

National Identity in the Arts



5. Portraits of Many Kinds

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Portraits of Many Kinds

THE DOMINANT ART FORM IN DUTCH ART of the seventeenth century was portraiture. I mean this beyond the literal sense that commissioned portraits of individuals, couples, or groups were a secure source of income for many painters, but also in the sense that almost every genre of art in the Dutch Golden Age could be described as a *portrait of a culture*: the people, their values and way of life, the houses in which they lived, the countryside that surrounded them, even the objects that they owned. More than any other class so far, this one is truly about National Identity.

While my examples will range widely, I am pinning each half to two geniuses who, though still a product of their place and time, stand nonetheless apart from it: **Rembrandt**, more Protean than any of his contemporaries, more baroque in manner, and painting in a style more recognizable as *his* rather than that of his nation; and the meticulous **Vermeer**, producing very few paintings, yet each one refusing to be tied to the expectations for the genre in lesser hands. *rb.*

Paintings by the main artists are listed chronologically on back page.

A. Rembrandt and the Rest

Rembrandt engaged with many of the subjects and concerns of his contemporaries, yet he deserves to be treated as a special case. Why?

VIDEO: *Rembrandt's Moods* (♫ Schickhardt, *Trio Sonata*)

B. Rembrandt as a Baroque Artist

In his earlier years at least, Rembrandt was more attuned to southern baroque than most of his contemporaries. We make some comparisons.

— paintings by Rembrandt and Hals, plus:

Baburen: *The Prodigal Son* (1623, Mainz)

Honthorst: *The Prodigal Son* (1623, Munich)

Honthorst: *Christ before Caiaphas* (1617, London NG)

Rubens: *Deposition from the Cross* (1614, Antwerp)

C. People in Groups

The three great group portraits by Rembrandt (the *Anatomy Lesson*, *Night Watch*, and *Syndics*), with some of their predecessors.

— paintings by Rembrandt and Hals, plus:

Pietersz: *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. de Vrij* (1603, A'dam Hist. Mus.)

De Keijzer: *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. de Vrij* (1619, A'dam Hist. Mus.)

Cornelis van Haarlem: *The St. George Civic Guard* (1599, Haarlem)

De Keijzer: *Company of Captain Allaert Cloeck* (1632, Rijksmuseum)

Bol: *Governors of the Wine Merchants' Guild* (1663, Munich)

VIDEO: *The Night Watch* (♫ Kindler, *Two Dutch Tunes*)

D. When is a Portrait not a Portrait?

The Dutch *tronie*, or smallish head-and-shoulders portrait intended to depict a character type or mood, rather than portray a named individual.

— paintings by Rembrandt, Hals, and Vermeer, plus:

VIDEO: Portraits and Tronies (♫ Van Noordt, *Sonata No. 1*)

Lievens: *Studies of an Old Woman* (c.1625)

VIDEO: *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Khan Academy SmartHistory)

E. So What's the Story?

Dutch *genre* painting (depictions of everyday life) often told a story or preached a moral. But Vermeer is frequently the exception.

— paintings by Vermeer and Steen, plus:

VIDEO: *The Wine Glass* (Khan Academy SmartHistory)

Terborch: *The Parental Admonition* (1654, Rijksmuseum)

Terborch: *Boy Delousing his Dog* (1655, Munich)

FILM: *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003), credit sequence

F. Houses and their Contents

Paintings of streets, houses both outside and in, the domestic lives led within them, and the food and material objects they contain.

Vermeer: *The Little Street* (c.1660, Rijksmuseum)

De Hooch: *Courtyard in Delft* (1658, London NG)

De Hooch: *At the Linen Closet* (1663, Rijksmuseum)

Claesz: *The Herring* (1636, Rotterdam) and *Vanitas* (1630, Hague)

Kalf: *Still Life with a Nautilus Cup* (1662, Madrid, Thyssen)

VIDEO: *Kalf Still Lifes* (♫ Dopper, *Old Holland Suite*)

G. Under Dutch Skies

The great era of Dutch landscape painting: a rapid survey.

— paintings by Vermeer and Ruisdael, plus:

Van Goyen: *Windmill by a River* (1642, London NG)

VIDEO: *Dutch Landscapes* (♫ *Laet ons den Landtman Loven*)

Artists and Paintings Shown

HALS: *St. George Civic Guard* (1616, Haarlem), *Prodigal Son* (1623, NY Met), *Nicolaes Hasselaer* (1628, Rijks.), *Merry Drinker* (1630, Rijks.),

REMBRANDT: *Supper at Emmaus* (1629, Jacquemart-André), *Anatomy Lesson* (1632, Mauritshuis), *Deposition* (1633, Munich), *Blinding of Samson* (1636, Frankfurt), *Self Portrait as the Prodigal Son* (1637, Dresden), *Night Watch* (1642, Amsterdam), *Supper at Emmaus* (1648, Louvre), *Self Portrait with Turned-up Collar* (1659, Washington NGA), *Syndics of the Cloth Guild* (1662, Rijks.), *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1669, Hermitage)

RUISDAEL: *Jewish Cemetery* (c.1660, Dresden), *Windmill at Wijk bij Doorstede* (1668, Rijks.), *View of Haarlem* (1673, Mauritshuis)

STEEN: *Woman at her Toilet* (1655, Rijks.; 1663, Royal Collection), *Skittle Players* (1663, London NG), *The Young Ones Chirrup* (1663, Mauritshuis)

VERMEER: *Milkmaid* (1658, Rijks.), *Wine Glass* (1659, Berlin), *Little Street* (c.1660, Rijks.), *View of Delft* (1661, Mauritshuis), *Woman Reading a Letter* (1663, Rijks.), *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665, Mauritshuis), *Allegory of Painting* (1667, Vienna), *Girl in a Red Hat* (1668, Washington NGA)

Dirk van **Baburen** (1595–1624, Dutch painter), Ferdinand **Bol** (1616–80, Dutch painter), Pieter **Claesz** (1597–1660, Dutch painter), **Cornelis** van Haarlem (1562–1638, Dutch painter), Cornelis **Dopper** (1870–1939, Dutch composer), Jan van **Goyen** (1596–1656, Dutch painter), Frans **Hals** (1582–1666, Dutch painter), Gerrit van **Honthorst** (1592–1656, Dutch painter), Pieter de **Hooch** (1929–84, Dutch painter), Willem **Kalf** (1619–93, Dutch painter), Thomas de **Keijzer** (1596–1667, Dutch painter), Hans **Kindler** (1892–1949, Dutch composer), Jan **Lievens** (1607–74, Dutch painter), Sybrandt van **Noordt** (1659–1705, Dutch composer), Aert **Pietersz** (1550–1612, Dutch painter), **Rembrandt** Harmensz van Rijn (1606–69, Dutch painter), Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, Flemish painter), Jacob van **Ruisdael** (1628–82, Dutch painter), Johann Christian **Schickhardt** (1682–1762, German composer), Jan **Steen** (1625–79, Dutch painter), Gerard **Terborch** the Younger (1617–81, Dutch painter), Jan **Vermeer** (1632–75, Dutch painter)

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