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Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Heda, Willem Claesz

Dutch, 1594 - 1680

BIOGRAPHY

Documents indicate that Willem Claesz Heda was born in Haarlem on December 14, 1594. This evidence is supported by an inscription designating his age—"aetate 84"—found on a 1678 portrait of Heda by the Haarlem painter Jan de Bray (Dutch, c. 1627 - 1688). Heda spent his entire career in Haarlem. In 1616, at the age of twenty-one, he became a member of the Saint George civic guard, serving as a corporal from 1642 to 1645. He married Cornelia Jacobsdr on June 9, 1619. Heda also took an active role in the Saint Luke's Guild. His name first appears on the guild rolls of 1631, the year in which he assisted Salomon de Bray (1597–1664) in its reorganization.[1] Heda was elected *deken* in 1642 and 1652, and was a *hoofdman* in 1637, 1643, and 1651. In a document dated July 7, 1642, Heda lists one of his sons, Gerret Willemsz Heda (Dutch, active 1640s and 1650s), as an apprentice.

Although he painted some portraits and figural compositions, Heda specialized in still-life painting. He was unquestionably one of the greatest masters of the genre. As is evident from his early *vanitas* still lifes, Heda was influenced by the Haarlem painter Floris van Schooten (active c. 1617–1655). His breakfast pieces—tabletop still lifes displaying an array of food, including cheese, fruit, and bread—likewise grew out of the Haarlem still-life tradition of the early seventeenth century, as was already noted during his lifetime by Haarlem historian Theodorus Schrevelius, who wrote that Heda painted "fruit and all kinds of knick-knacks" in the manner of Floris van Dyck (1575–1651). Heda's paintings evolved from additive compositions to monumental, monochrome breakfast and banquet pieces, executed with delicate brushwork that could vividly convey a wide range of materials and textures.

Heda and Pieter Claesz (Dutch, 1596/1597 - 1660) were the principal still-life artists in Haarlem until well after mid-century. Heda's great influence spread to painters in other artistic centers as well, among them the Amsterdam artist Jan Jansz den Uyl (c. 1595–1640).

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[1] See Ed Taverne, “Salomon de Bray and the Reorganization of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke in 1631,” *Simiolus* 6 (1972–1973): 50–69.

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