

# Asselijn, Jan

Also known as

Krabbetje

Crabbetje

Asselyn, Jan

Dutch, c. 1610 - 1652

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## BIOGRAPHY

Jan Asselijn was a prominent landscape painter and draftsman in the Dutch Italianate tradition. Born in the French town of Dieppe, France, as a child Asselijn moved with his family to Amsterdam in 1621. There he studied with Jan Martszen the Younger (c. 1609–after 1647), a specialist in battle scenes, and produced two cavalry scenes, dated 1634 and 1635. Like many Dutch painters seeking to perfect their art, Asselijn traveled to Italy after his early training, probably after November 1635.[1] The experience would influence his painting for the rest of his life.

In Rome, he became a member of the Bentvueghels (Dutch for “Birds of a Feather”), an association of northern artists who painted views of the sun-drenched Roman countryside, as well as picturesque scenes of everyday urban life. The group bestowed the nickname Crabbetje, or “little crab,” on Asselijn because of his deformed left hand.[2] Although no dated paintings survive from Asselijn’s time in Italy, his later works show the influence of the low-life street scenes of Pieter van Laer (Dutch, c. 1592 - 1642), as well as the light-infused landscapes of Jan Both (Dutch, 1615/1618 - 1652), both also members of the Bentvueghels. The renowned German writer Joachim von Sandrart praised the many “fine landscapes, small scenes, and animals,” that Asselijn made in Italy, while the Florentine art historian and biographer Filippo Baldinucci praised Asselijn’s renditions of *capricci* (“fantasies”) and his battle scenes.[3] Asselijn was also a prolific draughtsman, and produced many landscape drawings populated with ruins, animals, and peasants during outings in the Roman countryside with his colleagues. These Italian drawings continued to inform his works after he left Italy.

Asselijn returned to the Netherlands by way of Lyon, France, where he married Antoinette Huart around 1644. He also stayed briefly in Paris, and made paintings for the Hôtel Lambert with Herman van Swanevelt (Dutch, c. 1600 - 1655).[4] While there, he also created preparatory drawings for three series of prints of Roman

ruins by Gabriel Perelle (French, 1603 - 1677). By 1647, Asselijn had returned to Amsterdam, where Rembrandt made a portrait etching of him.[5] Asselijn painted Italianate landscapes for the remaining five years of his short life. He was buried on October 3, 1652.

Asselijn's most innovative contribution to the Dutch landscape tradition was the sweeping scale of his panoramic paintings. His broad views of the Roman countryside and picturesque harbor and river scenes are characterized by a bright palette suffused with silvery tones and rich peach and azure hues. He frequently set his scenes in the early morning or late afternoon, using the play of raking light and shadow to accentuate the monumentality of the Roman ruins that so often anchored his landscapes. Traveling merchants, shepherds, herdsmen, and their animal charges populate Asselijn's views, their theatrical gestures helping to draw the viewer into his scenes. Asselijn also produced a series of four winter landscapes, a rarity among the Italianate Dutch landscape painters.[6]

The Dutch biographer Arnold Houbraken states that Frédéric de Moucheron (Netherlandish, 1633 - 1686) and Willem Schellinks (1627–1678) studied with Asselijn. Asselijn's Roman studies and landscapes would later influence the work of Adam Pynacker (Dutch, c. 1620 - 1673), Thomas Wijck (c. 1616–1677), Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), and Karel Dujardin (Dutch, 1626 - 1678).

## Notes

[1] Asselijn was documented in Amsterdam as late as November 4, 1635, and there are no dated paintings between this year and 1647, by which time he had returned to Amsterdam; see Anne Charlotte Steland-Stief, *Die Zeichnungen des Jan Asselijn* (Fridingen, 1989), 12.

[2] Arnold Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburgh der Nederlandtsche Kosnstschilders en Schilderessen*, 3 in 1 vol. (The Hague, 1753; repr. Amsterdam, 1976), 2:327

[3] Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei Professori del Disegno...*, 7 vols. (Florence, 1681–1728), 4:331, 5:208.

[4] Peter Schatborn, *Drawn to Warmth: 17th-Century Dutch Artists in Italy*, (Amsterdam, 2001), 101.

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[5] Asselijn is referred to in a deed in Amsterdam that year; Anne Charlotte Steland-Stief, *Jan Asselijn: Nach 1610 bis 1652* (Amsterdam, 1971), 113.

[6] For example, *Frozen Moat Outside City Walls*, about 1647, oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum, Eliza S. Paine Fund in memory of William R. and Frances T. C. Paine, 1969.24.

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