



Portrait of Dina Margareta de Bye

Willem van Mieris
(Leiden 1662 – 1747 Leiden)

1705

oil on panel

32.4 x 26.7 cm

signed and dated in dark paint on gray rock, upper
right: “W. Van. Mieris. Fec Anno. 1705”

WM-102



How to cite

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Standing before an imaginary rocky landscape, a woman handsomely attired in an orange-tinged brown satin dress with an aqua-blue shawl draped across her body smiles charmingly out at the viewer. On the left, behind a partially drawn curtain and in front of a pillar, stands a fountain with a statue of a cupid riding a sea monster. The woman holds an orange in her left hand and carefully selects a red carnation from a bunch of flowers lying on a stone plinth faced with a carved relief sculpture of an unidentified allegorical subject.^[1] Resting on this garden plinth is a colored drawing of a flower, a small wooden box, some paintbrushes, and a couple of shells containing pigments.

The identification of the sitter is established by an eighteenth-century inscription written in Dutch on the back of the panel: “Dina Margareta de Bye, born on 7 May 1680 and deceased on 26 August 1740.”^[2] Dina Margareta was the second daughter of Johan Paeuw de Bye, a lawyer from Leiden, and his wife, Anna van Oorthoorn. In 1703 Dina Margareta married Pieter van der Dussen (1675–1726), also a lawyer, and moved from Leiden, where she apparently had been living with her parents on the Rapenburg, to her husband’s native city of Dordrecht.^[3] As Willem van Mieris already enjoyed a great reputation among the Leiden elite, he was a suitable choice to portray the esteemed Dina Margareta, even after she had moved to Dordrecht.

It was common for young, wealthy couples to commission pendant portraits upon the occasion of their marriage. Such “marriage portraits” (*huwelijksportretten*) would become important elements of their personal possessions.^[4] Although no documents list pendant portraits of the married couple, Dina Margareta’s inventory at her death in 1740 mentions a portrait of her husband and two portraits of her.^[5]

The pictorial elements and date of this portrait two years after her marriage indicates that it was made within the marriage portrait tradition. Dina Margareta’s face and right arm are directed toward the left, that is, in the direction of her husband, assuming the traditional arrangement of pendant portraits. The setting and her attributes, moreover, embody virtues that were expected of a young wife in early modern Dutch society: purity, chastity, and love.^[6] The water from the fountain and the statue of cupid allude to love and purity, and the carnation she holds was a popular bridal flower.^[7] Oranges symbolize chastity and, hence, they were often depicted as an attribute for brides and married women. For example, in a portrait of Maria Timmers by Caspar Netscher (ca. 1639–84), the sitter gestures toward an orange branch along the basin of a fountain containing a statue of cupid (**fig 1**).^[8] Willem’s father, Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–81), also depicted a woman holding an orange in his 1678 portrait of a married couple (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).^[9]

Although it is highly probable that Van Mieris painted the male portrait at the same

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Caspar Netscher, *Portrait of Maria Timmers (1657–1753)*, 1683, oil on canvas, 48.2 x 39.7 cm, Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 127



Fig 2. Willem van Mieris, *Preparatory Study for Portrait of Dina Margareta de Bye*, ca. 1705, signed, above the relief: *Willem / van Mieris. f.*, black chalk and wash on paper, 159 x 133 mm, Leiden Collection, New York (WM-107)



Fig 3. Arnold Boonen, *Portrait of Catharina Backer*, 1713, oil on canvas,



time, it is also possible that he created this portrait of Dina Margareta as a pendant to a preexisting portrait of Pieter van der Dussen, one perhaps even created by a different artist prior to the marriage.^[10] Van Mieris completed Dina Margareta's portrait only in 1705, two years after her marriage, perhaps because she had a baby in 1704 and likely had no time to sit for a portrait.^[11]

In preparation for his portrait, Van Mieris made a rough but precise preparatory drawing in black chalk, which fortunately is also in the Leiden Collection (**fig 2**) (WM-107).^[12] The drawing's composition and other pictorial elements are mostly consistent with those of the painting, although he redirected Dina Margareta's gaze so she looks out toward the viewer rather than to the left. He also shifted the direction of the sculpture of the cupid and sea monster in much the same manner, somewhat reinforcing the central focus of this image on Dina Margareta. The most significant alteration to the painting is the addition of the drawing, wooden box, paintbrushes, and shells on the stone plinth. As these are not typical attributes for a marriage portrait, the motifs can be considered personal attributes of this particular young woman. In those days, upper-class women often demonstrated their cultural and intellectual capabilities by drawing or painting. For example, in Arnold Boonen's marriage portrait of Catharina Backer, who was likewise from a distinguished family on the Rapenburg, the young bride is depicted not only with flowers in a basket but also with a floral still-life painting on an easel (**fig 3**).^[13] Such objects probably were meant to convey the same message about Dina Margareta, who was portrayed as a virtuous woman with a taste for art.

47.5 x 40 cm, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from Backer Stichting, inv. no. SB 2530, photo Amsterdam Museum, René Gerritsen

- Junko Aono, 2017

Endnotes

1. The relief, which is only partially visible, may represent a “Triumph of Bacchus” or a festive scene of drinking cupids. A depiction of excessive drinking could be interpreted as a moralizing warning and as an encouragement of temperance—one of the virtues expected of women—but the relief could also function simply as a decorative scene of merriment.
2. The RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) archive houses a letter by R. J. te Rijdt dated 24 November 1993, which confirms that the inscription is in eighteenth-century script.
3. Genealogical information about this couple is based on Piet Bakker’s unpublished research into the baptism, marriage, and burial registers in the Regionaal Archief Leiden (RAL) and Gemeente-archief Dordrecht (GAD). Dina Margareta’s father, Johan Pauw de Bye (1650–1715), owned Rapenburg 2 and lived there with his family from 1676 until 1715. According to the marriage register dated 5 May 1703, Dina Margareta resided on the Rapenburg: RAL, Arch. no. 1004, inv. no. 28, “Nederlands Hervormd Ondertrouw (1575–1795)”.
4. For this type of portrait, see Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986).
5. After resettling in Leiden after her husband’s death in 1732, Dina purchased her parents’ house on the Rapenburg. According to the estate inventory made after her death in 1740, she had decorated the large room facing the Rapenburg with “three paintings in gilt frames, that is, one portrait of Mr. and two of Mrs. Van der Dussen.”
6. Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986), 55–57, 184–91.
7. Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986), 33, 36, fig. 28, 63 n. 5; 189–91.
8. Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986), 189–91, no. 38, 244–45; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 310, no. 215. For a marriage portrait of a woman holding an orange, see, for example, Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 76.
9. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: 119, no. 113; Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986), 192–94, no. 39; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris, 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 204–6, no. 46.



10. Some portraits by Caspar Netscher have similar compositions and motifs. See, for example, *Portrait of a Man* (1680, oil on canvas, 48.3 x 39.3 cm, present location unknown): Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), no. 187.
11. Dina may have wished to have a different type of portrait—one as a mother—when she got pregnant after her marriage, leading her to pose for Van Mieris only after the birth of her child in 1704. The date inscribed on the picture plane has usually been read as “1705.” Although the last digit is rather unclear and could be read as a 1 instead of a 5, it is less plausible that the portrait was made in 1701. Portraits of unmarried women typically did not have a composition designed for a companion painting to be hung on the left side of the picture. For examples of such portraits, see Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: Huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Exh. cat. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum) (Zwolle, 1986), 73–75, 79–80, 83–86, 93–95, nos. 4, 6, 8, 10.
12. Willem van Mieris made preparatory drawings for his paintings; most of them are the same size as his paintings. The present drawing, however, is half the size of the final picture. For Willem van Mieris’s preparatory drawings, see Emke Elen-Clifford Kocq van Breugel, “Tekeningen van Willem van Mieris (1662–1747) in relatie tot zijn schilderijen,” *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 4 (1985): 152–58.
13. 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), 2: 329–36. Catharina (1689–1766), married to the textile manufacturer and art collector Allard de la Court, indeed made flower paintings. A few examples survive, such as the one in the Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal. She even made drawn copies after drawings by Willem van Mieris.

Provenance

- Dina Margareta de Bye (1680–1740); by descent in her family to Baron Jules de Wyckerslooth de Rooyestein, by 1831; by descent in his family (sale, Sotheby’s, Amsterdam, 17 November 1993, no. 19 [to Johnny van Haften Ltd., London; to a private collector, Monte Carlo, 1994]).
- Private collection, Monte Carlo (sale, Christie’s, London, 9 July 2003, no. 51, unsold); [Johnny van Haften Ltd., London, Richard Green, London, and Otto Naumann Ltd., New York, 2004].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2004.

Exhibition History

- London, Richard Green Gallery, “The Cabinet Picture: Dutch and Flemish Masters of the Seventeenth Century,” 14 April–7 May 1999 [lent by a private collector, Monte Carlo].



- Poughkeepsie, New York, “Changing Forms: Metamorphosis in Myth, Art, and Nature 1650–1700,” 28 September–19 December 2021, no. 19 [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].

References

- Wright, Christopher. *The Cabinet Picture: Dutch and Flemish Masters of the Seventeenth Century*. Sales cat. London, Richard Green Gallery. London, 1999, 170–71, 195–96.
- Nogrady, Elizabeth and Lara Yeager-Crasselt. *Changing Forms: Metamorphosis in Myth, Art, and Nature 1650–1700*. Exh. cat. Poughkeepsie, New York, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College. Poughkeepsie, New York, 2021, 48, no. 19.
- Nogrady, Elizabeth. “Strange Changes: Early modern Scientific Imagery of Metamorphosis and Myth.” In *Changing Forms: Metamorphosis in Myth, Art, and Nature 1650–1700*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 34–35, no. 19. Exh. cat. Poughkeepsie, New York, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College. Poughkeepsie, New York, 2021.
- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. “The Rules of Ovid: Myth, Classicism, and Metamorphosis in the Late Seventeenth-Century Netherlands.” In *Changing Forms: Metamorphosis in Myth, Art, and Nature 1650–1700*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 28, no. 19. Exh. cat. Poughkeepsie, New York, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College. Poughkeepsie, New York, 2021.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, rectangular oak, has bevels on all four sides.^[1] The unthinned and uncradled panel has machine toolmarks along the upper third and handwritten inscriptions but no wax seals, import stamps or panel maker’s marks along the reverse.

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 low brushmarking along the figure’s drapery folds, the stonework along the lower left corner, and the drapery swag along the upper left.

No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. Compositional differences between the painting and its preparatory drawing (WM-107) include the addition in the painting of the silk painting along the lower left corner, the paint box, paint-filled seashells, paint brushes, and cut flowers, and the placing of the three putti along the frieze closer together. In addition, in the painting the figure gazes toward the viewer, holds an orange in her proper left hand, and pinches a flower stem between the pointer and thumb of her proper right hand. In the preparatory drawing, the figure gazes off to the left,



holds nothing in her proper left hand, and holds two flowers stems in her proper right hand. Also, in the painting the fountain includes one putto blowing a horn facing toward the right. In the preparatory drawing, the fountain includes two putti blowing horns facing toward the left.

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint on a gray rock along the upper right corner.

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 good potential for dendrochronology.