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## HISTORY

*Dogs in paintings run, play, follow the prey, take care of their puppies and look at us.  
Such paintings are indispensable for unraveling the history of dogs.*

# DOGS AND DWARFS

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

### WHAT DO WE SEE?

Paintings of dogs portrayed with a dwarf became popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. Dwarfs were common at nearly every European court; the Spanish royal court had more than 100 dwarfs. They were objectified status symbols – court jesters, and kept to provide entertainment. They were given as gifts to fellow kings and queens; some were sold among royal families. Sometimes a royal bride would receive a dwarf as a wedding gift. Nevertheless, dwarfs had a good position at the royal courts. They danced at parties, made jokes, made music and were mimics, sometimes of their royal owners. On the one hand they got a lot of attention, but on the other, they were sometimes treated very badly. In general, they were considered slip-ups of nature.

### LIKE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

The dwarfs' owners showed them off and dressed them in expensive clothing; artists were commissioned to paint their portraits. Sovereigns and their children were portrayed with a dwarf, but the most interesting paintings show a dog and a dwarf. Some dogs were painted with a dwarf to emphasize both their sizes. Some paintings are mildly humorous, but overall they feel awkward. I did not find any paintings with dogs and dwarfs at northern European courts; most such paintings were made in Spain, Italy and France. When morality changed in the 18th and 19th centuries and people were no longer considered somebody's property, dwarfs ceased to be seen as part of court life.



Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf  
(ca. 1545) by Antonio Moro

*Even Princes of the Church kept dwarfs at their courts.*

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## 1. CARDINAL GRANVELLE'S DWARF (ca. 1545)

It was not only monarchs, but also Princes of the Church who kept dwarfs at their courts. The unnamed dwarf in Antonio Moro's painting *Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf* is an example. Anthonis Mor (1517-77), a Dutch painter in vogue at European courts, especially in Spain, made portraits of Margaretha of Parma, Prince William of Orange, and King Felipe II of Spain. Antonio Moro is the Spanish version of his name. Cardinal Granvelle was King Felipe's most influential advisor; he convinced the king to declare William of Orange an outlaw.

The dog's collar is decorated with the cardinal's coat of arms. At first glance it seems as if the dwarf is holding a leash, but it's a bauble. The nameless dwarf is dressed in fine clothes, wears a pointed cap and carries a sword. In spite of his warlike appearance, the dwarf seems vulnerable next to the huge dog. *Musée du Louvre, Paris*



*Las Meninas (1656) by Diego Velázquez*

The best-known painter of dogs and dwarfs at European courts is Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). The dog is a Mastiff, a type popular in 17th-century Spain and a forerunner of the Perro de Presa Canario, Bull-mastiff and others. The dog has cropped ears and a beautiful black mask.

## 2. LAS MENINAS (1656)

The best-known painter of dogs and dwarfs at European royal courts is Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). For many years, he was the Spanish royalty's court painter. At least 10 Velázquez portraits of court dwarfs are known; most of them are in the Prado Museum in Madrid. His world-famous *Las Meninas* – *The Ladies-in-Waiting* – was painted in 1656. The painting shows the Infanta Margarita Teresa (left; 1651-73), daughter of the Spanish King Felipe IV (1605-65), with her ladies-in-waiting and two dwarfs. Maria Bárbola, the dwarf on the right, is dressed in the same type of rich clothing as the Infanta and her maids of honor. In front of her lies a large yellow dog with cropped ears and a beautiful mask, being provoked by another dwarf,

Nicolasico Pertusato from Italy.

The dog is a Mastiff, a type of dog popular in 17-century Spain. No doubt this type is a forerunner of the Perro de Presa Canario, Bull-mastiff and others. Prominently placed in the painting, the dog was without doubt an important member of the household. Another Velázquez painting with this type of dog, possibly the same dog, shows King Felipe IV in hunting clothes. In the 17th century, hunting Mastiffs were used on large game. *Museo del Prado, Madrid*



*Large Dog, Dwarf and Lad (1652)  
by Flemish artist Jan Fyt  
The dog could be a forerunner of the Great Dane.*

## 3. LARGE DOG, DWARF AND LAD (1652)

Flemish painter Jan Fyt (1611-61) from Antwerp (Belgium), is well-known for his paintings of flowers, animals and hunting still lifes. In 1652, he painted *Large Dog, Dwarf and Lad*. The question is what the client intended: a portrait of the dog or of the lad? The dog is dominant in the painting; even in relation to the boy he's huge. The dog's collar is a dark bow; it seems the boy has wrapped the end around his finger. Maybe the boy's plans can be discerned from what he and the dwarf are holding. Is it an enormous red collar with (golden?) rings at the end? Are they going for a walk? Is it a shabrack (military saddlecloth) with little stirrups for small feet? The boy's name is unknown, but he's clearly from a wealthy family.

*Staatliche Kunst Sammlungen, Dresden*



*Don Antonio el Inglés (1640s)  
by Diego Velázquez  
The dog is a Mastiff type,  
but a black coat with white  
markings is a little unusual.*

## 4. DON ANTONIO EL INGLÉS (1640s)

In the 1640s, Velázquez painted *Don Antonio el Inglés* – *Don Antonio the Englishman*. Another name is *Portrait of a Buffoon and Dog*. In 1879, American painter John Singer Sargent made a copy of this painting and named it *Dwarf with a Mastiff*. Most striking about the painting is the almost impressionist style, and the baroque clothing with lace



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collar and cuffs. The feathered hat and knee-length boots complete the look. Don Antonio keeps the dog firmly on a red leash. Again the dog is a Mastiff, but the black coat with white markings is a little unusual for this type. William Secord, in his book *Dog Painting 1840-1940*, didn't label the dog as a breed, but the type can be seen in many 17th-century Spanish paintings.

*Museo del Prado, Madrid*

### 5. FERDINAND II AND HIS COURT DWARF (1604)



Ferdinand II and his Court Dwarf (1604)  
*Joseph Heintz the Elder (1564-1609) was a Swiss painter and architect. Is the Emperor's hand on the dwarf's head a gesture of protection, pride or possession?*

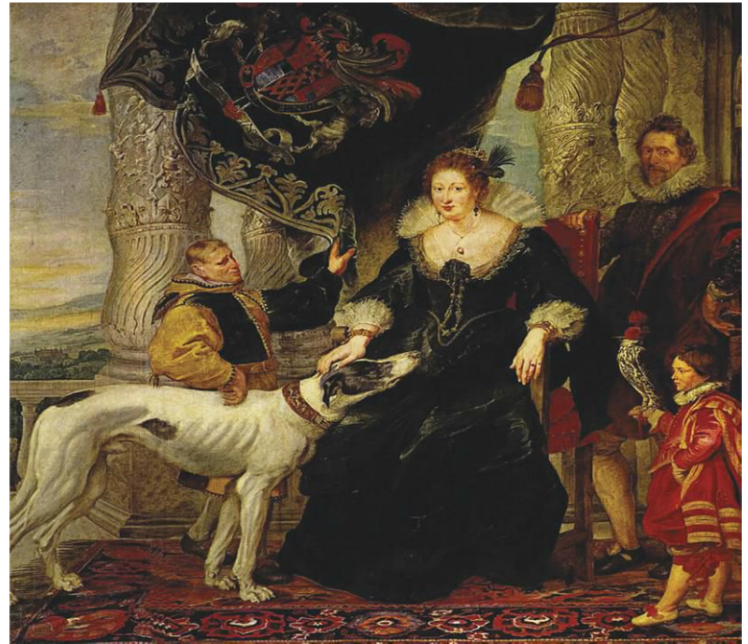
Joseph Heintz the Elder (1564-1609) was a Swiss painter and architect appointed by Bohemian King Rudolf II as portraitist and court painter. The artist worked in Prague, Rome and Augsburg painting religious subjects and portraits, as well as erotic mythological themes for his noble client. In 1604, he made a portrait of Ferdinand II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, with his

dwarf and small Isabella-colored dog. With its hanging tail, short muzzle and drop ears it's a typical small dog of the time. The dog is pulling the leash a little and wants to walk away, but the dwarf keeps the leash tight. The emperor's hand is on the dwarf's head. Is it a gesture of protection, pride or possession?

*Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*

### 6. ALETHEA HOWARD, COUNTESS OF ARUNDEL (1620)

Flemish baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) was born in Siegen, Germany, and died in Antwerp, Belgium. He was a multi-faceted artist, being sculptor, painter, architect and diplomat. Rubens was court painter for Archduke Albrecht of Austria and Archduchess Isabella of Spain; he moved in the best circles. In 1620, Rubens painted a portrait of Alethea Howard, Countess of Arundel (1585-1654), the wife of Thomas Howard, 21st Duke of Arundel (1585-1646), when she was in Antwerp on her way to Italy. She was heir to a large fortune and her husband Thomas was an ambitious art collec-



Alethea Howard, Countess of Arundel (1620)  
*by Peter Paul Rubens.  
The dog is obviously a Greyhound.*

tor. Their wealth must be seen; therefore, the Countess of Arundel posed for Rubens with her dog and court jester, and Robin, her dwarf. The man in the background was not in the original painting; an unknown artist added him later. Some sources say it is Thomas Howard, others Sir Dudley Carleton, an art collector, diplomat and secretary of state.

The dog is obviously a sighthound – a Greyhound. Its white coat has some black markings, its collar is richly decorated. The jester's hand lies on the dog's back; it seems that he wants to say something to Alethea, who caresses the dog's head. Although Rubens was not a trained animal painter, the dog's portrait is extremely good. Four centuries later, the Greyhound still looks much the same.

*Alte Pinakothek, München*

### 7. HAIRY HARRY, PIETRO THE COURT JESTER AND AMON THE DWARF (ca. 1598)

Strangely enough, the name of this painting does not include the two dogs, although they are prominently placed. Between 1598 and 1600, Italian painter Agostino Carracci (1557-1602) made this rather curious genre painting of *Arrigo peloso, Pietro matto e Amon nano* (Hairy Harry, Pietro the court jester and Amon the dwarf, who was also known as Rodomonte). There is a lot of detail to take in. The two dogs have been skilfully painted and, unlike the dogs in some other paintings in this article, it's possible to connect one of them to a modern breed.

The dog on the left is a spaniel or setting spaniel. The head is beautiful and typical of a gundog, as is the coat. At first sight it could be a large English Springer Spaniel, but that would be nonsense. The English Springer didn't exist in Italy at the end of the 16th century; it was

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developed three centuries later in England. Standing next to the dwarf, it seems to be a large dog, but it is not. The dog on Hairy Harry's lap is small and nondescript with a black-and-tan coat, curled tail, drop ears, a short brown nose and large eyes.

This curious painting was probably commissioned by Cardinal Eduardo Farnese, Duke of Parma, for his Palazzo Farnese in Rome, to show exotics that lived at court for amusement. Surrounded by the dogs, two monkeys and a parrot, sits Henry Gonzalez (Arrigo Peloso), a native of the Canary Islands. On the left is Amon the dwarf, on the right Pietro the jester. Not for nothing has Carracci been called the inventor of the caricature.

*Museo di Capodimonte, Naples*

### 8. THE DOGS OF THE MEDICI FAMILY IN THE BOBOLI GARDEN (early 17th Century)

The most beautiful painting I've found of a dwarf with dogs is *The Dogs of the Medici Family in the Boboli Garden* by Tiberio Titi (1578-1637). Titi worked mainly for the Florentine nobility and was the official portraitist of the well-known and wealthy Medici family. At the beginning of the 17th century, Titi painted the Medici family dogs in their Boboli garden. This garden is now a park in Florence, situated behind the Palazzo Pitti, a large Renaissance palace bought by the Medicis in 1549. At that time, royal courts and noble houses



*The Dogs of the Medici Family in the Boboli Garden*  
by Tiberio Titi (1573-1627)

had the habit of assembling collections of animals – monkeys, birds etc. – that were recorded in paintings. Of course, those families had the staff to care for the animals. The caretaker for the Medici dogs is depicted as a well-fed, arrogant dwarf whose function was more important than making jokes and fooling around.

In his left hand he holds the gold cord of a large black dog that re-



*Court Dwarf of the*  
*Spanish King Carlos II (1661-1700) and a Small Dog*  
by Juan Carreño de Miranda (1614-85)

sembles a Mastiff or young bear. Maybe it is a young bear. Then there are three black-and-white dogs, various red-and-white dogs with long and short coats, and two white dogs, one of them in a nice red box. They wear little bells, red bows and fancy collars. Most historians have called them lapdogs. The longer-coated, red-and-white dogs could be Toy spaniels, while the white one in the middle could be an early Lowchen. The artist had little skill painting dogs; his portraits show more quality.

*Private Collection*

### 9. COURT DWARF OF CARLOS II (1661-1700) AND A SMALL DOG

The 16th- and 17th-century Spanish Habsburg court kept dwarfs not only as a source of amusement, but as servants and animal caretakers, nursemaids and companions to the many princes and princesses. Many Spanish artists were influenced by Velázquez's renderings of court dwarfs and jesters. Juan Carreño de Miranda (1614-85), born to a noble family and appointed court painter in 1669, made *Enano de la Corte de Carlos II con un perrillo* (*Court Dwarf of Carlos II and a Small Dog*). As in other paintings of small dogs, this small dog is bloated.

### 10. RETRATO DEL ENANO MICHOL (ca. 1680)

In 1680, Carreño had made another painting, *Retrato del enano Michol* (*The return of Michol the Dwarf*). Although the dwarf in this painting and the previous one appear to be the same, they are not necessarily. Possibly Michol – full name Miguel Pol – was the animal caretaker. He is dressed in a fancy black coat with enormous cuffs



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that emphasize his size. The open pomegranates, emblems of the Habsburgs, refer to Michol's royal owner. The two small dogs are a lapdog type; the one on the left resembles a small spaniel.

*Meadows Museum, Dallas*

### 11. DWARFS WITH A DOG (1670s)

In the 1670s, two royal dwarfs belonging to Carlos II of Spain (1661-1700) were painted by the Flemish-Spanish painter and draftsman Jan van Kessel the Younger (1654-1708). He changed his Dutch name to Juan Vanchesel el Mozo (probably how the Spanish pronounced his name) or el Joven. Van Kessel was a member of the Flemish family of painters that included his father (Jan van Kessel the Elder) and uncle ("the other" Jan van Kessel). Born in Antwerp,



Retrato del Enano Michol  
(*The Return of Michol the Dwarf*) (ca. 1680)  
by Juan Carreño de Miranda (1614-85).

he moved to Madrid in or before 1669. The dwarfs are depicted in the courtyard of the Buen Retiro Palace in Madrid with King Felipe IV's monument in the background. They are accompanied by a large dog; the head of the dwarf dressed in black is only a bit higher than the dog's back. The dwarf on the left holds a long red rope. There's something written on the collar but I can't decipher it. The dog is very much the same Mastiff type as the one Jan Fyt painted in 1652. Both artists were born and lived in Antwerp, and were of the same generation, so likely knew each other's work.

*National Museum, Poznań, Poland*



Dwarfs with a Dog (1670s)  
by Jan van Kessel the Younger  
*The dwarfs belonged to Carlos II of Spain (1661-1700)*

### 12. THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO PAINTING A MUSICAL COMPANY (1631)

In 1631, Dutch painter Jan Miense Molenaer (1610-68) made a lively genre painting of musicians, a dog and a dwarf in his studio. As a pupil of Frans Hals, Molenaer's early work was strongly influenced by him. Molenaer lived and worked in Amsterdam and Haarlem. This painting includes Molenaer himself on the left – he has been working at the painting on the easel, a painting within a painting! The boy behind the chair is being admonished by the woman; the bearded man has a musical instrument under his arm. On the left is a larger stringed instrument, probably a lute. The empty wine jug in front has fallen over – “when the wine is in, the wit is out....” Although the dwarf and dog occupy an important position in the middle of the painting, there is nothing more to say about the dog other than it's a black male with a little tan on the muzzle, under the tail and at its feet. This isn't the only painting showing a dancing dog. A few years later, in 1640, François Verwilt of Rotterdam painted *A Man Dancing with his Dog*. (See *Nothing New: A Man Dancing with his Dog*, *Canine Chronicle 2011-12 Annual*.)

*Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museum, Berlin*



The Artist in his Studio Painting a Musical Company (1631)  
by Jan Miense Molenaer