



**Frans Hals**

(Antwerp 1582/83 – 1666  
Haarlem)

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Frans Hals was born in Antwerp in 1582 or 1583 to Franchois Hals, a cloth dresser from Mechelen, and his second wife, Adriana van Geertenryck, the widow of a tailor.<sup>[1]</sup> The family moved to Haarlem shortly after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585. Frans's brother, Dirck (1591–1656), was born there in 1591 and also became a painter. We have no information regarding Frans's artistic training. According to the anonymous biographer of Karel van Mander (1548–1606), Hals trained under him, but Van Mander himself makes no mention of this in his *Schilderboeck* of 1604.<sup>[2]</sup> Hals could have spent some time in Van Mander's workshop after the publication of this book, though this seems fairly unlikely considering that from 1603 until his death in 1606 Van Mander was not living in Haarlem. The first official record of Hals's presence in Haarlem dates from 1610, when he joined the Guild of Saint Luke.

Except for a brief sojourn in Antwerp in 1616, where he became acquainted with the work of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), Hals spent his entire life in Haarlem. He married Anneke Harmensdr (1590–1615), the daughter of a bleacher, around 1610.<sup>[3]</sup> This union should have gained Hals entry into the ruling elite, for Anneke's godfather and guardian, the wealthy brewer Job Claesz Gijbland (1572–1638), sat on the town council. For unknown reasons, however, Gijbland showed little interest in Hals and his family. When Gijbland had himself portrayed in 1611, he chose the established painter Frans de Grebber (1573–1649) over the still inexperienced Hals.<sup>[4]</sup> That Gijbland also subsequently never supported the couple is clear from the fact that he did nothing to prevent Anneke from being buried in a pauper's grave when she died in May 1615.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1617 Hals took a second wife, Lysbeth Reyniersdr (1593–after 1675), the daughter of a glassmaker; they would have eleven children. By this time, his career had taken off and he had been granted a prestigious commission in 1616 to paint a banquet of the officers of the Saint George Civic Guard.<sup>[6]</sup> Without diminishing his success, it should be noted that Hals faced little competition in these early years. The only other portraitist of significance in Haarlem, besides Hals and Frans de Grebber, was Cornelis Engelsz (1574/75–1650).



The tense political situation at that time impelled Prince Maurits to dissolve the Haarlem town council in 1618 and then reinstate it with his own supporters. Hals rapidly emerged as the leading portraitist of these new leaders and their families. His greatest patron was the affluent and highly influential Olycan family of brewers, at least fourteen members of which he portrayed. Various members of the Coymans family also sat for him. The most famous of these works may be the bewitching portrait of Isabella Coymans, the daughter of the wealthy merchant Josephus Coymans.<sup>[7]</sup> The lifelikeness of Hals's portraits was as highly praised and appreciated in his own time as it is today. In his 1628 city chronicle, Samuel Ampzing (1590–1632) exclaimed, "How dashingly Frans paints people from life!"<sup>[8]</sup> Twenty years later, in 1648, Theodorus Schrevelius (1572–1649), writing about Hals's portraits, would likewise extol how they "are colored in such a way that they seem to live and breathe."<sup>[9]</sup>

Hals's clients came not only from social and political elite, but also from other echelons of society. He portrayed various clergymen, including the Dutch Lutheran minister Conradus Vietor in 1644 (FH-101),<sup>[10]</sup> and—in small format—the city chroniclers Ampzing (FH-100) and Schrevelius.<sup>[11]</sup> The scholar Petrus Scriverius (1576–1660) and the celebrated French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) also sat for him, the latter around 1649 shortly before his departure to Sweden.<sup>[12]</sup> In the meantime, Hals was facing fierce competition not only from his contemporary Pieter Soutman (ca. 1580–1657), who returned from an extended sojourn abroad in 1628, but also from a new generation of portraitists, including the Catholic painters Pieter de Grebber (ca. 1603–52/53), Johannes Verspronck (1606/09–62), and later Jan de Bray (ca. 1627–97). Except for Verspronck, however, they were not specialists, and judging from the portraits that have come down to us, their clientele seems to have consisted primarily of fellow Catholics. Hals managed to retain his leading position, and his distinctive loose and unfinished manner of painting remained popular among Haarlem burghers until his death.<sup>[13]</sup>

In addition to having a successful career, Hals was an influential teacher. According to Houbraken, Adriaen Brouwer (1605/06–38) and Adriaen van Ostade (1610–85) apprenticed with Hals. Although undocumented, it is believed that Jan Miense Molenaer (ca. 1610–68) and Judith Leyster (1609–60) also learned the craft of painting from him; in any case, Hals and Leyster were well acquainted.<sup>[14]</sup> Cornelis de Bie furthermore credits Hals as being the teacher of Philips Wouwerman (1619–68). Less certain is whether Vincent Laurensz van der Vinne (1628–1702) studied with Hals, who painted his portrait in the late 1650s.<sup>[15]</sup> Hals's five sons—Harmen (1611–69), from his first marriage, and the four sons from his second marriage—all became painters and are assumed to have trained with their father.<sup>[16]</sup> Pieter van Roestraten (1630–1700), who married Hals's daughter Ariaentje in 1654, studied under Hals as well.

In addition to working for private individuals, Hals received commissions from prestigious institutions. Aside from the above-mentioned civic guard painting, between 1616 and 1639 he painted another four group portraits for both the Saint George Hall and the Calivermen's Hall in Haarlem. He was a member of the Saint George Militia Company and included his own likeness in his 1639 portrait of the company's officers and sub-alterns.<sup>[17]</sup> His civic guard paintings gained fame outside of Haarlem as well, and in 1633 the



Amsterdam Crossbowmen's Hall commissioned Hals to portray the company of Captain Reynier Reael and Lieutenant Cornelis Blaeuw. This picture, presently better known as *Meager Company*, however, is only partly by Hals. After a protracted conflict with his patron, Hals stopped working on it and Pieter Codde (1599–1678) was asked to finish it.<sup>[18]</sup> Furthermore, Hals painted group portraits of regents. In 1641 he immortalized the regents of the Saint Elisabeth's Hospital<sup>[19]</sup> (Verspronck had earlier portrayed the regentesses) and, in 1664, two years before his death, Hals produced group portraits of both the regents and the regentesses of the Old Men's Home, paintings that are now considered highlights of his oeuvre.

Although Hals never wanted for commissions and was probably well paid for his work, he regularly appeared before the Court of Petty Sessions for arrears in payment. These cases usually involved small amounts, except in 1654, when he owed a baker 200 guilders. He settled this debt with some objects and five paintings, including *Gathering of the Manna* by Maerten van Heemskerck and *Preaching of Saint John the Baptist* by Karel van Mander.<sup>[21]</sup> His exemption from paying his annual contribution to the Guild of Saint Luke in 1661 was not because of financial difficulties, but rather his advanced age. Yet even then he seems to have been in dire straits and had to request assistance from the city. Hals died in 1666 and was buried in the Sint-Bavokerk on 1 September.

-Piet Bakker

## Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Frans Hals is taken from Irene van Thiel-Stroman, "Frans Franchoisz Hals," in Neeltje Köhler et al., *Painting in Haarlem, 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum* (Ghent/Haarlem, 2006), 178–84.

2. This anonymous biography is included in the second edition of Van Mander's *Schilderboeck* of 1618. Irene van Thiel-Stroman, "The Frans Hals Documents: Written and Printed Sources, 1582–1679," *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 379, doc. 25. Van Mander is also called Hals's teacher in a New Year's greeting by the guild servant addressed to the board and members of the Guild of Saint Luke. Hessel Miedema, *De archiefbescheiden van het St. Lucasgilde te Haarlem* (Alphen a/d Rijn, 1980), 1:309.

3. Of their three children, only Harmen Hals (1611–69), who would become a painter, reached adulthood.

4. *Portrait of Job Claesz Gijbland*, signed and dated 1611, oil on panel, 129 x 101 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.



5. Pieter Biesboer, "The Burghers of Haarlem and Their Portrait Painters," *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 26.

6. *Banquet of the Officers of the Saint George Civic Guard*, 1616, oil on canvas, 175 x 324 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3: 5–7, no. 7.

7. *Portrait of Isabella Coymans*, ca. 1650–52 oil on canvas, 116 x 86 cm, private collection; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:98–99, no. 189; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 323, no. 69. The pendant of her husband Stephanus Geraerds (oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm) is in Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:97–98, no. 188; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 322–23, no. 68.

8. "Hoe wacker schilderd Frans de luyden naer het leven!" Samuel Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland* (Haarlem, 1628), 371.

9. "[D]ie soo ghecolereert zijn, dat se schijnen asem van haer te geven, ende te leven." Theodorus Schrevelius, *Harlemias* (Haarlem, 1648), 383.

10. Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3: 77–78, no. 152. For other examples of portraits of ministers, see Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. Cat., Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 348–49, no. 79.

11. *Portrait of Samuel Ampzing*, Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:46, no. 76; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 246–47, no. 40. *Portrait of Theodorus Schrevelius*, 1617, oil on copper, 14.5 x 12 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:7, no. 8; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 141–43, no. 5.



12. *Portrait of Petrus Scriverius*, 1626, oil on panel, 22.2 x 16.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3: 22–23, no. 36. *Portrait of René Descartes*, ca. 1649, oil on panel, 19 x 14 cm, Statens Museum, Copenhagen; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:89–91, no. 175; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 314–16, no. 66.

13. Pieter Biesboer, “The Burghers of Haarlem and Their Portrait Painters,” *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 32–36.

14. In 1635 Judith Leyster quarreled with Frans Hals about a pupil who had left her to apprentice with Hals, in conflict with guild regulations. Irene van Thiel-Stroman, “The Frans Hals Documents: Written and Printed Sources, 1582–1679,” in *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 388–89, doc. 71. Relations between the two artists must have been good nevertheless, for when Leyster’s husband, Jan Miense Molenaer, died, portraits of both spouses by Hals were listed in the estate inventory.

15. *Portrait of Vincent Laurens van de Vinne*, late 1650s, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 48.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3: no. 203; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 340–43, no. 76.

16. These are Frans Hals the Younger (1618–before 1678); Jan Hals (ca. 1620–before 1655); Reynier Hals (1627–71); and Nicolaes Hals (1628–86).

17. *Officers and Sub-Alterns of the Saint George Civic Guard*, ca. 1639, oil on canvas, 218 x 421 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3: 166–67, no. 124. Hals is the second man on the stairs at the left.



18. On this conflict, see: Irene van Thiel-Stroman, "The Frans Hals Documents: Written and Printed Sources, 1582–1679," *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 389–91, docs. 73–75, 78. According to Dudok van Heel, Hals must have received this commission through Uylenburg and painted it in the latter's workshop in Amsterdam, where it remained unfinished after Rembrandt's departure. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, "De jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten" (Ph.D. diss., Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, 2006), 116 n. 182. Dudok van Heel, who gave a brief talk on this commission at the invitation of Alfred Bader for a gathering of Rembrandt experts in England in 2011, is writing an article on this intriguing matter, which seems to imply that Hals and Rembrandt were personally acquainted, that will be published by the Bader Foundation.

19. *The Regents of Saint Elisabeth's Hospital*, 1641, oil on canvas, 153 x 252 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:73–74, no. 140; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 284–89, no. 54.

20. *The Regents of the Old Men's Home*, 1664, oil on canvas, 172.5 x 256 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, and *The Regentesses of the Old Men's Home*, 1664, oil on canvas, 172.5 x 256 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, 3 vols. (New York, 1970–74), 3:112–13, nos. 221 and 222; Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Royal Academy of Arts; Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (London, 1989), 362–69, nos. 85 and 86.

21. Irene van Thiel-Stroman, "Frans Franchoisz Hals," in Neeltje Köhler et al., *Painting in Haarlem, 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum* (Ghent/Haarlem, 2006), 180.

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