Nika Dubrovsky
adapted by Eugene Ostashevsky

WHAT THE DUTCH LIKE

A drawing book about Dutch painting

with paintings from the State Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg, Russia
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A DRAWING BOOK ABOUT DUTCH PAINTING

WITH PAINTINGS FROM THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM,
SAINT-PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

Adapted by
Eugene Ostashevsky
Are you allowed to play with paintings? Draw on them? Draw in them? Draw yourself in them? Are you allowed to play with the people in the paintings? To dance, make faces, and throw snowballs at them? In this book you are!

On weekends my mother took me to the Hermitage, a vast museum in the Russian city of Saint-Petersburg, that once was a palace for princes and princesses. I especially liked to see little paintings of people doing things I understood — dancing, skating, playing games. They came from Holland, a country where Dutch people live.

I also was little back then. That is why, to me, the paintings were large, the galleries went on and on, and the whole palace looked endless, like two mirrors set face to face. Much later, when I too had turned into a mother and an artist, I thought up this book. It’s a book that answers the question I anxiously asked as a child — “Am I allowed?” — with an “Of course you are!”

My book will show you parts of Dutch paintings in the Hermitage. I also drew and I wrote in it — but I left lots and lots of blank space for you. Draw in it! Write in it! Paint it! Color it! Now it’s your book, and it’s up to you to make it a unique work of art.

The end of this book tells you what painters and paintings I included.

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Nika Dubrovsky
They were the aces of faces. Silly faces, scary faces, sad faces, smiley faces. They knew how to face themselves, alright! They faced themselves in pictures. “Who am I, really?”

I made a face, not my own face. I made the face of somebody else. I drew somebody making a face. Can you draw somebody making a face?

They liked to make faces, especially in pictures!
THEY LIKED TO DANCE

ON HOLIDAYS OR OFF.
If the day was no holiday, they would just party without a cause. And on a day with no parties (such days were rare), someone might start dancing in the middle of the street... and, soon enough, the whole town was getting down! “When in Holland, make holidays,” said the people of Holland.

AND WHAT ARE YOUR DANCERS DOING?
ARE THEY FRANCING, ARE THEY FLYING, ARE THEY FALLING, ARE THEY SPINNING IN THE AIR.

ARE THEY STOMPING ON THE GROUND,
ARE THEY HUFFING, ARE THEY CLAPPING,
ARE THEY MAKING NO SOUND?
The Dutch took to growing tulips because tulips are beautiful. They took to selling tulips because they were poor. Tulips became expensive. Then they took to buying and selling tulips because tulips were becoming even more expensive. The Dutch became rich. But then they stopped buying tulips, because why would you buy something just because it is expensive? Duh! The Dutch became poor again.

**ESPECIALLY TULIPS.**

They liked to grow flowers, especially tulips.
THEY LIKED FIGHTS

IN TIGHTS!
I don’t know if they fought all the time or if they just thought fights look good in paintings, the way we think they look good in movies. Dutch people in paintings pull other Dutch people in paintings by the hair, hit other Dutch people in paintings with fists, and even try to poke them with knives.
THEY LIKED FISH, ESPECIALLY HERRING.

How they loved herring! They loved herring a lot. They even held an Annual Herring Test where people stuck fish in their ear and said they were “heart” of herring.

I ESPECIALLY “HEART” MAGIC CAKE. IT’S MAGIC BECAUSE WHEN YOU CUT A SLICE OFF IT, IT GROWS RIGHT BACK AGAIN. DRAW MY CAKE ALL OVER THE PAGE! PUT ICE CREAM ALL OVER IT, AND CHOCOLATE, AND BERRIES, AND... MAYBE HERRING?

I HATE HERRING. WHAT I “HEART” IS CAKE.
The Dutch thought they were much more normal than other people. They thought the people around them were just weird. Like, why weren’t they Dutch?

They called it “The City on the Hill” even though it was flat.

The Dutch thought they were normal. But why couldn’t you be friends with aliens?
They liked ice-skating

On ice or in pictures.

Holland is cold in winter and, at the time when Dutch people loved painting, there were no televisions or computers (which is why they loved painting), so in winter everyone who wasn’t a painter went ice-skating and everyone who was a painter painted people ice-skating.

I think the lines and curls skates leave on ice are a kind of writing in a language I don’t know. Write something in a language you don’t know.
A still life could show food, flowers, musical instruments, books, clocks, candles, and so on. Food eventually gets eaten, flowers wilt, musical instruments play music, book outlive their authors, clocks count the hours, candles go out. A still life is a picture of time.

They liked simple things and put them in pictures called still lifes.

I drew objects of the kind a magician might own.

Draw simple objects that are secretly magical.
They loved all their relatives, even ones they didn’t like.

And everybody in it.

Draw your family. Include relatives that don’t exist.

Like your great-great-grandmother, your third aunt three times removed, and your five incredibly annoying younger brothers.
The Dutch knew how to build tall ships that could sail the ocean. They sailed to places that were totally unlike Holland and, when they come back, they told stories about them. Some of the stories were true.

I drew a head covered in tails. You can ask it what happens on the other side of the ocean. Just don’t comb it.

Draw fantastic creatures that you would like to encounter in your travels.
Back then, people used religious difference as an excuse to steal. If you didn’t have the same religion as your neighbors, they could take your belongings, chase you from your home, and even kill you. The Dutch thought that was dumb. “Come live with us!” they said. “People should believe whatever they want, as long as they work.”
They liked board games and language games.

Just look at them: sometimes they sing, sometimes they dance, and sometimes they even play board games. Other people in other countries had other hobbies: pillaging, plowing, praying, and other things starting with P or other letters.
When I was a Russian child riding over the winter snow in a sled pulled by my mama or papa, I imagined I was being taken somewhere by an untalkative kalamazebra or a flock of minuscule flying bears.
Dutch people who liked to dance also liked to hug and kiss each other — even when dirty, sweaty, and stinky. The worse your friends smelled, the more love you expressed by hugging and kissing them.

Draw your friends and what you like to do together.

Me and my friends are too old to have pillow fights or to run around like crazy. We have to make do with talking while eating.
Most Dutch people were farmers. Raising cows and sheep was their job. But they preferred to pose for pictures with cats and dogs. Cats and dogs are better at being friends. They can be house-trained, which is a great advantage in friendship!

I would like to make friends with a cat who was also human, and an orangutan who was part kangaroo and part parrot. Draw the animals you would want as friends.

They liked animals.

They made friends with cats and dogs.

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THEY LIKED CITY LIVING.

IT TURNED THEM INTO CITIZENS.
In the middle of the city was the main square with a market, a church, and a city hall surrounded by houses and workshops. A river ran through it for fun and profit.

WHAT DOES YOUR DREAM CITY LOOK LIKE?

MY DREAM CITY LOOKS LIKE THIS. IN THE MIDDLE OF IT THERE’S A PLAYGROUND WHERE EVERYONE GOES TO PLAY. FOOD GROWS ON TREES. IT’S NOT YUCKY. NO ONE HAS TO WORK.
I love to read. That’s why I wrote this book.
I love to share what I love.

They liked to read

Anything with letters.
The pictures show all kinds of Dutch people reading: children, women, poor people, old people. They read alone or in company. Sometimes they even think about what they read. It is interesting to look at the face of a person thinking.

Draw somebody you have read a book about, or will read a book about, one day.
They liked to clean.

Imagine that.

“God made the world beautiful. It’s up to men and women to keep it that way.” That was the opinion of Dutch people. “Tidy your room. Wash your hands. Change out of your street shoes when you get inside.” Only a clean house feels like a home.

I drew myself slippers. They fly. They run. They have a built-in motor.

Draw yourself slippers. Unreal slippers.
THEY LIKED TO SHOP

BECAUSE... WHO DOESN'T?!

And that’s why painters painted shops and markets where people bought and sold food, books, jewelry, and lots of other stuff. Some people even bought paintings of their favorite places to shop so that they can look at them when not shopping.

I ALSO LOVE TO BUY STUFF... FOOD! BOOKS! GIFTS! SOME FOR ME AND SOME FOR MY FRIENDS.

DRAW WHAT YOU WANT TO BUY RIGHT NOW.
Holland lies flat and low at the mouths of huge rivers on the edge of a stormy sea. Its soil is unsteady. The Dutch have always been afraid of floods. They built dikes and levees to defend their land. They frightened children with tales of towns submerged by waves.

When I was little I was afraid of war. In school they told us to hide under desks in case of attack by some unnamed enemy.
When people work hard, God helps them make money,” thought the Dutch. “How much money you have shows how much God loves you.” And you can never get enough love.

They liked to make money. They could not get enough of it.

If I had enough money, I would spend it on a trip around the world with my friends.

Draw what you would buy if somebody gave you an entire bag of coins.
If you were in Holland you’d hear music everywhere: in houses and taverns, at markets and fairs, in the street or the countryside — anywhere!

Even Dutch cows loved music. They always wanted to sing along but their mouths were shaped wrong. “Music is so moving,” the Dutch cows kept trying to say.

They amused themselves with it often.

Do you like music? Draw it!
THEY LIKED SCIENCE

AND SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS.

The Dutch built windmills, dams, telescopes, and microscopes. The philosopher Spinoza, son of Jewish refugees, earned money by cutting lenses from glass. Lenses let you see things that are far away as if they were up close, and things that are small as if they were big — or the other way around!

I WOULD LIKE TO INVENT A LENS THAT MAKES ME CHANGE SIZE. THEN I CAN BE BIG WHEN I WANT AND SMALL WHEN I WANT.
They painted many paintings — millions of them, in fact! It used to be that you saw paintings only in churches or castles, but in Holland they thought paintings were so cool, everybody should have them!

I like to draw portraits.

Fill this page with pictures of people you know and people you don’t.

They liked paintings:

Painting them, buying them, owning them, or just looking at them.

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THEY LIKED TO MAKE FACES
The Dutch were fascinated by what the face of a person tells us about the person, and how faces are transformed by emotion and thought. Artists like Adriaen van Ostade painted common people making funny faces. Rembrandt, on the other hand, painted his own face to understand who he was. It is not easy to know who you are.

THEY LIKED TO DANCE
Dutch dances were the dances of ordinary people. They loved dancing on Sundays after church, or at festivals and fairs, called the Kermess. The American poet William Carlos Williams wrote a poem called “The Dance” about another painting of a Kermess: Find it online! Can you hear how the rhythms of the poem repeat the rhythms of awkward but spirited dancing?

THEY LIKED TO GROW FLOWERS
Tulips came to Holland from Turkey in the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, the entire country was neck-deep in tulipmania. The passion for these flowers led to formation of the first financial bubble in Europe: Tulipomania. The price of tulips rose so high that people would pay a fortune for a single bulb. People who could not pay were thrown into jail. The Dutch government then had to step in and regulate the market to prevent even higher prices. Tulips became so expensive that they were called “as sacred, almost like a church.”

THEY LIKED ICE-SKATING
The Dutch invented ice-skates with metal blades inserted into a wooden base. They also played a kind of golf on ice that became the prototype of hockey.

THEY LIKED SIMPLE THINGS
The Dutch loved all the things that made home, home—especially household goods and food. They admired the way different surfaces reflected light. They were masterminded by textures, colors, and consistencies. They thought about the promise of taste in look and smell. They sponged their cows! Envious Europeans were impressed by their ice-skating skills and their ability to turn wetlands into fertile fields.

THEY LIKED CITY LIVING
Holland was more urban than any other European country. Cities were guarded by police in daytime and by men of the guard at night. Children and grownups went strolling to get from place to place or just to have fun.

They liked to be close enough to each other
Dutch society was democratic, at least in comparison with its neighbors. The Spanish, who were Catholic, tried to impose their religion on the Protestant Dutch. But—let’s face it—cows and sheep are not as entertaining up close as they are from far away. Most of the time they just chew and poop. Cats and dogs are more fun. Cats and dogs know how to play.

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THEY LIKED TO SHOP
The Dutch empire was a capitalist one, an empire of trade. Dutch towns were centers of trade and markets. The shops stocked goods that were local, but they also carried products from all over the world. Dutch love of commodities is evident from the level of detail and the effort accorded them in paintings.

THEY LIKED TO CLEAN
While they liked to make money, they also liked their lands and cities clean. They liked to live — shows people played backgammon in taverns for money. They liked riding through the snow. In winter the rivers, canals, and lakes in Holland were coated with thick ice. Children and grownups went skating to get from place to place or just to have fun.

THEY LIKED TO MAKE SCIENCE
Foreign students flocked to Dutch universities to study new approaches to astronomy, chemistry, botany, and Middle Eastern languages. Religion had relatively little influence on academic activity. Some professors were foreign scholars and scientists who fled political or religious persecution at home. Dutch scientists invented many instruments for observation and measuring: the microscope, the refracting telescope, the mercury thermometer, the pendulum clock.

THEY LIKED PAINTINGS
Approximately two thousand painters lived and worked in Holland in the seventeenth century! The Dutch did not worship artists as prophets or heroes, but they did treat them with respect. It was the same respect you would give a jeweler, shoemaker, or a shipbuilder you met with the respect due a person who is good at doing something hard. Yet Holland had no permanent public places for viewing art. Museums had not been invented yet, and Protestantism prohibited putting images into churches. Ironically, that prohibition encouraged Dutch artists to paint what they knew best—everyday life! It was by painting the world around them that they learned to see it.

THEY LIKED TO MAKE MUSIC
The Dutch thought of thrash as a moral virtue. They watched over their investments. They tried to spend less than they made. The Dutch word “schuld” means “debt,” “fault,” and “guilt.” It is related to the English verb “should”: you should pay what you owe! People who could not pay debts went to prison. The Dutch thought God wanted it that way.

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PAINTINGS

1-2-3 Pieter Brueghel the Younger Fair with a Theatrical Performance Before 1638

1. 1 Adriaen van Ostade Sense of Hearing 1635

1. 4 Pieter Brueghel the Younger Fair with a Theatrical Performance Before 1638

1. 5-6 Georg Flegel Still Life with Flowers and Snacks 1630–1635

1. 7-8 Adriaen van Ostade The Brawl 1638

1. 11 Pieter Brueghel the Younger Fair with a Theatrical Performance Before 1638

1. 12 Gerrit Dou The Herring Seller 1670-1675

1. 13 Willem Ormea and possibly Abraham Willaerts Fish on a Sea Shore 1640

1. 14 Jan Brueghel the Elder Forest Landscape (Rest on the Flight to Egypt) 1607

1. 15 Jan Brueghel the Elder Winter Landscape 1611

1. 16 Jan Steen Tric-Trac Players 1667

1. 17 Jan Steen Marriage Contract Circa 1668

1. 18 Jan Steen Revelers 1660

1. 19 Isaac van Ostade Frozen Lake 1648

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1. 22 David Ryckaert III Peasant Woman with a Cat 1640

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1. 34 Jacob van Ruisdael Rivulet in a Forest 1660

1. 35 Frans Snyders and Jan Wildens Fruit Stall 1618–1621

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1. 43 Adriaen van Ostade Wandering Musician 1648

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1. 45 Pieter Janssens Elinga Room in a Dutch House Circa 1670

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1. 47 Catharina van Hemessen Self-Portrait 1548.
THIS BOOK IS A DRAWING BOOK, A COLORING BOOK, AND A NOTEBOOK. IT SHOWS PARTS OF DUTCH PAINTINGS FROM THE HERMITAGE MUSEUM IN SAINT-PETERSBURG, RUSSIA. I ALSO DREW AND WROTE IN IT, BUT I LEFT LOTS AND LOTS OF BLANK SPACE FOR YOU. DRAW IN IT! WRITE IN IT! PAINT IT! COLOR IT! NOW IT’S YOUR BOOK, AND IT’S UP TO YOU TO MAKE IT A UNIQUE WORK OF ART... COME INTO THE VAST WORLD THAT THE DUTCH DISCOVERED FOR US. IT IS THE WORLD AS OBSERVED NOT BY A GOD OR A KING, BUT BY AN ORDINARY PERSON — THE SAME AS YOU AND ME.