

Release Date: February 10, 2006

## First Retrospective of Painting by 17th-Century Painter Frans Van Mieris Opens at National Gallery of Art, February 26, 2006

**—Artist's Influence Seen in Works  
of Vermeer, Jan Steen, and Others—**



## **Frans van Mieris**

### ***"The Duet", 1658***

oil on panel

unframed: 31.5 x 24.6 cm (12 3/8 x 9 11/16)

Staatliches Museum, Schwerin

Washington, DC—**Amorous Intrigues and Painterly Refinement: The Art of Frans van Mieris** is the first retrospective exhibition devoted exclusively to the work of this influential 17th-century Dutch painter. Thirty-four paintings by Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635–1681) will be on view in the Dutch Cabinet Galleries of the National Gallery of Art from February 26 through May 21, 2006, the only venue for the exhibition in the United States.

Intimate in scale, Van Mieris' masterpieces rarely measure more than 15 square inches, but they are remarkable for their extreme realism, depiction of human emotion, and technical mastery. The widely-copied paintings influenced many fellow painters, including Vermeer. Gerrit Dou (1613–1675), founder of the Leiden school of fine painters (*fijnschilders*) and Van Mieris' teacher, called him "the prince of all my pupils."

The exhibition was organized by the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

### **Exhibition Support**

The exhibition is made possible by anonymous donors to the National Gallery of Art.

It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"This exhibition is a natural sequel to **Gerrit Dou 1613–1675**, which the Mauritshuis and the National Gallery of Art presented in 2000 and 2001," said Earl A. Powell III.

"We are indebted to our donors and lenders, the latter including many private collectors as well as a large number of museums, whose generosity and cooperation made this exhibition possible."

### **The Exhibition**

Organized chronologically, the exhibition presents the full scope of Van Mieris' career. The works were selected in consultation with leading Van Mieris scholar Dr. Otto Naumann.

Most of Van Mieris' works are lighthearted yet thoughtful genre scenes. As a storyteller in paint, Van Mieris recorded the interactions of people—often humorously, but also filled with erotic tensions and ambiguity. His work is sensuous and suggestive, reflecting contemporary ideas about the rituals of love, courtship, and seduction.

Van Mieris painted in an extremely detailed manner known as *fijnschilderkunst* ("fine painting"). By using fine brushes and applying the paint in successive layers, the artist made his brushstrokes virtually disappear. He often worked on copper because its hard surface enhanced his ability to paint in a smooth manner. Perhaps because of Leiden's prominence as a center of textile manufacturing, Van Mieris took particular care in rendering the rich textures of satin and other fabrics. One example of his virtuosity is the blue silk curtain in *A Trompe l'Oeil with a Garland of Flowers and a Curtain* (1658), painted so realistically one could imagine pulling the curtain back.

In his earliest paintings, Van Mieris emulated his teacher Dou. In *Sending the Boy for Beer* (c. 1655–1657), Van Mieris carefully rendered objects in the foreground—as Dou had—but gave greater emphasis to the human interaction. In *The Doctor's Visit* (1657), Van Mieris further reveals himself as a humorous storyteller. As a doctor checks the pulse of a lovesick young woman, he shares his diagnosis with the viewer by pointing and gazing upwards. In *A Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1663), Van Mieris placed his subject in a stone window frame, one of the compositional forms popularized by Dou; another is the arched top that occurs in many of Van Mieris' works.

By the end of the 1650s, Van Mieris began specializing in representations of the upper classes, such as the exquisite painting *"The Duet"* (1658), in which a couple is situated in a sumptuous interior appropriate to their high social standing. *The Little Dog* (c. 1660), one of the artist's most playful works, shows an elegantly dressed woman standing in her bedroom, teasing her pet spaniel. *A Woman Before a Mirror* (c. 1662) shows an affluent young woman holding a piece of jewelry to her neck.

Although mainly known for his genre scenes, Van Mieris was also a remarkable portrait painter. *Portrait of Cunera van der Cock, the Artist's Wife* (c. 1657–1658) is an intimate and revealing study. Van Mieris used his wife many times as a model, as in *The Art of Painting (Pictura)* (1661). The exceptional richness of Pictura's satin garment, with its vibrant hues of blue and pink, is due to its copper support and a thin layer of gold leaf under the paint.

Second only to Rembrandt in the number of self-images he produced, Van Mieris' face appears in more than a quarter of his paintings, as in *The Oyster Meal* (1661), where he is featured with his wife. In his splendid *Self-Portrait as a Painter* (1667), the artist portrayed himself as a distinguished gentleman at the peak of his success. The pose he adopts is found in a number of self-portraits, including those by Titian, Dürer, and Rembrandt—a pictorial reference to famous artists that Van Mieris obviously intended.

In the last decade of his career, Van Mieris executed a number of history pieces, scenes drawn from the Bible or mythology. Two of these are included in the exhibition, *The Death of Lucretia* (1679) and *Jeroboam's Wife with the Prophet Ahijah* (1671).

### **The Artist and His Influence**

Frans van Mieris the Elder was born into a Leiden dynasty of goldsmiths on April 16, 1635. After his initial training as a goldsmith, he studied painting, primarily with Gerrit Dou. From his marriage with Cunera van der Cock in the spring of 1657 came four children, of whom the two sons Jan (1660–1690) and Willem (1662–1747) became painters. His grandson, Frans van Mieris the Younger, also earned his living as an artist.

Van Mieris resided his entire life in Leiden, a prosperous city known for its textiles and as a center of culture and scholarship. The artist's finely painted cabinet pieces found a ready market among the city's affluent elite, and by the late 1650s his paintings had become quite popular and highly valued. 17th-century patrons often paid dazzling prices for the artist's genre scenes, portraits, and allegorical works. The artist was patronized by foreign princes such as Archduke Leopold Wilhelm and Grand Duke Cosimo de Medici III. The Grand Duke paid a visit to Van Mieris' studio on his trip to the

Netherlands in 1669 and acquired five works from the artist.

Artists also responded to Van Mieris' work, not only those from Leiden (among them Jan Steen, who was a good friend and drinking companion of the artist), but also painters outside the city, in particular Johannes Vermeer, Gabriel Metsu, Godfried Schalcken, and Eglon van der Neer. Finally, Van Mieris' impact was extended through the works of his sons and grandson, all of whom had successful careers painting portraits and genre scenes in the master's style.

### **Curators, Catalogue, and Related Activities**

The exhibition curators are Quentin Buvelot, curator, Mauritshuis, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings at the National Gallery of Art. Buvelot is the editor of the exhibition catalogue, **Frans van Mieris, 1635–1681**. In addition to essays by Buvelot, Otto Naumann, and Eddy de Jongh, the 256-page catalogue includes 125 color and 75 black-and-white illustrations as well as entries by Peter van der Ploeg, Bieke van der Mark, and Carol Pottasch. Published by the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Waanders Publishers, Zwolle, the catalogue is available for \$50 (hardcover) from the Gallery Shops: to order call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

A 12-minute introductory film about Van Mieris' art, in Dutch with English subtitles and produced by Bobcat TV for the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, screens in the West Building Micro Gallery and Information Room. The film is made possible by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. Kaplan.

An illustrated brochure is available free of charge at the exhibition entrance. The brochure was made possible by Sotheby's, New York, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Washington, D.C.

On the opening day of the exhibition, Frederik J. Duparc, director, Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, will speak on "Frans van Mieris: The Artist and His Reputation" and Wheelock will speak on "Courtship and Seduction in The Art of Frans van Mieris." The lecture program will be held in the East Building Auditorium at 2:00

p.m. on February 26.

A Gallery Talk on "The Golden Age of Dutch Painting" will be given by staff lecturer Eric Denker on February 20, 25, 26, and 27 at 12 noon. A Gallery Talk on "Amorous Intrigues and Painterly Refinement: The Art of Frans van Mieris" will be given by staff lecturer Philip Leonard on March 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 at 12 noon. Tours begin in the West Building Rotunda.

On Sunday, March 19, the Egidius Kwartet, a vocal quartet, will perform music by Susato and other Dutch composers in honor of the exhibition. The free concert begins at 6:30 p.m. in the West Garden Court, West Building.

###

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov