

January 13th

Memory Verse

...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, **neither shall they learn war any more.** Micah 4:3b

More information on this memory verse in the lesson for 18th January.



Do some drawing

Two rather different artists today who both lived in the Netherlands. Firstly, Maria Sibylla Merian, an artist whose surroundings had been sadly affected by war. She spent much of her life drawing plants and small creatures and must have longed, as we do nowadays, for that great day when no one learns war any more.

At Castle Waltha in the little Dutch village of Wieuwerd in West Friesland a group of Christians had made their home in the 1670s. You can see it in the picture – it was not so much a castle as a stately home.



These Christians had been persecuted from place to place until they settled in Altona near Hamburg. Then another war made that place unsafe too and so they moved to Castle Waltha where Broadbent¹ tells us “the country people received them gladly and a commission appointed by the Reformed Church to inquire into their views and ways reported them to be harmless, which led to their being allowed to remain in peace.”

The most famous lady who lived at the castle with these Labadists, as they were called, was Anna Maria Schürman about whom we learned/will learn in the lesson for 5th November. However in 1685 another remarkable lady came to join them. She was our artist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) whose beautiful still life picture heads this lesson. A still life is any picture of a group of objects that do not move. Flowers fruit and vegetables in attractive containers are common subjects for still life paintings.

Maria Sibylla's brother was already a member of the Labadist community. Maria and her mother and daughters joined him at the castle in 1685.

¹ E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (1931) p.249.

Maria was a brilliant artist who specialised in botanical (plant) drawings. She also made a number of discoveries in the field of entomology (the study of insects) especially in finding out more about what happened during the chrysalis stage of a butterfly's development when it changes from a caterpillar into its final form. Look again at her flower paintings at the top of this lesson. Find the tulip in the arrangement – what do you notice about it? Tulips like this come into today's lesson later on. Maria's picture will inspire you to try your hand at botanical painting or drawing. Here are some ideas to help you:

This time of year is not a good time for making flower arrangements but don't worry, you can set up a botanical still life for yourself to draw or paint. Use fruit and even vegetables from the kitchen as well as leaves from the garden or elsewhere.² Place the items carefully until you like what you see. Consider how the light falls on them and where the shadows are. When you are satisfied with your arrangement see what you can do. Use any medium you like – pencils, crayons, paint... You can even take a photograph and copy that if you find it helps. Earlier artists did the equivalent of this when they used a *camera obscura*³ to help them paint accurate pictures, it is not cheating!



2 Helpful resources for parents preparing for this topic of still life painting are here:

<https://www.accessart.org.uk/visual-arts-planning-still-life/>

3 If you are wondering what that is you can peep ahead to 25th January where there are instructions for making one yourself!

Maria's most famous pictures are like the one below and they always include insects or other small creatures so they are not really *still life* are they? The subject matter does not come from her native Netherlands either.



After the death of her mother Maria left the castle and returned to Amsterdam. The Dutch had a colony in south America, **Suriname**, or as it was then called, Surinam. Find it in your atlas. Together with her daughter, Maria sailed to Surinam to discover and paint the wildlife. The results were outstanding.

Due to ill health, Maria had to return to Amsterdam aged 54 in 1701. Here she published *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* a scholarly work detailing her discoveries of the vegetable, animal and insect life she had found in Suriname. It was lavishly illustrated with her beautiful colour plates showing what she had found there. The pictures are full of detail and accuracy and at the same time stunning works of art.

Maria supported herself by keeping a shop in Amsterdam where she sold specimens that she had collected in Suriname and also copies of her beautiful engravings. She died in Amsterdam on **13th January** 1717.

Today's second artist specialised in quite a different type of picture and involvement with beautiful flowers led directly to his dying a very poor man!

Jan Josephszoon van Goyen (1596-1656) was born on 13th January in the Netherlands. You will see from his dates that although his life overlapped with Maria's, he was a much older man and died when she was still a child. He was a landscape painter, that is, he specialised in outdoor views. He painted woods and fields, rivers and houses, cities and castles, seascapes and canals. His pictures are full of life and they tell us much about what life was like in the seventeenth century.



Many of Jan's paintings are of river scenes. The one above, *Village at the River*, shows buildings that look very ramshackle to us with their sagging roofs and lean-to structures. They seem to grow out of the ground along with the vegetation. The picture is alive with details – can you see the ducks? The women seem to be filling large pots with water. Whatever is the wooden house doing on top of those posts! Look closely and you will see is a kind of dovecote – at least that 's what it looks like to me! The building on the centre left with the strange posts sticking up at the corners defeats me though – is it a sort of haystack with a cover or open barn?

Nowadays you will find Jan's paintings in galleries all over the world and they can cost hundreds of thousands when they come up for auction. Alas, when he finished his studies in Haarlem and set up a studio, Jan did not get a high price for his work when it was new. To offset this difficulty he increased production, working hard to paint more pictures to sell. To cut costs he painted thinly (and quickly) using a limited selection of the least expensive colours. He supplemented his income working as an art dealer and auctioneer. He also invested money in land – and in tulips.

Investing money is a good thing to do. Everyone needs to provide for their old age by putting their savings to good use year by year. However, it is not always easy to make the correct decision about where to invest your money. In Jan's case the tulips were a bad mistake.

Tulips seem to have come originally from China. They reached the Netherlands by way of Turkey where they were extensively cultivated. Look again at the tulip in the picture of a flower arrangement by Maria that heads this lesson. It is not a solid colour but an attractive mix of purple and white. This kind of tulip was known as a “broken bulb” tulip and it was expensive and rare. You can see another example in Maria's picture opposite.



Any tulip of this kind was indeed “broken” for the pretty patterns on its petals were the result of disease. This was recognised at the time and thought to be the result of a deficiency in the soil. The fact that it is caused by a viral infection was not discovered until the 1920s. You will read misinformation today saying that these tulips have *evolved* the new patterns.⁴ But these plants have not acquired any new genetic information. The virus *infects* the bulb and *breaks* the plant's lock on a single colour, resulting in intricate effects of different colours on the petals – with the result that the plant generally sickens and *dies*.⁵ This is not evolution!

Dutch growers found they could grow the exotic tulip plants even in the cooler climate of the Netherlands. It was hard to produce the infected ones with the pretty petals reliably, though. These began to fetch higher and higher prices and became a status symbol. People began to borrow money to invest in the production of these special tulips as they fetched such stupendous sums of money.

Fashions change but bulbs cannot be produced overnight. Growers planned their tulip crops on the basis of prices agreed in advance and borrowed the money to produce the tricky virus infected plants. However, when the bulbs were ready some buyers said they would not pay the high price they had previously agreed. This was breaking an agreement and it caused a collapse in the market. Once one tulip producer could not pay back what he had borrowed to grow the tulips, people began to pull their money out of the other growers for fear they would lose theirs. Some people who had invested lost a lot of money – and one of them was Jan.

If you prefer to do a landscape painting or drawing rather than a still life today, go and take a look at the outside of your own house and street. Perhaps your garden would make a good subject. Again don't be afraid to use a photograph to copy. It will help you get everything in proper perspective and scale. Notice how Jan brings his landscape to life by including people doing their everyday jobs. You could do this too.

Tulips are still a major crop in the Netherlands.



4 https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/dutch_tulip_bulb_market_bubble.asp emphasis mine, spelling adjusted to UK.

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulip_breaking_virus