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Dutch Realism and Representation, 1600-1700

Dutch art of the 17th-century was characterized by an attention to the representation of the here and now. Faithfulness to observed appearances lead to an increased realism in depictions of ancient and contemporary themes, more sophisticated still life paintings, and a greater production of portraits. Dependent on providing an accurate likeness, portraiture benefited significantly from this widespread naturalism, and the genre became increasingly important in Golden Age Holland. Through portraits we are able to trace many of the artistic developments of Dutch painting, from more rigid and sober portrayals early in the century to elaborate and colorful works at its close. Some of the nation's leading painters were portraitists and contributed to its evolution. Frans Hals was dedicated almost exclusively to this genre, and his dynamic handling of paint added a palpable sense of life to the canvas and the person depicted. The great master Rembrandt van Rijn executed both history paintings and portraits with an unmatched drama and a psychological penetration that is still revolutionary today.



Rembrandt van Rijn, studio of
Dutch, 1606 -1669, active in Leiden and
Amsterdam

Portrait of a Woman, c. 1650
Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 253

This portrait is likely done by one of Rembrandt's assistants under the master's supervision. Rembrandt had a large workshop in which paintings were executed by others according to his design. The sitters of Rembrandt's portraits were often portrayed to resemble historical and biblical characters, and in this instance the subject may be the heroine in Joost van den Vondel's play about the history of Amsterdam, *Gysbrecht van Amstel*. The

pendant to the Ringling picture, the portrait of the woman's husband dressed in armor, is in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England.



Rembrandt van Rijn, studio of
Dutch, 1606-1669, active in Leiden and
Amsterdam

Lamentation, c. 1650
Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 252

This life-size composition is as much an exercise in representing human figures and faces as it is a depiction of a religious subject. The straightforward and utterly realistic approach to the biblical story is

characteristic of Rembrandt and his followers, as is the lack of self-conscious artistry. In fact, the painting was probably based on a composition by the master and executed by a student, possibly Samuel van Hoogstraten, who was also one of Rembrandt's biographers. For the figure of Christ, the artist chose a young slender model, one who was often used in Rembrandt's studio in the 1640s.



Frans Hals

Dutch, c. 1581-1666, active in Haarlem

***Portrait of Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan*, c. 1639**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 251

Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan (1572-1658) was one of Haarlem's leading citizens, a wealthy brewer who served as the city's mayor, and a member of the States General governing Holland. Hals painted at least nine portraits of the Olycan family, including the pendant to this work of Pieter's wife, Maritge, now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. The leading portraitist in his day, and a master of the palette and brush, Hals was able to use a limited number of colors to produce an almost endless variety of tonal nuances. Rapid brushstrokes reserved for the sitter's

face bring an air of spontaneity to the composition.



Willem van Aelst

Dutch, 1626-after 1687

***Still Life with Dead Game*, c. 1665**

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1951, SN 655

Van Aelst painted still lifes of both dead game and exquisite bouquets of flowers, in which each object is depicted with delicacy and particular attention to material, surface, and texture. In addition to the evident realism, this monumental work possesses a sense of both grandeur and sophistication. The fowl and hare from the hunt hang, not haphazardly, but in a self-consciously artistic manner. Gentle curves and patches of well-placed light across soft fur and open wings give a relatively dark and somber canvas variety, order, and even elegance.



Jan Davidsz de Heem

Dutch, 1606-1683/84

***Still Life with Parrots*, c. 1645**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 289

Dutch by birth, De Heem worked in Antwerp, possibly for religious reasons, where he became associated with the Baroque style of Rubens and was influenced by Frans Snyders. Despite these overt Flemish ties,

De Heem continued to attract Dutch patrons who esteemed his illusionistic style and the rarity of the objects he depicted, evidence of the wealth from the Dutch colonies worldwide. In fact, it is more than sufficient for the viewer to simply enjoy the visual feast. However, the luxurious display may also relate to the theme of

vanitas, the worthlessness of earthly pleasures and the transience of life.



Nicolaes Maes

Dutch, 1634-1693, active in Amsterdam and Dordrecht

***Portrait of Anna Hofstreek*, 1674**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 265

Maes began as Rembrandt's pupil in the 1650s. Under the master's influence, Maes painted subjects from everyday life in a muted palette and with wide, rough brushstrokes. However, by the 1660s he had gained an aristocratic clientele and began to specialize in idealized portraits in elegant poses derived from Anthony van Dyck. He used delicate brushwork and shimmering highlights to feature the luxurious textiles and jewels of his sitters. Anna Hofstreek's pose is unusual and

symbolic, likely meant to show that she is as chaste as the fountain's clear water in which she dips her fingers.



Isaac Luttichuys

Dutch, 1616-1673, active in Amsterdam

Portrait of a Man with a Spear, 1663

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 262



Isaac Luttichuys

Dutch, 1616-1673, active in Amsterdam

Portrait of a Woman with a Rose,

c. 1663

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1981, MF 81.6

In 1981, the Museum had the rare opportunity to reunite this long-separated pair, by purchasing the pendant to the man already in the collection. This is even more satisfying due to the continuous landscape that unites the works artistically. Alas, we do not know the identity of the elegant couple, whose combination of classical and contemporary dress suggests an allegorical theme.



Jan Anthonisz. van Ravesteyn

Dutch, c. 1570-1657, active in The Hague

***Portrait of Maria Bultel*, 1619**

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 254

Van Ravesteyn was one of the finest portraitists of the regent and aristocratic classes of the Netherlands in the early 17th century. He painted the *burgemeesters* of the Dutch towns and members of the ruling Orange-Nassau family with equal energy and skill. Maria Bultel (1584/85-1662) was born in Antwerp and married Simon van der Does in 1604, and they lived in Amsterdam where he served as sheriff and in other posts. The pendant portrait of Maria's husband, Simon, is now in the Snite Museum, University of Notre Dame.



Hendrick Cornelisz. van Vliet

Dutch, 1611/12-1675, active in Delft

***Interior of the Pieterskerk in Leiden*, 1653**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 288

Van Vliet not only demonstrates his artistic skill by creating this perspective view of the interior of the Protestant church of St. Peter in Leiden, he also inserts a moral lesson into the painting. The man in the center looks at a freshly dug grave, aware of his own mortality and the brevity of life. On the right, a woman is showing a tomb to a child, suggesting that time on earth should be spent wisely. The dog urinating on a column symbolizes an animal's lack of understanding of its sacred surroundings.



Nicolaes Maes

Dutch, 1634-1693, active in Amsterdam
and Dordrecht

Portrait of Engelberta van Brienen, 1670s
Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 266