The obscure D. Witting and the art of painting in Amsterdam in the 1630s

Jochai Rosen

This article discusses the little known 17th-century Dutch painter D. Witting, who is only known by his initial and whose small oeuvre includes only six paintings. It revolves around his painting depicting A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (oil on panel, 39x50 cm, with the art dealer F. Stöcklin, Basel, 1942). The article clearly demonstrates that every detail in this painting betrays a similarity with paintings by Pieter Codde and painters of his circle. The analysis of this painting yields a dating to c. 1630-1635 and clearly shows that Witting was associated with what is defined here as “The Codde Group”, active in Amsterdam during the second quarter of the 17th century. This article thus sheds more light on this group and its iconography, places Witting in Amsterdam and reaffirms his little known oeuvre.

Key terms: Dutch Golden Age; Genre painting; D. Witting; Pieter Codde; 17th century.

An ideal goal of every field of research would be to investigate its entire domain and reach even its most remote and neglected corners. Such a goal is particularly difficult to gain when it comes to the study of 17th-century Dutch painting, which is typified by a significant number of contributions of numerous minor masters. This article aims to contribute to our knowledge of such minor masters by presenting the oeuvre of D. Witting, an artist who worked on the margins of that art scene in terms of both the quality and quantity of his artistic output. I will show that the work of this artist is, to a large extent, dependent on that of other painters for its inspiration but can still be said to be the work of an independent master. Such work is to be found one tier above that of those masters who were satisfied in creating copies and variants after the work of much more able masters. Art historical research, as so many other fields of study, tends to prioritize and thus artists of lesser quality are often neglected. In terms of quantity I refer to the fact that some 17th-century Dutch painters are known only by their name while others are known only from a small oeuvre. Such a small oeuvre is usually the result of

specific circumstances and its small size hardly allows us to make any conclusions as to the value of their contribution. Therefore we should not overlook the importance of bringing even a small oeuvre into context and by doing so shedding more light on the interrelationships within a certain city school and a smaller group of painters; for it is clear that any piece of this enormous puzzle is important in order to create a better picture of painting in 17th-century Holland. It is now possible to connect the work of D. Witting to a group of painters which for the sake of this discussion will be referred to as “The Codde Group”.

We know almost nothing of the 17th-century Dutch painter D. Witting, not even his first name. He seems to have been active between 1630 and 1640 but we do not know where. His small body of work includes the highly intriguing painting A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (see Figure 1), which will serve as the starting point for this article.

Based on the boy’s outfit and his lace collar in particular, this painting can be dated to roughly between 1630 and 1635, which makes it one of the earliest examples of the representation of this topic in 17th-century Dutch art. Moreover, it includes

an unusual and intricate web of details that seems to reveal quite an original master, one that should have been better known to us.

The painting depicts the boy sitting on a painter's box (schilderkistje) with a drawing board and a sheet of paper on his lap, on which one can discern the face of a human figure. The boy is seen from the back as he turns his head towards the viewer. Before him stands a table laden with still life objects, among them a theorbo, compasses, some books and a skull. On the floor beneath the table are additional still life objects, among them a drum, a viola da gamba and a plaster cast of the head of Christ. To the left of the table stands an easel on which rests a panel depicting a guardroom scene; a few palettes are dangling from it, against it leans a maulstick, and before it stands a three-legged stool. To the right of the table two panels are resting against the wall, one of them depicting a standing man in full length. Further to the right stands a life-size mannequin with a wide-brimmed hat clapped aslant on its head, and immediately next to it an empty picture frame is hanging on the wall. In the right back corner a cavalier’s overcoat, gloves and sword are hanging; a framed landscape painting is visible on the back wall.

As we shall see below, some details and characteristics clearly situate this painting within the contemporary art scene of Amsterdam. Therefore, this article aims to show that in style and subject matter D. Witting was closely associated with a group of Amsterdam painters around Pieter Codde (1599-1678). This in turn will shed more light on both Witting himself and this small group of painters, their interrelationship and their keen self-awareness.

In 1994 F. G. Meijer published for the first time the work of Witting, and his efforts (Meijer 1994, 322-325), based on an initial attribution made by B. J. A. Renckens, resulted in the compilation of a small oeuvre assigned to this painter. The oeuvre of D. Witting began to consolidate in 1976 when Renckens, an employee of the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), attributed a Guardroom scene (see Figure 8) signed with the initials DW to Witting and made a note in the institute files. There is at least one known copy of this Guardroom scene, which serves to attest that Witting's original composition was considered, at least by one collector, good enough to merit an investment in a copy of it. This certainly sets Witting in a class apart from that of copyists and followers. Later on and on the basis of style A boy drawing in a painter's studio (see Figure 1) was also attributed to Witting. In 1994 Meijer (Meijer 1994, 322-325), based on its similarity to a still life painting depicting a similar array of objects, and particularly the unique plaster cast of the head of Christ, attributed the Still life with a theorbo,

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1 See after D. Witting: Guardroom scene, oil on panel, 46x62 cm. Sale, Brussels, Trussart, 15/11/1956, lot 31, illustrated, as J. Duck.
a viola da gamba and a model of the head of Christ to Witting. Based on the similarity to this still-life Meijer suggested that Witting is also responsible for a Vanitas still life with a violin. In his discussion Meijer also mentioned Two gentlemen playing backgammon in an interior (see Figure 4), which is signed and dated 1630 and which will be discussed in detail below. He also reassigned to Witting a genre painting depicting a Young officer and old scholar in an interior. This amounted to a small oeuvre of six original paintings and a copy that seems to show that Witting concentrated on genre themes and still lifes, although, according to one record, he also painted a marine landscape.

A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (see Figure 1) by D. Witting reveals a similarity with a contemporary painting by Pieter Codde known as The young draftsman (see Figure 2). Like Witting in his painting, Codde also depicts a young boy seen from the back, seated on a wooden box with a sketchbook on his lap. Here too some still life objects are located on a table in front of him while other items are set on the floor nearby.

Apart from the two examples mentioned above, Codde returned to the subject of the painter’s studio on a few other occasions, and all in all the subject makes up a significant group of paintings both in terms of its originality and the relatively wide range of aspects of the painter’s life it covers. He painted at least three different compositions of a Painter in his studio seated in front of his easel, a painting of a painter and a connoisseur seated in a studio, engaged in A conversation about art and another depicting a painter standing in the middle of his humble studio, surrounded by three men who carefully examine his paintings.

It seems that the connoisseurs seen in Codde’s paintings represent the audience for paintings representing The art of painting. These type of men are also the target of the boy’s gaze in Witting’s painting.

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2 D. Witting: Still life with a theorbo, a viola da gamba and a model of the head of Christ, oil on panel, 25.5x30.5 cm, whereabouts unknown.
3 Attributed to D. Witting: Vanitas still life with a violin, oil on panel, 34x48 cm, sale, Vienna, Dorotheum, 7/10/1998, lot 98, illustrated.
4 D. Witting: Young officer and old scholar in an interior, oil on panel, 25x34 cm, sale, Braunschweig, Hünerberg, 10/3/1960, lot 56, illustrated, as by Jan Olis.
5 Oil on panel, 34x57 cm, signed with initials. Sale Misses Jackson Barstow et al., London, Sotheby, 29/3/1972, lot 82. See RKD, Hofstede de Groot fiche no. 1636873.
6 Pieter Codde: Self portrait in front of the easel, oil on panel, 30.5x25 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen, inv. no. 1125; Painter in his studio, oil on panel, 32x25 cm, Stockholm, Hallwyl Museum, inv. no. 8 46; Painter in his studio, oil on panel, 45.5x38 cm, sale, New York, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 7/6/1978, lot 7, illustrated.
7 Pieter Codde: A conversation about art, oil on panel, 43.2x57.3 cm, Paris, Fondation Custodia, F. Lugt collection, inv. no. 7335; Art lovers in a painter’s Studio, c. 1628-1630, oil on panel, 38.3x49.3 cm, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie, inv. no. 3249.
During the middle ages painters were members of guilds which also included various craftsmen. As part of the intellectual awakening of the Renaissance, painters became more and more aware of themselves as artists who use their intellect to create their art and were thus different from craftsmen, who they perceived as simple manual laborers. They thus opted to separate themselves from them and the guild of St. Luke gradually became the sole domain of painters. As part of their heightened self-awareness artists in the 15th century developed the theme of St. Luke painting the Madonna, in many occasions depicting themselves as St. Luke. During this period the theme of a painter seated in his studio before the easel began to represent The art of painting and also had a practical function as a means to promote the painter's product. This theme became the common subject of a masterpiece created by students wishing to enter the guild and become masters; one such example is the famous St. Luke Painting the Madonna by Maerten van Heemskerk painted in 1532.

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8 See Rogier van der Weyden: Saint Luke drawing the Virgin, 1435, oil and tempera on panel, 138x111 cm, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.
9 Maerten van Heemskerk: St. Luke painting the Madonna, 1532, o/p, 168x235 cm, Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum.
17th century this theme became much looser and painters felt comfortable to depict themselves in the studio in self portraits per se. Painters gradually began to emphasize the intellectual capacity of their trade by presenting themselves as scholars or musicians. Painters also tended to highlight their contemplative capacity by presenting themselves smoking in the studio (Sluijter 1990, 295). As part of this preoccupation with their trade, a sub-genre was created depicting young boys beginning their art training as apprentices in an artist's studio. These paintings usually show a young boy drawing after cast models and sometimes even instructed by his master, as in Jan Steen's *The drawing lesson*. The subject of a boy seated alone in a painter's studio and drawing was quite common in 17th-century Dutch painting (De Jongh & Luijten 1997, 348-352). All the examples known to us are in a vertical format and depict a boy drawing from a single bust or statue. Codde (see Figure 2) and Witting’s (see Figure 1) examples are in a horizontal format and are much more elaborate in terms of the variety of still-life objects presented and their intricate arrangement. They certainly stand out as a separate and distinguishable sub-group within this genre. The painting by Codde is so far the earliest known depiction of this theme in 17th-century Dutch art and the painting by Witting is only slightly later, which makes them pioneering efforts.

Codde's preoccupation with the many aspects of the painter's life and, particularly, his depiction of the interaction between the painter and his collectors, is without any direct precedent and therefore suggests a highly developed self-awareness on his part. We must see Witting's painting in the context of Codde's unique depictions of the artist's world. It seems that in his intricate *A boy drawing in a painter's studio* (see Figure 1) Witting strove to emulate Codde.

Pieter Codde was born into a family from the regent class of Amsterdam. He was active as a painter as well as a poet and won recognition at quite an early age. When Rembrandt settled in Amsterdam the two became acquainted. Codde had some influence on Rembrandt and it seems that the two remained in contact until Rembrandt’s death in 1669 (Rosen 2009, 32-39). Codde began his career as a portrait painter but already in the late 1620s shifted to focus on genre themes. He became one of the leading figures in assimilating the genre theme known as

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10 Jan Steen: *The drawing lesson*, c. 1665, o/p, 24.1x20.3 cm, Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo collection.

11 For a few examples, see Jan Lievens: *The young draftsman*, c. 1630-35, o/c, 129x100 cm, Paris, Louvre; Michael Sweerts: *Boy drawing before the bust of a Roman emperor*, oil on canvas, 49.5x40.6 cm, Minneapolis, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Walerand Vaillant: *The young draftsman*, oil on canvas, 117x90 cm, Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. 777; Walerand Vaillant: *The young draftsman*, oil on canvas, 129x100 cm, London, National Gallery, inv. no. 3591; Walerand Vaillant: *The young draftsman*, oil on canvas, 119x90 cm, Maastricht, Bonnefantenmuseum, inv. no. 673.
The merry company (Kolfin 2005) and was one of the initiators of The Guardroom Scene (Rosen 2010a). He achieved success with his genre painting in the 1630s and spent the rest of his life living comfortably in his house on the Keizersgracht. Together with Rembrandt, he was one of the leading and influential painters of Amsterdam during the 1630s. One of his closest colleagues was the painter Willem Duyster (1599-1635) who was born a few months before Codde in Amsterdam. The two seemed to have been very close and might have even studied with the same master (Playter 1972, 28). Codde and Duyster also shared their choice of themes and Duyster too was one of the leading forces in the invention of the guardroom scene. Codde and Duyster together formed a nucleus around which a group of painters formed, a group that like them were of the same age and focused on genre paintings depicting social gatherings and guardroom scenes. Since it seems that Codde was the more charismatic and influential of the two, and since Duyster died at an early age and never really got the chance to assert his influence, it is Codde who was at the center of this group and therefore I refer to it here as “The Codde Group”. Another member of this group is the painter Simon Kick (1603-1652), who was Duyster’s brother-in-law. The two not only married each other’s sisters but also lived and worked in the same house. Kick too became member of this select group of 17th-century Dutch genre painters who produced guardroom scenes (Rosen 2007, 85-98). Pieter Potter (1597-1652) was a versatile painter who devoted a significant portion of his output to guardroom scenes (Rosen 2010b, 45-64). In 1631 he moved to Amsterdam and became acquainted with Codde and Duyster; his paintings reveal an apparent affinity with theirs. When Potter moved to Amsterdam he settled in a house next to Codde’s; the two families must have become acquainted, because a few years later Potter was caught in bed with Codde’s estranged wife! The painter Pieter Quast (1606-1647) was born in Amsterdam a few years after Codde and Duyster. He was a versatile painter who also created numerous drawings and designs for prints. He devoted a large portion of his output to merry companies and guardroom scenes and while doing that betrayed the strong influence of Codde. The latter had a painting by Quast in his collection and the two must have known each other quite well.

The above-mentioned five painters form the core of “The Codde Group” in Amsterdam. They were all born around the turn of the century, moved in the same circles, lived close to each other and specialized in the same themes. To this group we should add a few painters who were active in other cities but seem to have had occasional contact with Codde and his circle in Amsterdam and likewise focused on merry social gatherings and guardroom scenes. One of them was the painter Anthonie Palamedes (1601-1673) from Delft. He seems to have been in close contact with Codde in the late 1620s and early 1630s and painted similar
merry companies. Unlike Codde, who rarely painted after 1640, Palamedes continued to paint merry companies and guardroom scenes well into the 1660s and thus was one of the most important assimilators of this theme. The larger Codde group should also include the painter Jan Olis (c.1610-1676), who was active mainly in Dordrecht. He too seems to have been in close contacts with Codde in the late 1620s and early 1630s, and continued to paint merry companies and guardroom scenes in a style derived from that of Codde. Finally the Codde group should also include the painter Jacob Duck (c.1600-1667) from Utrecht (Rosen 2017a). In the late 1620s and early 1630s he was also in close contact with Pieter Codde and under the latter’s influence developed his unique form of merry companies and guardroom scenes and became the most prolific guardroom scene painter of all times.

The two paintings within Witting’s A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (see Figure 1) seem to amount to a sort of homage to two members of the Codde group, and in doing so they help us place him in a certain milieu and moreover in a certain city school.

The phenomenon of the painting-within-the-painting, a widely occurring phenomenon in 17th-century Dutch painting, is certainly beyond the scope of this study.12 While most of the paintings within paintings are generic and bear little if any significance, some do serve to clarify the meaning of the hosting painting and some even seem to be an homage. In fact, one of the most striking examples of an homage in the form of a painting within a painting appears in a painting from within the Codde group. A painting by Jacob Duck of a Brothel Scene now in the museum in Nîmes,13 includes three paintings hanging on the back wall. One of them depicts an Interior with a Dancing Couple by Pieter Codde.14 This quote by Duck of a painting by Codde must be seen as a token of his appreciation to his colleague and as a sort of homage to him (Beguin 1952, 112-116; Rosen 2017a, 168-169). This precedent makes it clear that specific paintings quoted within other paintings must be understood as a form of homage and this seems to apply also to the paintings within Witting’s A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (see Figure 1).

Restlessness in the Low Countries culminated in 1566 in a Calvinist Iconoclastic Fury (Beeldenstorm). The Spanish rulers of the Netherlands set out to eradicate what they perceived as a rebellion and this set in motion what would later become known as the Eighty Years’ War. During the later decades of the 16th

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12 For the subject of a painting within a painting see for example Georgel & Lecoq (1987); Zsuzsa (2005); Craft-Giepmans & De Vries (2012).
13 Jacob Duck: Brothel scene, c. 1632-1634, oil on panel, 40x68 cm, Nîmes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. IP-1363.
14 Pieter Codde: Interior with a dancing couple, 1627, oil on panel, 39.5x53 cm Paris, Louvre, inv. no. M.N.R. 452.
century the Spanish army ravaged the Low Countries in an effort to break the back of the local population, an effort that brought about tremendous chaos and destruction. Hostilities were halted in 1609 when the Spaniards, unable to break the Dutch Revolt, decided to agree on a cease-fire to last for twelve years. This actually meant that the Dutch Republic now enjoyed a de-facto state of independence and was free to develop its economy and rebuild the country. Using their newly acquired freedom the Dutch were able in a few years to create a seaborne empire and enjoy unprecedented economic growth, a phenomenon known as The Dutch Golden Age. Many Dutch merchants living in cities such as Amsterdam, Haarlem, Rotterdam and others became rich and soon began spending money on luxuries – among them art works – to embellish their new and spacious houses. This in turn brought about a flourishing of the arts. The fact that the ruling Calvinists were highly suspicious of traditional religious topics meant that the art market focused on painting rather than sculpture and that the audience preferred modern themes rather than subjects taken from the scriptures. This is why genre painting depicting contemporary themes became so fashionable in 17th-century Holland. The fact that the Catholics were generally oppressed and that Holland did not have a significant aristocracy, meant that it lacked arts traditional patrons; Dutch painters were thus forced to compete on the open market. This entailed severe competition and a need for artists to find new themes favourable to their audience, and when they found such themes they tended to specialize and focus on these successful formulae. The fact that 17th-century Dutch artist were organized in professional city guilds that also served a social purpose, meant that some ideas and formulae were followed and developed among painters from the same city.

The figure of the mercenary soldier became popular in the graphic arts of Germany in the 16th century and gradually penetrated into the painting of the Low Countries (Rosen 2010a, 26-42). The resumption of war activities in 1621 also meant a renewed interest in the figure of the mercenary soldier, and a few years after that this group of genre painters active in Amsterdam around Pieter Codde developed a genre formula known as the guardroom scene. The inclusion of a guardroom scene resting on the easel in Witting’s painting is closely reminiscent of Pieter Codde, who was the driving force behind the rise of this genre theme in Amsterdam. Codde included a guardroom scene standing in a very similar manner in a contemporary self-portrait (see Figure 3) (Rosen 2017b).

Here too the artist is sitting in the right foreground, his back and face turned towards the viewer. Here too the easel is located on the left with a guardroom scene in progress resting on it and a landscape hanging on the back wall.

The guardroom scene was known to Dutch contemporaries as a Kortegaard, Cortegaerdje or similar titles, which are all bastardizations of the French term Corps de garde. A guardroom scene is a genre painting depicting an interior of a provisional nature hosting officers, soldiers, and their camp followers. These would be depicted passing their leisure time surrounded by military items and booty (Rosen 2006, 151-174). The guardroom scene crystalized in Amsterdam around 1628 and immediately became popular in that city (Rosen 2010a, 55-58). It remained popular throughout the 1630s but declined after 1640. As mentioned above, this scene was adopted by painters active in other cities and there – particularly in Utrecht and Delft – it continued well into the 1660s.

As we have seen above, the existence of D. Witting was finally established and his small oeuvre firmly crystallized around a painting depicting Two gentlemen playing backgammon in an interior (see Figure 4), which is signed D.WITTING f and dated 1630.
The painting depicts a room with two men standing in profile, facing each other across a table and playing backgammon. A boy – probably a page – is standing in the back right. An overcoat has been thrown on a chair next to the man on the right, and a wide-brimmed hat is lying on a chair next to the man on the left. In its iconography and style, the *Two gentlemen playing backgammon in an interior* by Witting is similar to Willem Duyster’s *The backgammon players* (see Figure 5) painted about five years earlier.

This painting also includes two men seen in profile facing each other as they play backgammon. Here too the game board is set on the table between them, covered with an oriental rug, and additional figures are standing in the back. *The backgammon players* (see Figure 5) by Duyster precedes Witting’s *Two gentlemen playing backgammon in an interior* (see Figure 4), suggesting that Witting was familiar with Duyster and his work.

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15 At some point an anonymous painter added to this painting a map hanging on the back wall, a door leading to a furnished room in the back and a window in the left wall. These two stages are both known from photographs at the RKD, see https://rkd.nl/explore/images/68536.

The guardroom scene was invented in Amsterdam in the late 1620s in the circle of Pieter Codde and Willem Duyster, and Witting’s presentation of his young draughtsman drawing in a room with a guardroom scene resting on the easel brings him even closer to these two painters. It is therefore worthwhile to look carefully at the guardroom scene within Witting’s *A boy drawing in a painter’s studio* (see Figure 6).

It depicts two soldiers facing each other in profile, crouching over a drum and playing dice or cards. A third soldier is seen in the right background standing at the threshold of an open door. The room seems to include further details and props. It is not clear whether the guardroom scene on the easel is a specific painting – I have thus far been unable to match it with any of the known guardroom scenes; in any case, it is strikingly similar to a guardroom scene by Pieter Potter (see Figure 7).
Figure 6. D. Witting: A boy drawing in a painter’s studio. Detail: The panel with the guardroom scene.

Figure 7. Pieter Potter: Guardroom scene. Oil on panel, 21x28.5 cm, sale, Amsterdam, Sotheby’s, 9/5/2006, lot 32, illustrated.
This guardroom scene too depicts soldiers gathered around a drum for a game of dice: three crouch over the drum, two hold pipes in their hands while a fourth soldier relieves himself in the back. The similarities between the guardroom scene in Witting's painting and that by Potter reinforces the connection between Witting and the circle of painters around Pieter Codde. The motif of the soldier standing in the doorway is strongly reminiscent of a guardroom scene by Pieter Quast, whose contribution will be discussed below. Codde, Duyster, Potter and Quast painted guardroom scenes in Amsterdam during the late 1620s and the 1630s, as did Witting, at least on one occasion (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. D. Witting: Guardroom scene. Oil on panel, details and whereabouts unknown.](image)

His guardroom scene depicts a group of soldiers sitting in an interior and playing cards around a barrel. An officer stands to the right and looks at one of his soldiers, who reveals his cards to him. The right side of the interior features an elaborate display of military items: pieces of armor, boots, a holster, a drum and a company flag. The officer, facing left in profile, is resting one hand on a walking stick while keeping the other tucked behind his back. This exact posture is found in a few guardroom scenes by Pieter Quast and Pieter Potter, and this officer is particularly

16 See Pieter Quast: Guardroom scene, 1639, oil on panel, 34x43.5 cm, whereabouts unknown (Maarseveen et al 1998, 347).

similar to his counterpart standing in the center of a guardroom scene by Potter located in a castle (see Figure 9).\footnote{For other examples in the work of Pieter Potter, see Guardroom scene, 1634, oil on panel, 44x66 cm, sale, Cologne, Lempertz, 27/6/1974, lot 195, illustrated; Guardroom scene, 1633, oil on panel, 42x52.5 cm, sale March of Tweeddale et al., London, Sotheby’s, 13/12/1978, lot 81, illustrated; Prisoners pleading with an officer, 1646, oil on panel, 44x59 cm, sale, Paris, Hubert le Blanc, 24/9/1997, lot 16, illustrated. For Pieter Quast, see A company playing cards, oil on panel, 44x46 cm, sale, Amsterdam, Christie’s, 20/11/2013, lot 70, illustrated. See also Pieter Quast: Guardroom scene, 1640, oil on panel, 73x106 cm, Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. no. 1805; Peasants and soldiers by a campfire, 1639, oil on panel, 37.8x45.8 cm, sale, Amsterdam, Sotheby’s, 11/11/1997, lot 63, illustrated; Guardroom scene, oil on panel, 46x52.5 cm, sale, Vienna, Dorotheum, 13-14/4/1943, lot 109. For a similar figure in a merry company by Quast, see Merry company, oil on panel, 49x36.5 cm, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 71.20.}

![Figure 9. Pieter Potter: Guardroom scene. Oil on panel, 46.2x69.5 cm, sale, Amsterdam, Christie’s, 14/11/1991, lot 197, illustrated.](image)

The life-size mannequin seen in Witting’s A boy drawing in a painter’s studio (see Figure 1) is a rare detail, and as far as we know appears only once again in a 17\textsuperscript{th}-century Dutch painting.\footnote{Small mannequins are quite common in 17\textsuperscript{th}-century Dutch painting. A typical example would be Werner van der Valkert’s Portrait of a sculptor with a mannequin, 1624, oil on panel, 82.7x57.5 cm, Louisville (Kentucky), The Speed Art Museum, inv. no. 1963.29.} Not surprisingly, the other case is a painting by Simon Kick (see Figure 10), yet another guardroom scene painter from Amsterdam active in the first half of the 17\textsuperscript{th}-century.
The painting by Kick depicts a painter standing in the left foreground before an easel and painting the portrait of a man sitting in front of him and holding a roemer in his hand. Kick’s painting, like those by Witting and Codde, shows a keen interest in the world of the studio and in the painter’s proficiency. The painting by Kick is dated roughly between 1645 and 1650 and therefore Witting's use of the mannequin certainly predates that of Kick.

As already mentioned above, Witting’s *A boy drawing in a painter’s studio* includes another interesting little panel depicting a full-length figure of a standing man (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11. D. Witting: A boy drawing in a painter’s studio. Detail: The panel with full length figure.](image)

This type of painting was known as a costume study (*Kostümstudie* in German) or a fashionable figure (*modefiguur* in Dutch). It bears a striking similarity to a series of small panels by Pieter Quast depicting a single figure standing in full length. The one in the Rijksmuseum (see Figure 12)

\[19\] depicts an officer holding a walking stick and striking an elegant pose.

\[19\] Although the painting bears the signature WB, thought to be by Willem Bartsius but apparently alluding to Willem Buytewech, I accept the attribution of this painting to Quast made by M. C. de Kinkelder. See [https://rkd.nl/explore/images/24528](https://rkd.nl/explore/images/24528).
He wears a jerkin held with a blue sash, breeches, cavalier’s boots, a gorget, a tie and a wide-brimmed hat decorated with an ostrich feather. In the back a soldier is seated smoking by a military drum while another stands nearby. Quast’s
series, which consists of small panels of about 35 cm in height and 25 cm in width, includes the figures of an officer or a cavalier, the latter being sometimes part of a pendant with a matching painting of an elegant woman in full length. He is one of the only painters to produce a significant number of this type of paintings, although occasional examples by other painters are known too. These small paintings seem to be studies conceived as part of a larger process that also yielded many prints of fashionable figures after designs by Quast (see Figure 13).

For example, Salomon Savery’s print after Quast depicts an officer standing in an open landscape while in the background soldiers are pillaging a church, gathering booty and taking prisoners. This event accords with Quast’s interest in the mercenary world and with his contribution to the guardroom scene formula. It seems that Witting included the Quast-like panel because, as a figure and costume study, it would be perfect within a representation of The art of painting.

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20 See also Pieter Quast: Standing man, oil on panel, 39x27 cm, sale, Paris, Hotel Drouot, 8/11/1928, lot 16, illustrated, as by Jacob Ducq; Standing cavalier, oil on panel, 45x33.3 cm, sale, Martigny (Switzerland), Galerie Du Rhone, 6/6/2010, lot 1137, illustrated; Standing man, oil on panel, 41x23.2 cm, sale, South Kensington, Christie’s, 2/7/1997, lot 401, illustrated, as circle of Pieter Quast; Standing man, oil on panel, 44.4x31.7 cm, Misses Rachel F. and Jean I. Alexander collection, London, 1953. For pendants by Quast, see Standing woman and Standing man, 1622, oil on panel, 42.3x28.3 cm each, sale, Paris, Binoche et Giquello, 2/12/2011, lot 4, illustrated; Lady wearing an orange silk dress and Cavalier wearing cream with yellow stockings and shoes, oil on panel, 35x24 cm each, Sale Arquint, London, Sotheby’s, 8/7/2004, lots 266-267, illustrated.

21 These paintings are sometimes taken to be either portraits or genre presentations: a painting in the National Gallery, London, for example, is considered a genre presentation in line with Quast’s guardroom scenes; Pieter Quast: A standing man, oil on panel, 34.9x23.5 cm, London, National Gallery, inv. no. 6410 (MacLaren & Brown 1991, 318).

22 Another painter who produced quite a significant number of this type of small single figures is Jacob van der Merck. One such painting is thought to be a Portrait of Frederik Hendrik van Oranje-Nassau (1584-1647), oil on panel, 41.2x26 cm, previously in the Viscount Ridley collection, Great-Britain. See also Standing woman, with its pendant depicting a Standing Man, both oil on panel, 36x27.5 cm, previously in the Van Limburg Stirum collection, The Netherlands; Standing man, oil on panel, 42x27.5, previously in the collection of Dr. L. D. van Hengel, Arnhem; The yellow lady, oil on panel, 40x25.2 cm, Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv. no. GK 220. For an example by another painter, see Laurence Neter: Standing soldier, 1637, oil on panel, 30.2x24 cm, sale, New York, Christie’s, 3/5/1997, lot 50, illustrated.

23 See also Pieter Quast: Man in a fashionable outfit, engraving on paper, 141x94 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. RP-P-1879-A-3450. When Figure 12 was exhibited in the Burlington House in 1952, it was attributed to Willem Buytewech, although it is clearly signed by Quast. This misattribution is due to the fact that both artists specialized in preparing designs for series of prints depicting fashionably dressed single figures (Gowing 1953, 52). See also above note 19.
The fact that D. Witting's work is mentioned in written sources, the fact that some of them are signed either partially or wholly by his hand, the fact that they display...
a uniform style and a limited selection of subject matter point to the fact that his assembled oeuvre is solid albeit small.

Witting’s work reveals a close affinity with the group of painters around Pieter Codde and particularly with that of the painters from Amsterdam. It seems that, like them, he was active in Amsterdam during the second quarter of the 17th century. Also like them, Witting manifested a high level of self-awareness, especially in *A boy drawing in a painter's studio* (see Figure 1) – which seems to be his take on the topic of *The art of painting*. Like them he was a figure painter who specialized in guardroom and brothel scenes, and like Pieter Potter he occasionally painted still lifes. I believe, therefore, that D. Witting should be included in what I have termed “The Codde Group”. Since this is a small group of 17th-century Dutch painters who invented and developed a new type of genre painting, it is significant to be able to include another painter in this group.

As Witting seems to belong to the same generation as this group of painters but seems to have been more of a follower, I can cautiously infer that he was a bit younger than them and was probably born around 1610. Since there is no evidence to suggest that Witting was active after 1640, I tend to agree with Meijer and surmise that Witting probably died at a young age (Meijer 1994, 325).

I hope that my effort to highlight an obscure painter such as D. Witting will help to further underscore the important contribution of painters of his stature to painting as a whole in the Dutch Golden Age. The loss of the records of the Amsterdam painters’ guild may prevent us from ever learning more about D. Witting, but we can hope that sometime in the future a new painting might resurface and shed more light on this intriguing painter and his milieu.

References


About the author

Jochai Rosen is a senior lecturer in the Department of Art History at the University of Haifa, Israel. He specializes in Netherlandish art of the early modern period and in 17th-century Dutch genre painting in particular. His recent book *Jacob Duck (c.1600-1667): Catalogue Raisonné*, was published by John Benjamins Publishing Company in the Series *Oculi. Studies in the Arts of The Low Countries*. Author’s contact: jochai.rosen@gmail.com

L’obscur D. Witting et l’art de la peinture à Amsterdam aux années 1630

Le présent article discute un peintre néerlandais peu connu du 17e siècle, D. Witting, dont on ne connaît que l’initiale de son prénom et dont l’œuvre compte au total six peintures. Nous nous concentrons sur sa peinture *Un garçon dessinant dans un studio de peintre* (huile sur panneau, 39x50 cm, chez le marchand F. Stöcklin, Bâle, 1942). Nous démontrons clairement que tous les détails de cette peinture trahissent une ressemblance à des peintures de Pieter Codde et de membres du cercle de celui-ci. L’analyse de la peinture donne une date vers 1630-1635 et montre clairement que Witting était associé à ce que nous appelons ici « le groupe Codde, » actif à Amsterdam pendant le deuxième quart du 17e siècle. Nous éclairons davantage ce groupe et son iconographie, nous plaçons Witting à Amsterdam, et nous confirmons son oeuvre si peu connue.

De onbekende D. Witting en de Amsterdamse schilderskunst rond 1630

Het onderwerp van dit artikel is de Weinig bekende zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse schilder D. Witting, wiens volledige voornaam onbekend is en wiens kleine oeuvre uit slecht zes schilderijen bestaat. Uitgaand van zijn schilderij *Een jongen schilderend in een schildersstudio* (olieverf op paneel, 39x50 cm, kunsthandelaar F. Stöcklin, Basel, 1942). Het artikel laat zien dat elk detail in dit schilderij overeenkomst vertoont met vergelijkbare schilderijen van Pieter Codde en schilders uit diens kring. Een nadere analyse leidt tot een datering in de periode ca. 1630-1635 en levert bewijsmateriaal voor een connective met tussen Witting en de zogenaamde “Codde-groep”, die actief was in Amsterdam in het tweede kwartaal van de zeventiende eeuw. Het artikel werpt nieuw licht op deze groep en haar iconografie, plaatst Witting in Amsterdam en vestigt de aandacht op zijn weinig bekende oeuvre.