

Dutch Portraiture

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Dutch portraiture. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, explain the influences on the art of this time, and identify examples of Dutch portraiture paintings. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:



BIG IDEA

Dutch portraiture strove to capture both the appearance and personality of the person or people in the portrait.

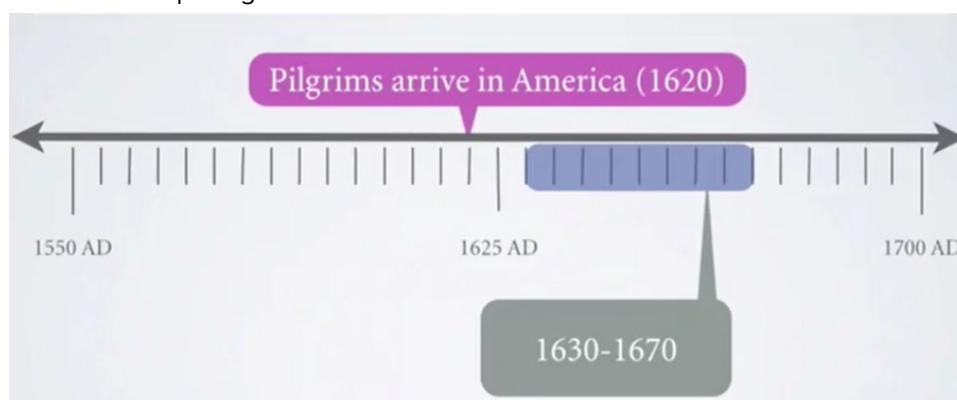
1. Period and Location: Dutch Portraiture

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from between 1630 and 1670. Note that the arrival of the pilgrims in New England in 1620 is marked as a reference point on the timeline below. Today's artwork focuses geographically on the Netherlands, in particular Amsterdam and Haarlem.



DID YOU KNOW

Haarlem, in the Netherlands, is the namesake of Harlem on Manhattan Island in New York, despite the different spelling.



2. Dutch Portraiture: Influences

The expansion of wealth during this time meant that more people wanted portraits. Portraits were painted of people from many different levels of society, which gave artists opportunities to explore the use of different poses and approaches to painting that they might not have been able to use with the aristocracy, had it

existed in this region.

Portraiture formed part of a more generalized Baroque interest in explorations of emotion and **verisimilitude**, specifically in capturing the likeness and personality of the person or people in the portrait.



TERMS TO KNOW

Portraiture

An artistic likeness of an individual.

Verisimilitude

Having the appearance or likeness of truth.

3. Dutch Portraiture: Examples

3a. Frans Hals

Frans Hals' painting "Archers of Saint Hadrian" successfully captures the individual personality of each person in the painting, as well as aspects of their profession, essentially creating numerous individual portraits within the context of a single group portrait. With the recent liberation from Spain, the sense of nationalism was very strong in the Dutch Republic, and the popularity of civic organizations such as the one featured in this painting was very high.



Archers of Saint Hadrian by Frans Hals

1633

Oil on canvas

The portrait's composition diverges from earlier, more organized compositions. There's a lot of energy in this image, as if some of the members have stopped momentarily to turn towards the viewer entering the room. Hals manages to capture the individuality of every member of the group through the use of personal details and arrangement with respect to other members.



THINK ABOUT IT

How do you think the stances of the varying group members differ from one another? Well, for example, some are shown looking at the viewer, while others are looking at each other. Some are reserved, and some are more animated. Though spontaneous in appearance, this was the result of careful planning. Hals successfully weaves these different elements together to create a cohesive and balanced collection of individual portraits in a group setting.

Compared to the vibrancy of the last painting, Hals' painting of the women regents, below, is a much more composed and arranged painting, reflecting the rigid discipline and puritanical character of respected Calvinist women. It's also a great example of the Calvinist influence of humility. The women are shown seated, as full-length portraits were considered too grandiose. The individualism remains, however, as each member of the painting can stand independently of the others.



The Women Regents of the Old Men's Home in Haarlem by Frans Hals

1670

Oil on canvas

The palette is much more subdued than with the Archers. The women are wearing dark clothing—another sign of humility—so the artist isn't able to emphasize the details in the clothing, as would have been possible with royal portraits. It's a notable shift from the exquisite detail of material textures that Northern European artists were known for.

3b. Judith Leyster

Judith Leyster was known for the informal nature of her paintings. Similar to Hals in his Archers painting, in Leyster's self-portrait, you get the sense that you just walked in on the artist as she was painting, causing her to casually lean back and greet you with a smile.



DID YOU KNOW

Her fancy clothing is indicative of her success as a painter. It's very unlikely that she actually painted in formal attire, which would be comparable to you painting in a formal suit or evening gown.



Self-Portrait by Judith Leyster

1635

Oil on canvas

Leyster masterfully uses lighting to create a very realistic impression of skin on her face. There is a very subtle sheen noticeable on her cheek, forehead, and the side of her nose. She also uses color to help differentiate herself, dressed in dark colors, from the lightly-colored subject being painted. In addition, this subject almost appears to be playfully mimicking the artist's gesture with the bow on his violin, just as her brush hovers above her painter's palette.

3c. Rembrandt

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, commonly known as Rembrandt, is considered the most important painter

to have emerged from Amsterdam during the 17th century. His popularity contributed to his very successful art studio, which turned out numerous works of art, as well as students and imitators of the master's style.

This portrait for the local Surgeons' Guild, called "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp," is an example of Rembrandt's skill, like Frans Hals', in creating an effective and dynamic multi-person portrait. It is also an example of the influence of Caravaggio and his use of tenebrism to illuminate the cadaver.



The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp by Rembrandt

1632

Oil on canvas

The physicians that surround Dr. Tulp crowd around the head of the cadaver. Many of the physicians are noticeably straining to get a better view. As in Hals' painting, you get the sense that you have walked in on a lesson, with two of the figures in the back making eye contact with you.



DID YOU KNOW

Dr. Tulp was an actual person. He was the head of the Surgeons' Guild in Amsterdam.

The composition is arranged around the diagonal of the cadaver, forming the diagonal axis. The anatomy professor and physician Dr. Tulp flexes his left hand to help demonstrate the function of the muscles and tendons that he carefully lifts up with his forceps.

The layer of dirt and grime that accumulated on this next painting, as well as the varnish that was used that darkened over time, led to its nickname "The Night Watch," given that historians believed it was a theme set

at night. However, after restoration, the painting was revealed to be much brighter than before. The painting is considered to be one of the greatest group portraits to emerge from the Dutch Republic. It depicts two officers—the captain with the red sash and a lieutenant in the pale yellow uniform—walking on a diagonal through the commotion of men preparing for a parade, with small children running through the group.

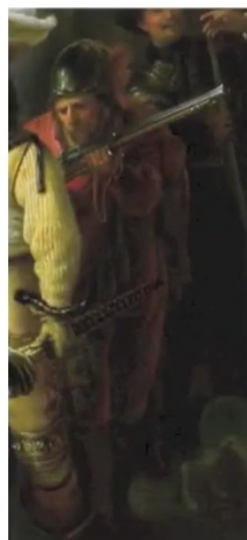


The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq (also known as The Night Watch) by Rembrandt

1642

Oil on canvas

This is another example of a civic group commissioning a group portrait, just as the Archers did from Frans Hals years earlier. Rembrandt masterfully uses chiaroscuro and light to both illuminate the most important figures in the front, and to move you back into the painting by focusing on the little girl. In a clever nod to this group of musketeers, Rembrandt shows the loading, preparation for firing, and actual firing of a musket, shown below.



Rembrandt produced many self-portraits. This particular example shows the Italian influence and stylistic characteristics he absorbed from his teacher who studied in Rome. It's an example of the balanced composition and naturalism favored by Italian artists, as well as an example of the tenebrist technique and influence of Caravaggio. It even recalls the use of chiaroscuro and sfumato that was employed by Leonardo da Vinci in his famous portrait of the "Mona Lisa."



Self-Portrait by Rembrandt

1659-1660

Oil on canvas

The portrait, however, is a very Baroque example of the Dutch interest in verisimilitude. Rembrandt doesn't hold back in conveying the appearance of himself as an aged man—there's no hint of idealization, and you can assume he appears as he really does.



DID YOU KNOW

In this particular portrait, compared to others that he did of himself at this time, some perceive a sense of humility. In fact, Rembrandt had recently declared bankruptcy, and this may have influenced the more subdued nature of the painting. He's poised, but there's no hint of vanity; he isn't projecting any characterization other than that of a painter.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Dutch portraiture**. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms, and explain the **influences on the art of this time**. You also learned to identify **examples of Dutch portraiture paintings** by examining artwork by the painters **Frans Hals**, **Judith Leyster**, and **Rembrandt**. It's important to note that Dutch portraiture strove to capture both the appearance and personality of the person or people in the portrait.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Verisimilitude

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