Jan Lievens Wall Text Panels
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A Dutch Master Rediscovered

Jan Lievens (1607–1674) was a daring and innovative painter, draftsman, and printmaker. He created a wide range of works, including portraits, landscapes, genre scenes, and religious and allegorical images, that were highly valued by his contemporaries. A child prodigy, Lievens astounded art lovers with the skillful paintings he was already executing at the age of fourteen. During the formative period of his career, the boldness of his vision and brushwork rivaled that of his colleague Rembrandt van Rijn, who was a year older. Indeed, Lievens was in many respects the initiator of artistic developments that characterized the two men's works in the late 1620s. In subsequent decades, Lievens achieved the international fame that had always been his ambition.

While Lievens enjoyed great artistic success in his lifetime, his posthumous reputation has never risen to a commensurate level. His peripatetic career and wide range of styles, together with the erroneous attribution of many of his best paintings to other artists, Rembrandt among them, obscured his considerable accomplishments. This exhibition, which brings together paintings, prints, and drawings from all stages of Lievens' career, including a number of recently rediscovered works, presents a reassessment of his artistic contributions.

Lievens' Career

Lievens began his career in Leiden at the beginning of the 1620s, after studying in Amsterdam with the history painter Pieter Lastman. Lievens' bold, early style, which is characterized by thick impastos and dramatic effects of light and dark, reflects the added influence of Dutch artists from Utrecht who had studied the work of Caravaggio in Italy. During the late 1620s, Lievens and his Leiden colleague Rembrandt van Rijn had a close relationship, and often depicted similar subjects and worked in similar styles in their paintings, drawings, and etchings. Contemporary critics, including Constantijn Huygens, secretary to the Prince of Orange, recognized both artists' precocious abilities. On Huygen's recommendation, several aristocratic patrons in The Hague had their portraits painted by Lievens.

Aspiring to become an internationally renowned court artist, Lievens left Leiden for London in 1632 to work at the court of Charles I, king of England. There, he came under the influence of Anthony van Dyck and developed an elegant, refined manner for rendering portraits. In 1635 he moved to Antwerp, where he painted genre scenes and landscapes, as well as large-scale religious subjects for the Jesuits. In 1644 Lievens relocated yet again, this time to Amsterdam, where his sophisticated international style of painting was greatly admired. He received many major commissions, including paintings for the Amsterdam town hall. Dutch political, business, and cultural leaders sat for his portraits and avidly collected his landscape paintings and drawings. Despite his achievements, Lievens faced financial difficulties at the end of his life, and he died in poverty.

Lievens and the Utrecht Caravaggisti

In the early 1620s, Lievens was influenced by a group of artists now known as the Utrecht Caravaggisti. These Dutch artists, including Gerrit van Honthorst and Hendrick

ter Brugghen, began to paint dramatically lit compositions with tightly cropped figures after encountering the revolutionary style of Caravaggio (1571–1610) during their studies in Rome. Their fresh, innovative depictions of card players, musicians, revelers, and religious subjects received high acclaim in the Netherlands. Lievens was among the first to adopt their bold aesthetic, perhaps because he had gone to Utrecht sometime after completing his studies in Amsterdam and had seen their works firsthand.

Rembrandt as Model

Lievens was already established in his career in 1625 when he began working closely with Rembrandt, who had just completed his artistic training with Pieter Lastman, a prominent teacher in Amsterdam under whom Lievens had also studied. Whether Lievens shared a studio with Rembrandt in Leiden in the late 1620s is not known, but they both adapted stylistic characteristics of the Utrecht Caravaggisti, including strong contrasts of light and dark.

This exhibition reveals for the first time that both artists also sat as models for one another's compositions. The young Rembrandt with his brown curls, slightly bulbous nose, and rounded cheeks is recognizable in three of Lievens' paintings, all of which are on view in this gallery: *The Cardplayers* (ca. 1623–24), *Youth Embracing a Woman* (ca. 1627–28), and the *Lute Player* (ca. 1628). The center figure in *The Cardplayers* is Rembrandt, and is the earliest known depiction of the artist, who would have been roughly seventeen years old at the time it was painted. The faces in these paintings closely resemble Lievens' *Portrait of Rembrandt* from 1629, which is displayed in the next gallery.

The Dutch Court

In the late 1620s and 1630s, Frederik Hendrik, the Prince of Orange, headed the prosperous Dutch Republic and resided with his court in The Hague. A respected military leader, the prince wanted to enhance the prestige of the Dutch court through the acquisition of art. His advisor in this endeavor was his secretary, Constantijn Huygens, a man of letters with interests in science as well as art and music.

In 1628 Huygens visited both Lievens and Rembrandt in Leiden and was immediately taken by their individual talents. Huygens recognized that Lievens was particularly accomplished at painting "human countenances," and it was on his recommendation that Lievens received several prestigious portrait commissions from the prince and his courtly retinue. Huygens predicted that the young Lievens would surpass the "absolute genius" of the great masters from the previous generation, including Peter Paul Rubens, Michel van Mierevelt, and Hendrick Goltzius. Huygens admired Lievens' inventiveness and the audacity of his themes and forms, noting that everything his "young spirit endeavors to capture must be magnificent and lofty."

Huygens likely introduced Lievens to Anthony van Dyck in 1631, when the Flemish artist visited The Hague. Van Dyck thought highly enough of Lievens to paint a now-lost portrait of the young artist and to include it in a select series of artists' portraits he was creating. This encounter with Van Dyck may partly explain why, in a few short years, Lievens would be drawn to the English court.

Friends and Rivals
In the late 1620s, Lievens and Rembrandt were working in a white heat, pursuing similar styles and subjects, and responding to each other's works as if sparring in a battle of wills. The two artists certainly benefited from their association with each other, but they must have felt the pressure of growing competition for patronage and prestige as their abilities increased.

This rivalry likely came to a head when Huygens, the advisor to the House of Orange, first visited their studios in 1628. Huygens recognized a unique talent in each painter and, perhaps supposing that competition would spur both to even greater achievements, may have challenged the two young masters to portray the same subjects. This hypothesis would explain why between 1628 and 1631 Lievens and Rembrandt produced so many parallel works: *Samson and Delilah*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, *Christ on the Cross*, and an old man sitting alone in contemplation—Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* and Lievens' remarkable *Job in His Misery*. By the early 1630s, the two artists' styles had become so alike that contemporaries often had difficulty determining which works were by Lievens and which by Rembrandt.

In 1632 both men left Leiden for larger artistic centers: Rembrandt for Amsterdam, Lievens for London. Even after the two artists went their separate ways, Rembrandt continued to admire Lievens' work. Years later, Rembrandt copied two of Lievens' etchings—the only time he directly emulated the work of another printmaker. One of those etchings is on view in this gallery.

Lievens as a Graphic Artist
Lievens was a remarkably expressive draftsman, equally adept at pen and wash, red and black chalk, and a combination of these techniques. Lievens' earliest known drawings depict historical or biblical scenes, but most drawings from the start of his career in Leiden are boldly executed figure studies. Lievens made some of these studies in preparation for his paintings or prints.

In his etchings, Lievens defined forms with strong contours while modeling them with a delicate, almost pointillé, or dotted, technique. He based a number of his prints on his painted compositions; however, like Rembrandt, Lievens frequently reworked his etching plates, occasionally resulting in a radically different image.

Note: Each time a plate is altered, it is assigned a new "state" and is numbered. The individual state of each of Lievens' etchings is identified on the labels, along with the total number of states created.

Tronies
During the 1620s, the manner in which both Lievens and Rembrandt were painting was so close that contemporaries were sometimes uncertain as to the attribution of their works. Both artists were experimenting with textures and with how thickly they applied their paint; they even wiped and scratched into the paint to achieve certain pictorial effects.

They also expanded their subject matter beyond history, genre, and still-life painting to include tronies, or head-and-shoulder studies. They particularly enjoyed making tronies of elders because of their "character," the creases that lined a wizened face or the wisdom

that radiated from those who have experienced the vagaries of life. An excellent example of a tronie in this gallery is the *Profile Head of an Old Woman*, which was once thought to be a portrait of Rembrandt's mother by the young Rembrandt.

London and Antwerp, 1632–1644

When Lievens moved to London in 1632, he almost certainly worked as an assistant in the studio of Anthony van Dyck, court painter for Charles I. No painting from this period of Lievens' career is extant, but several works on paper survive.

In 1635 Lievens moved to Antwerp. There, he would have had the opportunity to study the legacy of paintings by Flemish masters Van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens, as their work adorned many of the city's civic and religious buildings. He quickly became part of a vibrant artistic community that included Adriaen Brouwer and other genre and still-life painters, and joined the painters' guild. In 1638, Lievens married the daughter of a prominent sculptor. He probably converted from Protestantism to Catholicism, the predominant religion of Flanders, which would have facilitated his ability to secure important commissions from religious organizations and orders such as the Jesuits.

In Antwerp, Lievens effectively varied his style according to the subject matter. When making genre scenes, he painted in a rough manner inspired by his friend Brouwer; for religious themes and portraits, he adapted the elegant style of Van Dyck.

A New Interest in Landscapes

Lievens first experimented with landscape painting and drawing in Antwerp, but landscape drawing wouldn't become a significant part of his artistic production until after he returned to Amsterdam in 1644. In fact, almost all of his 85 or so surviving landscape drawings appear to have been made at this time. Given what we know of Lievens and Rembrandt, it is tempting to associate Lievens' growing interest in landscape drawing with contemporaneous developments in Rembrandt's work: in the mid-1640s, Rembrandt began his walks around Amsterdam, drawing and etching as he went. But just as in the early years in Leiden, it is not possible to establish precisely the direction of influence between these two strong artistic personalities.

For a large number of his large, finished landscape drawings, Lievens used oriental rather than Western paper. The fine texture and surface of these papers provided an attractive support for his brown ink drawings. Rembrandt also used oriental papers, though chiefly for etchings; he and Lievens were the only artists of their time to explore the rich visual possibilities of these exotic papers in any depth. Their shared fascination with oriental papers hints, once again, at a renewed artistic contact between Rembrandt and Lievens in Amsterdam in the late 1640s and 1650s.

Return to the Netherlands, 1644–1674

In 1644 Lievens moved to Amsterdam, the largest and most dynamic city in the Dutch Republic. Lievens rightly believed that his mastery of the Flemish style of painting and his many Dutch contacts would lead to prestigious commissions. He also knew enough about Dutch sensitivities to realize he would have to show a certain restraint in pose and technique. Thus, when Lievens was invited to paint a portrait of Adriaen Trip, a member of one of Amsterdam's most prominent families, he showed the young aristocrat in a direct yet elegant manner.

That Lievens, not Rembrandt, received the Trip commission is notable, for Rembrandt had portrayed Adraien's mother and sister in 1639. Rembrandt's dominance in the city was waning by the mid-1640s, which certainly would have created an opportunity for Lievens. However, Lievens was chosen as the portraitist the year he arrived in the city, indicating that Amsterdam's upper class quickly recognized his talents.

Lievens' portraits are remarkable for their diversity of style and technique, ranging from the soft and feminine portrayal of Anna Maria van Schurman to the crusty and thickly painted portrait of the Delft merchant Jacob Junius. His portraits were highly prized by the city's elite, and his immediate success with the Dutch Republic's most prominent patrons continued until 1674.

The Late Years

The commissions Lievens anticipated in Amsterdam came quickly, and by the end of the 1640s, his services were in great demand. Lievens was correct in believing that his friendship with Huygens would lead to important princely and civic commissions for large-scale allegorical and historical scenes. These projects cemented his reputation as one of the preeminent Dutch history painters. However, not surprisingly, Lievens could not be stilled. He traveled to The Hague, Berlin, and, finally, back to Amsterdam in pursuit of significant projects.

Lievens' return to Amsterdam in 1659 was linked to the decoration of the newly constructed town hall. Lievens and several other artists, including Rembrandt, were each invited to illustrate an episode in the historic battle of the Batavians against the Romans in 69 AD as a prefiguration of the Dutch revolt against the Spanish. Lievens' finished work for that project, *Brinio Raised on a Shield*, is represented in the exhibition by his oil sketch for the work. Rembrandt's painting, *The Conspiracy of Claudia Civilis*, apparently did not satisfy the city officials, for they removed it shortly after it was installed.

The paths of Lievens and Rembrandt crossed repeatedly throughout their long careers, and, unfortunately, their final days came to the same sad conclusion. Like Rembrandt, Lievens had lifelong problems managing his financial affairs, and his difficult personality complicated relationships with his family and patrons. Rembrandt died a pauper in Amsterdam in 1669, and Lievens, whose work had always been highly esteemed by the powerful and the elite, died in poverty in Amsterdam in 1674.