

Bartholomeus van der Helst

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Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613 – buried 16 December 1670) was a Dutch portrait painter.

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Biography

Born in Haarlem, the son of a Haarlem innkeeper, Van der Helst moved to Amsterdam some time before 1636, for he was married there in that year. His first dated picture, a group portrait of the regents of the Walloon Orphanage (currently the location of *Maison Descartes* in Amsterdam), dates from 1637. It is unknown from whom he learned to paint, but in Haarlem he must have at least known the work of Frans Hals, who like him, never traveled to Italy and specialized in portraiture. Hals refused even to travel to Amsterdam to paint the lucrative *schutterstukken*, and a few years after the trekschuit made commuting to Amsterdam possible in 1632 he attempted this in 1636 with the *De Magerie Compagnie*, but gave it up and let Pieter Codde finish it. As the son of an innkeeper with ever-increasing trekschuit patrons, van der Helst would have seen immediately the importance of this and the relative value of Amsterdam above Haarlem. In any case, he moved to Amsterdam and in 1639 he won his own *schutterstuk* commission, The *company of Captain Roelof Bicker and Lieutenant Jan Michielsz Blaeuw*. In Amsterdam he may well have trained with Nicolaes Eliaszoon Pickenoy.

Career in Amsterdam

In Amsterdam Van der Helst was a contemporary of Rembrandt. He soon became the most popular painter of portraits in that city, his flattering portrayals in the style of Anthony van Dyck being more immediately appealing than Rembrandt's dark and introspective later work. Some of Rembrandt's pupils, including Ferdinand Bol and Govaert Flink, adopted Van Helst's style instead of their master's.



Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Münster, painted 1648, exhibited at the Rijksmuseum.

the original paint and cloth were also afflicted as well as the frame.^[1]

van der Helst died at Amsterdam in 1670.

Legacy

Along with the portraits for which he is most famous, Van der Helst painted a few historical, biblical and mythological scenes. Upon his death, his widow offered his works for sale in 1671 in an advertisement in the *Haarlems Dagblad*,^[1] probably necessary because of the (depressed) Dutch economy:

The widow of Bartholomeus van der Helst, in life a very respected and artistic painter, is willing to sell all of his works, including many large pieces, that are painted by himself as well as respected masters such as Frans Floris, Simon de Vos, Goltzius, Adriaen Brouwer, Pieter Lastman, Gerard van Zyl, Simon de Vlieger, Hendrik Gerritsz Pot, Otto Marcellis, Willem van de Velde, etc.

Most famous portrait today

Today van der Helst's most famous portrait is his half-length portrayal of Gerard Andriesz Bicker, the son of Andries Bicker, the mayor of Amsterdam, whom he also painted in 1642. This portrait is often used to depict obesity as a symbol of wealth of the Amsterdam merchants of the Dutch Golden Age in Amsterdam. It was probably painted in 1639, the same year as the first *schutterstuk* where Roelof Bicker is the central figure. At that time Gerard Andriesz Bicker would have been 17 years old, but already holding the titles *lord of Engelenburg* and *High bailiff of Muiden*. It was quite common for artists to win whole family portrait commissions from members of the *schutterij* after painting group portraits. This is why the competition in *schutterstukken* became so fierce, led of course by Rembrandt's *Nightwatch*.

References

- ↑ Bartholomeus vander Helst biography (http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/houb005groot1_01/houb005groot1_01_0184.htm) in *De groote schonburgh der Nederlandsche konstschilders en schildersessen* (1718) by Arnold Houbraken, courtesy of the Digital library for Dutch literature
- ↑ 25-jun-06 (<http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nieuws/agenda/vanderhelst?lang=en>) News item Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, retrieved 30-aug-09
- ↑ Advertisements in the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* of 1671 (<http://www.apud.net/ohc/ohc71a.htm>)

There is also a portrait by this painter in the Kadriorg Palace Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia ("Lady in Black")

Bartholomeus van der Helst



Self-portrait, painted 1655

Born	1613 Haarlem
Died	1670 (buried 16 December) Amsterdam
Nationality	Dutch
Field	Portrait painting
Works	<i>Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Münster</i>
Influenced by	early Rembrandt Anthony van Dyck
Influenced	Ferdinand Bol Govaert Flink Joshua Reynolds



Gerard Andriesz Bicker