BIOGRAPHY

Jan Both was born in Utrecht probably between 1615 and 1618.[1] His father, Dirck Both, a glass painter, may have introduced him to the rudiments of the trade, but he almost certainly received training from a different master as well.[2] A record from the Utrecht Saint Luke’s Guild, presumably referring to Jan, notes that in 1634–1636 a son of Dirck Both was apprenticed to an unnamed master from the guild. This master was probably Abraham Bloemaert (Dutch, 1566 - 1651), with whom Jan’s older brother Andries Both (Dutch, 1611/1612 - 1641) had been apprenticed in 1624 and 1625.[3] Jan left Utrecht for Rome in the mid-1630s, joining his brother, who had gone to Italy in 1633.[4] Jan appears in the records of the Accademia di San Luca on June 12, 1638, in attendance at a meeting of fellow artists.[5] In 1639 and 1641, he is documented as living with his brother on the Via Vittoria in the parish of San Lorenzo in Lucina, a popular district for foreign artists.[6]
Both’s stay in Rome was short-lived. By 1642 he had returned to Utrecht, where he established himself as an independent master, and in that same year he took on his first apprentice, Hendrick Verschuuring (1627–1690).[7] In 1649 Jan was elected overman (regent) of the Saint Luke’s Guild in Utrecht, a post he held jointly with Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–1660/1661) and Cornelis van Poelenburch (Dutch, 1594/1595 - 1667).[8] Both remained in the city until his death and he was buried on August 9, 1652, in the Buurkerk.[9]

It was after his return to Utrecht that Both produced the bulk of his work, which consisted of paintings, drawings, and etchings of pastoral, religious, or mythological subjects set in Italianate landscapes. He received his most important commission, however, while still in Italy. In 1640 Both was among a group of artists, including Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/1605 - 1682), Nicolas Poussin (French, 1594 - 1665), Gaspard Dughet (French, 1615 - 1675), and Herman van Swanevelt (Dutch, c. 1600 - 1655), involved in the decoration of Philip IV’s newly built summer retreat, the Buen Retiro palace in Madrid. The details of the commission remain obscure, but Both completed at least five large landscape paintings by 1641. His idyllic depictions of the Italian countryside suggest the classicizing influence of Claude, but also that of his fellow northerners in Rome such as Pieter van Laer (Dutch, c. 1592 - 1642), Paul Bril (Flemish, 1554 - 1626), and Poelenburch.

According to Both’s earliest biographer, the German artist Joachim von Sandrart I (German, 1606 - 1688), Jan and his brother Andries had collaborated frequently in Rome, with Jan painting the landscapes and Andries the figures.[10] Upon returning to Utrecht, Jan continued the collaborative practice with artists such as Poelenburch and Weenix.[11] One such group effort was a portrait done collectively in 1644 by Jacob Duck (Dutch, c. 1600 - 1667), Bartholomeus van der Helst (c. 1613–1670), and Poelenburch for the Utrecht collector Willem Vincent, Baron van Wytenhorst, for which Jan was asked to paint the background landscape.[12] In 1648 Both gave a portrait of himself, painted by Poelenburch, to Van Wytenhorst, a testament to the close relationship he had gained with his collector.
[1] The date of Jan’s birth as first documented by Sandrart has been contested by some scholars. De Bruyn places it at about 1618 or slightly later, while Blankert has argued for an earlier date, c. 1615. The Utrecht municipal archives contain no birth or baptismal records before 1612, and records between 1612 and 1626 exist only for two churches.


[3] Joachim von Sandrart, Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister, ed. A. R. Peltzer (Munich, 1925), 312; Arnold Houbraken, De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:114. The Utrecht archives record Andries’ apprenticeship with Bloemaert from 1624 to 1625, though they only name a son of “Dirck Bot.” Scholars have assumed it could only be Andries, given that he was born around 1611–1612, and would have been of appropriate age to hold an apprenticeship in those years. The document is found in Samuel Muller, De Utrechtsche archieven, I: schildersvereeingen te Utrecht (Utrecht, 1880), 118–122.

Drawings, and Prints (New York, 1976), 34. Andries was first recorded in the French city of Rouen in 1633 and then in Rome in 1635.


[8] Samuel Muller, De Utrechtsche archieven, I: schildersvereeningen te Utrecht (Utrecht, 1880), 129.


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