



Ferdinand Bol

(Dordrecht 1616 – 1680 Amsterdam)

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Ferdinand Bol was baptized in Dordrecht on 24 June 1616. His parents were the surgeon Balthasar Bol (d. 1641) and Tanneke Fernandes.^[1] We do not know from whom Bol received his first lessons in painting in his native city. A logical candidate is Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–1652), Dordrecht’s most esteemed and talented painter. The long-held assumption that Bol must also have studied for a while under a Utrecht master derives chiefly from an incorrect reading of the signature on a “Bloemaert-like” *Vertumnus* from around 1635, which until recently was considered to be Bol’s first signed painting.^[2] In December 1635, he signed four notarial deeds in Dordrecht as “Ferdinandus bol, schilder” (Ferdinandus Bol, painter), indicating that he had completed his training by that year.

Soon thereafter, in 1636, Bol left his hometown and set off as a master painter for Amsterdam, where he worked under Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), the first of the Dordrecht artists to do so.^[3] Bol rapidly mastered Rembrandt’s style and subsequently worked for a few years as a full-fledged assistant in his workshop on the Nieuwe Doelenstraat. The documentary evidence for Bol’s association with Rembrandt includes an annotation on the verso of a drawing by Rembrandt that can be dated around 1636.^[4] This inscription in Rembrandt’s handwriting mentions the sale of work by “fardijnandus.” Furthermore, “Fernenandus Bol” also witnessed a document dated 30 August 1640, in which Rembrandt empowers a Frisian lawyer to settle an inheritance matter in Leeuwarden.

Bol probably worked with Rembrandt until shortly before 1642, the year of his earliest dated paintings.^[5] Around that time—possibly in 1641, when Bol’s father died—he established himself as an independent artist in Amsterdam and embarked on a successful career as a history and portrait painter. Like his teacher, he produced many *tronies*, the first of which date from 1644 (see, for example, *Man with a Fur-Trimmed Hat*).^[6] His work, especially his portraiture, was strongly indebted to Rembrandt’s style until around 1650. A telling example of this influence is the famous likeness of Elisabeth Bas (1571–1649), presently considered by most scholars to be an early portrait by Bol, but previously thought to be an important work by Rembrandt.^[7] He also adopted his master’s predilection for self-portraits: there are at least six likenesses of Bol from the second half of the 1640s sporting a typical painter’s bonnet (see, for example, *Self-Portrait, Behind a Parapet*).^[8]

Bol’s growing reputation led to his first major commission, a portrait of the regents of the Lepers’ Asylum, in 1649.^[9] The palette of this group portrait strongly recalls that of Rembrandt, yet the poses of the regents foreshadow the elegance that would increasingly mark Bol’s portraits from 1650 on. Possibly with an eye to upcoming commissions for the prestigious decorative program of the new town hall, Bol acquired citizenship of Amsterdam in 1652.^[10] A year later, he executed his first significant commission outside of Amsterdam: a group portrait of the officers of the Gouda civic guard.^[11]

Bol married Lysbeth Dell (1628–60) in October 1653, at which time he was recorded as living on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal. Through Lysbeth’s father, Elbert Dell (1595–1667), a wine merchant and auctioneer of the Admiralty of Amsterdam, and her mother, Cornelia Spiegel (1606–46), Bol gained entry into the Amsterdam patriciate.^[12] His in-laws thus played a pivotal role in the many prestigious and lucrative commissions he received from various municipal boards of governors after his marriage, such as those from the burgomasters’ and aldermen’s chamber in the new town hall in the period when Lysbeth’s uncle, Hendrick Dirckz Spiegel (1598–1667), was burgomaster.^[13]

Bol did not secure these commissions solely through his influential relatives; his success was also due to his great talent. He was present, along with his master, Rembrandt, in the Kloveniersdoelen in 1654 at a celebration held by the Guild of Saint Luke, which inspired Jan Vos (1612–67) to write his paeon to the leading Amsterdam painters of his day, including Bol.^[14]



It was hardly a coincidence that virtually all of the painters who worked on the new town hall appeared in Vos's poem. One year later, in 1655, Bol was "head man" of the Guild of Saint Luke and in this capacity, together with the painter-dealer David Colijns (1582–1665/66), appraised a collection of paintings, a role he would assume on several other occasions as well.^[15] In 1658, he confessed, with Govaert Flinck (1615–60) and two other painters, to having drawn from nude female models, which was illegal at the time.

Bol faced personal adversity in 1660 when his wife died just after giving birth to their son Balthasar (b. 1660). Professionally, however, he remained very busy. In the first half of the 1660s, he received a number of commissions for group portraits of governors, as well as of individual sitters. He also landed a few important and lucrative commissions outside of Amsterdam. The exceptionally wealthy Utrecht widow Jacoba Lampins (1613/14–67) ordered four monumental history paintings for the *salet* (drawing room) of her house on the elegant Nieuwegracht.^[16] He also painted a large chimneypiece, *Allegory on the Municipal Government of Leiden*, for the burgomasters' chamber of the Leiden town hall in 1664.^[17]

Bol had so much work in the 1660s that it is difficult to imagine he did not have some form of assistance. How long Frans van Ommeren served as Bol's assistant is unknown, but a document from 1662 indicates that Van Ommeren was partly responsible for the workshop production. In his *Schouburgh*, Houbraken mentioned two other pupils of Bol: Cornelis Bisschop (1630–74) of Dordrecht, and the German painter Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), who became the leading portraitist in England after the death of Sir Peter Lely (1618–80).

On 10 October 1669, two days after Rembrandt's burial, Bol took a second wife, Anna van Erckel (1624–80), the extraordinarily wealthy widow of Erasmus Scharlaken (ca. 1610–68), treasurer of the Admiralty of Amsterdam. They were already acquainted, as Bol had portrayed her and Scharlaken as Isaac and Rebecca in a painting from ca. 1648.^[18] According to his marriage settlement, Bol owned sixty paintings, and his possessions, partly belonging to his first wife, were valued at a hefty 14,800 guilders.^[19] Anna van Erckel was at least three times wealthier than he was; the couple was so affluent, in fact, that Bol no longer had to earn a living. He seems to have stopped painting fairly soon after he married, and lived chiefly off his investments. His last dated painting is from 1669.

Many of Bol's final commissions stemmed from his good relations with the Admiralty. For instance, between 1667 and 1669, he painted a series of portraits of Admiral Michiel Adriaensz de Ruyter (1607–76), whose popularity had reached record heights in the Dutch Republic following his heroic expedition to Chatham.^[20] In 1672, Bol exchanged his house on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal for one on the Keizersgracht, between the Vijzelstraat and the Reguliersgracht. The dire economic crisis after 1672 seems to have left him and his wife unscathed. When the 200th penny levy was charged in 1674, their initial fortune seems even to have increased. As befitting a man of his standing, he joined the boards of several municipal institutions, and in 1675 Bol, the painter of so many regents, himself was portrayed as a member of the board of the Old People's Hospital in Amsterdam.^[21] Anna van Erckel died in April 1680. Bol survived his wife by only a few months and was buried in the Zuiderkerk on 24 July of that year.

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Ferdinand Bol is taken from Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982).
2. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 16–17, no. 35. The attribution to Bol can no longer be sustained, as the signature on the painting must be read as that of Ferdinandus West, who was active in The Hague between 1637 and 1683. See Erna Kok, “Zonder vrienden geen carrière: De succesvolle loopbanen van de zeventiende-eeuwse kunstenaars Govert Flinck en Ferdinandus Bol,” *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27 (2011): 310–11.
3. He would be followed by Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), Jacobus Levecq (1634–75), Nicolaes Maes (1634–93), and Arent de Gelder (1645–1727), all from Dordrecht, and perhaps also by Abraham van Dijck (1635/36–80).
4. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch (London, 1973), 2: 106–7, no. 448.
5. *Portrait of Anna Maria von Schurman*, 1642 (Baltimore Museum of Art), and *Portrait of an Elderly Woman*, 1642 (Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin); Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 136–37, no. 117; 138, no. 121.
6. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 2, 57–58.
7. *Portrait of Elisabeth Jacobsdr Bas (1571–1649)*, ca. 1641 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 5, Nachträge, Ortsregister, Ikonographisches Register, Bibliographie (Landau, 1994), 3084–85, no. 2016. However, Blankert does not support the attribution to Bol and thus includes the portrait in his catalogue of rejected works. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 13, 57, 184, no. R200.
8. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 58, 118–21, nos. 60–65.
9. *Four Regents of the Lepers' Asylum*, signed and dated 1649 (Amsterdam Museum). Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 20, 59, 61, 67, 68, 155, no. 177; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 1, J. A. Backer – A. van Dijck (Landau, 1983), 315, no. 179.
10. Bol purchased “poorterrecht” or citizenship, in 1652, which allowed him to live and conduct trade in the city, and to join the guild.
11. *Officers of the Gouda Militia under Colonel Govert Suijs*, signed and dated 1653 (Museum Gouda). Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 20, 68, 156, no. 178; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 1, J. A. Backer – A. van Dijck (Landau, 1983), 315, no. 180.
12. Bol's mother-in-law was the sister of Elbert Spiegel (1600–1674), receiver-general of the Admiralty of

- Amsterdam, married to Elisabeth de Vlaming van Oudshoorn (1600–1669), whose father, Cornelis de Vlaming van Oudshoorn, served as burgomaster nine times between 1656 and 1680. Bol portrayed the couple in 1660 (Museum Briner und Kern, Winterthur). Cornelia had another brother, Hendrick Spiegel, a merchant and a council member between 1655 and 1665, who was elected burgomaster four times. For the Spiegel family's artistic patronage, see Rudolf E.O. Ekkart, "A *Portrait Historié* with Venus and Cupid: Ferdinand Bol and the Patronage of the Spiegel Family," *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 14–41.
13. Bol worked for the Women's House of Correction (ca. 1655), the Wine Merchants' Guild (1659), the Lepers' Asylum (1661), the Admiralty of Amsterdam (1661–63), and the Zuiderkerk (1669). For a survey, see Albert Blankert, *Kunst als regeringszaak in Amsterdam in de 17e eeuw: Rondom schilderijen van Ferdinand Bol* (Amsterdam, 1975); Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 48–55. For Bol's commissions for the Amsterdam town hall, see Albert Blankert, *Kunst als regeringszaak in Amsterdam in de 17e eeuw: Rondom schilderijen van Ferdinand Bol* (Amsterdam, 1975), 11–36; Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 108–18.
 14. See, for example, Nina Geerdink, "De man van het beeld aan het woord: Jan Vos' 'Zeege der Schilderkunst' (1654)," *Nieuw Letterkundig Magazijn* 28 (2010): 45–50.
 15. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 73. He appraised the paintings owned by Johannes Verspreet in Amsterdam on 13 December 1656. Together with the art dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh, he appraised the paintings of François Gysels and Laurens Mauritsz Douci on 16 July 1666 and 18 January 1669, respectively. Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 76.
 16. Margriet van Eikema Hommes, *Art and Allegiance in the Dutch Golden Age: The Ambitions of a Wealthy Widow in a Painted Chamber by Ferdinand Bol* (Amsterdam, 2012).
 17. The painting is now known only from photographs. It was lost in the fire at the Leiden town hall in 1929. Marike Hoogduin-Berkhout, "Op de geluckige regeeringe van Leiden': Geschilderde voorstellingen in het Leidse stadhuis 1575–1700," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 22 (2006): 87–92; Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 21, 50, 75, no. 44.
 18. *Couple in a Landscape*, ca. 1648 (Dordrechts Museum). See the entry *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, fig. 3, in this catalogue; Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 23, 151, no. 167; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 1, *J. A. Backer – A. van Dijck* (Landau, 1983), 208, no. 150. It is virtually certain that this portrait corresponds with the description of "des Overledens en desselfs eerste man contrefeytsel verthonende Isacq en Rebecca in een ebbe lijst door Ferd. Bol" (the likeness of the deceased and her first husband in the guise of Isaac and Rebecca in an ebony frame by Ferd. Bol) in the estate inventory of Anna van Erckel (1681). Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 84–85.
 19. For a transcript of the marriage settlement, including all of the paintings, see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 76–78.

20. Bol received this commission from the Admiralty of Amsterdam on the occasion of De Ruyter's victory over the English in the Four Days' Battle in 1666. The portrait of De Ruyter was intended for the chambers of the admiralties in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Middelburg, Harlingen, Enkhuizen, and Hoorn, and so six copies of this "state portrait" were made. At present, copies can be found in the Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam, the Mauritshuis in The Hague, and the Westfries Museum in Hoorn. Subsequently, Bol (his workshop) received orders for a few more versions of the "state portrait." Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), 23, 63, 123–28, nos. 76–87, pls. 84–95; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 1, J. A. Backer – A. van Dijck (Landau, 1983), 314, no. 177.
21. Pieter van Anraedt (before 1640–78), *Six Regents and the Warden of the Old Peoples' Hospital in Amsterdam*, signed and dated 1675 (Amsterdam Museum). Ferdinand Bol is seated at the far left.

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