

ARTUS QUELLINUS SCULPTOR OF AMSTERDAM

Royal Palace Amsterdam
in collaboration with Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

18 June - 27 October 2025

Press
Information about the exhibition



Artus Quellinus
Atlas, ca. 1662-1663
Avesnes stone with white paint, h. ca. 700 cm
Citizens' Hall, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

The master sculptor Artus Quellinus takes centre stage

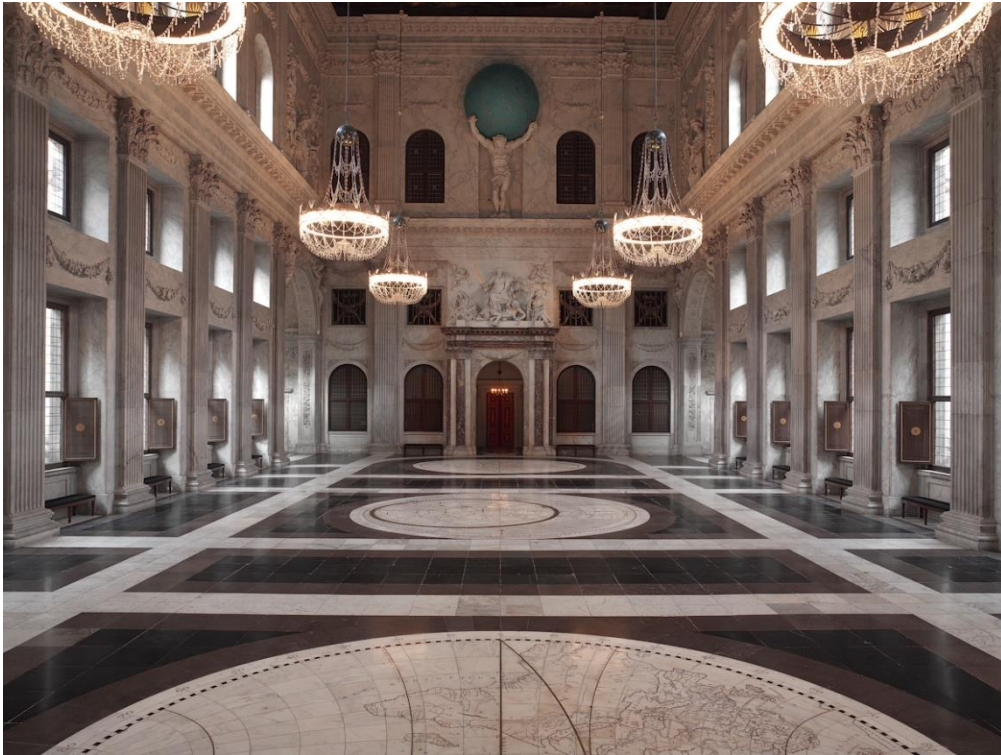
‘Het licht der beelthouwerij onzer eeuw’ (‘The guiding light for sculptors in our age’), this is how poet Joost van den Vondel characterised his contemporary Artus Quellinus (1609-1668). The Flemish sculptor had elaborately decorated the new town hall of Amsterdam, now the Royal Palace, inside and out. An art project that was hitherto unrivalled in the Netherlands. Vondel even compared Quellinus to Phidias, the most celebrated sculptor from Greek antiquity. A most grand compliment.

Artus Quellinus was one of the best and most influential sculptors from the seventeenth century. His talent, craftsmanship and success made him the northern European pendant to Italian artists of that time, such as Gianlorenzo Bernini. The expressive power of his sculptures can be experienced most profoundly at the Royal Palace Amsterdam, his most ambitious commission. Today, after more than 350 years, his sculptures still manage to move and impress us. At the same time, Quellinus is not well-known to the public.

That is why Royal Palace Amsterdam and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam join forces to place Artus Quellinus in the limelight in the first monographic exhibition on his work: *Artus Quellinus. Sculptor of Amsterdam*. A new book with the same title accompanies the exhibition – a much needed overview of the latest insights into his life, oeuvre, working method and impact. Both the exhibition and the book are based on current art historical and technical research conducted by the Rijksmuseum. In other words, it is about time that Artus Quellinus takes centre stage - and he does so at a hallmark moment: the year 2025 marks the 750th anniversary of the city of Amsterdam.

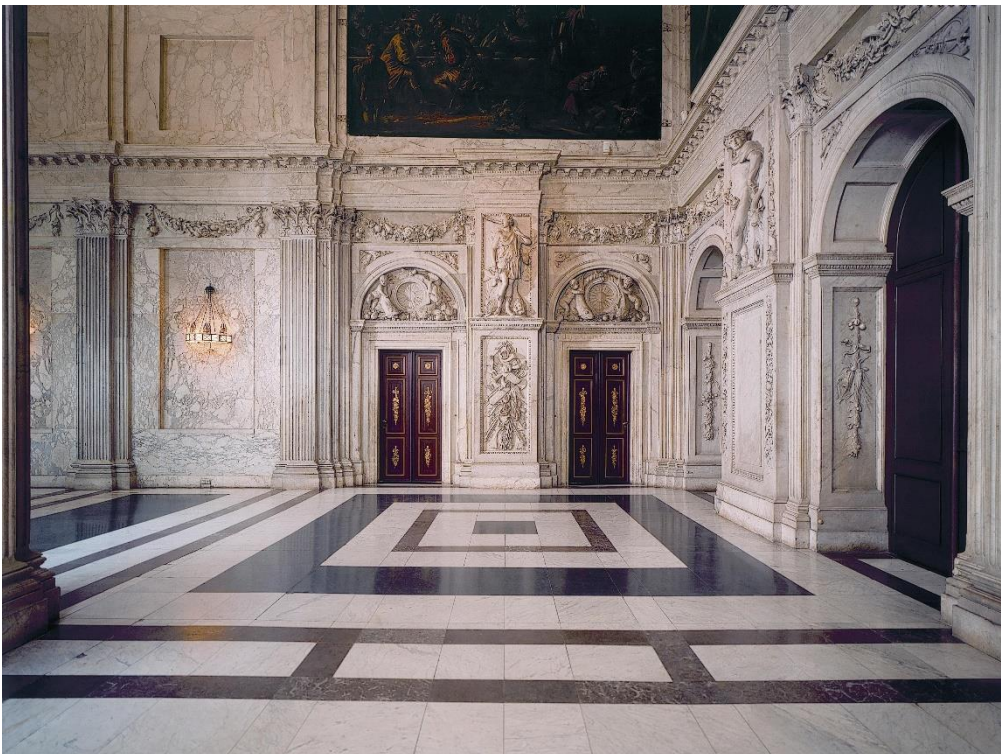
For the first time ever, a wide audience is introduced to the artistry of the Antwerp sculptor. *Artus Quellinus. Sculptor of Amsterdam* is the largest, most ambitious exhibition at the Royal Palace to date and marks the grand finale of Amsterdam’s celebratory year. In this international project, Quellinus’ sculptural decorations for the former town hall are presented in dialogue with many works from the Rijksmuseum, supplemented by a broad selection of extraordinary loans from museums, churches and private collections from the Netherlands and abroad. They include masterpieces that were rarely or never before seen in the Netherlands. A unique opportunity to bring Quellinus’ legacy together under one roof. In addition to sculptures by Artus Quellinus himself, his oeuvre is shown together with works by important contemporaries and followers. In that way, the exhibition explores the lasting impact Quellinus had on the art of sculpture in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. It gives the public the opportunity to engage with an art form that is not often found in exhibitions: seventeenth-century sculpture of the highest quality.

The exhibition location: The Citizens' Hall and Galleries of the Royal Palace Amsterdam



The Citizens' Hall with sculptural decorations by Artus Quellinus, 1651-1663

Photo: © Royal Palace Amsterdam, Erik & Petra Hesmerg



The Southeast Gallery with sculptures by Artus Quellinus, 1651-1653

Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam.



Artus Quellinus
Diana (the Moon), ca. 1652-1653
marble, h. 189 cm
Southeast Gallery, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

Roman gods and goddesses in the corners of the Galleries represent the planets, sun and moon. Quellinus gave his Amsterdam Diana, goddess of the hunt, local attributes: fish instead of game.

Quellinus at the Royal Palace

The most important treasure of sculpture in the Netherlands

The former town hall of Amsterdam on Dam Square, now the Royal Palace, became known as the 'eighth wonder of the world' shortly after it was built in the mid-seventeenth century. The leading architect Jacob van Campen designed a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that conveyed a powerful message, not only by virtue of the building's sheer size, but also through its architectural style and imagery: Amsterdam is the centre of the universe. Far and wide, there was only one sculptor who possessed the talent and skills to translate Amsterdam's message into stone. For nearly fifteen years, the Flemish sculptor Artus Quellinus was responsible for designing and executing a vast sculptural programme, from the gigantic bronze statues on the roof to the smallest decorations on door frames. Hundreds of sculptures were made by him and his many assistants, forming the most important treasure of sculpture in the Netherlands.

The Tribunal: the 'Nightwatch' of Netherlandish sculpture

Sculptor Artus Quellinus' powerful abilities as a storyteller and craftsman are palpable throughout the Palace. Though nowhere else is this sensation stronger than in the Tribunal on the ground floor, where death sentences were read out in the seventeenth century. The space is decorated with sinister sculptured images that reflect its original function.



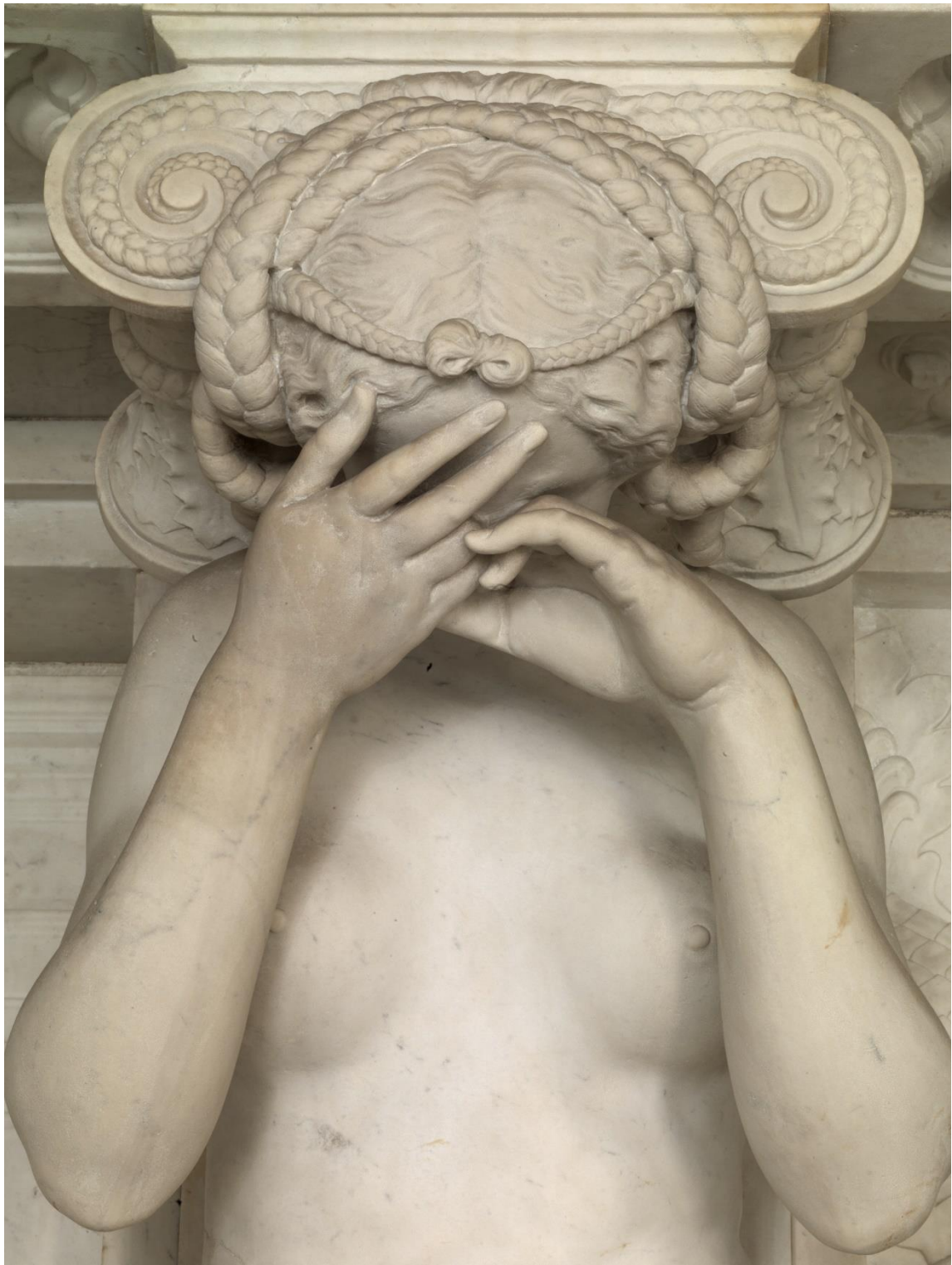
Artus Quellinus

The reliefs about justice in the Tribunal, 1651-1655

marble, ca. h. 300 cm x b. 8,69 cm

Tribunal, Royal Palace Amsterdam

Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen



Artus Quellinus
Remorse (detail), 1651-1652
Marble, h. 245 cm
Tribunal, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

Quellinus makes us forget that his sculptures are made of stone. He was able to make cold, hard marble resemble soft flesh-and-blood bodies and convey emotion.



Artus Quellinus
Justice, 1652
Marble, h. 141 cm
Tribunal, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Erik & Petra Hesmerg

In the seventeenth century, courts of justice were found inside town halls. They often included a statue of Lady Justice. In the Palace's Tribunal, Justice's tunic is so thin and clinging so closely to her body that her navel is visible through the fabric.

The Royal Palace and Rijksmuseum join forces

The exhibition was realised by Royal Palace Amsterdam in close collaboration with the Rijksmuseum. The strong connection between the Rijksmuseum collections and the Royal Palace is unique and provides a good basis for the collaboration. Hundreds of Quellinus' sculptures decorate the Palace walls, his *magnum opus*, and the Rijksmuseum preserves the largest collection 'moveable' art works by the master and his contemporaries. Highlights in the Rijksmuseum's collection are the marble portrait busts of the burgomasters of Amsterdam, such as that of Andries de Graeff, one of the minds behind the new town hall. This portrait bust is presented in the exhibition, in a way bringing him back to the building he helped conceive. Other highlights include a large amount of terracotta sketches (*bozzetti*) and models on loan from the city of Amsterdam, that Quellinus made as preparatory studies or *vidimus* models for his work on the town hall. As such, the Rijksmuseum is the main lender to the exhibition: over fifty works will be on display. What is more, the valuable expertise on sculpture of the Rijksmuseum specialists is combined with the Palace team's knowledge of the building, making it an ideal partnership for this project.



Artus Quellinus
Portrait of Andries de Graeff, 1661
marble, h. 76 cm
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The art loving Andries de Graeff was one of the burgomasters who commissioned Quellinus to work on the Amsterdam town hall. His sideways glance gives this formal portrait the look of a snapshot. The hand holding his toga together enhances the sense of motion and adds liveliness to his pose.

Publication *Artus Quellinus. Sculptor of Amsterdam*

The richly illustrated Rijksmuseum publication *Artus Quellinus: Sculptor of Amsterdam* accompanies the exhibition. There was an urgent need for a new publication about Quellinus, as the only monograph about the sculptor is almost a hundred years old. Bieke van der Mark, researcher at the Rijksmuseum and guest curator of the exhibition, is the book's main author. In addition, it includes articles by Liesbeth van Noortwijk, curator of the exhibition, Alice Taatgen, senior curator of the Royal Palace, Frits Scholten, senior curator of sculpture at the Rijksmuseum, and others. The exhibition and publication present the latest insights from the Rijksmuseum research project *Quellinus at Work*. This research project has greatly enriched our knowledge of Quellinus' life, work and workplace practice. How did he come to a final design? How did he handle his materials and implements? Which role did the assistants in his studio have? Answers to these questions have formed the basis of both the exhibition and the new go-to reference book about Artus Quellinus.

The publication is available from 17 June 2025 in Dutch and English.



Artus Quellinus

Bozzetto of a cog carried by Minerva, Mercury, Hercules and Neptune, ca. 1651-1652

Terracotta, 31,7 x 29,5 x 24 cm

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (loan City of Amsterdam)

Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The Dutch word 'boetseren' (modelling a sculpture), resembles *bozzetto*, a sketch in clay. We see this happening here. Quellinus seems to be modelling his design before our eyes.



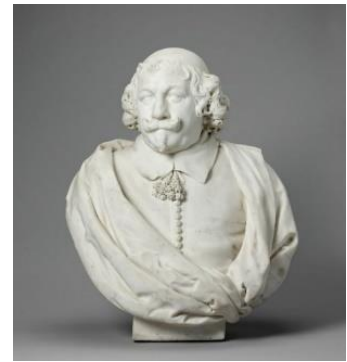
Artus Quellinus
St Peter, ca. 1659
marble, h. ca. 220 cm
Antwerp, Sint-Andrieskerk
Photo: Art in Flanders, Hugo Maertens

Quellinus' religious masterpiece, his monumental *St Peter*, is coming back to Amsterdam for the exhibition for the first time after more than 360 years. Quellinus gave *St Peter* the dignity of a saint, combined with a deeply felt emotive appeal of remorse and repentance.

Themes in the exhibition

Mighty in marble

Quellinus made impressive portrait busts of Amsterdam burgomasters and other influential politicians. The lively style combined with the materiality of marble emphasised the sitters' status. The portraits are presented in the Citizens' Hall, welcoming visitors to the Palace and the exhibition. Never before were so many important seventeenth-century portrait busts shown together.



Artus Quellinus,
Portrait of Andries de Graeff (1611-1678), 1661
marble, 76 x 76 x 36 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Artus Quellinus
Portraits of Cornelis Witsen (1605-1669) and Catharina Opsy (geb. 1619), 1658
marble, 71 x 60 x 37 cm and 72 x 57 x 35 cm
Paris, Musée du Louvre
Photo : Musée du Louvre

Antwerp, City of Rubens

Artus Quellinus grew up in a family of artists in Antwerp, a bustling city with a lively cultural scene. Peter Paul Rubens and his innovative style set the tone in Flanders. The world-famous painter was a friend of the Quellinus family and mentor to the young Artus, who learnt to translate Rubens' lifelike figures into three-dimensional sculptures.



Artus Quellinus
Samson and Delilah, ca. 1640
terracotta, 37,5 x 43 x 31 cm

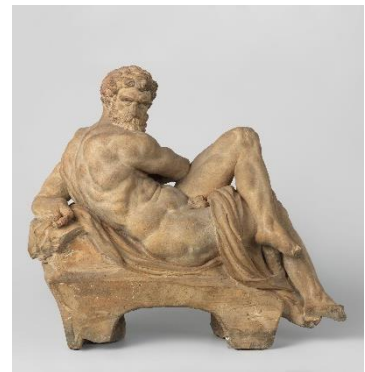
Berlin, Skulpturensammlung Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Photo: SMB

Artus Quellinus
Virgin and Child, ca. 1640-1647
Terracotta, 31,5 x 13,5 x 21,5 cm
Copenhagen, SMK – Statens Museum for Kunst
Photo: SMK – Statens Museum for Kunst

Erasmus Quellinus the Younger and Jan Philips van Thielen
Flower garland with a statuette of the Virgin and Child, ca. 1652
Oil on canvas, 155,7 x 123,5 cm
Mannheim, Reiss-Engelhorn Museum
Photo: Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim

To Rome

Around 1636, Quellinus travelled to Rome. While there, he not only saw ancient sculptures, but also those of his famous predecessor Michelangelo and contemporaries. Quellinus brought two worlds together: influences from Italy, and the Flemish exuberance of Rubens' work.



Roman after a Greek original, 1st-5th century A.D.
bronze elements attributed to Nicolas Cordier, ca. 1610-1611
Zingarella
Marble and bronze, h. 183cm
Paris, Musée du Louvre
Photo : Musée du Louvre

Artus Quellinus
Model for Prudentia, 1650-1651
terracotta, h. 91 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
Photo Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Artus Quellinus after Michelangelo
The Day, 1658
Terracotta, 43 x 48,5 x 19,3 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



Artus Quellinus
Virgin and Child with John the Baptist, ca. 1640-1647
Terracotta, h. 32,5 cm
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation
Photo: The Phoebus Foundation

An endearing scene of the sacred mother and child who lock eyes. In capturing this spontaneous moment, Quellinus allows us to feel their intimate bond.



Artus Quellinus
The Element Earth, 1655-1656
Avesnes stone with white paint, 233 x 176 cm
Citizens' Hall, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen



Artus Quellinus
Festoon with a monkey, plants and fruit (detail), ca. 1655
Marble, h. ca. 250 cm
Citizens' Hall, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

The Palace walls are sumptuously decorated with festoons: garlands with flora and fauna. With sunflowers, oak leaves, grapes, corn, pears and lemons. With squirrels, monkeys, birds, shells, crabs and fish. Every festoon is unique.

Themes in the exhibition (cont.)

Putti, Putti Everywhere

While in Rome, Quellinus appropriates the popular *putto*-motif from François du Quesnoy, and introduces it in the Northern Netherlands. These nude children are depicted playing together or with animals, or weeping tragically, introducing a happy or melancholy note, depending on the context.



Artus Quellinus (attributed)
Child Bacchantes and Satyrs Dancing and Playing Music, ca. 1640
ivory, 16 x 10 x 2,5 cm
Private Collection
Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



François du Quesnoy
Child Bacchantes and a Goat, ca. 1626-1630
Marble, 24,2 x 41,8 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (purchased with the support of the M. van Poecke Family/Rijksmuseum Fund and the J.W. Edwin Vom Rath Fund/Rijksmuseum Fund)
Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Eye for Nature

Quellinus was a keen observer of the natural world, which can be seen in his animal sculptures and the many festoons in the Palace: sculpted garlands with flora and fauna. They celebrate the rich variety and abundance of flowers, plants, animals and shells, both local and foreign.



Artus Quellinus
Lioness Suckling her Cubs, ca. 1640-1650
terracotta, l. 32 cm
New York, The Leiden Collection
Photo: The Leiden Collection



Artus Quellinus

Bozzetto for a door lunet with putti and fish, ca. 1651-1652

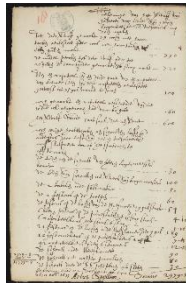
terracotta, 44,5 x 80 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (loan City of Amsterdam)

Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

'Sculptor of Amsterdam'

The construction of Amsterdam's new town hall – now the Royal Palace – was a project unprecedented in its scale and lavishness. For Quellinus, it was the most important commission of his life. The mastermind behind the building's overall design was architect Jacob van Campen. He envisioned architecture and art to combine to reflect a perfect universe, with Amsterdam at its centre. Quellinus' classical but vibrant visual idiom matched this ambition perfectly.



Barend Graat

Stonemasonry yard on Keizersgracht, ca. 1650-1659

Pen and ink and brown and grey wash, 250 x 448 mm

Amsterdam City Archives

Photo: Amsterdam City Archives

Artus Quellinus

Bill for various services, 1655

Thesaurie Ordinaria Archive

Amsterdam City Archives

Photo: Amsterdam City Archives



Artus Quellinus

Festoon with shells and door lunet with putti and fish, ca. 1655

Avesnes stone with white paint (festoon) and marble (lunet), ca. 145 x 170 cm

Southeast Gallery, Royal Palace Amsterdam

Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

Themes in the exhibition (cont.)

The Master and his Workshop

Quellinus must have had dozens of assistants at his workshop in Amsterdam. What was his work process? Surviving models in fired clay give us the chance to look over his shoulder.



Artus Quellinus

Model for the tympanum on the Dam side (a triton and nereid), 1650-1653

Terracotta, 44,7 x 30 cm

Amsterdam Museum (loan City of Amsterdam)

Photo: Amsterdam Museum

Artus Quellinus

Model for The Judgement of Junius Brutus in the Tribunal, ca. 1651-1652

Terracotta, 70 x 83,5 x 20 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Rombout Verhulst

Model for the Tribunal's bronze doors, ca. 1652

Unfired clay, 65,6 x 48,4 cm

Amsterdam Museum (loan City of Amsterdam)

Photo: Amsterdam Museum

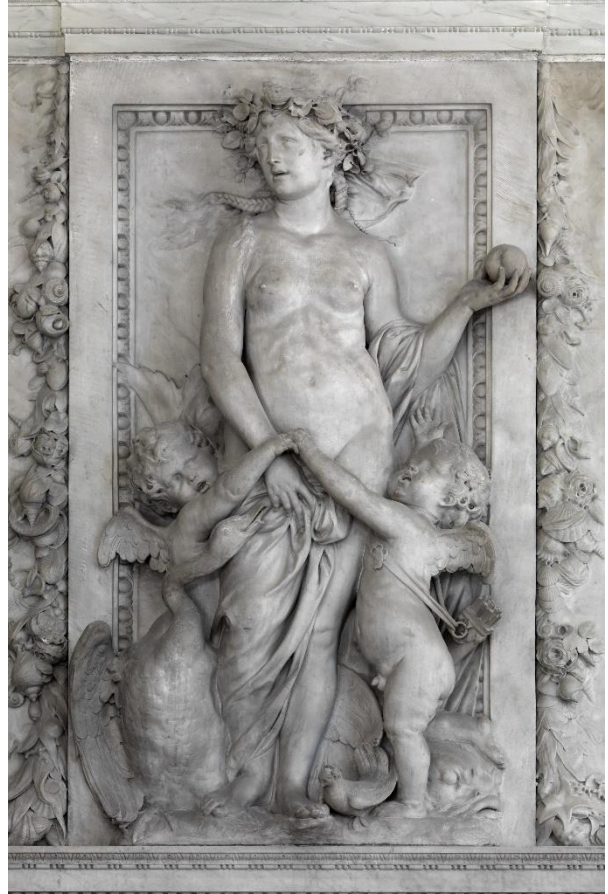
Networker in Amsterdam

Besides his work for the town hall, Quellinus completed numerous other commissions in Amsterdam, including the monumental fountain of Pallas Athena, which the City of Amsterdam presented as a diplomatic gift to stadtholder Johan Maurits in Cleves. Quellinus' brother Hubertus recorded the sculptural programme of the town hall in over a hundred prints. They helped spread the sculptor's fame even further.



Artus Quellinus
Pallas Athena, 1660
marble, h. 342 cm
Cleves, Museum Kurhaus Kleve
Photo: Museum Kurhaus Kleve

Quellinus' Pallas Athena appears combative and dignified: a classical goddess at her finest. The impressive fountain was a diplomatic gift from the city of Amsterdam to Stadtholder Johan Maurits in Cleves. The fountain became the centrepiece of the stadholder's park landscape designed by Jacob van Campen.



Artus Quellinus,
Mars, ca. 1653-1654
 and
 Rombout Verhulst
Venus, ca. 1653-1654
 Northwest Gallery, Royal Palace Amsterdam
 Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen

Quellinus was extremely skilled in depicting different fabrics and textures in marble. He dressed Mars, god of war, in a draped cloak, metal chain mail, a tunic made of strips of leather and very thin trousers. In the Gallery, Mars glances towards his beloved Venus, goddess of love, sculpted by Quellinus' most talented apprentice Rombout Verhulst.

Themes in the exhibition (cont.)

After Quellinus

Quellinus' Amsterdam workshop was a springboard for talented young sculptors. His most successful assistants were his cousin Artus Quellinus the Younger, Rombout Verhulst, Bartholomeus Eggers and Giusto Le Court. They appropriated Quellinus' innovative style.



Giusto Le Court
Envy, ca. 1665
Marble, h. 70 cm
Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André
Photo : Musée Jacquemart-André

Giusto Le Court
Mercury, ca. 1655-1657
Marble, h. 86 cm
Stra, Museo Nazionale di Villa Pisani
Photo : Museo Nazionale di Villa Pisani

Artus Quellinus
Mercury (detail), ca. 1652-1653
Marble, 189 x 107 cm
Southeast Gallery, Royal Palace Amsterdam
Photo: Royal Palace Amsterdam, Tom Haartsen



Artus Quellinus the Younger
Humility, ca. 1690-1699
oak, h. 140 cm
Wouw, Lambertuskerk
Photo: Liesbeth van Noortwijk

Quellinus' cousin and assistant bore his name: Artus Quellinus the Younger gave the lively classical style a new, extra decorative twist, entirely in line with the fashions of the late seventeenth century.