of a man, possibly Nicolaes Hasselaer, brewer and captain-major*

of a military body in Amsterdam, c. 1633–35, shows a middle-class Dutch burgher who had made his fortune as a beer brewer. Hasselaer held various public offices, he was a diplomat in Russia, a regent of Amsterdam's municipal orphanage, and an officer of the local military body.

This dynamic portrait illustrates Hals' exceptional style of portraiture. The sense of vitality and immediacy results, in part, from his painting the model directly onto the canvas, without any preparatory underpainting. The spatial arrangement is quite daring. Instead of a frontal pose, the torso and left arm push diagonally into the picture plane; the right arm crosses in front of the chair and his hand rests on a staff. The face is animated by the clear daylight falling presumably from a window on the left. Rather than the theatrical light of Caravaggio, or the spiritual, 'inner' light of Rembrandt's late works,

Govert FLINCK
1615–1660
Gerard Pietersz. Hulft, director of the East India Company 1654
oil on canvas
130.0 x 103.0 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-3103)

Frans HALS
1581/85–1666
Portrait of a man, possibly Nicolaes Hasselaer, brewer and captain-major of a military body in Amsterdam c. 1633–35
oil on canvas
79.5 x 66.5 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-1246)

Jan de BRAY
c. 1627–1697
The Haarlem printer Abraham Casteleyn and his wife Margarieta van Bancken (detail) 1663
oil on canvas
84.0 x 108.0 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-3280)



Hals' use of light looks forward to the Impressionists: it is the mobile, shimmering, animating light of day. The *bravura* brushwork, with which he captured the strength and life of the right hand in just a few strokes, was typical of Hals' daring, confident manner. Hasselaer's second wife appears in Hals' *Portrait of a woman, possibly Sara Wolphaerts van Diemen, c. 1633–35*, also in this exhibition.

A delightful wedding portrait, *The Haarlem printer Abraham Casteleyn and his wife Margarieta van Bancken*, was painted in 1663 by Jan de Bray (c. 1627–1697) and conveys the warmth of the relationship between the husband and wife. The books and the globe on the left refer to Casteleyn's successful international publishing and printing business. Margarieta gestures toward the garden, perhaps alluding to the garden of love. This and their clasped hands, symbolising fidelity, suggest that marriages based on love and respect were part of the uniquely modern phenomenon that was the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.





Abraham MIGNON
1640–1679
The overturned bouquet
c. 1660–79
oil on canvas
89.0 x 72.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-267)

The Artists and their World

The sheer number and the high quality of artists make the artistic environment in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century extraordinary, if not unique. Each city, and almost every town, had its own group of painters. The passion for collecting paintings, prints and the decorative arts was unprecedented. The art market not only supported a large number of artists, but the competition meant that the standard of work was very high. Painters who are well known today, such as Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals, worked within a community of exceptionally skilled contemporaries. One way through which the high level of skill was attained was the concentration on a particular genre: artists tended to specialise as painters of portraits or landscapes or flower pieces or genre scenes. Some painters, like Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633–1707), a skilled painter of seascapes, painted marine backgrounds for other painters.

Abraham Mignon (1640–1679) was renowned by contemporaries as a ‘very great Flower Painter’, and the results of his specialisation can be seen in his brilliant portrayal of many different flowers in *The overturned bouquet*, c. 1660–79. Flower painting was a popular genre, allowing artists to show their virtuosity in depicting a variety of species. The peak of the tulip mania of the 1630s was over by the time Mignon painted this work, but the highly prized, frilly-edged, variegated tulips feature here along with irises, poppies, carnations and crab apple blossoms. Insects hidden amongst the blooms, including flies, butterflies, a spider and a dragonfly, testify to the Dutch love of illusionism. The drama of the sudden toppling of the elaborate floral arrangement, as the cat accidentally upsets the vase in its efforts to reach the wooden mouse-trap, may carry another meaning related to the nature of love and lust.





Jacob BACKER
1608–1651
*Johannes Lutma,
Amsterdam silversmith*
c. 1640
oil on wood panel
91.0 x 71.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam
(Sk-A-3516)



Johannes LUTMA I
1584/85–1669
Salt cellar 1639
silver, parcel-gilt
height 24.2 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam
(BK-1960-13A)

Jan de BRAY
c. 1627–1697
*The governors of the Guild
of St Luke, Haarlem, 1675*
1675
oil on canvas
130.0 x 184.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-58)

Adriaen van OSTADE
1610–1685
The painter's studio
c. 1670–75
oil on wood panel
37.0 x 36.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-298)

Artists and artisans were organised into guilds, or professional organisations. Each city had its painters' guild, named after the patron saint of painters, St Luke. The guild protected its members against competition from artists from other cities, and looked after them in difficult times. It was based on an apprenticeship system. The guild governed standards of quality and price, and without membership an artist or artisan was not permitted to continue in that profession. In Jan de Bray's *The governors of the Guild of St Luke, Haarlem, 1675*, it seems that the governors have been interrupted at one of their regular meetings. The figure second from the left holding a panel represents the painter himself, Jan de Bray (c. 1627–1697) – he was painted by his brother Dirck de Bray (1651–1678), who is shown taking the minutes of the meeting. The two figures standing and looking out to the viewer are the painters Jan van Hotingh (active 1659–95) on the left, and Jan de Jongh (active 1664–77), pointing to the book, who each painted themselves. The seated figure holding the brass plaque bearing the image of St Luke is Gerrit Mulraet, dean of the guild. Mulraet, along with the two other governors shown in de Bray's painting, was not a painter, but a brass founder and coppersmith.

The connections between painters and craftsmen in Dutch society are illustrated in this exhibition with the portrait *Johannes Lutma, Amsterdam silversmith*, c. 1640, by Jacob Backer (1608–1651). Lutma (1584/85–1669) is shown with one of his masterpieces – a silver, partially gilded salt cellar – and holding a chasing hammer, one of the tools of his trade. The actual salt cellar is also in this exhibition, one of a pair made by Lutma in 1639.

The art market in Holland operated differently to that in the rest of Europe where painters most commonly relied on commissions. Artists in Holland could sell to customers directly from their studio, or through exhibitions organised by the guild. Raffles or auctions provided another avenue for sales. Art dealers and street vendors flourished, and painters could even use their works to pay off debts.

The painter's studio, c. 1670–75, by Adriaen van Ostade (1610–1685), offers us a glimpse into the artist's world. The artist, seated at the easel, relies on the light from the small window to work on his painting of a landscape. Beyond him two pupils grind pigments for the paint the artist will use. Pupils served long apprenticeships, learning to prepare paint and canvases and copying the work of



their master. Often they would live with the painter, paying for their board and tuition. Such arrangements were carefully monitored by the guild.

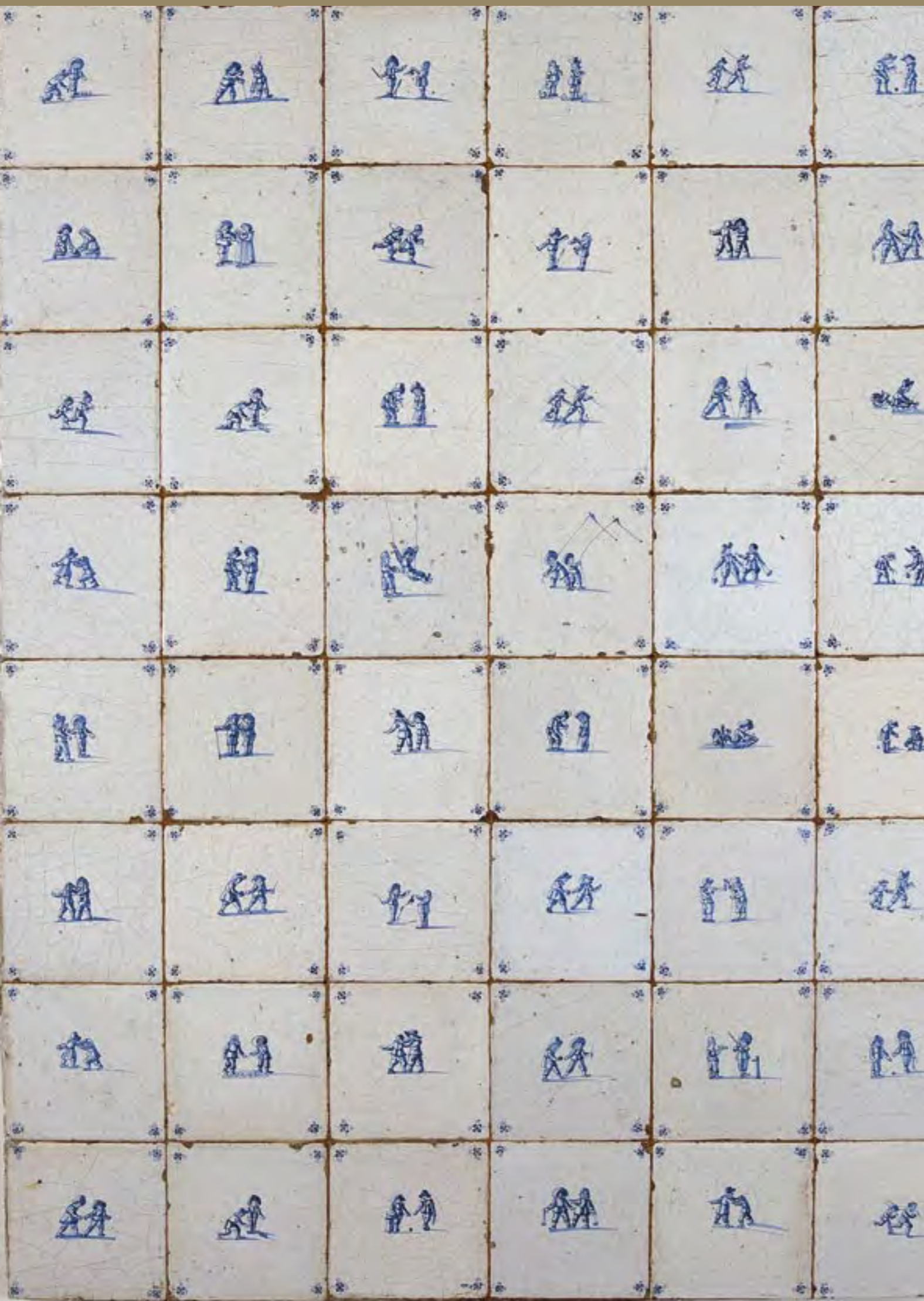
Regulations restricted artists from accepting commissions outside their own city. One of the exceptions was Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669), who received commissions from foreign collectors. His *Self-portrait at an early age*, c. 1629, shows the young, already famous artist challenging the conventions of portraiture. Light rakes across his cheek and his neck, but his face is covered by shadow.

The conventional strategies that portrait painters relied on to express character, such as illuminating the face, have been deliberately ignored. Yet this very device of obscuring the face in shadow allows Rembrandt to express a moodiness and to give the subject an emotional presence that far outweighs the tiny scale of the portrait. Rembrandt is equally unconventional in his technique, for example, in the scratching of the end of his brush into wet paint to suggest the curly hair, in the backlighting and in the heavy impasto on the shirt collar.

REMBRANDT
Harmensz van Rijn
1606–1669
Self-portrait at an early age
c. 1629
oil on wood panel
22.6 x 18.7 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam. Purchased
with the aid of the
Rembrandt Society, the
Photo Commission,
the Prince Bernhard
Foundation and the
Ministry of CRM
(Sk-A-4691)

Jan de BRAY
c. 1627–1697
*The governors of the Guild
of St Luke, Haarlem 1675*
(detail) 1675
oil on canvas
130.0 x 184.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-58)





THE NETHERLANDS
Delft
Scenes of children playing
c. 1680-1720
faience
107.0 x 80.0 cm (overall)
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam
(BK-1955-328-a)

Pieter de HOOCH
1629-1684
*Interior with a mother
delousing her child's hair,
known as 'A mother's duty'*
1658-60
oil on canvas
52.5 x 61.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam. On loan
from the City of
Amsterdam
(Sk-C-149)

Genre

The word 'genre', originally a French word, really means 'kind' or 'sort' or 'variety'. In the context of seventeenth-century Dutch art, it refers to 'scenes of everyday life'. However, the Dutch did not use this term – they described categories of paintings according to their subjects, such as 'a merry company' or 'a picnic group' or 'a bordello scene'.

No society had focused on itself, painting scenes of domestic life, interiors and tavern scenes, to the extent that the Dutch did in the seventeenth century. Scenes of daily life had been painted before, but not for their own sake – more often they were used to illustrate a moral or an allegory, or the cycle of seasons.

Dutch genre painters, and the public with its intense demand for these works, were fascinated with their own world. These paintings celebrated the textures and colours of the possessions which they valued – their tiles, pewter, glass, carpets and the clothing they wore.

However, while at first glance some Dutch paintings seem to be a mirror of reality, a closer study reveals that many of them have allegorical or symbolic meanings. For instance, *The love letter*, 1669-72, by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) can be read on a literal level as simply representing a woman receiving a letter. However, the symbolism takes the scene to the level of an emotionally charged moment in a love story. Contemporary audiences would immediately understand the reference to love in the painting hanging behind the mistress and her maid: the sea refers to love, and the ship to the lover.

Similarly, *Interior with a mother delousing her child's hair, known as 'A mother's duty'*, 1658-60, by Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684), showing a mother searching for signs of lice in her daughter's hair, refers to parental duty and may extend to the teaching of honesty and good manners as well. Although the expressed subject is the mother engrossed with her task of caring for her daughter, the artist's attention is taken up with the details and textures of this typically Dutch interior. The room is quite spare, furnished only with a box-bed and a high chair with a built-in chamber pot (a Dutch 'potty chair'). A painting is seen over the door and a copper pan, used for warming the bed, hangs on the wall.

A section of the wall alongside the open door is decorated with a panel of blue-and-white Delft tiles, placed there so that the wall, which would be frequently touched as people came and went, could be easily cleaned. A similar panel of Delft tiles, decorated with scenes of children playing, can be seen in the exhibition. In *A mother's duty*, tiles are also visible mounted on the skirting boards to facilitate cleaning. The now famous delftware grew in importance throughout the seventeenth century. The quality of oriental porcelain imports drove the technical and aesthetic improvements in Dutch porcelain, produced mainly in Delft and Haarlem. By 1680 there were over twenty separate potteries in Delft, producing the famous blue-and-white ware.





Jan Davidsz de HEEM
1606–1683/84
Still life with fruit
c. 1640–50
oil on canvas
67.3 x 79.8 cm
National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1935
(231-4)

An important category of Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting was the still life. Jan Davidsz de Heem's *Still life with fruit*, c. 1640–50, shows the table laden with exotic fruits including plums, oranges, morellos, grapes and the large split pomegranate in the foreground. De Heem (1606–1683/84) spent some time in Antwerp in the 1630s where, due to the important trading port there, he could see and paint the range of fruits seen here. His biographer, Sandrart, wrote that he copied the fruits with 'exceeding excellence' and 'surpassed all others in the Netherlands'. As well as the rare fruits, de Heem includes three glasses (a green *roemer*, a tall flute and a wine-glass), a German silver-gilt cup, and a blue-and-white ceramic platter and bowl. The forward edge of the platter, from which grapes and a citrus twig fall, and the linen cloth beside it, seem to project into the viewer's space, emphasising the illusion that everything portrayed in pigment is actually part of our 'real' world. This type of opulent still life, with its display of precious objects and rare fruits, belonged to a special category known as a *pronk* (sumptuous) still life.

The spatial construction of *A mother's duty*, with its emphasis on rectangular forms and the spatial layering achieved by the opening of one space onto another, is typical of de Hooch's style. In this composition the viewer's gaze is led from the darker interior to the sun-filled room beyond, and out into the courtyard. Just as the figures are framed by the rectangle of the wall, so the view to the outside world reminds us that their intimate domestic activity takes place within the wider framework of Dutch society. The vertical and horizontal lines of the tiled floor lend an even greater clarity to the spatial effect of the composition. The vertical lines merge to a vanishing point just above the doorknob on the edge of the open connecting door. The light enters the room from more than one source, unlike the single light source favoured by his contemporary, Vermeer. De Hooch's light is warmer and sunnier than the cool, silvery light of Vermeer; and his shadows are deep, almost black.

Peasant and low-life scenes form a specific category of genre paintings. Often these carry a moral message. In a society that valued order and cleanliness, an untidy, dirty and disordered interior could be seen as an indication of a lack of discipline and principles. Domestic disorder could be an indication of moral disorder. Adriaen van Ostade's *Peasants in an interior*, 1661, is a milder view of peasant life than his earlier works which showed coarse figures drinking and brawling. Van Ostade (1610–1685) may have found that this gentler attitude was more acceptable to his clientele. The scene is an inn; the man standing before the fireplace, holding a pitcher of beer, regales his pipe-smoking listeners with a story. In the foreground a child stirs a pan of porridge, while a dog watches hopefully. Another party drinks, smokes and carouses in the shadows. The floor is littered with objects – firewood, an old slipper, a wooden spoon, pots and pans and a broken eggshell. The disorder points to lack of hygiene. The slumped poses of the company speak of wasted hours. The use of a fine brush on the smooth copper surface allowed Adriaen van Ostade to capture the intricate detail of the scene. He was a very prolific artist, leaving over 800 paintings, and hundreds of drawings and watercolours.

Adriaen van OSTADE
1610–1685
Peasants in an interior
1661
oil on copper
37.0 x 47.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam. On loan
from the City of
Amsterdam (Sk-C-200)





The City

The level of urbanisation in the United Netherlands, and in Holland in particular, was exceptional in Europe at the time. More than half of the almost two million inhabitants of the Netherlands lived in cities, at a time when the rest of Europe was predominantly rural and agricultural. Urban centres such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Zeeland, Haarlem, Delft and Utrecht flourished with the growth in trade and industry.

The commercial activity of the Dutch was noted by the English writer Daniel Defoe, who in 1728 observed: 'The Dutch are the carriers of the World, the middle persons in Trade, the Factors and Brokers of Europe; they buy to sell again, take in to send out; and the greatest part of their vast commerce consists in being supply'd from all parts of the World, that they may supply all the World again.'

The VOC (East India Company) employed a staggering 30,000 people at a time when the population numbered fewer than two million. Other industries which supported the urban centres included the processing of herrings for export, the bleaching and dyeing of textiles in Haarlem, and the production of ceramics (delftware) in Delft.

The cities were not only defined by their commercial activity. Universities in Leiden, Utrecht, Amsterdam and Harderwijk indicate the interest in scientific research and intellectual life. The cosmopolitan character of the cities created an environment where freedom of thought and religion flourished.

The town hall, Amsterdam, 1690, by Gerrit Berckheyde (1638–1698), celebrates the central edifice of the largest and most important commercial centre in the United Netherlands. The building was designed in 1648 by Jacob van Campen (1595–1657), in a classical Italian style, and construction was completed by 1655. The activity depicted in the square suggests the richness and diversity of life in this thriving urban centre. A print shop, on the left side of the square, displays a globe at the first-floor level, referring to the interest in exploration and trade in the New World. City fathers, merchants and town councillors congregate in the square. The cosmopolitan nature of Amsterdam and its role as the centre of international trade are signalled by the three figures in oriental costume. The various commercial activities taking place in the square remind us of its role as a market place. This type of commercial activity is seen at close range in Emanuel de Witte's *The Nieuwe Vismarkt (new fish market), Amsterdam, c. 1677*. Here the whole commercial enterprise of Dutch life is played out in the exchange between the merchant offering the fish to the gentleman, who carefully weighs up its value. Like the still life painters, de Witte (1616/18–1692) has clearly enjoyed conveying the weight and the slippery, scaly nature of a variety of fish. Behind the market stall, in the sun-filled square on the Prins Hendrikkade, landmarks still recognisable today are visible. This 'new fish market' was set up around the middle of the seventeenth century to help meet the large demand for fresh and salt-water fish on Dam Square.

Gerrit BERCKHEYDE
1638–1698
*The town hall,
Amsterdam 1690*
oil on canvas
52.8 x 62.6 cm
National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1920
(1050-3)



Emanuel de WITTE
1616/18–1692
The Nieuwe Vismarkt
(new fish market),
Amsterdam c. 1677
oil on canvas
52.0 x 62.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-2536)



Jacob van RUISDAEL
1628/29–1682
View of Haarlem from
the north-west, with the
bleaching fields in the
foreground c. 1670
oil on canvas
43.0 x 38.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-351)

Two aspects of the all important textiles industry are expressed in *View of Haarlem from the north-west, with the bleaching fields in the foreground*, c. 1670, by Jacob von Ruisdael (1628/29–1682) and *The tailor's workshop*, 1661, by Quiringh van Brekelenkam (c. 1620–c. 1668).

The choice of the tailor's profession and workplace as an independent subject for painting indicates its significance in Dutch life. Brekelenkam painted no less than eleven paintings on this theme. In this



scene the tailor seems to be involved in a business transaction with his customer, a woman who is perhaps on her way to the market, judging by her pail which is the type used to carry fish. The two young assistants sit on the table to sew, to take advantage of the light. Bolts of fabric hang from the suspended shelf on the right. Clothing was very expensive in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, perhaps explaining the exchange between the tailor and his customer: she seems to be passing a very critical eye over the merchandise, while the animated tailor defends his work, or perhaps his prices.

An earlier stage of the processing of cloth is seen in Ruisdael's *View of Haarlem*, where linen is stretched out on the grass for bleaching. This area was ideal for bleaching because the light was particularly bright. After being washed in the clean dune water, the linen was bleached and then dried in the wind. The silhouette of the city of Haarlem, of which Ruisdael was a native, can be seen on the horizon. The painting, with its low horizon line and the consequent emphasis on the atmospheric sky, typifies the realist Dutch landscapes that influenced eighteenth-century English artists such as J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), John Constable (1776–1837) and

Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). The circling birds increase the airy feel of the sky, and the grey clouds are pierced by sudden shafts of brilliant sunlight which illuminate passages of landscape below.

The tiny windmills peppering the silhouette of the city in Ruisdael's painting are a reminder of the role played by windmills in land reclamation in the low lying country. Their importance to the economy of the United Netherlands was celebrated in silver windmill cups, such as the one shown here, made in Dordrecht in 1636. The cup was intended for drinking games: the drinker had to empty the cup before the sails of the windmill came to a stop. The drinker first set the sails in motion by blowing into a pipe, activating a mechanism inside the mill. If unsuccessful in emptying the cup before the sails stopped, the drinker then had to empty the cup several times, depending on the number indicated on the dial.



THE NETHERLANDS,
Dordrecht
Windmill cup 1636
silver
23.0 x 8.0 cm diameter
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (BK-NM-590)

Quiringh van
BREKELENKAM
c. 1620–c. 1668
The tailor's workshop 1661
oil on canvas
66.0 x 53.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam. On
loan from the city of
Amsterdam (Sk-C-112)



CLAUDE LORRAIN
 c.1604/05–1682
River landscape with Tiburtine Temple at Tivoli
 c. 1635
 oil on canvas
 38.0 x 53.0 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Felton Bequest, 1967
 (1796-5)

Jan BOTH c. 1615–1652
Italian landscape with the Ponte Lucano c. 1640–52
 oil on copper
 45.5 x 58.5 cm
 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-51)

The Landscape and Travelling Artists

Landscape, along with genre and portraiture, was the branch of painting in which the talents of Dutch artists were most clearly expressed and most influential. Seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes were characterised by their sense of airiness and atmosphere, their spaciousness, and the artists' close observation of the natural world. Within the category of landscape, a great deal of specialisation existed. River landscapes, flat landscapes, winter landscapes, night scenes, landscapes with animals or watermills or heroic trees, became the specialised areas of individual painters.

English artists, such as Turner and Constable, valued Dutch landscape painting for its realism and atmospheric skies, as an alternative to the model of the classical Italian landscape expressed in the paintings of Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), Nicolas Poussin (1593/94–1665) and Gaspard Dughet (1615–1675). However, generations of Dutch artists were also lured to Italy, particularly Rome, and were influenced by the classical Italian landscape. Claude and Poussin were revered as the greatest European landscape painters, and Dutch painters of Italian scenes also enjoyed great popularity.

Jan Both (c. 1615–1652) was one of many painters who undertook the expensive and sometimes dangerous journey to Italy, regarded as part of the education of an artist. Many of his Italian landscapes, such as *Italian landscape with the Ponte Lucano*, c. 1640–52, were painted years after his trip to Italy (1636–1641). The round tower (an ancient tomb) and the arched stone bridge seen in this painting were



located at Tivoli, just outside Rome, indicating that Both used sketches made while in Italy. The example of Claude is evident in the way the artist establishes depth in the composition. Just as in many of Claude's compositions, the viewer's eye is gently guided along the diagonals set up by the river bank to the bridge and tower, and then around the bend in the river to the distant hill. The light emanating from the back of the composition is a unifying element in the composition. This and the sense of calm are typical of paintings by Claude. However, Both's Dutch heritage is evident in the detailed treatment of the feathery foliage of the trees and the realism of the figures. Instead of Arcadian shepherds or mythological figures, Both refers to the everyday life of a poor farmer with his ox-cart.

The market was so strong for Italianate landscapes in the Netherlands that even painters who had not visited Italy themselves were influenced by the classical Italian style they saw in the work of Both and others. Aelbert Cuyp (1620–1691) had never visited Italy, but the golden light of his *Landscape with cattle*, c. 1639–40, is characteristic of Dutch Italianate artists.



Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29–1682) is regarded as the greatest Dutch landscape painter of the seventeenth century. However his uncle Salomon van Ruysdael (c. 1600/03–1670) and his student, Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709), were also key landscape painters of the period. Hobbema's *A watermill*, c. 1666, painted at the peak of his career, shows the subject for which he is best known. Watermills feature in over thirty of his works. But it was his master, Jacob van Ruisdael, who identified the watermill as a motif for painting. The two artists travelled together in the 1660s sketching many mills, and the differences in their handling of a similar motif is evident in a comparison between Hobbema's *A watermill*, 1666, and Ruisdael's *The watermill*, c. 1660, both shown in the exhibition. Compared to the darker, moodier quality of Ruisdael's work, Hobbema's view seems to sparkle in the daylight. His colours, particularly the blues and whites of the sky, are brighter and the touch of his brush is lighter than that of his master. Differences in composition create a different mood in each painting – the watermill seems larger and more monumental in Ruisdael's work because of the tighter composition and the slightly lower viewpoint. The scale of the figures in each painting changes the sense of scale of each watermill.

Winter landscapes form a special category in Dutch seventeenth-century painting. The Dutch fascination



with realism, the observation and recording of the details of everyday life, is nowhere more apparent than in *Diversions on the ice* by Hendrick Avercamp (1585–1634). It was probably painted around 1610, but because so little is known about the artist and so few of his works were dated, it is difficult to be sure. It shows people enjoying a range of activities on a frozen river. In the foreground a man can be seen playing *kolf*, a cross between hockey and golf played by two or four people, using sticks with a lead or iron head and a ball made of wood or leather filled with cow's hair. Other figures can be seen skating, strolling and chatting, or walking their dogs. One woman, in front of the house on the left, is doing her washing in a hole in the ice. The high viewpoint used by Avercamp allows us to look down on the scene and see the variety of activities taking place. In this way his work is similar to the Flemish landscapes of the Antwerp painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c. 1525–1569).

Avercamp's composition is enlivened with bright accents of colour and unified by the wintry atmosphere. His observation of the details of life around him may have been heightened by his isolation as a deaf-mute. Avercamp lived in Kampen, on the eastern side of the Zuyder Zee, and was known as the '*Stomme van Kampen*', the 'mute from Kampen'.



Jacob van Ruisdael
 1628/29–1682
The watermill c. 1660
 oil on canvas
 64.7 x 70.8 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria
 Felton Bequest, 1922
 (1249-3)

Meindert HOBBERMA
 1638–1709
A watermill c. 1666
 oil on wood panel
 60.5 x 85.0 cm
 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-156)

Hendrick AVERCAMP
 1585–1634
Diversions on the ice
 c. 1610
 oil on wood panel
 25.0 x 37.5 cm
 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Sk-A-3247)

Religion and Society

Pieter Jansz
SAENREDAM
1597–1665
*The transept of the
Mariakerk in Utrecht, seen
from the north-east* 1637
oil on wood panel
59.0 x 45.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-858)

The main religion in the United Republic of the Netherlands (the North) was the Protestant or Calvinist faith. The Southern Netherlands, which stayed under Spanish rule, remained Catholic. Although Calvinism was referred to as the official and the only true Christian religion, in reality a great many Dutch people held other religious beliefs. In 1672 one third of the population of the Republic was Catholic, one third was Calvinist, and the rest were Jews or members of one or other dissident Protestant movement. The waves of immigration from the Southern Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany and Portugal increased the cosmopolitan diversity of the population and the reality of the co-existence of a range of religious beliefs.

The issue of religious tolerance in the Netherlands is a vexed one. A greater freedom of religious expression was enjoyed in the Netherlands than in other parts of Europe. All religions were tolerated. But Catholics were not eligible for public office, and they were also required to practise their faith in *schuilkerken* (hidden churches), places of prayer situated behind the facades of other houses so that they were not recognisable as such from the street.

The shift from Catholicism to Calvinism as the official religion is reflected in the adaptation of formerly Catholic churches, such as the Mariakerk in Utrecht, to the requirements of Protestant worship, free of decoration and religious images. The unadorned, whitewashed interior walls of the Mariakerk, seen in Pieter Jansz Saenredam's *The transept of the Mariakerk in Utrecht, seen from the north-east*, 1637, illustrate the Calvinist view that images or representations of Christ and Christian themes were idolatrous.

From 1628 Saenredam (1597–1665) specialised in church interiors. His complex spatial constructions were realised by first making detailed drawings of the entire church. He then recorded the dimensions of the floor plan and made highly accurate



perspective drawings which were transferred to the panel. The voluminous space inside the church is accentuated by the low viewpoint. The scale of the figures, visitors, a cripple and a beggar, gives a clear sense of the dimensions of the church interior.

While Saenredam celebrated the spare, plain surfaces of a Protestant church interior, some years later Emanuel de Witte (1616/18–1692) recorded the first purpose-built synagogue in Amsterdam, five years after its consecration, in his painting *Interior of the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam*, 1680. By the end of the seventeenth century, almost 10,000 Jews lived in Amsterdam, making it the largest Jewish community in western Europe. De Witte conveys the sense of a vibrant community coming together for worship. We are drawn into the composition by the foreground figures and even the two dogs, which form a bridge between the viewer and the congregation. In contrast with the austerity of the Saenredam's interior, the synagogue has a warm atmosphere generated by the light flowing into the interior, the rich reds and the ornate gold candelabra.

One of the worshippers in the Portuguese synagogue painted by de Witte may have been the Jewish physician and writer, Dr Ephraim Bueno, an important member of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) painted his oil study of Dr Bueno in preparation for an etching which was executed in 1647. As it is a study, Rembrandt has roughly sketched in the composition, giving his focus to the sitter's face. Even in an oil sketch such as this, Rembrandt was able to convey a strong sense of presence. In the compelling directness and thoughtfulness of Dr Bueno's gaze, Rembrandt suggests something of the depth of the inner life of this man.

In contrast to the public observance of religious rituals, *Old woman in prayer*, c. 1650–60, by Nicolaes Maes (1634–1693), gives an insight into the world of private devotion in the Netherlands. Here an old woman in frugal circumstances prays for God's blessing before beginning her simple meal of porridge, salmon, bread and butter, and possibly beer in the lidded stone tankard. The open Bible, the hourglass and prayer book on the ledge beside her give emphasis to her devout faith. The hourglass, symbolising the passing of time, is a reminder of the brevity of life and the importance of preparing for the next life. The immediate realities of everyday life are humorously brought to our attention by the imminent mishap suggested by the activity of a mischievous cat in the foreground.

Maes's handling of light and shadow to focus our attention on the old woman and her meal, and to create a sense of drama in an otherwise ordinary scene, was probably learnt from his master, Rembrandt. The precision with which he depicted each object in the composition, however, is very different from Rembrandt's style of painting.

Emanuel de WITTE
1616/18–1692
*Interior of the Portuguese
synagogue in Amsterdam*
1680
oil on canvas
110.0 x 99.0 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (Sk-A-3738)



Glossary

genre	painting that depicts scenes from daily life, especially in Dutch seventeenth-century art, although the word itself means 'kind' or 'type' or 'sort'.
illusionism	naturalistic art in which the viewer seems actually to be seeing the object or space represented.
oeuvre	an artist's body of work.
camera obscura	an apparatus which projects the image of an object or a scene on to a sheet of paper or ground glass, so that the outlines can be traced. It consists of a shuttered box or room with a small hole in one side, through which light from a brightly lit scene enters and forms an inverted image on a screen opposite. For greater convenience, a mirror is usually installed, which projects the image the right way up on to a suitably placed drawing surface.
perspective	any graphic method, geometrical or otherwise, concerned with conveying an impression of spatial extension into depth on a flat surface.
pigment	the colouring agents in paint, the simplest including coloured clays, minerals and plants which are crushed and ground to a fine powder and held in suspension by the medium (typically, oil).



The map above shows The Netherlands in the context of Europe.

Map on the left from Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, and E.H. ter Kuile, *Dutch Art and Architecture 1600 to 1800*, The Pelican History of Art, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977.



Post Primary School Starting Points for Discussion

Art

Patronage

Compare and contrast art patronage in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century with that of other European centres of the time. Who were the main patrons? What interested them and why? How does patronage reflect the social and political values of different places?

Consider the role of patronage in art today.

The Studio

What does Adriaen van Ostade's painting *The painter's studio*, c. 1670–75, reveal about an artist's training and work in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century?

Artists' Guilds

Based on your knowledge of artists' guilds in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, suggest how they may have contributed to the thriving art industry.

Landscapes

The English landscape painters Thomas Gainsborough, J. M. W. Turner and John Constable admired Dutch seventeenth-century landscapes for their realism and for their atmospheric skies. Find Gainsborough's *A sea piece*, 1783, Constable's *Study of a boat passing a lock*, c. 1823–26, and Turner's *Walton Bridges*, 1806, in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. What evidence can you find of the influence of Dutch seventeenth-century landscape painting on the work of these artists?

Examine the works of artists who were inspired by their travels to Italy. Compare Jan Both's *Italian landscape with the Ponte Lucano*, c. 1640–52, with Claude Lorraine's *River landscape with Tiburtine Temple at Tivoli*, c. 1635, in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.

In what ways do you think Dutch artists specialised in particular genres of landscape painting, such as night scenes or winter landscapes? Compare and contrast Hendrick Avercamp's *Diversions on the ice*, c. 1610, with winter landscapes by other artists, such as those by French Impressionist artists, or winter landscapes from the early 1990s by the Melbourne artist Peter Booth.

Portraits

Compare the portrait styles of Rembrandt and Frans Hals. Consider composition, light and brushwork.

Select one portrait from the exhibition. What does the portrait tell us about the character and psychology of the sitter? Look carefully at the face and hands. What do they tell us?

Space

Spatial layering – the way one space opens onto another – is a particularly characteristic element of paintings of interiors in Delft. Look at Vermeer's *The love letter*, 1669–72, and de Hooch's *A mother's duty*, 1658–60. What other methods did these artists use to create a sense of three-dimensional space? Consider linear perspective, framing devices, the scale of objects, light leading the eye to the back of a composition.

Light

Light was an important element of Dutch art in the seventeenth century. However it was handled very differently by different artists. Compare the use of light in Rembrandt's *Self-portrait at an early age*, c. 1629, Vermeer's *The love letter*, 1669–72, and Hals' *Portrait of a man, possibly Nicolaes Hasselaer*, c. 1633–35. Consider the light source, the 'colour' of the light, and the different effects achieved by the light in each painting.

Specialisation and technique

The extraordinary degree of realism evident in many Dutch paintings was achieved, in part, by artists specialising in one particular genre. Look at the specialisation of one or more artists in the exhibition. What particular skills did they develop to portray their particular subject? What can you learn about technique by looking closely at the paintings? Think about the surface the work is painted on (canvas, panel, copper), the size or type of brush, the application of paint.

Metaphors and symbols

Often apparently straightforward descriptions of the real world in Dutch seventeenth-century painting have another layer of meaning which can be understood through symbols. For example, the painting of the ship at sea in Vermeer's *The love letter*, 1669–72, was understood as reference to a lover and to love itself; a clock or ripe fruit may suggest the passing of time. Discover the 'hidden' meanings that exist in many of the paintings in the exhibition.

The Decorative Arts

Jacob Backer's *Johannes Lutma, Amsterdam silversmith*, c. 1640, suggests the close connection between painters and craftsmen in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Explore the relationship between the decorative arts and the paintings in the exhibition.

Society

Compare Gerrit Berckheyde's *The town hall, Amsterdam*, 1690, with a town or city square with which you are familiar – for example, Federation Square in Melbourne. Compare the ways in which the centres are used, such as the way people meet, buy and sell, travel and worship in their city.

The world of commerce was central to Dutch life in the seventeenth century. What evidence can you find of commercial activity in the paintings?

English Girl with a Pearl Earring

For students of Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the exhibition offers the rare opportunity to see a painting by Vermeer.

Think about Chevalier's account of the attention given to grinding pigments in the novel as you look at the intense blues and yellows in the painting.

In the novel the main character, Griet, is very sensitive to the position of objects in the room where Vermeer was painting. Look at the placement of the figures and objects in *The love letter*. What evidence can you find of Vermeer's care with the composition of the painting?

Aspects of life in Delft referred to in the novel are revealed in other works in the exhibition. Look at Emanuel de Witte's *The Nieuwe Vismarkt (new fish market), Amsterdam*, c. 1677, in terms of Griet's visits to the market in Delft. Pieter Jansz Saenredam's *The transept of the Mariakerk in Utrecht, seen from the north-east*, 1637, is typical of the Calvinist church interiors that Griet visited. Most powerfully, the Delft tiles, *Scenes of children playing*, c. 1680–1720, are similar to the tile described in the novel showing two children, possibly Griet and her brother, Frans. The tile, painted by her father, was treasured by Griet.

Practical Activities

Ceramics

Produce a small glazed ceramic plate or tile using only blue-on-white. Consider using figures, landscape or oriental motifs like the delftware painters.

Portraits

Dress a friend in dark clothes and sit them in front of a dark background. Use a spotlight to emphasise the face and hands. Observe the way light falls on the face from one direction. Use soft pigmented pastels to create the tones of the face. Make sure you capture the contrast between light and dark for dramatic effect.

Still Life

Still life painting was a popular genre in the seventeenth-century Netherlands and gave artists the opportunity to display their expertise in painting. Examine the ways artists have painted exotic flowers and fruits.

Using a variety of fruit and flowers, assemble a still life arrangement as a subject for a painting. Draw a number of quick sketches of this still life. Add detail to your drawings with line, shape and texture. Emphasise the decorative qualities with the addition of colour and paint.

Further Research

The *camera obscura* was a device used by many Dutch artists to accurately depict three-dimensional objects in space. Find out more about the *camera obscura*. You may find an illustration of one, or perhaps even construct your own.

The only female painters referred to in the exhibition are the flower painter Maria van Oosterwijk (1630–1693), whose portrait was painted by Wallerand Vaillant in 1671, and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750), whose *Still life with flowers on a marble table top*, 1716, is in the exhibition. Research other women artists throughout history. What obstacles have they faced?

Further Reading

Exhibition Catalogue: *Dutch Masters from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, Ruud Priem. National Gallery of Victoria, 2005.

C. Brown, *Scenes of Everyday Life. Dutch Genre Painting of the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1984.

S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York, 1987.

S. Slive, *Dutch Painting 1600–1800*, New Haven/London, 1995.



Jacob Gerritsz CUYP
(attributed to)
1594–c. 1651
Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter 1637
oil on canvas
106.7 x 132.1 cm
Courtesy of National Library of Australia and National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Rex Nan Kivell Collection (NK3)



Primary School Starting Points for Discussion

Everyday Life

Dutch artists of the seventeenth century loved to paint their own everyday world. In the exhibition we can see interiors of houses, buildings, street scenes, markets, daily life and ordinary people. Discover how many different professions are represented. What did people eat and drink?

Discuss what you have learnt about Dutch life in the seventeenth century through the paintings and the decorative arts in the exhibition.

Symbols in Art

Jacob Gerritsz Cuyyp's *Portrait of Abel Tasman, his wife and daughter*, 1637, shows an apple being passed by Janetjie to her stepdaughter, Claesgen. Handing over the apple symbolises passing knowledge from the adult to the child. Discuss how knowledge, precious things, photographs and stories pass from one generation to another. Describe how this has happened in your family.

Recreation in the Landscape

Look at Hendrick Avercamp's winter landscape, *Diversions on the ice*, c. 1610. What activities can you identify? What winter games and sports would take place on the ice today? Try setting up your own game of *kolf* at school.

Seventeenth-century Fashion

The stiff white collar worn by the woman in Frans Hals's *Portrait of a woman, possibly Sara Wolphaerts van Dieman*, c. 1633–35, was known as a 'millstone ruff'. Look closely at the way it is made. Can you imagine wearing such a collar? What would it have felt like? What would be the practical problems of dressing in clothes like this? Look at other paintings in the exhibition to discover other popular fashion items in the Netherlands.

Portraits

Choose a portrait in the exhibition. Examine the clothes and materials worn by that person. What do the clothes tell you about the person? What else does the artist tell us the personality and character of the person in the painting?

Still Life

What is a still life painting? Why do you think artists painted still life pictures? Find two in the exhibition.

What do they tell us about science and the natural world? Name the flowers, fruit, insects that have been included in these works.

Decorative Arts

Find these objects in the exhibition: table carpet, windmill cup, candlestick, saltcellar, spiceservice. Describe the purpose of each one. Do we have any of the same items in our homes today? What materials are these objects made of? Look at the designs. Who would have made these objects? What makes them special?

Practical Activities

Portraits

Draw a portrait of yourself (or a friend) with images and symbols that reflect you, your interests, your achievements and your personality. Govert Flinck's portrait *Gerard Pietersz Hulft, director of the East India Company*, 1654, may provide inspiration.

Ceramic Tiles

A wall of blue-and-white Delft tiles in the exhibition shows scenes of children playing. Can you see similarities with games that are played today? Using clay, develop a series of tiles that show the various activities that children enjoy now.

Light and Shadow

Experiment with different lighting effects. Choose a subject – for example, a person or a bowl of fruit – then observe the different effects of natural light from a window and artificial light (a candle or a torch). Change the angle of the light. Does changing the source of light and its direction alter the mood created? What other changes occur? Draw your subject, considering the light source.

Drama

Look at Adriaen von Ostade's *Peasants in an interior*, 1661. Observe the setting, the poses, facial expressions and gestures of the people, and their activities. Create a dialogue and/or a short play based on these characters and this scene.

Writing about Art

Look at *The Nieuwe Vismarkt (new fish market), Amsterdam*, c. 1677, by Emanuel de Witte. What is happening in this painting? Find descriptive language to match the sounds, atmosphere, people and activities. How does it make you feel? Write a descriptive piece in response to the painting, based on these words.

This Education Resource refers to *Dutch Masters from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam* and relates to the themes in the exhibition.

Written for teachers and senior students, the content relates to P– 10 curriculum areas of Art, Studies of Society and the Environment, English and VCE Art, Studio Arts and English Study Designs.

This Education Resource was written by Ruth Pullin, Education Officer with assistance from Michele Stockley, Jane Strickland, Rebecca Hicks, Education Officers, and Robyn Krause-Hale, Senior Education Officer. Special thanks to Laurie Benson, Assistant Curator, International Art.

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