

Ochtervelt, Jacob

Dutch, 1634 - 1682

BIOGRAPHY

Jacob Ochtervelt, one of the leading specialists of aristocratic genre paintings in the 17th century, was born in Rotterdam in 1634. His father, Lucas Hendricksz Ochtervelt, was a bridge worker who earned a modest annual salary and was not, therefore, able to raise his family in the luxurious patrician manner that would become the principal subject of Jacob's work.[1] The only known reference to Ochtervelt's artistic education comes from the scholar Arnold Houbraken, who noted that Ochtervelt and Pieter de Hooch (Dutch, 1629 - 1684), also from Rotterdam, had been pupils of the Haarlem master Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683) at the same time.[2] If Ochtervelt had been a student of Berchem, it would probably have been in the late 1640s or early 1650s and he would presumably have been trained in the Dutch Italianate landscape tradition. Indeed, his earliest works are of landscapes with figures. However, Ochtervelt soon abandoned that style and subject matter and turned almost exclusively to aristocratic genre scenes and portraiture, with which he enjoyed great success.

Documents concerning his life focus entirely on his activities as a family man and member of the community. In 1655, Ochtervelt married Dirkje Meesters in the Reformed Church of Rotterdam. The couple never had children of their own, but from 1666 they served as guardians to the orphaned children of Ochtervelt's brother Jan.[3] From 1661 to 1672, Ochtervelt appears 14 times in the Rotterdam archives as a witness to christenings, will signings, and property settlements. In 1667, Ochtervelt was nominated to be master of the Guild of Saint Luke, but lost the election to Cornelis Saftleven (1607–1681). In 1674, Ochtervelt was drawn, like so many other artists, to Amsterdam because of the city's bustling art market. He remained there until his death in 1682.

Nearly all of Ochtervelt's surviving oeuvre of 130 paintings depict the life and leisure of the upper class: men and women reading and writing letters, eating and drinking, making music, and playing games. The subject matter, which owes much to the refined images of the wealthy bourgeoisie by Gerard ter Borch the Younger (Dutch, 1617 - 1681), allowed Ochtervelt to demonstrate his fine technique and sensitive handling of light and shadow. In particular, he relished depicting different

colors and textures of materials, thereby also betraying the influence of Frans van Mieris (Dutch, 1635 - 1681), whose elegant works are marked by smooth execution, invisible brushwork, and extraordinary attention to detail.

Notes

[1] Susan Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), 4.

[2] Arnold Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen*, 3 vols. in 1 (The Hague, 1753; reprinted, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:34–35.

[3] Susan Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), 4.

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