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Gerbrand van den Eeckhout

(Amsterdam 1621 – 1674 Amsterdam)

How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Gerbrand van den Eeckhout” (2017). 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/gerbrand-van-den-eeckhout/ (accessed November 16, 2026).

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Gerbrand van den Eeckhout was baptized in Amsterdam on 22 August 1621. His parents were the goldsmith Jan Pietersz van den Eeckhout (1584–1652) and Grietje Claes Leydeckers (1586–1631).[1] Gerbrand's father was born in 1583 in Harlingen (in the province of Friesland), but was not Frisian. His father Pieter Lodewijcks (1544–1619), a Mennonite peddler, came from Brussels, from which he had fled for religious reasons. After temporary sojourns in 's-Hertogenbosch and Harlingen, where Pieter married Marritge Jans van Winterswijk, he ultimately acquired citizenship in Amsterdam in 1588. Five years later, Gerbrand's father and the latter's elder brother Lodewijck were both baptized as Protestants.

In 1612 Jan Pietersz van den Eeckhout bought two buildings on the Kalverstraat. He turned them into a single residence called 't Vliegend Paert, which was home to three generations of the family. Gerbrand, who never married, may have lived there well into adulthood, for he gave the Kalverstraat as his address in documents up to 1662.[2] This is also the address where his father was taxed for assets worth 4000 guilders in 1631, indicating that the family's circumstances were modest in these years.

Jan Pietersz van den Eeckhout's affluence and social standing grew substantially when, in 1633, two years after the death of Grietje, he took a second wife, namely Cornelia Dedel (1594–1660) from Delft. Her parents were Willem Dedel (1552–1638) and Ida Bruyns van der Dussen (1557-99), the daughter of a well-to-do brewer. Dedel—himself a brewer in Delft and a director of the Dutch East India Company—was affluent, and as the son of a Leiden draper and burgomaster, belonged to the local patriciate. His brother-in-law was Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg (1537–1614), the famous Leiden portrait painter and burgomaster, and father of Rembrandt's first teacher.[3]

According to Arnold Houbraken (1660–1719), Van den Eeckhout was "a pupil of Rembrandt van Rijn."[4] He would have gone to study under him at the age of fourteen.[5] He painted his earliest work in 1640.[6] This usually suggests independence, but given his young age, it is unlikely that he already had his own studio. Upon finishing his training, he may have stayed on for a while with his master, enjoying a privileged position. Perhaps he worked side by side with Ferdinand Bol (1616–80) in Rembrandt's workshop, as his early paintings display a great similarity with works by Bol.[7] Whatever his position, Van den Eeckhout must have been on good terms with his master, for in his biography of Roelant Roghman (1627–92), Houbraken noted that Roghman "along with Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, [was] a great friend of Rembrandt van Rijn in his time."[8] That Roghman and Van den Eeckhout were good friends emerges from the will that the latter executed in 1674, in which he calls Roghman "an old acquaintance" and remembers him with 50 guilders.[9]

Van den Eeckhout was an exceptionally productive and versatile artist. About two hundred paintings have been attributed to him, along with countless drawings, etchings, book illustrations, and—doubtless inspired by his father's profession—pattern books for gold- and silversmiths. He painted primarily history scenes, generally of biblical subjects, as well as portraits. His treatment of light and his handling of paint in these portraits recall Rembrandt, but in terms of composition he followed the prevailing fashion. Many commissions came from his immediate surroundings, such as the portraits of his stepmother, Cornelia Dedel (1644), and of his father (1644, 1651), among others.[10] In addition, in 1657 and 1673 he portrayed the officers of the Coopers and Wine Rackers' Guild; the former commission would have come via his brother Jan Jansz van den Eeckhhout (1619–69), who was a wine merchant.[11]

Van den Eeckhout was a history and portrait painter, but from the early 1650s he also acquitted himself well as a genre painter. This turn was no doubt dictated by the deteriorating market, which led to increasingly fierce competition and spurred artists to pursue new avenues.[12] If he was a follower as a history and portrait painter, he proved to be an innovator

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as a genre painter. His guardroom scenes from 1651 onward are still indebted to other artists, such as Anthonie Palamedesz (1601–73), but Van den Eeckhout's depictions of elegant companies disporting themselves on terraces or in elegant interiors were ahead of their time.

In addition to Rembrandt and Roghman, Van den Eeckhout was also acquainted with the landscape painter Willem Schellinks (1626–78), the poet David Questiers (1623–63), and the bookseller Hieronymus Sweerts (1629–96). They all loved poetry and exchanged poems they had penned themselves.[13] Moreover, he was in touch with the well-known rector Jacob Heyblock (1620–90), making several contributions to his famous *Album Amicorum*. For instance, in 1654 Van den Eeckhout wrote some lines of verse for a fine drawing he had made of *Hermes and Argus,* and next to an *Ysvermaakje* (scene of amusement on the ice) drawn by Jan van de Cappelle (1626–79). In these lines Van den Eeckhout honored the artist "who had taught himself to paint of his own volition"[14] and whom he had portrayed one year earlier.[15]

During the last years of his life, Van den Eeckhout lived with Maria van Schilperoort, the widow of his brother Jan, on the elegant Herengracht (nowadays number 525), close to the Vijzelstraat.[16] In September 1674 he fell seriously ill and drew up his will. To his sister Ida (1634–78) he left "a picture painted by him, the testator, and already hanging in her house," and to his sister Margaretha "a picture equal in worth to the one he bequeathed to his sister Ida, to be taken from the works he will leave behind and which will be assessed by someone who is knowledgeable about paintings." To his nephew/cousin and godchild, Gerbrand, he bequeathed "all of his art on paper and works in clay, consisting of prints, drawings, and sculpted figures and animals, so that he might enjoy the proceeds he will gain by putting them up for auction."[17] Van den Eeckhout died a few days later, and was taken from the Herengracht to the Oudezijds Kapel to be buried in the family grave on 26 September 1674.

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Endnotes

1. Her parents were the cobbler Claes Gerbrandts and Marie Willems, whose brother Jan Claes Leydeckers witnessed Gerbrand's baptism and was later portrayed by Rembrandt van Rijn in the *Nightwatch*.
2. Moreover, in 1655 he was appointed sergeant of the civic guard in the district to which the Kalverstraat belonged. See Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), The Hague, Abraham Bredius Archive.
3. Cornelia's cousin/nephew, Huybrecht Dedel (d. 1635), is called a painter in a few Leiden documents, but no work by him is known.
4. "Een Leerling van Rembrant van Ryn." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 100.
5. Ulrich Thieme, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig, 1914), 10: 355.
6. *Gideon Visited by the Angel,* signed and dated 1640 (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm).
7. Ferdinand Bol's apprenticeship with Rembrandt lasted from 1636 to 1642 and so overlapped considerably with that of Van den Eeckhout. See Walter Liedtke, "Rembrandt's 'Workshop' Revisited," *Oud-Holland* 117 (2004): 68. After his training with Rembrandt, Van den Eeckhout is thought to have worked for some time with a follower of Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), for example Claes Moyaert (1592–1655), given that his approach to biblical themes, and primarily his rendering of figures, are definitely indebted to Lastman.
8. "In zyn tyd, met Gerbrant van den Eekhout, een groot vriend [was] van Rembrant van Ryn." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 1: 174.
9. "Een oude bekende." See Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary A. Lock, no. 2179, fol. 97–104, 19 September 1674.
10. *Portrait of Cornelia Dedel*, 1644 (Private Collection). *Portrait of Jan Pieterz van den Eeckhout (1584–1652)*, 1644 (Musée de Grenoble); see Adolph Staring, "Portretten door Gerbrand van den Eeckhout," *Oud Holland* 63 (1948): 180. *Portrait of the artist's father, Jan Pietersz van den Eeckhout (1584–1652), half-length*, 1651 (Private Collection); see Adolph Staring, "Portretten door Gerbrand van den Eeckhout," *Oud Holland* 63 (1948): 182.
11. *Officers of the Coopers and Wine Rackers' Guild*, signed and dated 1657 (National Gallery, London), in which his brother Jan van den Eeckhout is also portrayed. *Officers of the Coopers and Wine Rackers' Guild*, signed and dated 1673 (Amsterdams Museum).
12. Piet Bakker, "Crisis? Welke crisis? Enkele kanttekeningen bij het economisch verval van de schilderkunst in Leiden na 1660," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27 (2011): 232–70.
13. A.D. de Vries, "Willem Schellinks," *Oud Holland* 1 (1883): 151–52.

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14. “Die de schilderkunst by hem selfs uyt eygen lust [heeft] geleert.” Kees Thomassen and J.A. Gruys, eds., *The Album Amicorum of Jacob Heyblocq: Introduction, Transcriptions, Paraphrases, and Notes to the Facsimile* (Zwolle, 1998), 173–74.
15. *Portrait of Jan van de Cappelle (1626–79)*, signed and dated 1653, (Amsterdams Museum). This portrait may be identical to the one listed in Jan van de Capelle’s 1680 inventory. Hanging in the *voorhuis* (front parlor) was “Een conterfeytsel sijnde den Overleden [van] Eeckhout” (a likeness of the deceased [by] Eeckhout). See Abraham Bredius, “De schilder Johannes van de Cappelle,” *Oud Holland* 10 (1892): 29.
16. H.F. Wijnman et al., *Vier eeuwen Heerengracht, oneven* (Amsterdam, 1976), 346. According to Wijnman, Van den Eeckhout lived with his stepmother, Cornelia Dedel, yet this is impossible given that she died in 1660. On the basis of (possibly) his will of 1674, drawn up on the Herengracht, Manuth assumes that Van den Eeckhout lived with Maria van Schilperoort, his brother’s widow. He bequeathed her 300 guilders and stipulated that “ingevalle hij op sijn Overlijden noch bij sijn voornoemde behout-suster mochte inwoonen” (in the event that at his death he was still living with his above-mentioned sister-in-law), she would receive room and board from him for the period he lived with her prior to his death. See Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary A. Lock, no. 2179, fol. 97–104, 19 September 1674.
17. “Een stuck schilderij door hem testateur geschildert ‘t haeren huys alreede hangende”; “een stuck schilderij van gelijcke waerde als aen sijne suster Ida gelegateert, te nemen uyt de schilderijen die hij sal comen naer te laten tot seggen van yemandt kennisse van schilderijen hebbende”; “alle sijn Papiere Kunst en geboetseert goet, bestaende in Printen, Teyckeningen en geboedseerde beeltgens en beesges, om de penningen die daervan by publique vendutie sullen comen te procederen by hem genooten te werden.” See Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary A. Lock, no. 2179, fol. 97–104, 19 September 1674.

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