

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Courtesan Counting Money

Jan van Mieris
(Leiden 1660 – 1690 Rome)

ca. 1680
oil on panel
28.4 x 22.6 cm
signed and indistinctly dated in light paint, upper left corner: “J. van Mi….. Fecit. ..6.”
JM-101

How to cite

Aono, Junko. “Courtesan Counting Money” (2017). In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge. New York, 2023–. https://theleidencollection.com/artwork/a-courtesan-counting-money/ (accessed November 03, 2026).

A PDF of every version of this entry is available in this Online Catalogue's Archive, and the Archive is managed by a permanent URL. New versions are added only when a substantive change to the narrative occurs.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

"A lady counting money, with a jolly old woman, by Jan van Mieris" was the brief description given for this picture when it appeared in the 1707 sale of the Amsterdam collector Petronella de la Court.[1] Behind a partially drawn red curtain partly obscuring a purse, a young woman puts a coin on the table as she gazes seductively at the viewer. The old woman standing behind her smiles as she looks approvingly at the young woman's action. Taking into account several motifs—the young woman's low décolleté, a canopied bed, and a man who is about to leave the room—the scene clearly takes place in a brothel where the young courtesan and her procuress happily divide their profits.[2]

Thematically as well as stylistically, the work is characteristic of genre pictures that Jan van Mieris painted around 1680 when he was training with his renowned father, Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–81).[3] These genre paintings, which feature highly finished and enamel-like surfaces, a meticulous rendering of the texture of fabrics, and the cool, smooth surfaces of a woman's skin, demonstrate how much Jan was indebted to his father for his subjects, figure types and painterly technique.[4]

Jan van Mieris's source of inspiration for *Courtesan Counting Money* comes from his father's *Woman with a Lapdog, Accompanied by a Maidservant* of 1680 (FM-105), which probably depicts Bathsheba after the wizened old woman has delivered David's letter to her **(fig 1)**.[5] The similarity in figure types in the two pictures is striking, especially in their facial features and clothing. Jan van Mieris's courtesan wears a similar dark green velvet jacket with a plunging décolleté and a satin skirt that radiates a silvery luster, while the procuress, with a double hood covering her head, displays a comparably vulgar smile on her wrinkled face.[6] Jan van Mieris, however, chose a different narrative structure. Whereas Frans the Elder focused on the moment of private confidence between the two women and alluded to the suitor only through the motif of the letter on the table, Jan van Mieris strove to clearly relate the course of events in the brothel. By adding pictorial elements such as the bed, the man leaving the room, and the pearl necklace on the table that must have been removed during the sexual transaction, Van Mieris suggests a linear series of actions leading up to the moment depicted.

One of the most striking differences between the two works is the relationship of the viewer to the scene. In Frans the Elder's painting the woman's averted gaze as she listens attentively to the old crone excludes the viewer from the privacy of the moment, whereas the courtesan in Jan van Mieris's painting stares directly out at the viewer. She counts her money seductively, inviting her next customer to enjoy her pleasures. Jan's pictorial device and suggestive subject matter were apparently appreciated by the distinguished art collector Petronella de la Court, who owned a

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Frans van Mieris, *Woman with a Lapdog, Accompanied by a Maidservant (probably Bathsheba with King David's Letter),* FM-105

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

number of his works and was likely the first owner of the present picture.[7] The painting's explicitly amorous message, however, was not evident to everyone. The art dealer Jan Pietersz Zomer, who compiled the list of paintings within the inventory of Petronella's estate in 1707, described the picture as "een suynigh huyshouden" (a scene of prudent housekeeping), which is probably the most chaste interpretation of the scene the artist could ever have expected.[8]

- Junko Aono, 2017

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

Endnotes

1. Sales cat. Petronella de la Court (1624–1707), Amsterdam, 19 October 1707, no. 16 [for f. 190]: “Een geldtellend Juffertje, met een oud vrolyk Besje, van Jan Mieres.” Other pictures by Jan van Mieris in the catalogue are: nos. 4, 17, 79, 80, 96–98.
2. The peculiar gesture of the old woman, clasping her upper arm with her left hand, perhaps carried a sexual connotation in those days. For examples of the similar gesture, see, for instance, *Tavern Scene with a Drunken Man*, by Cornelis Bega (private collection) in Peter van den Brink, ed., *Cornelis Bega: Eleganz und raue Sitten* (Exh. cat. Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum; Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie) (Stuttgart, 2012), 180–83, no. 42.
3. Jan van Mieris became a member of the Leiden Guild of Saint Luke in 1686, but this does not exclude the possibility that he produced signed pictures before that time. Evidence for this theory may be found in *A Woman and a Man in an Interior* (see note 4), which is dated 1680. After his apprenticeship with his father, Jan probably started to paint his own compositions while still active in his father’s studio and under his guidance. The handful of works from the early 1680s can be considered such examples.
4. See, for instance, *Training the Little Dog*, ca.1680 (sale, Charpentier, Paris, 6 April 1957, no. I), and *A Woman and a Man in an Interior*, dated 1680 (sale, Lepke, Berlin, 31 March 1925, no. 46). Also, for *Lady at Her Dressing Table*, ca. 1680, see James A. Welu, *17th-Century Dutch Painting: Raising the Curtain on New England Private Collections* (Exh. cat. Worcester Art Museum) (Worcester, Mass., 1983), 57–61, no. 15, as by Frans van Mieris the Elder. Sometimes Jan’s quotation of motifs is so obvious that one could easily discern which of his father’s pictures was his model. His *Cavalier and a Lady* from the Wallace Collection in London is one such an example. See: Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 53–56, no. 45, fig. C45; John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection, Catalogue of Pictures: IV Dutch and Flemish* (London, 1992), 211–13, no. P176; Stephen Duffy and Jo Headly, *The Wallace Collection’s Pictures: A Complete Catalogue* (London, 2004), 273, no. P176; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (Zwolle, 2005), 234, no. 45.
5. Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (Zwolle, 2005), 239, no. 133; Peter C. Sutton, ed. *Love Letters: Dutch Genre Painting in the Age of Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Greenwich, Conn., Bruce Museum; Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland) (London, 2003), 148–49, no. 26.
6. Frans van Mieris the Elder also portrayed this model as a procuress in his *A Woman (Bathsheba?) with a Procuress*; see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:99–100, no. 87; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (Zwolle, 2005), 236, no. 87.
7. Petronella de la Court’s close connection to Jan van Mieris is also supported by the fact that she owned a

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

group of early works he made during his short period of activity in Leiden before his departure for Italy. The inventory of Petronella de la Court from 1707 (see next note) includes three paintings by Jan van Mieris, and her sale catalogue (see note 1) includes no less than eight pictures by the painter.

8. Amsterdam City Archive, Notarial Archives, not. G. Ypelaer, inv. 5338, fol. 606, 16 August 1707, inventory of Petronella de la Court: for the inventory, see Piet Bakker's biography of Jan van Mieris in this catalogue. With thanks to Margreet van der Hut for drawing our attention to Jan Pietersz Zomer's role in compiling the list of paintings in Petronella de la Court's inventory.

Provenance

- Petronella de la Court (1624–1707), Amsterdam (her sale, Amsterdam, 19 October 1707, no. 16 [for f. 190]).
- Baron von Schönborn, Amsterdam (his sale, Amsterdam, 16 April 1738, no. 76 [for f. 42], as attributed to Frans van Mieris).
- (Sale, Drouot, Paris, 23 June 1983, no. 20, as attributed to Frans van Mieris).
- (Sale, Christie's, Paris, 24 June 2004, no. 30, as by Willem van Mieris).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2004.

References

- Aono, Junko. *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting*. Amsterdam, 2015, 178, no. 3.
- Van der Hut, Margreet. *Jan van Mieris (1660-1690): His Life and Work*. Zaandijk, 2021, 62–63, no. 15.

Technical Summary

The support, asingle plank of vertically grained, rectangular-shaped oak, has bevels on all four sides.[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradledandhas machine tool marks along the reverse. There is an import stamp, remnants of two labels, and handwritten numbers but no import stamps, stencils or panel maker's mark.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied, and the paint applied in successive thin layers of transparent glazing. The contours of the figure's flesh tones, the folds of her green velvet jacket and white satin skirt, the strand of pearls, and the red drapery resting on the table stand are slightly raised. The painting

© 2026 The Leiden Collection

is in good condition, though the brown background is thin and allows the ground to show through. Minor compositional changes visible in infrared images and as pentimenti include the figure's proper right cheek, which was widened and depicted more frontally, and alterations to her proper right forearm and pinky, and to the smile of the old woman standing behind her.

The painting is signed and indistinctly dated in light paint along the upper left corner. Although this painting has previously been attributed alternately to Frans, Willem, and Jan van Mieris, the first letter of the signature identifying the artist's first name appears to be an "F" or a "Ⱦ" that has been struck through.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2004 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination only.

© 2026 The Leiden Collection