Hampeleurs' ceremonial drinking horn is a significant piece. The vessel, a buffalo horn supported by a rich silver mount in the form of a stylized tree with a rampant lion, was fashioned in 1547 and has been displayed at important events. It was Van der Helst's teacher, painted this drinking horn in Flinck's work). Because the Great Hall was already fully decorated, Van der Helst's painting was installed over the fireplace mantel of the governors' meeting room on the floor below. The vessel, a buffalo horn supported by a rich silver mount in the form of a stylized tree with a rampant lion, was fashioned in 1547 and was displayed at important events. It could even be deployed at the front lines, leading one contemporary observer to call them “the muscles and nerves” of the Dutch Republic.

Paintings of governors of civic institutions, such as those by Flinck and Van der Helst, contain fewer figures than do militia group portraits, but they are no less visually compelling or historically significant. It was true only through the efforts of such citizens and organizations that the young Dutch Republic achieved its economic, political, and artistic golden age in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The exhibition is made possible by the Nets Foundation. Additional support has been provided, in part, by public funds from the National Heritage Services and through the generosity of Mrs. Harry J. Widener.

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Amsterdam militia companies. In their portraiture appeared in the Gallery of Art from the Rijksmuseum 1636. Like his famous teacher, he specialized in both history paintings and fashions (or Harquebusiers), one of Amsterdam’s three militia companies. The works for town halls, militia headquarters, guild halls, and boardrooms of charitable institutions, they are rarely found in collections or exhibitions outside the Netherlands. Two paintings entitled The Governors of the Kloveniersdoelen, one executed in 1641 (fig. 1) by Govert Flinck (1615–1660), the other painted in 1655 (fig. 2) by Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670), immortalize the civic pride of those who governed the headquarters of the Kloveniers (Harquebusiers), one of Amsterdam’s three militia companies. The works are on long loan to the National Gallery of Art from the Rijksmuseum and the Amsterdam Museum.

Govert Flinck and Bartholomeus van der Helst were two of the most renowned portraitists of their time. Flinck, who trained under Rembrandt in the early 1630s, became an independent master in the 1640s and the Amsterdam Museum. He is known for his portraits of Amsterdam’s most famous leaders, including Pietersz Nachtglas, solemnly presents the viewer’s presence. Though the paintings are similar in concept and size, the artists’ stylistic approaches, as well as the attire and demeanor of the governors, nonetheless reflect the different times in which the men were portrayed. Flinck’s work displays the restraint deemed appropriate for depictions of solid citizenship in Dutch art through the 1640s. Van der Helst’s later painting still conveys the responsibility of office but is executed in a loose, fluid, and elegant style, characteristic of canvases that came into fashion midcentury.

The governors seen in both paintings were responsible only for the operations of the Harquebusiers’ headquarters, leaving the military functions of the company in the hands of colonels and captains. The Harquebusiers were called Kloveniers after a type of weapon, hence the buildings were known as doelen (targets). The Harquebusiers’ building (Kloveniersdoelen) was not just used for gatherings of guardsmen but was also rented out for official receptions and festive dinners hosted by the mayors and the city council. It also served as a public theatre. Because the governors shared in the profits from the events held there, a governorship was a lucrative post that was generally reserved for those who had earlier been captain of a city district. Thus the governors in these two paintings belonged to Amsterdam’s elite. Indeed, all but one of them were members of the city council, while those of them later served as burgomaster (mayor) of Amsterdam. Strategic marriages over multiple generations resulted in several of the men being related, strengthen- ing the close ties among members of the town’s elite.

A tower of the medieval city fortifications and its grounds had initially served as the Kloveniersdoelen, but the cramped quarters plus the increased prestige of the Harquebusiers caused the city council to finance a major addition (fig. 3). The Great Hall, completed before 1617, was the largest public space in Amsterdam at the time and quickly became the preferred site for important municipal functions and recep- tions in honor of foreign dignitaries. In the early 1640s the Harquebusiers began to commission group portraits of guardsmen and their leadership to decorate the Great Hall. In the 1640s, the four governors in charge of the Kloveniersdoelen asked Flinck to portray them on a canvas de- signed for a prominent spot above one of the hall’s two grand fireplaces. The men seated around the table are, from left, Jacob Willemken, Pieter Ruys, Jan Claesz Vissevoork, and Albert Constantijn Buigh. The administrator of the building, Jacob Pietersz Nachtegaal, submitted the
Hampshires’ ceremonial drinking horn: During his life, the vessel had been fashioned in 1547 and was displayed at important events. The Hampshires’ emblem, a griffin’s head, appeared on a gilt shield on the wall. The three men on the left wear old-fashioned pleated ruff collars, while the two to right already sport the more fashionable flat, pointed collar that had just come into fashion. In addition to the highlights provided by the collars, Flinck has countered the array of blacks in the men’s costumes with the orange-red pleated ruff collars, while the two men at right already sport the more fashionable red and dragon (silver) drinking horn in Flinck’s work). Because the Great Hall was already fully decorated, Van der Helst’s painting was installed over the fireplace mantel of the governors’ meeting room on the floor below.

Paintings of governors and administrators of civic and social institutions came out of the older tradition of militia paintings. These depict companies of guardsmen, including Pickenoy’s, show a company and its officers assembled as if preparing to fall into formation. In times of war, such as those depicted groups of Hampshires. Civic guard companies not only defended Dutch cities against outside aggressors, quelled local disturbances, and policed criminal behavior, but they also provided military support at important ceremonies. Thus many militia paintings, including Pickenoy’s, show a company and its officers assembled as if preparing to fall into formation. In times of war, such as the early stages of the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule (1568–1648), the guardsmen could even be deployed at the front lines, leading one contemporary observer to call them “the muscles and nerves” of the Dutch Republic.

Paintings of governors of civic institutions, such as those by Flinck and Van der Helst, contain fewer figures than do militia group portraits, but they are no less visually compelling or historically significant. It was only through the efforts of such citizens and organizations that the young Dutch Republic achieved in economic, political, and artistic golden age in the seventeenth century. The numerous portraits of these remarkable people, painted by important artists, allow us to look back at that world and envision the character and appearance of those who were instrumental in creating such a dynamic and successful society.

This exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is made possible by the Hetà Foundation.

This program is also supported, in part, by public funds from the Netherlands Cultural Services and the production of Van der Helst’s painting was featured in the Van der Helst’s painting was installed over the fireplace mantel of the governors’ meeting room on the floor below.

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