

Ruisdael, Jacob van

Also known as

Ruysdael, Jacob van

Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682

BIOGRAPHY

The exact date of Jacob van Ruisdael's birth is not known, but a document from June 1661 gives his age as thirty-two. His father, Isaack (c. 1599–1677), and uncles Jacob (c. 1594–1656) and Salomon van Ruysdael (Dutch, c. 1602 - 1670), were born in Naarden, at which time his family's surname was De Gooyer. After the death of Jacob's grandfather Jacob Jansz de Gooyer in 1616, his father and two uncles changed the family name to Van Ruysdael after the country estate 'Ruysdael' (or Ruisschendaal) near De Gooyer's hometown Blaricum.[1]

On November 12, 1628, Isaack van Ruysdael, by then a widower, was married for the second time, to Maycken Cornelisdr. His son Jacob may have been the child of this marriage. In addition to his documented activities as a picture dealer and a maker of ebony frames, Isaack van Ruysdael was also a painter. Jacob van Ruisdael's earliest works, dated 1646, were made when he was only seventeen or eighteen. He entered the Haarlem Saint Luke's Guild in 1648. It is not known who his early teachers were, but he probably learned painting from his father and from his uncle, Salomon van Ruysdael. Some of the dunescapes that he produced during the late 1640s clearly draw on the works by Salomon, while his wooded landscapes of these years suggest he also had contact with the Haarlem artist Cornelis Vroom (c. 1591–1661).

Arnold Houbraken writes that Ruisdael learned Latin at the request of his father, and that he later studied medicine, becoming a famous surgeon in Amsterdam. Two documents appear to support the latter claim. The first is a register of Amsterdam doctors that states that a "Jacobus Ruijsdael" received a medical degree from the University of Caen, in Normandy, on October 15, 1676. This entry in the register has been crossed out—it is not clear when—and one wonders whether, at this late stage in his artistic career, Ruisdael would have gone to France to get a medical degree. Nonetheless, as the second document attests, a landscape with a waterfall was sold in 1720 as the work of "Doctor Jacob Ruisdael," thus the possibility that the artist Jacob van Ruisdael was also a practicing doctor

cannot be entirely dismissed.

During the early 1650s, Ruisdael traveled to Westphalia near the Dutch-German border with Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (1620–1683), whom Houbraken identifies as “een groot vriend” (a great friend) of Ruisdael. Among the sites they visited was the castle Bentheim, which appears in both artists’ work from this period.

About 1656 Ruisdael settled in Amsterdam, where on July 14, 1657, he was baptized into the Reformed Church (he had been brought up a Mennonite). In 1659 he was granted citizenship in Amsterdam, and his name appears again in the records the next year when he testified on July 8 that Meindert Lubbertsz, who later changed his name to Meindert Hobbema (Dutch, 1638 - 1709), had been his pupil. In Amsterdam, Ruisdael must have known the work of Allart van Everdingen (Dutch, 1621 - 1675), who resided in that city from about 1652. Everdingen had traveled to Scandinavia in the 1640s and painted views of pine forests and rocky waterfalls, subjects that Ruisdael explored in the mid-1660s. From about 1670, Ruisdael lived over the shop of the Amsterdam art and book dealer Hieronymous Sweerts, located just off the Dam, Amsterdam’s main public square. He was buried in his birthplace of Haarlem on March 14, 1682, but may well have died in Amsterdam, where he is recorded in January of that year.

Among the greatest and most influential Dutch artists of the seventeenth century, Ruisdael was also the most versatile of landscapists, painting virtually every type of landscape subject. His works are characterized by a combination of almost scientific observation and a monumental, even heroic compositional vision, whether his subject is a dramatic forest scene or a panoramic view of Haarlem. Early in his career he also worked as an etcher. Thirteen of his prints have survived, along with a considerable number of drawings.

Ruisdael had numerous followers, the most important of which were Hobbema and Jan van Kessel the Elder (Flemish, 1626 - 1679). In addition, several other artists are associated with him by virtue of their having contributed figures to his landscapes. Among these are Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), Philips Wouwerman (Dutch, 1619 - 1668), Adriaen van de Velde (Dutch, 1636 - 1672), Johannes Lingelbach (c. 1622–1674), and Gerard van Battem (c. 1636–1684).

[1] The De Gooyer family may have been tenants of one of the houses on the Ruysdael estate. See Neeltje Köhler and Pieter Biesboer, *Painting in Haarlem 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum* (Ghent, 2006), 291, note 4. A fourth uncle, Pieter (born c. 1596), continued to use the family name De Gooyer.

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