



Nicolaes Maes  
Dutch, 1634 - 1693

## *Portrait of a Lady*

1676

oil on canvas

overall: 116 x 91 cm (45 11/16 x 35 13/16 in.)

Inscription: lower right: NMaes 1676

Gift of Joseph F. McCrindle 2001.138.1

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### ENTRY

Nicolaes Maes portrayed this unknown Dutch matron standing outdoors in a walled garden before a dark yet shimmering golden drape that wraps around a large marble column. The dark sky with its bands of red and orange light near the horizon signifies that it is evening, a time of day when one might imagine a woman presenting herself in such a setting in formal attire. As she gazes out at the viewer, she rests her right forearm on the base of the column while she gracefully fingers the deep folds of her rust-red velvety dress with her left hand. A sweeping diaphanous shawl covers her décolletage and softens her form. A double strand of pearls and elegant dangling earrings reinforce the impression of wealth and good breeding that her stern expression and strict bearing amply convey. [1]

The woman's elegant clothing reflects contemporary fashion in the Netherlands during the 1670s, but is nonetheless generalized and simplified to give the sitter a more timeless, almost classical look, consistent with the idealized setting in which Maes has situated her. Marieke de Winkel has remarked that the sitter's tucked-up white sleeves lack the cuffs and lace that would have been part of a woman's ensemble in those years. [2] Maes has rendered the dress with remarkably free and flowing brushwork, suggestive of the imaginative nature of his design, and with reddish tonalities that echo the evening sky.

The woman's features and flesh tones are rendered far more carefully than are the draperies. One can imagine that Maes' restrained flair in these aspects of the portrait resulted directly from the force of the sitter's no-nonsense personality. She probably also insisted that Maes accurately depict her fashionable headdress, a style that was in vogue for a short time in the mid-1670s. She wears a *tipmuts*, a

black cap with a point at the forehead made of a transparent, gauzelike material. At the back her hair is done up in a *wrong*, a stiff structure in the form of a crescent (covered in silk the color of the lady's hair) on which the plaits were coiled. The cap was then held on with gold or silver cords tied at the nape of the neck. [3]

Despite the sitter's distinguished appearance and apparent social status, her identity has been lost over the course of time. The Camberlyn family, which owned the painting in the eighteenth century, wrongly identified the woman as Johanna Koerten (1650–1715) when the portrait was exhibited in Brussels in 1886. [4] However Koerten, wife of Adriaan Blok and renowned throughout Europe for her paper cuttings, had a smooth, round face, quite different in appearance from the woman portrayed here. [5] In 1676, moreover, Koerten would have been only twenty-six years old, much younger than Maes' sitter. Although the identity of the sitter remains unknown, it does seem probable that she came from Amsterdam, where Maes had settled in 1673 to take advantage of the strong portrait market in that city. [6] It is possible that this portrait was originally paired with one of the woman's husband, but the fact that she wears no ring probably indicates that she was unmarried.

Houbraken wrote that he knew of no portrait painter before or after Maes who was more successful in depicting a sitter's appearance. [7] This same biographical account also makes clear that Maes was keenly aware of his clients' wishes and was willing to adapt to changing styles and tastes. [8] For example, even though Maes was trained by Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669), Houbraken noted that the artist soon realized that young women preferred to be portrayed in white rather than in brown. [9] Houbraken also stated that to learn a more elegant manner of portraiture, Maes traveled to Antwerp to study portraits painted by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640) and Sir Anthony van Dyck (Flemish, 1599 - 1641). [10] Although Houbraken's account has been questioned, [11] his recollections ring true with the radical transformation of Maes' portrait style in the 1660s, from a Rembrandtesque mode to a more elegant and refined portrayal of his sitters, a change that reflected broader cultural patterns in the Netherlands during that period.

Maes' full adaptation of the international Flemish style of portraiture is evident in this elegant and refined portrait, not only in the outdoor garden setting, with streaks of red and orange enlivening the evening sky, but also in the broadly brushed, shimmering drapery wrapped around the marble column signifying the sitter's social standing and upright character. Even the woman's pose, as she rests

her arm on the base of the column, is drawn directly from Van Dyck prototypes, although this pose is found more often in portraits of men. [12] Maes' palette is, however, quite distinct from that of Van Dyck. Nowhere in the Flemish artist's work does one find the brilliant rust-colored reds seen here in the woman's dress. Maes' careful rendering of her face also differs from Van Dyck's more generalized and idealized portrayals of his sitters. In this strict adherence to reality, Maes remained true to his firm roots in Dutch pictorial traditions.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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## NOTES

- [1] Similar dangling earrings are found in other portraits of the period. See, for example, a portrait of a young woman dated 1670 by Bernart Vollenhove, reproduced in Hans-Joachim Raupp, ed., *Portraits* (Münster, 1995), 150, no. 57.
- [2] I would like to thank Marieke de Winkel for her thoughtful comments about the woman's wardrobe and hairstyle; see correspondence, dated March 11, 2005, in NGA curatorial files.
- [3] Marieke de Winkel, in her correspondence dated March 11, 2005, in NGA curatorial files, notes that this fashion lasted only a few years because it was so uncomfortable to sleep with and gave women headaches. See also Marieke de Winkel, "Historische haartooien," *Kunstschrift* 2 (1997): 40–43; see also the hairstyle of Maria van Colve in Maes' portrait of her and her daughter, 1672, in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
- [4] See Henri Hymans, "Correspondance de Belgique: L'exposition rétrospective de Bruxelles," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (1886): 434.
- [5] For Johanna Koerten, including a portrait engraving, see Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 3:293–308.
- [6] The timing of Maes' move from Dordrecht to Amsterdam may also be connected to the void left by the deaths of Amsterdam's premier portrait painters, Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669) and Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670).
- [7] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint,

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Amsterdam, 1976), 2:274: “ik niet weet dat ’er een Schilder voor of na hem is geweest, die gelukkiger is geweest in ’t wel treffen der gelykenissen van der menschen weezens.”

- [8] See, for example, Houbraken’s account of how Maes removed pockmarks from a portrait when the female sitter objected to her appearance. See Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:276–277.
- [9] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:274: “de jonge Juffrouwen meer behagen namen in het wit dan in ’t bruin.”
- [10] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandtsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:275.
- [11] William W. Robinson, “Nicolaes Maes: Some Observations on His Early Portraits,” in *Rembrandt and His Pupils*, ed. Görel Cavalli-Björkman (Stockholm, 1993), 112–114. Robinson argues that Maes would have been able to learn Van Dyck’s style of painting in The Hague by viewing portraits by Jan Mijtens (c. 1614–1670) and Adriaen Hanneman (Dutch, c. 1603/1604 - 1671).
- [12] See, for example, Van Dyck’s *Portrait of the Abbé Scaglia*, 1634, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. It has been lined and the tacking margins have been removed, but the X-radiographs show faint cusping along all four edges. The current stretcher is approximately ¼ to ½ inch larger than the painted dimensions in the vertical direction, along the top of the painting. This area has been filled and inpainted to integrate it into the composition, though the current frame conceals it. The ground is a red layer of medium thickness. The paint was applied both wet-into-wet and wet-over-dry. The image was created by building up multiple thin layers of paint. Glazes were used to define the shadows and create the sitter’s red dress. Aside from highlights in the sitter’s jewelry and dress, there is almost no impasto.

The painting is in fairly good condition. Losses are found in the paint and ground along the bottom edge and a diagonal tear exists in the gold drapery to the left of

the sitter's knee. Maes used a fugitive red lake pigment in the sitter's face but not in her neck and décolletage. Unfortunately, this pigment has faded, causing the sitter's face to appear paler than her chest and neck.[1] The painting was treated between 2002 and 2003 at which time discolored varnish and inpaint were removed and a red glaze was applied to the sitter's face to minimize the color discrepancy and return the painting to its original appearance.

[1] This information was obtained through analysis of cross-sections and dispersed pigment samples by the NGA Painting Conservation department in conjunction with the NGA Scientific Research Department (see report dated January 29, 2003, in NGA Conservation department files).

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## PROVENANCE

Possibly Joseph Guillaume Jean Camberlyn [1783-1861], Brussels.[1] Camberlyn d'Amougies collection, by 1886;[2] Dowager Camberlyn d'Amougies, Pepinghen, near Brussels, by 1897 until at least 1915;[3] her son, Joseph Camberlyn d'Amougies; (sale, Frederik Muller, Amsterdam, 13 July 1926, no. 618, as *Portrait de Johanna Koerten, Femme d'Adriaan Blok*); De Haan. (sale, Sotheby's, London, 16 November 1960, no. 90a); (Appleby Brothers, Ltd., London). Mrs. Albert Heyse, Ghent; (Heyse sale, M. Dragonetti, Ghent, 13-15 May 1963, 2nd day, no. 345).[4] (Appleby Brothers, Ltd., London); purchased by Joseph F. McCrindle [1923-2008], New York;[5] gift 2001 to NGA.

[1] Provenance as given by León Krempel, *Stidoem zi dem datoertem Gemalden des Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693)*, Petersberg, 1999: no. 185.

[2] The painting was owned by this collection when it was lent to the 1886 exhibition in Brussels.

[3] She was given as the owner by Ernst W. Moes, *Iconographia Batava. Beredeneerde Lijst van Geschilderde en Gebeeldhouwde Portretten van Noord-*

*Nederlanders in Vorige Eeuwen*, Amsterdam, 1897-1905: 523, no. 4246, and by Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und Kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der Hervorragendsten Holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols., Esslingen am Neckar and Paris, 1907-1928: 6(1915):no. 201.

[4] The provenance is contradictory at this point. The painting appears to match the painting in the Heyse sale, which includes the size and a photograph in the catalogue. According to the introduction in the sale catalogue, the collection that sold in Ghent in 1963 was formed mainly by Albert Heyse, who died in 1955. His widow maintained the collection after his death, and therefore presumably purchased the NGA painting after its appearance in the 1960 sale in London. The 1963 sale was under the direction of Jean Heyse, whose relationship to Mr. and Mrs. Albert Heyse has not been determined.

However, Appleby Brothers is listed as the buyer in the 1960 catalogue, and they appear to have kept the painting until they included it in an exhibition in the summer of 1962. McCrindle purchased the painting in July 1962 from the exhibition, according to the invoice; see the copy in NGA curatorial files.

[5] A "Nicolas Maes oil painting" appears on an Appleby Bros. Ltd. statement of account with J.F. McCrindle, dated 8 January 1963, in NGA curatorial files. This confirms the 1962 invoice.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1886 Exposition de tableaux de maîtres anciens organisée au profit de la Caisse centrale des artistes belges, Academie Royale de Belgique, Brussels, 1886, no. 128, as Portrait de Johanna Koerten Blok.

1962 First Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Oil Paintings of the 17th and 18th Century, Appleby Brothers. Ltd., London, 1962, no. 17.

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- 1915 Bijleveld, W. J. J. C. "Een merkwaardige verzameling oud-Nederlandsche kunst in België." *Oud Holland* 33 (1915): 161-164.
- 1962 Appleby Brothers Ltd. *First exhibition of Dutch and Flemish oil paintings of the 17th and 18th century*. Exh. cat. Appleby Brothers Ltd., London, 1962: 34-35, no. 17, repro.
- 1963 Hall, H. van. *Portretten van Nederlandse beeldende kunstenaars: repertorium*. Amsterdam, 1963: 171-172, no. 1157.1.
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