

**Q:** What exactly is genre painting? In past art history classes, I have learned about different genres of painting. How does 'genre painting' relate to the broader genres of painting?

**A:** As long as you have studied art history, you have heard about different genres of painting, meaning different subjects: still lifes, portraits, religious scenes, and so on. So what does it mean when a painting is described as a genre painting? A genre painting is simply a painting whose subject matter is from the everyday world.

Tags: [Genre Painting](#), [Portraits](#), [Still Life](#), [terminology](#)

**Q:** What is a *vanitas* painting?

**A:** *Vanitas* is an adjective describing paintings that remind the viewer of death and the transience of life on earth. The term *vanitas* is most often associated with *vanitas* still life paintings that were popular in seventeenth century Dutch art. However, the term *vanitas* can also refer to specific details within the painting (for example, skulls or any other image suggestive of destruction and decay), and we see these details in other genres of painting as well. Think, for example, of Jacob van Ruisdael's *Jewish Cemetery* and Georges de la Tour's *Penitent Magdalen*.

Tags: [Baroque](#), [dutch painting](#), [still life painting](#), [terminology](#), [Vanitas](#)

**Q:** Why was still life painting such a popular genre in Dutch Baroque art?

**A:** Because of the rise of a middle class who served as the primary art patrons (as opposed to the Church), Dutch art favored genre scenes. This allowed for the rise of genres, like still life painting, that had previously been viewed as lowly and unimportant. The Dutch not only

liked scenes of everyday life but also greatly valued the objects that they collected in their homes, and still life paintings were a wonderful way to showcase this specific aspect of Dutch life.

Tags: [artistic genres](#), [dutch baroque](#), [still life painting](#)

**Q:** What does it mean for a monarch to have absolute power? Don't all monarchs have absolute power?

**A:** When we refer to a monarch as having absolute power, we mean that there are no checks on his or her authority; in other monarchical countries (notably in England), monarchs have to share power with a parliament. Louis XIV of France had absolute power, which explains the over-the-top grandeur of so much art created for him.

Tags: [Absolute Power](#), [French Baroque](#), [Louis XIV](#), [monarchies](#)

**Q:** The relationship between Spain and Flanders is a bit confusing. Could you explain this in more detail?

**A:** Flanders, or the Southern Netherlands, became a province of the Spanish Empire in the seventeenth century as a result of the intermarrying of the Dukes of Burgundy and the Spanish royal family.

Like Spain, it was Catholic and it ultimately answered to the rulers of Spain. Although there was some measure of self-governing in Flanders, power ultimately lay in the Spanish court.

Tags: [Flanders](#), [Spain](#)

**Q:** What is a “pronk” still life?

**A:** A pronk still life is a type of still life that is an ostentatious display of wealth. It is usually very sumptuous and over-the-top. Jan de Heem’s still life paintings are quintessential examples of “pronk” still lifes.

Tags: [still life painting](#), [terminology](#)

**Q:** What cultural and geographical area is suggested by the phrase “the Dutch world?”

**A:** When studying Dutch Baroque Art, students often come across the phrase “the Dutch World.” Indeed, the Dutch world comprised much more than the small geographical region of Holland in the Netherlands. The combination of the wealth of the Dutch and their limited natural resources, led the Dutch to explore the globe. Dutch explorers colonized the Americas and also travelled to Asia, where they capitalized on the demand for products from the East. The famed “East India Company” established a presence in the East (particularly Indonesia and India) and brought highly-sought products into Europe for profit. Thus, the Dutch world included cultural influences from very far away. This is evident in the many Dutch still life paintings that show luxurious and exotic imports from the East. Thus, the Dutch world comprises not only the northern provinces of the Netherlands (the Dutch Republic) but also the far reaches of the world where the wealth Dutch republic had colonies in the Americas and Asia.

Tags: [Colonization](#), [geography](#), [The Dutch Republic](#), [travel](#)

**Q:** Who was part of the Bamboccianti group?

**A:** In the early part of the seventeenth century, a group of Netherlandish artists worked in Rome and became known as the Bamboccianti. The leader of this movement was Pieter van Laer, whose physical deformity led to the group's name, which translates into "ugly doll" or "puppets." These artists did not follow the typical Dutch tradition and were not interested in idealizing or moralizing.

Tags: [Artistic Movements](#), [Artists Broad](#)

**Q:** Who was Gerrit Dou?

**A:** Gerrit Dou was one of the most important artists working in Holland. He is particularly well-remembered, because he was a leading student of Rembrandt. His work shows the influence of Rembrandt's use of chiaroscuro and his interest in colorism, but unlike his teacher who was famous for portraits, Dou is famous for his small genre scenes.

Tags: [Gerrit Dou](#), [portrait painting](#), [Rembrandt](#)

**Q:** What was unique about Rembrandt's portraits as opposed to portraits by other artists?

**A:** Rembrandt was one of the most celebrated painters from the Dutch Republic and indeed one of the most celebrated artists of all time. He was especially known for his skill as a portrait painter. His portraits were unique in the use of extreme tenebrism, which gives them a sense of mystery that is not typical in portrait paintings. He focused on the physical likeness of his sitters, of course, but seemed more interested in

giving them a deep psychological immediacy that few other artists were able to achieve.

Tags: [portraiture](#), [Rembrandt](#), [Tenebrism](#)

**Q:** What was one of the primary contributions of artist Hendrick ter Brugghen?

**A:** Hendrick ter Brugghen, a native of Utrecht, brought the style of Caravaggio from Italy to the North and was one of the leaders of what would become known as the Utrecht Caravaggisti, a group of artists in Utrecht that had an interest in theatricality, realism, and tenebrism.

Tags: [artistic influence](#), [artistic styles](#), [caravaggism](#), [Hendrick ter Brugghen](#), [Utrecht Caravaggisti](#)

**Q:** What was the Utrecht Caravaggisti?

**A:** The Utrecht Caravaggisti was a group of artists working in Utrecht (in the Dutch Republic). Many of these artists had travelled to Rome in the early seventeenth century where they had seen first-hand and were influenced by the work of Caravaggio. They brought with them an interest in theatricality, realism, and tenebrism.

Tags: [artistic genres](#), [artistic styles](#), [caravaggism](#), [Utrecht Caravaggisti](#)

**Q:** What is the “Golden Age” of Dutch painting?

**A:** When people refer to the “Golden Age of Dutch Painting,” they are generally referring to the seventeenth century, when such esteemed artists as Rembrandt, Vermeer, and others produced some of the most celebrated paintings of art history. It was during this time that previously under-valued genres, such as landscapes, still lifes, and genre

scenes depicting the domestic world flourished. In many ways the “Golden Age” in the Dutch Baroque anticipates the direction in which later European art was headed.

Tags: [dutch painting](#), [Rembrandt](#), [terminology](#), [Vermeer](#)

**Q:** What was Frans Hals most famous for?

**A:** Frans Hals was a very successful Dutch painter. He painted a variety of genres of painting, but it was as a portrait painter that he excelled and his portraits were tremendously influential on later generations of portrait painters. Although he worked in a variety of genres, it was as a portraitist that he excelled, and he is most celebrated today for his contributions to this genre of painting. His portraits advanced the genre towards a much more ‘modern’ style. He very successfully painted group portraits, managing to give each figure a remarkable liveliness. For example, see his [Officers of the Saint George Civic Guard](#). Note that this painting is in the public domain. His portraits of individuals also are suffused with a remarkable liveliness and immediacy. The figures in his portraits often smile directly at the viewer, sometimes even seeming to laugh.

Tags: [Frans Hals](#), [painting genres](#), [portraiture](#)

**Q:** Unlike so many Netherlandish artists, Rembrandt never travelled abroad. What then, were his greatest sources of influence?

**A:** Rembrandt was influenced by the art he saw in his native Netherlands. Many new artistic styles made their way into the Netherlands, so he was exposed to many foreign styles indirectly. His main source of influence, however, was the world around him; he observed his surroundings and the natural world and aimed to imitate what he saw while suffusing it with a deeper psychological significance.

Tags: [artistic influence](#), [Rembrandt](#)

**Q:** What is drypoint?

**A:** Drypoint is an intaglio type of engraving in which lines are carved into a metal plate with a sharp pointed instrument. The process is rougher than engraving and results in a raised edge coming up around the edges of the groove that has been created. As a result, the final printed image often has a soft, almost blurry quality in the lines.

Tags: [Drypoint](#), [Printmaking](#), [Technique](#)

**Q:** What is the difference between an etching and an engraving?

**A:** Much like drypoint, engraving is a process that is rather similar to drawing. A tool is used to “draw” grooves directly into a metal plate. The grooves will then fill with ink that will be transferred to paper in the printing process. (Drypoint uses a different tool than used with engraving to create the line. Engravings create smoother, sharper lines than drypoints.) Etching differs from engraving in that rather than drawing directly into the metal, the artist creates grooves in a wax coating that is placed over the metal plate. Because wax is a softer material, it is easier for the artist to create grooves in the wax; therefore, the process is more precise and imitative of drawing. The grooves in the wax expose the metal beneath. The plate is then dipped in an acid, which eats away at the metal but leaves the wax intact. Thus, the grooves are created by a chemical process. The artist then wipes away the wax. When ready for printing, it works in the same way as the engraving: the grooves fill with ink and transfer to the paper in the printing process.

Tags: [Engraving](#), [Etching](#), [Printmaking](#), [Technique](#)

**Q:** What was unusual about Rembrandt's self-portraits?

**A:** Rembrandt's self-portraits were celebrated because of their beauty and psychological interest. What was truly unique about Rembrandt's self-portraits was the sheer number of them. Most artists only painted a small handful of self-portraits (if that many), whereas Rembrandt was known to have painted more than ninety portraits of himself!

Tags: [painting genres](#), [portraiture](#), [Rembrandt](#), [self portraits](#)

**Q:** Why did the Dutch so frequently paint domestic scenes?

**A:** Because they worked in a Protestant culture, Dutch artists did not paint the religious paintings that had been common in Italian, Spanish, and Flemish Baroque art. Without religion as a subject matter, artists had to paint genre scenes to make a living. Moreover, there was a real demand for these types of scenes. Domestic subjects were particularly popular as there was a large middle class in Holland with people who were proud of their homes and the objects in them. Thus, it made sense that artists would turn to this subject for many of their paintings.

Tags: [Baroque Painting](#), [Domestic interiors](#), [Genre Painting](#), [middle class](#), [protestant art](#)

**Q:** Rachel Ruysch was active in the eighteenth century. Why, then, is she studied in the unit with Baroque art rather than with Rococo or Enlightenment art?

**A:** Although she worked in the eighteenth century, Ruysch was fundamentally linked to the still life painting tradition of the Dutch Baroque. Stylistically, she departed from strictly Baroque styles and suggested what would come with the Rococo, but she was nonetheless part of an earlier tradition.

Tags: [Artistic Movements](#), [Rachel Ruysch](#), [still life painting](#), [Women in Art](#)

**Q:** Why are there so few Vermeer paintings in existence?

**A:** Vermeer is a mysterious figure in art history. We know little about his format training and career. It is unclear how he learned to paint, and there is no evidence that he taught any students. Unlike most Dutch artists of his time, he was not prolific, only painting perhaps forty-some paintings in his lifetime. To this day, the circumstances of his life as a painter remain unclear.

Tags: [Artistic Output](#), [Vermeer](#)

**Q:** Who were Vermeer's patrons?

**A:** Like many of the details of Vermeer's career, this question remains uncertain. Many of his paintings ended up in the hands of a prominent art dealer in Delft. It is not clear whether he commissioned these paintings or if they simply ended up in his hands.

Tags: [Patronage](#), [Vermeer](#)

**Q:** In Protestant areas (England, the Dutch Republic, America, etc.), religious art is depicted less often than it is in Catholic areas. Does this mean that people in Protestant cultures were less devout than people in Catholic cultures?

**A:** No. The fact that less religious art was produced in Protestant countries is simply a reflection of the Protestant faith's desire to move away from what they viewed as the ostentatious wealth of the Catholic Church. Indeed, there was a vein of iconoclasm in Protestant cultures, meaning that they viewed religious images as idolatrous. Protestants were just as devout as their Catholic contemporaries.

Tags: [artistic themes](#), [Protestantism](#), [Religion in Art](#)