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The Anatomy Lesson of Willem Röell, painted in 1728

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The Anatomy Lesson of Willem Röell, painted by Cornelis Troost in 1728, should be considered a group portrait of the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. Professor Röell, praelector anatomiae (lecturer in anatomy) of the Surgeons' Guild, was portrayed while performing an anatomical dissection of the knee joint in the corpse of an elderly man. The three surgeons in the painting, dressed in fashionable suits, held important positions as governors of the Guild. The Guild assistant, holding a box containing surgical instruments, is standing in the background (left corner).

This painting did not record a real anatomical demonstration, as held in the Guild's anatomy theatre, but served as a group portrait. Every person in the painting had to pay a fee to the artist for the privilege of posing in this masterpiece. In the 18th century, the painting was on display on the wall of the boardroom of the Surgeons' Guild in the Waag (weigh house) at the Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam, among other group portraits that had been painted for the Guild in the 17th and 18th centuries. These works of art were painted to commemorate the praelector anatomiae, governors and surgeons of the Guild. Today, this painting is on display in the Amsterdam Museum in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Read more about the stories behind this masterpiece in an essay online.