



Govaert Flinck

(Kleve 1615 – 1660 Amsterdam)

How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Govaert Flinck” (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/govaert-flinck/> (accessed May 01, 2026).

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Govaert Flinck was born in the German city of Kleve, not far from the Dutch city of Nijmegen, on 25 January 1615. His merchant father, Teunis Govaertsz Flinck, was clearly prosperous, because in 1625 he was appointed steward of Kleve, a position reserved for men of stature.^[1] That Flinck would become a painter was not apparent in his early years; in fact, according to Arnold Houbraken, the odds were against his pursuit of that interest. Teunis considered such a career unseemly and apprenticed his son to a cloth merchant. Flinck, however, never stopped drawing, and a fortunate incident changed his fate. According to Houbraken, “Lambert Jacobsz, [a] Mennonite, or Baptist teacher of Leeuwarden in Friesland, came to preach in Kleve and visit his fellow believers in the area.”^[2] Lambert Jacobsz (ca. 1598–1636) was also a famous Mennonite painter, and he persuaded Flinck’s father that the artist’s profession was a respectable one.

Around 1629, Govaert accompanied Lambert to Leeuwarden to train as a painter.^[3] In Lambert’s workshop Flinck met the slightly older Jacob Adriaensz Backer (1608–51), with whom he became lifelong friends. Both later moved to Amsterdam, where Backer established his own studio around 1633. According to Houbraken, Flinck then decided to “train with Rembrandt for a year with the aim of becoming accustomed to his handling of paint and way of painting, and in which he rapidly became so successful at imitating them that a number of his works were mistaken for real paintings by Rembrandt and sold as such.”^[4]

It was long believed that Flinck left Leeuwarden in 1633, but recent research on the art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh (ca. 1584/89–1661) suggests that late 1634 or early 1635 is more likely.^[5] If Flinck spent a year with Rembrandt to master his style, this apprenticeship would have taken place in the Sint-Antoniebreestraat, where Rembrandt ran Uylenburgh’s workshop from 1631 to 1635. When Rembrandt left Uylenburgh to start his own studio in the Nieuwe Doelenstraat, Flinck took over for him either in late 1635 or early 1636. Just how long he worked for Uylenburgh is not known, but it was probably several years. In 1637, after buying some prints at auction, Flinck gave Uylenburgh’s shop as his address.

Once he had become independent, Flinck immediately benefited from an extensive and affluent circle of customers. His mother was the sister of the Amsterdam cloth merchant Jacob Leeuw (1636–1704), and Flinck painted the portraits of almost every member of Leeuw’s family. Moreover, because the Leeuw family was related to the Amsterdam Mennonite elite through a number of marriages, Flinck found an important Mennonite clientele beyond his immediate family. When the prosperous cloth merchant Jan Pietersz Bruyningh (ca. 1600–46) died in 1646, he owned no fewer than eight paintings by Flinck.^[6]

The year 1645 marked several significant changes for Flinck. In the summer he married the Remonstrant Ingetje Thovelingh (ca. 1620–51) of Rotterdam, daughter of a wealthy director of the Dutch East India Company. Flinck, too, was not without means. In 1644 he had bought two adjacent houses in Amsterdam’s Lauriergracht for the princely sum of 10,000 guilders. Shortly after he married, he built in this complex “a large painting gallery with high windows ... on the upper ledges of which stood busts of the emperors, many handsome casts of the finest Antique marbles, and, hanging in between, all kinds of exotic robes, garments, harnesses, rifles, and swords; also old expensive velvet, and other gold-embroidered decorations.”^[7] This ensemble was so extraordinary that Jan Vos (1610–67) dedicated a poem to it.^[8]

Another major change involved his style of painting. For a long time after he had trained with Rembrandt, Flinck painted in a manner that was almost indistinguishable from that of his master. When in the early 1640s the bon ton among the Amsterdam elite was to have oneself portrayed in the academic style blowing in from Flanders at the time, Flinck decided to adapt to the new fashion. Weaning himself from Rembrandt’s style proved difficult.^[9] Flinck ultimately succeeded



extraordinarily well in this, especially after he studied the works of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) on a trip to Antwerp shortly before his wedding, probably around 1645.^[10]

To a certain extent, the year 1645 also signaled Flinck's definitive breakthrough among members of the Amsterdam patriciate. Flinck was no longer dependent on his family and its connections for commissions; he now had access to the highest social circles. As early as 1642 he had painted his first group portrait, namely of the four regents of the Kloveniersdoelen.^[11] In 1645 he was awarded an even more prestigious commission from the same civic guard to paint the portraits of the company of Captain Albert Bas and Lieutenant Lucas Conijn.^[12] A regular buyer of his work was the famous burgomaster Joan Huydecoper (1599–1661), whose company of militiamen Flinck portrayed to commemorate the Peace of Münster.^[13] According to Houbraken, Flinck also received commissions from the brothers Pieter (1612–80) and Jan Six (1618–1700), the latter of whom later became burgomaster. In 1655, for example, Flinck painted the portrait of Jan Six's wife, Margaretha Tulp (1634–1709), the daughter of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1593–1674).^[14] Flinck also maintained a close friendship with the "Lord mayors Cornelis and Andries de Graeff." According to Houbraken, "the latter visited [Flinck] at home on many occasions; and he was so familiar with the former that in the evening, tired from painting, he often went to visit him uninvited."^[15] The patronage of the De Graeff family was also expressed in Flinck's painting of Andries (1611–78).^[16]

Flinck's fame was not confined to Amsterdam. He maintained ties with his native Kleve, where he received honorable and lucrative commissions from Frederick William (1620–88), Elector of Brandenburg and Duke of Kleve. Frederick William married Louise Henrietta of Orange (1627–67), the eldest daughter of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik (1584–1647), in Kleve in 1646, and two years later Flinck painted an allegory for them on the occasion of the birth (and death) of their son, Prince William Henry (1648–49).^[17] According to Houbraken, many of the decorations in the artist's painting gallery on the Lauriergracht came "from the old court of the Duke of Kleve," whose great favor Flinck enjoyed.^[18] This royal patron, whose likeness Flinck painted in 1652,^[19] was so delighted by the master's achievements that he presented him with a miniature portrait of himself encircled with diamonds.^[20]

Flinck also painted on several occasions Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (1604–79), who on his return from Brazil was made stadholder of Kleve by Frederick William.^[21] It would have been through these influential patrons that Flinck was introduced to the court in The Hague. Hence, in 1654, he received an important commission from Amalia von Solms (1602–75) to paint an allegory in memory of her husband, Stadholder Frederik Hendrik, who had died in 1647, to hang in her "grote cabinet" (large cabinet) in Huis ten Bosch Palace.^[22]

Flinck's most important commissions, however, came from Amsterdam. As a protégé of the De Graeff brothers, Flinck benefited greatly from the commissions to decorate the new city hall on Dam Square. Hence, in 1656 he painted the monumental *Consul Manius Curius Dentatus Refusing the Gifts of the Samnites*^[23] and, in 1658, an even larger picture of *Solomon Praying for Wisdom* for the council chamber.^[24] In November 1659, at the height of his fame, Flinck received his most distinguished commission, namely to paint twelve works for the gallery of the town hall, known as the Batavian Series, in which he agreed to produce two canvases a year for 1000 guilders each. Two months later, on 2 February 1660, before he had really begun working on this commission, Flinck died.^[25]

In the several years before his death, Flinck's personal circumstances had changed dramatically. In 1651, five years after the birth of their son Nicolaes Anthonis (1646–1723) and after a long illness, Ingetje Thoveligh died of dropsy. That same year Flinck joined the Remonstrant community. He remained a widower for five years before marrying Sofia van



der Houven of Ghent in 1656. Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) wrote a poem celebrating this marriage in which he eulogized Flinck's artistic prowess.^[26] The inventory of Flinck's possessions made shortly after his death reveals that he bequeathed a considerable fortune of more than 44,000 guilders to his son, Nicolaes Anthonis, including an exquisite collection of paintings, many of which were by him.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all the biographical information on Govaert Flinck is taken from Petra Jeroense, “Govaert Flinck (1615–1660): Eine Künstlerbiographie,” *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* 63 (1997): 73–112.
2. “Een Lambert Jacobze, Mennonist, of Doopsgezind Leeraar te Leuwaerden in Friesland, komt te Kleef prediken en zyne Geloofsgenooten daar omstreeks bezoeken.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 20.
3. On Lambert Jacobsz, see Marijke van der Meij-Tolsma, “Lambert Jacobsz (c. 1598–1636): Een Amsterdamse historieschilder te Leeuwarden,” *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 4 (1988): 29–54; Piet Bakker, “Een schilder en zijn netwerk: Lambert Jacobsz en een nieuw beeld van de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst in Friesland,” *De Vrije Fries* 88 (2008): 31–64.
4. “Een Jaar by Rembrandt te gaan leeren; ten einde hy zig die behandeling der verwen en wyze van schilderen gewendde, welke hy in dien korten tyd zoodanig heeft weten na te bootzen dat verscheiden van zyne stukken voor echte penceelwerken van Rembrandt wierden aangezien en verkocht.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 19–20.
5. Jaap van der Veen, “Het kunstbedrijf van Hendrick Uylenburgh in Amsterdam: Productie en handel tussen 1625 en 1655,” in *Uylenburgh & Art and Commerce from Rembrandt to De Laïresse, 1625–1675*, ed. Jaap van der Veen and Friso Lammertse (Exh. cat. London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 2006), 160.
6. Sebastien A.C. Dudok van Heel, “Doopsgezinden en schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw – Leerlingen, opdrachtgevers en verzamelaars van Rembrandt,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 6 (1980): 105–23; Erna Kok, “Zonder vrienden geen carrière: De succesvolle loopbanen van de zeventiende-eeuwse kunstenaars Govaert Flinck en Ferdinand Bol,” *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27 (2011): 314.
7. “Een groote schilderzaal met hooge lichten ... op welker bovenlyst de Borstbeelden der Keyseren geplaatst stonden, vorder vele fraje afgietsels naar de geachtste marmere Antiquen, en tusschen beide met velerhande vremde gewaden, kleederen, harnassen, schiet- en steekgeweer behangen; als ook oude kostelyke fluweele, en andere met goud geborduurde behangsels.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 22; Sebastien A.C. Dudok van Heel, “Het ‘schilderhuis’ van Govaert Flinck en de kunsthandel van Uylenburgh aan de Lauriersgracht te Amsterdam,” *Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum* 74 (1982): 70–78.
8. Jan Vos, *Alle de Gedichten van den poëet Jan Vos* (Amsterdam, 1727) 319–20; quoted in Sebastien A.C. Dudok van Heel, “Het ‘schilderhuis’ van Govaert Flinck en de kunsthandel van Uylenburgh aan de



- Lauriergracht te Amsterdam,” *Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum* 74 (1982): 73.
9. Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 21.
 10. Josua Bruyn, “Book Review: Sumowski’s *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler, II*,” *Oud Holland* 101 (1987): 226. Bruyn dates a journey to Antwerp to “around 1645” and substantiates this date with Flinck’s *Bust of an Old Man* and *Portrait of a Man*, both dated 1645, which Bruyn regards as Flinck’s first departure from Rembrandt’s style; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1035, no. 682, and 1038, no. 700.
 11. *The Four Regents of the Arquebusiers Civic Guard*, signed and dated 1642 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 166, no. 475; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1040, no. 714.
 12. *The Company of Albert Bas and Lucas Conijn*, signed and dated 1645 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 167, no. 477; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1041, no. 715.
 13. *Civic Guardsmen of the Company of Captain Joan Huydecoper and Lieutenant Frans van Waveren*, signed and dated 1648 (Amsterdam Museum). Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 166, no. 476; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1041, no. 717.
 14. *Portrait of Margaretha Tulp*, signed and dated 1655 (Staatliche Museen, Kassel). Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 149, no. 401; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 5, *Nachträge, Ortsregister, Ikonographisches Register, Bibliographie* (Landau, 1994), 1983, 3101, no. 2088.
 15. “Heeren Borgemeesteren Kornelis en Andries de Graeff ... komende de laatste hem dikwils te zynen huize bezoeken; en by den eerst gemelden was hy zoo gemeenzaam in den ommevang, dat hy dikwils des avonds moede van schilderen, ongenood hem ging bezoeken.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 20.
 16. *Portrait of Andries de Graeff (1611–1678)*, ca. 1650 (Toshikazu Kaida Collection, Tokyo); Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 107, no. 205.
 17. *Allegory of the Birth and Death of Wilhelm Heinrich of Brandenburg*, ca. 1649 (Neues Palais, Potsdam). The painting was completed in two phases following the early death of Prince William Henry. Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 39, 92, no. 120; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1025, no. 631.
 18. “Uit het oude Hof van den Hartog van Kleef.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der*

- Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 22. An indication that Flinck had worked for the elector previously is found in the diary of Frisian Stadholder William Henry (1613–64). When he spent the summers of 1647 and 1648 at the elector's court in Kleve, he noted three times that he had had himself portrayed in the "schilderhuys" (painter's house), unfortunately without mentioning by whom. One or more of these sittings may have been for the portrait by Flinck (which can no longer be identified) of Stadholder William Henry, oil on panel, 75 x 63 cm. Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 110, no. 215; P.H.D. Leupen, *Gloria Parendi: Dagboeken van Willem Frederik, Stadhouder van Friesland, Groningen en Drente, 1643–1649, 1651–1654* (The Hague, 1995), 432, 433, 543.
19. *Portrait of Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg (1620–1688)*, signed and dated 1652 (Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin); Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 106, no. 198; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1039, no. 705.
 20. "dat hy zyn pourtret met Diamenaten omzet aan hem vereerde." Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 22.
 21. Flinck painted Johan Maurits in 1653 and 1658. Neither portrait can now be found. The painting from 1653 is known solely from a print by Cornelis van Dalen. Only a copy exists of the second; see Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 110, no. 120.
 22. *Allegory in Memory of Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange, with a Portrait of His Widow Amalia von Solms*, signed and dated 1654 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 92, no. 118; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1025, no. 636. See also Peter van der Ploeg and Carola Vermeeren, *Princely Patrons: The Collection of Frederick Henry of Orange and Amalia of Solms* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle, 1997), 128–31, no. 8.
 23. *Consul Manius Curius Dentatus Refusing the Gifts of the Samnites*, signed and dated 1656 (Royal Palace, Amsterdam); Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 90, no. 113; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1026, no. 638.
 24. *Solomon Praying for Wisdom*, signed and dated 1658 (Royal Palace, Amsterdam); Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck (1615–1660)* (Amsterdam, 1965), 71, no. 30; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, *G. van den Eeckhout – I. de Joudreville* (Landau, 1983), 1027, no. 640.
 25. For the historical context of this commission, see Margriet van Eikema Hommes and E. Froment, "Een doek van geene beteekenis': De nachtelijke samenzwering van Claudius Civilis in het Schakerbos van Govaert Flinck en Jürgen Ovens technisch onderzocht," *Oud Holland* 124 (2011): 144–49.

26. J.F.M. Sterck et al., eds. *De Werken van Vondel. Vol. 10, 1663–1674* (Amsterdam, 1935), 199.

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