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Portrait of a Thirty-Year-Old Man

Frans van Mieris
(Leiden 1635 – 1681 Leiden)

1669
oil on panel with arched top
23.5 x 16.8 cm
signed and dated in dark paint, center left, left of figure's upper arm, AE in ligature: "AE T. 30 Fvan Mieris Ao 1669"
FM-110.a

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In 1669 Cosimo III de' Medici visited a number of painters in their studios as a part of his "grand tour" through the Northern Netherlands. In his travel journal he referred to three painters as being famous: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), Rembrandt's pupil Gerrit Dou (1613–75), and Frans van Mieris, "pittore assai celebre."[1] Cosimo visited the latter artist in Leiden on 22 June 1669, the year Van Mieris executed these pendant portraits of an unknown couple, which are among the best portraits to have emerged from that important seventeenth-century artistic center.

Like most of his genre pieces, Van Mieris's portraits are small and executed in a very refined technique.[2] These pendant paintings, which have a long and distinguished provenance but whose whereabouts were unknown for more than half a century,[3] are the only pair of his portraits of a husband and his wife that has not been separated over the course of time (see FM-109).[4] The two panels show Van Mieris's great qualities as a portraitist. We see a young couple (according to the inscriptions, "At. 30" and "AET. 25," the husband was 30 and his wife five years his junior) standing in the open air before a dwelling in a parklike setting. That they belong to the upper classes is evident from their expensive clothing. He is dressed in a fashionable *Japonse rok* with lace chemise, while she wears a white and red silk dress decorated with red bows. Her hands, neck and hair all are decorated with expensive strands of small pearls, and the large wedding ring on her pinky finger can hardly be missed.

The poses are remarkably lively and interrelated: the man leans on the balustrade in a relaxed manner and gazes at his wife who turns slightly toward him while looking out at the spectator. In the garden behind the man, a sculpture, probably depicting Venus, the goddess of love, is a counterpoint to the sculpture of Cupid with his arrow behind the woman. This juxtaposition of pictorial elements suggests that a loving bond exists between the spouses. She smiles enigmatically, holding her hand on her belly, as if to suggest she is with child.[5] Indeed, the gesture can be linked to a Dutch expression of "pushing one's apron to a side," meaning to be pregnant.[6]

The arrangement of these pendants, with the husband placed on his wife's left, is traditional for such a pairing, an approach from which Van Mieris departed four years later when he painted another set of pendants depicting a married couple (see FM-109). These four panels are the only pendant portraits by Van Mieris that are still extant.[7] Despite the different orientation in the two sets, many similarities exist in Van Mieris's approach. In both sets of paintings, the man gazes at his wife, while she looks at the viewer. They also share a similar contrast between the dress of the male, who wears a comfortable *Japonse rok*, and that of the female, who is decked out in a satin dress with many ribbons.

Contemporary viewers would have admired the exquisite rendering of virtually every

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Frans van Mieris, *Double Portrait of Franciscus de le Boe Sylvius and His Wife, known as "The Music Lesson*," 1672, panel with arched top, 41 x 31 cm, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, 1743

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conceivable texture in these paintings, especially the various fabrics of the figures' clothing. When the French connoisseur and scholar-diplomat Balthasar de Monconys (1611–65) visited Leiden on 13 August 1663, he met "ce fameux Peintre Mirris" (this famous painter Mieris).[8] In his travel journal, De Monconys extolled the red velvet cloak of the woman in Van Mieris's *Doctor's Visit* (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) and noted that her cream-colored satin dress was executed so well that it looks real: "si bien faits qu'on eust assuré que c'estoit de l'estoffe."[9] In 1675 Joachim von Sandrart (1606–88), describing *The Cloth Shop* (Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), the subject of which is germane to this theme, emphasized that the painter had depicted a wide range of fabrics and done so with total conviction.[10] In order to render convincingly shimmering fabrics such as satin, Van Mieris applied extremely fine, fluid brushstrokes with infinite patience, to convey folds, gleams of light, or reflections. It is in fact the subtle rendering of the light reflected by the different fabrics that makes them so convincing, almost tactile. The painter's great eye for detail is also evident from the small chips in the stone balustrade that he depicted with the utmost care.

Only four names of those depicted in Van Mieris's 20 extant portraits can be identified with some certainty, but these sitters indicate the prominent status of his clientele.[11] The earliest identifiable portrait is the striking depiction of Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve, a Danish count who visited Leiden briefly in 1662.[12] The other known sitters are all important Leiden citizens: Agatha Paets, whom Van Mieris portrayed in 1665, was the wife of Cornelis Paets (1636–94), who served several terms as burgomaster of Leiden and was an important client of the artist;[13] Florentius Schuyl (1619–69), a Leiden professor whom Van Mieris portrayed in 1666, this time painted on copper;[14] and, finally, Franciscus de le Boë Sylvius (1614–72), a professor of chemistry and medicine, and his second wife, Margareta Lucretia Schlezer (see FM-104), who sat for a double portrait by the artist in 1672 **(fig 1)**.[15]

The names of the sitters in most of Van Mieris's portraits are unknown because, as is the case here, identifications were often omitted at public sales of family pieces. Buyers were interested more in acquiring a "Van Mieris" than in knowing who was represented, particularly once the paintings left Leiden. The history of Van Mieris's portrait of Jacob van Heemskerck (1643–64), which the artist probably made in 1663, exemplifies the fate of a number of his portraits. The doors covering that portrait were removed in 1771 when the painting was sold at auction, likely because the doors displayed a family a coat of arms and the sellers did not want this information known.[16] Making things more difficult, in the past the provenance of the portrait of Jacob van Heemskerk was confused with that of the male portrait discussed here, in part because both paintings are executed on panels of the same size.[17] Whether or not the present pendant paintings once had covering doors is not

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known, but without identifying coats of arms it is unlikely that the identities of these charming sitters can be determined.[18]

- Quentin Buvelot, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 27, 173, 185–86. Cosimo III must have contacted Van Mieris before 1669 (but see ibid., 1: 27 n. 37, 137), because when he visited in 1669 he came to see paintings he had commissioned the year before.
2. Rudolf E.O. Ekkart in Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 6 vols. and index (Leiden, 1986–92), 6a: 24–25.
3. Otto Naumann was unable to trace the paintings for his authoritative monograph on Van Mieris; see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:139 n. 253.
4. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: nos. 90, 94, 95 (and perhaps 91).
5. See the remarks by Otto Naumann in Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 41.
6. As kindly communicated by Marieke de Winkel.
7. There must have been more sets of portraits; see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 139; 2: 102.
8. Balthasar de Monconys, and Sieur de Liergues, *Iovrnal des voyages de monsieur de Monconys . . . Lyons* (Paris, 1665–66), 2: 153; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:168–69.
9. Balthasar de Monconys, *Journal des Voyages de Monsieur de Monconys*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1665–66), 2: 153; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:168. For the painting, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: no. 71-I; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), no. 40.
10. Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister,* ed. Arthur R. Peltzer, 4 vols. (Nuremburg 1675–79, reprinted in Munich, 1925), 196; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 183. Later on, De Piles would repeat this positive criticism (see ibid., 192–93); see also G. de Lairesse, *Groot Schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1740) 1:174. For the painting, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: no. 31; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 30, fig. 4.
11. See Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:134–41. A portrait that Van Mieris made of the Leiden burgher Francois Gomarus was described in an inventory in

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1669, its present whereabouts unknown (not mentioned in Naumann 1981; see Eric Jan Sluijter, *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* [Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal] [Leiden, 1988], 53 n. 213).

12. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: no. 40; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington, National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), no. 30.

13. Private collection, United States; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: no. 60; Buvelot 2005, no. 35.

14. Mauritshuis, The Hague; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: no. 63; Buvelot 2005, no. 37.

15. "Den overleden[en] met sijn laetste huysvr[ouw] van Mi[e]ris." Quoted from Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 1986–92), 3a: 337. See Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 101; Eric Jan Sluijter, "'All striving to adorne their houses with costly peeces': Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors," in *Art & Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Exh. cat. Newark, Newark Museum; Denver, Denver Art Museum) (Zwolle, 2001), 107, 110, 113 (and fig. 141), 228 n. 27.

16. See R. E. O. Ekkart, "Frans van Mieris en het portret van Jacob van Heemskerk," *Leids Jaarboekje* 77 (1985): 48; Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 1986–92), 6a: 112 and fig. 31.

17. For the *Portrait of Jacob Willemsz van Heemskerck (1643–1664)*, made around 1663, panel, 22.5 x 16.5 cm, present whereabouts unknown, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:137–38, no. B 28 and fig. CB 28; R. E. O. Ekkart, "Frans van Mieris en het portret van Jacob van Heemskerk," *Leids Jaarboekje* 77 (1985): 48–51 and fig. 1; Rudolf E. O. Ekkart in *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, ed. Thedoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, 6 vols. and index (Leiden, 1986–92), 6a: 25, 112, 135, no. 3, 147 n. 215 and fig. 31; 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), 238, no. 126. The reference to the Heemskerk sale of 2 September 1771 was introduced in the provenance of FM-110.a as a hypothesis by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith,* ed. and trans. Edward G. Hawke, 10: 83, no. 307, 89, no. 330, and erroneously repeated thereafter, 8 vols. (London, 1907–28); originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten höllandischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts,* 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28) Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2, 89, already doubted this provenance.

    That the painting came from the famous collection of Gerret Braamcamp has been doubted by Clara Bille, *De Tempel der Kunst of het Kabinet van den Heer Braamcamp,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1961), 2:106,

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no. 136, quite wrongly in my opinion, as the catalogues of the sales in 1834 and again in 1868 clearly refer to this famous collection. See References and Provenance. This provenance was already proposed by John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–42), 1:71, who as a dealer was very well informed; see also Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:89.

18. The same applies to certain double portraits by Van Mieris (Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. [Doornspijk, 1981], 2: nos. 105, 113; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), no. 46 and 58, fig. 18).

Provenance

- Gerard Bicker, Lord of Swieten, The Hague, by 1738 (his sale, The Hague, 12 April 1741, nos. 60 and 61 [for 105 florins]).
- Probably Gerret Braamcamp, Amsterdam (his sale, Van der Schley, de Bosch, Ploos van Amstel, de Winter and Yver, Amsterdam, 31 July 1771, no. 136 [Ploos van Amstel for 54 florins]).
- Cornelis Ploos van Amstel, Amsterdam, 1771.
- Possibly Simon Stinstra, Haarlem (his sale, Amsterdam, 26 March 1783, no. 82 [Fouquet for 30 florins]).
- [Pieter Fouquet, Amsterdam].
- Charles-Ferdinand, Duc de Berry, Paris, before 1820.
- His widow, Marie-Caroline de Bourbon, Duchesse de Berry, Galerie du Palais l'Elysee Bourbon, Paris, 1820–37 (put up for sale in London, 17 April 1834, nos. 76 and 78, not sold; sale Paillet, Paris, 4–6 April 1837, nos. 66 and 67 [Prince Demidoff for 4,200 and 5,250 francs, respectively]).
- Anatole N. Demidoff, Prince of San Donato (1812–70), Florence, by 1837 (his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 18 April 1868, nos. 7 and 8 [Madame de Caussin for 10,700 francs]).
- Adèle Caussin, "Madame la Marquise Landolfo Carcano" (1831–1921), Paris, 1868–1912 (her sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 30 May 1912, nos. 164 and 165 [Baron Cassel van Doorn for 15,200 francs]).
- Baron Cassel van Doorn, Brussels, by 1912.
- Collection of Mrs. Jacobs, New York.
- Hugo L. Moser (1882–1972), Berlin and Aerdenhout (his sale, Mensing, Amsterdam, 9 April 1940, no. 719 [for 3,600 florins]).
- Private collection, Netherlands; by inheritance to the son of this Dutch couple, until 2003.
- [Marina Aarts, Amsterdam, 2003; Bijl-van Urk, B. V., Alkmaar, 2003].

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- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- London, Messrs. Christie, Manson and Woods, “Catalogue of the Matchless Collection of Dutch and Flemish Pictures of His Late Royal Highness the Duke de Berri,” April 1834, 36, nos. 76 and 78.
- Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum, “Winter-tentoonstelling van oude kunst uit particulier bezit,” 20 January–14 February 1940, 6, nos. 43 and 44 [lent by Hugo L. Moser].
- Laren, Singer Museum, “Kunstbezit rondom Laren, 13de–20ste eeuw: Schilderijen-beeldhouwwerken,” 3 July–31 August 1958, 28, nos. 112 and 113.
- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, “Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries,” 12 October 2014–4 January 2015; Birmingham, Birmingham Museum of Art, 1 February–26 April 2015, no. 24 [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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- *Catalogue of the Matchless Collection of Dutch and Flemish Pictures of His Late Royal Highness the Duke de Berri*. London 1834, 36, nos. 76 and 78.
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2:88–89, nos. 73 and 74.

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Versions
Versions and Copies

1. Oil on panel, 22 x 16.5 cm, sale, A. Wollenberg, Berlin, Lepke, 17 March 1932, no. 202, probably identical with the painting that appeared at sale, Sotheby's, Amsterdam, 22 May 1990, no. 91, Sotheby's, Amsterdam, 12 May 1992, no. 20, bought in, and Sotheby's, Amsterdam, 7 May 1993, no. 62; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), no. 73a.
2. Oil on panel, 22 x 17 cm, sale, Spitzer et al., Luzern, Fischer, 10 May 1939, no. 1595 and fig. Tafel 31; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), no. 73b.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained and vertically oriented rectangular oak with an arched upper edge, has bevels on all four sides and a shim glued along the lower edge.[1]

The unthinned and uncradled panel has machine toolmarks along the right bevel, one red wax collection seal with a crisp impression of an octagonal-shaped starburst (similar to the impression on the seal on the panel reverse of the companion portrait FM-110.b), remnants of additional red wax, and an old paper label

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identifying J. C. Verhoeven as having restored the painting in 1949. Vertical scrapes expose light-colored wood below the restorer's label (similar to the scrapes on the panel reverse of the companion portrait FM-110.b), but there are no import stamps, stencils or panel maker's marks.

The paint is applied over a smooth light-colored ground in successive thin layers with low brushmarking and transparent glazing. Visible strokes of brushwork occur along the folds of the figure's white shirt, jacket and sash, as well as along the balustrade. Lively brushwork is found through the upper third of the sky and to the left of the tree.

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint to the left of the figure's upper arm.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional changes revealed in the images include a slight shift to the left of the vertical architectural element behind the figure's head, which was originally located above the part in the figure's hair.

The painting, which was cleaned and restored in 2003 and revarnished in 2009, remains in an excellent state of preservation.

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 has good potential for dendrochronology.

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