

Adriaen Brouwer

Adriaen Brouwer was born c. 1605/06 in Oudenaarde (Belgium). After the death of his father he left his home, he was about sixteen, and went to Antwerp, then to Holland. He worked in Haarlem in the workshop of Frans Hals (c. 1623-24) and then in Amsterdam. In 1631 he returned to Antwerp, became a member of the St. Lukas Guild and ran a small workshop. Brouwer was always in debt, spending some months in prison. It was Rubens, who highly appreciated the artist and owned 17 of his pictures, who probably obtained Brouwer's release. The artist spent his last years in the house of the known engraver P. Pontius, who worked with Rubens. Brouwer died at early age, in 1638 in Oudenaarde, during the Plague.

The life of the people was the central theme of the work of Adriaen Brouwer. He combined the subjects of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the stylistic influences of Frans Hals and Rubens with surprising and lively results. He specialized in genre scenes, which took place in shabby, dirty, small taverns and inns, visited by peasants, beggars, tramps & they drink, eat, play cards and dice, smoke, sing, quarrel, fight. Spirit of vitality and careless trouble-making is combined with bitterness, emptiness, and grotesque. Brouwer is an outstanding master of composition. There are usually two planes in his pictures: in the foreground is the main compact group, in the background, in semidarkness of a tavern, are shadowy figures of other visitors, who mind their own business; with the help of light and shadow the artist achieves the effect of deep space. The artist is an interesting colorist; his canvases are usually in olive-brown palette, the background is in airy grey and yellowish shades, the clothes of the people in the foreground are in color harmony (spots of faded greyish-blue, cream and dusty-pink shades). Brouwer's technique is free and artistic. He also painted a number of extremely important works as a portraitist and landscape artist.

Brouwer's work stands alone in Flemish painting school. The works of A. Ostade, who imitated his style, look too well-behaved and bright. After Bruegel, Brouwer is considered the foremost painter of bucolic themes, the greatest collection of 16 of his works is in the the Alte Pinakothek at Munich.

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