

RACHEL RUYSCH

1664 – 1750

*The most celebrated
flower painter of the
Dutch Golden Age*

*“I have sought to
surpass nature in
its beauty.”*

– Rachel Ruysch

TIMELINE

- 1664 Born in The Hague, Dutch Republic
- 1681 Trained in drawing and painting in her father's studio
- 1691 Married the painter Jurian Pool
- 1693 Became a mother of ten children
- 1708 Appointed court painter to the Electress Palatine of Düsseldorf
- 1720–1740 At the height of her fame across Europe
- 1750 Died in The Hague



THE ARTIST

Rachel Ruysch was born into a family of artists; her father, Frederik Ruysch, was a respected nature painter and art dealer. From childhood she showed extraordinary talent, especially in painting flowers with scientific accuracy and poetic beauty.

She became the leading still life painter of her time, famous throughout Europe for her exquisite floral arrangements. Her patrons included princes, princesses and collectors who paid high prices for her work. Ruysch combined careful observation with a deep understanding of nature. She raised a large family and ran a successful studio, mentoring other artists, including her daughter Anna Ruysch.

A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

- Court painter to European royalty
- Most sought-after flower painter in her lifetime
- Works in major collections across Europe
- Mentored artists including her daughter
- International fame and financial success

HER ART

Rachel Ruysch's flower paintings are renowned for their astonishing detail, harmony and sense of life. She studied flowers at every stage—from bud to full bloom to decay—often using a microscope.

Her compositions are carefully balanced and often include insects, shells or fruit, symbolising the beauty and transience of life. Her technical skill in colour, texture and light was unequalled.



LOOKING BEYOND THE MYTH

Because she painted flowers—a subject seen as 'decorative' rather than 'serious'—historians wrote more about her male contemporaries. Yet Ruysch's paintings were technically more demanding than many other genres. She was a pioneering scientific observer and a brilliant entrepreneur.

We should remember her because she transformed flower painting into one of the highest achievements of the Dutch Golden Age.

HER CONTEMPORARIES

- Jan van Huysum 1682–1749
- Pieter de Hooch 1629–1684
- Johannes Vermeer 1632–1675
- Abraham Mignon 1640–1679
- Rachel Ruysch 1664–1750
- Willem van Aelst 1627–1683

Ruysch's work was admired by collectors throughout Europe. She was at the very centre of the Dutch art world.

AT A GLANCE

- Nationality: Dutch
- Movement: Dutch Golden Age
- Specialty: Flower still life
- Active: The Hague
- Career: Over 50 years
- Patrons: European royalty and nobility
- Reputation: Celebrated across Europe in her lifetime

WHY HISTORY OVERLOOKED HER

- Art history focused on history painting, not still life.
- Flower painting was considered a "minor" genre.
- Women artists were rarely included in the grand narrative.
- Changing tastes and new art movements marginalised still life.
- Many works remained in private collections.

History did not deliberately erase Rachel Ruysch. Shifting priorities and biases gradually pushed her into the background.

WHY HER WORK MATTERS

- She elevated flower painting to the highest level of art.
- Her work shows scientific knowledge and artistic genius.
- She was a role model for women artists for generations.
- Her paintings remain timeless beautiful and technically extraordinary.
- She deserves to be recognised as one of the greatest painters of the Dutch Golden Age.



DID YOU KNOW?

A bouquet painted by Rachel Ruysch could be worth more than a portrait by many male painters of her time.



WHERE TO SEE HER WORK

- Mauritshuis, The Hague
- Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
- Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
- Düsseldorfer Museum, Germany
- Private collections worldwide



CONTEMPORARIES FOR CONTEXT

- Jan van Huysum 1682–1749
- Pieter de Hooch 1629–1684
- Johannes Vermeer 1632–1675
- Abraham Mignon 1640–1679
- Willem van Aelst 1627–1683

Rachel Ruysch is considered to have surpassed them all in the art of floral still life.

- 5 Spray (Posy) of Flowers with Insects and Butterflies on a Marble Ledge 1690s Private collection
- 6 Still Life with Flowers Late 17th century Collection uncertain (versions exist in several museums and collections)

- 4 Flowers on a Tree Trunk (Forest Floor Still Life) c.1700 Private collection

- 3 Roses, Convolvulus, Poppies and Other Flowers in an Urn on a Stone Ledge c.1688–1690 National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

- 1 Portrait of Rachel Ruysch c.1692 Godfried Schalcken Private collection

“Flowers are like people; each has its own character, its own expression, and its own beauty.”

– RACHEL RUYSCH



FORGOTTEN WOMEN ARTISTS IS NOT ABOUT REWRITING HISTORY. IT IS ABOUT COMPLETING IT.

