

Nooms, called Zeeman, Reinier

Also known as

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Zeeman

Seeman

Nooms, Reinier

Dutch, c. 1623 - 1664

BIOGRAPHY

Reinier Nooms was a highly respected painter, draftsman, and internationally renowned graphic artist who specialized in maritime subjects during a period when the Dutch commercial empire spanned the globe. He was born in either 1623 or 1624, presumably in Amsterdam, to parents whose names are unknown. Nooms probably received his artistic training in Amsterdam, but we do not know the name of his teacher. His earliest known work is a drawing dated 1643 made at the age of 19 or 20 that depicts the rear of Amsterdam's Old City Hall (Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg).[1]

Nooms's artistic speciality and the fact that he signed his paintings *R. Zeeman* or *Reinier Zeeman* (*zeeman* = sailor or seaman) make it virtually certain that he was both a professional sailor and an artist. Nooms drew on his intimate knowledge of ships to create images that are so accurate that settings, specific vessels, and the activities taking place in ports and aboard ships can be exactly identified. His paintings usually have a blue-gray tonality that he enlivened with a sensitive use of light and a restrained use of bright colors, including occasional touches of gold on his ships. White highlights animate his figures and activate the undulating surfaces of water. Nooms also preserved an overall clarity of form while subtly drawing the eye to a painting's focal point.

Nooms appears to have spent time in Paris in the late 1640s or early 1650s, when he published two series of lively etchings depicting views of the French capital and its surroundings: *Receuil de plusieurs Nauires, et Pâisages faits après le naturel par R. Zeeman 1650* and *Quelque Nauires desseigner & graver par Remy Seeman Ao1652*. It is possible that he learned the art of etching and printmaking in the workshop of the Flemish marine artist and engraver Matthieu van Plattenberg (also known as Plattenmontaigne; 1607/1608–1660), who had settled in Paris.[2]

After his return to Amsterdam in 1652, Nooms started a fertile collaboration as a printmaker with the publisher Cornelis Danckerts and his son, Dancker Danckerts. During the 1650s he designed a number of compelling print series that provide much information about Amsterdam, its busy harbor, Dutch waterways and the types of boats plying those waters, and views of other ports.[3] Nooms was back in Amsterdam in time to witness the fire that destroyed the Old City Hall on July 7, 1652. He commemorated the dramatic event with a beautiful etching that he signed with the following statement: “R Zeeman Inventoor et fecit e x. I op dee ovde here graft I after dee geesondee broeder” (R Zeeman inventor and c[reator] and executor [engraver] I at the old Herengracht I behind the [house or tavern called] Gezonde Broeder).[4]

On April 6, 1653, Nooms married Maria Jansdr Moosijn from Bruges, the sister of Michael Moosijn, an engraver with whom Nooms collaborated on two popular engravings of Maerten Harpersz Tromp, a famous admiral who died in battle in 1653. The couple had two daughters, Neeltjen (born in 1653) and Lisbet (born in 1655). Nooms’s married life seems to have been as stormy as some of the seas he depicted. A notarial record of January 6, 1656, relates statements made by his wife on December 27, 1655, that her husband had fallen in with bad company, was visiting houses of ill repute, stayed out until the wee hours of the morning, and had even begun to hit her on occasion.[5]

Nooms probably returned to Paris in 1656 and then traveled around the Mediterranean basin, where he made a number of evocative drawings and etchings of coastal areas and ports. He also may have visited Berlin around 1657 to work for the elector of Brandenburg.[6] From 1661 to 1663 Nooms accompanied the celebrated Dutch admiral Michiel de Ruyter on an expedition to eradicate piracy along the coast of North Africa.[7] Upon his return from the Mediterranean, Nooms painted four large canvases for the Admiralty of Amsterdam that depict the port cities Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli on the Barbary Coast, and Valetta on Malta (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). It is not certain, but very likely the Board of the Admiralty specifically recruited Nooms to accompany De Ruyter to create a visual record of the expedition.

Nooms was a prolific artist: more than 80 paintings and 177 etchings from his hand are known.[8] His career spanned about 14 years, from around 1650 to his death in 1664. Most of his oeuvre depicts his two main artistic interests: marine subjects—including ships, naval battles, and foreign ports—and cityscapes featuring his hometown of Amsterdam and its bustling harbor in the IJ estuary.

Aside from the accuracy of his renderings of ships and harbor activities, he was also attuned to the impact of variable weather patterns on the water and on sailing conditions, and he excelled at conveying a range of atmospheric qualities. His paintings and prints found eager buyers among Amsterdam's merchant community and others who derived their living from maritime pursuits.[9] Nooms died in Amsterdam in 1664, at age 40 or 41. When his widow remarried in 1667, her dowry included several paintings by Nooms as well as books on navigation.

[1] Amsterdams Historisch Museum and Art Gallery of Ontario, *The Dutch Cityscape in the 17th Century and Its Sources = Opkomst en bloei van het Noordnederlandse stadsgezicht in de 17de eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1977), 164–165, no. 73. The dated drawing of the Old City Hall is in the collection of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, inv. 22760.

[2] For the discussion about Nooms's stay in Paris, see Jeroen de Scheemaker and Dieuwke de Hoop Scheffer, "Reinier Zeeman," *The New Hollstein: Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700*, vols. 56–57 (Rotterdam, 2001), 56:xv–xvii. In 1918, William Aspenwall Bradley noted that "Nooms's etchings are widely acclaimed, as they have 'a truth of observation and rendering, coupled with a charm and purity of linear style that puts him in the very front rank of craftsmen on copper.'" William Aspenwall Bradley, *Dutch Landscape Etchers of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, 1918), 90.

[3] Nooms created etchings for the following print series: *The Four Elements*, 1651–1652; *Stads-Poorten van Amsterdam* (Town Gates of Amsterdam); *Verscheijde Schepen en Gesichten van Amstelredam* (Various Ships and Views of Amsterdam), in three parts of 12 prints each, c. 1652–1656; *Verscheijde Binnewaters* (Various Inland Waterways), 1654; *Quelques Ports de Mer* (Various Seaports), 1656; *Nieuwe Scheeps Batalien* (Naval Battles), 1652–1654; *The Views in Amsterdam*, c. 1659/1662; and *Vues de Paris et ses environs* (Views of Paris and the Surrounding Area), c. 1667–1677.

[4] Jeroen de Scheemaker and Dieuwke de Hoop Scheffer, "Reinier Zeeman," *The New Hollstein: Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700*, vols. 56–57 (Rotterdam, 2001), 56:40–41, no. 9. The plate for this etching is the only one that Nooms did not sell to a publisher.

[5] Jeroen Giltaij and Jan Kelch, *Praise of Ships and the Sea: The Dutch Marine Painters of the 17th Century* (Rotterdam, 1996), 277.

[6] Jeroen de Scheemaker and Dieuwke de Hoop Scheffer, "Reinier Zeeman," *The New Hollstein: Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700*, vols. 56–57 (Rotterdam, 2001), 56:xiii.

[7] Friso Lammertse, "Reinier Zeeman en notaris Gerard de Jager schilderen Algiers," in J. R. Ter Molen and Michiel Nijhoff, *Vorm geven aan Veelzijdigheid* (Rotterdam, 1993), 46–47. A drawing of Tripoli is the single surviving sketch from this voyage. Nooms did produce a series of finished drawings derived from his sketches that has survived as a complete set (*Atlas Van der Hem*, vol. 35, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna).

[8] According to the database of the Rijksdienst voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague (RKD), 63 of 87 paintings by Nooms are on canvas, 22 are on panel, and 2 are on canvas transferred to panel.

[9] In addition to the Admiralty Board and merchant families like the Bickers, at least one of his publishers, Cornelis Danckerts, and several tavern keepers owned paintings by Nooms. See the Montias Database of 17th-Century Dutch Art Inventories, search for "Zeeman," <http://research.frick.org/montias/recordlist.php>, accessed March 1, 2011.

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