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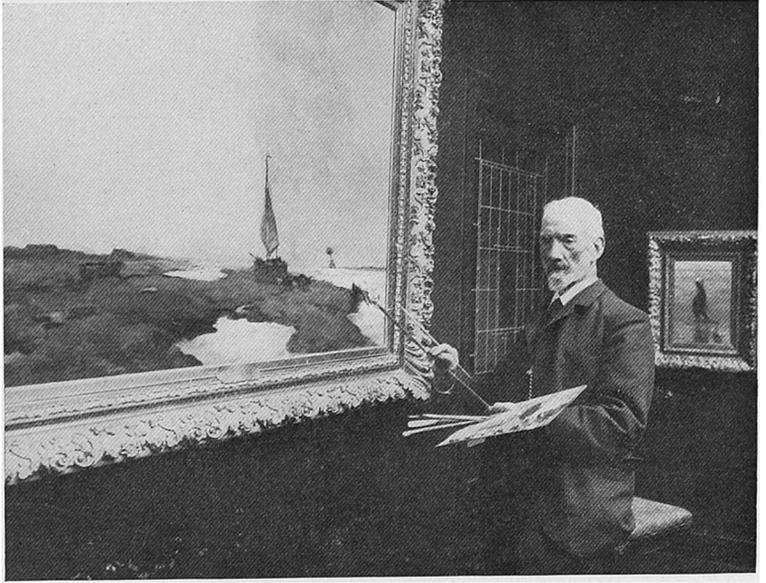
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JOHANNES HENDRICK WEISSENBRUCH  
Portrait Taken in his Studio

## THE ART OF JOHANNES HENDRICK WEISSENBRUCH

The recent death of Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch removes from the art world of Holland one of its most noted and honored figures. Long recognized as one of the modern Dutch masters of painting, it is, however, only of comparatively recent years, since his "Cloudy Day Near Haarlem" was sold to London, that his art has been appreciated outside of his native land. While the names of Israels, Blommers, Alma-Tadema, Mesdag, and many another of his contemporaries have long been household words in English-speaking communities, comparatively few are familiar with the life-story of the great painter who has just passed away in his eightieth year.

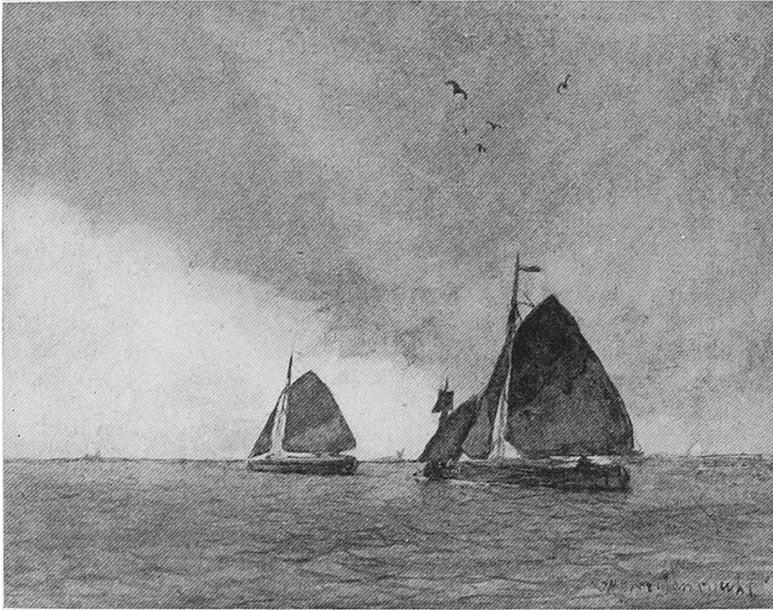
Weissenbruch as an artist was steadfastly loyal to the best traditions of the Dutch school, and any notice of his achievements naturally suggests a word as to the conditions under which the modern Dutch school has developed. Dutch art in the last century passed through various sharply defined stages, and it is in the last of these—and the greatest—that Weissenbruch finds an enviable and abiding place.

During the first half of the century the Dutch and Belgian painters

were avowed followers of the French neo-classical school, and David, Gros, and Girodet were the idols they imitated. Pieneman, Bree, Navez, and Paelinck had their day of popularity and passed away, and the school they represented passed away with them, and left not so much as the faintest impress on the succeeding art of Holland and Belgium.

Then with the rise of the Romantic school in France, under the leadership of Delacroix, Vernet, and Decamps, came romanticism in Holland, and Hubert van Hove, Herman ten Kate, Charles Rochussen, Stroebel, and Van Trigt renounced the classicism of their predecessors and adopted the tenets and practices of their French mentors. Scott, Schiller, and Hugo inaugurated romanticism in literature, and supplied to the school of romantic art its themes and its heroes and heroines for pictorial treatment.

On the one hand, the classicists paid more attention to line than to color; and on the other, the romanticists neglected the rich life of the present in their devotion to an assumed golden age, which was supposed to transcend the actual in its romantic interests. It was inevitable that against both these schools there should sooner or later be a



RIVER VIEW—WATER-COLOR  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

reaction, and reaction came in a double form: First, a reverent study of the warm lights and rich colorings of the early Dutch masters; and second, a firm insistence on the worth and dignity of present-day life for pictorial purposes.

A group of talented men, among whom were Hubert van Hove and Josef Israels, undertook the difficult task of restoring life and vitality to their country's art. Van Hove was the first to admire the beauties of the old Dutch masters, and to advocate a return as regards color schemes to the principles and practices of Rubens, Rembrandt, and the other giants in whose fame the Dutch people glory. Israels was one of the first to recognize the poetry of humble Dutch life, and to insist by practice and precept on incorporating in art all that was sweet and lovable in the every-day life about him.

The seeds thus sown took root and had a generous growth. The warmer, richer palettes of the early masters became in a measure apparent in the work of the younger Dutch painters. Blommers, Valkenburg, Artz, Neuhuys, Breitner, Witkamp, De Jong, and others became ardent disciples of the leading spirits in the movement. In landscape, too, Kobell, Schelfhout, Koekkoek, and others went to nature earnestly and reverently, and likewise inaugurated a new régime. As far as possible they renounced the studio, and in meadow, on canal bank, at the seaside, worked in the open air, feeling the influence and catching the glory of the actual. The artificial in seascape and landscape quickly died out, and the "picturesque," which has been a stumbling-block in the way of so many promising artists, was almost as speedily rejected as of less interest and beauty than the gray skies, the flat fields, and the saffron seas of commonplace, every-day Holland. One of the earliest and most enthusiastic members of this new school was Weissenbruch.

"What was called the picturesque in a landscape," says Max Rooses, in discussing the development of Dutch art at this time, "became an unnecessary detail to the younger men of the newer school; they painted nature in its own beauty and in the simplicity of its charm as they saw it in their daily life. They followed the French school up to a certain point, but their work was more simple and homelike; they learned to appreciate the beautiful, soft, hazy atmosphere of their own country—that haziness which envelops everything with a soft, vaporous air like the cloudiness of a string of real pearls.

"Of this group Bilders is the most important. He admired in the landscape, not a favorite spot, or a pretty pool, or a gayly colored cow, he saw rather land and meadow and wood in the mass as one whole, beautiful by reason of its grand lines, its rich tones. William Roelofs went a step farther; his first works differed little from those of his predecessors, but by degrees he tore himself away from the accepted style and became the true reformer. It was no longer the color or the beautiful contours of a view that attracted him, but

the country itself, the vegetation, the cattle in the meadows, the sky that seems always holiday-making, the ever-changing clouds, always full of beauty.

“A whole school followed in this new track: Van de Sande Bakhuyzen, whose handling is simpler than that of Bilders; Mevrouw Bilders van Bosse and Mevrouw Mesdag, both broad and masculine in their art; van Borselen, with his soft and fine touch; Stortenbeker, full of simplicity, yet not without greatness; Gabriel, who depicted with extraordinary fidelity both land and sea; John Vrolijk, whose cows are always grazing in sunny meadows under a brilliantly blue sky; de Haas, whose cattle are more heavy and massive; du Chattel, who prefers the effect of light in spring and in autumn; Apol, who devotes himself almost exclusively to snow scenes, producing singularly charming effects of the sun shining upon monotonous whiteness; Mari ten Kate, with whom the subject is as if of minor importance; de Bock, who loves the giants of the forest, and who takes us along rivers and lakes into fields and into meadows, in the broad glare of the sun, or in a gray light, understanding the rendering of Dutch landscape in all its phases; Wijsmüller, who is attracted by nature in the most varying moods and is able to reproduce them all with equal taste and ease; Weissenbruch, who paints all that appeals to him in nature in the most happy and natural manner; Tholen, who by great accuracy, both in drawing and in color, is able to give importance to every subject.”

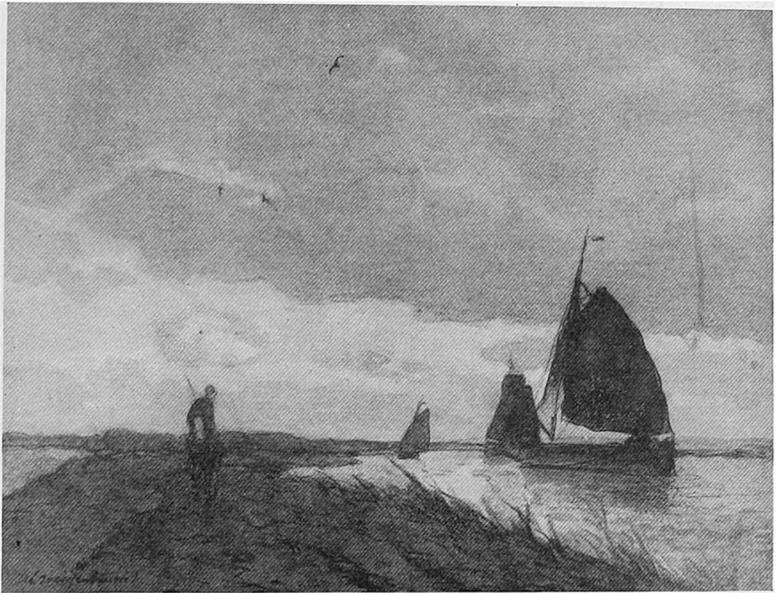
This list of men who have attained eminence by renouncing the dicta of former schools, and going direct to nature with the distinct purpose of getting as close to facts as possible, might be greatly extended, but it is needless here to follow in fuller detail the development of modern Dutch art. I have quoted the foregoing mainly to show with what men Weissenbruch was associated in furthering the



ON THE BEACH  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

aims and ambitions of the new school, and to assign him his place in his nation's art, which by common assent is of pre-eminent interest.

Apropos of this art, it may be said here—a truth which Max Rooses points out and emphasizes—that among the schools of different countries and nations the Dutch school takes a peculiar and distinguished place. It has not the versatility of others, it feels no inclination to embark upon great subjects, nor to take voyages of discovery into



THE "SPAARNE"

By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

unknown regions; but it does not seek to deceive or impose upon the world by any false glitter; it is opposed to all show and exaggeration, all that may be called theatrical; it is thoroughly sincere, and it expresses and renders just what it sees and feels. The Dutch school knows its *métier* better than any other, and is the worthy and direct descendant of former centuries, transformed though not degenerated. The subjects are modest, but acquire importance by fine execution; the colors are sober, pure, and in good taste, neither loud nor discordant; conscientious and honest, it combines with its homely virtues the higher attributes of real art; a sensitiveness for the beautiful and the power to portray it, without being either commonplace or artificial.

The art of Weissenbruch is part and parcel of the national art thus

broadly outlined. Nature gifted him with a constitution as strong as iron and a mental vision of extraordinary clearness; it endowed him with wit, humor, and forcefulness of address. And he has imparted to his canvases his own personal characteristic. Thus the appeal he makes is simple, direct, and spontaneous. As in his spoken language, so in the language of his pigments, he knows where to place the points



HARBOR SCENE

By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

of emphasis with telling effect. He never perpetrates the fanciful or the mysterious, and he is never guilty of sentimentality in paint.

He early learned the importance of judicious elimination in the interest of power, and persistently put this principle into practice. His characteristic canvases show a stretch of sand, with the sea beyond and the sky above, and possibly but a single sail in the distance; or an expanse of green meadow, with a tree or two or a windmill to break monotony; or a sedge-lined canal, with a lighter or two as the only suggestions of human interest. In a word, absolute simplicity of composition, without an unnecessary detail to break the impression he wishes to convey, is an essential feature of his best canvases.



LAKE NEAR NOORDEN  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

was thoroughly grounded in the principles and practices of the new school, to which he ever remained loyal. In one particular he eclipsed both his teachers and his associates, and that is his remarkable manipulation of light and shade. This is the distinctive glory of his art.

No matter how tame and commonplace the scene, seascape or landscape, the luminosity of his skies, the effect he gets of a flood of sunlight breaking through the clouds or glinting on the waves cannot fail to arrest the attention of the specta-



LANDSCAPE  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch  
Courtesy of W. Scott Thurber

Weissenbruch came naturally by his devotion to the Dutch landscape as it is actually seen. Born in 1824, he was first the pupil of van Hove, and subsequently for a time the pupil of Schelfhout. By these masters he

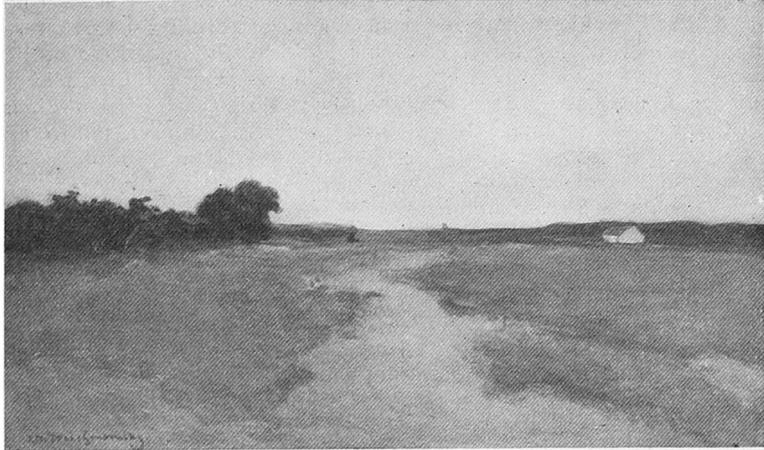
tor and elicit words of admiration. In this one particular at least he has had no peer in Holland. He fully realized this, and deliberately sought opportunities for the display of his abilities. Indeed, he watched for gray days and stormy days for the purpose of catching and recording an elusive gleam of light or a glorious burst of sunshine.

Great as were the artist's gifts as a painter, he worked untiringly for the reputation he acquired. Many of his canvases he had in his studio twenty, thirty, or even forty years before he was satisfied to send out the finished work to the public. If he lost his initial inspiration he waited for it to return. In a conversation at one time relative to the way in which he worked, he said: "My whole being must be deeply affected." Again, in discussing an exhibition he remarked: "Better send in one good picture than a lot of poor ones, but then that *good* one must be so good that it almost walks out of the frame and becomes a portion of nature itself."

Early in his career he adopted the advice of his friend Bosboom never to destroy any of his studies, and consequently to the day of his death his studio was literally crowded with a multitude of drawings and unfinished canvases. His common practice was to make rough sketches of such scenes as caught his fancy and to color these or work in the details at his leisure in the studio. Apparently he worked on the principle that there was sufficient cause in the first place for his making the study, and if for any reason he lost the original impulse he never despaired of its returning. He jocosely likened his studio to a hospital, and his "scrawls," as he called his sketches, to patients. Said he one day: "You see I am like a surgeon in a hospital; all these lying around me are my patients, and as I walk about



NOORDEN—STUDY IN CHALK  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch



LANDSCAPE

By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch  
 Courtesy of W. Scott Thurber

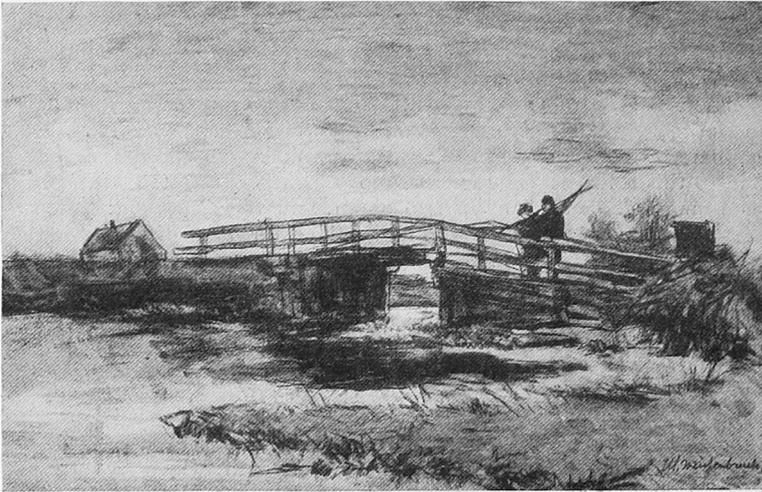
among them I notice those most in need of doctoring. I pick out some sickly looking specimen and say to myself, 'Only wait a moment, and I will find some remedy for you'; some need much medicine, and some even require a severe operation to bring them round. Look at that one in the corner. I believe it is suffering from jaundice, but doubtless I shall find a cure for it.'

He ridiculed the inspirational idea of daubing a canvas over with paint and in an hour or two calling it a masterpiece. Rarely did he allow a picture to go out of his studio inside of years from the time he began it. Many an artist would call this Dutch plodding, but on the principle that dissatisfaction with one's own performance is the first requisite of improvement, and that intelligently directed efforts must of necessity approximate perfection, Weissenbruch's theory and practice was good. If other artists of less renown were to indulge in the same stern self-criticism, make use of the same untiring industry to correct errors, wait as patiently and as confidently for the return of a lost inspiration, and give to each individual work the same care and the same devotion that he gave, there would be fewer failures in the ranks of professional artists.

There is small need here to describe individual pictures by Weissenbruch. They are simply transcripts of every-day Holland scenes, tame often to a fault, shorn of all brilliancy, and devoid of special features. Their supreme merit is their absolute correctness, and for those not familiar with the peculiar characteristics of Dutch

scenery, perhaps even this merit might pass as a demerit. Nevertheless, Weissenbruch must be ranked as one of the masters of landscape and seascape painting in Holland, and it is nothing less than remarkable that his fame did not spread beyond the confines of his own little country until something like ten years ago. Apparently his case is a reversal of the old maxim, "No one is a prophet in his own country." Still it may be noted in passing that honors were his. He won gold medals at Paris, Amsterdam, Chicago, and other cities; was decorated with the order of St. Michaël of Bavaria, and with the order of Oranje-Nassau; and is represented in most of the important museums of Holland.

Most of Weissenbruch's work has been done in the immediate vicinity of his home. Noorden, a picturesque hamlet made famous not merely by himself but by brother artists like Roelofs and Bauffe, was a favorite sketching-ground, and here he got the material for many of his best pictures. He also regularly visited Haarlem, Rynsburg, Katwyk-on-Sea, and other sketching-grounds to which the later Dutch painters have been wont to go for inspiration for their works. It is a significant fact, and one worthy to be noted in this connection as an evidence of the simple tastes and interpretative sense of the Dutch painters, that none of these resorts is remarkable for its natural beauty. Indeed, Noorden is a flat, watery, uninteresting country, which would appeal to few artists, perhaps, except those whose



BRIDGE AT NOORDEN—STUDY  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch



FARM-HOUSE AT NOORDEN—CHARCOAL DRAWING  
By Johannes Hendrick Weissenbruch

supreme ambition was to transcribe the actual, and who, whether from devotion to fact or loyalty to country it matters not, could see beauty in what to most people would be devoid of poetic charm.

A few years ago F. A. E. L. Smissaert, a personal friend of Weissenbruch, as also of most of his contemporary artists, published an appreciative notice of the painter in a Dutch magazine, and his estimate of the man and his work may be fittingly quoted as a conclusion to this article. Said he, apropos of the debt Dutch art owed to such men as Israels, Roelofs, Bosboom, and Weissenbruch:

“We younger men are grateful to them for many things, for they are our pioneers in a healthier interpretation of art. And among them all Weissenbruch holds a prominent place; for who depicts as well as he the effect of the sun struggling through stormy clouds, or who appreciates better the value of light and shade? Who understands the variation in the very atmosphere, the many varieties of sunrise and sunset, and above all things, the sweet, suffused twilight? Who so skillful as he in giving a fresh construction to a well-worn subject, in finding ever new inspirations? Who remains so young and so enthusiastic—who, indeed, but Weissenbruch, whose pictures fill us with delight and create an impression on our minds that is not easily forgotten.

“As a rule, an artist sees nature *à travers son tempérament*. If his

mood be highly strung, he will depict it in a tender, sympathetic manner; if sorrowful, his conception of it will be grave and dreamy; when he feels happy and contented, all nature appears to smile on him, and his work reflects brightness and sunshine; or again, if his temper be fiery and sensitive, strong contrasts of light and shade and startling effects of color become a marked feature of his pictures.

"Weissenbruch proves this rule; he sees nature through the medium of his temperament, which is hot and sensitive, a temperament to which all that is great and noble appeals. His whole being, therefore, as we have already observed, is deeply affected by the beauty of natural scenery, and may be said to be the outcome of his art convictions, which are not acquired, but constitute part and parcel of himself; thus he is in harmony with what he depicts, and he paints in the manner he does because it is impossible for him to do otherwise. Nature has assigned to him the position he holds amongst his fellow-artists."

E. C. CADY.



VUE DE VILLE HOLLANDAISE  
By Jan Weissenbruch