

HISTORY IN ART

Bartholomeus van der Helst 1613–1670

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1613 – Bartholomeus van der Helst born in Haarlem in the north of the Netherlands. Little is known of his early life, except that he was the son of an innkeeper.

1636 – Van der Helst is now living in Amsterdam and gets married to Anna du Pire from the Catholic southern Netherlands. They will eventually have six children.

1637 – He paints *The Regents of the Walloon Orphanage in Amsterdam*, his first dated painting. No details of his art training are available, but it is possible that he was a pupil of Nicolaes Pickenoy.

1638 – His portrait of an unknown man seems to reveal the influence of Rembrandt, who established himself as a portrait painter in Amsterdam a few years earlier.

1639 – Van der Helst receives an important commission for a civic guard portrait: *Militia Company of District VIII under the Command of Captain Roelof Bicker*, which he completes in 1642. This portrait leads to many other portrait commissions.

1642 – He gains a prestigious commission to paint the portrait of the mayor of Amsterdam, Andries Bicker. He also paints his son, Gerard Andriesz Bicker. Van der Helst is now the most sought-after portrait artist in Amsterdam, eclipsing Rembrandt, who is also earning most of his income from portraits. His style is now more akin to the elegant and often colourful portraits of Anthony van Dyck, rather than the darker, more sombre portraits of Rembrandt. Two of Rembrandt's most well-known pupils, Govaert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol abandon their master's style and follow Van der Helst's example.

1648 – Van der Helst paints *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Munster*, marking the treaty that brought an end to the Eighty Years' War between the Protestant north and the Catholic south in the Netherlands. This painting is much admired and Sir Joshua Reynolds states more than a century later that in his estimation it is superior to Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, which also depicts members of the Amsterdam Civic Guard.

1652 – Van der Helst is commissioned to paint a portrait of Mary, widow of the Stadtholder William II of Orange and mother of William III of Orange, the future king of England.

1670 – Van der Helst dies in Amsterdam, leaving his wife in considerable debt. She has to sell artworks by him and paintings from his collection of other Dutch artists' works, and other valuable items in his possession.