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Hendrick ter Brugghen

(The Hague 1588 – 1629 Utrecht)

How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Hendrick ter Brugghen” (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/hendrick-ter-brugghen/ (accessed November 16, 2026).

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Hendrick ter Brugghen was born probably in The Hague in 1588.[1] His father, Jan ter Brugghen (1561–1626), was the first bailiff of the States of Holland.[2] Hendrick's grandfather, who came from a distinguished family from the provinces of Utrecht and Overijssel, was a Catholic priest and as such not allowed to marry. Hendrick's father was therefore illegitimate. Because of this background, it was long assumed that Hendrick too was a Catholic, but his marriage on 15 October 1616 to Jacomijna Verbeeck (d. 1634), a lawyer's daughter, took place in a Dutch Reformed church. Moreover, four of the couple's eight children were baptized in Reformed churches. Unlike his brother and sister, however, Ter Brugghen never became a Protestant. His widow, though, did join the Reformed Church, but not until shortly after his death.

Ter Brugghen probably spent his childhood in The Hague. Between 1602, the last mention of him in The Hague, and 1613, the first record of him in Utrecht, the Ter Brugghen family is recorded only in Abcoude.[3] Yet Jan must have settled in Utrecht before 1613, because his son trained as a painter under Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651), who lived in Utrecht continuously from 1593 until his death.[4] After his apprenticeship with Bloemaert, Ter Brugghen traveled to Italy where, in his own words, he "executed art for innumerable years."[5] He must have left after April 1607, because in that month he served in the army of the Frisian stadholder Ernst Casimir I (1573–1632). According to his son Richard ter Brugghen (1616–1710), who published a *Notificatie* (*Notice*) with a biographical sketch of his father in 1707, Ter Brugghen worked in Naples and Rome, where he is said to have met Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), who lived there until 1608. The veracity of these facts is difficult to determine. Richard's *Notice* was a somewhat propagandist pamphlet intended to bring about a reevaluation of his father's work.[6] In his son's eyes, Ter Brugghen's reputation had suffered greatly from Joachim von Sandrart's negative assessment of his work in his *Teutschen Academy*.[7] Sandrart (1606–88) dedicated just a few lines to Ter Brugghen in which he hinted that he was not a great admirer of the artist. Sandrart appreciated the way Ter Brugghen followed "natuur" (nature), but qualified this by describing it as "unangenehm" (unpleasant), suggesting that this was related to Ter Brugghen's "tiefsinnige, jedoch schwermütige Gedanken" (profound, but melancholy thoughts), a judgment that was later interpreted to mean that Ter Brugghen suffered from melancholia.

Ter Brugghen spent the summer of 1614 in Milan. After a few months, and in the company of three other Utrecht painters, he embarked on a journey along the Gotthard Pass, arriving in Utrecht at the end of the year. In 1616 he enrolled as a master painter in the Guild of Saint Luke in Utrecht and, presumably because he was now financially independent, married Jacomijna Verbeeck. The couple took up residence in the artist's home on the Korte Lauwerstraat. Little work from Ter Brugghen's early years is known; the first painting that can be attributed to him with certainty dates from 1619.[8] There are also indications that he made a second journey to Rome, which would have been between the summer of 1619 and the summer of 1621.[9] He appears regularly in the Utrecht archives from 1622 on.

Ter Brugghen's early work shows the influence of Northern Italian masters such as Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639) and Carlo Saraceni (1579–1620), especially in his use of color and choice of subject. In these years Ter Brugghen painted exclusively history pieces. An entirely new phase in his career dawned when Dirck van Baburen (ca. 1595–1624) and Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656) returned from their Italian travels in 1620. The work of both these artists revived Ter Brugghen's interest in the art of Caravaggio (1571–1610). In 1621 he painted his first genre pieces—*The Flute and Fife Players*—which were followed by numerous scenes with musicians.[10] *The Flute and Fife Players*, as well as other works painted shortly after in 1621, are so indebted to Van Baburen that it is entirely possible that the two artists operated a joint

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workshop.[11] Such an arrangement would not have been for long, however, because Van Baburen died in 1624.

Ter Brugghen seems to have achieved considerable success by 1626. Around that time he moved to the Snippevlucht, a narrow street along Utrecht's Oude Gracht, near the town hall. He rented a large house from Johan Wtewael, a solicitor and burgomaster of Utrecht and brother of the painter Joachim Wtewael (1566–1638).[12] The Snippevlucht was very close to the inn run by Ter Brugghen's brother Jan, *het Casteel van Antwerpen*, one of the finest in Utrecht. It is therefore not strange that Rubens chose to stay at Jan's inn when he spent a few days in Utrecht in the summer of 1627. Sandrart, who was Rubens's guide in Utrecht, later explicitly reported visits by Rubens to Van Honthorst, Bloemaert, and Cornelis van Poelenburch (1594/1595–1667), but did not mention Ter Brugghen. According to Arnold Houbraken, who derived his information on Ter Brugghen from the above-mentioned pamphlet about the artist, Rubens is said to have declared that he "traveled throughout the Netherlands in search of a painter, and had found only one, going by the name of Henrik Ter Brugghen."[13] Whether Rubens really said this is impossible to determine, but the two artists do appear to have met. Ter Brugghen must have been one of the other Utrecht painters whom Rubens purportedly wished to visit.[14]

Regardless of Rubens's opinion, Ter Brugghen did not suffer from a lack of appreciation in his own day. Between 1618 and 1625 the stadholder's court commissioned him to paint a portrait of the Roman emperor Claudius, to be part of a series of *Twelve Roman Emperors* by various artists.[15] This commission may have prompted the poet Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) to include Ter Brugghen in his summary of the greatest artists of the Dutch Republic.[16] Yet Ter Brugghen's excellent reputation is apparent in other ways as well. In the 1630s, Charles I of England (1600–49) owned a painting of his depicting a viola da gamba player, while his sister Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1662), the widow of the "Winter King," Frederick V of the Palatinate (1596–1632), in all probability commissioned Ter Brugghen to paint a mantelpiece. The high regard in which he was held is also clear from the prices people were prepared to pay for his work. In 1644, for instance, the famous Delft collector Boudewijn de Man owned a painting of Bacchus valued at 280 guilders.[17]

Ter Brugghen died at the age of forty-two on 1 November 1629, probably as a result of a plague epidemic that was raging in Utrecht in that year. He was buried in the Buurkerk. He left behind his wife, who was expecting their eighth child—a daughter, Henrickgen, born in March 1630. In 1708 Cornelis de Bie (1627– ca. 1714) described Ter Brugghen as one of the "most celebrated and talked about painters of his time," and today the artist is widely regarded as the most gifted of the Dutch Caravaggists.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Hendrick ter Brugghen was long thought to have been born in Overijssel in 1588. Bok and Kobayashi, however, have shown that this is probably not true because Ter Brugghen's parents are recorded as already living in Utrecht in 1581, where Jan ter Brugghen owned a house. This house was sold on 19 April 1589. Nine days later Jan bought a house in The Hague. Since there is mention of a "Ter Brug deurwaerder" (Ter Brugghen bailiff) in a Hague tax register of 1585, it may be reasonably assumed that Hendrick was born in The Hague. Marten J. Bok and Yoriko Kobayashi, "New Data on Hendrick ter Brugghen," *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury*, no. 1 (1985): 7–34; Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," in *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986), 65. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Hendrick ter Brugghen is taken from Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," *in Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986).
2. William of Orange (1650–1702) had earlier appointed him secretary to the Court of Utrecht in 1581. Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," in *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986), 65.
3. Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam, 2007), 3.
4. See the biography of Abraham Bloemaert in this catalogue.
5. "[E]tterlicke jaeren conste geexerceerd." Marten J. Bok and Yoriko Kobayashi, "New Data on Hendrick ter Brugghen," *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury*, no. 1 (1985): 25, doc. 17.
6. For the circumstances surrounding this pamphlet by Richard ter Brugghen, see Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," in *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986), 67; Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam, 2007), 1–6. The text of the *Notificatie* is known only from having been reworked into a biographical sketch in Cornelis de Bie, *Den spiegel van den verdrayde werelt* (Antwerp, 1708), 271–77.
7. Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, ed. Arthur R. Peltzer (Nuremberg, 1675–79; reprint, Munich, 1925), 178.
8. *The Adoration of the Magi*, signed and dated 1619 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam,

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2007), 92–93, no. A10.

9. Christiaan Schuckman, "Did Hendrick ter Brugghen Revisit Italy? Notes from an Unknown Manuscript by Cornelis de Bie," *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury*, no. 4 (1986): 7–22. For the period in which he may have made this second journey, see Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," in *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986), 66.

10. *The Flute and Fife Players*, 1621 (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel); Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam, 2007), 174–77, no. A61.

11. Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam, 2007), 19–22.

12. An important indication of his prosperity is the substantial sum of 18 guilders in *huisgeld* (real estate tax) he had to pay in 1629, suggesting that he lived in a large house. This is further supported by the professions practiced by his father-in-law, a lawyer, and his own father, who became the first bailiff after having been secretary to the Court of Utrecht; see note 2.

13. "… de Nederlanden nu te hebben dorreist, en een schilder te hebben gesocht, en maar een, met name Henrik Ter Brugghen te hebben gevonden." This quote is taken from Arnold Houbraken's first edition of his *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718), 1: 273–74. In the second edition from 1753 he dedicates less space to Ter Brugghen and summarizes Rubens's meeting with Ter Brugghen as "Hy [Ter Brugghen] heeft d'eer gehad dat Rubbens, wanneer hy tot Utrecht kwam om de Schilderkonstoeffenaars te bezoeken, in gezelschap van hun alle, zyne Konst by uitnementheid roemde" (When Rubens went to Utrecht to visit artists, he [Ter Brugghen] was honored when Rubens praised his excellence in the company of others); Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 1: 134. This quote, like the first, is based on the *Notificatie* by Richard ter Brugghen. See also Benedict Nicolson, *Hendrick Terbrugghen* (The Hague, 1958), 31n7.

14. Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, ed. Arthur R. Peltzer (Nuremberg, 1675–79; reprint, Munich, 1925), 178. For Rubens's visit to Utrecht and Richard's interpretation of it, see note 6.

15. *The Roman Emperor Claudius*, 162(?) (Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Jagdschloss Grunewald, Berlin). Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1626): Catalogue Raisonné* (Amsterdam, 2007), 140–41, no. A42. For questions surrounding this commission, see Benedict Nicolson, *Hendrick Terbrugghen* (The Hague, 1958), 49–50, no. A9.

16. A.H. Kan, *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens door hemzelf beschreven* (Rotterdam, 1994), 73. Also see also the biography of Abraham Bloemaert in this catalogue.

17. Marten J. Bok, "Hendrick Jansz ter Brugghen," in *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter*

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Brugghen en tijdgenoten, ed. Albert Blankert and Leonard Slatkes (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum) (Utrecht, 1986), 71.

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