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Portrait of the Pharmacist Dr. Ysbrand Ysbrandsz. (1634/35–1705) in an Interior

Cornelis de Man
(Delft 1621 – 1706 Delft)

ca. 1667
oil on canvas
58.2 x 49.7 cm
inscribed with sitter's family name on painting with coat-of-arms, upper center: "Circumfpecte. YSBRANS." inscribed on book, center left: "ALL'ILLUSTRISSIMO SIGNOR CONTE NICOLO PONZONI"
CdM-100

How to cite

Rahusen, Henriette. "Portrait of the Pharmacist Dr. Ysbrand Ysbrandsz. (1634/35–1705) in an Interior" (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-portrait-of-the-pharmacist-dr-ysbrand-ysbrandsz-in-an-interior/ (accessed November 14, 2026).

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Dr. Ysbrand Ysbrandsz, a pharmacist from a prominent Rotterdam family, is seen gazing wistfully to his left, having momentarily interrupted his writing to gather his thoughts.[1] His personal motto, *Circumspecte*, visible on the coat-of-arms hanging on the wall, means "with caution" or "with meticulous care," a highly appropriate sentiment for a pharmacist. His father had a successful career in the Dutch East India Company, even serving as its governor of the Coromandel Coast, the southeastern coast of the Indian subcontinent.[2] Ysbrandsz trained for his profession at the medical school of the University of Leiden. Following his studies he returned to Rotterdam, where he married Maria Blaeu in 1664.

Ysbrandsz must have been well respected by his peers, because between 1667 (when he was 32 years old) and 1704 they regularly chose him to serve as headman of Rotterdam's Apothecary Guild. Ysbrandsz may have commissioned Cornelis de Man to paint this portrait to celebrate his first election as headman in 1667. Apart from his professional leadership, Ysbrandsz was also active in municipal politics; from 1673 on he served on Rotterdam's City Council, and in 1703 he was elected burgomaster.[3]

Ysbrandsz's decision to have Cornelis de Man paint his likeness may well have been influenced by professional connections: De Man's grandfather, uncle, and a cousin were pharmacists as well. Sometime in the 1670s, De Man included his uncle and cousin in a group portrait known as *Three Pharmacists*, which contains laboratory equipment and a view of an apothecary **(fig 1)**. The Ysbrandsz and De Man families certainly would have known each other professionally, given that Cornelis's family lived and worked in Delft, only fifteen kilometers from Rotterdam.[4]

Cornelis de Man, who became a member of the Guild of Saint Luke of Delft in 1642, travelled to France and Italy before settling back in Delft around 1653. He often merged portrait and genre traditions to depict professionals at work. This type of portraiture was first popularized in the Dutch Republic in the 1620s by Thomas de Keyser (1596–1667), as in his 1627 portrait *Constantijn Huygens and His Clerk* **(fig 2**).

Like De Keyser, Cornelis de Man had the ability to depict his sitters so that they seem thoughtfully and emotionally engaged in their work. De Man's paintings have a remarkable clarity of style that not only comes from his mastery of perspective, but also from his ability to clearly define the shape and character of individual objects, in part through color.

In this striking portrait, De Man alludes to the range of Ysbrandsz's scholarly interests through the objects in the still life on the table. A gleaming skull rests amidst various books and papers, a pictorial element that warns the viewer that life, which is finite, should be lived to its fullest. Ysbrandsz's professional and public life confirm that he

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Cornelis de Man, *Three Pharmacists*, 1670s, oil on canvas, 90 × 112 cm, National Museum, Warsaw, inv. no. M.ob. 22



Fig 2. Thomas de Keyser, *Constantijn Huygens and His Clerk*, 1627, oil on panel, 92.4 cm x 69.3 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG21



Fig 3. Johannes Vermeer, *The Astronomer*, ca. 1668, oil on canvas, 51 cm × 45 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. R.F. 1983-28

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took this advice seriously. The violin indicates that music and the liberal arts were important components of his cultural life, but also shows that he knew how to relax and entertain. The text on the musical score next to the violin reads “All’Illustrissimo Signor Conte Nicolo Ponzoni,” identifying it as Tarquinio Merula’s Opus XVII. This score contains twenty-five songs for violin and viola that Merula dedicated to Niccolo Ponzoni, Count of Cremona, in 1651. Cremona had by that time already become famous for the violins produced by several generations of the Amati family, and for those by Nicolo Amati (1596–1684) in particular.[5] It is intriguing to think that De Man’s painting could depict one of Nicolo’s celebrated violins.

The celestial globe on the table serves a dual purpose. In addition to reaffirming Ysbrandsz’s wide-ranging scholarly interests, the globe also pays homage to his wife, Maria Blaeu. Maria’s paternal grandfather, Willem Jansz. Blaeu (1571–1638), and uncle, Joan Blaeu (1596–1673), were internationally famous cartographers, whose globes and maps were prized for their accuracy and beauty.[5] Willem Blaeu had produced his first of a series of celestial globes in 1597 and, based on its size and character, this Blaeu globe was made between 1602 and 1606.[6] The globe as an attribute of learning also connects De Man’s painting to Johannes Vermeer’s slightly later paintings *The Astronomer*, 1668 **(fig 3)** and *The Geographer*, 1669 **(fig 4)**. As with his Delft colleague, De Man’s depiction of his sitter’s quiet reflection is profoundly evocative.

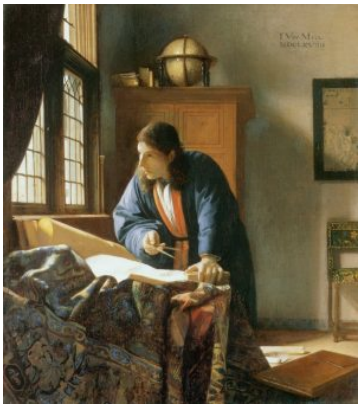


Fig 4. Johannes Vermeer, *The Geographer*, ca. 1668–69, oil on canvas, 52 cm × 45.5 cm, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt, inv. no. 1149

- Henriette Rahusen, 2017

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Endnotes

1. This entry is based on the catalogue entry “Cornelis De Man: The Pharmacist Dr. Ysbrand Ysbrandsz.,” in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., with Daniëlle H. A. C. Lokin, *Human Connections in the Age of Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Miyagi, Miyagi Museum of Art; Tokyo, Bunkamura Museum of Art) (London, 2011), 93–95, no. 25.
2. The robe worn by Ysbrandsz was known in the Dutch Republic as a *Japonse rok* (“Japanese robe”). These loose-fitting and padded robes were modeled on the precious silk kimonos (*keyserrocken*, “imperial gowns,” or *schenckagierocken*, “gift gowns”) that the Tokugawa Shogun gave to high-ranking officials of the Dutch East India Company during their annual visits to Edo, Japan. The *Japonse rok* was worn indoors by men and women alike to ward off the cold. See Charlotte van Rappard-Boon, *Imitation and Inspiration: Japanese Influence on Dutch Art from 1650 to the Present*, ed. Nanne Dekking (Amsterdam, 1991).
3. For the biography of Ysbrandsz (also Ysbrans), see Petrus Johannes Blok and Philip Christian Molhuysen, *Nieuw Nederlands biografisch Woordenboek*, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1911–37), 1: 1596, no. 2303; 10: 74–78. See also the three articles on De Man by Clotilde Brière-Misme in *Oud Holland* 52 (1935): 1–26, 97–120, and 281–82.
4. See M. E. Lambrechtsen, “Cornelis de Man (1621–1706), een selectie uit het oeuvre van een veelzijdige Delftse schilder” (master’s thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2005). For the pharmacists in the De Man family, see the article on the residence of Cornelis’s cousin, also named Cornelis de Man, at Koornmarkt 93 in Delft.
5. A photograph of the front and back of a violin made ca. 1650 by Nicolo Amati that shows distinct similarities to the one in this painting appears in an article about Florian Leonhard, a leading international dealer in string instruments: Helen Wybrew-Bond, “Plenty of Strings Attached,” *Centurion*, 10 August 2011.
6. For the biographies of Willem and Joan Blaeu, see Petrus Johannes Blok and Philip Christian Molhuysen, *Nieuw Nederlands Biografisch Woordenboek*, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1911), 10: 74–78. Willem Blaeu’s son Jacob married Maria Soetens in Rotterdam on 20 October 1643; their daughter Maria Blaeu was baptized on 20 September 1644. See *Digitale Stamboom*, Gemeentearchief Rotterdam.
7. Rob van Gent, “De nieuwe sterren van 1572, 1600 en 1604 op de hemelglobes van Willem Jansz. Blaeu,” *Caert-Thresoor* 12, no. 2 (1993): 40–46.

Provenance

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- Probably private collection, Boston, Lincolnshire.[1]
- (Sale, Sotheby's, London, 17 May 1961, no. 99, as by Michiel van Musscher [for £320 to Daan Cevat]).
- Jan Richard van Reekum, Laren, the Netherlands, by 1965.
- Private collection (sale, Sotheby's, Amsterdam, 14 November 2006, no. 121 [Johnny van Haeften Ltd., London, 2006]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Provenance Notes

1. This provenance is based on a label adhered to the reverse of the painting: "G. Sinclair, Carver and Gilder, Boston. N. B. Old Glass & Picture Frames [illegible] Equal To New. Ladies' Needlework Mounted & Framed in the [illegible] style." This label is very likely associated with the framing business of Charles George Sinclair, active in Boston, Lincolnshire, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The business probably closed in the 1890s.

Exhibition History

- Kansas City, The Nelson-Atkins Museum, 15 December 2008–31 December 2009, on loan with the permanent collection [lent by the present owner].
- Kyoto, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, "Communication: Visualizing the Human Connection in the Age of Vermeer," 25 June–16 October 2011; Miyagi, The Miyagi Museum of Art, 27 October–12 December 2011; Tokyo, Bunkamura Museum of Art, 23 December 2011–14 March 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Ithaca, Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, "An Eye For Detail: Dutch Painting from the Leiden Collection," 20 September 2014–21 June 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, "A Thirst for Riches: Carpets from the East in Paintings from the West," 4 June–15 October 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].

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- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H’ART Museum, “From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, “Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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- Blanc, Jan. “Being Modern, Being Dutch: The Seventeenth-Century Invention of the Golden Age.” In *Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre*. Edited by Blaise Ducos and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 40. Exh. cat. Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi. London, 2019. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]
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Technical Summary

The support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with tacking margins removed, has been lined. There is pronounced cusping along the lower edge, slight cusping along the upper and left edges but none along the right edge, and a small triangular canvas insert along the lower half of the right edge.[1] There are no wax collection seals, stencils, paper labels or import stamps along the lining canvas or stretcher reverse.

A light ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by glazes and paint applied smoothly, wet-into-wet, with no visible brushwork or use of impasto, although the dark paint of the pattern on the oriental carpet is slightly raised.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images at 780–1000 nanometers, but a crispness to the contours of the figure's facial features, hair and hands suggests further investigation with longer wavelengths of infrared may be useful.

The painting is unsigned and undated, but is inscribed with the sitter's family name on the painting with a coat-of-arms in the upper center; a second inscription appears on the book at the center left.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition. It is in good condition and in a good state of preservation.

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Technical Summary Endnotes

1. 3 cm H x 2 cm W

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