An Artistic Tour of Holland VI-Amsterdam. Part 1

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This is part I of the sixth document based on my PowerPoint presentations on the arts in The Hague, Dordrecht, Delft, Leiden, Haarlem and Amsterdam during the late medieval and early modern period, which I prepared for my class, *An Artistic Tour of Holland, 1200-1700*, and offered through the Second Half Life-Long Learning Institute in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Dutch Art of its Golden Age (late 16th and the 17th centuries) is usually presented as a coherent and unique art tradition that was a product of the new bourgeois culture that dominated the United Provinces, better known in English as the Dutch Republic. One of the chief characteristics of the art of the Northern Netherlands, especially in the seventeenth century, was its focus on depicting contemporary life. This was a result of its patrons, who chiefly consisted of members of the manufacturing, commercial and administrative elite, the city regents and ordinary middle class consumers. The Dutch Republic was the most urban society in Europe and its urban elite dominated political power in its cities, its most urban provinces and in the Republic as a whole. They managed to free themselves from the personal rule of a monarch, the aristocracy and traditional religion. At the same time, the old aristocratic, religious, cultural and military values retained a strong influence and appealed even to some of those whose wealth came from trade and industry. Dutch art in its Golden Age was far from unified and can best be understood by examining it through the context of the history and traditions of its most important cities. Although Dutch cities were not very far apart, and the Republic's efficient transportation system made travel inexpensive, safe, and fast, the work of its famous artists was rooted in the patronage of their home town. Research has shown that at least sixty percent of art produced by artists in a particular town was bought by their fellow citizens.

The idea for the course and its chief source is Elizabeth de Bièvre, *Dutch Art and Urban Cultures*, *1200-1700* (2015). Other useful sources are listed in the first document of An Artistic Tour of Holland c. 1500-1700 on The Hague.

Kingdom of The Netherlands-contemporary map



Contemporary Map of the Center of Amsterdam



Rijksmuseum 1885, P. J. H. Cuypers



Rijksmuseum Today, Amsterdam



Rijksmuseum Great Hall,1885, Amsterdam



Rembrandt van Rijn, Nightwatch, 1642, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Obama and Prime Minister Rutter at the Rijksmuseum



Nightwatch Flashmob https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSIXleVWPaE

The painting was promoted in the 19th century on the high alter of the Rijksmuseum's Honor Gallery as a symbol of national unity in the Kingdom of The Netherlands created after the Napoleonic wars. With the extensive renovation and rebuilding of the museum, it celebrates the cultural legacy of a now peaceful and liberal state. However, in the 17th century, it was a celebration of civic force and of victory achieved after four centuries of conflict and external aggression. It was commissioned in 1640 as one of a series of six civic guard paintings for the grandiose new banqueting hall of the Kloveniersdoelen, the headquarters of the arquebusiers, who built the hall between 1631 and 1626 to receive official visitors at a time when the city's town hall was still a ramshackle building.



Rembrandt van Rijn, Nightwatch, 1642, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Rembrandt's enormous painting, originally 4 by 5 meters, although it was trimmed somewhat in 1715 when it was moved from its original site, includes 30 more than full size males and one young girl at the outset of a military action. The list of names on the shield, which was added sometime later, starts with the name of the captain and his lieutenant, Frans Banning Coq and Willem Ruytenburgh, and mentions their titles as Lord of Purmerend and Ilpendam and Lord of Vlaerdingen. They catch the light at the center foreground and step resolutely forward to lead the guard into action. They look at each other with a swaggering self-confidence. Behind them in darker hues, more in the shadow and arranged in converging diagonals, are three groups made up of individuals who each concentrate on their part of the operation.

In 1640 there were about 4,000 militia members out of a population of 125,000, divided into twenty companies, each belonging to a different precinct of the city. Each company had a single captain, two lieutenants, four sergeants and an ensign. The rank of captain was often a step to becoming a burgomaster. Those who became officers aspired to be leaders among the regents, the wealthy merchants who ruled the city and by the third quarter of the 17th century they had made Amsterdam a virtually independent power in the Republic as the center of the Republic's

world-wide trade network and a Great Power in Europe and on the world's oceans. The militia companies had played a key role in this after the Alteration in 1578 and until the Peace of Münster in 1648, after which their military role declined.

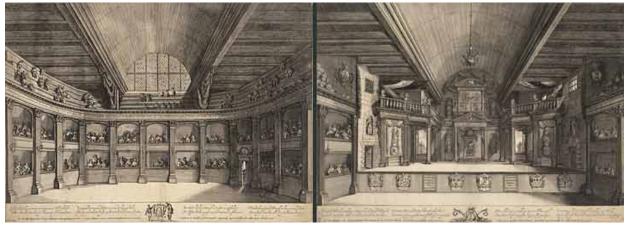
In 1529 Amsterdam's militia companies were the first to commission a militia company group portrait. The greatest production of these was between 1578 and 1650. Anybody who entered the Banqueting Hall in 1642 would have been overwhelmed by the painted army around them of life-sized officers in full kit and equipped with batons, guns, and lances. Before the construction and decoration of the new town hall between 1648 and 1655, these militia group paintings were the main public works of art in the city.

Cornelis Anthonisz, *Banquet of members of Amsterdam's Crossbow Civic Guard*, 1533, Amsterdam Museum.



The militia companies were joined by other municipal corporations, such as orphanages, old people's houses, and almshouses. All of which ordered group paintings of their boards of governors. Compare this earlier painting with Rembrandt's.

Salomon Savery, Schouwburg Theater, Amsterdam, 1658, engraving



The city government built a theater, The Schouwburg, to promote the arts. It was designed by Jacob van Campen and opened on January 3, 1638 on the Keisergracht in Amsterdam. The first play produced was *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* by Joost van den Vondel. It is still produced today on the anniversary of the Schouwburg's opening. The play tells the story of how the town militia saved the city from being taken by forces from West Friesland and Kennemerland.

The Schouwburg Theater Entrance from 1638

De wereld is een speeltoneel
(The world is a theater)
Elck speel zijn role en krijcht
zijn deel
(Everyone plays his role and
gets his part).



Pieter Lastman, Joseph Selling Grain in Egypt, 1612, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.



History painting was very popular in Amsterdam. In 1620, Forty-four per cent of all paintings were historical, 31% in 1630, and 22% in 1640. Pieter Lastman drew the young Rembrandt to Amsterdam as an apprentice in 1623/24. The picture demonstrated the role of leaders and followers in pursuit of a common cause. Amsterdam's grain trade (from the Baltic) was essential to its early growth.

Rembrandt van Rijn, St. John Preaching, c. 1634, Staatliche Museum, Berlin



Critics in the 17th century commented on the skill with which Rembrandt constructed his composition in his paintings. He often highlighted the action of the painting by bathing it in golden light against a darker background. He also used a heavy *impasto* to emphasize the action of the story. His paintings also used vigorous and looser brush strokes than most artists of his time.

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Wedding Feast of Samson*, 1638, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.



A characteristic of Rembrandt's group paintings was his ability to represent every individual according to his or her station in life and age, complete with representative expressions, gestures, and posture. Rembrandt often bought second hand clothes and costumes, which allowed him to better represent the variety of people he met on the streets of Amsterdam and in his paintings. He also invested heavily in prints, paintings, objects, foreign costumes, and antiques for his pictures, as his inventory for his bankruptcy demonstrated in 1656.

His contemporaries noted the organization, vigor, and attention to the variety of character in his *Nightwatch* and other group paintings. This reflected the ideals of the Regents who in the first half of the 17th century brought coherence to a dynamic and multi-cultural city. As Rembrandt became successful, he began to identity with the regent class, as his fancy house and studio on the Breestraat, and his marriage to Saskia, the daughter of a wealthy art dealer, Hendrick van Uylenburgh, suggest. His father in law lent him money to buy the house. Rembrandt's patrons were the entrepreneurial merchants and dynamic Regents who constituted a new bourgeois ruling class in Europe.

Rembrandt, Saskia in Arcadian Costume, 1635, National Gallery, London



Rembrandthuis Museum, St. Anthonie Breestraat, Amsterdam



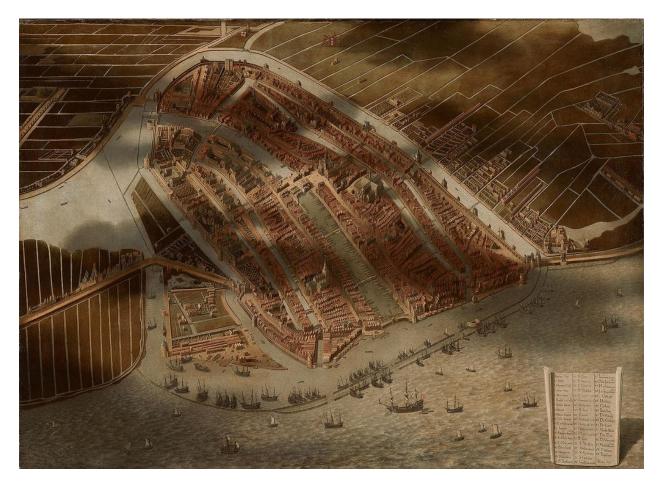
Cornelis Anthonisz, Birdseye View of Amsterdam, 1538, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam



Around 1200 a settlement arose along the Amstel where it meets the IJ and an inlet of the Zuiderzee. Settlers chose this marshy area because the higher land along the dunes was already occupied. Fishing was their most important early industry. They built on tree trunks and pilings

on both sides of the river and connected the settlement with a dam, a bridge and sluice. Sluices later allowed the tides to clean its canals. By 1275 the Count of Holland freed Amsterdam merchants from tolls and in 1306 they negotiated a town charter from their feudal lord. It was a small settlement and it was not until 1529 that there was evidence that the city owned surrounding land. They acquired the surrounding villages of Amstelveen, Lootendorp, Slooten and Oostdorp. The lack of land resources encouraged the early settlers to develop fisheries and non-capital intensive economic activities. Their growing trade allowed them to import wood and build bigger ships for fishing and trade. By 1500 the town had grown to about 10,000 people, similar in size to Dordrecht, Haarlem and Delft.



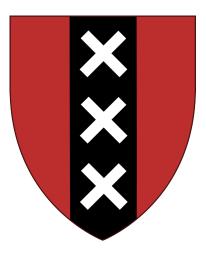


From an aerial perspective (impossible at the time), we look down on what Amsterdam looked like in about 1640 when its municipal boundaries were still defined by the city walls and the surrounding Singel canal. On the upper left, the Amstel flows into the city past Dam Square and into the IJ. By Micker's time the city had undergone three expansions. The old town hall on Dam square still has its tower in this picture with the Oude Kerk below it. The Nieuwe Kerk is on the left. The three chief monuments are lighted by the sun. The harbor is emphasized in the foreground. On the right is he Haarlemmermeer Gate and the dike that leads to Haarlem. The construction outside the walls shows 16th century growth. Micker's map is based on that of Cornelis Anthonisz but his higher perspective corrects some faults in the former's map.

Contemporary view of Amsterdam



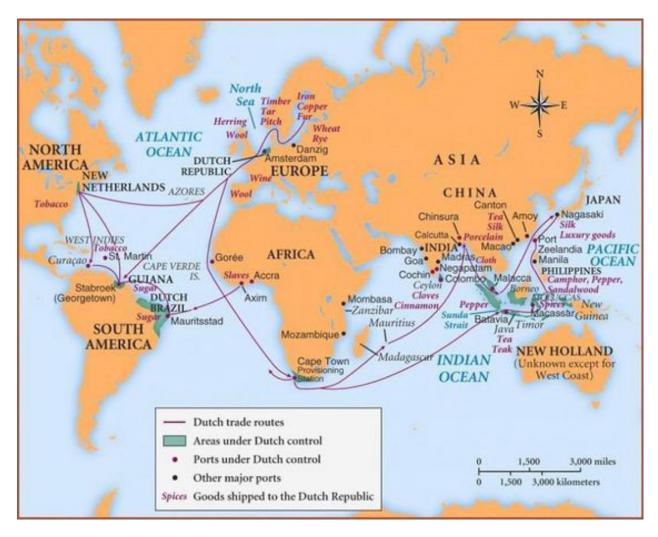
Insignia of Amsterdam



Coat of Arms of Amsterdam



The motto reads *Valiant, Steadfast, and Compassionate*. The crosses are the cross of St. Andrew but have also been seen as windmills. The crown was granted to Amsterdam by Emperor Maximillian I for Amsterdam's support in the wars between the Cods, who Maximillian and Holland's cities supported, and the Hooks, who were the local nobility in the countryside.



Amsterdam's geographical position allowed it to trade with Northern Germany and the Baltic and with Flanders and France. Ships also sailed to England for wool and traded grain, fish, and textiles for wine and other products from the Mediterranean. They competed with Hansa towns such as Kampen and Deventer and increasingly with the French, and Flemish in European trade. Their trade produced armed conflict with Denmark as they ventured further into the Baltic and became a major player in the European fish and grain trade. The latter earned the city the name of *korenschuur* (grain silo) as the merchants stored grain and waited to sell it when shortages made the price go up abroad.

Johannes Pontanus reversed Hesiod's depressing description of how Greece had gone from a period of gold, through silver and bronze, and then of iron in his widely read study of Amsterdam in his *Historical Description of the widely famous Emporium of Amsterdam* (1614): "Because during the beginning of the community the inhabitants were fishermen exploited by the Lords of Amstel, and afterwards they wrestled at home and abroad for two hundred years as part of the county of Holland...because their princes were always involved in wars. . .that was the iron age. During the Burgundian period after the death of Countess Jacoba, when the community started to grow and when the exchanges with both direct neighbors and distant peoples increased,

the first development of the town occurred. This was the age of silver. And lastly we shall discuss our own period, which started about thirty-two years ago, in which the citizens, rich within their own territory and powerful outside, not only wandered over Europe and Africa, but also took their ships to Asia and the New World to fill them with gold and other riches. I, therefore shall be justified in considering these years as belonging to the golden age" (quoted by De Bièvre, p. 260).

Jan van der Heyden, *The Oude Voorburgwal and the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam*, c. 1670, Mauritshuis, The Hague.



The weak Lords of Amstel made Amsterdam relatively independent. The city was divided by the Amstel river. The east side was called the Oude Zijde and the west side the Nieuwe Zijde. The names still exists. A church was built on the Oude Zijde in the late 13th century, dedicated to St. Nicholas and John the Baptist, both saints were associated with water. The bishop of Utrecht authorized an independent new parish church on the Oude Zijde in 1334, which later became the Oude Kerk. It was extended in 1370 and two chapels were added, dedicated to the patrons of two militia guilds, St. Sebastian and St. George. Other chapels, alterations and extensions followed over the years making it one of the most irregular churches in The Netherlands. The wealthy lived along the river on the Warmoestraat (vegetable street) near the church. The tower was

given a new spire in 1565 in the Renaissance style with bells, which could be heard and seen from afar on both land and sea.

Van der Heyden's depiction of the Oude Kerk has been found to be an accurate rendition of reality. The Oude Voorburgwal was the oldest canal in the city. The Oude Kerk is the oldest Gothic Hall style Church in the northern Netherlands, with the transepts as high as the nave. The beer dock in he left foreground is where imported beer was off loaded. On the left side of the canal beyond the stone bridge was the clandestine Catholic Church, Our Lord in the Attic, concealed by the façade of an ordinary house.

Emanuel de Witte, Interior of the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, c. 1661, Amsterdam Museum



Oude Kerk (Old Church) interior, c. 1300-1560, Amsterdam





Sex Workers' Statue, Amsterdam

The plaque reads:

"Respect all sex workers in the world."



The Oude Kerk is not far from the red light district6 of Amsterdam.

Red Light District, Amsterdam

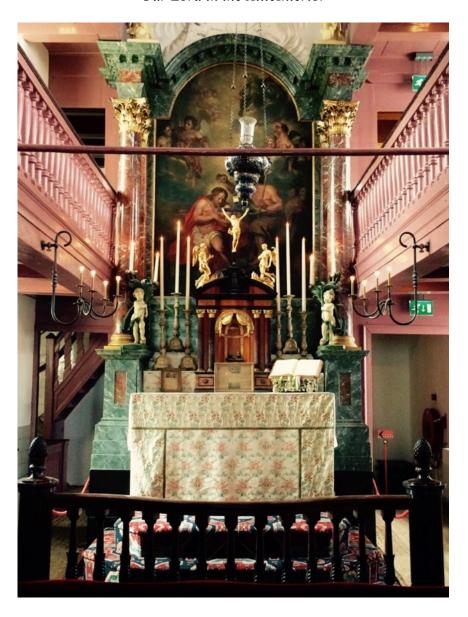


Church of Our Lord in the Attic.

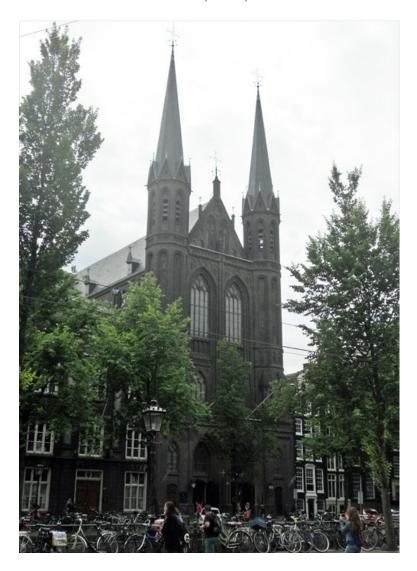


Catholic churches were not allowed during the period of the Republic but 'hidden' Catholic churches were substantial. Onze Lieve Heer in de solder (Our Lord in the Attic) was constructed in 1663 within three floors of a town house. It is located near the Oude Kerk.

Our Lord in the AtticInterior



Lutheran Church, 1633, Amsterdam



Lutheran churches were tolerated much earlier in Amsterdam. Today it is part of the University of Amsterdam

Jan van der Heyden Dam Square with the Nieuwe Kerk.c. 1670, Kunstmuseum, Basel.



The construction of a church on the west side of the city was authorized by the bishop of Utrecht in 1408 and was dedicated to St. Catherine before it was completed in 1410. She was the patron saint of millers. Mills were built on the west side of the town to catch the prevailing winds while ships favored the east side sheltered from the winds.

The church was ambitiously designed after the cathedral at Amiens. It was largely financed by a wealthy merchant-banker, who was an advisor to Count Willem VI. It was a very different church because, unlike the Oude Kerk, the Nieuwe Kerk had only one Guild chapel but many family chapels. It contained many more works of art than the Oude Kerk but very few survived the Alteration (when Amsterdam became Protestant and took over the property of the Catholic Church) in 1578. The planned tower was never built.

The Nieuwe Kerk gained prominence because it overlooked Dam square, which also contained the *Stadhuis*, the *Waag* (1502-65), and the *Beurs* (1608). Main streets from the Dam led to neighboring towns. The main road to the south, the *Kalverstraat*, was the most important because it led to Leiden and The Hague. Cattle were driven up the street and a cattle market was held from 1492.

Nieuwe Kerk western entrance, Nieuwezijde Voorburgwal, Amsterdam.



Nieuwe Kerk seen from the Dam



Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam



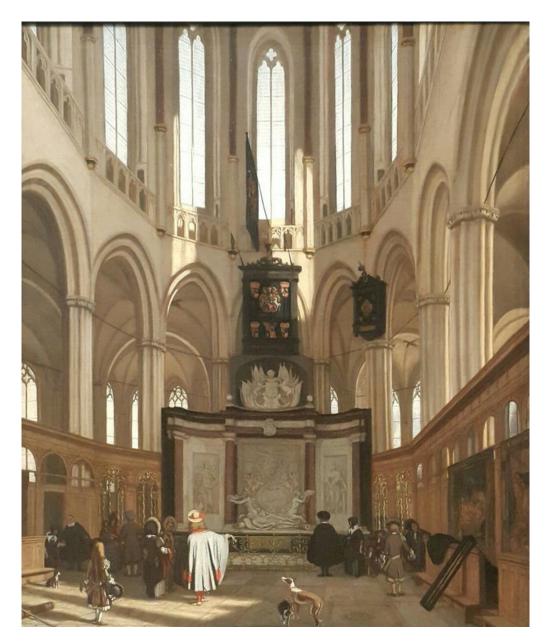
Choir Screen, Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam





Organ, 1655, Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam

Emanuel de Witte, The Tomb of Admiral de Ruyter, 1683, Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam



Rombout Verhulst produced the sculpture for de Ruyter's tomb in 1681. De Ruyter was the most famous admiral of the Dutch Republic. He sailed up the Thames in 1667 and burnt the Chatham dockyards and towed away the English flagship, the Royal Charles, during the second Anglo-Dutch naval war. He died off the coast of Sicily in 1667.

Stern Carving from the Royal Charles, 1660, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



The English warship, the Royal Charles, which had brought Charles II back to England when the monarchy was restored in 1660, was captured by Admiral de Ruyter when he sailed up the Thames in 1667 and burned the Chatham dockyards. The ship was towed to Holland and scrapped, but this monument to Holland's daring raid was saved.

Pieter Saenredam, The Old Town Hall of Amsterdam, 1657, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

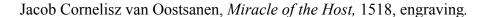


The picture was based on his drawing from life of sixteen years earlier. The painting was ordered to be hung in the council room of the new town hall. The old town hall burned down in 1652. Already in 1639 the town council had declared that the building would be torn down and replaced by a new and bigger town hall.

Early in the 15th century Count Albert had granted Amsterdam's burgomasters the right to be the sovereign authority in the city. The Count had no say in the selection of *schepen*, (aldermen), who chose four burgomasters from their own group. Thus, Amsterdam's government was a tight oligarchy. All-important town officials were appointed by the burgomasters. The burgomasters were also financially independent since they could levy and collect their own taxes. The position of *schout*, (sheriff), was bought by the town from the Lord in 1509. Seven *schepenen* served as the town's judges. The *vroedschap*, town council, sat for life and new members were chosen by the sitting members.

The town government was originally housed in a complex of buildings on the Dam, consisting of a town hall built in 1395, later enlarged by the premises of the St. Elisabeth Hospital. The colonnaded building, with a jawbone of a whale on the façade, contained the Tribunal of Justice. Residents could look through the railings when a death sentence was announced. The chamber of the Burgomaster was on the second floor of the tower. The building

on the right was used as the office of the Wissel Bank (Exchange Bank), founded in 1609, which transferred money between banks via *giro* accounts (essentially a paper accounting system). It was backed by the guarantee of the city and was a major reason why Amsterdam became the financial center of Europe in the 17th century.





A Legend explained that a dying man vomited a communion host after receiving the last rights. His daughter threw the host into the fireplace but it did not burn. Each time it was taken to be preserved at the St. Nicholas church, but it miraculously returned to the man's house on the Kalverstraat. In 1345 the Bishop of Utrecht contributed to Amsterdam's sense of identity by making the chapel built to commemorate the miracle a pilgrim destination and provided indulgences for visitors. A larger church was later built to celebrate the miracle of the host, the *Heilige Stede*, in which the original fireplace was preserved. A feast of the Blessed Sacrament is held each year during Lent to commemorate the miracle with a procession and afterwards a food feast for which a special dispensation from fasting was provided during Lent.

Jan Veen Huysen, Nieuwezijde Kapel as seen from the Kalverstraat, 1664-65



The *Heilege Stede* chapel to commemorate the miracle of the host was burned in a fire in 1452 but was replaced with this larger building, which still exists but is now a reformed church behind a row of houses and shops.

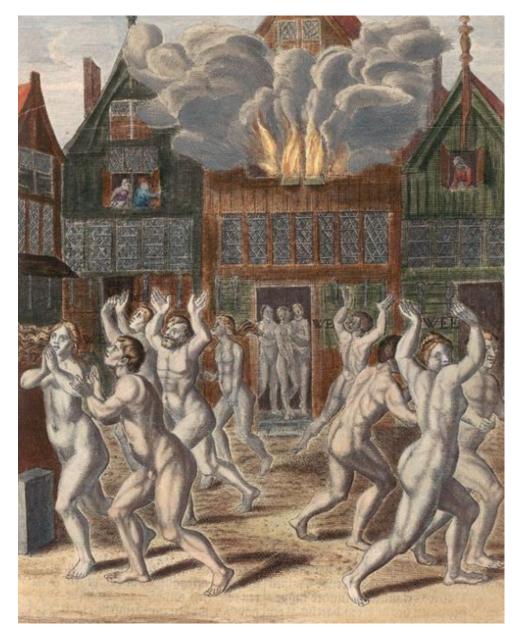
Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen, *Nativity with Shepherds and the Boelen Family*, 1512, Museo di Capo di Monte, Naples.



This painting was commissioned by Marghereta van Boelen, who had recently been widowed, for a Carthusian monastery outside of the walls of Amsterdam. She is portrayed on the right. Note that the infant rests on a bed of wheat, a reference to the miracle of the host and the Eucharist as well as Amsterdam's important grain trade. Note also the unusual a nativity scene with a harbor view.

Unfortunately, there was a great deal of religious conflict in 16th century Amsterdam between those who denied the Eucharist and the traditionalists who saw it as essential to Catholicism. Amsterdam was the last major city in the United Provinces to become officially Protestant in May of 1578. In 1531 the city announced plans to build a public wool house on the grounds of the *Heilege Stede* chapel. A group of women objected one night and 300 of them destroyed the newly built foundations. This has become known as the *Vrouwenoproar*, the revolt of the women.

Anonymous, after Barend Dircksz, *Anabaptists Running Naked in Amsterdam*, 1612-14, engraving from *Hortensius*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



The papal inquisition arrived in Amsterdam in 1525 and an anti-heresy *placard* was posted that required the death sentence for radical religious dissenters. Ten Anabaptists were sentenced and executed in The Hague and their heads were returned to Amsterdam and staked on pikes along the IJ. There was a good deal of opposition to the executions in the city. The Anabaptists turned violent with the arrival of a new leader and fifteen were executed. Despite the new militant policy of the government, a group of twelve ran through the city naked to proclaim the naked truth as commanded by God.

Anonymous, after Barend Dircksz, *Anabaptists attacked in Amsterdam*, 1657-59, engraving from Hortensius, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



In May 1635 a group of 40 armed Anabaptists attacked the Town Hall. One of the burgomasters and several other officials were killed. The attackers were tortured and killed.

Cornelis Anthonisz, The Prodigal Son Welcomed Back into the Church



The revolt of the Anabaptists and the religious turmoil in Amsterdam produced a change of government in the city and put it in the hands of strong orthodox Catholics, who controlled the government until the Alteration in 1578. Several printing houses in Amsterdam produced series of prints promoting the established order. This is the last woodcut out of a series of six. This and other series focusses on sons who spend their patrimony through gambling, drinking and frequenting prostitutes. The prodigal son returns and the two most disputed sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, are seen in the background.

Pieter Aertsen, Cook in Front of a Fireplace, 1559



Between 1535 and 1555 there are no records of indigenous Amsterdam painters, as opposed to many engravers. In 1555 Aertsen, who had a studio in Amsterdam before he went to Antwerp, returned to the city and became one of its most important painters. He was commissioned to paint many alter pieces, which are now lost, but he was also known for his kitchen and market pictures with strong assertive individuals. At a time when all genre scenes were still mostly religious, the lack of any religious symbols here was a breakthrough. Nonetheless, viewers at the time, would probably have thought of her as Martha, who in the Gospel was busy preparing a meal while her sister Mary was listening to Christ. The image can also be seen as a warning against the dangers of the pleasures of the flesh, 'voluptas carnis.' Although he never painted a picture without a figure, he is one of the founders of still-life painting in the northern Netherlands.

Anonymous, *Woman from Hoogwoud in North Holland Costume*, c. 1560, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



This is one of a series of paintings of women in traditional costumes produced in Amsterdam to celebrate country women. In the 19th century, these sort of pictures became advertisements for products from the countryside.

Dirck van Barendsz, Maria Triptych, Stedelijk Museum Het St. Catherinagasthuise, Gouda.

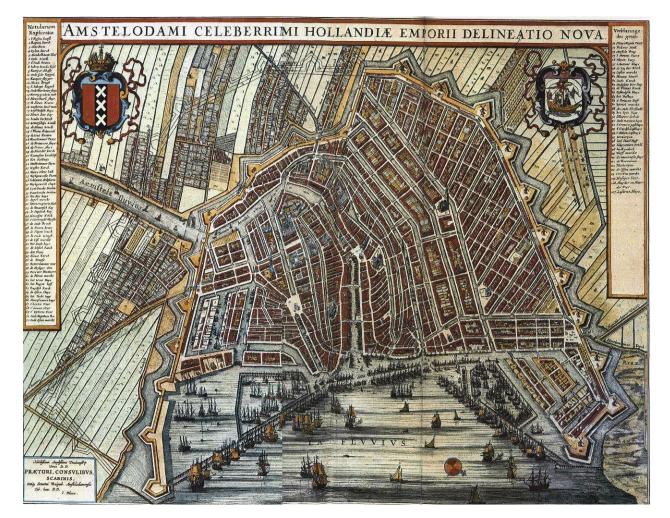


Van Barendsz (1534-92) was one of the first Amsterdam painters to have spent time in Italy. From 1555 until 1562 he worked with Titian in Venice. He shared Titian's fluidity of style and heavy brushstrokes. He produced a number of alter pieces, of which only the *Maria triptych* survives.

Dirck van Barendsz, Portrait of the Kloveniers in Rot L., 1566, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Barendsz produced a number of militia group portraits. At nearly three meters wide this was the largest painting of this genre to be produced at the time. It shows eighteen *hoplieden*, captains, sitting comfortably around a table eating bread and fish. They are pictured as individuals. This is the last militia group painting before the city government disbanded the militias in 1567. The crackdown on religious dissent broke out into open violence in 1566 as the *beeldenstorm* (iconoclasm) broke out around the country. Many Protestants fled the city and joined the *Geuzen* (the rebels against Spanish rule), leaving Amsterdam as the only major city in the northern provinces to support Phillip II in the 1570s. There was a good deal of opposition to the city government's repression of dissent and the city no longer trusted the *schutters* (militia) and suppressed them. In 1578 the *Geuzen* were at the city gates, blockaded the harbor and overthrew the government with the help of former *schutters* in the city. They dismissed Spain's hired troops and chose new burgomasters. This became known as the Amsterdam Alteration.



Joan Blaeu, Map of Amsterdam, 1649, Scheepvaart Museum

It was not until 1588 that the rebellious provinces formerly proclaimed their complete independence as the United Provinces. It was formally recognized as such by other states, except for Spain and its allies.

The population of Amsterdam had grown from about 30,000 to 60,000 during the sixteenth century but grew very rapidly to 100,000 in the early 17th century and doubled again in the next fifty years. Among the many immigrants to Amsterdam were wealthy merchants from Antwerp and other European merchant cities.

From 1595 a large public works department developed, which dramatically expanded the physical space of the city, expanded and developed its canal structure, and built many public buildings during the next 80 years, see the video below.

Expansion of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century, 2014, Stadsarchief Amsterdam https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvsHvfs3G1M&feature=youtu.be

Hendrik Cornelisz Vroom, *The Return to Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies,* 19 July 1599, 1599, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam



The first Dutch expedition to the East Indies was in 1596 but it was the 1598 expedition that brought back great riches and was publicly celebrated in Amsterdam on its return. The total profit was 400%. The inscription on the frame reads: "four ships have sailed to Bantam to collect spices and have planted commerce there, returning richly to the Amsterdam *palen*," a wooden harbor enclosure.