



Frans Hals, Conference by Marie Claire Valck Lucassen

At the Dutch Embassy



Quiz: Name three of the most important Dutch painters! Well, there is Rembrandt. He is the fixed star in the Dutch and also the world heaven of painting. Vermeer also comes to mind immediately. While his fame was waning after his very early death, the Hollywood movie "The Girl with the Pearl Earring" made him into a world renowned superstar. Tickets to the Vermeer exhibition in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam were like gold-dust. Now the Rijksmuseum has dedicated a new exhibition to Frans Hals, a painter who has his rightful place in this trio of "The Bigbig Three of the Golden Age".

Frans Hals is famous for his brushstrokes which seem so arbitrary and rough and appear to be applied to the canvas "as if fencing with the brush", particularly if you stand very close to his paintings. Walk away a few centimeters to see the entire picture and you might think that he has captured the lace, the brocades and the jewels worn by his subjects in a photograph. Even more stunning are the facial expressions: the smiles, the twinkles in the eyes, the mouths that will break out into a smile in the next second. You stand there and wonder: how did he do it?

Marie Claire Valck Lucassen led us through nearly all of the paintings in the exhibition, pointing out these and many other interesting details. She also compared the way of painting by Frans Hals to that of his contemporaries and to later painters. She explained that the magic brushstrokes of Frans Hals led some art critics over time to dismiss him as a drunk who paints in a frenzy, and cannot be taken seriously. The fact that he became a member of the guild comparatively late and that a lot of happy drinkers are depicted in his paintings may have reinforced such views. A close look at the pictures of Frans Hals shows that this could not possibly be the case and those who knew what

they were talking about, did highly appreciate him.

Many famous painters, including Sargent, van Gogh, Liebermann and Courbet, have sat down to copy paintings by Frans Hals. Van Gogh felt that the work of Frans Hals was worth as much as Michelangelo, Raphael and the works of Greek antiquity. The well known American painter, Whistler, took a special detour to Haarlem to see the paintings of Frans Hals. Whistler's famous portrait of his mother is much inspired by the painting of the Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House by Frans Hals.

Who was Frans Hals? Well, he was a political refugee! When the Spanish Duke of Farnese retook Antwerpen in 1585, many people fled from the Southern Netherlands to the Northern provinces, including the family of Frans Hals. They settled in Haarlem, a place where Frans Hals would stay for the rest of his very long life. He was a respected member of the painter's guild and of the civic guard. He was married twice and had 11 children.

Unfortunately the wonderful Frans Hals exhibition in the Rijksmuseum has now closed its doors. However, you will still be able to see the exhibition in Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, from 12 July 2024 until 3 November 2024. Don't miss it! If you had the opportunity to listen to the highly informative, fascinating and interesting conference by Marie Claire Valck Lucassen on the 5 June in the Dutch Embassy, you know why. If not, you have to take my word for it! The Dutch Embassy was again a very gracious host and laid on a tasty buffet with sandwiches, wine, and coffee.

Thanks for a wonderful, enlightening and tasty afternoon. *Bedankt en proficiat!*

*Gudrun Schmidt
German Group*