

# Adriaen Brouwer Biography

## Adriaen Brouwer

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# Biography

The Flemish painter Adriaen Brouwer (ca. 1605-1638) exerted an immense influence on his contemporaries. His success as a painter of genre subjects ensured the popularity of scenes of peasant life in Dutch and Flemish painting of the 17th century.

Adriaen Brouwer was born at Oudenaarde in the southern Netherlands. There is no reliable account of his training as an artist. He lived in Holland, working in Haarlem and Amsterdam, from about 1625 until 1631. In Haarlem he undoubtedly knew and was influenced by Frans Hals. An early painting, typical of Brouwer's Dutch period, is the *Pancake Man*, which, with its lumpish, misshapen peasant types and strong local colors, recalls the 16th-century Flemish master Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

In 1631 Brouwer was in Antwerp, where he was listed as a master in the Guild of St. Luke (the painters' guild) and where he remained until his death, at only 32 years of age, in 1638. During these few years the artist produced some masterpieces. In works such as the *Peasants Playing Cards* the sharp local colors of the early period have been replaced by an all-embracing tonality and a more painterly handling, probably derived from Hals; and the observation of human foibles and passions has likewise become more acute and sympathetic. Despite their sometimes coarse subject matter, Brouwer's figure paintings are remarkable for their sensitive color and refinement of execution. Not to be overlooked among the works of the last Antwerp years are his landscape paintings, which have a surprising freshness and poetic quality.

The records plainly show that Brouwer was a man of unconventional behavior: he undoubtedly led a rather bohemian existence and was frequently in debt. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the traditional picture of the artist as a dissolute and irresponsible buffoon is largely an invention of early biographers, who seem to have believed that Brouwer's manner of life resembled that of the uncouth boors in some of his tavern scenes.

Both Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt paid Brouwer the compliment of acquiring paintings by his hand for their own collections. Brouwer's principal followers in the rendering of peasant subjects were the Dutch painter Adriaen van Ostade and the Flemish painter David Teniers the Younger.