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Portrait of an Elegant Man

Willem van Mieris
(Leiden 1662 – 1747 Leiden)

1708
oil on oval panel
19.5 x 15 cm
signed and dated in light paint, left midpoint: “W. Van. Mieris. Fe= 1708”
WM-103.a

How to cite

Aono, Junko. “Pendant Portraits of an Elegant Couple, 1708” (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/portrait-of-an-elegant-man/ (accessed November 01, 2026).

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The couple in these two oval portraits represents the height of fashion in the early eighteenth century, both elegant and refined. The man wears a stylish long wig, a white blouse and a brown jacket with a golden buckle, and he has gracefully draped a gray velvet mantle around his body. Holding his right hand before his chest, he looks affectionately toward his wife. She responds to her husband's gaze by turning her head slightly in his direction, though she looks directly at the viewer. She wears a white blouse and a green satin dress adorned with a golden fringe and jewelry, and she gently holds a golden-brown shawl to cover her left shoulder. Her dark brown hair is elegantly coiffured, with a long, flowing lock falling over her right shoulder onto her décolleté, a style of dress derived from French fashions that had transformed the wardrobes of wealthy citizens in the Dutch Republic by the early eighteenth century.

Although the identity of the couple remains unknown, the pair clearly belonged to the affluent elite who were able to commission portraits from Willem van Mieris, an artist who had already established an outstanding reputation for himself.[1] Van Mieris had excelled in portrait painting from the earliest years of his career, representing stolid Dutch burghers in their domestic environments, as in his pendant portraits purported to represent Samuel van Acker and his wife (WM-106.a–b), but over time his style evolved to a more flowing manner to reflect the changing social and cultural character of the Netherlands. In the small bust-length pendant portraits discussed here, Van Mieris depicted his sitters in an oval format, thereby focusing his entire attention on the figures and their elegant appearance. His refined painterly technique is particularly evident in the minute rendering of textures, such as the soft curled hair, the pleats of the thin white blouse, the beautifully draped shawls, and the golden jewelry with precious stones. The sitters' elegant poses and gestures, characteristic of this master at this period of his career, reflect the period's dominant classicizing style.

This type of portrait pair usually hung together with images of relatives and ancestors, as was the case with two oval portraits that Van Mieris made for his patron Allard de la Court and his wife, Catharina Backer. Those pendants hung together with 26 other family portraits in the dining room of the couple's home.[2] Such portraits were sometimes inherited by descendants and remained within the family, but many were dispersed over the centuries and can no longer be identified with known sitters, a fate also shared by the present works.

Provenance research has recently clarified the complete history of their ownership since the nineteenth century. The red wax seals affixed to the back of both panels, which contain a monogram consisting of the letters C, V, and L (**fig 1**), have been identified with the collector Christophe van Loo from Ghent. He purchased both portraits at the auction of the collection of Count Philippe Vilain XIIII of Brussels,

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Wax seal wax of a monogram consisting of the letters C, V, and L, affixed to the reverse of the female portrait of WM-103.b

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held in Paris in 1857, and they were later sold at the Van Loo sale in Paris in 1881.[3] Remarkably, the auction catalogues of 1857 and 1881 describe the couple as Willem van Mieris and his wife. This identification, however, is far from convincing. The couple hardly looks old enough to be 46 and 45 years old, respectively, the ages of the artist and his wife in 1708, the year these portraits were painted.[4]

- Junko Aono, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Van Mieris, for instance, made several portraits of the De la Court family, as Pieter de la Court van der Voort was his art patron and gave him numerous commissions. A pair of portraits of this benefactor and his wife is said to date to 1708, and the portrait of his son Allard de la Court, mentioned in the current entry, was made in 1705; see Cornelia Willemijn Fock and Rudolf E. O. Ekkart, "De portretgalerij van de familie De la Court," *Jaarboek Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* 35 (1981): 179, 181, 201, no. 17, 203, no. 21, 204, figs. 15 and 16, 205, no. 23, 206, fig. 19.
2. See note 1 and 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), 2:457–58. The collection of Jhr. De la Court, sold on 21 September 1904, contained "portraits en buste de Pieter de la Court et de sa femme Sara Poelaert" (lot no. 104, copper, oval, 10.5 cm high). Hofstede de Groot identified this portrait of Sara Poelaert with the one mentioned by Moes under no. 359. This pair of portraits was also found in the eighteenth-century inventories of the De la Court family, but these two paintings cannot be identified with WM-103.a–b, since the sizes of WM-103.a–b are much larger and the supports are panel, not copper. Ernst Wilhelm Moes, *Iconographia Batava: Beredeneerde lijst van geschilderde en gebeeldhouwde portretten van Noord-Nederlanders in vorige eeuwen*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1905), 2: 219, no. 5971; 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*, 8 vols., trans. Edward G. Hawke, 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), 10:199, nos. 358, 359.
3. Sale, Count Philippe Vilain XIIII, Paris, 2 May 1857, nos. 43, 44 [760 and 850 francs, respectively, to Van Loo]; sale, Christophe van Loo, Paris, 25 May 1881, nos. 15, 16 [1,920 and 1,600 francs, respectively, to F. Hérard].
4. Van Mieris's wife, Agneta Chapman, was born in 1663 and died in 1744. For a pair of drawn portraits of this couple, possibly made upon the occasion of their marriage in 1684, see Albert J. Elen, "Willem van Mieris and His First Model: Agneta Chapman as the Morgan *Flora*," *Master Drawings* 47 (2009): 465, figs. 2–3.

Provenance

- Count Philippe Vilain XIIII, Brussels (his sale, Paris, 2 May 1857, nos. 43, 44 [respectively 760 and 850 francs to Van Loo]).
- Christophe van Loo, Ghent (his sale, Paris, 25 May 1881, nos. 15, 16 [respectively 1,920 and 1,600

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francs to F. Hérard]).

- Flury Hérard (his sale, Paris, 18 November 1919, nos. 55, 56).
- Monsieur G… (his sale, Drouot, Paris, 8 February 1939, nos. 47, 48).
- Private collection, Paris; and by descent (sale, Christie's, Paris, 22 June 2005, no. 42 [to Salomon Lilian B. V., Amsterdam]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2005.

Exhibition History

- 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].

References

- 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: 197, no. 347. London, 1928.
- Nogrady, Elizabeth. "Willem van Mieris, *Portrait of an Elegant Man*." In *Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady et al., 101, ill. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H'ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art. Zwolle, 2025. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, oval, non-Baltic oak, has a horizontal bevel across the midpoint of the lower edge and short bevels that form facets along the remainder of the oval.[1] The unthinned and uncradled panel has shallow machine tool marks and three diagonal gouges along the upper edge of the reverse. There are no import stamps or panel maker's marks, but there are white chalk and two red wax seals. The smaller darker red seal depicts a "CVL" monogram within an oval, presumably that of Count Philippe Vilain XIIII, and is identical to the one red wax seal on the companion portrait of a woman WM-103.b.[2] The larger, brighter red seal contains an illegible oval impression with "COMMISSAIRE…." printed above it and "DU MUSEE ROY…" printed below.

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A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint applied smoothly in successive thin layers of transparent glazing, with slightly raised contours along the figure's facial features, right hand, blue drapery and gold clasp; the curls of the figure's long hair are rendered in delicate parallel curved strokes of light-colored paint.

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

The painting is signed and dated in light paint along the left midpoint.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition and remains in a good 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 some potential for dendrochronology.

2. Sold by Count Philippe Vilain XIIII, Brussels (his sale, Paris, 2 May 1857, nos. 43, 44 (respectively for 760 and 850 francs to Van Loo).

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