Pieter de Hooch Biography

Pieter de Hooch

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Contents

Pieter de Hooch Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

The paintings of middle-class Dutch interiors by the Dutch artist Pieter de Hooch (1629-after 1684) are prized both for the vision of the serenity and order of the life they portray and for their qualities of abstract organization.

Born in Rotterdam in 1629, Pieter de Hooch, or Hoogh, was employed in 1653 as a "servant" and "painter" by a cloth merchant who had homes in both Delft and Leiden and who by 1655 owned 10 paintings by De Hooch. His early works were mainly crowded scenes of the activities of soldiers in their leisure time. In 1654 De Hooch was said to be living in his native city. That year he married a Delft girl, and the following year he was a member of the Delft guild.

De Hooch's best works were painted during his residence in Delft, roughly in the years between 1655 and 1662. They clearly belong to the Delft school, with marked resemblances to the mature works of Jan Vermeer. De Hooch's earliest dated pictures are from 1658, and they show him at the height of his powers. His mastery of elaborate spatial construction is exemplified in the *Card Players* (1658), where the rectangles of architectural details and furnishings form an abstract pattern in which figures are placed with an effect of the most satisfying equilibrium. The view from the interior to outside areas in this painting is the kind of problem in space representation that characterized De Hooch's works of his Delft period.

The interrelations between De Hooch and his great contemporary in Delft, Vermeer, are not fully understood. They obviously shared an interest in the representation of interior space with figures. De Hooch's style differs from Vermeer's in that his light and colors are warmer, his spatial constructions tend to be more complex, and his figures lack the monumental three-dimensionality of Vermeer's. The faces that De Hooch paints are particularly lacking in conviction; they are weak in both form and characterization.

In the 1660s and 1670s De Hooch lived and worked in Amsterdam. He gradually adopted a more upper-class orientation, with greater emphasis on the elaboration of decoration and costumes. From the later 1660s on his paintings were cold and dry and not above the level of achievement of his generally prosaic followers.

The latest date De Hooch inscribed on a painting was 1684. How long he lived after that and where he died are unknown.