



THE LEIDEN
COLLECTION





Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom

1694

oil on panel

Willem van Mieris

36.2 x 29.2 cm

(Leiden 1662 – 1747 Leiden)

signed and dated upper center: W. van / M****s /

Anno 1694

WM-105

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Willem van Mieris's bright and vivacious *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom* exudes luxury. The sitter's sumptuous clothing, accessories, and furnishings, all rendered with the artist's refined painting technique, convey her wealth and social standing. She gazes directly at the viewer, her expression animated by a slight smile. The woman's ensemble consists of a shimmering burnt-orange dress over a lace-trimmed blouse, belted with a red sash and worn with a fringed blue silk shawl that she lightly caresses. Her elongated neck and high forehead draw attention to a perfectly curled coiffure enhanced by lavish white ostrich feathers. She sits in an elegant interior demarcated by a voluminous red velvet drapery, resting her right elbow on a table overlaid by a colorful Persian-style textile. The classically infused architecture features engaged columns, a hint of ornamentation carved in relief, and an open archway with a landscape beyond. Van Mieris signed and dated the painting at top center, just beneath the ionic pilaster's capital.

Van Mieris found great success creating portraits of wealthy patrons in his hometown of Leiden. Trained by his father, Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–81), Willem held prominent roles in the city's artists' organizations and belonged to an affluent social circle, which, combined with his keen understanding of this milieu's preferences and priorities, led to a steady stream of commissions.^[1]

In his portraiture, he often relied on tried-and-true formulas, returning repeatedly to specific compositional types and color combinations. Many of these harken back to earlier works that Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) and Pieter Lely (1618–80) made for the English court, aspects of which later portraitists working in the northern Netherlands, such as Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84), adopted for sitters originating from a wider swath of Dutch society.^[2] The vivid color scheme in *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*—consisting of a bronze silk dress, red sash and curtain, and blue shawl, all echoed in the draped table covering—is one Van Mieris used frequently, including in earlier and later works. Examples in The Leiden Collection include *Diana, Goddess of the Hunt* of 1686 and *Portrait of Dina Margareta de Bye* of 1705 (fig 1). The latter painting shows a particular similarity to *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*: the women in these two paintings both display graceful anatomy and stylized gestures evocative of classical sculpture.^[3]

Van Mieris's use of pictorial conventions did not prevent him from evolving his imagery to meet the changing tastes of his patrons. As French fashion and decor gained popularity among the Dutch elite in the late 1600s, he increasingly incorporated intricate hairstyles and flamboyant, revealing garments into his portraiture.^[4] This artistic adaptability served him well: even in a contracting art market, Van Mieris continued to attract prosperous clients willing to pay substantial

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of Dina Margareta de Bye*, 1705, oil on panel, 32.4 x 26.7 cm, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. WM-102.



Fig 2. Detail of overtoom from Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*, 1694, oil on panel, The Leiden Collection, New York, inv. no. WM-105.



Fig 3. Reinier Nooms, *The Overtoom* from *Verscheijde Schepen en Gesichten van Amstelredam, derde deel* (Various Ships and Views of Amsterdam, Part III), published by Cornelis Danckerts I, 1652–54, 131 x 239 mm, etching and drypoint on paper, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-AO-8-24-1.

sums for his work.^[5]

The patron who commissioned this showy portrait—likely the sitter, her husband, or a family member—would certainly have admired Van Mieris’s masterful depiction of the varied textures of the expensive fabrics that the artist clearly relished painting. Particularly striking is the contrast between the heavy folds of the red velvet curtain, punctuated by a large dangling tassel, and the supple silks of the sitter’s dress and the lively fringe of her shawl. Leiden was a center of textile production and trade, and Van Mieris knew that his patrons paid special attention to how he rendered fabrics in his paintings.^[6] This industry served as an important engine to the art market. It provided income for many of the city’s wealthiest inhabitants, who in turn bought and commissioned paintings.^[7]

Throughout his career, Van Mieris successfully courted clients with ties to the textile industry. In 1683, the year after he joined the Guild of Saint Luke, he painted a portrait of Samuel Van Acker (now in The Leiden Collection), a merchant of the woolen textile *grein*, handling bolts of cloth. Other major patrons included Petronella de la Court (1624–1707), whose husband was the silk merchant Adam Oortmans (1622–84), as well as De la Court’s cousin, the fantastically wealthy cloth manufacturer Pieter de la Court van der Voort (1664–1739).^[8]

In addition to rich fabrics, Van Mieris also depicted numerous foreign luxury items in his *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*, underscoring both his painterly skill and the sitter’s wealth. Trimming her blouse is voluminous gros point lace, a type that originated in Venice.^[9] To create its distinctive floral pattern, Van Mieris used creamy, curved strokes of the brush, bordered by dots of paint to lend the lace a dynamic three-dimensionality. On the table lies an Isfahan-style carpet, a type of table covering that also appears in paintings by the artist’s father, including *The Death of Lucretia*, evoking coveted textiles imported from Persia.^[10] Here, Willem’s carpet is striking for its detail. He used short strokes of pigment and minute white highlights to mimic the carpet’s spiky pile, creating a textural contrast to the smooth silks and ruffled lace worn by his subject. Also vying for the viewer’s attention are the pinpricks of light reflecting off the hard sheen of her pearl necklace, made from expensive jewels harvested in the Indian Ocean and brought to the Netherlands by the Dutch East India Company, and the soft plumes of large white ostrich feathers, which first came to Europe via trade with sub-Saharan Africa.^[11]

Housewives obsessed with buying foreign luxury goods to display within the home were at times the subject of satire, as in Hieronymus Sweerts’s novel *De tien vermakelijkheden des huwelijk*, or *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (Amsterdam, 1678). Yet, as Judith Noorman observes, there was some truth to this stereotype, given that the responsibility for home decor largely fell to women, some of whom saw it as a



Fig 4. Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of Sara Maria van der Marck tot Leur*, 1692, oil on oval panel, 30 x 24 cm, private collection.



Fig 5. Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of Jacob van Wassenauer*, ca. 1690–1700, oil on panel, 51.5 x 41 cm, Kasteel Duivenvoorde, Voorschoten, inv. no. DVS00460.

means “to raise the social and professional status of their families.”^[12] This dynamic is almost certainly at play here, with Van Mieris furthering such aspirations by portraying his subject in her well-appointed (or idealized) home, presumably as directed by the sitter or a loved one who commissioned the portrait.

Visible through the archway at right is a landscape with a quaint Dutch village featuring a church steeple and low-slung, modest buildings. Van Mieris painted this background in a muted palette of brown, green, and gray, with just a hint of pale blue sky. The handling is also quite loose, with the leaves of the trees indicated by smudges of paint, a far cry from the meticulous brushwork of the women’s luxurious clothing and elegant furnishings.

Particularly distinctive is the hand-turned wooden *overtoom* (**fig 2**) on a small hill before the church. This device was designed to haul boats across land from one waterway to another. Such rolling bridges existed in the northern Netherlands as early as 1200.^[13] While the generalized forms of this *overtoom* and the nearby buildings preclude identifying a specific location, small portages like this one were constructed throughout the Netherlands, including around Leiden. Van Mieris may have loosely based his depiction of an *overtoom* on prints by such artists as Reinier Nooms (ca. 1623–64), whose *The Overtoom* (**fig 3**) dates from around 1652–54. He may also have consulted compendia of waterworks like those designed by Cornelis Meijer (1629–1701), published in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.^[14]

By depicting an *overtoom* and unassuming village, Van Meiris departed from the type of background motif he typically included in his portraits of women. Usually he favored idealized, often classicized elements, such as the fountain with putto and mountainous landscape with cypress trees in *Portrait of Dina Margareta de Bye* (**fig 1**), or the stone relief of Venus in his 1692 portrait of Sara Maria van der Marck tot Leur (d. 1699) (**fig 4**), whose physiognomy and pose resemble the sitter’s in the present painting.^[15] This departure from convention suggests that the *overtoom* had significance for the sitter and patron—perhaps evoking a noteworthy locale or ties to a family business.^[16]

A pendant depicting the woman’s husband may have accompanied *A Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*, a supposition supported by the angle of the figure’s legs, as though turned toward a companion.^[17] Van Mieris and his father both created pendants or dual portraits that included inventive interplays between couples. In The Leiden Collection are Frans van Mieris the Elder’s *Portrait of a Thirty-Year-Old Man* and *Portrait of a Twenty-Five-Year-Old Woman* in which the man stands beside a statue of Venus, goddess of love, while the woman, who pushes aside her apron perhaps in an allusion to pregnancy, is accompanied by a sculpture of Cupid.^[18] A pendant to the present work may have included an element related to the *overtoom*,



much as Willem Van Mieris's portrait of Jacob van Wassanaer from around 1690–1700 shows the sitter with papers on his table that relate to his role of *dijkgraaf*, or dike warden (**fig 5**).^[19]

The combination of motifs in this portrait would have held particular appeal for a decidedly local audience. Such viewers would appreciate seeing the rich textiles and other luxuries alongside a mechanical device indicative of business acumen, which together project a strong message of prosperity. This carefully crafted juxtaposition affirms the prominent place both artist and patron sought to establish for this individual, among her peers as well as in her environs.

- Elizabeth Nogrady, 2025

Endnotes

1. See the biography of Willem van Mieris by Piet Bakker in this catalogue.
2. Willem van Mieris may have learned this repurposing from his father, Frans van Mieris the Elder, who also repeated compositional elements in his works. See Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris, 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 36–37.
3. For Van Mieris's classical inspiration in genre painting, see Junko Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting, 1680–1750* (Amsterdam, 2015), 103–12.
4. See Junko Aono, "Pendant Portraits of an Elegant Couple, 1708" (2017), in *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed., ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge (New York, 2023–), <https://theleidencollection.com/groups/willem-van-mieris-pendant-portraits-of-an-elegant-couple-elegant-man-and-elegant-woman-1708/>.
5. See the biography of Willem van Mieris by Piet Bakker in this catalogue. For the importance Dutch artists placed on developing close relationships with a small number of highly affluent patrons in the late 1600s, see Junko Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting, 1680–1750* (Amsterdam, 2015), 20–22.
6. N.W. Posthumus, *Geschiedenis van de Leidsche Lakenindustrie*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1903–39); and Martha C. Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago, 1986), 49–69. For an example of his father's ability to render fabrics, and praise of the skill in contemporary art theory, see Angela Ho, "An Invitation to Compare: Frans van Mieris's 'Cloth Shop' in the Context of Early Modern Art Collecting," *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 5 (2009): 707–9.
7. C. Willemijn Fock, "Art Ownership in Leiden in the Seventeenth Century," trans. Anne Baudouin, *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 13.
8. Margreet van der Hut, *Het kunstkabinet van Petronella de la Court: De verzamelingen van een zeventiende-eeuwse mecenas* (Zaandijk, 2021), 45–48; and C. Willemijn Fock, "Willem van Mieris en zijn mecenas Pieter de la Court van der Voort," *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1983): 261–82.
9. Many thanks to Gon Homburg and the Textile Research Center, Leiden, for identifying this lace.
10. For Frans van Mieris, see Onno Ydema, *Carpets and Their Datings in Netherlandish Paintings, 1540–1700* (Zutphen, 1991), 100, 102–3.
11. For a description of seventeenth-century pearl fisheries off the southern coast of India, see Markus Vink, "Pearls: The Noble Harvest from the Sea," in *Encounters on the Opposite Coast: The Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden, 2015), 230–40. For feathers, see Stefan Hanß, "Making Featherwork in Early Modern Europe," in *Materialized Identities in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1750*, ed. Susanna Burghartz et al. (Amsterdam, 2021), 137–85.

12. See Judith Noorman, “Beeldende kunst m/v,” in *De zeventiende eeuw*, ed. Helmer Helmers, Geert Janssen, and Judith Noorman (Leiden, 2021), 352–53.
13. Thank you to Karel Davids for identifying this machine as an *overtoom*. See Karel Davids, *The Rise and Decline of Dutch Technological Leadership: Technology, Economy and Culture in the Netherlands, 1350–1800* (Leiden, 2008), 1: 82, 212; and Jur Kingma, “Overtomen,” *Nederlandse Stichting Erfgoed Nieuwsbrief* (January 2021): 2.
14. See, for example, Giovanni Battista Falda, after Cornelis Meijer, *L’arte di rendere i fiumi navigabili, in varij modi, con altre nuove inventioni, e varij altri segreti* (Rome, 1677), plate 30 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-OB-36.030[V]). More generally, the inclusion of the *overtoom* may have reflected a national pride in Dutch hydraulic innovation. See Pieter Martens and Konrad Ottenheim, “Fortifications and Waterworks: Engineers on the Road,” in *The Low Countries at the Crossroads: Netherlandish Architecture as an Export Product in Early Modern Europe (1480–1680)*, ed. Konrad Ottenheim and Krista De Jonge, *Architectura Moderna* 8 (Turnhout, 2013), 368–72. For an *overtoom* in painting, see *Landscape with Overtoom* by an unidentified artist (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-132). Thanks go to Annie Correll for bringing this painting to my attention.
15. Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of Sara Maria van der Marck tot Leur*, 1692 (private collection; RKD image no. 171657).
16. Examples of female portraits showing local pride can be found in seventeenth-century Dutch art; one example that incorporates architecture and engineering is David van der Plas’s 1683 likeness of Magdalena Poulle (1632–99) and her nephew Pieter Poulle holding a plan of her country seat, Gunterstein. See Judith Noorman, “Beeldende kunst m/v,” in *De zeventiende eeuw*, ed. Helmer Helmers, Geert Janssen, and Judith Noorman (Leiden, 2021), 336–38.
17. Compare, for example, this pose to Michiel van Musscher’s *Portrait of Eva Suzanna Pellicorne* of 1687 in The Leiden Collection. In Van Musscher’s portrait, this gently twisted posture aims the sitter at the pendant of her husband, Pieter Ranst Valckenier. Further uniting the two compositions is the artist’s depiction of the couple’s grand house, presumably the Valckenier family manor, which extends across both paintings. See Ilona van Tuinen, “Pair of Portraits: Pieter Ranst Valckenier (1661–1704) and Eva Suzanna Pellicorne (1670–1732), 1687” (2017), in *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed., ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge (New York, 2023–), <https://theleidencollection.com/groups/michiel-van-musscher-pair-of-portraits-pieter-ranst-valckenier-1661-1704-and-eva-suzanna-pellicorne-1670-1732-1687/>. This use of an identifiable landmark with family ties may be an example of the same approach used by Van Mieris seven years later in *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*.
18. Quentin Buvelot, “Portrait of a Thirty-Year-Old Man and Portrait of a Twenty-Five-Year-Old Woman” (2017), in *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, 4th ed., ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Elizabeth Nogrady with Caroline Van Cauwenberge (New York, 2023–), <https://theleidencollection.com/groups/frans-van-mieris-portrait-of-a-thirty-year-old-man-and-portrait-of-a-twenty-five-year-old-woman/>. For a more general discussion of Frans van Mieris’s portrayal of couples, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris*

(1635–1681) *the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 139–41.

19. A *dijkgraaf* was a civic leader who managed issues related to waterways. The items depicted in Wassenaer's portrait include a copy of *Costume van Rijnland*, his seal, and the document "Opdragt van de landen gelegen in Lisse" (Allotment of the lands located in Lisse), referring to land that he lent out, either in his capacity as *dijkgraaf* or as a private person. Thank you to Simone Nieuwenbroek, curator at Landgoed & Kasteel Duivenvoorde, for sharing this information. This portrait is larger than *Portrait of a Woman with an Overtoom*. See Sabine Craft-Giepmans, Hilde Gilissen, and Annette de Vries, *Adellijke familieportretten op Duivenvoorde* (Voorschoten, 2015), 35, 150–51, no. 202. For an earlier example in Dutch art of a couple whose portrait pair relates to a sitter's professional life, see Bartholomeus van der Helst's portrayals of Geertruida den Dubbelde and Aert van Nes, 1668 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. nos. SK-A-140 and 141).

Provenance

- (Sale, Christie's, New York, 5 October 1995, no. 180.)
- [Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam, by 1997.]
- From whom purchased by the present owner in 2008.

Exhibition History

- Albany, Albany Institute of History & Art, "Delights of the Senses: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life, Featuring Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 14 September–31 December 2024, no. 11 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Nogrady, Elizabeth, and Diane Shewchuk, eds. *Delights of the Senses: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life, Featuring Paintings from The Leiden Collection*. Exh. cat. Albany, Albany Institute of History & Art. Albany, 2024, 62–63, no. 11.