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Woman Reading and a Man Seated at a Table

Frans van Mieris
(Leiden 1635 – 1681 Leiden)

probably 1676
oil on panel
33.1 x 27.8 cm
inscribed along upper edge of map, on background wall: “ CVR A PN DA(?) AD … Leyde.” Alternate reading: “(ABOAVA PI …VA(?)) AD … Leyde.”
FM-107

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Frans van Mieris was not only a master at rendering different materials, but also in depicting the relationships of people in domestic settings. Here he has portrayed a young woman quietly immersed in reading a broadsheet or newspaper she carefully holds in her hands while, opposite her, a man with a finger resting against his forehead in a thinking pose looks directly out at the viewer.[1] Even though the two individuals are in close proximity, their activities and body language suggest that they are in their own separate worlds. There is a comparable difference of emphasis in the way they are depicted. The woman's smooth skin is fully illuminated, and the artist carefully captured the folds and shimmering surface of her beautiful silk deep red jacket and copper-colored dress with numerous bright highlights. The man's black outfit, however, is barely visible, which helps underscore the importance of his head and gesture. Van Mieris visually connects the two individuals with the exquisitely depicted glass of red wine and silver dish on the table between them.

Behind the couple is a monumental arched doorway leading to another room with a large map on the wall. Passing through the doorway is a young boy who carries a lute and some sheet music, motifs that suggest a romantic interlude may be on the gentleman's mind. The composition, in this respect, is similar to *Young Woman Playing a Harpsichord to a Young Man*, ca. 1659 (London, National Gallery) by Jan Steen (1625/26–79).[2] Lutes can be found in numerous paintings and prints from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, either as signs of intimacy or as references to women or the female genitals. Indeed, "to strike the lute" was a Dutch expression for sexual intercourse,[3] something that would explain the pointed look on the man's face.

The main protagonists in this painting are Van Mieris himself and his wife, Cunera van der Cock (1629/30–1700), called "Kniertje," whom he had married in 1657, shortly after the birth of their first daughter, Christina (1657–85).[4] The couple later had two sons and two more daughters, Anna (1658–1723) and Cornelia (1665–1751). The sons, Jan (1660–90) and Willem (1662–1747), both became artists, and perhaps one of them was the model for the boy in this painting. Later eighteenth-century descriptions of the painting, such as an entry in the 1768 catalogue of the Leipzig collector Gottfried Winckler (1731–95),[5] confirm that collectors were aware of the fact that Van Mieris had used himself and his wife as models, something he did in no less than a quarter of his painted oeuvre.[6]

The stone window-framing device, which occurs in many of Van Mieris's works, is considered the trademark of the Leiden *fijnschilders*. Nevertheless, this window frame is a later addition and was not part of the artist's original concept.[7] This added surround can be seen clearly in an X-radiograph **(fig 1)** and even with the naked eye.[8] Remarkably, the X-radiograph also shows that Van Mieris painted his genre

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. X-radiograph of *A Woman Reading and a Man Seated at a Table*, probably 1676, oil on panel, 33.1 x 27.8 cm, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. FM-107.



Fig 2. Cornelis Henricus van Meurs, after Frans van Mieris the Elder, *A Woman Reading and a Man Seated at a Table*, ca. 1720?, engraving (cut at the bottom), 292 x 271 mm, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1903-A-23289.



Fig 3. Attributed to Willem van Mieris, *A Man Drinking and a Woman*

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scene over a male portrait.[9] Evidence for the fact that the window-framing device was a later addition comes from two painted copies and an engraving **(fig 2)** that show the painting in its original, smaller format.[10] The engraving, by the little-known engraver Cornelis van Meurs (active before ca. 1720?), gives a date for Van Mieris's panel of 1676, which is entirely appropriate for Van Mieris's development.[11]

Offering Him a Fish, oil on panel, 34 x 29 cm, private collection.

The window-framing motif appears to have been added by the artist's son Willem van Mieris, who made a copy of the painting in 1687.[12] He was probably also responsible for producing a "pendant" to this picture, *A Man Drinking and a Woman Offering Him a Fish*, which in the past was attributed to his father **(fig 3)**.[13] Willem van Mieris followed his father in choice of subject matter and technique, but his paintings are rather slick in execution. In *A Man Drinking and a Woman Offering Him a Fish*, the reflected light is a little hard and the figures are stereotypes.[14] Between 1733 and 1764, both paintings are documented together in sales catalogues.[15] The enlargement of the present picture must have been done before 1733, as the catalogue of the sale of the collection of Adriaan Bout gives the present dimensions, with the additions.

The provenance of *Woman Reading and a Man Seated at a Table* previously contained major lacunae. It can now be established, however, that the painting, which was described in the sales catalogues of the collections of Adriaan Bout and Benjamin da Costa,[16] was later owned by the famous Leipzig banker Gottfried Winckler (1731–95). In the entry on the painting in the 1768 catalogue of Winckler's collection, reference is made to the Da Costa collection.[17] With this information, the vague reference to a subsequent owner, a "Mr Duval" from Geneva, can now be completely understood: he is the court jeweler Jean-François-André (François) Duval (1776–1854) from Saint Petersburg, who bought a major portion of Winckler's paintings collection.[18] Duval's collector's mark, "FD," was also found on the back of this panel.[19] In 1845 Duval sold his collection to Napoleon III's half-brother, Charles-August-Louis-Joseph (1811–65), Duc de Morny, who lived in Paris but dispersed many of the newly acquired paintings in London a year later.[20] The painting would stay in England for more than 150 years, until it was acquired by the Leiden Collection in 2008 from the heirs of the Marquis of Lansdowne.

- Quentin Buvelot, 2017; revised 2022

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Endnotes

1. Although the paper has been formerly described as a letter, the single sheet, with its two-columned format, topped by an emblem, can likely be identified as an official broadsheet issued from the States General or local municipality. The paper was first described as a newspaper in Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *La vie des peintres flamands, allemands et hollandois, avec des portraits gravées en taille-douce, une indication de leurs principaux ouvrages, & des réflexions sur leurs différéreéntes manièeres* (Paris, 1760), 3: 21. For examples of such publications, see Andrew Pettegree, "Broadsheets: Single-Sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print. Typology and Typography," in *Broadsheets: Single-Sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print*, ed. Andrew Petegree (Leiden, 2017), 1–32. Lara Yeager-Crasselt recognized the paper as a broadsheet in 2022. See correspondence with the author, dated 23 August 2022, kept on file at The Leiden Collection.
2. Illustrated in Quentin Buvelot, Otto Naumann, and Eddy de Jongh, *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681*, ed. Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 122, fig. 17a. See also Van Mieris's *The Duet*, painted in 1658 (Schwerin, Staartliches Museum), in Quentin Buvelot, Otto Naumann, and Eddy de Jongh, *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681,* ed. Quentin Buvelot (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), no. 17, 120–23.
3. See Eddy de Jongh in Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genre Prints in the Netherlands, 1550–1700*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Ghent, 1997), 63–66, and E. de Jongh in Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 56 and fig. 13.
4. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 126n205, was more hesitant in describing the figures in the present painting as the artist and his wife.
5. Franz Wilhlem Krechauf, *Historische Erklärungen der Gemälde, welche Herr Gottfried Winkler in Leipzig gesammlet* (Leipzig, 1768), 173–74, no. 431.
6. For more on this subject, see the entry *"Self-Portrait" with a Plumed Beret* in this catalogue.
7. Van Mieris's painting initially measured about 24 x 19 cm. Van Mieris is known to have enlarged some of his panels; see Quentin Buvelot and Otto Naumann, "Format Changes by Frans van Mieris the Elder," *Burlington Magazine* 150 (2008): 102–4; see also the entry *Death of Lucretia* in this catalogue.
8. See Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 103.
9. Otto Naumann thinks it might be a portrait of Charles I wearing armor and a goatee (e-mail to the author, 9 June 2011).
10. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 103–4, nos. 92a–b.
11. See Gerdien Wuestman, "C.H. van Meurs and His *fijnschilder* Prints: A Mysterious Printmaker with a

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Forgotten Oeuvre," *Simiolus* 37, no. 2 (2013–14): 129–30, no. 2. In an e-mail of 12 May 2013 she kindly pointed out to the author that the prints made by Van Meurs after Van Mieris were already mentioned in Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville, *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres avec leurs portraits gravés en taille-douce* (Paris, 1745), 2: 100, and thus must have been made before that date. See also G.E. Wuestman, "De Hollandse schilderschool in prent: Studies naar reproduktietechniek in de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw / Dutch Art Seen Through Prints: Studies in Reproductive Printmaking in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Utrecht, 1998), 43n59. See also: Alfred von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon; auf Grund archivalischer Forschungen bearbeitet* (Vienna, 1910), 2: 155, no. 4; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: fig. C 92. The engraving is clearly signed lower left "C: H: Van Meurs. Sculp." with the inscription at lower right "F. Van Mieris pinxit Anno 1676". Gerdien Wuestman pointed out in a written communication that a copy of the print kept in the Bibliothèque National, Paris, still has its original margins and contains a verse, which reads: "Attentif au Recit Des Relations Nouvelles / Je Delasse L'Esprit Et Je Me Rejouis / La Diversité Plait et Remet La Cervelle / Fatiguee Par Les Soins, L'Etude et Les Ennuis."

12. Willem van Mieris may have added the window frame as early as 1687, the date of his copy of the original composition (Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* [Doornspijk, 1981], 2: 104, no. 92b). If this is indeed the case, Van Meurs did not reproduce the additions in his reproductive engraving.

13. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 104, no. 93. Interestingly, this painting by Willem van Mieris was also enlarged: starting out as a panel of 25 x 19 cm, it was enlarged to 34 x 29 cm. The painting recently appeared at a sale at Christie's, New York, 31 January 2013, lot 258, where it was bought in.

    This was not the first time that a "pendant" was created for a painting by Frans van Mieris the Elder, or that a copy was made after his work. See Otto Naumann and Quentin Buvelot in Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 233, no. 44 and fig. 22c. Importantly, Cornelia Moiso-Diekamp, *Das Pendant in der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 378–79, did not accept the two paintings as pendants.

14. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 104, in no. 93, already attributed *A Man Drinking and a Woman Offering Him a Fish*, as well as the additions of the present painting, to Willem van Mieris.

15. Bout sale, The Hague, 11 August 1733, nos. 52–53 (both sold to Da Costa); Da Costa sale, The Hague, 13 August 1764, nos. 36–37; see also Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *La vie des peintres flamands, allemands et hollandois, avec des portraits gravées en taille-douce, une indication de leurs principaux ouvrages, & des réflexions sur leurs diffféreéntes manièeres* (Paris, 1760), 3: 21.

16. Bout sale, The Hague, 11 August 1733, nos. 52–53; Da Costa sale, The Hague, 13 August 1764, nos. 36–37; see also Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *La vie des peintres flamands, allemands et hollandois, avec des portraits gravées en taille-douce, une indication de leurs principaux ouvrages, & des réflexions sur leurs*

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différeéntes manièeres (Paris, 1760), 3: 21.

17. *Historische Erklärungen der Gemälde, welche Herr Gottfried Win[c]kler in Leipzig gesammlet* (Leipzig, 1768), 173–74, no. 431: "Dieses Gemälde . . . war den Kennern sonst im Cabinette des Herrn d'Acosta im Haag besonders schätzbar." Winckler had one other autograph Van Mieris: number 432 describes *Tronie of a Man in Oriental Dress* (Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* [Doornspijk, 1981], 2: 84, no. 70); the whereabouts of this painting were unknown for a long time, but it appeared at auction at Sotheby's, London, 5 December 2012, lot 6, repr., where it was bought by Johnny van Haeften, London, after which it was shown by him at the TEFAF, Maastricht, 2013. A painting of a woman holding a dog, described in the Winckler catalogue under number 433, may have been painted by the grandson of Van Mieris, Frans the Younger; see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 134–35, no. B 20 and fig. CB 20.
18. See Dieter Gleisberg, ""Liebe zur Kunst und besonders zur Mahlerey': Die Gemäldesammlung des Leipziger Bankiers Gottfried Winckler," *Leipziger Almanach* (2011–12): 160–62.
19. This seal was mentioned, but not identified, in *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures Belonging to The Marquess of Lansdowne, K. G. at Lansdowne House, London and Bowood Wilts* (London, 1897), 62, in no. 160.
20. See Dieter Gleisberg, ""Liebe zur Kunst und besonders zur Mahlerey': Die Gemäldesammlung des Leipziger Bankiers Gottfried Winckler," *Leipziger Almanach* (2011–12): 162.

Provenance

- Adriaan Bout, The Hague (his sale, The Hague, 11 August 1733, no. 53 [505 guilders to Benjamin da Costa]).
- Benjamin da Costa, The Hague, 1733–1764, and his widow (his sale, The Hague, 13 August 1764, no. 37 [615 guilders to Odor or Audon]).
- Gottfried Winckler, Leipzig, 1768.
- Jean-François-André (François) Duval (1776–1854), Saint Petersburg and Ghent (to Charles de Morny).
- Charles August Louis Joseph (Charles) de Morny (1811–65), Paris, 1845 ("Duval" Sale, Phillips, London, 12 May 1846, no. 114 [for 13,629 francs to Phillips] and De Morny Sale, London, Phillips, 20 June 1848, no. 99 [388.10 pounds to Farrer]).[1]
- Probably acquired by Henry Charles, 4th Marquess of Lansdowne (1816–1866), Bowood House, Calne (Wiltshire).
- Henry Charles Keith, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne (1845–1927), Bowood House, Calne (Wiltshire).
- By descent to Henry William Edmund, 6th Marquess of Lansdowne (1872–1936), and George John Charles, 8th Marquis of Lansdowne (1912–1999), and his heirs, Bowood House, Calne (Wiltshire), until

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2008.

- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2008.

Provenance Notes

1. Frans van Mieris's *"Self-Portrait" in Fanciful Dress*, now in The Leiden Collection, was also sold in the "Duval" Sale at Phillips in London on 12 May 1846 (no. 42).

Exhibition History

- London, Royal Academy, 1884, no. 63 [lent by Marquis of Landsdowne].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2011–January 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Wellesley, Davis Museum at Wellesley College, on loan with the permanent collection, 1 August 2016–present [lent by the present owner].
- San Diego, Timken Museum of Art, "Exchanging Words: Women and Letters in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting," 21 September–31 December 2022 [lent by the present owner].
- Baltimore, Baltimore Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, October 2023–January 2025 [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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Versions
Versions

1. Unknown artist after Frans van Mieris, oil on panel, 25 x 20 cm, sale, N. Nieuhoff, Amsterdam, 14 April 1777, no. 123; sale, J. Tak, Soeterwoude, 5 September 1781, no. 12; sale, De Quarles, Amsterdam, 19 October 1818, no. 31; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:103–4, no. 92a.
2. Willem van Mieris, oil on panel, 45.5 x 36 cm, signed and dated 1687, collection Hollandt,

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Braunschweig, cat. 1843, no. 212; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:104, no. 92b.

Prints

1. Cornelis Henricus van Meurs (b. 1680), after Frans van Mieris, engraving, 292 x 271 mm, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, RP-P-1903-A-23289, showing the original format of the painting.[1]
2. Johann Friedrich Bause (1738–1814), mentioned in entry of the painting in *Historische Erklärungen der Gemälde, welche Herr Gottfried Win[c]kler in Leipzig gesammlet* (Leipzig, 1768), 174, in no. 431.
3. "Klauber," probably Ignaz Sebastian Klauber (1753–1817), made in St. Petersburg in 1812, reproduced in catalogue of the "Duval" Sale, London, Phillips, 12 May 1846, no. 114.

Versions Notes

1. Cornelis Henricus van Meurs also engraved the following paintings in The Leiden Collection: Caspar Netscher, *Lucretia*, ca. 1665–67; Frans van Mieris, *Death of Lucretia*, 1679; and Gerrit Dou, *A Young Woman Playing a Clavichord*, ca. 1665.

Technical Summary

The support, a rectangular-shaped composite panel comprising five vertically grained oak planks, has been marouflaged to a single plank of oak.[1] A central rectangular plank has four narrow planks added to the edges. The composite panel has been thinned and marouflaged to a rectangular-shaped, vertically grained plank of oak, which has no bevels or machine toolmarks. Three red wax collection seals, a handwritten black inscription, and remnants of two layers of paper tape are located along the outer edges of the panel reverse, but there are no paper labels, import stamps or panel maker's marks.

The X-radiograph reveals an earlier composition on the central rectangular plank depicting a half-length male figure wearing armor on his proper right arm and holding a stick or baton, and a highly radio-opaque layer along the four narrow outer planks. The final painted composition of the woman and man shows virtually no radio-opaque imagery aside from the female figure's flesh tones, highlights along her garments, and the letter she reads.

A ground layer, which appears to be dark, has been thinly and evenly applied followed by relatively opaque paint with no obvious brushwork or impasto along the lighter areas and with thinly applied transparent glazes along the richly colored sections, such as the red clothing, green furniture and red wine.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 720 nanometers. The images reveal the

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female figure's drapery was painted before the backrest of the chair.

The painting is unsigned and undated. An inscription has been written in capital letters in dark paint along the upper edge of the map hanging by a nail along the background wall.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition and remains in a good state of preservation.[2]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination of the X-radiograph and panel reverse images by Ian Tyers. According to Tyers, the panel does not have great potential for dedrochronology, as the central oak plank is inaccessible.
2. Entry based on 2012 examination report by Jevon Thistlewood, paintings conservator, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

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