



Samuel
van Hoogstraten

The Illusionist



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Foreword

For a period of around five years, Samuel van Hoogstraten was in Rembrandt's house nearly every day. This was during his training, which consisted of a combination of practical experience and theoretical discussions, in the pupil's studio in Rembrandt's house. These were Van Hoogstraten's formative years, during which he learned the art of painting, matured as a person and eventually emerged from under Rembrandt's protective wings. It is fitting, therefore, that the first monographic exhibition of Van Hoogstraten's work is organised at Rembrandt's house, today's Rembrandt House Museum. Much has been written about Van Hoogstraten's treatise, *Introduction to the Academy of Painting*, but his art has remained somewhat underilluminated. The exhibition *The Illusionist. Samuel van Hoogstraten* and this accompanying publication aim to change this.

Our colleagues at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna shared this sentiment. When they heard about our exhibition project, they decided to join us, which resulted in the exhibition *Rembrandt-Hoogstraten. Colour and Illusion* (8 October 2024 to 12 January 2025). Van Hoogstraten achieved great fame in Vienna, during the few years he spent there. This is why several important works by him are still part of the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. We are very grateful to our Viennese partners for the especially fine collaboration and exchange of knowledge. In particular, we would like to thank

Dr Sabine Haag (Director General, Kunsthistorisches Museum), Dr Peter Kerber (Director, Gemäldegalerie) and Sabine Pénot (Curator, Gemäldegalerie).

In addition, scientific research was done on the materials that were used for several of Van Hoogstraten's paintings from every period of his career. This research was conducted by Erma Hermens (Director of the Hamilton Kerr Institute for the conservation of easel paintings and the Conservation and Science Department of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK) in collaboration with Lidwien Speleers (conservator at the Dordrechts Museum), Elizabeth Wigfield, Kim Muir and Allison Langley (conservators at The Art Institute of Chicago), Francesca Casadio (vice president and Grainger Executive Director, Conservation and Science, the Art Institute of Chicago), Jacquelyn Coutré (Eleanor Wood Prince Curator in Painting and Sculpture of Europe, the Art Institute of Chicago) and Eva Götz, Elke Obenthaler and Ina Schlama (conservators at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna), and Johanneke Verhave (independent conservator).

This fruitful collaboration contributed to the knowledge that is shared throughout this publication as well as in the exhibition at the Rembrandt House Museum. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this valuable book: the authors, publisher, designer, translator and the Rembrandt House Museum team.

In parallel with the two exhibition projects and accompanying publications, work is underway on an online overview of Van Hoogstraten's oeuvre in collaboration with the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague. As a result of the initiative and collaboration of our two senior curators, Leonore van Sloten and David de Witt, as well as the tireless efforts of the RKD team members, a complete survey will be launched on the RKD website by the closing of the exhibition in Amsterdam. This will allow researchers anywhere in the world to study Van Hoogstraten's work, and it will be easy to add new insights or as-yet unknown works. The RKD colleagues we would like to mention and thank for their collaboration are: Chris Stolwijk (Director), Sabine Craft-Giepmans (Head of Research & Development), Sabine van Beek (Junior Curator, Dutch and Flemish Old Masters), Marit Angenent (scientific research), Frédérique Beerse (Image Editor, RKD Samuel van Hoogstraten Study) and Yvonne Bleyerveld (senior curator Drawings and Prints before 1800). External experts who have contributed to completing and updating the existing data about van Hoogstraten's artworks include Susan Anderson, An van Camp, Stephanie Dickey, Olenka Horbatsch, Sabine Pénot, Marleen Ram, William W. Robinson, Michiel Roscam Abbing, Nina Schroeder-van 't Schip, Maud van Suylen and Cécile Tainturier. We also thank Stijn Alsteens, Celeste Brusati, Rob Fucci, Volker Manuth, Sander Paarlberg, Ilona van Tuinen en Marieke de Winkel for their valuable additional insights.

Simultaneously with this publication, a monograph will be published on Samuel van Hoogstraten's first teacher, written by Michiel Roscam Abbing and Robert Schillemans. The description of the complete oeuvre of Samuel's father Dirck van Hoogstraten provides the first opportunity to compare Samuel's work with that of his father.

Our exhibition became a reality thanks to the enthusiastic and generous responses of lenders at home and abroad, starting with the Dordrechts Museum in Dordrecht. They have lent us a large number of works for this project and provided all the necessary cooperation to honour their fellow townsman. Other lenders I would like to thank are: Amsterdam Museum, City of Amsterdam (longterm loan to the Rijksmuseum), Rijksmuseum, The Art Institute of Chicago, Dordrechts Museum, Huis Van Gijn, Hessen Kassel Heritage, the Archbishop's Chateau in Kroměříž, Fondation Custodia (Collection Frits Lugt), Musée du Louvre, Museum Boijmans Van

Beuningen, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, and various private collectors. Several lenders took the opportunity to restore their works or to have them restored, which not only improved the condition of those works but also yielded several new insights.

This project could not have been carried out were it not for the financial support of third parties. We would like to extend our gratitude to the Turing Foundation, Blockbusterfonds, Cultuurfonds and Fonds 21. The exhibition has been organized with support from the central government: on behalf of the Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands has granted an indemnity guarantee. I would also like to thank several generous donors to the publication: Otto Naumann, Kunsthandel P. de Boer Gallery, Koetser Gallery, Mark Weiss Gallery and Sotheby's London. For their support of the exhibition and the catalogue raisonné I would like to thank Daniel, David and the late Isabel Bader at Bader Philanthropies. For their support of the catalogue raisonné, I would also like to thank the Familie Van Hoogstraten Foundation. Finally, I would like to thank the long-term sponsors of the Rembrandt House Museum: the Huysgenoten and Friends of the Rembrandt House Museum, the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, Kikkoman and Mastercard.

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Introduction

As an artist, Samuel van Hoogstraten is somewhat elusive. The names of many seventeenth-century artists, such as Johannes Vermeer, Jan Steen and Jacob van Ruisdael, immediately conjure up an image: you can easily summon up one of their works. This is much less true, however, for Van Hoogstraten. He made several absolute masterpieces, including *Old Man in a Window* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna [fig. 43] and *The Slippers* in the Musée du Louvre in Paris [fig. 60], but there was much more to his work. His oeuvre is characterized by great variety: he regularly changed his painting method as well as his subject matter. Many other seventeenth-century Dutch painters specialized in a particular genre, thus reinforcing their image. Van Hoogstraten, however, liked to move between still life, architectural views, scenes from daily life, portraits, and biblical or mythological depictions. Like his master, Rembrandt, he believed that, as a painter, you ought to be able to depict everything. According to one of his pupils, he was highly ambitious and determined in this respect. When he saw a type of painting that someone else had been successful with, he aimed to paint it himself, and preferably even better.

There is one subject, however, that is primarily associated with Van Hoogstraten: optical illusion. He was a true pioneer of the painting of trompe-l'oeil still lifes, with which he achieved his greatest (international) successes. His letter boards and perspectival through-views were trailblazing, and his perspective box with distorted interior is still considered an astonishing work of art. It is entertaining art, nonetheless grounded in a great knowledge of the visible world. This is where his

two passions – art and science – came together. Indeed, during his lifetime, Van Hoogstraten was the most famous artist who came out of Rembrandt's studio. After the seventeenth century, however, he was overshadowed by his famous teacher, a fate that he shared with several other artists. It is time, therefore, for Van Hoogstraten to be reintroduced.

This publication explores the many sides of Van Hoogstraten, including his colourful life and the role that Rembrandt played in his development, his fascination with illusionism and the imitation of nature, his scientific approach to painting and his intellectual interest in distant lands and other cultures. In addition, this book offers an analysis of Van Hoogstraten's advice with regard to painting techniques and his own application of it.

The overall impression of Van Hoogstraten that emerges is one of an ambitious artist who did not repeat himself, was constantly trying something new. Well-travelled, he kept in close contact with international scholars, and celebrated success with his art. This book reveals fascinating new insights, large and small, such as the conclusion that, at 1.80 m, Van Hoogstraten was quite a tall man for his time. An imposing illusionist, thus.

1 Samuel van Hoogstraten
Self-Portrait, c. 1677
Oil on panel, 20 x 16.4 cm
Huis Van Gijn, Dordrecht

Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678) was about fifteen years old when his guardian advised him not to become a painter, as it was uncertain whether he could earn a living from this trade. Van Hoogstraten, however, could not be dissuaded, which turned out to be a good decision. His later pupil and eighteenth-century biographer Arnold Houbraken counted him among the lucky painters of his century, because 'favoured by fortune, [he] mostly sailed with the wind'. At the same time, Houbraken pointed out that there was more to Van Hoogstraten's success than pure luck: Van Hoogstraten was driven by a 'particularly competitive impulse'.¹ He was someone who worked hard, was ambitious and a keen learner. He wanted to excel at everything, surpass his colleagues and, according to Houbraken, had knowledge of almost everything, particularly the rules of art. Van Hoogstraten recorded these rules in his book *the Introduction to the Academy of Painting; or, The Visible World* (1678), which was full of recommendations for aspiring artists. One of these clearly related to himself: works of art needed to be elegant, authoritative and impressive. Compositions needed to be elevated and to 'continue to amaze' in centuries to come. And creating 'elegant works' required an 'elevated mind'. To achieve this, Van Hoogstraten wrote, there is no better means than 'associating with wise and bright men' and reading authoritative books, which 'elevate' people.² For Van Hoogstraten too, social and intellectual development were the recurring themes of his life.

Samuel van Hoogstraten, 'the Ingenious and Poetic Painter'





10 Samuel van Hoogstraten
A View Through a House, 1662
Oil on canvas, 264 x 136.5 cm
National Trust, Dyrham Park,
Gloucestershire



11 Samuel van Hoogstraten

A Young Man Reading in a Renaissance Palace, c. 1662-1667

Oil on canvas, 238 x 173 cm

Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht

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16 Samuel van Hoogstraten

Seated Male Nude, c. 1646

Pen in brown ink, brown and grey wash, black and red chalk, with white highlights, 248 x 172 mm
Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (former collection Koenigs)

HOW TO BECOME AN ARTIST

Epcó Runia

If you wanted to become an artist in the seventeenth century, you needed to pursue an education that did not differ much from that of regular artisans. Only two centuries later did artists break away from the world of craftsmanship and acquired their own training institute with a name that, remarkably, mainly suggested theoretical knowledge: the art academy. In the seventeenth century, however, a painter's education was still embedded in the guilds: professional associations of craftsmen skilled in a particular craft that regulated production and quality, and served a common interest. In the training programme stipulated by the guild, boys (girls were excluded) aged 12-14 years studied under a master painter who was a member of the guild. After a few years, an apprentice could become a journeyman. Journeymen who had finished their apprenticeships, were recognized as craftsmen and could earn money. If you wanted to establish yourself as an independent painter, you had to pass a master's test before you were admitted to the guild. Artists usually took this step between the age of 20 and 25.

Samuel van Hoogstraten was first taught painting by his father in Dordrecht and joined Rembrandt's studio at the age of fifteen, studying there for about four years. After that, he probably worked as an assistant (journeyman) for a while. During that time, Rembrandt had around four apprentices at any given moment. Van Hoogstraten's co-apprentices were Carel Fabritius, Abraham Furnerius and Bernard Keil. Most of Rembrandt's pupils were ambitious: they had learned the fundamentals of their craft elsewhere and became apprentices to the great master to learn his exceptional painting technique. Those who could boast an apprenticeship with Rembrandt had an advantage in finding clientele later.

Rembrandt himself, however, also benefitted. His apprentices paid tuition fees of about 100

guilders per annum.¹ Thus, with four apprentices, Rembrandt already assured himself of an annual income equal to average annual income of a craftsman. In addition, his apprentices contributed to production in his "painting factory". A painting made by an apprentice could be sold as a product of the master, including Rembrandt's sought-after signature (see pp. 124-127). So, all in all, this was a lucrative business model.

Van Hoogstraten must have learned a lot from Rembrandt. As well as practical skills, this would also have included ideas about art theory (see pp. 66-81). Van Hoogstraten described himself as a diligent pupil who disliked being corrected and did not rest until he had corrected all of his mistakes. Sometimes, he would not stop to eat or drink only 'slaking his thirst with his tears'.²

Traces of Rembrandt's practical instruction can be seen in the drawings that Van Hoogstraten made in Rembrandt's studio, such as the study of a young man wearing a loin cloth who is seated on a chest [fig. 16]. Such drawings were made during sessions in which Rembrandt's pupils participated along with their master. One pupil would model without clothes on, so that the others could best study both his posture and anatomy.

Towards the end of his life, Van Hoogstraten wrote in his *Introduction to the Academy of Painting; or, The Visible World* that he kept the life drawings he made during his apprenticeship and that he regretted that he had never been taught how to depict the human body in an elegant pose. This drawing seems to confirm this.³

However, despite his criticism of Rembrandt's teaching method, Van Hoogstraten was often positive about his former teacher. After all, he owed him a lot, because after learning the basics of painting from his father, he learned from Rembrandt what it was to be an artist. It was his own 'academy of painting'.

This book is published to accompany the exhibition *The Illusionist. Samuel van Hoogstraten*, on view from 1 February through 4 May 2025 in the Rembrandt House Museum, Amsterdam

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Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), a name to remember. Of all Rembrandt's pupils, he became the most successful. During his lifetime, that is. Because, after the 17th century, he was forgotten by the general public, despite the fact that he was a learned artist who constantly experimented with different subjects and optical tricks. He was a pioneer of illusionism: the 3D artist of his time. Later in life, he wrote a famous book full of instruction for new generations of painters - his intellectual masterpiece. High time for a renewed introduction.



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