THE LEIDEN COLLECTION

Paulus Lesire

(Dordrecht 1612 – 1654/56 probably The Hague)

How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Paulus Lesire” (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/paulus-lesire/ (accessed November 24, 2026).

A PDF of every version of this biography is available in this Online Catalogue's Archive, and the Archive is managed by a permanent URL. New versions are added only when a substantive change to the narrative occurs.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Paulus Lesire was born in Dordrecht in 1612. His parents were the glassmaker and house painter Augustijn Lesire from The Hague and Anneke Claesdr, the daughter of a Dordrecht glassmaker. The couple lived in the Steegoversloot “naast de Paternoster” (next to the Paternoster [a house]). Paulus’s father was still living there when he married his second wife, Claartje Bartholomeusdr van Eissel, in 1631, and it is from this house that he was taken to be buried in 1648. Augustijn joined the Dordrecht Guild of Saint Luke in 1611, becoming its dean in 1639. In 1631 he registered his two sons as members of the guild: Claes as a glassmaker, who also became a candlemaker and a captain in the militia, and Paulus as a painter.

Paulus Lesire’s master is not known, but is presumed to have been Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594–1652). In September 1634 Lesire married Lowize le Claar in The Hague. The couple moved to Dordrecht, where Lesire produced history paintings in the style of “de Leidse Rembrandt” (Rembrandt of Leiden) and portraits commissioned by the local elite. Around 1639 he painted the third company of the Kloveniersschutterij, or harquebusiers.[1] When John Berry, an English student at Leiden University, visited the Dordrecht harquebusiers shooting range ten years later, he noted in his travel journal that the picture had remained unfinished. Only the heads had been painted because, according to Berry, “the States refused to allow the cost, which had it been perfect, it would have required.”[2] In the same year, Lesire designed the title print for Johan van Beverwijcks’s *Van de wytnementhyt der vrouwelicken geslachts*, which was published in Dordrecht. This book also contained a portrait of the famous artist and woman of letters Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–78) after an etching by Lesire.

Soon thereafter Lesire moved to The Hague, where he probably lived until his death without, incidentally, ever becoming a member of the local Guild of Saint Luke. In 1644 he painted a large picture of The Hague militia portraying the moment a year earlier when they had gathered on the beach at Scheveningen to lend luster to Queen Henrietta Maria’s (1609–69) departure for England.[3] At an auction, organized by the Hague Guild of Saint Luke in 1647, the art dealer Cornelis van Heynsbergen bought a work by Gerard Houckgeest (ca. 1600–61) on behalf of Lesire from a large group of paintings belonging to Jan van Goyen (1596–1656) and Johan Schuyff (1608/09–66). A year later Lesire promised to paint the portrait of Sara van Nuffelen, widow of Reinier van Persijn (d. 1639), justice of the Court of Holland, and also of her son and his family, to repay an outstanding debt he owed her. Interestingly, in this document the widow refers to him several times as “mijn neeff” (my cousin), a kinship that may have gained him entry into the Hague elite.[4]

Lesire had probably been a widower for some time by 1648. In that year he seems to have lived with the cloth maker Heijmraet Claessen and his wife, Maria de Hoogh, a close relative of the Hague painters Dirck (1613–51) and Gerrit de Hoogh (d. ca. 1679). Lesire partially repaid a debt of 850 guilders to the couple for “huyshuir en verteerde costen” (board and lodging) with a single painting that was valued at 700 guilders. The cloth maker may have been the business partner of the Arnhem cloth merchant and treasurer Willem Craeyvanger (1615/16–after 1666), a relationship that would explain why Craeyvanger chose to have his portrait specifically painted by Lesire during a visit to The Hague in 1651. When, in 2009, the hitherto unknown likenesses of Craeyvanger, his wife Christine van de Wart (1620–66), and their eight children unexpectedly came on the market, it was initially thought that the portrait of Christine, painted in ca. 1655–56, was also by

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Lesire. It has since been attributed, however, to a then still young Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84), who, with his teacher Gerard ter Borch (1617–81), was also responsible for the likenesses of the eight children.[5]

It is not known precisely when Lesire died. Among the paintings that the Hague wine merchant Joris de Caullery (ca. 1606–after 1661) divided among his children in 1654 was Rembrandt's famous portrait of De Caullery as an officer of the Hague militia from 1632 and "portraits of his attenders done by Paulus Lesire" (zyn comparants conterfeijtsel gedaen bij Pouwels Lesire).[6] Lesire's last known painting is a 1654 portrait of a man in armor, which led Loughman to wonder whether the sitter might have been De Caullery because, in the 1654 deed, the sitter was said to be a naval officer.[7] Although Loughman believed that the date on the portrait could also be read as 1656, which would rule out identifying the sitter as De Caullery, Van Suchtelen has confirmed that the date is actually 1650.[8]

- Piet Bakker, 2017

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Endnotes

1. The whereabouts of this unfinished painting of a militia guild is unknown. See John Loughman, “De stad en haar kunstconsumptie: openbare en privéverzamelingen in Dordrecht, 1620–1719,” in *De Zichtbaere Werelt: schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad*, ed. Peter Marijnissen et al. (Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) (Zwolle, 1992), 38–39.
2. C.D. van Strien and H.H. Meier, “John Berry: A Leiden Student as a Tourist in the Low Countries, 1649–1650,” *Lias* 18 (1991): 207.
3. *Departure of Queen Henrietta Maria of England from Scheveningen in 1643 (Attended by the Hague Militia Commanded by Pieter van Coevenhoven),* 1644 (Sotheby’s, Amsterdam, 17 November 1993, lot 60).
4. The family relationship could not be confirmed, and therefore it is not known how they were related.
5. See the biographies of Gerard ter Borch and Caspar Netscher in this catalogue.
6. Abraham Bredius, “De portretten van Joris de Caullery,” *Oud Holland* 11 (1893): 127–28.
7. *Portrait of a Man in Armor*, signed and dated 1654 or 1656 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Metz). See also John Loughman in *De Zichtbaere Werelt: schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad*, ed. Peter Marijnissen et al. (Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum) (Zwolle, 1992), 213; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 3, *B. Keil – J. Ovens* (Landau, 1983), 3: 1161.
8. Ariane van Suchtelen notes that Lesire’s *Portrait of a Man in Armor* was “previously considered his last painting, because it supposedly bears the date 1654 or 1656. Closer inspection (under a microscope) has shown, however, that the date should be read as 1650 (with thanks to Raphaël Mariani, Metz).” See the entry *Portrait of Willem Craeyvange*r and *Portrait of Christine van der Wart* (note 6) in this catalogue.

Literature

- Bredius, Abraham and Veth, G.H. “Poulus Lesire.” *Oud Holland* 5 (1887): 45–51.
- Veth, G.H. “Aanteekeningen omtrent eenige Dordrechtse schilders; XXVII Poulus Lesire.” *Oud Hollan*d 8 (1890): 28.
- Van Dalen, J.L. *De Groote Kerk (Onze Lieve Vrouwenkerk) te Dordrecht.* Dordrecht, 1927,

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

132.

- Van Strien, C.D. and Meier, H.H. “John Berry: A Leiden Student as a Tourist in the Low Countries, 1649–1650.” *Lias* 18 (1991): 207.
- Sumowski, Werner. *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*. Vol. 3, *B. Keil – J. Ovens.* Landau, 1983, 3: 1711–43.
- Marijnissen, Peter, et al., eds. *De Zichtbaere Werelt: Schilderkunst uit de Gouden Eeuw in Hollands oudste stad*. Exh. cat. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum. Zwolle, 1992, 213–19.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection