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# Eglon van der Neer

(Amsterdam 1634/36 – 1703 Düsseldorf)

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Eglon van der Neer was born in Amsterdam around 1635. His parents were the landscape artist Aert van der Neer (ca. 1603–77) and Lysbeth Goverts (1608–ca. 1662).[1] According to Arnold Houbraken, Van der Neer, "who in his youth [was] inclined toward art, after his father's example, developed a fondness for painting pictures."[2] Hence, his father decided to allow him to train with Jacob van Loo (1614–70), a leading portrait and genre painter of the day who was placed on a par with Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), Ferdinand Bol (1616–80), and Govaert Flinck (1615–60) by the poet Jan Vos (1612–67) in his 1654 *Zeege der Schilderkunst*.[3]

After his apprenticeship, Van der Neer, barely nineteen years old, moved to France where he worked for Count Friedrich von Dohna (1621–88), the Dutch governor of the Principality of Orange.[4] He returned to the Dutch Republic in 1658 and the following year married Maria Wagensvelt (d. 1677), whose father, Aernout Wagensvelt (ca. 1599–1663), was a prosperous notary and secretary at the court of law in Schieland. After their wedding the couple settled in Amsterdam. From then on Van der Neer specialized in elegant conversation pieces in the style of Gabriel Metsu (1629–67) and Pieter de Hooch (1629–84) and, as Houbraken noted, "he also often painted groups in modern dress in the style of Ter Borch, sometimes somewhat differently, since he was inclined to variety."[5]

In 1663 Van der Neer moved to Rotterdam, where he was soon embroiled in a long and costly court case over his father-in-law's estate. He became a highly sought-after artist in the city on the Maas River and was fairly well off. Yet, in those years his comfortable circumstances also depended in part on the annual interest generated by an inheritance of a wealthy aunt of his wife. In 1670 he paid his dues to the painters' confraternity Pictura in The Hague, probably for no other reason than to be able to sell his work in the court capital, for he continued to live in Rotterdam.[6]

Adriaen van der Werff (1659–1722) was his pupil in Rotterdam between 1671 and 1675. Van der Werff regularly accompanied Van der Neer when he visited Leiden to see his good friend Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–81), whom he had probably known since 1658. This contact may have helped Van der Neer receive the commission to portray Justus Ghys (1638–80), a wealthy Leiden textile merchant, and his wife, Jaquemijntje le Pla (1647–96?).[7] His father's death in 1677 took Van der Neer back to Amsterdam, but only briefly, for barely a month later his own wife died. He visited Amsterdam again the following year, this time to witness the marriage of Willem van Aelst (1627–after 1687), the renowned still-life painter who was clearly a close friend.

Probably spurred by the crisis in the art market in the Dutch Republic, in the late 1670s Van der Neer traveled regularly to Brussels, which, by this time, had outstripped Antwerp as the artistic center in the Southern Netherlands.[8] He settled there in 1680 and in that same year married Marie du Chastel (1652–92). She was a miniaturist with excellent connections in the highest Brussels circles who had worked at the Danish court before she met Van der Neer. His new domicile brought him not only new clients, but also a new artistic direction, for he now concentrated exclusively on landscapes and history paintings. This rigorous break with the past was also expressed in his conversion to Catholicism.

In 1687 King Charles II of Spain (1661–1700) appointed Van der Neer as court painter, for which he received an annual allowance. According to Houbraken, this prestigious appointment was prompted by the artist's portrait of Maria Anna von Pfalz-Neuburg (1667–1740), the sister of Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm (1658–1716) and future spouse of Charles II of Spain. Houbraken's statement must be wrong, however, because the likeness dates from 1689.[9] In fact, Van der Neer, who never visited Spain, was in all likelihood never active as court painter; the king's appointment was probably in recompense for outstanding payments. The portrait of Maria Anna also remained unpaid for years, despite Johann

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Wilhelm's repeated entreaties to his sister.

That the elector, a passionate art collector and great lover of Netherlandish painting, was willing to act on Van der Neer's behalf illustrates the artist's exceptional position. Johann Wilhelm presented the painter with a medal of honor on a chain when the artist visited him in Düsseldorf, probably in late 1695. Van der Neer depicted this medal in the self-portrait he painted for Johann Wilhelm the following year.[10] In March of 1697, the elector named Van der Neer "Titularhofrat" (honorary privy councilor), and in March 1698, Van der Neer accepted an appointment as the elector's court painter. In Düsseldorf in 1697, he met and married his third wife, Adriana Spilberg (b. 1656), the daughter of the previous court painter Johannes Spilberg (1619–90), who had died in 1690.[11] The marriage was to be short-lived, for Van der Neer died in 1703, "accompanied to his final resting place by a considerable cortège."[12]

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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## Endnotes

1. If not stated otherwise, the information about Eglon van der Neer is taken from Eddy Schavemaker, *Eglon van der Neer (1635/6–1703): His Life and His Work* (Doornspijk, 2010).
2. "Die in zijn Jeugt aanleiding tot de Konst vond by syn vader, kreeg genegenheid tot het schilderen van beelden." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 172.
3. Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten van den poëet Jan Vo*s (Amsterdam, 1662), 125–41, esp. 140. See also the biography of Jacob van Loo in this catalogue.
4. This information is from Houbraken. It is not known whether Van der Neer traveled to Orange of his own volition—possibly en route to Italy—or had acquired this office through the intercession of an intermediary in the Dutch Republic.
5. "Hy schilderde ook veeltyds gezelschapjes op de Moderne wys gekleed als Terburg, somwyl ook wat anders, aangezien hy tot verandering geneigt was." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 174.
6. See also Edwin Buijsen et al., *Haagse Schilders in de Gouden Eeuw* (The Hague, 1998), 332.
7. *Portrait of Justus Ghys (1638–80)* and *Portrait of Jaquemijntje le Pla (1647–96?)* (both Private Collection); see Eddy Schavemaker, *Eglon van der Neer (1635/6–1703): His Life and His Work* (Doornspijk, 2010), nos. 33 and 34.
8. On the Dutch painters who sought employment abroad, see Horst Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Haarlem, 1942; reprint, Amsterdam, 1983).
9. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 174.
10. *Self-Portrait,* signed and dated 1696 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence); Eddy Schavemaker, *Eglon van der Neer (1635/6–1703): His Life and His Work* (Doornspijk, 2010), no. 132.
11. Eddy Schavemaker, *Eglon van der Neer (1635/6–1703): His Life and His Work* (Doornspijk, 2010), 32.
12. "En werd met een aanzienlyke rouwstacie ten grave geleit." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 173.

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