



How to cite

Bakker, Piet. "Abraham Bloemaert" (2017). Revised by Piet Bakker (2019). In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 2nd ed. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. New York, 2017–20. <https://theleidencollection.com/artists/abraham-bloemaert/> (archived June 2020).

A PDF of every version of this biography is available in this Online Catalogue's Archive, and the Archive is managed by a permanent URL. New versions are added only when a substantive change to the narrative occurs.

Abraham Bloemaert was born in Gorinchem on Christmas Eve, 1566. His parents were Cornelis Bloemaert (ca. 1540–93), a Catholic sculptor who had fled nearby Dordrecht, and Aeltgen Willems.^[1] In 1567, the family moved to 's-Hertogenbosch, where Cornelis worked on the restoration of the interior of the St. Janskerk, which had been badly damaged during the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566. Cornelis returned to Gorinchem around 1571, but not for long; in 1576, he was appointed city architect and engineer of Utrecht. Abraham's mother had died some time earlier, and his father had taken a second wife, Marigen Goortsdr, innkeeper of *het Schilt van Bourgongen*.

Bloemaert probably attended the Latin school in Utrecht. He received his initial art education from his father, drawing copies of the work of the Antwerp master Frans Floris (1519/20–70). According to Karel van Mander, who describes Bloemaert's work at length in his *Schilder-boek*, his subsequent training was fairly erratic.^[2] His first teacher was Gerrit Splinter, a "cladder," or dauber, and a drunk. The young Bloemaert lasted barely two weeks with him.^[3] His father then sent him to Joos de Beer (active 1575–91), a former pupil of Floris. According to Van Mander, however, De Beer was "not the best of painters."^[4] Bloemaert continued his training with Coenraet Strick, the bailiff of Hedel, an entirely unknown painter who, as noted by Van Mander, "could but little paint."^[5] The plan to apprentice Bloemaert to the famous Anthonie Blocklandt van Montfoort (1534–83), another pupil of Floris, had to be abandoned because of the artist's sudden death.^[6] Bloemaert's father then sent him to Paris, but here too he met with bad luck. After a six-week stay with "Jehan Bassot," a certain "Maistre Herry" took him under his wing for eighteen months. Shortly thereafter, Bloemaert joined the Paris studio of Hieronymus Francken (1540–1610), who had also studied under Floris,^[7] before returning to Utrecht around 1585, bitterly disappointed with his fragmented training.^[8]



In Utrecht, Bloemaert initially worked for his father, and when Cornelis was temporarily appointed engineer in the service of Amsterdam, Bloemaert went with him.^[9] Though his father soon returned to Utrecht, Bloemaert remained in Amsterdam. He took rooms and a studio in the former Clarissenklooster, and in October 1591 was registered as a burgher of Amsterdam. On 1 May 1592, he married Judith van Schonenburch (d. 1599), who came from a prominent Utrecht patrician family.

In Amsterdam, Bloemaert rapidly rose to become a respected painter whose work found its way into distinguished collections. Van Mander's friend Jacques Razet (d. 1609) owned several pictures by him, including three "large, circular *tronies* of Venus, Juno, and Pallas Athena."^[10] The paintings were probably the same type as *Bacchus* and *Ceres*, painted on circular panels, which Bloemaert's friend Aernout van Buchell (1565–1641) discovered in the possession of a Utrecht art lover in 1590. The latter two pictures have survived and were recently identified. Previously attributed to Floris, both are now considered to be Bloemaert's earliest works.^[11] Another important collection was that of the Amsterdam banker Sion Luz, who owned Bloemaert's celebrated *Death of the Children of Niobe* of 1591.^[12] This Mannerist painting clearly reflects the influence of Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611), court painter in Prague. Spranger's work had become known in the Netherlands through Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), who made engravings of his drawings and designs in Haarlem as of 1585. Bloemaert's *Marriage of Peleus and Thetis* from around 1593^[13] derived directly from Spranger's famous *Marriage of Amor and Psyche*, of which Goltzius had made a print in 1587.^[14] When visiting friends in Haarlem and Amsterdam in 1602, Spranger may also have met Bloemaert.^[15]

When Bloemaert's father died at the end of 1593, the artist returned to Utrecht and remained there until his death. Along with Joachim Wtewael (1566–1638) and Paulus Moreelse (1571–1638), Bloemaert was to become one of the leading Utrecht painters of his generation. His prominence is reflected by the fact that he was appointed dean of the Saddlers' Guild less than six months after his return.^[16] He received the status of burgher and moved with his family into a former priest's house on the Nieuwe Gracht. His wife died there of the plague at the end of 1599. Bloemaert remarried within a year. His new wife, Gerarda de Roij (d. 1648), the daughter of a brewer, bore him fourteen children, including four sons—Hendrick, Adriaen, Frederick, and Cornelis—who all became painters.

Bloemaert was also a noted teacher; the names of thirty-three of his pupils are known today, but it is possible that between 1590 and 1650, dozens more aspiring artists could have found their way to his studio.^[17] In 1612, together with Paulus Moreelse, he founded an "academy" where artists could receive drawing lessons. His pupils included the acclaimed Caravaggisti Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1629), Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656), and Jan van Bijlert (1597/98–1671). Cornelis van Poelenburch (1594/95–1667), Jan Both (ca. 1618–52), and Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–60/61), who became renowned painters of Italianate landscapes, also learned their trade from Bloemaert, as did his four artist sons.

With the exception of his son Hendrick (1601–72), none of his pupils continued to work in Bloemaert's style after training with him. Conversely, one pupil had a major influence on Bloemaert's own work. After Van Honthorst returned from Italy in 1620, Bloemaert became briefly influenced by his dramatic Caravaggesque use of light and shade, as can be seen in Bloemaert's *Supper at Emmaus* from 1622.^[18] *Flute Player*, painted a year earlier—a subject he and Ter Brugghen had previously introduced to Utrecht and which was greatly



imitated—also displays a Caravaggesque influence.^[19]

Although Bloemaert's work was dominated by Mannerism for a long time, around 1610, again influenced by Goltzius, he developed his own style with distinct, classicizing features. This shift, incidentally, was already visible in earlier works such as the *Adoration of the Shepherds* of 1604.^[20] In this painting, the Sprangerian poses have already given way to more naturalistic attitudes. And yet Bloemaert's work would always retain Mannerist traits, as can be seen clearly in the 1624 *Adoration of the Magi*, in which the group of soldiers in the background could also pass as a separate work by Spranger.^[21] More than two hundred paintings by Bloemaert are known today, the vast majority of which represent religious or mythological scenes. After 1600, however, he also painted the first of his characteristic landscapes with ruined, picturesque villages. Narratives, depicted on a small scale, played merely a supporting role in these paintings. Although Bloemaert's style changed several times in the course of his long career, he always retained his distinct palette of rich colors, ranging from lemon yellow and bright blue to acidic green and pink. He generally reserved light pastel tints for his landscapes.

Bloemaert's reputation extended beyond Utrecht. In 1610, 1615, and 1622, he received painting commissions from the city of 's-Hertogenbosch for the high altars of the Clarissenkerk, the cathedral, and the Jesuit church. Around 1624, he also painted a monumental altarpiece for the Jesuit church in Brussels.^[22] Thereafter, he was regularly commissioned to make devotional works for clandestine churches in towns in the provinces of both Holland and Utrecht.^[23] The stadholder's court in The Hague also took note of his immense talent. Between 1618 and 1625, he painted a portrait of the Roman emperor Domitianus as part of a series of *Twelve Roman Emperors* that the court had ordered from a number of artists.^[24] Around 1635, he participated in another joint commission, the *Pastor Fido* series for Honselaarsdijk Palace.^[25] He had previously painted independent works to decorate the same palace. In 1625, he had been asked to portray three episodes from the story of Theagenes and Chariclea, which he worked on until 1628.^[26] During the course of this commission in 1626, Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of King James I of England and exiled Queen of Bohemia, visited his Utrecht studio and requested a portrait of her dog.^[27] Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) also paid a visit to Bloemaert's studio the following year, while on a diplomatic mission to the Northern Netherlands, a testament to his considerable reputation. Rubens had taken the opportunity to visit several cities for his own pleasure, including Utrecht.^[28] It is therefore unsurprising that Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), a great admirer of Rubens, included Bloemaert alongside Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) and Jan Lievens (1607–74) in his summary of the Dutch Republic's most important painters.^[29]

Bloemaert continued to paint steadily throughout the last twenty years of his life. His largest project during this long period, however, was the preparation of a teaching manual. His son Frederick printed a selection of his father's countless drawings and published these in 1650 under the title *Artes Apellae liber etc.*^[30] Retitled *De Teeken-const* in later editions, this book immediately came to occupy an important position in drawing instruction, one it maintained until well into the nineteenth century. Bloemaert died at the age of eighty-six on 13 January 1651, and was buried in the Catharijnekerk in Utrecht next to his wife, who had died two years earlier.



- Piet Bakker, 2017; revised in 2019

Endnotes

1. The exact year of Abraham Bloemaert's birth has not been established. It was long assumed to be 1564. Ruurs, however, convincingly argues that the correct year is 1566. See Rob Ruurs, "The Date of Abraham Bloemaert's Birth," *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury* 9 (1989): 4–6. Unless otherwise noted, biographical information on Abraham Bloemaert and his family is taken from Marten J. Bok, "Het leven van Abraham Bloemaert," in *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 18–22.
2. Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fols. 297r–98r. The number of factual details in this account and the reliable impression they give suggest that Bloemaert and Van Mander probably knew each other well.
3. Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297r. For Gerrit Splinter, see Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the "Schilder-Boeck" (1603–1604)*, ed. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk, 1999), 6: 87.
4. "Niet den besten Schilder." Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297r. For Joos de Beer, see Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the "Schilder-Boeck" (1603–1604)*, ed. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk, 1999), 6: 88. See also Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris: Leven en werken* (Brussels, 1975), 1: 115.
5. "Een weynigh schilderen con." Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297v.
6. For Blocklandt's apprenticeship with Floris, see Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris: Leven en werken* (Brussels, 1975), 1: 110.
7. Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris: Leven en werken* (Brussels, 1975), 1: 113–14. The frequent mention of Frans Floris in Bloemaert's biography raises the question of whether the two families were related. Bloemaert's focus on Floris, however, probably says more about Utrecht painting in general during the second half of the sixteenth century. Utrecht was strongly oriented toward Antwerp, where Floris was the head of a large and flourishing studio up until his death in 1570. In his day, Floris, like Rubens after him, was the undisputed leader of the local painters. Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris: Leven en werken* (Brussels, 1975), 1: 21.
8. According to Van Mander, Bloemaert regularly sighed to his pupils: "Ick wouw dat ick eens binnen mijnen leven had moghen een goet meester sien schilderen, of de verwen ghebruycken, op dat ick hun wijse oft manier hadde siende moghen afleeren" (I wish that I,

once in my life, had been able to see a good master paint, or use paint, in order that I might have been able to learn his way or manner through observation). Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297r.

9. Marten J. Bok, "Het leven van Abraham Bloemaert," in *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 18–19.
10. "Groote Tronien in ronden wesende Venus, Iuno en Pallas." Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297r. Razet was a friend of Van Mander, and Van Mander and Bloemaert may well have met each other through him. For Jaques Razet, see Marten J. Bok, "Art-Lovers and Their Paintings: Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* as a Source for the History of the Art Market in the Northern Netherlands," in *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art, 1580–1620*, Ger Luijten et al. (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1993), 159; see also Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 58, no. 5.
11. *Bacchus and Ceres* (The Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Faringdon). See Marcel Roethlisberger, "Early Abraham Bloemaert," *Tableau 17*, no. 3 (December 1994): 44–51. See also Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 58, no. 4.
12. *Death of the Children of Niobe*, signed and dated 1591 (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 65–67, no. 14. See also Ger Luijten et al., *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art, 1580–1620* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1993), 373–74, no. 31. For Sion Luz, see Marten J. Bok, "Art-Lovers and Their Paintings: Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* as a Source for the History of the Art Market in the Northern Netherlands," in Ger Luijten et al., *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art, 1580–1620* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1993), 157. According to Van Mander, a painting of the same subject by Bloemaert also hung in Prague, "doch met een andere ordonnantie" (but with a different ordonnance). This was "een groot heerlyck en uytnemende stuck daer zijn Majesteyt en alle Const-verstandighe groot behaghen in hebben" (a large, majestic, and excellent piece in which his Majesty and all art connoisseurs delight). Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 297v.
13. *The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis*, ca. 1593 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 62, no. 12; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 126–27, no. 43.
14. Bartholomeus Spranger, *The Wedding of Cupid and Psyche*, 1585 (Rijksmuseum,

Amsteram); Hendrick Goltzius, *The Feast of the Gods at the Marriage of Cupid and Psyche*, 1587 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

15. This refers to a drawing of the figure of Fame in Spranger's *Marriage of Amor and Psyche*, which Bloemaert used for his own *Marriage of Peleus and Thetis* and on the back of which he wrote: "d'Heer Barth. Spranger van den Schilde." Albert Blankert et al., *Gods, Saints, and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Washington, 1981), 88, no. 5; see also Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 126–27, no. 43.
16. Until 1611, the year the Guild of Saint Luke was founded, painters were members of the Saddlers' Guild.
17. For a list of pupils' names, see Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 645–51.
18. *Supper at Emmaus*, signed and dated 1622 (Koninklijk Museum der Schone Kunsten, Brussels). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 220–21, no. 284.
19. *Flute Player*, signed and dated 1621 (Centraal Museum, Utrecht). M. Roethlisberger and M.J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 222–23, no. 285; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 152–53, no. 58.
20. *Adoration of the Shepherds*, signed and dated 160(4) (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 112–13, no. 66.
21. *Adoration of the Magi*, signed and dated 1624 (Centraal Museum, Utrecht). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 255, no. 387; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 112–13, no. 33. See also Albert Blankert, "Classicism in Dutch History Painting," in *Dutch Classicism in Seventeenth-Century Painting*, Blankert et al. (Exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen; Frankfurt am Main, Städtisches Kunstinstitut) (Zwolle, 2000), 18.
22. *The Adoration of the Magi*, ca. 1624 (Musée de Grenoble). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 252–54, no. 386; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches

- Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 64–66, no. 6.
23. Xander van Eck, *Clandestine Splendor: Paintings for the Catholic Church in the Dutch Republic* (Zwolle, 2007), 19–49.
 24. *Domitianus*, 1618–25 (Schloss Caputh, Schwielowsee, Germany). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 295–96, no. 454. See also Elizabeth Nogrady, “Het schilderen van series: Een Utrechtse specialiteit,” in *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 46–54.
 25. Painted around 1635, this four-part series was shared among four Utrecht painters. Bloemaert’s section was *Amaryllis and Mirtillo*, ca. 1635 (Jagdschloss Grunewald, Berlin). Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 327–28, no. 513; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect. Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 142–43, no. 52.
 26. Only two of these three paintings have survived. See Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 278–80, nos. 425 and 426; Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 136–39, no. 50.
 27. Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 582–83.
 28. Marcel Roethlisberger and Marten J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints* (Doornspijk, 1993), 1: 583; Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, ed. Arthur R. Peltzer (Munich, 1925), 202–3. For Rubens’s visit to Utrecht, see the biography of Peter Paul Rubens in this catalogue.
 29. Albert H. Kan, *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens door hemzelf beschreven* (Rotterdam, 1994), 73.
 30. Liesbeth M. Helmus and Gero Seelig, eds., *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) (Petersberg, 2011), 58, no. 2.

Literature



- Van Mander, Karel. *Het Schilder-boeck*. Haarlem, 1604, fols. 297v–98v.
- Houbraken, Arnold. *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandsche konst-schilders en schilderessen*. Amsterdam, 1718–21; revised edition published in The Hague, 1753; reprinted in Amsterdam, 1980, 1: 44–45.
- Von Sandrart, Joachim. *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*. Edited by Arthur R. Peltzer. Munich, 1925, 202–3.
- Bok, Marten J. “Abraham Bloemaert.” In *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*. Edited by Albert Blankert and Leonard J. Slatkes, 208–12. Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum. Utrecht, 1986.
- Ruurs, Rob. “The Date of Abraham Bloemaert’s Birth.” *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury* 9 (1989): 4–6.
- Roethlisberger, Marcel. *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints*. 2 vols. Doornspijk, 1993.
- Van Mander, Karel. *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the First Edition of the “Schilder-Boeck” (1603–1604)*. Edited by Hessel Miedema. Doornspijk, 1999, 1: 446–50; 6: 84–101.
- Helmus, Liesbeth M., and Gero Seelig, eds. *Het Bloemaert-effect: Kleur en compositie in de Gouden Eeuw*. Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Schwerin, Staatliches Museum. Petersberg, 2011.