THE LEIDEN COLLECTION

Bartholomeus van der Helst

(Haarlem 1613 – Amsterdam 1670)

How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Bartholomeus van der Helst” (2024). In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge. New York, 2023–. https://theleidencollection.com/artists/bartholomeus-van-der-helst/ (accessed November 22, 2026).

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.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Bartholomeus van der Helst is one of the most important Northern Netherlandish portraitists of the seventeenth century. The artist's 155 known portraits include spectacular high points, such as the *Banquet at the Crossbowmen's Guild in Celebration of the Treaty of Münster* (1648).[1] Writing about this painting in the early eighteenth century, Arnold Houbraken extolled "the flesh, so natural, clear, and glowing; the nature of the diverse fabrics of the clothing so faithfully observed, the gold and silver beakers, and other feast ornaments and tableware painted in such natural and skillful detail that one has to be amazed."[2] The *Wegwyzer door Amsterdam* (1713) also notes the work's celebrated reputation, declaring it "so skillful, so delightful, and so splendid in arrangement, attitude, and manner of painting, that one would be at a loss to find its equal elsewhere."[3]

The painter responsible for this unqualified masterpiece was born in Haarlem in 1613 to Lodewijk van der Helst and his second wife, Aeltje Bartels.[4] Lodewijk earned a living as a merchant , and in 1624 he was an innkeeper at Den gecroonde Oyevaer (The Crowned Stork) on the Grote Houtstraat. In 1625, he left for Amsterdam, where he is mentioned as a *drogegasterijhouder* (innkeeper) on the Heerenmarkt,[5] but he was back in Haarlem in 1627, running the Oyevaer again. The business was likely not doing well, however, for in 1629 he was forced to give the inn's furnishings—including "eighty scenes or paintings of different kinds and by different masters"—as security to settle a debt of 1,800 guilders for wine received.[6]

While it is not known where or with whom Van der Helst trained, scholars have assumed that the celebrated portraitist Nicolaes Eliasz Pickenoy (1588–1650) was his teacher, based on Pickenoy's evident influence on Van der Helst's early work. Van der Helst must have completed his artistic education before 1636, the year he married the eighteen-year-old orphan Anna du Pire (1618–79), whose parents were the peddler Jan du Pire and Susanna van de Venne of Southern Netherlandish origins. The newlywed couple lived alternately on the Nieuwmarkt and the Nieuwe Doelenstraat in Amsterdam. From 1647 on, Van der Helst rented a house on the Walenpleintje, possibly because he was in need of a larger workshop. The couple had six children, only two of whom reached adulthood, including Lodewijk (1642–after 1683), who followed in his father's footsteps as a painter.[7]

Van der Helst met with instant success. His earliest known work, a 1637 portrait of the four regents of the Walloon Orphanage, immediately showcased his virtuosity.[8] About two years later he produced a magisterial portrait of the militia company of Roelof Bicker (1611–56),[9] which hung with Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* (1640) and other works in the brand-new assembly hall of the Kloveniersgilde (Arquebusiers' Guild) in Amsterdam's Nieuwe Doelenstraat in 1642. This marked the beginning of the patronage of the powerful Bicker family, for whom Van der Helst went on to paint a dozen portraits in the years that followed. In 1648, he experienced a second high point with the above-mentioned *Banquet at the Crossbowmen's Guild in Celebration of the Treaty of Münster*, commissioned by Captain Cornelis Witsen (1605–69) to immortalize his militia company on the conclusion of the Peace of Münster. It hung in the Voetboogdoelen (headquarters of the Crossbowmen's Civic Guard) near a group portrait of the militia company of Joan Huydecoper (1599–1661), which Govaert Flinck (1615–60) had painted on the occasion of the same event.

Celebration of the Treaty of Münster seems to have ushered in a new phase in Van der Helst's career, with Witsen (who would serve four terms as burgomaster) succeeding the Bickers as his principal benefactor. In 1652, the artist reached a new peak with his enchanting full-length portrait of Princess Mary Henrietta Stuart (1631–60), the young widow of Stadtholder William II (1626–50), which may have been commissioned by the Hague court.[10] It is only fitting, therefore,

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

that Van der Helst's name figures alongside those of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), Flinck, Ferdinand Bol (1616–80), and other illustrious painters—the cream of the Amsterdam art world—to whom the poet Jan Vos (ca. 1610–67) paid tribute at the famous celebration of the Guild of Saint Luke in 1654.[11] Van der Helst's standing is also conveyed in the odes Vos dedicated to the painter's numerous portraits of Amsterdam regents, including several that can no longer be located, such as that of Burgomaster Frans Banninck Cocq (1605–55). (We do have a likeness of Banninck Cocq, head of the Handboogdoelen, the headquarters of the Longbowmen's Civic Guard, who appears in one of the Van der Helst's group portraits of its board of governors.[12]) While a significant number of Van der Helst's clientele were patricians, some nonregents—including members of the fabulously wealthy Trip and De Geer families—found their way to his workshop as well.[13] He also portrayed famous admirals, such as Aert van Nes (1626–93), in collaboration with the well-known marine painter Ludolf Backhuysen (1630–1708), who provided seascapes in the background of Van der Helst's portraits.[14]

Van der Helst's stature is also reflected in the high prices he charged. This did not escape the notice of Joachim von Sandrart (1606–88), who in his *Teutsche Academie* (1675) wrote that Van der Helst made a pretty penny.[15] For instance, in 1652 Van der Helst charged Pieter Lucasz van der Venne, a cousin of his wife, 1,000 guilders for a portrait of his family.[16] Four years later, he received 1,400 or possibly even 2,000 guilders for a similar portrait of the family of Rijcklof van Goens, who went on to serve as governor-general of the Dutch East India Company.[17] The likeness of Princess Mary Henrietta Stuart may have drawn an even higher price than 2,000 guilders.[18] Van der Helst's work would not have fetched these kinds of sums on a regular basis, certainly not for individual portraits, yet even as an exception, asking 2,000 guilders or more for a single painting is unique. No other Amsterdam portraitist, not even Rembrandt, commanded such exorbitant prices.

Even when the demand for portraits was dwindling in the 1660s, Van der Helst still managed to maintain his practice. He found new benefactors in the Amsterdam burgomaster Joan Huydecoper, who after Flinck's death was in search of a new portraitist, and in the Hinlopen family. That he retained his sterling reputation is clear from the fact that while visiting Amsterdam in 1667, Cosimo III de' Medici ordered self-portraits from a few painters, including Van der Helst.[19] Thereafter, he went on to paint another ten or so portraits. The artist died in 1670, and on 16 December was taken from the Nieuwe Doelenstraat to be buried in the Walenkerk.

His death spelled the end of one of the most successful artistic careers of the seventeenth century. Van der Helst, who made his debut with portraits à la Pickenoy, found his own idiom in the 1640s. In these years he gradually abandoned his subtle chiaroscuro in favor of a cool, even illumination. He also replaced his plain, generally monochrome backgrounds with small vistas full of (usually significant) details in light and bright colors. His buyers must have appreciated his virtually perfect technique and great precision, as well as his unequalled rendering of textures. This held true especially for satin gowns, as can be seen in one of his most famous paintings, the 1654 double portrait of the draper Abraham del Court and Maria de Kaersgieter,[20] as well as in what may have been his last likeness, his 1670 *Young Woman Holding a Sunflower* in The Leiden Collection.[21]

- Piet Bakker, 2024

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Endnotes

1. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Banquet at the Crossbowmen's Guild in Celebration of the Treaty of Münster*, 1648 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 198–202, no. 43.
2. "Het naakt, zoo natuurlyk, helder en gloeijent [is], de onderscheiden stoffen der bekleedingen onderkennelyk in haar aart waargenomen, Goude en Zilvere kelken, en andere Feest- en Discierselen zoo uitvoerig natuurlyk en konstig geschildert, dat men zig daar over moet verwonderen." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 9.
3. "Zoo konstig, zoo heerlyk, en zoo fraai, in schikking, houding, en schildertrant, dat men vergeeffe moeiten zoude doen, om elders tot dit, eene weerga te vinden." [N. Den Hoorn], *Wegwyzer door Amsterdam . . . Benevens eene beschryvinge van het Heerlijk stadhuis te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1713), as quoted in Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 8.
4. There is no consensus regarding his year of birth. According to Cornelis de Bie's account in *Het Gulden Cabinet* of 1661, Van der Helst was born in 1613, a date followed by most authors ever since. See J.J. de Gelder, *Bartholomeus van der Helst* (Rotterdam, 1921), 12; and Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 24.
5. A *drooggasterij* is an establishment where one could not only drink but also eat, and sometimes sleep. See J.B. Glasbergen, *Beroepsnamenboek: Beroepsaanduidinen voor 1900 in Nederland en België* (Amsterdam, 2004).
6. "Tachtentich tafereelen ofte schilderijen van verscheyden soorten ende meesters." J.J. de Gelder, *Bartholomeus van der Helst* (Rotterdam, 1921), 134–35 (doc. 42).
7. The other child was his daughter Susanna (1638–1703). In 1660, she married the estate agent Pieter de la Croix (1636–87), who was also a poet, a translator of French plays, and a governor of the Amsterdam theater.
8. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Regents of the Walloon Orphanage*, 1637 (Amsterdam Museum, on loan from the Stichting Hospice Wallon). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 149–50, no. 1.
9. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Militia Company of District VIII under the Command of Caption Roelof Bicker*, ca. 1640–43 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 152–55, no. 3.
10. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Mary Stuart, Princess of Orange, as Widow of William II*, 1652 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 229–30, no. 65. The most likely source of the commission

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

is the Hague court, certainly during the First Stadtholderless Period. However, there is no convincing proof of this. The first mention of the painting in the stadtholders' collection dates from 1754. It is not certain whether this painting is the same as a "seeckere schilderije, de Princesse Maria by den voorn[oemde] Bartholomeus van der Helst geschildert" (certain picture, the Princess Mary painted by the afore[-mentioned] Bartholomeus van der Helst), which was in the possession of Lodewijk de Bas in 1674, when he bought it (in part) with a bond of 2,000 guilders from Anna du Pire, Van der Helst's widow. See J.J. de Gelder, *Bartholomeus van der Helst* (Rotterdam, 1921), 146 (doc. 101). This portrait was probably auctioned after De Bas's death in 1705, and so theoretically could have been the work hanging in the Binnenhof in 1754. Arguing for a commission from the court and thus for the existence of a second version is the self-portrait that Bartholomeus van der Helst painted for Cosimo III de' Medici (1642–1723) in 1667, now in the Uffizi Gallery, in which he shows himself holding a medallion with the portrait of Mary Stuart. Cosimo III will have set great store by the fact that Van der Helst portrayed himself with his most prestigious commission. This qualification applies to Mary Stuart's portrait only if Van der Helst actually received the commission from the court.

11. N. Geerdink, "De man van het beeld aan het woord. Jan Vos' 'Zeege der Schilderkunst' (1654)," *Nieuw Letterkundig Magazijn* 28 (2010): 45–50.

12. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *The Headmen of the Longbowmen's Civic Guard Headquarters*, 1657 (Amsterdam Museum). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 232–35, no. 67.

13. Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), nos. 90–92 (De Geer family); nos. 83, 123, 124, 153, 154 (Trip family).

14. For the portraits of Aert van Nes and his wife, Geertruida den Dubbelde, see Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 333–35, nos. 151 and 152. For the portraits of the naval officers Egbert Cortenaer and Johan de Lieffde, see Van Gent, 295–96, no. 119; 331–32, no. 150. All four portraits may have been painted in Rotterdam. In Amsterdam, he portrayed the naval officers Willem van der Zaan, see van Gent, 308, no. 131; and Gideon de Wildt and his wife, Maria Smit, see van Gent, 267–69, nos. 93–4.

15. T. Kirchner et al., eds., *Joachim von Sandrart: Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste, Nuremberg 1675–1680* (Wolfenbüttel, 2008–12), 3: 317, http://ta.sandrart.net/en/text/543.

16. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Pieter Lucasz van de Venne with Anna Carpentier*, 1652 (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 227–28, no. 64. Van der Venne—a merchant with ongoing (financial) problems—was loath to pay so much money and sued Van der Helst. In 1665, two Haarlem painters hired by Van der Venne deemed the portrait to be worth 300 guilders, "maer ten respecte vande meester sijn naem ende reputatie" (but in view of the master's name and reputation) valued it at "vierhondert guldens . . . ende niet meer" (no more than 400 guilders). Van der Helst finally settled for 460 guilders two years later. The identification of the sitters and the settlement of the dispute are treated in S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, "Duizend gulden voor een portretopdracht aan Bartholomeus van der Helst,"

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Maandblad Amstelodamum 85, no. 2 (1998): 33–40.

17. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Family Portrait of Rijcklof Volckertsz van Goens (1619–1682), Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and His Wife, Jacobina Bartholomeus, with Two Children and a Javanese Servant*, 1656. This work was destroyed in the fire that broke out in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in 1864 and is known only from an 1858 watercolor by Johan Philip Koelman (1818–93) (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam).

    From September 1655, when Rijcklof van Goens (1619–82) arrived in Amsterdam as the commander of the return fleet from Batavia, to October 1656, when he left for India, he recorded all of his expenses in a notebook (Van Goens Family Archive, inv. 14, 1.10.32, National Archive, The Hague). For the paintings he mentions, see P.A. Leupe, "Rijklof van Goens. Gouverneur-generaal van Nederlansch Indië. 1678–1681," *Berigten van het Historisch Genootschap te Utrecht* 5, no. 2 (1856): 28–48, esp. 47–48. Among his entries is: "Aen van der Elst . . . voor 5 conterfeytsels 1.400 [gulden]" (to Van der Helst . . . 1,400 [guilders] for 5 likenesses). Such a description generally refers to five individual, independent portraits. However, a few pages later, the same notebook includes a summary list of the goods Van Goens left behind in Amsterdam. In addition to a few portraits by Flinck and Isaack Luttichuys, he notes that "ten huyse van d'Heer Demmer hangen de effigie van mijn, mijn huysvrouw, kinderen . . . in een groot stuck, cost 2.000 [gulden]" (hanging in the home of Mr. Demmer are the effigy of me, my wife, [and] children . . . in one large piece, price 2,000 [guilders]). That this is a painting by Van der Helst emerges from the 1687 estate inventory of Van Goens's son, in which this painting is attributed to the artist. See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 261–62, no. 88, esp. 262n6. De Gelder theorized that the two amounts differ so greatly because the background view of the harbor of Batavia was painted by another artist. See J.J. de Gelder, *Bartholomeus van der Helst* (Rotterdam, 1921), 143 (doc. 77). In the expense account, large amounts are indeed disbursed to two possible candidates, Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611–93) and Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633–1707), but these are for actual paintings and not collaborative efforts. The discrepancy can in part be explained by the frame, added later, although this does not entirely explain the difference of 600 guilders.

18. See note 10.

19. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Self-Portrait*, 1667 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 329–30, no. 149. See also note 10.

20. Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Portrait of Abraham del Court and His Wife, Maria de Kaersgieter* (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam). See Judith van Gent, *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk* (Zwolle, 2011), 240–41, no. 71.

21. See the entry *Young Woman Holding a Sunflower*, by Elizabeth Nogrady, in this catalogue.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Literature

- Von Sandrart, Joachim. *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*. Nuremburg, 1675–79; revised edition edited by Arthur R. Peltzer, published in Munich, 1925, 183–84.
- Houbraken, Arnold. *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*. Amsterdam, 1718–21; revised edition published in The Hague, 1753; reprinted in Amsterdam, 1980, 2: 9–10.
- De Gelder, Jan Jacob. *Bartholomeus van der Helst: Een studie van zijn werk, zijn levensgeschiedenis, een beschrijvende catalogus van zijn œuvre, een register en 41 afbeeldingen naar schilderijen.* Rotterdam, 1921.

- Van Gent, Judith. *Bartholomeus van der Helst (ca. 1613–1670): Een studie naar zijn leven en werk*. Zwolle, 2011.
- Kirchner, T., et al., eds. *Joachim von Sandrart: Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste, Nuremberg 1675–1680*. Wolfenbüttel, 2008–12, 3: 317. http://ta.sandrart.net/en/text/543.
- Horn, Hendrik J., and Rieke van Leeuwen. *Houbraken Translated: Arnold Houbraken's Great Theatre of the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses*. The Hague, 2021, 2: 9–10. https://houbraken-translated.rkdstudies.nl/2-1-59/page-1-9/.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection