

Cornelius Ketel's Painting

Cor-ne-li-us Ketel painted pictures. He was born in the Ne-ther-lands – do you know where that is? You can find it in your atlas. Cornelius travelled to many places to paint. He worked in Paris and in London. While he was in London Elizabeth I was the queen.



Cornelius liked to paint pictures that had a message. In England he painted a picture about Wisdom and Good Sense defeating Brute Force. If you have read *Pilgrim's Progress* you will have some idea what the picture might have looked like. We can't see that picture now. Only a tiny scrap of it is left from all those years ago.

Cornelius Ketel also painted portraits. A portrait is a picture of a person. In those days there were no photos. If you wanted a picture of someone, they had to sit still for a long time while the painter painted their picture. Cornelius was good at it. People paid him well to paint them. Cornelius invented a new kind of painting. Many other painters copied his idea. It was this: paint a group of people standing together in one picture. You might not think that was a very unusual idea, but it was. This is how it happened:

Cornelius went back to the Netherlands after his time in England and France. In the Netherlands every town had a group of Night Watchmen. They had the job of keeping the town safe after dark. Every night they shut the gates of the town. All night they took turns to keep watch in case there were robbers or fires. They watched out for enemies that might come to attack the town too. In the morning they opened the gates and went home to bed!

The leaders of the Night Watchmen were always top men in the town. They were well off-men. Every year they had a feast together. If there was a new leader of the Night Watchmen they had a picture painted of themselves as they sat at their feast table. They all paid the painter some money to be in the picture.

Cornelius said, “I will paint you but do not just sit at a table. Stand up together. Then I can paint your fine clothes well. Bring your watchmen's swords and guns too. They will look good in the picture. I will paint you standing outside the town gates because it is your job to open and close them. Bring your dogs too if you like.”

The Night Watchmen liked the idea. Cornelius was clever. He went to each man's house in turn and painted the picture bit by bit. There was no need for them all to stand together while he painted them. Here is what he painted:



The men have their best clothes on. Two have brought their big guns. Some have swords. They are all trying to look very brave and strong. Can you see the dogs? Which one do you think they took with them to guard the town? One young man is called the “ensign”. Can you find him? He is carrying a big flag over his shoulder.

Do you wonder what has happened to the town gate? Ketel said he would put it in the picture but you can hardly see it. That is because the painting used to be much bigger. At some time or another a lot has been cut off all round the edge! The part with the gate on it has mostly gone. Why would you cut up a painting? Group paintings like this were hung up when they were finished in the hall

belonging to the Night Watchmen. In that hall they did their practice. They practised with swords and other weapons. Over the years the paintings hanging on the on the walls would get damaged. The edges would get banged and knocked. Perhaps holes would be made in them. This may be why the picture was cut round the edge to tidy it up.

Many other painters copied Cornelius Ketel's idea. The most famous painting like this one is called "The Night Watch" by Rembrandt. Can you find a print of it in one of your books?