

Witte, Emanuel de

Dutch, c. 1616 - 1691/1692

BIOGRAPHY

Emanuel de Witte was born in Alkmaar in about 1616, the son of Pieter de Wit, a local schoolteacher, and his wife, Jacomijntge van der Beck. According to Arnold Houbraken, De Witte studied with Evert van Aelst (1602–1657), a still-life painter in Delft.[1] In 1636 De Witte joined the Saint Luke's Guild in Alkmaar but he soon moved to Rotterdam before returning to Delft in 1641. In October of that year a daughter of his was baptized in Delft; one year later, on October 4, 1642, he married the child's mother, Geertgen Arents. De Witte joined Delft's Guild on June 23, 1642, and was regularly documented in the city during the next several years; in March 1650 he rented an inexpensive house on the Nieuwe Langendijk for a year.

De Witte probably moved to Amsterdam in 1651, although he was first recorded there in January 1652. Geertgen died soon after, and De Witte married Lysbeth Lodewyck van de Plass in 1655; the couple had a daughter, born in February 1656. In 1658, however, Lysbeth was banished from Amsterdam for robbery, and she took their daughter with her. In addition to his personal troubles, De Witte suffered financial difficulties during the latter years of his life and was forced to indenture himself on numerous occasions. He was known to experience severe bouts of depression, and it is believed that he committed suicide in the winter of 1691–1692 in Amsterdam.[2]

Although De Witte started out as a painter of biblical and mythological scenes, after 1650 he turned increasingly toward the depiction of church interiors. He often incorporated the pulpit or other church furniture in his views of Delft or Amsterdam churches. Along with his Delft contemporaries Gerard Houckgeest (1600–1661) and Hendrik Cornelisz van Vliet (Dutch, 1611 - 1675), De Witte was an influential painter of architectural settings. Unlike Houckgeest and Van Vliet, however, who concentrated on the accurate rendering of space and perspective, De Witte rendered fanciful church interiors. He also demonstrated a greater interest in the contrasts of light and shadow and emphasized figures and animals in his interior spaces. In addition, he painted market scenes and several portraits.

[1] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 1:283.

[2] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 1:286–287.

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