

# Middle Class Takes Over Art World

## Dutch Republic, 17th Century

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**Theme: In the 17th century Dutch Republic the middle class took over the world of art.**

### Background

- **European art world prior to the 17th century**
  - **The aristocracy and the Catholic Church dominated the world of art.**
  - **Artists worked on a commission basis for their patrons.**
- **Founding of the Dutch Republic**
  - For most of the 17th century, the provinces of the Dutch Republic occupied the same territory as the present Kingdom of the Netherlands, with the exception of southeastern parts of the modern country.
  - From 1481 until 1579, these provinces had been **governed by members of the Spanish Habsburg family.**
  - In **1579** the provinces joined reluctantly to **declare their independence** from the Habsburg King of Spain, Philip II (1527-98), brother of the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (1503-64). Philip II held title to all of the Netherlands and ruled them through a governor in Brussels.
  - In **1581 they joined in a formal confederacy called the Dutch Republic.**
  - Motivated by local economic interests and encouraged by the many Netherlandish Protestants who wished to leave the Catholic Kingdom of Spain, noble provincial leaders had been rebelling since 1568. Philip II and the Spanish governors of the Southern Netherlands resisted this secession, and did not officially recognize the United Provinces until **1648, when the “Eighty Years War” ended with the Peace of Munster.**
  - The Dutch Republic had actually enjoyed some measure of recognition since 1609, when it had concluded the “Twelve Years Truce” with the Spanish at Antwerp. By agreeing to the Truce on Northern Netherlandish terms, Philip II acknowledged the reality of the Republic, which was led primarily by Protestant Dutch leaders of the aristocratic and upper middle classes.
  - The southern Netherlands is today called Belgium.
- **The rising of the Dutch Republic middle class**
  - During the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, the **Dutch Republic enjoyed the highest per capita income in Europe, and probably in the world.** While the Dutch Republic is today best remembered for its precocious capitalist financial and commercial innovations, it was also the most advanced industrial producer during the period and the most urbanized society in Europe.
  - This new nation capitalized on the ingenuity of its middle class and its few natural resources to become the marketplace and foremost economic power in Europe.
  - The change was unique in Europe because Dutch society was dominated by an advanced urban elite of merchants and craftsmen.
  - The Dutch no longer defined their social position by the privileges conferred on them by birth but instead by their mercantile status and income.
  - Almost half lived in cities and only a third worked in agriculture.
  - This expanded middle class had surplus incomes to spend on pictures for their modestly luxurious homes.
  - A market of this size had never existed before, providing a new opportunity for artists.
  - The total population of the Dutch Republic was approximately two million.

- **The overtaking of the art world**
  - Visitors to the Dutch Republic in the 17th century were amazed at the popularity of art. British traveler Peter Mundy noted in 1640: **“As for the art of Painting and the affection of the people to Pictures, I think none other go beyond them....”** In addition to well-off merchants, Mundy reported bakers, cobblers, butchers, and blacksmiths as avid art collectors.
  - **Traditional patronage was supplanted by the middle class.**
  - **“Works of art, ranging from simple prints and copies to originals hung in almost all Dutch homes.”** For example, pictures of some kind or another were found in about two thirds of Delft households.
  - **It was not uncommon for a wealthy citizen to own ten or fifteen paintings, in addition to prints and large maps.**
  - **Estimates put the number of works produced during the century of the Golden Age of Dutch art between five and ten million.**
  - **Very few of these, perhaps less than 1%, have survived.**
  - **Over the course of a century, the Dutch supported more than a thousand artists, including some of the greatest painters of any era.**
  - This new market defined Dutch art of the 17th century, making the 17th century the Golden Age of Dutch art.

# Dutch Republic

Frontage on North Sea  
17th Century



Object 1a: **Portrait of Lucas van Voorst**, 1628, Paulus Moreelse, Oil on panel, 88.64.1, G312

Object 1b: **Portrait of Catharina van Voorst**, 1628, Paulus Moreelse, Oil on panel, 88.64.2, G312



- Introduction
  - Let me first introduce you to the change agents, two of these middle-class people who took over the art world.
- Engagement
  - Look closely at these two portraits. What words would you use to describe them? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - In the Dutch Republic a large and prosperous merchant class arose, ranging from local government officials to tradesmen of more modest means. In what ways do Lucas and Catharina show their status?
  - The van Voorsts likely practiced the Calvinist faith. Calvinists valued the virtues of modesty, morality, and moderation. In what ways has the artist shown their connection to their faith?
- Label
  - **Lucas van Voorst (1590–1669) was a goldsmith and jeweler in the Dutch town of Utrecht. Yet Paul Moreelse, one of the finest portrait painters of the time, offers no indication that van Voorst is a craftsman. Instead, he shows the man as a prosperous citizen, fashionably dressed, his table covered with an exotic and presumably expensive Persian rug. A family chronicle describes Lucas as “an amiable man, not vindictive, affectionate and beloved by his friends, charitable, generous, gay.... He was of medium height, with well-made shoulders, legs, and calves, or a merry countenance, with some red and white intermixed.”**
  - **Catharina van Voorst (1595–1650), Lucas’s wife and cousin, wears sumptuous attire, including a fine pleated ruff and gold thread embellishments. Her carefully depicted jewels were probably made by her husband.** She bore nine children, seven of whom survived to maturity. Two sons followed their father into his profession of goldsmith and jeweler.
  - The portraits of Catharina and Lucas remained in the van Voorst family until 1968. Sometime during those 340 years, the oak panels were reduced in height by about eight inches—mostly at the bottom. Originally, this painting showed all of **Catharina’s white feather fan**. And what a fan it must have been: **inserted into a gold handle and hung from a thick gold chain, the feathers were likely expensive imports from the Netherlands' vast trade empire.**
- Learning objective
  - Dutch society was dominated by an advanced urban elite of merchants and craftsmen. The Dutch no longer defined their social position by the privileges conferred on them by birth but instead by their mercantile status and income. And with wealth and newly found status, the middle class took over the world of art and this included commissioning portraits of themselves.
  - Whereas previously portraiture was largely limited to the aristocracy and the church, the growing middle class in the Dutch Republic commissioned portraits to convey their new status as well.
- Factoids



- **The objects**

- Portraits tell us something about the calling and the social status of their subjects. The sitters' dress, pose, and attributes are a reflection on their wealth, profession, and convictions.
- The Dutch middle class were described as **devout, hard-working, parsimonious people**, most of whom disliked the exuberant pomp of their Baroque southern neighbors.
- The clothes in Dutch 17th-century portraits are sober, conservative black, with sometimes (daringly) a hint of white. But look at these paintings closely and you soon begin to realize that sober is the last thing these frocks are. In many of these paintings the outer trappings are everything. Superficiality rules.
- Black was predominant partly because it implied sobriety and modesty. But at least as important was the fact that it was fashionable. These days, when you go out somewhere special, the chances are that you reach for black. Well, for much of the 17th century it was like that in the Netherlands.
- So black is the old black; but never let it be said that these Dutch plutocrats - having a gay old time among their embarrassment of riches, at the high watermark of their nation's astonishing economic and cultural success - were flinging on the equivalent of a cleverly cut Topshop LBD, safe in the knowledge that cheap black looks less cheap than cheap color. This black is all about rich detail and texture. The overgown - known as a vlieger - is a satin jacquard weave with a floral motif.
- Status is further denoted in this double portrait through the sitter's clothing. **Black was a color which indicated sobriety and modesty in the wearer, but it was also the most expensive color to wear, as a true black dye was difficult to achieve.** On any fabric other than leather, it was unstable and faded easily—usually to a horrible white-orange or bruised blue. Black was reserved for Sunday best clothing. Although this sombre clothing may be a reflection of the sitter's conservative religious status, it also reflects her high economic and social position in society.
- The dress code of the Dutch elite was black silk garments and tan riding cloaks, elegant lace ruffs and flat collars, gloves and felt hats, their high-keyed sashes linking them to their militia "colors."  
**Ostentation was unseemly in the Dutch Republic.**
- Catharina's apparel
  - She is wearing a white linen diadem cap with white bobbin lace edging. The lace scallops are very large, showing off her wealth and status. These diadem shaped caps are very common in the Dutch 1620s and 30s.
  - Sleeves were usually separate items, pinned or laced onto the jacket or bodice.
  - The huge ruff is still the height of fashion in the 1620s but would soon be replaced by the flat 'falling' collar.
  - Her vlieger is a large floor length sleeveless gown.
  - Her stomacher is a triangular shaped decorated and often boned piece that is pinned to the bodice and shown at the front. It is combined with open jacket, bodice or vlieger and is richly decorated with gold thread and beads. Stomachers were also often used to show off wealth and status in their rich gold thread embroidery, braiding and use of lace.
  - The lace cuffs are made of very thin linen, which is pleated and edged with bobbin or needle lace. The lace follows a typical design made in Flanders and Italy.
  - Gloves, fans and handkerchiefs were expensive fashion accessories. Gloves were often made of leather or silk and were richly and beautifully embroidered
  - Stomachers were also often used to show off wealth and status in their rich gold thread embroidery, braiding and use of lace.
- Collars
  - Until around 1625 both men and women wore ruffs; later on limp, flat collars became fashionable. The collars were made of fine white linen (known as cambric), trimmed with lace. To make a ruff, more than 15 meters (16.4 yards) of fabric was pleated to form a circumference of 38 centimeters (15 inches). Every time it was washed, the whole collar was taken apart, bleached and repleated. The bleaching of linen, which involved a combination of buttermilk and sunlight, took place outside of town. Twice a year horse-drawn barges left Amsterdam for the bleaching fields. Anyone who wanted to wear white collars had to own a lot of them.

- Stiffening the collar required wheat meal, a rare commodity owing to the war with Spain. Nonetheless, collars grew larger and larger and starch no longer sufficed to make them stand up. Very large ruffs had to be held up with a supportasse, a wire frame wound round with thread of silver, gold, or silk.
- Black dye
  - Producing fast black in the Middle Ages was a complicated process involving multiple dyeings with woad or indigo followed by mordanting, but at the dawn of Early Modern period, a new and superior method of dyeing black dye reached Europe via Spanish conquests in the New World. The new method used logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum*), a dyewood native to Mexico and Central America. Although logwood was poorly received at first, producing a blue inferior to that of woad and indigo, it was discovered to produce a fast black in combination with a ferrous sulfate (copperas) mordant.
- Smiles
  - It was unusual for people in the 17th century to be portrayed smiling. The smile was mistrusted and often equated with foolishness.
  - **By the 17th century in Europe it was a well-established fact that the only people who smiled broadly, in life and in art, were the poor, the lewd, the drunk, the innocent, and the entertainment** – some of whom we'll visit later. Showing the teeth was for the upper classes a more-or-less formal breach of etiquette. St. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility of 1703*, wrote: There are some people who raise their upper lip so high... that their teeth are almost entirely visible. This is entirely contradictory to decorum, which forbids you to allow your teeth to be uncovered, since nature gave us lips to conceal them.
  - When a camera is produced and we are asked to smile, we perform gamely. But should the process take too long, it takes only a fraction of a moment for our smiles to turn into uncomfortable grimaces. What was voluntary a moment ago immediately becomes intolerable. A smile is like a blush – it is a response, not an expression per se, and so it can neither be easily maintained nor easily recorded.
- **Paulus Moreelse** (1571 – 1638) (pronounced More-eel-seh)
  - Paulus Moreelse (1571 – 6 March 1638) was a Dutch painter, mainly of portraits.
  - Moreelse was born and lived most of his life in **Utrecht**. He took a study-trip to Italy, where he received many portrait commissions. Back in Utrecht, in 1596 he became a member of the Saddler's guild, which then embraced the painters as well. In 1611, along with Abraham Bloemaert, he was one of the founders of a new painters' guild, called "St. Luke's Guild", and became its first dean.
  - **Moreelse was a well known portrait painter who received commissions from right across the Dutch Republic.** His earliest known work dates to 1606. Other than portraits, he also painted a few history paintings in the Mannerist style. More interesting than these are his Arcadian scenes with shepherds and shepherdesses; he was one of the first Dutch artists to paint such pictures.
  - As an architect he designed the Catherine Gate (destroyed) and possibly the façade of the Meat Market in Utrecht
  - He served on the town council and was involved in founding Utrecht's university in 1636.
- **Portraiture in 17th Century Dutch Republic**
  - **In the 16th century, only those with a claim to nobility were worthy of portrayal.** Nobility was primarily based on hereditary title.
  - **Portraiture flourished in the northern Netherlands and the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century. There was a large mercantile class who were far more ready to commission portraits than their equivalents in other countries; a summary of various estimates of total production arrives at between 750,000 and 1,100,000 portraits.** Among the many thousands of portraits made during the Dutch Golden Age, those that survive to this day tend to be of the highest quality, preserved over the centuries by their owners and descendants.
  - The Rise of Portraiture

- **Portraiture as an artistic category in Europe had flourished** in Renaissance Italy and thereafter in the southern Netherlands, which grew wealthy from a trading economy centered in the port city of Antwerp.
  - Interest in images of individuals, as opposed to saints and other Christian figures, was fueled in part by the new and burgeoning concept of personhood. The **rise of Renaissance humanism**—a revival of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy valuing human dignity and the material world—contributed to this sense of personal identity, as did a new kind of **economic autonomy enjoyed by wealthy merchants and successful tradesmen**.
  - **These shifts in attitude and economy greatly expanded the market for portraits. Gradually, merchants and successful traders joined traditional customers—the aristocracy and high-ranking members of the church—in commissioning portraits of themselves.**
- For the Dutch, a similar sense of individuation may have been fostered by religion. Calvinists were encouraged by their clergy to pursue a direct, unmediated understanding of faith through reading the Bible. In the secular realm, scholars working in the republic, such as René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza, represented a new breed of intellectuals who advanced the idea that human reason and rationality, alongside faith in God, could improve man’s condition in life.
- **Economically, the ascendance of the northern Netherlands to the world’s premier trading hub (following the blockade of the port of Antwerp) produced vast new commercial opportunities.**
  - **A decentralized political structure also vested power in a new “ruling class” that consisted of thousands of city regents (city councilors), burgher merchant families, and those made prosperous through the pursuit of trades such as brewing or fabric making.**
  - **With disposable income and social standing, they avidly commissioned portraits** from the many painters offering their services.
  - **Portraits were made of newlyweds, families, children, groups, and individuals wishing to create records of family members, ceremonial occasions, and to mark civic and personal status in their communities.**
- Early in the seventeenth century, **the types and styles of portraits made in the northern Netherlands were governed by conventions established by earlier portrait painters to carefully communicate status, regional and family identity, and religious attitudes.**
  - Émigré painters from the southern Netherlands and Dutch artists who had visited Italy brought their knowledge of these approaches to the northern Netherlands. The quality of these conventional portraits was impersonal, unsmiling, and formal.
  - **Sitters’ poses (a three-quarter view was typical) and placement of hands (for men, assertive gestures; for women, demure ones) were prescribed to conform to portrait decorum.**
- Throughout the Golden Age, Dutch portrait painters continued many of these conventions as likenesses still functioned as **a means of illustrating a subject’s identity and status**. However, the genius of the age was in the way Dutch portraitists also transformed the genre by infusing portrait subjects with increasing naturalism, humanity, emotion, and sometimes drama. They expanded technique, subject, and pose. Subjects turn to us in direct gaze, gesture with confidence, and express mood, becoming individuals in whom painters attentively captured personality and character—qualities that make these pictures distinctive and even modern to our eyes.
- From what little we know of the studio procedures of artists, it seems that, as elsewhere in Europe, the face was probably drawn and perhaps painted at an initial sitting or two. The typical number of further sittings is unclear - between zero (for a Rembrandt full-length) and 50 appear documented. The clothes were left at the studio and might well be painted by assistants, or a brought-in specialist master, although, or because, they were regarded as a very important part of the painting.
- Marriage Portraits

- **The most common occasion for commissioning a portrait was marriage, and many pendant portraits— a pair of separate paintings depicting a man and woman that were meant to hang together on a wall— were commissioned. Double portraits with the man and woman in the same painting were less common.**
  - **The couple's dress, though subdued in color and conservative, is made with rich fabrics and laces that communicate their status.**
  - **A pair of sober pendants takes a more traditional approach to the marriage portrait, reflecting the couple's immaculate appearance, modesty (the woman's), and status in the community (the man's), rather than the couple's relationship. The poses are complementary.**
  - **The Dutch mentality of the period revolved around a dialectical play of inherent tensions between piety and morality, on the one hand, and unprecedented prosperity and materialism on the other.**
- **The Middle Class in 17th Century Dutch Republic**
    - During the seventeenth century, the Netherlands—a country of approximately two million inhabitants—enjoyed unprecedented wealth. **The Dutch Republic enjoyed the highest per capita income in Europe, and probably in the world. While the Dutch Republic is today best remembered for its precocious capitalist financial and commercial innovations, it was also the most advanced industrial producer during the period and the most urbanized society in Europe. Socio-economic and political power in the Republic was based primarily on trade and industry, rather than landownership**
    - Although the country was short on natural resources and engaged in intermittent wars, several factors contributed to form a climate for remarkable prosperity, based largely on trade. **The Dutch Republic became the leading marketplace for Europe.**
      - In the late Middle Ages, many Dutch farmers had moved away from agricultural staples in favor of more valuable products for export, such as dairy and dyestuffs.
      - Along with cod and herring, which the Dutch had learned to preserve, these goods provided an important source of capital, while grain and other necessities were imported cheaply from the Baltic and elsewhere.
      - Exports and imports alike were carried on Dutch ships and traded by Dutch merchants, giving the Dutch the expertise and funds to invest when new trading opportunities became available through global exploration.
      - Most overseas trade was conducted with the Caribbean and the East Indies, but Dutch colonies—dealing in fur, ivory, gold, tobacco, and slaves—were also established in North America, Brazil, and South Africa.
    - The Dutch economy benefited from entrepreneurship and innovation in many areas. Most industries were based in and around the cities. In addition to trading, **the top industries were agriculture, fishing, textiles, and shipbuilding.**
    - **Extensive trade helped the Dutch create the most urbanized society in Europe, with an unprecedented 60 percent of the population living in cities.**
      - While economic power in most countries was closely linked to landownership, in the Netherlands cities drove the economic engine, providing a nexus where traders, bankers, investors, and shippers came together.
      - A landed aristocracy remained, but it was small in number, consisting of only a dozen or so families at the start of the seventeenth century. Their influence and holdings were concentrated in the inland provinces of the east, which also had the largest rural populations, chiefly independent farmers who owned their land.
  - Art flourished in the new Dutch republic of the 1600s. After separating from the Spanish-controlled Southern Netherlands (Flanders, now Belgium), the small, seafaring nation thrived from international maritime trade, and the economic gains were broadly distributed. In neighboring nations, the predominant patrons of the arts were royalty and the Catholic Church. But **in the Protestant Dutch republic, the primary patrons were merchants and craftsmen, the middle class.**

- Closure
  - Here we have an example of the change makers in the 17th century Dutch Republic, the middle class with their unprecedented wealth. We see here their desire to show their status through portraiture and the fact that these paintings remained in the family for over three hundred years illustrates how treasured these were.

Props: Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599 – 1660) was a Spanish painter, the leading artist in the court of King Philip IV, and one of the most important painters of the Spanish Golden Age. He was an individualistic artist of the contemporary Baroque period. In addition to numerous renditions of scenes of historical and cultural significance, he painted scores of portraits of the Spanish royal family, other notable European figures, and commoners, culminating in the production of his masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656).

**Philip IV in Brown and Silver, 1632**  
**Diego Velázquez**





**Portrait of Pope Innocent X, 1650**  
**Diego Velázquez**



**Jacob van Ruisdael, View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds, c. 1670–75, oil on canvas**





Object 2: **Fishing Vessels Offshore in a Heavy Sea**, 1684, Ludolph Backhuysen, Oil on canvas, 82.84, G309



- Introduction
  - Let's turn our attention next to the backbone of the Dutch Golden Age ... both economically and artistically.
- Engagement
  - Here we have a painting by Ludolph Backhuysen, one of the leading seascape painter of the Netherland. What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - While the Dutch were grateful for the bounty provided by the sea, its power and unpredictability posed an ever-present risk. How has the artist represented both the risk and the bounty of shipping?
  - Marine painting is among the distinctive inventions of Dutch 17th-century culture. Why do you suppose these paintings were so attractive to middle class buyers?
- Label
  - A fishing **boat caught in a storm** thrashes about the waves, its mainsail torn. Another boat, in the far right of the picture, is on its way to help. Meanwhile, a merchant ship in the distance heads out to battle the storm.
  - As **one of the great marine painters of the 1600s, Ludolph Backhuysen** painted many dramatic scenes like this. **A Dutch artist, he would naturally have been drawn to the sea as a subject, the oceans being the main source of food, trade, and military victories for the Dutch, enabling their prosperity.** Though, as this painting shows, the sea was sometimes more foe than friend.
- Learning objectives
  - The backbone of the prosperity of the middle class was the sea.
  - Dutch Republic artists invented and made popular marine art.
- Factoids
  - **This object**
    - This painting shows **fishing vessels suffering from the storm passing to the right**. They display the **Dutch flag of orange, white, and blue**. Sailors struggle to control their vessels, masts are already broken, and collision seems possible. Floating debris may suggest that one vessel has already sunk. A buoy in the foreground may be an indicator of the danger of running into an underwater obstacle. Amid the dark gray and steely blue clouds and water, the sun's golden rays give hope that calmer weather will soon return. The subject may be considered a vanitas, a reminder of the fleeting nature of earthly existence.
    - **The Dutch took pride in their ability to prevail against such calamities through perseverance and faith. In Backhuysen's composition, this optimism in the face of peril is represented by the golden light breaking through the clouds at left, signaling that the storm is about to pass and that these ships will survive.**
  - **Ludolph Backhuysen (1631-1708)** (pronounced back-house-in)

- Ludolf Backhuysen, whose name appears in the literature in a number of different forms (for example, Bakhuisen, Backhuisen, and Bakhuizen), was **born in the German town of Emden** on December 18, 1631. He was the son of a scribe, Gerhard Backhaus, and initially followed in his father's footsteps, **working as a clerk** in the government offices at Emden. After the family **moved to Amsterdam in 1649**, he held a similar post with the firm of the wealthy merchant Guilielmo Bartolotti van den Heuvel, a fellow native of Emden.
- In 1656, while apparently still working for Bartolotti, Backhuysen is recorded as a member of Kalligraphie, a society of those proficient in beautiful penmanship. From 1650 onward he was also working as a draftsman, producing "pen paintings" and grisailles. As late as 1657 and 1660, he is still referred to in documents as a draftsman, and although his earliest dated oil painting was executed in 1658, he did not join the painters' guild until February 1663. By this time any formal training he may have received in the art of painting must have been completed. No contemporary records of any apprenticeship survive, but Houbraken states that Backhuysen studied first with Allart van Everdingen (Dutch, 1621 - 1675) and then with Hendrick Dubbels (1620/1621–1676?).
- **Despite his late start as a professional painter, Backhuysen rapidly gained widespread fame and patronage. He became the unchallenged leading seascape painter of the Netherlands after Willem van de Velde the Elder (Dutch, 1611 - 1693) and his son Willem van de Velde the Younger (Dutch, 1633 - 1707) immigrated to England in late 1672 or early 1673.** Even as early as 1665, it was to Backhuysen that the burgomasters of Amsterdam turned when commissioning a large view of the city's harbor to send as a gift to Hughes de Lionne, Marquis de Berny, a minister of Louis XIV of France. For this painting the artist was paid the sizable sum of 1,275 florins.
- Backhuysen's clientele is reported to have included a number of other European rulers—among them Peter the Great of Russia, the king of Prussia, the elector of Saxony, and the grand duke of Tuscany—and his works continued to be extremely popular with leading collectors throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After about 1850, however, his reputation began to wane, and only recently has he once more come to be considered a leading master of Dutch marine painting.
- **Backhuysen's canvases are often large and frequently depict stormy scenes. His lighting and color schemes are typically more dramatic** than those of his contemporary Willem van de Velde the Younger, although some of their works of the 1670s are rather similar and on occasion have been confused. It is not clear if one artist influenced the other at this time or if their stylistic convergence was coincidental. A painter upon whom Backhuysen certainly did exert an influence was Abraham Storck (1644–1708). He also had a number of pupils, including Hendrick and Jan Claesz Rietschoof, Michiel Maddersteg, Jan Dubbels, Pieter Coopse (Dutch, active 1672 - 1677 or after), and Anthonie Rutgers.
- In addition to the seascapes for which he is famous, Backhuysen painted some portraits, allegorical compositions, and townscapes. Besides his work as a calligrapher, he was also a printmaker. He married four times, and died after a long illness in Amsterdam, where he was buried in the Westerkerk on November 17, 1708.
- **He was an ardent student of nature, and frequently exposed himself on the sea in an open boat in order to study the effects of storms.** (This story may be apocryphal.) His compositions, which are numerous, are nearly all variations of one subject, the sea, and in a style peculiarly his own, marked by intense realism or faithful imitation of nature.
- Ludof Backhuysen specialized in ships adrift in tempests. He executed his largest surviving paintings as if he were observing the disaster in the midst of the roiling seas, thus engaging beholders in the unfolding tragedy, encouraging them to empty haze with the ships and their crews and to contemplate the powers of God, beyond full comprehension. But even as such paintings acknowledge the fragility of Dutch seaborne success, their distant shafts of sunlight usually hold out hope for reversals of misfortune.
- **Seascapes**
  - **Marine painting is among the distinctive inventions of Dutch 17th-century culture, and it has long been identified with the importance of the sea and seafaring for the rise and**

**prosperity of the Dutch Republic and its citizens' well-being.** Dutch marine art is not, however, a single subject but presents a body of images remarkable for its ubiquity in society and variety of media, audiences, and purposes. It also explores glowing views of crowded harbors, gripping images of battles and triumphs, appalling scenes of shipwreck, and meditative glimpses of coastal and inland waters.

- Painted during the peak years of Dutch artistic achievement between 1600 and 1700, these superlative, emotional works are **the first in which European artists realistically depicted natural settings, rendering coastal atmospheres and various weather conditions with great focus and virtuosic technique.** Artists such as Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan Porcellis, Simon de Vlieger and Ludolf Backhuysen were masters of air, light and water, and used their prodigious talent to convey a world of political allegory and mystical allusion on canvas.
- **Nothing matches the sea as a subject for its versatility, its many moods, and the endlessly intriguing optical effects of water and light. Dutch masters of paint and color attracted to the seascape developed novel approaches to composition and technique.** The methods pioneered by the artists traveled well, spreading from the Netherlands to England, the rest of Europe, and ultimately to the Americas, serving as the foundation for the many examples of maritime paintings.
- **With works celebrating Dutch trade and commemorating military victories, the seascape became a popular genre serving the tastes of a prosperous Dutch Republic.** In a nation of sailors and skaters, it is no wonder that marine subjects became a favorite of seventeenth-century collectors and artists alike. Aristocratic patrons and wealthy burghers commissioned works intended for intimate viewing and public display.
- The sea and the vessels traversing it bore rich meaning for Flemish and Dutch artists, who voraciously mined the visual vocabulary offered by maritime subjects. A ship could represent the progress of an individual soul or the unified destiny of a nation with equal impact. Storms and shipwrecks supplied ample drama in the form of obvious danger from greater powers, as in while half-hidden rocks and submerged sea creatures suggested mystery, uncertainty or the realm of the supernatural. Military assertions and ecclesiastical refuge took geological forms that clearly communicated the artist's position — or that of his patron — on Dutch political or spiritual life.
- As the Dutch emerged as a world military and economic presence, they projected an increasingly **consistent image of their country and lifestyle through their art.** Luminous streams of sunlight amid atmospheric clouds characterize a typical lowland sky.
- The inspiration of military might in Golden Age painting cannot be overstated. Netherlandish forces were unabashed in their celebration of naval victories and heroes. Pictures such as *A Dutch Settlement in India, Probably Surat* by Ludolf Backhuysen were commissioned by Dutch provincial potentates, cities or by the admirals themselves. Artists often accompanied the fleet to commemorate battles, at times compressing various episodes of a naval event into a single scene, bringing all of the pictorial power of war and seascape to bear. The interplay of gun smoke, fire and water tested the limits of artistic technique and infused every painting with potency and true bravado.
- **These images tell the story of the marine activities that drove the Dutch economy, the seafaring prowess that ensured Dutch independence, and the natural beauty that assured the Dutch people of God's presence.**
- **Shipping — the backbone of Dutch Republic economy**
  - **Through its large naval fleet, the Dutch Republic dominated world trade and established extensive colonial holdings, which formed the basis of its great wealth and power.**
  - **The Dutch rose to greatness from the riches of the sea. During the seventeenth century they became leaders in marine travel, transport, commerce, and security as their massive cargo carriers and warships traversed oceans and their small vessels and fishing boats navigated inland and coastal waterways. Water was central to their economic and naval successes, but was also a source of pleasure and enjoyment.** In the warm summer months, dune-covered beaches offered scenic vistas, while in the winter, frozen canals provided a place for people of all ages to skate, play, and enjoy the outdoors.

- **With their massive fleet of cargo ships they became leaders in international maritime trade and transport, while their mighty warships commanded the high seas.** They established a successful **herring industry** with their vast array of fishing boats, and they navigated local estuaries, rivers, and canals with their yachts and barges.
- Throughout the seventeenth and for most of the eighteenth century, British economists recognized the superiority of Dutch performance and policy. William Petty's pioneering work on *Political Arithmetick*, written in 1676 and published in 1690 was perhaps the most astute assessment. He demonstrated that a **"small country and few people may be equivalent in wealth and strength to a far greater people and territory."** He provided a foretaste of the type of reasoning used later by Adam Smith and Douglass North when he **compared the performance of France and Holland. The population of France was more than ten times that of the United Provinces, but he estimated the Dutch merchant fleet to be nine times as big as the French, its foreign trade four times as big,** its interest rate about half the French level, its foreign assets large, those of France negligible.
- **The Military Power of the Dutch at Sea**
  - **Long after the Dutch achieved their freedom from Spain in 1648, depictions of naval battles remained a popular artistic subject—particularly after war broke out with England, another maritime rival, in the 1650s and 1660s.**
- **The Mercantile Might of the Dutch in the World**
  - **Herring fishing**
    - The backbone of the fishing industry was the **North Sea herring fishery, which was quite advanced and included a form of "factory" ship called the herring bus.** The herring bus was developed in the fifteenth century in order to allow the herring catch to be processed with salt at sea. This permitted the herring ship to remain at sea longer and increased the range of the herring fishery. **Herring was an important export product for the Netherlands particularly to inland areas, but also to the Baltic offsetting Baltic grain imports.**
    - **The herring fishery reached its zenith in the first half of the seventeenth century.** Estimates put the size of the herring fleet at roughly 500 busses and the catch at about 20,000 to 25,000 lasts (roughly 33,000 metric tons) on average each year in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The herring catch as well as the number of busses began to decline in the second half of the seventeenth century, collapsing by about the mid-eighteenth century when the catch amounted to only about 6000 lasts. This decline was likely due to competition resulting from a reinvigoration of the Baltic fishing industry that succeeded in driving prices down, as well as competition within the North Sea by the Scottish fishing industry.
  - **The Grain Trade**
    - **Baltic grain played an essential role for the rapidly expanding markets in western and southern Europe. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the urban populations had increased in the Low Countries fueling the market for imported grain. Grain and other Baltic products such as tar, hemp, flax, and wood were not only destined for the Low Countries, but also England and for Spain and Portugal via Amsterdam, the port that had succeeded in surpassing Lübeck and other Hanseatic towns as the primary transshipment point for Baltic goods. The grain trade sparked the development of a variety of industries. In addition to the shipbuilding industry, which was an obvious outgrowth of overseas trade relationships, the Dutch manufactured floor tiles, roof tiles, and bricks for export to the Baltic; the grain ships carried them as ballast on return voyages to the Baltic.**
  - **Expansion into African, American and Asian Markets – "World Primacy"**
    - **The Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, and West India Company, founded in 1621, connected the globe through a vast network of trade routes that stretched from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean, New Amsterdam (New York) to Asia. As they sailed the seven seas, Dutch ships transported luxury goods - exotic spices and rare flower bulbs from the Far East, salt from Brazil - as well as more utilitarian items,**

such as lumber from the Baltic used for construction and shipbuilding. An ugly side of this global commerce was the Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, though slave ships were rarely depicted in their marine imagery. The global scale of commerce created enormous wealth, in turn stimulating a booming art market. Scenes of maritime trade were particularly appealing to newly affluent investors, for whom they represented the means of their economic success.

- **Transportation and Tranquility on Local Waters**
  - **When Dutch merchant ships returned home from foreign shores and fishing boats came in from the North Sea, barges carried their goods to local markets via an extensive system of coastal and inland waterways. These canals and rivers proved just as efficient for the transportation of passengers. During the seventeenth century one could go by barge from Amsterdam to Haarlem in an hour, with trips leaving every hour. The journey from Haarlem to Leiden took two hours, and that from Delft to The Hague one hour and fifteen minutes.**
- **The Beauty and Power of the Sea**
  - **While the Dutch were grateful for the bounty provided by the sea, its power and unpredictability posed an ever-present risk. The Netherlands (literally, low lands) is located largely below sea level. During the early seventeenth century, tidal deluge was a constant threat, while arable, pastoral acreage was scarce. Between 1590 and 1640, reclamation efforts added some two hundred thousand acres of land, over a third of which came as a result of windmills pumping water into a sophisticated network of dikes, canals, and locks that helped control water levels throughout the land. The Dutch had a clear understanding of the overwhelming force and destructive power of water, for when dikes broke, the land flooded, and when storms battered ships at sea, countless lives and precious cargo were put in jeopardy. These dangers cut across society, affecting sailors, merchants, fishermen, and passengers.**
  - **The Dutch took pride in their ability to prevail against such calamities through perseverance and faith.**
- **Shipbuilding**
  - **The Dutch shipbuilding industry was unparalleled in Europe, both in size and in expertise. During the seventeenth century, the East India Company shipyard in Oostenburg was the largest in Europe, with 1,400 workers on-site. It included a warehouse for the goods and items amassed by the East India fleet, storage for supplies, a forge, a slaughterhouse, a steam building for bending wooden planks, and a pharmacy, not to mention sheds for constructing all the ships' constituent parts. With these resources, the Dutch built the light, fast, and reliable ships that propelled them to the forefront of global maritime trade and transport.**
- **Another example**
  - **The Four Days' Battle, 1666, Abraham Storck, Oil on canvas, 84.31, G309**
    - This patriotic scene chronicles the Four Days' Battle (June 11-14, 1666) between the Dutch and the British fleets in the English Channel. The Dutch squadron's two principal ships, the Gouda and the Spiegel, appear toward the center of the composition. This battle, one of several naval engagements during the protracted trade wars between these two countries, ended favorably for the Dutch. The British fleet sustained the loss of 8,000 men and 17 ships.
    - The Four Days Battle was one of several naval engagements, which took place on the southern part of the North Sea, during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-7). The Second Dutch War was one of three trade wars between the British and the Dutch between 1652 and 1673.
    - The British fleet was ultimately defeated and forced to retreat into the Thames, having suffered the worst attrition rate among commanding officers in the entire history of the Royal Navy, before or since. But in an astonishing feat by seventeenth century standards,

the dockyards repaired the shattered ships and got the fleet back to sea within seven weeks, where they inflicted a defeat on the Dutch during the St James' Day fight.

- Abraham Storck (1635-1710) was a Dutch landscape and maritime painter. Lived in Amsterdam, 22 yrs old when he painted this. Painted during the same year as the battle. (Modern equivalent of internet instant reporting?) Experts surmise that Storck relied on those who participated in the battle as a basis for the painting.
- Anglo-Dutch Wars: British wanted to dominate the seas, saw Dutch as rivals.
- Three separate war periods: 1st (1652-54), 2nd (1665-67) and 3rd (1672-74)
  - First War based on the British First Navigation Act (9 October 1651), which forbade the import of goods to Britain, unless transported either in English vessels or by vessels from the country of origin, a measure aimed against the Dutch. This act was the failed result of the Dutch wanting to join in with Britain in a commonwealth.
  - The Second War was based on British capturing New Amsterdam (became New York) and the British attacking the Dutch slave trade bases in West Africa. The Four Days' Battle was part of this 2nd War period.
  - The Third War was based on Dutch West Indies trade opposed by both France and Britain.
- Closure
  - With this painting we have discovered the backbone of the Dutch Republic economy. Shipping and its associated work provided good incomes to the middle class workers and great investment opportunities for them as well. We've also learned that Dutch Republic artists invented a new genre of paintings, seascapes, that rapidly became household items for many of the middle class.

## Triangle Trade Dutch West Indies Trading Company



Object 3: **The Asparagus Vendor, 1675–80, Pieter de Hooch** (pronounced Peter de Hoe), Oil on canvas, 82.46, G309



- Introduction
  - So here we have a prosperous middle class with money to spend. While the Dutch Republic was renowned for its religious tolerance, the state religion was Calvinism which encouraged austerity and humility. With these cultural mores how was the newly wealthy middle class to show its status?
- Engagement
  - Here we have the painting of a home from circa 1675 in a city in the Dutch Republic. What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - What objects can you identify in the painting that show the wealth of the people depicted in the painting?
  - What do you wonder about in this painting?
- Label
  - Pieter de Hooch's clients preferred contemporary domestic scenes, which expressed the values of an increasingly prosperous Dutch middle class. In this picture, the family's wealth is reflected in several details. The mistress of the house, outfitted in fine fabrics and baroque pearls, welcomes a shopkeeper delivering fresh white asparagus—always a delicacy. She turns to speak to her husband, dressed in a rich red kimono—visual evidence of the Dutch East India Trading Company's access to Japanese culture. Note also the large kast, or wardrobe, draped with a sheet to protect the fine furniture from scratches.
- Learning objectives
  - The middle class of the Dutch Republic invested their newly found wealth into homes, decorations, and furnishings, including a great deal of art.
  - Because of their familiar and frequently sentimental subject matter, genre paintings were popular with the middle class.
  - Artists of the Dutch Republic dominated this genre in 17th century Europe.
- Factoids
  - **The object**
    - The Dutch India Company opened up trade routes with the Far East and with that came Asian products to buy so the merchant class could show off their new wealth. Note that every person in this work is doing something rather mundane, as this is a scene of daily life (known as a genre scene). **Pieter de Hooch is known for these genre scenes of domestic Dutch life.** His work was admired for his “command of perspective and responsiveness to light and atmosphere.” (Sutton)
    - The orange or red robe, worn by the man, is not a color often found in Japan and is probably an under robe. This under robe would be worn with a much more elaborate outer kimono in Japan. “The under robe is called a Nagajuban, a kimono-shaped robe worn by both men and women beneath the main outer garment....While the most formal type of nagajuban are white, they are



often as beautifully ornate and patterned as the outer kimono. Since men's kimono are usually fairly subdued in pattern and color, the nagajuban allows for discreetly wearing very striking designs and colors.” (Wikipedia)

- The two women in the scene are not servants, but members of the family. Look closer to see that they are wearing pearls and are probably the wife and the elderly mother or mother-in-law, showing off their wealth but also involved in housework. They are being offered **white asparagus, which was a delicacy.**
- The open footstools were precautions against the damp Dutch floors.
- Artists during this time also painted both inside and outside in one painting, so we can see a little of the landscape outside the home. They could paint religious and secular subjects; they no longer needed to rely on the church for all their commissions. They painted everyday life and subjects doing everyday things. They experimented with more intense light and scale and balance, sharp diagonals and extreme foreshortening, identifiable sources of light, use of asymmetrical works and natural colors. The composition is such that it leads the eye throughout the painting, with a believable way to support weight of the figures.
- **There is a lot of imagery and symbolism. Valuable items in the home: birdcage, mirror, hanging picture, wardrobe, 2 porcelain bowls, and the globe.** The oldest extant globe is from 1492.
- Iconographically, this is about the workings of a household. This piece is about prosperity. A bit of narrative in a genre painting.
- The cloth over the bottom of the cupboard is probably just to protect it. It would not be an altar (as the secret Catholics sometimes had upstairs). These are valuable pieces and the cloth would protect it from the damp. It does not look like an altar. Alison has seen many Catholic altars in homes.
- The man descending the staircase probably is coming from his office upstairs.
- The fact that he's in a Japanese morning coat suggests he's a man of leisure. Shoguns gave these coats as gifts. The man can afford asparagus and can afford not to have to work. He may have been studying, since the globe indicates this is a household interested in scientific pursuits. His red taffeta hat is to keep his head warm. These houses were incredibly cold.
- The architecture of the house doesn't quite work. The rising stairs are curving.
- The woman in the middle (with Baroque pearls) of the room is the wife. She has ribbons streaming from her hairnet. The bodice of her dress is silk.
- Floors show in black-and-white marble would actually have been only in public buildings and churches. Even for wealthy burghers, marble would have been too costly. The painter flatters the home. But they would have had tile floors. Those would have been really cold.
- The woman at the back sits not only on an elevated platform, but she has a foot warmers. This woman is either the aunt or the mother-in-law. She also has flouncy sleeves and a decorative headscarf.
- The peasant is identified by the straw hat.
- The question of all the empty containers – the basket, the birdcage and the woman's hand - are probably not significant. The woman's hand gestures toward her husband, probably asking can they (afford to) get the costly asparagus being peddled? We can't really tell if it is pricey green asparagus. Or ridiculously more pricey white asparagus. Neither would have been grown in Holland.
- In the Dutch Republic, genre paintings were generally made for private wealthy patrons and depicted scenes of contemporary daily life. These were often filled with symbolic references, such as a clean house indicating a virtuous housewife and mother. The dog may be a symbol of fidelity.
- **Pieter de Hooch (Rotterdam 1629 – 1684 Amsterdam)**
- **Pieter de Hooch specialized in domestic interior and courtyard scenes that may be compared to the work of Johannes Vermeer, De Hooch's contemporary** in Delft, where he lived during the 1650s. The occupations of De Hooch's father, Hendrick Hendricksz, a bricklayer, and his mother, Annetje Pieters, a midwife, suggest a working-class upbringing. Arnold

Houbraken's compendium of biographies relates that De Hooch was apprenticed to the landscape painter Nicholas Berchem in Haarlem, whose Italianate scenes evidently had little influence on De Hooch's development. By 1653, De Hooch was recorded in Delft, working both as a painter and as a servant to a successful linen merchant and art collector, Justus de la Grange, to make ends meet. Inventory records show that La Grange had eleven of De Hooch's works in his collection. In 1654 De Hooch married Jannetje van der Burch, with whom he had seven children. The artist's fortunes improved by the end of that decade, as he refined his style and subjects, mainly toward **exploring the effects of light and space in an ordered rectilinear interior or enclosure**. He was later associated with other Delft artists working in the second half of the seventeenth century, including Emanuel de Witte, Nicolaes Maes, Carel Fabritius, and Johannes Vermeer, who were united by a focus on spatial effects.

- De Hooch's placid domestic scenes of middle-class households are a stark contrast to the bawdiness and disarray of Jan Steen's interiors. Rather, **they seem to exemplify the world of the virtuous, modest wife and homemaker whose life did not, perhaps, extend much beyond her interior courtyard.**
- **The proper role of men and women in the family was expounded upon in Jacob Cats' 1625 influential book Houwelick (Marriage), which detailed the various duties of women throughout the stages of life. The images created by De Hooch and others reaffirmed those values.**
- In the early 1660s, when he settled his family in Amsterdam and depicted a wealthier, more refined milieu, De Hooch's style moved closer to the smooth finesse of Leiden fijnschilderen (fine painters) such as Dou. By the late 1660s, however, his output became uneven and his palette grew darker. Details of his final years are not abundant, but it is known that he died in the Amsterdam Dolhuis (insane asylum) in 1684.
- **The leading motive in the best De Hooch painting is a houseman's proper pride in a fine house, a very intimate feeling.**
- **Socio-economy**
  - Social structure
    - Extensive trade helped the Dutch create **the most urbanized society in Europe, with an unprecedented 60 percent of the population living in cities**. While economic power in most countries was closely linked to landownership, in the Netherlands cities drove the economic engine, providing a nexus where **traders, bankers, investors, and shippers came together**. A landed aristocracy remained, but it was small in number, consisting of only a dozen or so families at the start of the seventeenth century. Their influence and holdings were concentrated in the inland provinces of the east, which also had the largest rural populations, chiefly independent farmers who owned their land.
    - In the Netherlands in the 17th century, **social status was largely determined by income**. The landed nobility had relatively little importance, since they mostly lived in the more underdeveloped inland provinces, and it was the urban merchant class that dominated Dutch society. The clergy did not have much worldly influence either: the Roman Catholic Church had been more or less suppressed since the onset of the Eighty Years' War with Spain. The new Protestant movement was divided, although exercising social control in many areas to an even greater extent than under the Catholic Church.
    - **The affluent middle class consisted of Protestant ministers, lawyers, physicians, small merchants, industrialists and clerks of large state institutions. Lower status was attributed to farmers, craft and tradesmen, shopkeepers, and government bureaucrats.** Below that stood skilled laborers, maids, servants, sailors, and other persons employed in the service industry. At the bottom of the pyramid were "paupers": impoverished peasants, many of whom tried their luck in a city as a beggar or day laborer.
    - Workers and laborers were generally paid better than in most of Europe, and enjoyed relatively high living standards, although they also paid higher than normal taxes. Farmers prospered from mainly cash crops needed to support the urban and seafaring population.
  - The home

- According to Rybczynski, "It was the opinion of more than one contemporary visitor that the **Dutch prized three things above all else: first their children, second their homes, and third their gardens.**" The Netherlands was highly urbanized, in comparison with Europe and England, and was the first country to build up a substantial middle class. Dutch families became the first to begin to withdraw their nuclear families from the public thoroughfare of the medieval home. At the same time, the place of work began to be separated from the home, with the man dominating the workplace and the woman the home. Also at this point, children stayed at home for a far longer period than they did in the Middle Ages. This new distribution of people and place was key, according to Rybczynski, in creating a new sense of home that was dominated more by the woman than the man and that centered around the rearing of children within the privatized setting of the nuclear family.
- **The central role of women in the 17th-century Dutch household revolved around the home and domestic tasks.** In Dutch culture, **the home was regarded as a safe-haven from the lack of Christian virtue and immorality of the outside world.** Additionally, the home represented a microcosm of the Dutch Republic, in that the smooth running of an ideal household reflected the relative stability and prosperity of the government. The home was an integral part of public life in Dutch society. Public passersby could clearly view the entrance halls of Dutch homes decorated to show off a particular family's wealth and social standing. The home was also a place for neighbors, friends, and extended family to interact, further cementing its importance in the social lives of 17th-century Dutch burghers. The physical space of the Dutch home was constructed along gender lines. In the front of the house, the men had control over a small space where they could do their work or conduct business, known as the voorhuis, while women controlled most every other space in the house, such as the kitchens and private family rooms.
- **Manuals written by men instructing women and wives in various aspects of domestic duties proliferated, the most popular being Jacob Cat's Houwelyck.** As evidenced by numerous 17th-century Dutch genre paintings, the most important domestic tasks performed by women included supervising maids, cooking, cleaning, needlework, and spinning. [
- **The Dutch also kept their homes extremely clean, and to the shock of foreign visitors, it was often necessary for visitors to take off their shoes upon entering the private quarters of a Dutch home.** On the cleanliness of the Dutch homes, he writes the following: **"As every homemaker knows, the less furniture there is, the easier it is to keep a room clean, and this too may have had something to do with the relative sparseness of the Dutch interior, for these houses were spotlessly, immaculately, unbelievably clean. The well-scrubbed Dutch stoop is famous and has come to serve as an example of public exhibitionism and bourgeois pretentiousness.... but it was no pretense; the interiors of the Dutch houses were equally scrubbed and scoured. Sand was scattered on the floor, recalling the medieval practice of covering floors in rushes. Pots were shined, woodwork varnished, brickwork tarred."**
- A considerable proportion of inhabitants of Dutch towns had more than sufficient income to provide for their fundamental needs. Many chose to spend their surplus on furnishing for their homes, including pictures. This led to a great demand for paintings at low prices. Since these paintings were to be hung in rooms of ordinary Dutch houses, most of them were small.
- Art for wall decoration was so popular that the Dutch Republic supported scores of artists who could hardly paint fast enough to meet the demand. Cheaper etchings also were popular. When the Dutch weren't collecting paintings of hearth and home, they were buying splendid repousse and open work silver in the form of dishes, table silver, wedding cups, jewelry boxes, candlesticks, cruets, and toilette sets such as the silver-gilt one comprised of 12 pieces including mirror, basin, ewer, comb box, and even a porringer so the lady of the house could have breakfast while making up for the day.
- The population of the Dutch Republic during the 17th century was roughly 2 million people. Estimates of works of art produced during that time range from five and ten

**million. (Very few of these, perhaps less than 1%, have survived.) Works of art, ranging from simple prints and copies to originals, hung in almost all Dutch homes.**

- In their travel diaries, many foreigners, among them, Englishmen John Evelyn and Peter Mundy and the Frenchman Samuel Sorbière, commented on the amazing abundance of paintings in the Netherlands. Mundy, visiting Amsterdam in 1640, wrote:
  - **As for the Art off Painting and affection off the people to Pictures, I thincke none other goe beeyond them, ... All in generall striving to adorne their houses ... with costly peeces, Butchers and bakers ... yea many tymes Blacksmiths, Coblers, etts. [etc], will have some picture or other by their Forge and in their stalle. Such is the generall Notion, enclination and delight that these Countrie Native[s] have to Paintings.**
  - Evelyn wrote, "**pictures are very common here [in the Netherlands], there being scarce an ordinary tradesman whose house is not decorated with them.**" The figures given to us by historical documents confirm the travelers' amazement. In the middle of the seventeenth century some Dutch homes had thirty to fifty paintings per room, rooms which, it should be noted, were not all that spacious.
  - An English observer commented that in the Republic even humble abodes brimmed with pictures, but laborers and small peasants surely could not afford more than a few mediocre prints, if any at all.
  - Solid burghers collected avidly. They hung pictures throughout their homes, the largest and probably finest in an upstairs living room but others in bedrooms, halls, and even kitchens.
  - As burghers amassed more wealth, particularly after the peace of 1648, they built increasingly large homes, which could accommodate larger paintings and more of them. The increase in production of large canvases after mid-century can in part be explained by this development.
- Horticulture
  - Vegetables had always played an important part in the Dutch diet. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rural and urban sectors were each responsible for growing their own vegetables. Farmers consumed what they grew on their private gardens and orchards while those in the cities cultivated their own vegetables within the city walls. However, as the urban population increased, urban gardens and orchards were cleared for building new homes and storefronts. In Holland, horticulture arose as a type of farming clustered around the vicinity of cities. Professional market gardens were established.
  - Horticulture farmers were concerned about orienting their crops to the market than for self-sustenance. **From the beginning to the end of the seventeenth century, Leiden and Delft horticulture farmers changed from growing "coarse" vegetables like cabbages, carrots, turnips, and onions to "fine" vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, and cauliflower. This change reflected the increased wealth of city burghers, who could now afford the more expensive vegetables.**
  - **Imported items like citrus fruit, pomegranates, figs, and olives were even more expensive.**
  - Asparagus
    - Asparagus is believed to be seen in an Egyptian freeze dating back to 3000 BC and is said to have been known in Syria and Spain.
    - The ancient Greeks ate wild asparagus for its tender shoots but it was the Romans who first started to cultivate asparagus more than 2000 years ago. Julius Caesar is alleged to have eaten asparagus with melted butter,
    - Just as we do, these early adopters enjoyed eating asparagus in season but they also dried it for use in the winter. The Romans are said to have frozen asparagus in the Alps for the feast of Epicurious (roughly in January / February) transporting it there by fast chariots and runners whilst the Emperor Augustus is said to have built a fleet of ships to transport Asparagus around the Roman Empire.
    - As well as growing asparagus for its culinary delights, the Greeks and Romans considered it to have medicinal qualities.
    - After the demise of the Roman Empire little is heard of regarding the history of asparagus for a while; evidence suggests that asparagus was being grown in French monasteries in 1459 but it is unheard of in England or Germany until the mid 1500's.

- In the 16th Century asparagus starts to appear in the history books again. It has reached France and England with Louis XIV of France allegedly having special greenhouses built to grow his asparagus.
- Genre paintings
  - “Genre” is French, meaning type or variety. In English it has been adopted to: 1) encompass all the various kinds of painting —landscape, portraiture, and so on are different “genres”; and 2) describe subjects from everyday life —tavern scenes or domestic interiors are “genre pictures.”
  - As the statistics from Haarlem show, **no single type of painting gained more in popularity between 1600 and 1650 than scenes of everyday life—their audience more than doubled.** Pioneered in Haarlem and Amsterdam, genre, like still life and landscape, had emerged only in the sixteenth century.
  - **Today we group diverse subjects under the single rubric “genre,” but in the seventeenth century different settings would have been denoted by specific names—merry companies, smoking pictures, carnivals, kermesses (harvest festivals), and so on. Some serious, some comic, they depict in great detail the range of life and society in the seventeenth-century Netherlands,** from peasants in a tavern brawl to the quiet domestic order of a well-kept home. The pictures impart a broad sense of what living in the seventeenth-century Netherlands looked and felt like, capturing the texture and rhythms of life in a particular place and time.
  - Genre also provides a window on the way people living in the Dutch Republic understood—and valued—their society, surroundings, and moral responsibilities. Especially in the early part of the century, genre pictures tended to have clear allegorical content. The vanities of worldly pleasures, the dangers of vice, the perils of drink and smoke, the laxness of an old woman who nods off while reading her Bible—all these helped promote a Dutch image of rectitude. **Genre painting both reflected and helped define ideals about the family, love, courtship, duty, and other aspects of life.**
  - Many genre paintings drew on familiar sayings and such illustrated books as Jacob Cats’ Houwelick (On Marriage), which was first published in 1625 and sold, according to contemporary estimates, some 50,000 copies. It gave advice on the proper comportment of women from girlhood to widowhood and death. Emblem books were another popular form of “wisdom literature” that advised on the proper conduct of all aspects of life, from love and child-rearing to economic, social, and religious responsibility. These books encapsulated a concept with an illustration and pithy slogan, amplified by an accompanying poem.
  - By midcentury, most genre pictures had become less obviously didactic. Spotless home interiors with women busy at their tasks or tending happy, obedient children conveyed in a more general way the well-being of the republic and the quiet virtues of female lives. These domestic pictures, in which few men appear, reflect a civic order that was shaped in part by a new differentiation between the private and public spheres. Women presented in outdoor settings were often of questionable morals and depicted in contexts of sexual innuendo. By contrast, male virtues celebrated in genre painting are usually active and public.
  - **Genre paintings increased steadily from 4% in the beginning of the century to 12% at the end.** Second to landscapes, genre paintings were the most frequently mentioned in the inventories by the end of the 17th century.
- Closure
  - With this painting we have discovered the social status was determined by income, and the newly moneyed middle class of the Dutch Republic took advantage of that. They owned homes in the cities and richly decorated them with paintings, a highly acceptable way to show status in a Calvinist society.

## Woman giving Money to a Servant-Girl (1670)

Pieter de Hooch

Los Angeles County Museum of Art





Object 3A: **Merry and Rowdy Peasants at an Inn**, 1653, Philips Wouwermans, Oil on canvas, 81.107, G311



- Introduction
  - We've already explored one type of genre painting for which the Dutch are so well known: the domestic interior of the Asparagus Vendor. Let's turn next to one I consider just plain fun: the tavern scene, or in this case, an inn scene (although in general, these buildings served both functions).
- Engagement
  - Let's look at this from two distances. From afar, what captures your attention?
  - Now those who are close, start identifying details.
  - Art historians like to attach moral messages to genre paintings .... although many would say the artist may not have intended that message. What moral message would you assign to this painting?
  - Along with landscape paintings, genre paintings were very popular with their middle class buyers. What makes this painting interesting to you?
- Label
  - It seems harmless, even humorous, by today's standards of social life. But this painting was meant to moralize about the dangers of drinking too much. Wouwermans infused his peasants with an individuality and naturalness of gesture that leaves no doubt about their drunken behavior: some are skinny-dipping, a few are being helped home, and one peasant is about to relieve himself on a fence post.
- Learning objective
  - The popularity of genre paintings with the middle class.
- Factoids
  - The object
    - **Country inns, offering basic amenities and refreshments, such as beer, cheese, and bread, were used by travelers and locals alike as stopping places and taverns, as well as social centers and gaming halls.**
    - Oddball landscape.
    - He's actually a specialist in horse paintings for aristocrats.
    - Hybrid landscape with genre of everyday life.
    - See topography – grandeur of wide open spaces. Foreign, yet has Dutch peasants in it.
    - Groping couple on the stairs. Card-playing. Wild dancing. Coach. Inn for travelers and prostitutes. Drinking. The guy is far gone and is being helped by his wife. This wife is helping the toddler defecate. Another guy is pissing into the wind. "Pissing" is a Dutch word. And there have been people who write about the delights of pissing into the water.

- The label is all moralizing. (Kettering dislikes the definitiveness of MIA labels on Dutch 17th c art.) Because they set the case. And the painters actually left lots of ambiguity. These labels allow only one interpretation.
- Sure, there's nasty stuff going on. But the two kids are having a wonderful time with the hobby horse. In the tradition of Peter Bruegel – yes, there is some moralizing. But there's also LUST, two very fat people who are kissing. Everybody is having a great time.
- Comic element –
- This is absolutely a seasonable painting. Swimmers – if only can get beyond the defecating, the pissing, the drunkenness – you see the enjoyment of the seasons.
- Urinating. Quote by Saftleven: “Spring loosens the earth, frees ships from their slumber and entices young men into the water, where they urinate to their heart's content.”
- Philips Wouwermans (1619 (baptized) – 1668) (pronounced WOO-ver-man)
  - Philips Wouwerman (also Wouwermans) was a Dutch painter of hunting, landscape and battle scenes.
  - Life and work
    - **Philips Wouwerman was one of the most versatile and prolific artists of the Dutch Golden Age.** Embedded in the artistic environment and tradition of his home town of Haarlem, Wouwerman made an important and highly influential contribution to the canon of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. His pictures were in demand during his lifetime, and even more sought after in the 18th century. Throughout Europe, formerly princely art collections like in Dresden and St. Petersburg still bear witness to this widespread admiration of Wouwerman's art.
    - Born in Haarlem in 1619, **the son of a now altogether obscure painter** named Pouwels Joostsz. Wouwerman, little is known about the artistic schooling of Wouwerman. According to Cornelis de Bie, he studied with Frans Hals (1581/85–1666), but the particular style of Hals didn't leave a footmark on his oeuvre. Apart from a short stay in Hamburg at the end of the 1630s, Wouwerman seemed to have **lived in Haarlem during his whole artistic career and died as a prosperous member of the community at the age of 48.** He joined the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1640 and here took on several official posts in the years to come. Wouwerman also worked as an estate agent in his home town, as many documents in Haarlem archives mentioned the artist in this context.
    - **Wouwerman started his artistic career with simple depictions of everyday life.** His paintings of the mid-1640s often feature a diagonal slope of land, a tree which functions as a repoussoir, and figures accompanied by horses. Over the next thirty years he developed an individual style, treating a wide range of subjects from genre and landscape to military and religious scenes (equestrian scenes, hunting and hawking parties, landscapes with travellers, cavalry battles and military encampments, peasants festivities etc.). He is noted for his skill in the depiction of horses of all breeds seen in motion. The art historian Frederik J. Duparc calls Wouwerman "undoubtedly the most accomplished and successful 17th-century Dutch painter of horses". The masterpieces from his best period (around 1650–1660) are of indisputably high quality, beautifully combining imaginary southern landscapes and a typically Dutch atmosphere. **Wouwerman's paintings are characterized by subdued colors, a cool atmosphere and a wealth of witty, anecdotal details.** He died in Haarlem.
  - Output
    - **About 800 pictures were listed in John Smith's Catalogue raisonné (1829/1842) as the work of Philip Wouwerman.** In Hofstede de Groot's enlarged Catalogue (1908) the number exceeds to 1200. In Birgit Schumacher's recently published Catalogue raisonné (2006), only about 570 pictures were listed as authentic works, as many of the pictures mentioned by Hofstede de Groot were actually painted by countless followers and imitators all over Europe. Jan and Pieter Wouwerman, the younger brothers of Philips, were often regarded as close followers whose pictures seemed to have been frequently attributed to Philips.
- Genre



- **Genre paintings show scenes that prominently feature figures to whom no specific identity can be attached – they are not portraits or intended as historical figures.**
  - The tradition of reproducing the life of the people reaches back to medieval times and it was taken up by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569, Flemish) who displayed his knowledge of human nature in humorous scenes from the lives of peasants.
  - **Together with landscape painting, the development and enormous popularity of genre painting is the most distinctive feature of Dutch painting in this period, although in this case they were also very popular in Flemish painting.** Many are single figures, like the Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*; others may show large groups at some social occasion, or crowds.
  - There were a large number of **sub-types within the genre: single figures, peasant families, tavern scenes, "merry company" parties, women at work about the house, scenes of village or town festivities (though these were still more common in Flemish painting), market scenes, barracks scenes, scenes with horses or farm animals, in snow, by moonlight, and many more.** In fact most of these had specific terms in Dutch, but there was no overall Dutch term equivalent to "genre painting" – until the late 18th century the English often called them "drolleries". Some artists worked mostly within one of these sub-types, especially after about 1625.
  - There was no overall Dutch term equivalent to "genre painting"; until the late 18th century the English often called them "drolleries".
  - **Over the course of the century, genre paintings tended to reduce in size.**
  - Men, women, and children alike participate in the *melée*, which the jug being wielded by one of the rabble-rousers identifies as a drunken brawl. Some genre pictures may appear to our eye as rather cruel, relying on stereotypes in which physical coarseness—large features, stumpy limbs, or bad posture—is correlated with coarse behavior and character. The assumption was that peasants were naturally prone to drunkenness, laziness, and other vices. Urban viewers of these images would have considered them comic, but also illustrative of the kind of reprehensible conduct caused by immoderate behavior, which they, naturally, avoided.
  - Though genre paintings provide many insights into the daily life of 17th-century citizens of all classes, their accuracy cannot always be taken for granted. **Many which seemed only to depict everyday scenes actually illustrated Dutch proverbs and sayings or conveyed a moralistic message – the meaning of which may now need to be deciphered by art historians,** though some are clear enough. Many artists, and no doubt purchasers, certainly tried to have things both ways, enjoying the depiction of disorderly households or brothel scenes, while providing a moral interpretation – the works of Jan Steen, whose other profession was as an innkeeper, are an example. The balance between these elements is still debated by art historians today.
- Closure
    - With this painting we see another example of genre painting so popular with the middle class.

Object 4: **River Landscape with a Ferry**, 1656, Salomon van Ruysdael, Oil on canvas, 45.9, G311



- Introduction
  - So the Dutch loved paintings for their homes, and we've already seen that they had portraits and a new type of painting they innovated, genre or everyday life paintings. But what was the most popular type of painting found in middle class homes? Let's take a look.
- Engagement
  - What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - Rivers and waterways were crucial to Dutch economy and recreation. How has van Ruysdael depicted both of these uses?
  - Imagine that you were a 17th century Dutch middle class city dweller. Would you want to own and display this painting in your home? Why/why not?
- Label
  - Nothing could be more Dutch than boats on a wide river under a cloudy sky: a ferry approaching shore, a rowboat out for a joy ride, a sailboat heading to the horizon.
  - **Water was crucial to Holland's flourishing economy, with rivers and canals serving as its main commercial arteries.**
  - To the Dutch, such images of serene rivers and boats were emotionally resonant, underscoring the peacefulness and affluence of their newly independent country.
- Learning objectives
  - The most popular type of painting found in middle class homes was landscapes.
  - The overarching innovative concept of seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting is that it began to focus on the natural local environment and was painted with a seemingly realistic likeness.
- Factoids
  - **The object**
    - River scene after the rain. Always showed sun out at noon.
    - Knew just what he was doing. Wonderful example of his work
    - Interested in changing light on the river. In this one – clouds sweep into the distance.
    - Has order like the Claesz still life with the vertical.
    - Scene is one of prosperity of the country – now independent. Very conventional – loaded with cultural meaning. People could read it – identify all the kinds of boats in it
    - There are SO many kinds of boats on the river. Real reflection of their lives/time. People of this time would have been able to name each of these
    - Shows the wealthy disparity – central to this. Carriage. Some people have money for carriages. There are two horses. One has a foal that is nursing.
    - There's a barge – a pleasure boat. There's a boat filled with boozy lower class people. The same class of people as the cattlemen. Great details in the cattle. One cow is scratching an itch. Another cow is drinking water.

- Whole composition is muted. Great genre scene
- **Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/1603 - 1670)** (pronounced rahyz-dahl)
  - **Salomon van Ruysdael was one of the main pioneers, with Jan van Goyen, of naturalistic landscape in the earlier 17th century in Holland.**
  - The Haarlem landscapist Salomon van Ruysdael, who was born in Naarden, was the youngest of four sons and one daughter born to Jacob Jansz de Gooyer, a Mennonite joiner from Blaricum. After his father's death in 1616, Salomon and two of his brothers, Isaack and Jacob, changed the family name to Van Ruysdael after the country estate 'Ruysdael' (or Ruisschendaal) near Blaricum. **Salomon, along with his brother Isaack and his nephew Jacob van Ruisdael** (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682), **established themselves as artists in Haarlem**, while Pieter, the only brother to keep the De Gooyer name, settled in Alkmaar as a cloth merchant. Jacob Jacobsz continued his father's cabinet-making business in Naarden. Salomon married Maycke Willemsdr Buyse sometime before 1627; the couple had four children, one of whom, Jacob Salomonsz (1629/1630–1681), also became a painter.
  - Although Salomon van Ruysdael's training is unknown, his early paintings were influenced by Esaias van de Velde I (Dutch, 1587 - 1630), who worked in Haarlem from 1609 to 1618. **Ruysdael joined the Saint Luke's Guild in 1623, and not long thereafter produced his earliest dated painting, from 1626.** As early as 1628 he was already praised for his abilities as a landscapist by the Haarlem chronicler Samuel Ampzing. In 1637 Hendrick Pietersz de Hont became his apprentice, and Cornelis Decker is mentioned as a pupil in 1646. Ruysdael may also have been responsible for the training of his son and his nephew. He remained active in the guild throughout his career, serving as a vinder in 1647, a deken the following year, and a vinder again in 1669. Later in his life, he became involved with civic affairs, serving as district master on the Kleine Houtstraat from 1659 to 1666.
  - Aside from being a painter, **Ruysdael was also involved with several other activities during his career.** He **dealt in blue dye** for Haarlem's bleacheries and was a member of the Guild of Cloth Merchants from 1658 to 1670. A document from 1657 also mentions him as being a **participant in a tanning mill** in Gorinchem. Furthermore, as Houbraken chronicles, Ruysdael even **invented a process for creating imitation marble.** Such varied activities, in addition to his career as an artist, **brought him considerable wealth**; he owned several houses in Haarlem throughout his lifetime.
  - Like his father, Ruysdael was a Mennonite, and in 1669 he was listed among the members of the United Mennonite Church of Haarlem when he was living on the Kleine Houtstraat. His faith prohibited him from bearing arms, and as a result he had to pay an annual fee to be excused from his civic guard duty.
  - Although Ruysdael lived and worked in Haarlem throughout his life, his paintings, which depict views of various cities, including Alkmaar, Arnhem, Dordrecht, Leiden, Nijmegen, Rhenen, and Utrecht, suggest that he made several trips throughout the Netherlands. Unlike certain other landscape painters of the period, his nephew among them, **Ruysdael generally painted actual landscapes of such places as Arnhem, Dordrecht, and Utrecht, sometimes combining motifs from different places in one picture.**
  - **Experts agree that Ruysdael's most powerful work was done after 1645. His command of the landscape elements—great trees anchoring one side of the composition, distant views that draw the eye, and a vast expanse of sky and clouds—seems more assured, and his use of color for effect more brilliant. From that point Ruysdael became increasingly interested in light effects and decorative elements in his compositions.** Critics have speculated that his change of style was in part due to the influence of several Dutch painters, such as Jan Both, who were returning to Holland from study in Italy.
  - Along with Pieter Molijn (Dutch, 1595 - 1661) and Jan van Goyen (Dutch, 1596 - 1656), **Ruysdael became one of the leading landscape painters of his generation, ushering in the remarkable "tonal" landscapes that are the hallmark of early Dutch realism.** He often depicted river views, in which light and atmosphere pervade the scene. **His paintings of the 1640s helped lay the foundation for the "classical" period of Dutch landscape painting that**

followed, led by a generation of artists that included his nephew **Jacob van Ruysdael**, **Meindert Hobbema (Dutch, 1638 - 1709)**, and **Aelbert Cuyp (Dutch, 1620 - 1691)**. Aside from his river views and landscapes, Ruysdael also painted seascapes and still lifes.

- He died on November 3, 1670, and was buried in Haarlem's Saint Bavo's Church.
- Rivers and the Dutch Republic economy
  - Inland and coastal fisheries were as important as the deep-sea herring fisheries. Only a small percentage of salted herring were directed at Dutch markets, and so other fisheries were required for local consumption. Located along rivers, the Zeeland Delta, and around the Zuider Zee, **freshwater fisheries were an extremely important component of the domestic economy**; the government of Friesland prohibited the export of freshwater fish, imposing heavy fines and forbidding the construction of ships that could transport fish out of the province. However, the trade-oriented prejudices of the Dutch Republic were evident in the language used to differentiate between the types of fisheries. Those who consumed or sold their catch locally were referred to as a lesser sort of folk (*de schamele gemeente*), transforming the economic hierarchy between domestic and international traders into a social distinction.
  - **Between 1607 and 1640, entrepreneurs and engineers drained vast lakes in the province of Holland, thus creating acres of new arable land.**
    - New villages sprung up in these low-lying "polders," protected only by dikes and pumps, driven by the readily available wind power of the flat countryside.
    - Entrepreneurs created an efficient system of transportation along rivers and canals, using horse-drawn boats.
    - Between 1609 and 1672, Amsterdam rebuilt itself on a plan of concentric canals, allowing the city to maximize valuable water frontage for warehouses and to create a novel sewer system controlled by sluices.
  - **The Dutch also dominated trade between European countries.** The Low Countries were favorably positioned at a crossing of east-west and north-south trade routes, and **connected to a large German hinterland through the Rhine river.**
- Landscape genre
  - Claude Lorraine (1600-1682, French, working mostly in Italy) is one of the earliest important artists to concentrate on landscape painting. For his finished pictures he selected only such motifs he considered worthy of a place in a dreamlike vision of the past. Claude was the first to open people's eyes to the sublime beauty of nature. Others credited with developing the landscape genre are Rubens, Van Dyck, Poussin, and Salvator Rosa. As a subject in its own right—something more than a backdrop for figures—landscape was still relatively new, a creation, largely, of the southern Netherlands in the sixteenth century. But those panoramic bird's-eye views (called "world landscapes") by artists such as Joachim Patinir (1480 – 1524) from Antwerp or Pieter Breugel the Elder, who died in Brussels in 1569, were quite different. They are crowded with ordinary detail as well as fantastic and sacral elements. **Dutch painters began to produce a new view, one of the here and now—the world as experienced by real people.**
  - The flat, low-lying Netherlands does not boast the world's most dramatic scenery, yet **probably no place on earth was so often painted.** Paradoxically, the most urbanized nation of the seventeenth century also invented the naturalistic landscape.
  - **The most popular type of painting found in middle class homes was landscapes.** In fact, **the word "landscape" comes from the Dutch landschap. During the 17th century the percentage of landscape paintings in collections rose from 25 to 40%, displacing history paintings as the most popular type of painting.**
  - Landscape painting exploded during the Dutch Golden Age, bringing with it an emphasis upon the **unique characteristics of Dutch landscape features, villages, and rural life** connected with a rising esteem for Dutch values. Many of these scenes were based on central "heroic" elements indigenous to the area such as a tree, windmill, or cloud-filled sky.
  - **Landscape paintings appealed to the middle class, providing a source of refreshment and pleasure for the city dweller and reminding them of the pride they felt for their nation.**

- **The average price was modest, perhaps the equivalent of two weeks' pay for a skilled craftsman.**
- **The overarching innovative concept of seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting is that it began to focus on the natural local environment and was painted with a seemingly realistic likeness.**
- Beginning in Haarlem, artists shifted away from depicting historical, allegorical and biblical subjects containing narrative and instead **represented the Dutch natural surroundings and everyday life. Realism replaced idealism.** The landscape itself became the prominent subject and was no longer just a background accessory as it was, for example, in Jan van Eyck's Ghent altarpiece. Kiers and Tissink attribute **this change in prominence to greater national pride and appreciation for the beauty of nature**, which they considered God's creation (Kiers and Tissink, p.37).
- **Figures, called staffage, became smaller and fewer in number and were used merely for scale or to animate the scene. With the reduction in size, most landscape artists painted their own figures while many earlier artists relied on others more capable to add these figures.**
- **Strong horizontal bands of color were used to create the feeling of receding space; brown in the foreground, green in the middle, and a blue in the background.** The horizon itself was often set high and there were strong areas of dark and light to add depth. Dark trees might often frame the landscape. Some early landscapes had more than one vantage point. One that showed forms in the foreground from in front of the picture plane on the ground and the other showing forms further back in space by employing a bird's eye view from up above. Esias van de Velde "effected a radical shift, reflecting the unspoiled remaining margins of the actual Dutch landscape" (Israel, p. 558).
- In addition, there were **innovations in color palette and compositional devices. During the 1620's, Dutch landscapists started using a more subdued, darker, and limited palette.** Using lots of values of just a couple hues of brown, gray, ochre, or blue, their landscapes became more monochrome and tonal. "Jan van Goyen, together with Solomon van Ruysdael would further develop this new manner of painting...These two artists thus became the so-called masters of the **tonal landscape**". Israel explains this phenomenon of tonal paintings on the difficulty and expense of getting American and Mediterranean dyes tuffs starting in the early 1620's. Interestingly, it also occurred in other genres (Israel, p. 559). There were innovative compositional devices that gave the Dutch landscapes a modern look.
- In trying to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, the artist then and now uses such devices. For example, **a strong dark form like a large tree in the foreground against a lighter background was used to create depth. Such a feature is known as a repousoir.** Aert van der Neer used this in many of his works in order to silhouette a form in the foreground against his skies depicting special effects of light (Duparc, p. 216).
- **A strong diagonal form representing a dune or bush or meadow was similarly used. Using a broken line for a canal, pathway, or road to lead the viewer into the painting and further in toward the horizon to achieve a greater sense of depth is another.**
- Innovations in painting technique were also used such as using an under painting and allowing it to show through, or applying paint in a more loose and rough manner in which the brushstrokes remain visible. In Rembrandt's Stone Bridge, "The storm cloud at the upper right is composed of course brushstrokes, using little paint, so that the underpainting shows through in places.... This small Dutch landscape painting with its dramatic chiaroscuro is unique in Rembrandt's oeuvre" (Kiers and Tissink p. 130). Rembrandt and others even used the opposite end of the paintbrush to 'draw' into the wet paint.
- **Close attention to detail and the effect of light on forms in nature became a preoccupation. The horizon was dropped below the middle of the composition, ultimately to the bottom third of the board or canvas, allowing much more room and emphasis on the sky and atmospheric effects due to changeable weather conditions.** Dutch artist and theorist, Karel van Mander, recommended such effects in The Book on Picturing of 1604 (Sturgis, p.182). **In addition, a single, often low vantage point began to give their landscapes a more realistic perspective, which along with all the other innovations helped to unify the composition.**

- Around 1650, “...sharper contrasts between light and dark, more vibrant colors and more robust forms began to appear in the compositions of young landscape painters, such as Aelbert Cuyp and Jacob van Ruisdael. These new masters, whose works determined the face of Dutch landscape painting, created a manner of painting that was both magnificent and monumental” (Kiers and Tissink p. 221).
  - **While the Dutch landscape artists focused on realism, they made preliminary pencil or oil sketches from direct observation in ‘plein air’ then used them as resources in the studio where they completed their paintings. They were not adverse to rearranging, replacing, adding or omitting features of their views for aesthetic purposes. Sometimes they made composites by combining two works into one.**
  - **Landscapes were the easiest uncommissioned works to sell.**
  - **The Dutch were the first in the history of art to discover the beauty of the sky.** They simply represented a piece of the world as it appeared to them, and discovered that it could make just as satisfying a picture as any illustrations of a heroic tale or a comic theme.
- Artists and art market
    - Like Salomon van Ruysdael whose father was a joiner (carpenter), **most Dutch painters came from the middle class.** Many were sons of painters, art dealers, engravers, glass-makers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, and craftsmen. About a third of the painters had wealthier fathers who were landlords, brewers, and merchants.
    - **Most works were painted for the open market,** another key change in the Dutch art world. **Prior to this time and throughout the rest of Europe, paintings were done on a commission basis.**
    - **To keep the paintings affordable and minimize the artist’s risks in the open market, they innovated in two ways: 1) specializing in a specific type of painting such as winter scenes, moonlight scenes, seascapes, country views, or cityscapes and 2) creating tonal paintings with fewer details that allowed them to paint faster and avoid long drying times.**
    - **In order to keep up with this increased demand for paintings, the Dutch artists increased production without sacrificing quality by specializing in a particular genre,** such as history painting, portraiture, genre, landscape, seascape, still life, or floral painting.
    - **By mid-century, landscape painting was the most widely produced and collected category of painting and, on average, one of the most affordable.**
    - While landscape encompassed numerous modes, from the pastoral to the allegorical, its least assuming theme was **its most innovative: the local land** (Westerman p. 104).
    - Monetary value coincided with a hierarchical order of these specialties as well as with the size of the paintings, with larger historical paintings receiving the highest amount and small floral paintings receiving the least. Alan Chong examines the inventories of Dutch landscape painting showing price fluctuations in the market and presents tables that demonstrate that “the prices and availability of landscape paintings made them the art form of the middle-class” (Sutton p. 104-120).
    - **By specializing, artists created similar paintings again and again and carried particular motifs over from one painting to another. This afforded them repeated experience, increased skill, and greater speed.** Even within each genre there were sub-specializations to further increase production and ensure high quality. This was particularly true of landscapes, which experienced tremendous innovation.
    - Since some Flemish artists of the 16th century specialized in painting landscapes but only as backgrounds, “the emigration of such specialists from Flanders to the North at the end of the 16th century must have been an important stimulus to the development of landscape painting as an independent genre in Holland” (Kiers and Tissink p. 37).
- Closure
    - Due to middle class demand landscape paintings became the most popular type of painting in the Dutch Republic, rising from 25 to 40% of the market and displacing history paintings as the most popular type of painting.



# Ghent Altarpiece, 15th Century

## Hubert van Eyck and Jan van Eyck

The Ghent Altarpiece is a very large and complex 15th-century polyptych altarpiece in St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium. It is attributed to the brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck, who were Early Flemish painters. It is considered a masterpiece of European art and one of the world's treasures. (Ghent pronounced G as in gas, ent as in went).



## **Pastoral Landscape, 1638** **Claude Gellée (called Le Lorrain)**

Claude Gellée, called Le Lorrain, was apprenticed to a pastry chef in his native France, but in 1628 he moved to Rome and studied painting. This work is the best example from his brilliant, pivotal years between 1635 and 1640. His compositions from that time express an awareness of light and its effects gained from his direct experience with nature. Claude was the supreme master of the ideal landscape and the founder of the modern landscape tradition. Previously, landscape as such wasn't considered a subject worthy of painting. Claude's influence was felt for hundreds of years by countless artists, including Claude Monet.





Object 5: **Still Life, 1643, Pieter Claesz**, Oil on panel, 45.10, G311



- Introduction
  - Still life paintings were another way to show status and to contemplate the spiritual side of life. The Dutch middle class were proud of their wealth, and paintings like the one we'll explore next reminded them and their visitors of the good things they could afford.
- Engagement
  - One of the reasons still life paintings were so popular in the Dutch Republic is that they showed status. Take a moment to identify the objects in this painting that show status.
  - In some ways, still life paintings replaced Christian art, especially for the Calvinists. In what ways does this painting remind viewers of the spiritual side of life?
- Label
  - **Claesz was one of the most important Dutch still-life painters of the 1600s**, depicting objects with an **extraordinary sense of naturalism**. Everything on the table, from the fluted glass and goblet to the lobster and crab, is indeed life-like. You can almost smell the lemons.
  - The Dutch proudly displayed such expensive status symbols in their homes, the exotic food and material possessions reminding them of the good things in life, even as the watch reminds them of their transience. The bread and wine, in a touch of Christian symbolism, echo the moralizing message of **vanitas, or vanity: all earthly things must pass**.
- Learning objective
  - Still life paintings emerged simultaneously in Italy, Spain, and northern Europe in the 16th century. While they didn't rank high with art theorists, they were very popular with the Dutch middle class. As a result they attracted some of the finest artists and commanded high prices.
- Factoids
  - **The object**
    - Master of niche painting. All his still life look like this
    - Elegant objects
    - Color of lemon, crab, lobster
    - Flute glass (measured off – Kaywin said in earlier lecture that was part of a Dutch drinking game) and drinking glass. You had to drink exactly between the measurement marks, or drink again until you drank just that much. It got harder as participants got drunker.
    - All set in luminous atmosphere – different than Mignon's forest floor
    - Laid table still life
    - Watch – in lots of still life
    - Lemon – Where are these grown? Must be imported. All in these still life have the curling rind.
    - Knife – protruding into picture plane – into our space.
    - Claesz – “artificial miracle that we can touch the elements of the picture.
    - Lobsters – were about as precious as they are today.
    - Order v. fragility. Things seem topsy-turvy.
    - Why have they left their meal?
    - Disorder of leftovers. Yet there is an orderliness to the composition.
    - Deliberate vertical – flute glass

- Ambiguity – rather like a museum: Hodge-podge in every gallery – things don't necessarily make sense. It's just what the museum has, so they stick all the pieces together in rooms. Same with still life painters. They painted what they had. Like the museum, they had a collecting mentality.
  - Element of the clock ticking away.
  - Virtuosity of painting. Tentacle of lobster – can see through. See faint reflection of red lobster in the pitcher.
  - Sometimes artists mirror themselves in pitchers and other shiny surfaces.
  - Order v. disorder.
  - White bread would only have been available to the wealthy.
  - The glass is called a roemer or a Berkemeyer (likely the later). This particularly large and elaborate beaker would have been filled with wine and passed around at festive occasions. Both decorative and functional, the prunts on the stem may have steadied a greasy-fingered drinker's grip on the glass at a time when forks were not commonly used.
- **Pieter Claesz 1596/1597 - 1660**
    - **Pieter Claesz, the most important still-life painter in Haarlem in the 1620s**, was born in Berchem in 1596 or 1597. He was apparently admitted to the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke in 1620, but by 1621 he must have been living in Haarlem, where his son, landscape painter Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), was born. Although it is unknown what date he joined the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, the 1634 guild register lists him as a master painter. After his first wife died, he married Trijntien Lourensdr on August 8th, 1635, with whom he had two daughters, his only children.
    - Claesz's teacher is unknown, but his earliest dated works evoke the meticulous laid table scenes of the Antwerp painters Clara Peeters (c. 1594–1657) and Osias Beert the Elder (Flemish, c. 1580 - 1624).
    - Avoiding the more common types of art, such as genre painting and portrait art, **Claesz became an early pioneer of table-top still lifes—quiet symbolic arrangements of dining objects together with foods like olives, herring, fresh fruits, crispy rolls and pastries—characterized by an extraordinary degree of naturalism and fine detail. Claesz stocked his tabletop images with a wide variety of food and drink, smoking implements, and musical instruments.**
    - **He painted with tangible detail and carefully observed light effects, and sought to enhance the illusion of reality by arranging objects on the table so that they appear to recede in space.** Between 1630 and 1640 Claesz adopted a more subdued, monochromatic palette, typically consisting of subtle tonal harmonies of grey, green and brown, occasionally with a sharp burst of yellow provided by a peeled lemon. After 1640 (our paintings was created in 1643), more dramatic colors and compositions return to his paintings, likely influenced by the sumptuous still lifes of Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606 - 1684) and Abraham van Beyeren (1620/21–1690). Claesz's later paintings occasionally feature vines and leaves painted by Roelof Koets (1592–1655).
    - **Claesz's innovative compositions and his distinctive ability to recombine the same set of objects into a multitude of original and compelling arrangements influenced artists in Haarlem and beyond.** When the Haarlem painter Willem Claesz Heda (Dutch, 1594 - 1680) began producing still lifes in 1628, he looked to Claesz for subjects as well as compositional and stylistic solutions. Samuel Ampzing praised both Claesz and Heda for their still lifes in his 1628 Beschrijvinge ende Lof der Stad Haerlem. Constantijn Huygens included Claesz on a 1647 list of painters skilled enough to contribute to the decorations at the Oranjezaal at the Huis ten Bosch, specifically passages depicting gold and silver objects, although it has never been confirmed that Claesz participated in this commission.
  - Still life paintings
    - Still life paintings of vegetables and fruit were popular among both burghers and farmers; **after landscapes, still life was the most prevalent category of paintings.**

- **Dutch still life painting was essentially a new small-scale form of Biblical art designed for domestic display, which typically conveyed a moral message about the transience of material objects and consumption. The latter was expressed through the use of symbolic objects (embodying time, impermanence or decay), like a watch, hour-glass, a wilted flower, a piece of fresh fruit, a skull, a guttering candle, and so on. In fact, the majority of all objects which appeared in this type of realist painting were carefully chosen for their symbolic references to the ephemeral quality of human life.**
- Still-life painting occasionally registers the pride that contemporaries took in global trade and colonial endeavor.
  - Still lifes gathered disparate objects from all reaches of Dutch trade, and brought them home, representing them in European terms of science and collecting, without specific concern about their origins.
  - **Still lifes often illustrate both cornucopia of plenty and vanities motifs, paradigmatic for the Dutch mentality of the 17th century, which reveled in prosperity yet was anxious about the moral consequences of wealth; a constellation of beliefs that celebrated Dutch enterprise but obsessively acknowledged its depend on God’s benevolence.**
  - These paintings rightly centralize the concerns of 17th-century burghers and aristocrats with the resource management of the Republic and of the domestic household, which writers considered a microcosm of the larger polity.
- **Still-life painting, as a subject worthy in its own right, seems to have appeared more or less simultaneously in Italy, northern Europe, and Spain in the sixteenth century.** Painters turned their focus on plants, animals, and man-made objects just as scientists and natural philosophers developed a new paradigm for learning about the world that emphasized investigation over abstract theory. **Exploration, by Spain and the Netherlands especially, increased interest in exotic specimens from around the globe and created a market for their accurate renderings. Still-life painting also spoke more universally about the bounty of God’s creation and the nature of art and life. “Simple” paintings of flowers and food could have complex appeal and various meanings for viewers.**
- Ars longa, vita brevis (Art is long, life is short)
  - Painted images prolonged the experience of nature. Finely painted flowers brought tremendous pleasure during a cold Dutch winter. Permanence was considered a great virtue of art—it outlasts nature. **Still life reminded viewers of the prosperity of their republic. It is probably not a coincidence that it emerged parallel with the world’s first consumer society.** The Dutch were proud of their wealth and the effort that produced it, yet abundance could also nudge the conscience to contemplation of more weighty matters. Paintings in which fruit rots, flowers wither, insects nibble at leaves, and expensively set tables lie asunder served as a **memento mori or “reminder of death,” intended to underscore life’s transience and the greater weight of moral considerations.**
  - Still life did not rank high with art theorists. Hoogstraten (see p. 125) called still-life painters “foot soldiers in the army of art.” Yet **Dutch still-life paintings were hugely popular. They attracted some of the finest artists and commanded high prices.** Many painters specialized in certain types of still life, including pictures of flowers or game, banquet and breakfast pieces that depict tables set with food, and vanitas still lifes, which reminded viewers of the emptiness of material pursuits.
- **Still-life subjects**
  - **Breakfast and banquet pictures**
  - **Game pictures**
    - Game pictures were especially sought by aristocratic patrons (or those with aristocratic pretensions) who alone had the land and means to practice the hunt.
  - **Vanitas**
    - Some Dutch painters referred explicitly to the transience of life by incorporating skulls, hourglasses, watches, and bubbles. All these reminders of death serve to underscore the “vanity” of life and the need to be morally prepared for final judgment.
    - Book of Ecclesiastes, Old Testament: Vanity of vanity; all is vanity.

- **Flowers and flower painting**
  - The Dutch prized flowers and flower paintings; by the early seventeenth century, both were a national passion. Flowers were appreciated for beauty and fragrance and not simply for their value as medicine, herbs, or dye-stuffs. Exotic new species from around the globe were avidly sought by botanists and gardeners. Paintings immortalized these treasures and made them available to study—and they gave sunny pleasure even in winter. Viewers could see—almost touch and smell—the blossoms.
- **To instruct or delight: symbolism in Dutch Republic art of the 17th century, or, is this more than a pretty picture?**
  - Art historians argue over the amount of symbolism in Dutch Republic art, especially still lifes like this.
  - The debate concerning the nature of seventeenth-century Dutch painting —especially genre painting —is still raging. In recent years countless investigations have focused on **the meaning and function of this art within its historical context**. Little agreement has been reached, however, regarding the goals pursued by Dutch painters and the perception of their works by contemporary audiences. In a recent summary Jan Bialostocki listed three possible answers:
    - In 1876 Eugène Fromentin asserted that the painter had **no other motivation than a purely artistic need to depict reality**;
    - A hundred years later iconologists, of whom E. de Jongh may be considered the most important, have suggested that **the intention of these artists was "tot lering en vermaak" (to instruct and delight)**;
    - Svetlana Alpers has offered another solution, suggesting that the aim of Dutch painters was to **increase the visual knowledge of reality**.
  - The **iconological method** of explaining seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting —which has been enthusiastically employed since the 1800s, particularly by Dutch art historians —**has been the most successful**. Its results have significantly enriched our knowledge of Dutch genre art. Generally speaking, this method, which has also been somewhat imprecisely typified as "emblematic interpretation," **attempts "to decipher layers of meaning and literary allusions hidden in paintings** and to relate the significance of genre painting to the classical concept of docere et delectare (**to teach and delight**)."  
As a result, a non-narrative art, which for the most part appears to be devoid of any relationship to textual references, has nevertheless been joined to texts. This has led to such far-reaching conclusions as the following: "The joyful, often coarse domestic and tavern scenes have been convincingly established as instructive lessons, warning against sin, recalling death, challenging the viewer to lead a God-fearing life."
  - These new insights have been translated into literature intended for a broad, nonspecialized public —educational brochures, exhibition wall texts, newspaper articles, and a recent survey of Dutch art. Such materials lead one to believe that a general consensus exists concerning seventeenth-century audiences' perception of this art. Furthermore, in contrast to what Josua Bruyn believed in 1981, guides leading tours in Dutch museums extensively, and almost exclusively inform visitors about the hidden meanings, disguised symbols, and moralizing messages contained in genre pieces, still lifes, and even landscapes. Viewers are told what a painting "really means." Its "message," disguised by the painting's realistic appearance, usually contains an easily formulated warning and an edifying lesson.
  - One must ask, however, whether a number of notions that have become familiar due to the success of iconological investigations (e.g., ideas regarding didactic function and the disguising of meaning) are fully justified and whether arguments in their favor are sufficiently valid.
  - **One of the well-known obstacles for the iconologist attempting to comprehend the aims and aspirations of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter, as well as the attitude of the artist's public, is the scarcity of contemporary literature shedding light on the matter.**
  - **It is difficult to find anything in texts on the art of painting from this period that would indicate that didacticism was an important aim. We cannot assume that the lack of writing on this subject resulted from the fact that it was considered self-evident.** When authors

mentions paintings, they say remarkably little about their subject matter and nothing about their content or literary aspects they are almost exclusively interested in outward appearance.

- **Commonplaces taken from emblem literature in particular have been projected onto painting, despite their entirely different nature, context, function, tradition, and pictorial themes.**
  - Emblem books, a combination of a title, poem, and an illustration, was invented by the Italian Renaissance poet Andrea Alciato in 1531, when his German publisher added woodcuts to his short, epigrammatic poems.
  - Emblem books were introduced to the Low Countries in the 1550s, but were mostly written in Latin, as almost all literature was at the time. In the 1570s and 1580s, an increasing number of poets called for the writing of the literature in the vernacular. In 1601, Daniel Heisius published the first emblem book with subscriptions in Dutch. The first decades of the 17th century formed the zenith of emblem literature in the Dutch Republic. Nowhere else was the genre to flourish as richly. In a characteristically Dutch type of emblem, the picture and text referred directly to daily life, resulting in highly recognizable and therefore extremely popular emblem books. These emblems were the perfect vehicle for moralistic lessons. Jacob Cats' book was perhaps the most important book of the Dutch Golden Age.
  - Based on these sources, one has to ask whether such didactic principles had an important place in the minds of the majority of Dutch painters of this time and whether their audiences considered moralizing an important function of the paintings. By no means do I wish to argue that didactic-moralizing intentions are never present in paintings but rather that it appears incorrect to use such notions as the basis for interpretation.
  - **Associations were given direction through selective choice of subject matter, motifs, and related conventions for the representation of daily life.** The subjects and motifs depicted in non-narrative paintings transmitted meaning to the viewer through adaptation to or deviation from pictorial conventions; through stereotypes recognizable to the public for whom they were intended; and through the visualization of simple, accessible metaphors. The viewer or buyer could make these connotations more specific by interpreting them in terms of his own intellectual, social, and religious background.
  - Furthermore, one gets the impression that the goal of iconography, namely bringing to the surface and "deciphering" significant elements no longer obvious to the modern observer, has been confused with the existence of disguised or hidden meanings. It also seems that the means used for this type of deciphering —specifically with regard to emblems — are equated with the painter's own sources, and this has frequently given rise to overly specific interpretations. In addition, interpretations involving such a use of emblematic and literary-theoretical sources have often projected an extremely unlikely intellectual load and erudition onto the painter, his paintings, and his public.
- Another example of a still life painting is **Still Life with Fruits, Foliage and Insects, c. 1669, Abraham Mignon**, Oil on canvas, 87.4, G311
  - Still lifes often carried symbolic meanings for their original Dutch viewers. Here, the crowded display of fruit and insects testifies to the bounty of nature. Abraham Mignon's virtuoso technique also reveals his desire to vie with the natural world and briefly halt time's passage by fixing these objects in paint. The sheer variety of natural organisms still fascinates. But the fruit has begun to rot, and the once-mighty oak tree shows signs of blight. The stone in the foreground has fallen from a once-perfect building, and the arch in the right background crumbles. Butterflies and caterpillars, traditional symbols of transience, also allude to the impermanence of earthly things.
  - Abraham Mignon
    - Born in Frankfurt, Mignon (1640-1679) was originally apprenticed at the age of nine to the artist Jacob Marrell, who took his pupil with him when he moved from Germany to the Netherlands in 1664. From 1669 both artists are recorded as members of Utrecht's St Luke's Guild. Here Mignon studied under the still-life specialist Jan Davidsz. de Heem and worked as his assistant until 1672. Mignon's paintings of flowers and fruit feature the same opulent style of composition and the same brilliant colors as De Heem's work. Mignon's paintings were

popular at court, the Elector of Saxony and the French king Louis XIV both bought work by Mignon. Abraham Mignon continued to live in Utrecht, until his death in 1679.

- Closure
- For many of the Dutch middle class, still life painting such as these replaced religious paintings. These paintings enabled the middle class to revel in their prosperity but yet reminded them of the moral consequences of their wealth. Accordingly, they became very popular in Dutch homes.

## Emblem from Cats' *Monita amores virginei* (1620)



Although hardly known outside of Holland, among his own people for nearly two centuries he enjoyed an enormous popularity – the complete collection of his poems is said to have sold around 50,000 copies, and was reputedly the only book, other than the Bible, to be found in many Dutch homes.



Object 6: **The Denial of St. Peter**, c. 1623, Gerrit van Honthorst, Oil on canvas, 71.78, G313



- Introduction
  - We've talked about Calvinism as the state religion of the Dutch Republic and its ban on many religious images, especially those of the New Testament. However, the state and its people practiced a high degree of tolerance. Calvinists made up only about one-third of the population, and Roman Catholics made up another third. (Many of the rest were other Christian groups (including Anabaptists) and Jews.) Let's explore the art to be found in Catholic homes of the middle class.
- Engagement
  - First off, what is going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - To rebuild confidence in the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, after the twin shocks of the Protestant Reformation (1517) and the Sack of Rome (1527), a campaign of reform was necessary. One of the outcomes of this reformation identified requirements for Counter Reformation art, including that it be direct and compelling in its narrative presentation. What has the artist done to make this painting direct and compelling?
  - Another requirement was making them as understandable and as relevant to ordinary people, as possible. What choices has the artist made to fulfill this requirement?
- Label
  - This painting illustrates a scene from the **Christian Bible. A young maidservant accuses the apostle Peter, in the yellow cloak, of knowing Jesus. Fearing for his own safety, Peter denies the acquaintance.**
  - While working in Italy, the Dutch artist Gerrit van Honthorst earned the nickname Gerard of the Night for his dramatically lit night scenes. Like the Italian artist Caravaggio, whom he admired, Honthorst constructed **psychologically intense paintings through the use of strong contrasts of light and shadow, close-ups of large working-class figures, and expressive hand gestures.**
  - Per Allison Ketterling: "Denial of St. Peter" was probably for a Catholic patron – a clandestine Catholic who would not have kept it in the front room of his home, where it could be seen.
- Learning objective
  - The impact of Calvinist state religion on religious art.
- Factoids
  - **This object**
    - **Saint Peter**
      - **"Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came onto him saying, 'Thou also was with Jesus of Galilee'. But he denied before them all, saying 'I know not what thou sayest.'" This passage from the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament, the Christian body of sacred writings, is the subject of this painting.**

- The story begins when Jesus has his Last Supper with the twelve apostles and he foretells that all of them would forsake him when he was in danger. Peter denied that he would do so. That evening when they all went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, the Roman soldiers found Jesus and arrest him. All the apostles deserted him, though Peter followed at a distance. Three times, Peter was asked if he had been with Jesus and each time he denied. Immediately after the third denial, a cock crowed, whereupon Peter realized what had happened and broke down crying, repentant.
  - After Jesus' death, Peter became a leader of the first Christian communities in Jerusalem and Rome. He was greatly admired and died a martyr's death in 64 CE during the persecutions of the Roman emperor Nero.
  - Saint Peter is a symbol in Christianity of the power of forgiveness. Peter had committed the greatest sin, denial and betrayal of Jesus, and yet was reconciled to him through repentance of his action. His image was favored by the Church of the Counter Reformation in promoting devotion to the Seven Sacraments, of which penance is one.
  - His appearance is remarkably constant in art, usually shown as an old but vigorous man, with short grey curling hair, balding or tonsured, and a short, usually curly beard, often with broad, rustic features. He commonly wears a yellow or gold cloak over a blue or green tunic.
  - In the painting, **much play is made of gesture. The woman makes her accusation by grasping Peter's cloak. He denies it with a hesitant outstretched hand. A soldier accuses him with a pointing finger. Three other soldiers gaze at Peter with incredulity. The masked flame in the center has the power to draw the figures together and adds to the drama of the moment.**
  - The painting is a frieze-like moment of three-quarter length figures gathered in the canvas. Although the picture is neither signed nor dated, it fits into Honthorst's body of work. It was painted shortly after his return to Holland from Italy and reflects the Italian baroque style.
  - Most of the figures are close to the picture plane and encircling Peter but leaving an opening so that the viewer can complete the circle. He uses foreshortening—a way of proportionately representing an object or person to make it appear three dimensional—in depicting the right arm of the soldier with his back to us. Honthorst adjusted the dimensions of the arm from the elbow to the hand.
  - These are 'real' people and we can identify with Peter's human expression.
- **Gerrit van Honthorst (1590 – 1656)**
    - **Gerrit van Honthorst was born in Utrecht, a city with a largely Catholic population,** to a large Catholic family, the son of a painter of tapestry cartoons. There, he studied with Abraham Bloemaert, a prominent history painter who was, like Honthorst, a **practicing Catholic**. A combination of factors—an identification with his faith, the already established practice of northern painters finishing their training in Italy, and the esteemed status of artists in a highly developed art-patronage system—probably led him to **Rome in 1610**. There, already an accomplished painter at age twenty, he **became acquainted with the work of Caravaggio di Merisi (1571–1610) and his followers, whose stylistic innovations wielded a huge influence on artists across Europe**. They included Honthorst's contemporary Hendrick ter Bruggen, also a Catholic from a wealthy Utrecht family who went to Rome in 1604.
    - **The Caravaggisti, as they were known, developed iterations of the dramatically lit, dynamic scenes focused on a few central figures placed in a dark, shallow space. These scenes, often related to the lives of saints, were staged not with idealized figures, but with ordinary people in contemporary dress.** Honthorst's work in this vein was celebrated in Italy and earned him the name "**Gherardo della Notte**," after the dark, candlelit settings of his paintings. Some of his patrons—noblemen and church figures—had supported the work and livelihood of Caravaggio himself.
    - **On returning to Utrecht from Italy in 1620,** Honthorst joined the Guild of Saint Luke and later served in the position of deken (dean). **In Holland, there was little demand for the religious subjects he had painted for patrons in Italy, and he focused his efforts on portraits, genre pictures of musicians, and mythological and allegorical works, which were attractive to wealthy patrons. His success and associations with other successful artists such as Peter**

**Paul Rubens led to prestigious appointments as court painter in England, Denmark, and The Hague.** Honthorst was patronized by aristocratic collectors throughout Europe including King Christian IV of Denmark and Charles I of England.

- **Although he created numerous works of religious art, as well as large scale decorative works and portraits, he is best known for his genre painting - in particular, his scenes of taverns, musicians and merriment.**

- His use of chiaroscuro and art of depicting artificial light influenced a young Rembrandt (1606-69) and Georges La Tour (1593–1652).
- He is considered one of the most important Dutch history painters of his time.

- **Religion in the Dutch Republic**

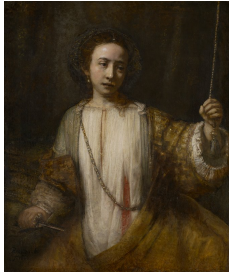
- Although the United Provinces did not secede solely for religious reasons, Netherlandish Protestant religion did provide popular impetus to the revolt.
  - The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, spearheaded by Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Jean Calvin (1509-64), had reached the Northern Netherlands in the third quarter of the century via France and the Southern Netherlands.
  - The first Protestant Churches in the Netherlands were called Reformed, and they followed Calvin's doctrines of a church founded on close readings of the original biblical text and of salvation through personal faith, rather than through mediation of the clergy and the sacraments.
  - The Reformed or Calvinist Church maintained the sacraments of baptism and communion, but it made them less central to belief and did not envelop them in the visual splendor associated with the Catholic mass. It did away altogether with sacraments wholly dependent on the clergy, such as confession.
  - This less hierarchical religion held strong appeal in lands far removed from Rome, and it provided a rallying ideology for local aristocratic leaders at odds with their Habsburg overlords, who had taken on the defense of the Catholic cause in Europe.
- **Established in the Netherlands by the 1570s**, the strict Protestant sect had quickly found converts among those who valued its emphasis on morality and hard work.
- In the Dutch Republic, **Calvinism had become the dominant faith, encouraging egalitarian worship in vernacular, unmitigated by a requisite clergy.** However, though Protestantism had largely replaced Catholicism, **the Dutch were distinct from their neighboring nations in that they did not have an imposed state religion. The religious tolerance of the Northern United Provinces "caused Protestant intellectuals and artists to leave the Southern Netherlands for the Dutch Republic, where they provided innovative stimulus to the production and discussion of art,"** and contributed to the North's economic growth and rational municipal leadership.
- Calvinism encouraged austerity and egalitarianism in matters of faith and **was strongly opposed to the use of images and icons in worship and their distracting presence in the church. "Calvinist theology did not allow the use of altarpieces and representations of God and Christ in worship, and it was opposed to the Catholic cult of saints, which required so many paintings and sculptures."** (Westermann 33).
- Furthermore, **the transition period of the Reformation saw a brutal episode of iconoclasm that destroyed most of the Christian art that artists in the seventeenth century might have otherwise been able to study.** Instead, the slate was wiped clean and Dutch artists were reminded that art with biblical content was vulnerable and risked being destroyed whereas safer, secular subjects were meant to be decorative and therefore were not contentious.
- **The treaty of the Union of Utrecht granted individual freedom of conscience in religious matters, but not the freedom to actively practice,** for instance, Catholicism. An important distinction was made between individual and collective, and between private and public. The seven provinces had advocated freedom of religion when they first united in 1579, and they enjoyed tolerance unparalleled elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, Catholic Mass was occasionally forbidden in some cities, although generally tolerated as long as it was not celebrated in a public place.

- After the secular authorities had opted for the Calvinist religion, at the end of the sixteenth century, **the adherents of the “old” faith were forbidden to hold public religious gatherings.** This ban would remain in place until the proclamation of freedom of religion in 1795. But a large proportion of the population remained— or indeed became – Catholic, and proved determined and resourceful in professing their faith. Together with their spiritual leaders, who were prepared to do their work against all odds, **the Catholics set up a network of several hundred churches. These “clandestine” churches were not identifiable as such from the outside, but inside they were decorated magnificently.** Above the altars and along the walls were ambitious, monumental paintings depicting biblical themes, saints, and points of Catholic doctrine.
  - The Catholic Church in the United Provinces was not a Church Triumphant, enjoying the support of the secular authorities, but the Church of a religious community that was tolerated under strict conditions. The Calvinist Church enjoyed a privileged position: it was the only one permitted to play a role in public life. But as long as the Catholics did not undermine too flagrantly the illusion of the Calvinist Church as the “Church of the whole nation,” **the authorities generally turned a blind eye to their religious observance.** It was agreed that priests would not be seen in the streets wearing their vestments, that no processions would be tolerated, and that there must be no ostentatious throng outside the church doors. The church was not permitted to be identifiable as such from the outside, so as not to violate the fiction that it was merely a private chapel. All those involved were party to this unwritten agreement: the Catholics, who generally took great care not to create any kind of public order disturbance, and the authorities, who knew perfectly well where the **Catholics’ clandestine churches** were, and that they lived a full religious life there. The restrictions imposed on Catholic worship varied from one city to the next, but they were never strict enough to satisfy Calvinist ministers, who frequently urged the authorities to take action.
  - Since the Catholic Church in the United Provinces was not invested with legal personality, it was no longer officially able to own any property. Some mission stations – the name used to denote the organizations based in clandestine churches, given the absence of fixed parish boundaries – gradually built up their own capital over the years, in the form of investments or houses, but these generated a modest income covering only a small percentage of the costs. This meant that to build churches, to buy liturgical silver and vestments, and to pay for other decorations, they relied on donations from the priests themselves or from members of the congregation.
  - Catholics gathered for mass in a warehouse or the spacious home of some fellow-religionist. Private chapels in the castles and town houses of nobles who had remained Catholic were frequently opened up to accommodate as large a congregation as possible. In the countryside, barns frequently doubled as churches.
  - The Office of Ecclesiastical Property was the institution that managed the expropriated real property of the Roman Catholic Church. That office was charged with continuing the charitable works of the Church foundations, which it could conveniently do by selling its choice properties and investing the proceeds in interest-bearing public bonds.
- Religious paintings
    - With the founding of the Dutch Republic, Calvinism was declared the state religion. Images, according to Calvin, held no religious relevance. Worse, they could lead to idolatry, the worship of the picture rather than the thing that it represented. Calvinist churches were bare of imagery. So, there goes a huge business opportunity for artists. But, religious paintings didn’t disappear completely.
    - The most recent research has shown, however, that **nine out of ten works of art made to decorate a clandestine church were by Catholic artists, primarily because of the tendency to grant commissions within one’s own social circle.** The artists who contributed most, in terms of numbers, were faithful adherents of the Mother Church, which they also supported zealously in their private lives.
    - Painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten described history painting as “the most elevated and distinguished step in the Art of Painting....” It revealed, he said, “the noblest actions and intentions of rational beings,” and he ranked it above portraiture, landscape, and every other kind of subject. The term **“history painting” refers to subjects taken from the Bible, ancient**

**history, pastoral literature, or myth.** In the Netherlands and across Europe, theorists and connoisseurs considered it the highest form of art because it communicated important ideas and required learning and imagination.

- **History painting** offered uplifting or cautionary narratives that were intended to encourage contemplation of the meaning of life. It also **satisfied a desire for religious imagery that remained strong, even after most traditional religious pictures had been removed from Calvinist churches.** Its moral lessons were important to Dutch viewers.
- Large New Testament paintings were often painted for use in private Catholic churches.
- Calvinist collectors were often especially interested in Old Testament paintings, as Calvin had advocated careful study of the biblical narrative.
- Large dramatic historical or Biblical scenes were produced less frequently than in other countries, as there was a limited local market for church art, and few large aristocratic Baroque houses to fill.
- **Characteristics of Counter Reformation art**
  - To rebuild confidence in the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, after the twin shocks of the Protestant Reformation (1517) and the Sack of Rome (1527), a campaign of reform was necessary. The impetus for such reform emanated from the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), founded by S. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), and from the 19th Ecumenical Council (the Council of Trent), initiated by Pope Paul III (1534–1549), which held 25 sessions between 1545 and 1563. **Reformers believed strongly in the educational and inspirational power of visual art, and promoted a number of guidelines to be followed in the production of religious paintings and sculpture.** These formed the basis for what became known as Catholic Counter-Reformation Art.
  - Reformers first stressed the need to distinguish the one true Church from the breakaway group of Protestant churches.
    - Artists should therefore focus on the **distinctive aspects of Catholic dogma**, including: The Immaculate Conception, The Annunciation of the Virgin, The Transfiguration of Christ, and others. Also, **any explicit portrayal of Christ's suffering and agony on the Cross** was deemed to be especially uplifting, and also served to illustrate the singular Catholic version of Transubstantiation in the Eucharist. The roles of the Virgin Mary, the Saints and the Sacraments were also a distinctive feature of Catholicism and were to be illustrated accordingly.
    - Second, reformers stipulated that **Biblical painting should be direct and compelling in its narrative presentation, and should be rendered in a clear, accurate fashion, without unnecessary or imaginary embellishments.**
    - Third, reformers - in particular, pious individuals such as Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales and Philip Neri - insisted that **Catholic art should encourage piety**: thus artists should paint and sculpt **scenes of appropriate spiritual intensity.**
    - Fourth, as to how paintings and statues were to be executed, reformers stressed **the importance of making them as understandable and as relevant to ordinary people, as possible.** Using these techniques, Catholic art was to combat the spread of Protestantism throughout Europe, especially in areas like France, southern Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary.
- Closure
  - While Catholicism went underground in the Dutch Republic, Christian art continued to be produced for clandestine churches and homes of Catholic believers.

Object 7: **Lucretia, 1666, Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn**, Oil on canvas, 34.19, G311



- Introduction
  - The one genre of painting we haven't covered today is history painting. History paintings with subjects taken from religion and ancient history had long been regarded as the highest form of art throughout Europe since they required knowledge of the stories and standard conventions as well as imagination, i.e., no painting from life. Throughout Europe, these paintings had been very popular. That changed in the Dutch Republic.
- Engagement
  - Let's start by exploring this painting by Rembrandt. What's going on here? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - While other artists focused on the physical drama of this story, Rembrandt chose to focus on the psychological drama. What choices did he make to relay the psychological drama? What is the impact of those choices?
  - While the popularity of history paintings in the Dutch Republic was slashed by 50%, they only dropped to second place. Why do you suppose the middle class continued to buy these paintings for their homes? What statement did they make with these paintings?
  - History painting offered uplifting or cautionary narratives that were intended to encourage contemplation of the meaning of life. Its moral lessons were important to Dutch viewers. What moral lessons does this painting illustrate?
- Label
  - Rembrandt tells the story of Lucretia through her solemn and saddened gaze, in the traces of blood on her gown, and the dagger in her hand. The wife of a Roman nobleman, Lucretia was known for her loyalty and virtue. She was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the ruling tyrant. Lucretia revealed the crime to her husband and father, and, in their presence, took her own life. **She chose death in order to prevent dishonor, at a time and place when a woman's perceived virtue was more valuable than her life.**
- Learning objective
  - Impact of the middle class on the genre of history painting
- Factoids
  - The object
    - This painting tells the **tragic story of Lucretia. The virtuous wife of a Roman noble killed herself after being raped by the son of Rome's tyrannical king, and her enraged husband and father launched a rebellion to overthrow the king that resulted in the Roman Republic. This story, recounted by the Roman historian Livy, resurfaced as a morality tale during the Middle Ages and a model of republican values during the Renaissance: a leader must answer to the people he serves.**

- Rembrandt's version of the Lucretia legend is **pure psychological drama. Largely bypassing the sensational violence that other artists focused on, he lets her face—its averted gaze and eyes welled with tears—tell the story.**
  - Rembrandt used techniques in painting Lucretia that suggest he created this work very quickly, possibly in a matter of days. He used his palette knife—a tool with a thin, flexible blade—to paint the majority of Lucretia's clothing. To produce the shadows on her attire he scraped paint away to reveal the brown-colored ground (the base layer of a painting) below.
  - Why Lucretia is gripping the cord remains a mystery. Is she ringing for help, having second-guessed her suicide attempt? Holding herself up as life drains away? Metaphorically closing the curtain on her life? Whatever the interpretation, the cord was a common prop used by artists' models.
  - Rembrandt was a master of chiaroscuro, the use of strong contrast between dark and light to suggest volume. The space surrounding Lucretia is left as vague darkness, though some viewers perceive a bed in the lower left.
  - Lucretia's story is a sordid tale. Away on a military expedition, her husband boasted to his comrades that his wife was the most virtuous of all their wives. Indeed, a surprise visit at home found her chastely weaving with her maids. Among the visiting comrades was Sextus Tarquinius, son of the tyrannical king of Rome. He slipped into her room and gave her two choices: sleep with him, or be killed with one of her slaves to make it look like an adulterous affair. Lucretia choose the first option. The next day, she summoned her husband and father, told them what had happened, and fatally stabbed herself to redeem her honor. Full of grief and anger, they swore to avenge her death, and the ensuing revolt allegedly led to the founding of the Roman Republic.
  - Interest in the story of Lucretia exploded around 1500 with the discovery of a fragment of an ancient statue—now lost—thought to be Lucretia. Even the pope wrote a poem about her, glorifying her chastity and virtue, and Lucretia became a popular name for girls.
  - Painters of the Baroque period were thrill-seekers, chasing after moments of intense emotion and sensuality, so many of them focused on Lucretia's rape as a dramatic erotic encounter.
  - Rembrandt's Lucretia is striking for what he leaves out of the picture—no rapist, no grief-stricken avengers, not a hint of nudity. Instead, he quietly mixes the profound emotions—pride, shame, regret—that Lucretia appears to stoically contain just beneath the surface.
- **Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669)**
    - Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, born in Leiden on July 15, 1606, was the **son of a miller**, Harmen Gerritsz van Rijn, and his wife, Neeltgen van Zuytbrouck. The youngest son of at least ten children, Rembrandt was not expected to carry on his father's business. Since the family was prosperous enough, they sent him to the Leiden Latin School, where he remained for seven years. In 1620 he enrolled briefly at the University of Leiden, perhaps to study theology. Orlers, Rembrandt's first biographer, related that because "by nature he was moved toward the art of painting and drawing," Rembrandt left the university to study the fundamentals of painting with the Leiden artist Jacob Isaacs van Swanenburgh (1571–1638). After three years with this master, Rembrandt left in 1624 for Amsterdam, where he studied for six months under Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), the most important history painter of the day.
    - After returning to Leiden, Rembrandt quickly developed a reputation as a history painter and portraitist. By 1628 his work, together with that of his Leiden colleague Jan Lievens (Dutch, 1607 - 1674), was enthusiastically praised by Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), the secretary to the Prince of Orange. **Huygens particularly admired Rembrandt's uncanny ability to convey feeling through gesture and expression and through dramatic contrasts of light and dark.** That same year, Rembrandt, at the age of twenty-two, took on his first pupils, Gerrit Dou (Dutch, 1613 - 1675) and Isaac Jouderville (1612–1645/1648). Documents indicate that Jouderville paid Rembrandt one hundred guilders a year to study with him.
    - By 1631 Rembrandt had become financially involved with the **Amsterdam** art dealer Hendrik van Uylenburgh (c. 1587–1661). The nature of Van Uylenburgh's enterprise, which was called "an academy" in its day, is not entirely understood, but it appears that he orchestrated an active art studio that specialized in portrait commissions. In any event, in about 1632 Rembrandt moved



to Amsterdam, where he **lived with Van Uylenburgh and ran his “academy”** until 1635.

**Rembrandt achieved tremendous success in his lifetime. He received many commissions and attracted a number of students who came to learn his method of painting.** Artists who had previously been trained elsewhere, including Jacob Backer (1608–1651), Govaert Flinck (Dutch, 1615 - 1660), and Ferdinand Bol (Dutch, 1616 - 1680), worked during these years at Van Uylenburgh’s studio under Rembrandt’s guidance.

- In 1633 Rembrandt became engaged to Van Uylenburgh’s niece Saskia, daughter of a wealthy and prominent Frisian family. They married the following year. In 1639, at the height of his success, Rembrandt purchased a large house on the Sint-Anthonisbreestraat in Amsterdam for a considerable amount of money. To acquire the house, however, he had to borrow heavily, creating a debt that would eventually figure in his financial problems of the mid-1650s. Rembrandt and Saskia had four children, but only Titus, born in 1641, survived infancy. After a long illness Saskia died in 1642, the very year Rembrandt painted *The Night Watch* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).
  - During the 1640s life became more unsettled for Rembrandt. Geertje Dirckx soon entered the household as a nurse for Titus and became a companion to Rembrandt. In 1649 he dismissed her and entered into a relationship with Hendrickje Stoffels that would last until her death in 1663. While Hendrickje seems to have been a warm and caring companion for Rembrandt, the early 1650s were fraught with personal turmoil. Rembrandt and Geertje Dirckx became embroiled in a number of contentious lawsuits that suggest he treated his former companion quite badly. Rembrandt and Hendrickje never married because of a stipulation in Saskia’s will that he was bound to transfer half of his and Saskia’s joint assets to Titus should he remarry. After Saskia’s death, the net value of their assets was determined to be more than forty thousand guilders. Presumably in the early 1650s Rembrandt did not have twenty thousand guilders to give to Titus. Being unmarried caused Hendrickje public humiliation when she became pregnant in 1654. She was called before a council of the Dutch Reformed Church and censored for having “lived with Rembrandt like a whore.” The couple’s daughter, Cornelia, was baptized on October 30, 1654.
  - Perhaps as a result of the public outrage over his domestic situation or his treatment of Geertje Dirckx, **Rembrandt lost favor with many of his patrons and became burdened by financial difficulties during these years. In 1656 he was forced to declare bankruptcy**, which led to the auctioning off of his estate, including his large art collection, in 1657 and 1658. He then moved to an artist’s quarter in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam, eventually renting a relatively small house on the Rozengracht where he lived for the rest of his life. Hendrickje and Titus subsequently formed a business partnership to protect Rembrandt from further demands of creditors.
  - Although Rembrandt still received a number of important portrait commissions during the late 1650s and early 1660s, stylistic trends had veered away from his deeply personal manner of painting. He became more and more isolated from the mainstreams of Dutch art. No students are documented as having worked with him during the latter half of the 1650s, and only one student, Aert de Gelder (1645–1727), is known to have come to study with him in the 1660s.
  - Rembrandt’s financial situation remained poor during the 1660s. He owed a substantial amount of money, in particular to the art dealer and collector Lodewijk van Ludick, a debt he hoped to repay with the money he would receive from his large painting for one of the lunettes in the Amsterdam Town Hall, *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm). Rembrandt’s composition, however, was rejected by city authorities in 1662. To raise funds he was then forced to sell Saskia’s grave in the Oude Kerk. He never regained financial solvency and ended up living on the savings of his daughter, Cornelia.
  - Although Rembrandt remained famous as an artist, there seems to have been little to lighten the burdens of his life during his last years. In 1663 the plague ravaged Amsterdam and claimed the life of Hendrickje. Four years later Titus married Magdalena van Loo, but in 1668 he also died, the victim of another epidemic. When Rembrandt died on October 4, 1669, he was buried in a rented grave, which has long since disappeared, in the Westerkerk, Amsterdam.
- History paintings in the Dutch Republic

- Painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten described history painting as “the most elevated and distinguished step in the Art of Painting....” It revealed, he said, “the noblest actions and intentions of rational beings,” and he ranked it above portraiture, landscape, and every other kind of subject. The term “history painting” refers to subjects taken from the Bible, ancient history, pastoral literature, or myth. In the Netherlands and across Europe, theorists and connoisseurs considered it the highest form of art because it communicated important ideas and required learning and imagination.
- As the Dutch said, it came uyt den gheest—from the mind. **To appreciate a history painting, or to create one, entailed knowledge, not only about the stories represented but also about the conventions and symbols of art.**
- **History painting offered uplifting or cautionary narratives that were intended to encourage contemplation of the meaning of life.** It also satisfied a desire for religious imagery that remained strong, even after most traditional religious pictures had been removed from Calvinist churches. **Its moral lessons were important to Dutch viewers.** History paintings could also extol, allegorically, Dutch identity and success, communicating a sense of lofty, even divine, purpose behind the nation’s destiny. But history painting was also a source of delight, offering exotic settings and stories of romance. Underlying these subjects—from the Old Testament to Ovid—is a focus on the human figure in action. Many artists chose moments of great drama or of transition, turning points in the fate of a person or situation. These subjects offered fertile ground where emotions and passions, whether religious, patriotic, or romantic, could be explored and experienced.
- **Though other types of pictures were sold in greater numbers by the mid-1600s, history painting never lost its prestige or popularity.** Rembrandt’s greatest ambition was to be a history painter, and he painted religious and historical subjects throughout his career; they account for more than one-third of all his painted works. Many artists better known for other types of painting also addressed religious subjects, even Jan Steen, who was most closely associated with rowdy feasts and households in disarray.
- Subjects from pastoral literature became popular with Dutch patricians around midcentury, especially in Amsterdam. They complemented the country estates that many wealthy families built as retreats and meshed with the trend toward classicism seen in Dutch painting around the same time.
- Middle class literacy
  - Although literacy levels are difficult to measure, contemporary comments and analysis of written records suggest that the **Dutch community as a whole was relatively more literate than other European populations**, through reading was probably more prevalent than the ability to write.
    - Dutch towns had vigorous publishing industries.
    - The most popular books had editions into the thousands of copies, very large given that the Dutch Republic had about 1.5 million inhabitants and that books were shared in families and schools.
  - Specialist research has demonstrated that although **Dutch painters were generally believed to have come from lower social classes it has been shown that their background was solidly middle-class.** “For example, twenty six of twenty seven Delft painters whose origins are known about and who were registered with the guild between 1613 and 1679, were sons or wards of painters, art dealers, engravers or glass makers who themselves were members of the Guild of Saint Luke or elsewhere.” **The level of literacy among painters seems to have been very high.**
    - A master’s workshop would also include reference books, including treatises on painting, the Bible, and other literature
    - **In 1604, Karel van Mander published the first Netherlandish treatise on painting and painters, simply called Schilder-Boeck (Painting-Book). The book has three parts: the genres and techniques of painting, biographies of Italian, German, and Netherlandish artists, and an explanation of one of the most famous ancient texts, Ovid’s Metamorphoses. The Metamorphoses offered painters a treasury of romantic and**

**adventurous stories about the classical gods and heroic mortals; most Dutch mythological paintings were based on this book.**

- History painters read the Bible and perhaps the history of the Jews by Flavius Josephus (CE 37-100?). The States-General financed one of the finest Dutch literary efforts: a new Dutch translation of the Bible, based on original readings of the Greek and Hebrew texts. The “States Bible” took two decades to produce and was published in 1637.
  - Most artists knew the most famous Renaissance compendium of allegorical imagery, the *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa (c. 1560-c. 1623), published in Dutch translation in 1644. Ripa gave explicit instructions on the proper attributes and appearance of all manner of personifications, from fidelity and laughter to agriculture and painting herself.
- Closure
    - The Dutch were well-educated for their times; in fact, they boasted the highest literacy rate in Europe. Owning and displaying a history painting would certainly have increased their status in the community.

Lucretia, 1664, National Gallery



**The rape, by Artemisia Gentileschi**



#### Tour summary

- Today we have explored how the middle class of the Dutch Republic in the 17th century overtook the art world. Prior to this time European art was done on a commission basis with the aristocracy and the Catholic Church. The economy of the Dutch Republic, making it the marketplace of western Europe, created a prosperous middle class with the highest per capita income in Europe if not the world. With a conservative Calvinist state religion and a natural predilection to parsimony, the middle class invested in their homes, and they turned to art to decorate them. This created a demand for millions of paintings over the century, paintings which met the tastes of the middle class. This taste resulted in an increase in the number of landscape, genre, still life, and portrait paintings and in a decrease of the number of history paintings, the genre most in demand throughout the rest of Europe. It also required that artists paint “to the demand”. Instead of the commissioned paintings of the past and in the rest of Europe, artists mostly relied on the open market for their sales: market places, fairs, and art dealers. All of these factors are evidence that the Dutch middle class took over the art world.



## Additional Factoids

- **Dutch political environment**
  - **Unlike its European contemporaries, the Netherlands emerged out of a period of tumultuous political and religious international conflict in a position of great wealth without sustaining the despotic control of a church or crown.** The virtual absence of these ruling bodies led to a partial dissolution of hierarchical understandings of wealth and faith, having a profound effect on the structure and sensibilities of Dutch society.
  - **“Whereas the Spanish [and French] Kingdom[s] and territories were ruled by an increasingly centralized court ... the government structure of the Netherlandish provinces had remained localized in the cities that formed their economic backbone, governed by a middle-class elite of so-called regents”** (Westermann 21). **Unusual for the period, especially considering the lack of natural resources in their small country, the Dutch grew very prosperous from trade and manufacture, and the resulting wealth was distributed somewhat evenly across the classes, instead of benefiting a few aristocrats.**
  - **The stabilizing economy, development of a middle class citizenry heavily involved in government and commerce, religious tolerance born out of the Reformation (and perhaps monetary motivations) and the intellectual immigrants that it attracted all contributed to the distinct climate of the Dutch Golden Age.**
- **Dutch political structure**
  - From its inception, the Republic precariously balanced the interests of the individual provinces, their cities, and their regents.
  - Each province elected its own Stadhouder (“city holder”), the highest military official, and its own States (delegates) to the States-General, an assembly that met in The Hague to set and execute the Republic’s military, diplomatic, and economic policies.
  - Within the States-General, the representatives from the province of Holland, and especially those from Amsterdam, its flagship city, wielded most power, as Holland was the most populous and prosperous of the provinces.
  - The States-General appointed a general Stadhouder as well, traditionally an aristocratic descendant of Willem I, Prince of Orange (1533-84). Willem I, “father of the fatherland”, had been the reluctant but effective leader of the Dutch revolt; the first nobleman to convict the Northern provinces to appoint him Stadhouder at large.
  - The Stadhouders were always dependent on the finances and political designs of the States-General, controlled primarily by the upper-middle-class regents from the cities rather than land-based nobles.
  - Despite its centralizing political and military institutions, the Republic was strikingly local in its economic and political organization. It was mostly in military crises that the Republic’s constituents transcended their differences for the common interest.
- **Dutch economy**
  - Dutch industry’s leading position in Europe due to:
    - its superior technology
    - its extensive use of sources of energy, including turf and wind
    - the adequate size of its work-force
    - readily available investment capital.
- **Dutch Republic’s new enemies**
  - After the war with Spain ended, the Dutch found themselves confronted with two other powerful enemies: **France and England, whom they battled on land and at sea in the second half of the seventeenth century.** Between the Eighty Years’ War and these subsequent confrontations, the country was at war for much of what we call the Golden Age. In 1672 the Dutch suffered a disastrous invasion by French troops (provoking anger at De Witt and returning power to stadholder William III [ruled 1672–1702]). Despite war and internal conflict, however, the country also enjoyed



long periods of calm and remarkable prosperity. (See the timeline for more about the complex history of the republic after independence in 1648.)

- **Dutch art market**

- Just as the exclusivity of wealth and faith were essentially removed from the very select elite, **the possession, patronage and enjoyment of art was democratized in the Netherlands. This too can be traced to the absence of a strong monarchy and Catholic authority, as the Church and Crown were the principal patrons of the arts in other European centers.**
- During the 17th century, the Dutch art market expanded vigorously and provided an income for numerous artists.
  - **Paintings were in great demand; it has been estimated that 70,000 paintings were painted on average every year; cheap works were readily available, which a large majority of the Dutch could afford.**
  - One of the most striking features of the emerging art market was the fact that **the majority of painters were not painting for private patrons. Instead, they painted for an anonymous public market.**
  - **The necessary preconditions for this were low production costs, a steady market demand, and prices high enough to cover material expenses and the artist's cost of living.** All of these conditions appear to have been present in the 17th century Netherlands.
- **Product innovation, which was characteristic of the Dutch economy as a whole, generated new demand, while specialization lowered the costs of producing paintings.** Since so many master painters were available, most of them could, to a large degree, specialize in different themes. These genres could be painted either originally or as copies. Innovations in technique were connected to these various specializations.
- **Since copies and paintings were available for as little as 5 or 10 guilders, or even less, many 17th century Dutch citizens could have afforded a painting or at least a copy, perhaps several.** Paintings had become common objects, plentiful and passively pervasive as “works of art, ranging from simple prints and copies to original paintings, hung in almost all Dutch houses; **it is estimated for example, that picture of some kind were found in about two-thirds of Delft households**” (North 107). Even more remarkable than the sheer number of households that contained any artwork is the number of artworks they contained. “What surprised foreign observers was not only the fact that people of modest means were prepared to buy paintings, but that they bought so many. **[One] claims that it was not unusual to find 100 or even 200 pictures in a modest household**” (Price 134). Although such an estimate is probably not representative of the average dwelling, rapidly produced landscapes and popular prints were desirable and reasonable investments for the disposable income of average citizens, as even “the most modest shopkeeper had his collection of pictures and hung them in every room” (Zumthor 195).
- It has been estimated that about 650 to 750 painters were working in the **Netherlands** in the mid-1600s—about **one for each 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants**. In cities the ratio was much higher: Delft had about one painter for every 665 residents, Utrecht one for every 500. **A similar estimate establishes the number of painters in Renaissance Italy at about 330 in a population of some 9 million.**
- Artists sold their uncommissioned work from their studios, in the marketplace, and at fairs. These fairs were regulated by the guild.
- The expanding art market also generated **a new profession, the art dealer**. Although most painters bought and sold the artworks of their colleagues from time to time, professional art dealers became much more common in the 1630s and 1640s, when printers, engravers, frame makers and unsuccessful painters began specializing in the art trade.
- While most painters painted for the public market, others worked at least temporarily for patrons. There were different kinds of patronage in the Dutch Republic. City governments commissioned the decoration of their town halls with allegoric paintings, to symbolize the omnipotent and righteous city government. Moreover, various social groups commissioned group portraits.
- In pre-industrial Europe, art was generally produced in towns and not in the countryside.

- In the Netherlands, **painters were organized in craft guilds of St. Luke, their patron saint.** Thirty-eight such guilds are known to have existed in the Northern Netherlands, mostly in larger cities. Only in Utrecht, Middelburg, Leiden, Haarlem, and Delft did local schools maintain a strong local presence, and only Amsterdam at the time of Rembrandt had a marked external influence.
- An artist whose work appealed to the middle class could hope for a reasonably steady income. Once his manner ceased to be fashionable, he might face ruin. Rembrandt is an example of this.
- **The majority of the artists remained craftsmen, but they distinguished themselves from members of other crafts by their higher incomes and their larger houses; the average master painter earned three times as much as a master carpenter.**
- We can distinguish three groups of collectors, active on the art market in the 17th century Netherlands:
  - Royal collectors, including foreign and Dutch princes such as Christian IV of Denmark-Norway, Emperor Rudolph, Charles II of England, and some of the princes of Orange.
  - The so-called connoisseurs, who were the elites from the larger cities, town governments, and craft guilds,
  - The general public.
- For the first two categories, purchase on commission was the rule; in the case of the general public, which consisted of the lower upper class and the middle classes, paintings were purchased in an anonymous art market, either by direct sales from the painter himself or via art dealers or auction.
- The painters of the Dutch Republic who had no inclination or talent for portrait painting had to give up the idea of relying chiefly on commissions. Unlike the masters of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, they had to paint their picture first, and then try to find a buyer.
- The shift from history painting to the landscape in the 17th century collections reveals the changing attitudes towards paintings in Dutch society. Montias explains this phenomenon with reference to reductions in production costs and the prices of landscape paintings, which increased the market share of landscapes as well as their proportion in private households. However, this seems to be a secondary cause.
- More fundamental was **the change in the function of paintings in the Dutch Republic. Until the 16th century, the devotional function was dominant in paintings;** people preferred paintings with religious subjects to be used as private tabernacles. **In the 17th century, the aesthetic function came to dominate.** A large proportion of the population no longer wanted paintings of the Virgin Mary or the saints but instead **bought paintings chiefly to decorate their homes and enjoy as objects of art.** The secularization of consumer tastes was not confined to the Dutch Republic. Everywhere in Western and Central Europe, the Reformation inspired fundamental change in the function of paintings.
- **The Most Popular Paintings**
  - The table below indicates which types of paintings were most popular, based on inventories from Haarlem. At the beginning of the century, the religious or literary themes of history painting were favored. But by 1650, “modern” interiors were decorated with larger numbers of portraits, landscapes, still lifes, and genre scenes from daily life.
    - Genre 1605 – 1624 - 1645-1650
    - Biblical scenes 42.2% - 18%
    - Portraits 18% - 18.3%
    - Land- and seascapes 12.4% - 21%
    - Still lifes 8.5% - 11.7 %
    - Scenes from daily life (genre) 6.1% - 12.9%
    - Other 12.8% - 18.1%
  - **A cheap engraving, for example, could be had for about a third of the price of a small fish or flower still life painting—and for about a seventh of the price of a more elaborate, high-finish banketje still life. On the other hand, a cutting-edge fijnschilder (fine painting) work of Gerrit Dou might be sold for 1,000 guilders or more, the cost of a comfortable Dutch house.**
- **Specialization**

- **The multiplicity of categories in Dutch seventeenth-century paintings was fostered by the fact that instead of painting to the order the few wealthy and powerful, painters were (for the first time in the history of Western art) producing wares for individual buyers each with a different economic and cultural backgrounds receptive to pictures with all kinds of subject matter and a wide range of styles. Since it took a very long time to become proficient in any one area, painters usually specialized and concentrated their efforts to one area.**  
Vermeer and Rembrandt were among the few painters who were able to create masterpieces in different categories.
- **Artists' Income and Economic Background**
  - **The average income of those artists who were registered with the guild exceeded that of other craftsman. A number of noted artist were able to earn great sums of money (especially through portraiture) and elevate themselves to higher cultural levels within Dutch society.**
  - **A detailed study of the Dutch art market has shown that artists who had received formal training and belonged to the Guild of Saint Luke earned on the average between 1,150 and 1,400 guilders a year. This sum was between two and three times as much as a master carpenter earned in the same period.**
  - **Success was guaranteed by the production of art which matched the buyers' expectations.** But many painters depended on secondary sources of income to survive.
  - **Generally speaking, 20 guilders was a good price for a painting when wages for a Delft cloth-worker were less than one guilder a day.**
  - **Specialist research has demonstrated that although Dutch painters were generally believed to have come from lower social classes it has been shown that their background was solidly middle-class.**
  - **The level of literacy among painters seems to have been very high.**
- **Reasons for high loss of 17th century paintings**
  - **Houses** at that time were not built as they are today with air space between the walls. They must have been **very damp** and water must often have actually dripped from them.
  - This dampness was aggravated by the **absence of central heating** and by the fact that in simpler dwellings **cooking was done in the living quarters, which were inadequately ventilated.** Until the end of the eighteenth century **cooking and heating always took place on open fires.** The **resulting smoke, soot, and vapor attached itself to everything not regularly cleaned.**
  - This was aggravated by **the use of candles (which were expensive and therefore not always of the best quality)** and, still worse, of **all sorts and qualities of oils employed for lighting.**
  - The gout and rheumatism that were facts of life at this time resulted from environments that were also destructive of works of art, which could be safeguarded only with great effort and constant vigilance. For the bulk of common paintings these precautions could not be taken.
- **Training of Dutch artists**
  - To become an artist, boys (rarely girls) would find masters to take them as **apprentices** when they were in their early teens (or earlier, ages ten to twelve).
    - The child's parents would pay the master a fee for instruction, materials, and often room and board.
    - An apprentice helped organize and clean the studio and learned to sharpen metal points (the precursors of pencils) to lace canvases not a support known as a stretcher, to bind brushes, grind colored pigments and mix them with oil to produce paints, to prepare canvases or panels with a ground layer for painting, and to prepare copper plates for engraving or etching.
    - Pupils also learned to draw, first after the master's drawing, prints, and paintings, then from inanimate objects such as plaster casts of antique statues, anatomical figures, and body parts. Later they might draw from dressed mannequins and eventually live animals and people.
    - Once pupils were able to draw and design compositions, they learned to paint with the palette and brushes, first after their master's own pictures. Soon, they would be allowed to paint the less

important parts of the master's paintings. Under guild regulations, masters could sell such collaborative works as their own.

- **After four to six years, the apprentice would pass an examination and often make a masterpiece to show the guild his mastery of request skills.**
  - Finished apprentices with funds to set up a studio would become masters in their own right and take on pupils, but many keep working as journeymen in a master's studio.
  - The social status of painters varied from day laborers through independent masters to well-rewarded court artists.
  - In addition, there were well-to-do amateurs who painted for pleasure. Several women became accomplished painters in this way. Most master painters were men, but more than a dozen women are recorded as having attained master's status, most famously Judith Leyster (1609-60).
  - The earliest Dutch academy, founded in Haarlem in 1583, was no more than a loose association of friends. A second informal academy appeared in Utrecht early in the 17th century, and other groups formed in Amsterdam and The Hague. These academies existed alongside the guilds to offer additional opportunities for drawing and discussions.
- 
- **Painter common practices**
    - Many artists prepared their paintings with drawings, including a sketch of the whole composition and detailed studies of figures, objects, and body parts.
    - Painters worked on wood panels or, increasingly, on cheaper canvas.
    - These supports were usually prepared with a "ground" that included chalk, white or brown pigment, and a binding material such as oil or glue.
    - On the ground, painters would sketch out preliminary designs in chalk or pencil and then "dead-color" that composition in monochrome paint.
    - Next, they would paint the final layers, frequently working from the background to the foreground, perhaps leaving open spaces for figures and objects close to the front of the pictorial space.
    - Painters often changed their minds or corrected mistakes by just painting over them. As the top layer of paint has often become more transparent over time, such changes (pentimenti) have become visible again.
    - Most painters added protective varnish at the end. Invariably, these varnishes darkened over time, causing paintings to look yellow.
- 
- **Dutch Calvinist/Reformed Church**
    - The Dutch Reformed Church was the largest Christian denomination in the Netherlands from the onset of the Protestant Reformation until 1930. It was the foremost Protestant denomination, and—since 1892—one of the two major Reformed denominations along with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.
    - It developed during the Protestant Reformation, being shaped theologically by John Calvin, but also other major Reformed theologians. It was founded in 1571.
    - The Reformed Church quickly became seen as a beacon of Dutch resistance for a number of reasons. The first was the most obvious as the Reformed Church was Protestant, while the Spanish and Austrians who controlled the Netherlands, were staunchly Catholic. Support for the Reformed Church was a way for Netherlanders to show their displeasure with Spanish rule. Second, the Reformed Church allowed for autonomy for Dutch political and religious goals. The Reformed Church was a home-grown movement and was a symbol of Dutch independence as well as an ideological break with their Spanish overlords. Importantly, the Reformed Church became the de facto state religion of the Netherlands during this time and never really relinquished control until centuries later.
    - Calvinism is largely represented by Continental Reformed, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist traditions.
    - Calvin emphasized the role God plays in the process of salvation. He theorized that believers were predestined to salvation. This means that before God had even created the world, he chose which people would be beneficiaries of his gift of salvation.

- Calvin affirmed a strict understanding of God's sovereignty. He believed that God was in complete control over humanity's actions and that nothing happens unless God wills it. The five foundational tenets of Calvinism are often referred to as 'points.'
- Total depravity: This is the belief that all human beings are sinful and are born with an inherent sin-nature. Every human is completely sinful from the moment of birth.
- Unconditional election: This is the belief that God predestined individuals for salvation, and that individuals cannot choose God without God enabling them to do so.
- Limited atonement: This is the belief that God sent Jesus Christ to die for the sins of his chosen saints only, and not for the sins of those who are unbelievers.
- Irresistible grace: This is the belief that God's chosen elect cannot resist God's grace in their lives.
- Perseverance of the saints: This is the belief that once an individual is saved, he/she can never lose his/her salvation because he/she is eternally bound to Christ.
- Images, according to Calvin, held no religious relevance. Worse, images could lead to idolatry, the worship of the picture rather than the thing that it represented. In the summer of 1566, spurred on by the sermons of Calvinist preachers, zealous mobs descended on churches in the Netherlands, intent on ridding them entirely of their imagery. Many churches were literally white-washed. This is called iconoclasm.

## **Middle Class Takes Over Art World Dutch Republic, 17th Century**

Prior to the 17th century, in western Europe, the aristocracy and the Catholic Church dominated the world of art. Then in 1581 the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands broke free of Spain's Hapsburg rule and declared themselves the Dutch Republic. This new nation capitalized on the ingenuity of its middle class and its few natural resources to become the marketplace and foremost economic power in Europe. The change was unique in Europe because Dutch society was dominated by an advanced urban elite of merchants and craftsmen. The Dutch no longer defined their social position by the privileges conferred on them by birth but instead by their mercantile status. Almost half lived in cities and only a third worked in agriculture. And with wealth and newly found status, the middle class took over the world of art.

Visitors to the Dutch Republic in the 17th century were amazed at the popularity of art. British traveler Peter Mundy noted in 1640: "As for the art of Painting and the affection of the people to Pictures, I think none other go beyond them...." In addition to well-off merchants, Mundy reported bakers, cobblers, butchers, and blacksmiths as avid art collectors. Traditional patronage was supplanted by the middle class. This new market defined Dutch art of the 17th century, making the 17th century the Golden Age of Dutch art.

Let's start with the change agents as illustrated in these portraits of **Lucas van Voorst and his wife Catharina by Paulus Moreelse**. Lucas van Voorst was a goldsmith and jeweler, a craftsman, not a land-owning aristocrat. Yet Moreelse, one of the finest portrait painters of the time, shows him and his wife as prosperous citizens. Throughout the rest of Europe portraits were restricted to aristocrats. Suddenly in the Dutch Republic a large and prosperous merchant class arose, ranging from local government officials to tradesmen of more modest means. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic enjoyed the highest per capita income in Europe, and probably in the world. Portraits were one way to show status and thus, portrait painting thrived in the Dutch Republic in the 17th century.

What was the source of that new money for the middle class? The backbone was the sea. This picture **Fishing Vessels Offshore in a Heavy Sea by Ludolph Backhuysen** illustrates both the dangers and the benefits of the sea. Herring was an important export product, and the Dutch were particularly good at the fishing trade. They developed a "factory" ship, called a herring bus, which allowed the catch to be processed with salt at sea. This gave the Dutch an edge in the marketplace. They built on this sea experience to become the foremost traders in Baltic grain and later trade with Asia and the Americas, with their Dutch East and West Indies Trading Companies. Shipbuilding, agriculture, and textiles were the other leading industries in the Dutch Republic. All this industry resulted in high wages and investment opportunities for the growing middle class.

While the Dutch Republic was renowned for its religious tolerance, the state religion was Calvinism which encouraged austerity and humility. With these cultural mores how was the newly wealthy middle class to show its status? The simple answer is art for their homes. And boy, did they pick up this fad. The population of the Dutch Republic during the 17th century was roughly 2 million people. Estimates of works of art produced during that time range from five and ten million. (Very few of these, perhaps less than 1%, have survived.) Works of art, ranging from simple prints and copies to originals, hung in almost all Dutch homes.

What types of paintings did the middle class choose for their homes? One of the most original new type of painting displayed citizens going about daily life. The **Asparagus Vendor by Pieter de Hooch**, is a great example. This picture captures a moment in time in the life of this family, the husband descending the staircase, the wife dealing with the vegetable vendor, and another woman of the household doing her needlework. It reflects the family's wealth in their house, furnishings, clothing, and the rare and expensive asparagus. Note also the cleanliness of the house, a trait often commented on, especially by

foreign travelers. Another good example of genre painting is *Merry and Rowdy Peasants at an Inn*, 1653, Philips Wouwermans. Genre paintings more than doubled between 1600 and 1650.

But the most popular type of painting found in middle class homes was landscapes. In fact, the word “landscape” comes from the Dutch *landschap*. During the 17th century the percentage of landscape paintings in collections rose from 25 to 40%, displacing history paintings as the most popular type of painting. Landscape paintings appealed to the middle class, providing a source of refreshment and pleasure for the city dweller and reminding them of the pride they felt for their nation. The average price was modest, perhaps the equivalent of two weeks’ pay for a skilled craftsman. Most were painted for the open market, another key change in the Dutch art world. Prior to this time and throughout the rest of Europe, paintings were done on a commission basis. To keep the paintings affordable and minimize the artist’s risks in the open market, they innovated in two ways: 1) specializing in a specific type of painting such as winter scenes, moonlight scenes, seascapes, country views, or cityscapes and 2) creating tonal paintings with fewer details that allowed them to paint faster and avoid long drying times. **River Landscape with a Ferry by Salomon van Ruysdael** is a prime example of the realism of Dutch 17th century landscapes, portraying a river, one of the key commercial transportation arteries of the day. Rivers and canals facilitated the movement of people and goods throughout the Dutch Republic and into the interior of Europe, a necessity for this nation which led Europe in trade.

Still life paintings were another way to show status and to contemplate the spiritual side of life. The Dutch middle class were proud of their wealth, and paintings such as **Still Life by Pieter Claesz** reminded them and their visitors of the good things they could afford, such as the imported lemons and the lobster and crab. At the same time the watch, bread, and wine reminded them of the ephemeral nature of these world possessions, a *memento mori* or “reminder of death.” Another good example is **Still Life with Fruits, Foliage and Insects by Abraham Mignon**. The Spanish and the Dutch were exploring around the globe and bringing home exotic specimens. Still life paintings brought these exotic finds to the middle class. Still life paintings emerged simultaneously in Italy, Spain, and northern Europe in the 16th century. While they didn’t rank high with art theorists, they were very popular with the Dutch middle class. As a result they attracted some of the finest artists and commanded high prices.

History paintings with subjects taken from religion and ancient history had long been regarded as the highest form of art throughout Europe since they required knowledge of the stories and standard conventions as well as imagination, i.e., no painting from life. Throughout Europe, these paintings had been very popular. That changed in the Dutch Republic. Let’s first consider religious paintings.

With the founding of the Dutch Republic, Calvinism was declared the state religion. Images, according to Calvin, held no religious relevance. Worse, they could lead to idolatry, the worship of the picture rather than the thing that it represented. Calvinist churches were bare of imagery. So, there goes a huge business opportunity for artists. But, religious paintings didn’t disappear completely. The Dutch practiced religious tolerance. Catholics made up about one-third of the population and they were allowed to practice their faith within the confines of their own homes. Thus, paintings such as **The Denial of St. Peter by Gerrit van Honthorst** would have been owned by a Catholic citizen, and there was still a market for these religious works of art.

Finally, paintings of ancient history. The Dutch were well-educated for their time; in fact, they boasted the highest literacy rate in Europe. Owning and displaying a history painting would certainly have increased their status in the community. Mia’s best example is **Lucretia by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn**. This painting encapsulates the story of Lucretia, the wife of a Roman nobleman. She was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the ruling tyrant. She chose suicide over dishonor. Paintings such as this encouraged contemplation of the meaning of life and satisfied a desire for religious imagery banned by Calvinist churches. Though other types of pictures were sold in greater numbers by mid-century, history painting never lost its prestige or popularity.

Conclusion



