NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Claesz, Pieter

Dutch, 1596/1597 - 1660

BIOGRAPHY

Pieter Claesz, the most important still-life painter in Haarlem in the 1620s, was born in Berchem in 1596 or 1597.[1] 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.[2] Although it is unknown what date he joined the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, the 1634 guild register lists him as a master painter.[3] After his first wife died, he married Trijntien Lourensdr on August 8th, 1635, with whom he had two daughters, his only children.[4]

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). 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. After 1640, 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*.[5] 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.[6]

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

[1] Documents notarized by Samuel Coesaert on September 29, 1640 and October 2, 1640 describe Claesz as about forty-three years old; see Martina Brunner-Bulst, *Pieter Claesz.: Der Hauptmeister des Haarlemer Stillebens im 17. Jahrhundert: Kritischer Œuvrekatalog* (Lingen, 2004), 134.

[2] A "Pieter Clasen(s)" was admitted as a master in the Antwerp guild in 1620; Ph. Rombouts and Th. von Lerius, *De Liggeren en andere historische archieven der Antwerpsche Sint Lucasgilde*, 2 vols., (Amsterdam, 1961), 1:560–561.

[3] Hessel Miedema, *De archiefsbescheiden van het St. Lukasgilde te Haarlem 1497-1789*, 2 vols, (Alphen aan de Rijn, 1980), 2:420.

[4] Claesz's death in late 1660 is confirmed by records of the Haarlem Municipal Orphanage, which took in his daughters on January 3, 1661; see Pieter Biesboer et al., *Pieter Claesz: Master of Haarlem Still Life* (Exh. cat: Haarlem, Zürich, Washington, 2004), 136–137.

[5] Samuel Ampzing, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland*, (Haarlem, 1628), 372.

[6] J.G. van Gelder, "De schilders van de Oranjezaal," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. 11, 1948/49: 126–7.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

June 14, 2015

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Pieter Claesz," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, https://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/18426 (accessed October 24, 2020).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington