

## Dutch Women Artists in the Time of Frans Hals

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<b>Dates</b>	Tuesdays 12, 19 and 26 October 2021
<b>Times</b>	18.00-20.00 BST
<b>Location</b>	Zoom Webinar
<b>Tutor</b>	Clare Ford-Wille
<b>Level</b>	All Levels

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Gerard ter Borch, *A Lady reading a Letter*, about 1665 (detail)

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### Course Description

Many vital contributions made by 17th-century Dutch women artists have subsequently been overlooked. Over three evening sessions, discover the rich and vibrant work of artists including Judith Leyster, Gesina ter Borch and Rachel Ruysch, most of whom worked during the time of Frans Hals. We'll see that, while gaining important portrait commissions during the period wasn't easy, the remarkable Judith Leyster nevertheless succeeded, and that women particularly excelled as painters of everyday life and still life, producing highly innovative work.

We'll also consider the representation of 17th-century women, looking closely at the Wallace Collection's much-loved painting *A Woman Reading a Letter*, by Gerard ter Borch. In this painting, the model is likely to be the artist's younger half-sister, Gesina ter Borch – also a painter, mainly of watercolours, as well as a writer of love poetry. We'll explore how the painting might be understood as a testimony to women's achievements, which we will bring to light on this course.

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## **Session One - The Portrait and the Art of the Everyday: Judith Leyster and Dutch Women Artists**

Judith Leyster was one of Frans Hals's most important contemporaries and rivals in Haarlem. However, almost immediately following her death in 1660, knowledge of both her and her work dwindled and until more recently, many of her paintings were hidden away or attributed to male artists, such as Hals. In our first session, we'll consider Leyster's portraits and outstanding portrayals of genre figures, and see how her painting technique is distinctly different from that of Hals, but no less innovative.

In this session we'll also consider Maria de Grebber, the daughter of Leyster's probable teacher who worked within the family workshop, mainly as a portrait painter, as well as two other women: the printmaker Magdalena van de Passe, and her pupil, Anna Maria van Schurman, who were also well-known contemporaries.

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## **Session Two - The Painting of Still Life: from the Mysterious Clara Peeters to the Courtly Rachel Ruysch**

Still life, for its own sake, was one of the new painting subjects to emerge in the 16th century. It was considered suitable for women artists since it could be pursued at home, rather than in the studio or workshop, and wasn't seen to rival male artists.

In our second week, we'll explore Clara Peeters's 'breakfast pieces', which clearly influenced works by Dutch male painters across the border in the Northern Netherlands, such as Pieter Claesz and Willem Claesz. Heda. We'll also see how Rachel Ruysch, the daughter of the anatomist and botanist Frederik Ruysch, became an outstanding interpreter of flower paintings, with an international career as court painter to the Elector Palatine in Düsseldorf. In this session we'll also look at Ruysch's contemporaries: the flower painters Maria van Oosterwijk, Maria Moninckx, Alida Withoos, and Johanna Helena Herolt-Graff, who worked for the horticulturist and art collector, Agnes Block.

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## **Session Three: Science, Discovery and the New Botanical Art: Maria Sibylla Merian**

The focus in our final week is Maria Sibylla Merian, who had an extraordinary life. First trained as an artist by her stepfather from the age of 12, she was given some silkworms that began a lifelong, passionate study of the metamorphosis of insects. This led eventually to the production of her ground-breaking, two-volume study of *Caterpillars, Their Wondrous Transformation and Peculiar Nourishment from Flowers* in 1683, combining scientific study with exquisite illustrations.

In 1699 Merian sailed from Amsterdam to the Dutch plantation colony of Suriname in South America, in order to study butterflies, and the result of her outstanding observations and paintings was *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, in which some of the first examples of serious and exquisite botanical illustration, combining science and art, can be seen. This session considers how Merian intersected with a number of artists and scientists, revealing significant links between art and the understanding of the natural world.

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**Course Tutor**

Clare Ford-Wille is an associate lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London; she also lectures regularly for other institutions including the V&A, the National Trust, the Arts Society and the Art Fund, as well as leading groups to places of art-historical interest in Europe, Armenia and the USA.

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**Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience**

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

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**Joining Information and Format**

This course will be taught through Zoom Webinar. For more information, including instructions on how to download and use the system, please visit [www.zoom.us/support](http://www.zoom.us/support).

Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all three dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing all sessions of the course.

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**Course Recording**

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for one week only.

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