

Molenaer, Jan Miense

Dutch, c. 1610 - 1668

BIOGRAPHY

Jan Miense Molenaer was the oldest son of the tailor Jan Mientzen Molenaer and his second wife, Grietgen Adriaensdr. Molenaer was born in Haarlem around 1610.[1] He may have trained with Frans Hals (Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666) or his brother Dirck Hals (1591–1656), as his earliest known works, which date to 1629, favor the same palette and subjects as these two masters, notably energetic scenes of merrymaking.[2] In 1634, Molenaer is mentioned in the register of the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke.[3]

During the 1630s, Molenaer depicted a wide range of subjects, from merry company scenes to tavern groups, biblical scenes, theatrical subjects, and portraits. His style of painting was quite varied, ranging from precise and refined to loose and free. Above all, Molenaer was able to impart individuality to his figures and convey their relationships with one another. In 1636, Molenaer married his fellow Haarlem artist, Judith Leyster (Dutch, 1609 - 1660). In 1637, the two moved to Amsterdam, where they resided for the next 12 years. Attracted like so many others to the city's bustling art market, Molenaer found professional and personal success in Amsterdam. He continued to paint a variety of subjects, from theatrical scenes and images of the five senses to religious narratives, but he also produced genre scenes of peasant villages and tavern scenes. While in Amsterdam, the couple had four children, all baptized in the Nieuwe Kerk.[4]

Molenaer and Leyster relocated to Heemstede, south of Haarlem, around 1648. Molenaer's output during this last phase of his career is large, though not particularly inspired. During this time he was also contending with mounting debts, difficulties with his forays into real estate investments, and illness.[5] On November 6, 1659, Molenaer and Leyster, both in poor health, drew up their wills. Although Molenaer recovered, Leyster died three months later at the age of 50. Molenaer soon moved back to Haarlem, and spent the last five years of his life in a rented house on the Burgwal, where he died in 1668. He was buried in the Grote Kerk four days later.

Notes

[1] Molenaer testified on behalf of the Amsterdam art dealer Joannes de Renialme on November 21, 1637, calling himself “about 27 years old.” See Irene van Thiel-Stroman, “Jan Miense Molenaer,” in *Painting in Haarlem 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum*, ed. Neeltje Kohler (Haarlem, 2006), 243, n. 1.

[2] Dennis P. Weller, “Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age,” in *Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Dennis P. Weller (Raleigh, 2002), 10.

[3] Hessel Miedema, ed., *De archiefbescheiden van het St. Lukasgilde te Haarlem 1497–1798*, 2 vols. (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1980), 420, 933.

[4] Irene van Thiel-Stroman, “Jan Miense Molenaer,” in *Painting in Haarlem 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum*, ed. Neeltje Kohler (Haarlem, 2006), 241.

[5] Dennis P. Weller, “Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age,” in *Jan Miense Molenaer: Painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Dennis P. Weller (Raleigh, 2002), 22.

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