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“Self-Portrait” with a Plumed Beret

Frans van Mieris
(Leiden 1635 – 1681 Leiden)

1668
oil on oval panel
11.3 x 8.2 cm
signed and dated in dark paint along background, lower right quadrant: “F van Mieris . 1668”
FM-108

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Frans van Mieris the Elder produced numerous self-portraits and used himself as a model in many of his genre scenes.[1] In no less than a quarter of his painted oeuvre, which numbers some 120 paintings, we encounter the faces of Van Mieris and his wife, Cunera van der Cock. In some cases, Van Mieris created a hybrid form, as in pendants from 1662 in which the artist depicted himself holding a pipe and his wife pulling the ear of a little dog.[2] In this little painting, dated 1668, we can recognize the painter's features and his double chin, as well as his characteristic moustache and curly hair.[3] Situated before a plain background, Van Mieris painted himself bust-length with a smile on his face, as though surprised at seeing the viewer. Wound around his neck and partly draped over his shoulder is a patterned scarf that largely covers a shiny metal gorget, which contemporary viewers would have understood as having a military function.[4] On the painter's cap is a plume that is the same color as his brown hair. It is possible that Van Mieris, as he often did, originally paired this portrait with one of his wife; the earliest of such pendants date around 1657–58.[5] He usually painted such pendant portraits on oval panels of approximately the same size as the portrait discussed here, as in pendants dated 1661 **(fig 1)** and **(fig 2)**.[6]

The fact that Van Mieris produced such an unusually large number of self-portraits is no doubt directly associated with his fame. This artist probably turned to the mirror for artistic purposes more frequently than any other artist in the Republic, including his teacher, Gerrit Dou (1613–75), and Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), both of whom also came from Leiden.[7] In his youth, Rembrandt had produced a series of etchings that arose from intense observations of his own physiognomy and the constant changes in his facial expression. These are essentially studies of "affects" or passions, what we would call emotions. This tradition cannot be separated from certain passages in art-theoretical writings. Rembrandt's pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten wrote about the subject in his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Introduction to the Advanced School of Painting), advising artists who studied themselves in the mirror "to transform themselves into actors," and that in acting out the "passions" they should endeavor "to be player and spectator at the same time."[8]

Van Mieris conceived this small painting as a *tronie*, a type of picture in which painters represented a character type or a particular facial expression, in this case, surprise. In traditional portraits, sitters were never depicted smiling.[9] Moreover, in his "official" self-portraits, Van Mieris always presented himself as a true gentleman, as can be inferred from a painting of 1667 **(fig 3)**.[10] This type of small "pseudo" self-portrait was probably intended as a comic image, which at the same time constituted a fine example of Van Mieris's exquisite technique. That paintings of this kind were not interpreted as "ordinary" portraits is clear from descriptions in the inventory of the

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Self-Portrait*, 1661, oil on panel (oval), 11.2 x 8.4 cm, private collection



Fig 2. Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Portrait of Cunera van der Cock, the Painter's Wife*, 1662, oil on panel (oval), 11.2 x 8.4 cm, private collection



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Leiden collector Franciscus de le Boë Sylvius (see FM-104). This document made a clear distinction between the portraits and *tronies* of Van Mieris in the collection, even though the painter and his wife were recognized in each.[11]

Fig 3. Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Self-Portrait as a Painter*, 1667, oil on panel, 17.7 x 13.3 cm, Polesden Lacey, Surrey, The National Trust

- Quentin Buvelot, 2017

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Endnotes

1. On Van Mieris's numerous self-portraits, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 1:125–34.
2. Worcester Art Museum; Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:51–53, nos. 43–44; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 57, figs. 15–16.
3. The painting was not yet listed in Naumann's authoritative monograph on the artist (1981) and was mentioned first in Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 238, no. 125 (wrongly dated "1661"). Two seals (of a collector?) on the back of the panel have yet to be identified. For old descriptions of unidentified self-portraits by Van Mieris, see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:214–17.
4. The gorget was a favorite attribute in Rembrandt's self-portraits and *tronies*; see Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds, *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle,1999), 100, 108, 117.
5. These are in the National Gallery, London, and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; see Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:32–33, nos. 29–30; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 114–15, no. 15 and fig. 15a.
6. Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2:49, nos. 38–39; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans van Mieris 1635–1681* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 152–53, nos. 28–29. In 1662 Van Mieris would paint another set of pendant portraits of himself and his wife (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); see Naumann 1981, 2:50–51, nos. 41–42; Buvelot 2005, 152, figs. 28a–b.
7. On Rembrandt's self-portraits, see H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, 1990); Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds, *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle, 1999).
8. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Rotterdam, 1678), 109–10; Ernst van de Wetering in Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds, *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (Zwolle,1999), 21.
9. See Ernst 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), 15, 18.
10. For Van Mieris's "official" self-portraits, see see Otto Naumann, "Frans van Mieris as a Draughtsman," *Master Drawings* 16, no. 1 (1978): no. 13 (drawing), and Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk, 1981), 2: nos. 66, 110, 111 (paintings); cf. Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Frans*

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van Mieris 1635–1681 (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2005), 21, fig. 9, and no. 39 and fig. 39b.

11. Eric Jan Sluijter et al., *Leidse fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 133.

Provenance

- (Sale, Christie's, London, 7 April 1966, no. 122, withdrawn).
- Private collection, Paris (sale, Xavier de la Perraudière, Saumur, 16 December 2006, no. 105 [Johnny van Haeften, Ltd., London, 2006]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, "Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries," 12 October 2014–4 January 2015; Birmingham Museum of Art, 1 February–26 April 2015, no. 23 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre," 14 February–18 May 2019 [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

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Versions and Copies

1. Panel, 11 x 8.5 cm, K. H. Schulthess, Bazel, 1930; later J. Herscher, Bazel, 1963.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, oval-shaped oak, has no bevels.[1] The unthinned and uncradled panel has four semicircular incised lines that mirror its oval shape and two differently sized red wax collection seals stamped with different images. A dark red coating was applied to the entire panel reverse sometime after the incised lines were made and the smaller upper wax seal was attached. The larger lower wax seal was attached to this red coating. The panel has no import stamps, labels, stencils, panel maker's marks or machine tool marks.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint, which has been applied smoothly in thin layers of transparent glazing, light over dark. A black horizontal line of raised paint below the figure's teeth is from a past restoration.

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint in the background to the right of the figure.

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

The painting, which was cleaned and restored prior to its acquisition, underwent minor surface treatment in 2007 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 does not have enough rings for dendrochronology.

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