THE LEIDEN COLLECTION

# Pieter van der Werff

(Kralingen 1665 – 1722 Rotterdam)

## How to cite

Bakker, Piet. “Pieter van der Werff” (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/pieter-van-der-werff/ (accessed November 26, 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

Pieter van der Werff was baptized in Kralingen on 1 May 1665. His parents were Arjen Jans, the owner of a flourmill on the Oudendijk, and Maertje Adriaens. Pieter was the younger brother of “the renowned throughout Europe and world famous” painter Adriaen van der Werff (1659–1722).[1] The family belonged to Kralingen’s upper middle class, and Pieter’s father served several terms as an alderman.[2] Pieter studied under his brother, who was six years older, as a matter of course, and Adriaen’s international breakthrough in 1696 would have contributed to Pieter’s decision to stay on as an assistant in his workshop. His activities consisted primarily of making copies of Adriaen’s pictures. He also produced signed inventions of his own, which are still deeply indebted to his brother’s art. The siblings’ relationship was strictly professional, as evidenced from a journal in which Adriaen kept a detailed record of Pieter’s activities on the basis of which he would pay him down to the nearest penny in accordance with his share and hours.[3] “The only favor the Knight bestowed him free of charge was the loan of his works, from which Pieter culled models for composing the principal part of his originals.”[4]

In 1694 Van der Werff married Maria Bosman (1672–1700), the daughter of Adriaen Bosman, scion of a well-established Rotterdam brewers’ family, and Sara Teniers (1651–1706).[5] Van der Werff must have met her in his brother’s workshop, because according to Johan van Gool she had been “a pupil of the Knight van der Werff, already wonderfully advanced in art.”[6] If she were actually a practicing painter, she was not so for long because “her marriage dulled her drive, and in the end her artistic skill came to naught.”[7] Moreover, she did not live much longer, and was carried to her grave from their house in the Hoogstraat on 22 March 1700. Shortly after being widowed, Van der Werff and his young daughter Elisabeth moved in with Adriaen on the Delftsevaart, next to the house called *Paradijs* (Paradise).[8]

Van der Werff must have enjoyed a certain authority among his colleagues because he served as dean of the Rotterdam Guild of Saint Luke from 1703 to 1716. However, this appreciation could not prevent his life from taking a troubled turn. According to Van Gool, he had “een heel wonderzinnigen inborst” (a very peculiar disposition), which first manifested itself in a penchant for seclusion, and later in “noch vreemder grillen” (even stranger quirks) as a consequence of “eener ongemakkelyke Zenuwkwael, of zo genoemde Hypochondrie” (a disturbing nervous disorder, or so-called hypochondria), whereby “tot groote droefheit” (to the deep regret) of his family he could no longer function normally.[9] Van der Werff died in September 1722, and his body was carried from Adriaen’s house to the family grave in the Grote Kerk. His brother made the same sad journey seven weeks later; however, his funeral did not go unnoticed and displayed a certain pomp and circumstance: bells pealed loudly and without interruption in the town for no less than four hours.

The totally different circumstances surrounding the two funerals are highly illustrative of the brothers’ careers. While Adriaen’s was grand and compelling, Van der Werff’s was very modest and practically invisible. If Adriaen enjoyed a clientele from far beyond the borders of the Dutch Republic and the highest social circles, Van der Werff’s patrons came predominantly from Rotterdam and were of middle-class standing. Adriaen’s art was praised in every possible way, yet nothing is known about the contemporary appreciation of Van der Werff’s art; Van Gool was the first to mention him (1750). Van Gool believed that Pieter “can rightly be counted among the respectable masters.”[10] Van der Werff’s extant portraits, as well as his genre and history

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

scenes, confirm Van Gool's observation, even though, as has been noted, his work lacks originality. Van der Werff's was so skilled in imitating his brother's paintings that it was impossible even for connoisseurs "to distinguish with their eyes what was authentic or not."[11]

Van der Werff's was paid well for his work, in part because of this ability. Van Gool reports that at the 1713 auction of the renowned collection of Adriaen Paets (1631–86), treasurer of the Rotterdam Admiralty, two works by Van der Werff's went under the hammer for a substantial 550 and 335 guilders, respectively. In his biography of Adriaen, however, Van Gool mentions this same auction noting that six works by Adriaen fetched a total of no less than 15,600 guilders, an exorbitantly high amount, so high that "his art again garners a shining reputation throughout Europe, such that everyone yearns to see it, and even own it."[12] According to Van Gool, "the Knight beheld all of this, leaning out of a window next to me, his inner satisfaction palpable."[13] Whether Van der Werff's witnessed his brother's triumph (one of many) is unknown; Van Gool does not devote a single word to him in Adriaen's biography.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

## Endnotes

1. “Den door gansch Europe vermaerde en wereltberoemden.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 235.
2. Pieter’s uncle on his mother’s side also served as an alderman for some time. See E. Wiersum, “Ridder Adriaen van der Werff,” *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 5 (1927): 2.
3. For a transcription, see Barbara Gaethgens, *Adriaen van der Werff 1659–1722* (Munich, 1987), 442–44.
4. “De eenigste gunst dan, die hem de Ridder *gratis* bewees, was het leenen zyner Stukken, van welke zich Pieter bediende als patroonen om er het hooftwerk zyner Origineelen na te richten.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 238.
5. For genealogical details of Maria’s family, see E.A. Engelbrecht, *De Vroedschap van Rotterdam 1572–1795* (Rotterdam, 1973), 135–37. Her great-grandfather was Iman Hendricks Bosman, brewer at De Bijl, member of the city council from 1618 to 1624, and mayor of Rotterdam in 1621 and 1622. Maria’s mother, Sara Teniers, was a daughter of the surgeon Pieter Teniers (1622–53), originally from Bergen op Zoom (Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, Trouwboek).
6. “Eene Discipeles . . . van den Ridder van der Werf, zynde al fraei in de Kunst gevordert.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 241.
7. Haer huwelyk verflaeude de lust, en ging op ’t laetst, met haer Kunstvermogen, geheel te niet.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 241.
8. Presumably Pieter also lived in this house, which his brother bought in 1692 before he married. E. Wiersum, “Ridder Adriaen van der Werff,” *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 5 (1927): 5. Pieter gave “Delftsevaart” as his address when he married in 1694.
9. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

*waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 236.

10. “Met recht onder de brave Meesters mag getelt worden.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 237.
11. “Om door hunne oogen te kunnen onderscheiden, wat echt is of niet.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 236.
12. “Zyn Kunst op nieuw grooten luister door gansch Europe, dat elk reikhalse om die maer eens te zien, laet staen te bezitte.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750),1: 384–85.
13. “Van dit alles was de Ridder aenschouwer, die naest my uit een venster lag, men kon de vergenoeging uit zyn wezen zien.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde* (The Hague, 1750), 1: 385.

## Literature


- Van Gool, Johan. *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde*. 2 vols. The Hague, 1750–51.
- Wiersum, E. “Ridder Adriaen van der Werff.” *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 5 (1927): 1–15.


© 2026 The Leiden Collection