



Caspar Netscher

(Prague or Heidelberg ca. 1639 – 1684 The
Hague)

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According to Houbraken, Caspar Netscher was born around 1639. His parents were the sculptor Johann Netscher (d. 1639) from Stuttgart and Elizabeth Vetter, daughter of a Heidelberg *burgermeister*.^[1] Johan's father is said to have worked at the court in Heidelberg and Prague. Johann died shortly before Caspar's birth. His widow, fearing the dangers of the Thirty Years' War that was then still raging, fled the region and after many peregrinations finally settled with her children in Arnhem. She died soon thereafter, and Arnold Tulleken, the local doctor, took Caspar in. Tulleken initially gave the boy a medical education, but when Caspar displayed a propensity for drawing, Tulleken apprenticed him to the Arnhem painter Hendrik Coster (ca. 1620–64).^[2]

Thanks to the mediation of "Wynant Everwyn, who was a cousin of Ter Borch," Netscher entered the workshop of Gerard ter Borch (1617–81) in Deventer around 1655.^[3] Here he received the second part of his training, and mastered Ter Borch's refined style to perfection. He subsequently stayed on as an assistant until about 1659. In Deventer Netscher painted the portrait of Christine van der Wart (1620–66), wife of the Arnhem draper Willem Craeyvanger (1615/16–after 1666). This is one of Netscher's earliest portraits and the pendant of the portrait Craeyvanger had earlier commissioned from Paulus Lesire in The Hague.^[4] In the years that followed, Ter Borch's workshop also turned out eight individual portraits of the couple's children, now in The Leiden Collection, with Netscher and his teacher being responsible for four each.^[5] In addition to portraits, Netscher painted genre scenes in which he repeated, sometimes with minor adjustments, works by his teacher. Striking in this respect is that he signed these copies and variants himself, suggesting that he had a privileged position in Ter Borch's workshop.^[6]

According to Houbraken, upon completing his training under Ter Borch, Netscher went to Holland to work for art dealers. If he, in fact, left Deventer, he did so around 1658.^[7] Dissatisfied with his situation, Netscher decided to travel to Rome. His journey, however, took him no farther than Bordeaux, where he fell in love with Margaretha Godyn (d. 1694), whom he married in November 1659.^[8] Having worked in Bordeaux for some time, he came into contact with Marinus de Jeude, a wealthy art lover and collector who persuaded him to return to the Dutch Republic. Netscher settled in The Hague in 1662, and joined the local painters' confraternity *Pictura* in the same year.

In The Hague, Netscher painted portraits, genre scenes and history pieces. He was in the habit of making drawings of his finished work, a number of which have been preserved.^[9] On these so-called *ricordi* he noted information such as the prices, names of his patrons, and annotations regarding composition and color. From these notations it appears that Netscher's work did not initially fetch high prices. He received 66 guilders for a *Vertumnus and Pomona* in 1664, and 50 guilders for a portrait of a woman in 1667.

Netscher was one of the few genre painters in the court city. Evidently, this kind of painting did not find immediate favor with the internationally oriented elite. The artist excelled primarily in depictions of just one or a few figures absorbed in simple everyday activities. A splendid example of this is the *Lace Maker*, which demonstrates the artist's fine eye for detail as well as his remarkable skill in the rendering of textures, in particular shimmering silk.^[10]

Probably because he could not support his family with genre paintings alone, Netscher increasingly turned to portraiture, meeting with great success. If in his genre scenes Netscher continued to model his work on that of Ter Borch, in his portraits he drew on French examples. In this choice, not only did he distinguish himself from flourishing Hague colleagues, such as Adriaan Hanneman (ca. 1604–71) and Jan Mijtens (ca. 1614–70), but he also cleverly played into the growing interest in small, less formal portraits displaying a refined elegance. Netscher generally situated his sitters before a



background of sumptuous draperies with a view of a parklike landscape. His clients came from the Hague patriciate, as well as circles around the city's court and the diplomatic world. Netscher received commissions from outside The Hague as well, primarily Amsterdam, where he portrayed burgomaster Cornelis Bicker (1592–1654) and members of the Six family. He also enjoyed international renown and regularly welcomed high-ranking visitors in his Hague workshop. Cosimo III de' Medici (1642–1723), for instance, bought a number of copies after works by Ter Borch from him around 1668–69.

Netscher was highly productive, even when he was plagued by bouts of gout and confined to his bed. He only stopped working on 15 January 1684, according to Houbraken, “when this affliction affected his bowls, and caused his death.”^[11] When Margaretha Godyn died in 1694, having married again three years after Netscher's death, an inventory was drawn up of her possessions, which included many works by her first husband.^[12] Her estate bears witness to a certain affluence, and her inventory can be considered a posthumous reflection of Netscher's prosperous career.^[13] The artist's three sons followed in his footsteps, the most gifted of whom was Theodorus (1661–1728).^[14]

- Piet Bakker, 2017

Endnotes

1. Marjorie E. Wieseman found nothing in the German archives to support Houbraken's statement. In the Amsterdam wedding registers, however, she found a "Johannes Nescher, schilder" (Johannes Netscher, painter), who married Susanna Jans (d. 1659), widow of the painter and art dealer Maerten van Balckeneynde (d. 1631) from Rotterdam, in 1632. She thinks that this Johannes may have been Caspar's actual father. Although the name Netscher occurs only rarely in the Dutch Republic, I consider Houbraken's version to be more likely, certainly as long as no documents are found in which Caspar can be related to any member of the Netscher family referred to by Wieseman; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 23.
2. Coster was probably born in Arnhem around 1620. He was a portraitist and still-life painter. In 1638 he copied a portrait of Duke Karel van Gelre (d. 1538) for the court of Gelderland. Coster later left for Groningen, joining the guild there in 1656, and died in 1664. Hendrik Coster was also acquainted with the patrician Everwijn family. In 1639 he painted a portrait of the then six-year-old Jacob Everwijn (1633–1709), of which the present whereabouts are unknown. Jacob was later advocate of the audit office of Gelderland and Zutphen, and alderman and burgomaster of Arnhem; his parents were Johan Everwijn and Christina Kelffken.
3. "Wynant Everwyn, die een neef van Terburg was." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 3: 94. Houbraken was probably mistaken and meant Willem Everwijn, see Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 24; Ariane van Suchtelen and Menno Potjer, "De Arnhemse familie Craeyvanger – een bijzondere groep portretten door Paulus Lesire, Gerard ter Borch en Caspar Netscher" *Oud Holland* 127 (2014): 15n12. The intermediary between Netscher and Ter Borch was probably Willem Everwijn (1613–73), the son of Reynier Everwijn (1585–1630) and Naleke Craeyvanger (1585–1650) and tax collector of Arnhem, who was married to Johanna Kelffken (1631–1701), the daughter of Johan Kelffken (1583–1652) and Clara van Bronckhorst (1593–1652). Willem thus held the same position as Ter Borch's father in Zwolle. See the biography of Gerard Ter Borch in this catalogue. The couple sat for Ter Borch in 1653. See Johan Carol Bierens de Haan, ed., *Gelderse gezichten: Drie eeuwen portretkunst in Gelderland, 1550–1850* (Exh. cat. Nijmegen, Museum Het Valkhof) (Zwolle, 2002), 120–21, nos. 30, 31; S.J. Gudlaugsson, *Gerard ter Borch* (The Hague, 1959–60), nos. 103, 104. Houbraken calls Everwijn a cousin of Ter Borch; this presumed family relationship, however, has not been confirmed.
4. Paulus Lesire, *Portrait of Willem Craeyvanger (1615/16–after 1666)*, 1651; and Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Christine van der Wart (1620–66)*, ca. 1655–56 (both The Leiden Collection, New York); see their entries and the biography of Paulus Lesire in this catalogue.
5. Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of Jan Craeyvanger (1641–after 1668)*; Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of Willem Craeyvanger (1643–after 1712)*; Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of Reijnder Craevanger (1645–after 1675)*;

Gerard ter Borch, *Portrait of Engel Craeyvanger* (1649–after 1671); Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Peter Craeyvanger* (1650–after 1670); Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Gerrit Craeyvanger* (1651–1674); Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Lijsbeth Craeyvanger* (1653–?); Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Naleke Craeyvanger* (1655–1676) (all ca. 1658, The Leiden Collection, New York); see their entries in this catalogue. See also Ariane van Suchtelen and Menno Potjer, “De Arnhemse familie Craeyvanger—een bijzondere groep portretten door Paulus Lesire, Gerard ter Borch en Caspar Netscher” *Oud Holland* 127 (2014): 7–24.

6. The museum in Gotha, for example, owns a signed and 1655 dated copy by Netscher of Ter Borch’s *Paternal Admonition*, and in a private collection is a somewhat handsomer version from 1659 of Ter Borch’s 1635 *Doctor’s Visit*. Peter Hecht, ed., *Hollandse Fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 156n1. Both paintings are illustrated in Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Gerard ter Borch* (The Hague, 1959–60), 117, no. 110 IIa; 56, no. 4b.
7. According to Wieseman, he might have worked as a copyist for a Hague dealer; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 25.
8. Houbraken relates that Netscher had a letter of recommendation from Tulleken “aan zyn Neef Neny” (to his cousin Neny) in Bordeaux. He would have been referring to the Arnhem merchant Jacob Noeij, married to Elizabeth Evertsdr Tulleken, who lived in Bordeaux; Ariane van Suchtelen and Menno Potjer, “De Arnhemse familie Craeyvanger—een bijzondere groep portretten door Paulus Lesire, Gerard ter Borch en Caspar Netscher” *Oud Holland* 127 (2014): 13n11. See also Jacobus Anspach, “De Veluwsche familie Tulleken en hare aanverwanten,” *Heraldieke Bibliotheek Nw. Reeks*, vol. 3 (1881): 36.
9. Abraham Bredius, “Een en ander over Caspar Netscher,” *Oud-Holland* 5 (1887): 264–65.
10. *Lace Maker*, signed and dated 1662 (Wallace Collection, London).
11. “Toen deze kwaal in zyn ingewanden geslagen, hem de dood [had] aangebragt.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 3: 96.
12. For a transcript of this inventory, see Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 143–48, doc. 99; published earlier in Abraham Bredius, “Een en ander over Caspar Netscher,” *Oud-Holland* 5 (1887): 267–74.
13. When her estate was divided among her children on 15 September 1699, its total value was close to 37,000 guilders. The paintings were worth more than 4,000 guilders. Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 151, doc. 110.
14. The takeover of the workshop did not transpire smoothly, for Netscher’s widow, Margaretha Godyn, seems to have been in debt. According to Van Gool, she was a shrewd businesswoman who ran the house with an iron fist. She had her hands full primarily with her talented eldest son, Theodorus, who was a bit of a rake and continued to misbehave despite his mother’s exhortations. To get out from under her, he left for Paris in 1680, where he met with great success. This notwithstanding, he returned to The

Hague in 1700. In the meantime, he had established his reputation and, emulating his father, he portrayed numerous eminences, including King-Stadholder William III (1650–1702) and King Frederick I of Prussia (1657–1713). Theodorus left for England in 1715, and returned in 1722. Constantijn Netscher (1668–1723) had less natural talent and painted in the same manner as his father, whereby it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between their portraits. Anthonie (1679–1713), the third son who elected to become a painter, left after squandering his father's inheritance for the East Indies and died there in 1713.

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