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Woman Holding a Dog in a Landscape

Jan van Mieris
(Leiden 1660 – 1690 Rome)

ca. 1683–85
oil on panel
27 x 20.7 cm
JM-100



How to cite

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An elegantly dressed woman stands in a dimly lit wooded landscape beneath a rose-colored evening sky. She gently embraces her lap dog while, with her right hand, gracefully fingering the thin, taupe scarf wrapped loosely around the low neckline of her dark, shimmering dress.^[1] As she gazes toward the left, her young face is partly shaded by her stylish red velvet beret, the lustrous, soft texture and subtle sheen of which the artist has rendered with special care.

This picture was formerly attributed to Jan's father, Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–81), whose later work displays similarly strong chiaroscuro effects and robust highlights.^[2] Jan van Mieris, who was apprenticed to his father along with his brother Willem, produced a number of genre pictures in his father's manner during the early 1680s that are stylistically related to the present work.^[3] A similar woman, for example, appears in *A Woman Reading a Letter and Men Playing Tric-Trac beneath a Portico* (fig 1) and *Training the Little Dog* (ca. 1680).^[4] In each of these paintings, she strikes a comparable pose, with a frontal view of her upper body and her head turned to the right as she gazes somewhat downward, and she even holds her dog in an analogous manner. Particularly in the latter picture, the woman's dress and the rendering of highlights are remarkably similar. *Woman Holding a Dog in a Landscape* was probably painted a few years later, when Jan van Mieris began to focus on single figures in the open air, as in, for example, his *Smoking Man*, dated 1685.^[5] In this painting he similarly situated his sitter before a wooded landscape with dimly lit trees silhouetting the evening sky.

The elegant manner in which the woman holds her scarf and her little dog reveals Van Mieris's interest in classicism at this stage of his career. According to Van Gool, Frans the Elder initially considered sending Jan to Amsterdam to learn from Gerard de Lairese (1640–1711), the leading classicist painter and art theorist, though ultimately he changed his mind.^[6] Although Jan never did study with Lairese, he probably became involved in the circle of Amsterdam artists and art devotees who sympathized with Lairese's principles. Jan's allegory, *Minerva as Patron of the Arts*, dated 1685, was in fact inspired by Lairese's prominent series of five allegories in grisaille the artist painted for the textile magnate Philips de Flines, who lived on the Herengracht in Amsterdam.^[7]

As he stated in his *Groot schilderboek* (1707), Lairese believed that classical form and beauty were essential not only for history painting but also for the representation of everyday life. He wrote: "gracefulness," which

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jan van Mieris, *A Woman Reading a Letter and Men Playing Tric-Trac beneath a Portico*, 1680, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 67.4 cm, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, acc. no. 1977.10



consists of the ideal form and proper proportions of the human body elevated in ancient sculptures, “must indispensably be perceived in modern representations.”^[8] Whether this gracefulness was successfully incorporated into the female figure in the picture or not,^[9] Jan van Mieris became increasingly keen to learn directly from works by ancient and modern artists in Italy, and he departed for that country in 1688. Unfortunately, he soon fell ill and died at the age of thirty, just a few years after he arrived in Rome.

- Junko Aono, 2017

Endnotes

1. The fashionably dressed figure, presented knee-length in a landscape, could be considered a portrait. But the vague depiction of the woman's face, which is further obscured under the shadow of the beret, does not substantiate this interpretation.
2. For instance, see *Death of Lucretia*, dated 1679 (FM-103), or *The Letter Writer*, dated 1680, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
3. For Jan's genre pictures made around the early 1680s, see the entry on another picture by this painter in The Leiden Collection, JM-101.
4. Present location now unknown. For *A Woman Reading a Letter and Men Playing Tric-Trac beneath a Portico*, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: fig. 129; 2:130, no. B7; Peter 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), 200–2, no. 43. Naumann later suggested that Jan would have been capable of executing this picture almost entirely by himself. For *Training the Little Dog*, see also the entry on JM-101 and sale, Charpentier, Paris, 6 April 1957, no. 1.
5. The date of the current picture is suggested by Margreet van der Hut, who is researching a monograph on Jan van Mieris. I am grateful to her for offering me some unpublished information on this artist. *A Smoking Man* (oil on panel, 19 x 14 cm, Stiftung Kunsthau Heylshof, Worms) is one of the paintings by Jan van Mieris that was owned by Pieter de la Court van der Voort, the famous Leiden collector and patron of Willem van Mieris; see Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, ed., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 1986–92), 6: 479.
6. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen waer in de levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worde*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1750–51), 2: 443.
7. Alain Roy, *Gérard de Lairesse, 1640–1711* (Paris, 1992), 303–6, nos. P. 143–47; Ekkehard Mai, Sander Paarlberg, and Gregor M. Weber, eds., *De Kroon op het Werk: Hollandse schilderkunst 1670–1750* (Exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum; Kassel, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel) (Cologne, 2006), 200–1, no. 47. Lairesse painted these works between 1675 and 1683.
8. “De bevalligheid moet noodzakelyk in Moderne Verbeeldingen waargenomen worden.” Gerard de Lairesse, *Het Groot Schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1707), 1:177. For Lairesse's instructions on adapting important qualities of history painting to genre pictures, see Junko Aono, “Ennobling Daily Life: A Question of Refinement in Early Eighteenth-

Century Dutch Genre Painting,” *Simiolus* 33, no. 4 (2007/8): 240–43; and Junko Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting 1680–1750* (Amsterdam, 2015), 101–3.

9. Although the bend of the woman’s right arm seems far from natural in an anatomical sense, this type of “curved” arm was what Jan van Mieris had initially learned from his father’s later works, likely as a method to idealize or classicize ordinary people. For Otto Naumann’s discussion on the “curved” elbow depicted by Frans van Mieris the Elder, see Otto Naumann, “Frans van Mieris’ Personal Style,” in *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681*, ed. Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (Zwolle, 2005), 37–41.

Provenance

- Possibly Jan Six (1618–1700), Amsterdam.
- Possibly Schrödering, Hamburg.
- Gottfried Winckler (1731–95), Leipzig, by 1768.
- [Newhouse Galleries, New York, inv. no. 16516, before 1987].
- Private collection, Southern California (sale, Sotheby’s, New York, 15 October 1987, no. 26, as by Frans van Mieris the Younger [to a Midwest private collector]).
- Private collection, United States (sale, Sotheby’s, New York, 8 June 2007, no. 203 [to Jack Kilgore & Co., Inc.]).
- [Jack Kilgore & Co., Inc., New York].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

References

- Krechauf, Franz Wilhelm. *Historische Erklärungen der Gemälde, welche Herr Gottfried Winkler in Leipzig gesammelt*. Leipzig, 1768, 175, no. 433, as by Frans van Mieris the Elder.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*. Edited and translated by Edward G. Hawke, 10: 87, no. 322, as by Frans van Mieris the Elder. 8 vols. London, 1907–18. Originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928.

- Naumann, Otto. *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*. 2 vols. Doornspijk, 1981, 2: 134–35, no. B20, fig. CB20, as possibly by Frans van Mieris the Younger.
- Aono, Junko. *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting*. Amsterdam, 2015, 177, no 2.
- Van der Hut, Margreet. *Jan van Mieris (1660-1690): His Life and Work*. Zaandijk, 2021, 86–87, no. 27.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, rectangular oak, has bevels on all four sides.^[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has machine tool marks along the entire reverse. There is a remnant of a red wax seal, a black stencil, white chalk, and a handwritten inscription but no import stamps or panel maker's marks.

A warm-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied, and the paint has been applied in successive thin layers of transparent glazing. The contours of the figure's flesh tones, red hat, drapery folds, white sleeve, and the white fur of the spaniel are slightly raised. The painting is in good condition with areas of thinness through the figure's skirt and the landscape.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers or in the X-radiograph.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting underwent minor conservation treatment in 2007 and remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

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