

1975 NGA: 208–209, repro.
1976 Walker: 286–287, repro.
1979–1992 Sumowski, 8 (1984): 4066, 4084.
1983 Sumowski, 3: 2019, 2021, 2022, 2094, cat. 1368,
color repro.

1984 Philadelphia: 241, note 2.
1984 Robinson: 540–544.
1985 NGA: 240, repro.

Gabriel Metsu

1629–1667

GABRIEL METSU was born in Leiden in January 1629, only two months before the death of his father, the Flemish painter Jacques Metsue. In 1644, at the age of fifteen, Gabriel Metsu is recorded as one of a group of artists who were lobbying for the establishment of a Leiden Guild of Saint Luke, and in 1648 he became a founder-member of the organization. With the exception of short absences in the early 1650s, he spent the next decade in Leiden.¹ By July 1657, however, he had moved to Amsterdam. On 12 April 1658 he married Isabella de Wolff, a relative of the Haarlem classicist painter Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600–1652/1653). In January of the next year, Metsu became a citizen of Amsterdam, where he died in 1667 at the age of only thirty-eight.

It has been assumed that Metsu must have studied with Gerard Dou (q.v.), Leiden's leading genre painter during the 1640s. This assumption may well be correct but is not without problems, given that early works from Metsu's Leiden period tend to be executed in a fairly broad and fluid manner, far removed from the meticulously crafted, small-scale paintings of Dou and the other Leiden *fijnschilders*. With the possible exception of the local painter Jan Steen (q.v.), Metsu, in fact, seems to have been influenced more by the Utrecht artists Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–c. 1660) and Nicolaus Knüpfer (c. 1603–1655). Interestingly, after moving to Amsterdam, Metsu's style demonstrates more of the high level of detail and finish associated with the Leiden school.

The influence of several other artists—notably Johannes Vermeer (q.v.), Gerard ter Borch (q.v.), and Pieter de Hooch (q.v.)—is sometimes very evident in Metsu's work. Despite the existence of a sizeable number of dated paintings, however, these influences occur without any clear chronological pattern, and it is difficult to establish a firm structure for Metsu's stylistic development.

Metsu's most widely acclaimed paintings are the elegant genre pictures, generally depicting a small number of relatively large figures within an upright composition. In addition to indoor genre scenes, he painted a few depictions of outdoor markets, religious scenes, portraits, and still lifes.

His only known pupil was the genre and portrait painter Michiel van Musscher (1645–1705).

Notes

1. While annotations in the guild book for 1650 and 1651 by Metsu's name state that he had left the city, subsequent documents confirm that this absence was of a short duration; see Robinson 1974, 12.

Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 3: 32, 40–42, 51, 211.
Smith 1829–1842, 4 (1833): 70–110; 9 (1842): 517.
HdG 1907–1927, 1 (1907): 253–335.
Leiden 1966.
Gudlaugsson 1968.
Robinson 1974.
Philadelphia 1984: 248–253.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 253–254.

1937.1.57 (57)

The Intruder

c. 1660
Oil on oak, 66.6 x 59.4 (26½ x 23¾)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

On the step to the bed beneath the white skirt of the central figure: *G. Metsu*

Technical Notes: The original support, an oak panel with vertical grain, has been thinned, backed, and cradled. An x-radiograph taken in 1940 shows the painting prior to cradling and suggests the panel is composed of a single board. Paint is applied smoothly over an off-white ground in a thin series of glazes in the darks and more thickly in the lights,