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Jacob van Loo

(Sluis 1614 – 1670 Paris)

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Jacob van Loo was born in Sluis, in Zeelandic Flanders near Bruges, in 1614. His father, Jacques van Loo, was a notary. He also spent part of his youth in Vlissingen and Middelburg.[1] We do not know who taught Van Loo to paint. According to Arnold Houbraken he excelled at "painting nudes, and female nudes in particular."[2] Because his conversation pieces relate to paintings by Anthonie Palamedesz (1601–73) and Pieter Codde (1599–1678), one of them is presumed to have been his teacher. Nicolaes Moeyaert (before 1592–1655) is also mentioned in this context, as two copies after the work of this Amsterdam history painter are associated with Van Loo.

The possibility of an Amsterdam teacher gains further support from a 1635 document pointing to a stay in Amsterdam. This document concerns a transaction between the art dealer Marten Kretser (ca. 1598–1670), an acquaintance of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), and the bulb grower and art lover Jan Hendricksz Admirael. The two men agreed that in exchange for two tulip bulbs and 180 guilders in cash, Kretser would give Admirael "ten paintings in keeping with the contract made with Jacob van Loo listed."[3] This document reads as though Van Loo had painted all these works. However, another document related to this deal drawn up several days later refers to these paintings as "paintings by various masters."[4]

Van Loo was certainly in Amsterdam in 1642 when he transferred a bond to Hans Pietersz from London. In that same year he became embroiled in an indecency case. In 1643 he married Anna Lengele (ca. 1618–56), the daughter of a notary from The Hague and sister of the portraitist Martinus Lengele (ca. 1615–68), who was living in the Nieuwezijds Achterburgwal, now the Spuistraat, in Amsterdam. Through this marriage, Van Loo became related to the famous Mijtens family of painters; his wife's mother was Anneke Mijtens (d. 1631).[5]

The earliest dated painting by Van Loo is his portrait of Rutger van Weert and his family from 1644. That Van Loo quickly made a name for himself as a portraitist in Amsterdam is apparent from the fact that William Frederick (1613–64), Stadholder of Friesland, en route from The Hague in December 1648, stopped in Amsterdam to pose for Van Loo before boarding a ship for Harlingen, Friesland. It is therefore not surprising that a year later, Constantijn Huygens (1596–1647) included him and Jacob Backer (1609–51) as the only artists from Amsterdam to be considered among those who would receive commissions to decorate the Huis ten Bosch near The Hague. However neither he nor Backer was selected in the end. He was also not asked to work on the new Amsterdam town hall, although he seems to have hoped for this commission. Despite having lived in the city for years, he did not buy his Amsterdam citizenship until 1652. However, the poet Jan Vos (1612–67) does mention him in 1654 in his oft-quoted *Zeege der Schilderkunst* alongside Rembrandt van Rijn, Govaert Flinck (1615–60), Ferdinand Bol (1616–80), and a select group of other artists who at that time were the leading painters in Amsterdam, most of whom *did* work on the town hall.[6] That Van Loo did not entirely lack official commissions is borne out by the two group portraits of the regents and regentesses of the Aalmoezeniers Werkhuis in Haarlem, which he painted in 1658 and 1659.

In 1660, four years after the death of his first wife, an ailing Jacob van Loo drew up a will naming his six children as his heirs and the painter Gerard Pietersz van Zijl (ca. 1607–65), their guardian.[7] Shortly afterward his life took a most tragic turn when he fell out with the famously aggressive wine merchant Hendrik Breda. During the fight, the result of a long-running disagreement, Van Loo stabbed the wine merchant in the abdomen. The man died on the spot. Van Loo did not wait for his case to be heard, but fled with his children to Paris. After two failed attempts to get him to appear in court, Van Loo was sentenced in absentia to eternal exile from Holland and West Friesland on pain of "execution by the

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sword."[8]

In Paris, Van Loo was *reçu* by the Académie Royale in 1663, having submitted a portrait of the painter Michel Corneille (1601–64), his *morceau de reception*, to gain admission. He died on 26 November 1670. His son, Abraham Louis van Loo (1652–1712), became the progenitor of an important line of French artists, including Carle van Loo (1705–65). Van Loo's only pupil from his Amsterdam period is the famous painter of elegant conversation pieces, Eglon van der Neer (1634/36–1703), whose work, however, bears no discernible trace of Van Loo's influence.[9]

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Jacob van Loo is taken from David Mandrella, *Jacob van Loo 1614–1670* (Paris, 2011).
2. “In’t schilderen van naakte beelden, inzonderheid vrouwtjes.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., Then Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3: 172.
3. “Thien schilderijen als blijckt bij het contract daeraf met Jakob van Loo gemaeckt.” Abraham Bredius, “Waarom Jacob van Loo in 1660 Amsterdam verliet,” *Oud Holland* 34 (1916): 49.
4. “Stucken schilderyen van verscheyden meesters.” N.W. Posthumus, “De speculatie in tulpen in de jaren 1636 en 1637,” *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek* 13 (1927): 17–19; John Michael Montias, *Art at Auction in 17th-Century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2002), 73–76.
5. Onno ter Kuile, “Daniel Mijtens, ‘His Majesties Picture-Drawer,’” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 20 (1969): 18–19.
6. Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten van den poëet Jan Vo*s (Amsterdam, 1662), 125–41, esp. 140.
7. Abraham Bredius, “Waarom Jacob van Loo in 1660 Amsterdam verliet,” *Oud Holland* 34 (1916): 50.
8. “Metten zwaarde te werden geëxecuteert.” Abraham Bredius, “Waarom Jacob van Loo in 1660 Amsterdam verliet,” *Oud Holland* 34 (1916): 48.
9. See the biography of Eglon van der Neer in this catalogue.

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