

Hals

Frans Hals the Elder (c.1582 – 1666) was a Dutch Golden Age portrait painter who lived and worked in Haarlem. He is notable for his loose painterly brushwork, and he helped introduce this lively style of painting into Dutch art. Hals played an important role in the evolution of 17th-century group portraiture.

In 1610, Hals became a member of the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, and he started to earn money as an art restorer for the city council.



Married couple in a Garden c 1622

Wedding portrait of Isaac Massa and Beatrix van der Laan

Hals is best known for his portraits, mainly of wealthy citizens. He also painted large group portraits for local civic guards and for the regents of local hospitals. He was a Dutch Golden Age painter who practiced an intimate realism with a radically free approach. His pictures illustrate the various strata of society: banquets or meetings of officers, guildsmen, local councilmen from mayors to clerks, itinerant players and singers, gentlemen, fishwives, and tavern heroes.



Shrovetide Revellers c1615

The painting shows the face of an elegantly dressed smiling woman raising her right finger to make a point, while a man with a string of worst around his neck grabs her shoulder to whisper in her ear. Another amused gentleman leans on his shoulder and listens to their banter. Some claim these are the Baroque theatre characters Hans Worst and Peeckelhaeringh. Behind them other people are talking and laughing.



The Rommel-Pot Player c1618-22

The smiling rommel-pot player has gathered around him an audience of amused children offering him coins. The children delight in the appalling sounds emitted by this lowly instrument, which is made of a pig's bladder stretched over an earthenware jug half-filled with water. A reed is bound in a small pocket in the middle of the bladder and moved up and down to produce a rumbling sound. Played by impoverished street musicians, rommel pots were particularly associated with the pre-Lenten celebration of Shrovetide, here indicated by the fool's foxtail worn by the man. The Rommel-Pot Player is one of the earliest paintings to portray convincingly the vivacious and joyful expressions of children, here conveyed with Hals's distinctive brisk brushstrokes. This composition— associated with the idea of folly—was one of the artist's most popular subjects, and a number of versions and variants survive.



Two boys Singing c 1625



The Gypsy Girl 1628-30



Jonker Ramp and his

***The Laughing Cavalier* 1624**

***Sweetheart* 1623**

Hals was fond of daylight and silvery sheen, while Rembrandt used golden glow effects based upon artificial contrasts of low light in immeasurable gloom. Both men were painters of touch, but of touch on different keys — Rembrandt was the bass, Hals the treble. Hals seized a moment in the life of his subjects with rare intuition. What nature displayed in that moment he reproduced thoroughly in a delicate scale of color and with mastery over every form of expression. He became so clever that exact tone, light and shade, and modeling were obtained with a few marked and fluid strokes of the brush. He became a popular portrait painter, and painted the wealthy of Haarlem on special occasions. e.g. wedding portraits.



***Malle Babbe* 1633-35**

Malle Babbe was traditionally interpreted as a tronie, or genre painting in a portrait format, depicting a mythic witch-figure. The painting is now often identified as a genre-style portrait of a specific individual from Haarlem, known as Malle (meaning "crazy") Babbe, who may have been an alcoholic or suffered from a mental illness.

Under the witch interpretation, the owl was considered a possible familiar. However the subject matter of Frans Hals in his other paintings would suggest that the painting is probably of a pub scene, in which case the owl would reflect the Dutch proverb, "drunk as an owl."

The painting has been an object of artistic admiration from Hals's lifetime, as there are several copies and variants painted by his followers. It was admired by Gustave Courbet, who made a copy of it in 1869



***The Meagre Company, or The Company of Captain Reinier Reael
and Lieutenant Cornelis Michielsz Blaeuw, 1633-37***

refers to the only militia group portrait, or schutterstuk, painted by Frans Hals outside of Haarlem, and today is in the collection of the Amsterdam Museum, on loan to the Rijksmuseum, where it is considered one of its main attractions of the Honor Gallery. Hals was unhappy about commuting to Amsterdam to work on the painting and, unlike his previous group portraits, was unable to deliver it on time. The sitters contracted Pieter Codde to finish the work.

In his group portraits Hals captures each character in a different manner. The faces are not idealized and are clearly distinguishable, with their personalities revealed in a variety of poses and facial expressions.

Though it is impossible to tell on which side of the canvas Hals began painting, the light falls onto the figures from the left in the "standard" Hals tradition and this is also where the most important figures are situated within the painting. Since each sitter paid for his own portrait, it is presumed that Hals began with the most important sitters in order to "sell" canvas room to other paying officers. Whether or not Hals did in fact start on the left or drew a sketch of the entire group at once, the flag bearer on the left in this painting has been painted in a remarkably flamboyant way from the tip of his hat to the toe of his boots. This was possibly to prove to the decision makers in Amsterdam that Hals was capable of painting a schutterstuk in the "Amsterdam style", which included the entire figure. In Haarlem, the civic guards were traditionally portrayed in the kniestuk style of being "cut off at the knee" in three-quarter length portraits.

In 1636 Hals was called to Amsterdam to finish the painting, but he refused, offering to receive the sitters in his Haarlem studio with assurances that they would not need to sit very long. His offer was refused and Codde was hired to finish the piece. Because the men are thinner than the men portrayed in other, later, Amsterdam schutterstukken hanging near this painting, the piece was later nicknamed the "meagre company".

Quote, van Gogh: *'I don't know whether you remember that to the left of the Night watch, there's a painting — it was unknown to me until now — by Frans Hals and P. Codde, 20 or so officers full length. Have you noticed it??? In itself, that painting alone makes the trip to Amsterdam well worth while, especially for a colourist. There's a figure in it, the figure of the standard-bearer in the extreme left corner, right up against the frame. That figure is in grey from top to toe, let's call it pearl grey, — of a singular neutral tone — probably obtained with orange and blue mixed so that they neutralize each other — by varying this basic colour in itself — by making it a little lighter here, a little darker there, the whole figure is as it were painted with one and the same grey. But the leather shoes are a different material from the leggings, which*

are different from the folds of the breeches, which are different from the doublet — expressing different materials, very different in colour one from another, still all one family of grey — but wait! Into that grey he now introduces blue and orange — and some white. The doublet has satin ribbons of a divine soft blue. Sash and flag orange — a white collar.

Orange, white, blue, as the national colours were then. Orange and blue next to each other, that most glorious spectrum — on a ground of grey judiciously mixed, precisely by uniting just those two, let me call them poles of electricity (in terms of colour, though) so that they obliterate each other, a white against that grey. Further carried through in that painting — other orange spectrums against a different blue, further the most glorious blacks against the most glorious whites — the heads — some twenty — sparkling with spirit and life, and how they're done! and what colour! the superb appearance of all those fellows, full length. But that orange, white, blue chap in the left corner — — I've seldom seen a more divinely beautiful figure — — it's something marvellous.

Delacroix would have adored it'



Regents of the St. Elizabeth Hospital of Haarlem 1641

Hals' work was in demand throughout his life, but he lived so long that he eventually went out of style as a painter and experienced financial difficulties. In addition to his painting, he continued throughout his life to work as a restorer, art dealer, and art tax expert for the city councilors. His creditors took him to court several times, and he sold his belongings to settle his debt with a baker in 1652. The inventory of the property seized mentions only three mattresses and bolsters, an armoire, a table, and five pictures (these were by himself, his sons, van Mander, and Maarten van Heemskerck). Left destitute, he was given an annuity of 200 florins in 1664 by the municipality.



Verdonck