Judith Leyster's Artistic Identity and Self-Fashioning in Her Self-Portraits of 1630 and 1653

by

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Introduction

Gazing directly at us, a young smiling woman sits confidently in front of her unfinished painting, placed on her wooden easel, of a joyful young male violinist (Fig. 1). Her right arm rests comfortably on the top rail of a simple wooden chair; her left hand firmly grasps a large cluster of paintbrushes, a white cloth, and a painter's palette filled with fresh oil paints. The woman seems to be interrupted from her artistic craft by our presence; in her right hand, she holds her paintbrush in midair with an assured manner as if she is prepared and readied to complete her work in progress. Yet, she appears to be delighted by our presence. With her relaxed smile and her rose-blushed cheeks, she seems to warmly welcome and invite us into her private studio. Her eyes gaze straight at us in a vivid and friendly manner as if she recognizes us while her lips are slightly parted as if she is about to say something to us. This vivid portrait of a young woman artist in front of her easel is a self-portrait of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Judith Leyster (1609-1660). Good to start with this visual description. But, since it's about two self-portraits, you should also briefly describe the later painting.

Leyster painted this self-portrait in 1630 when she was twenty-one years old; it was painted during her most prosperous years as a well-established and professional painter. As a woman born in a non-artistic and middle-class family, she successfully became a master painter at the male-dominated Haarlem painters' Guild of St. Luke. Lesyter independently ran an independent workshop and had three male students, Davidt de Burry, Hendrick Jacobsz, and Willem Woutersz; and she received praises about her identity as a skilled woman painter from Haarlem's chroniclers Samuel Ampzing and Theodore Scherevel.[1] Ampzing described Leyster as a woman who painted with "a good and bold sense"; Scherevel identified Leyster as "one who? excels exceptionally", a "true leading star in art", who could "compete with men" and "is the wife of Molenaer, another renowned painter born in Haarlem, and well known in Amsterdam."[2] However, Ampzing and Scherevel's commentaries on Leyster's artistic identity were problematic. They praised her identity as a woman who succeeded in the male-dominated artistic craft of painting, but they failed to recognize her professionalism and her oeuvres as a worthy-to-be-remembered master painter. As art historian Frima Fox Hofrichter has argued:

> Generalized and uncritical admiration of Judith Leyster the painter (chiefly based on the unfamiliar spectacle of artistic talent manifesting itself in a woman) had terrible and demeaning legacy on the artist and her posterity. Scherevel's comment unwittingly encapsulates the essence of the problem: he lavishes praise on Leyster's unusual gifts, but gives us no examples of her work – instead he tells us who her husband was. The consequence of this superficial treatment is as familiar as it is deplorable – Leyster's oeuvre and reputation languished in obscurity, while her works were

1. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age,* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1989), 13-36.

2. Hofrichter, short title, 29-30.

> attributed, one after another, to artists whose works are still remembered – and spouses forgotten."[3]

Ampzing and Scherevel's hazy commentaries on Leyster contributed ongoing failure to recognize Leyster's artistic identity and oeuvre. Indeed, in the past centuries, several of Leyster's paintings have been lost or misattributed to her male contemporaries, including to the celebrated seventeenth-century Dutch painter Frans Hals (1580-1583) and her painter husband Jan Miense Molenaer (1610-1668). In spite of her success in the Haarlem art scene as a young woman painter, Leyster's name and work began to disappear from the Dutch art scene when she got married to Jan Miense Molenaer – who was also a painter trained at the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke – at the age of twenty-six.[4] As a married woman, a housewife, and a mother, Leyster's artistic identity and works were obscured by, and misattributed to, her husband who had a more prolific artistic fame. As a married woman in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Leyster's husband would also have acted as her legal guardian while she would have acted as a virtuous and subordinated housewife.[5] Hence, regardless of Leyster's fabulous artistic fame as a woman painter in her early twenties, there is a lack of archival traces on her identity, work, and life due to the rejection of women's legal competence during the Dutch Republic.[6] As Hofrichter stated, when Leyster passed away in 1660, "her name was already excluded from accounts of Netherlandish artists of the period."[7]

After she died in 1660, Leyster's name and works were entirely forgotten in European art history; nobody remembered nor mentioned Leyster's name and works once despite the existence of several well-preserved signed works of hers and the primary sources of Ampzing and Scherevel's writings on her. Leyster only began to reemerge in the European art scene when she was rediscovered by the Dutch art historian and curator Cornelis Hofstede de Groot (1863-1930) in the late nineteenth century. In 1893, Cornelis Hofstede de Groot published a study on her in which he reattributed seven paintings as hers based on analysis and discovery of her monogram. One of the paintings reattributed as Leyster's was *The Happy Couple* (1630), also known as *The Carousing Couple* and *The Jolly Companions* (Fig. 2), that was long celebrated as one of Frans Hals' works due to his faked signature, which covered over Leyster's monogram (Fig. 3). The signature forgery of Hals' on Leyster's could be explained by the strong similarities between their brushwork and style, and the increasing market value of Hal's works in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, the reattribution of *The Happy Couple* from Hals' to Leyster's led to a decline in its market value, from €4500 to €3500, which further demonstrate Leyster's struggle to gain

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3. Hofrichter, short title, 30.

4. Ellen Broersen, "Judita Leystar: A Painter of Good, Keen Sense," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*, (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 21.

5. Els Kloek, "The Case of Judith Leyster: Exception or Paradigm," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*, (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 55.

6. Ellen Broersen, "Judita Leystar: A Painter of Good, Keen Sense," 15.

7. Frima Fox Hofrichter, "The Eclipse of a Leading Star," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*, (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 115.

recognition and respect on her artistic mastery as a woman painter in the male-dominated art scene.[8]

Today, Leyster's works are continuously being rediscovered. The acknowledgment of Leyster's artistic identity and oeuvre is an ongoing inquiry. Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* was once her only known self-portrait until. New sent, in 2016, when the art auction house Christie's discovered and auctioned a never-seen-before self-portrait attributed to Leyster and dated to around 1653 (Fig. 4). This newly discovered second self-portrait demonstrates that she continued to paint after she became a wife and a mother; she continued to fashion herself as a painter despite her professional retrieval in the Holland art scene when she got married to Molenaer at the age of twenty-six. As seventeenth-century Dutch art specialist Paul Crenshaw states, "this discovery should put to rest one of the central questions in studies of the artist: although Leyster did renounce her professional ambitions upon marriage to Molenaer in 1636, she did not abandon the brush entirely."[9] In both Leyster's self-portraits, she gazes directly at her audience while holding her painter's palette. Her artistic identity as a woman painter is visually and explicitly portrayed. However, in her 1630 *Self-portrait,* Leyster depicts herself in a joyful, welcoming, and relaxed manner, whereas in 1653, she portrays herself in a rather distant, serious, and matured manner. Christie's discovery of Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* thus allows for an important re-evaluation of how Leyster presented her own artistic identity.

Recent scholars of the past two decades, such as the art historian Yael Even and curator Cynthia Rupprath, describe Leyster's *Self-Portrait* of 1630 as a self-promotional image of her artistic identity as a confident woman painter who mastered both portrait and genre scene paintings. Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* is often visually compared to Frans Hals' portraiture of women and other better-known female artist's self-portraits as a painter at work in front of an easel – such as Katharina van Hemessen's 1548 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 5) and Sofonisba Anguissola's 1554 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 6). For instance, in the article "Judith Leyster: An Unsuitable Place for a Woman" (2002), Yael Even stated that Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* is strategically painted; Leyster painted herself in "her socially dictated proper place… she has created a self-representation which like those of other artists from this period, shows her freedom from conventionality and restraint ordinarily demanded by a patron."[10] Leyster's *Self-Portrait* and other female self-portraiture of the European Renaissance – such as Hemessen's and Anguissola's – may "reflect the uncensored and progressive view of its author… [or may] represent the more conventional wishes of its subjects."[11]

Building on existing research and archival documentation, I will focus on what Leyster conveyed about her own intentions and circumstances in her two self-portraits, rather than comparing Leyster's artistic style and skill to Frans Hals or other better-recognized female painters.

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8. Frima Fox Hofrichter, 116-117.

9. Paul Crenshaw, "Frans Hals's Portrait of an Older Judith Leyster," in *Women, Aging, and Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 68.

10. Yael Even, "Judith Leyster: An Unsuitable Place for a Woman," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/journal of Art History 71*, no. 3 (2002): 11.

11. Yael Even, 123.

My research investigates Leyster's self-fashioning as a bold female painter within the patriarchal Dutch art scene through an art historical examination – particularly through a feminist lens – of her *Self-Portrait* of 1630 and her *Self-Portrait* of 1653. The later self-portrait especially requires new research. My research aims to contribute to the understanding of women artists' social position in the Dutch Republic; and to the recognition of Leyster as a self-made female painter, thus distinguishing her artistic identity as a professional painter from the long-standing domination of canonical male artists in the field of Dutch art history.

The first part of my research explores existing biographical details related to Leyster's artistic career. Was she a successful and respected professional painter? Or was she solely an amateur compared to her other male contemporaries at the Haarlem painter's Guild of St, Luke? I suggest that Leyster was a well-established, successful, and professional painter. I aim to define Leyster's artistic identity by examining her social and artistic position as a woman within the male-dominated artistic community of the early 17th-century Dutch art scene, particularly within the Haarlem art scene where Leyster was one of the few female members of the Painters' Guild of St. Luke. The second part of my paper investigates Leyster's artistic self-fashioning in her self-portraits through an iconographical and art historical analysis. What did Leyster try to convey in her 1630 *Self-Portrait?* In both Leyster's self-portraits, with a particular emphasis on her 1630's one, I suggest Leyster tried to fashion herself as a professional painter who exceeded in her artistic craft despite being born as a woman in a middle-working-class family. Leyster's carefully crafted an artistic representation of herself as a painter at work in front of her easel – while holding her painter's palette and brushes – to celebrate and manifest her identity as a woman portrait and genre scene painter who mastered the masculine artistic intellect and virtuosity. Lastly, my research concludes with a visual and art historical examination of the newly discovered Leyster's *Self-Portrait of* 1653. After her marriage in 1636, she painted little; why, then, did she decide to paint a complete and rather formal self-portrait in her final years? I suggest approaching Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* as her artistic statement about her artistic identity as a confident woman painter who mastered her skills throughout her lifetime.

-the intro is a bit long. It should introduce your argument and the structure of the essay. But save any in depth analysis of your sources for the body of the paper.

Leyster's Artistic Identity as a Professional Woman Painter

One's social identity and status were principally determined by one's family lineage and one's occupation; these two factors were inevitably intertwined. As the art historian Ann Jensen Adams states in her book *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (2009), "the identity of each family member [was] defined through their membership in that lineage, both through their relationship with their own ancestors and sometimes also with those of their spouses."[12] For instance, within an artistic family, the male descendants would naturally learn their father's artistic craft, proceed to master their father's artistic skills and techniques, inherit their father's workshop, and eventually transmit the artistic practices to their future sons. This practice creates an artistic family identity from one generation to the next, forming the

12. Ann Jensen Adams, "Family Portraits: The Private Sphere and the Social Order," in *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland: Portraiture and the Production of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114.

phenomenon of an artistic family dynasty. The female descendants, on the other hand, would also contribute to the continuity and stability of their family artistic lineage through marriage ties, such as marrying their father's workshop assistants and other prominent male artists.

Building on biographical documentation and historical research, it is possible to define Judith Leyster as a self-made painter. It is impressive how Leyster became a well-established painter and created an artistic identity for herself despite being born from a non-artistic family. Born in 1609, Leyster was the "eighth of nine children" of Jan Willemsz and Trijn Jaspersdr.[13] They were a middle-working-class family involved in the local Haarlem's textile industry; Judith's father was "a small-ware weaver (*smalwerker*), that is, someone who made narrow strips of cotton, wool, or silk."[14] In the early 1600s, there was a booming brewery business in Haarlem; "Haarlem beer was of a high quality and was exported to many other towns in Holland."[15] In the 1600s, Judith's father successfully involved himself in Haarlem's real estate market and owned a brewery that he named as "Leystar" – meaning "leading star", a surname that Judith's family all went by and carried upon in archival documentation. Indeed, "the adoption of a surname from one's house or place of business, was not uncommon."[16] Hence, it was possible to define Leyster's family as financially comfortable until her parents filed for bankruptcy in 1623 and left Haarlem. Before the bankruptcy, Jan and Trijn were well-off enough to provide their children with education and training outside of their family business. As the daughter, Judith was taught writing, reading, and arithmetic; particularly, she was allowed to study painting.

However, the reason why Jan and Trijn – a family of weavers and brewers with nothing to do with painter's trade – decided to let their daughter Judith be trained in art remains a contested questioning. Some art historians, such as Ellen Broersen, suggest that Judith was trained in art because her family was wealthy enough to afford art instruction for their daughter. Training in paintings might also have been a helpful artistic skill for the family's textile business; "Leyster's father also possibly produced fabrics' with figures' (*gebbelde*), perhaps with the help of patterns drawn by artists."[17] Other scholars, such as Frima Fox Hofrichter, suggest that Jan and Trijin sent their children out "to work in order to defray the family's expenses" in the early 1620s when the family's financial situation was deteriorating.[18] Either way, it was clear that Judith Leyster exceeded in her artistic craft. As a woman born in a non-artistic family, she was one of the first

13. Ellen Broersen, "Judita Leystar: A Painter of Good, Keen Sense," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*, (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 15.

14. Ellen Broersen, 15.

15. J.J. Temminck, "Haarlem: Its Social/Political History," in *Haarlem, the Seventeenth Century* (Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1983), 20.

16. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age*, 13.

17. Ellen Broersen, "Judita Leystar: A Painter of Good, Keen Sense," 19.

18. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age*, 14.

women admitted to the Haarlem painters' Guild of St. Luke as a master painter in 1633 at the age of twenty-four.

At the time, "there were many painters in Haarlem in this period, both amateur and professional."[19] As a member of the Haarlem's Painters Guild of St. Luke, Leyster was a professional and well-established painter. The Guild of St. Luke was a flourishing artistic institution that gathered important professional artists of the Netherlands – including painters, sculptors, embroiderers, goldsmiths, architects, second-hand dealers, and many other artistic professions and craftsmanship. As historian J.J. Temminck explains, "the Guild served two purposes: to maintain a high level of craftsmanship and to bar foreigners with their goods and products."[20] There were specific regulations to be admitted to the Painters' Guild of St. Luke. As Koos Levy-Van Halm explained:

> An applicant had to have studied and 'wrought' (*gewrocht*) with a master for a minimum of three years, followed by at least a year as an 'independent assistant with a master, or working independently for money.' Leaving aside the guild regulations, there were variations regarding the type of training and the fees to be paid, [which was quite expensive].[21]

On the same note, Frima Fox Hofritcher also stated that the admission process might require "presentation of a painting… [and] Leyster may have painted her *Self-Portrait* for this purpose."[22] Hence, it is reasonable to interpret Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* as a self-promotional image that showcases her mastery in both portrait and genre scene painting. As a master painter at the Guild of St. Luke, Leyster possibly trained with, or worked with, Frans Hals and Dirck Hals who were also master painters of the Guild. This would have explained the strong similarities in their painting technics and style. Moreover, Leyster's self-presentation as an artist in front of an easel in her self-portrait also evokes her artistic profession as someone who was trained at Haarlem's Guild; the portrayal of a painter "seated at an easel, holding a painter's objects most likely derived from the fifteenth-century Netherlandish image of St. Luke painting the Virgin… St. Luke was the patron of the painters' guild."[23]

Leyster wasn't the only woman painter at Haarlem, chroniclers Ampzing and Schrevelius also wrote about Maria de Grebber (1602-1680), who was a prominent woman painter from an artistic family in the Haarlem art scene. Both Leyster and Grebber were praised by Amazing and Schrevelius for how unusual and fascinating they are as women painters; their commentaries evoke

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19. J.J. Temminck, "Haarlem: Its Social/Political History," 24.

20. J.J. Temminck, 24.

21. Koos Levy-Van Halm, "Judith Leyster: The Making of a Master," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 69.

22. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age*, 15.

23. Cynthia Kortenhorst-Von Bogendorf Rupprath, "Self-Portrait," in *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1993), 165.

the idea that "the level of Haarlem painting was so good that even girls excelled at it."[24] Both women were recognized as female painters who succeeded to be as artistically skillful that their male contemporaries. Yet, I suggest there is still a difference between Leyster and Grebber's artistic success. Grebber was born in an artistic family, her father was the painter Frans Pietersz de Grebber (1573-1649) who owned a reputed workshop in Haarlem. As the daughter, Grebber could naturally inherit her father's artistic skills and worked in her father's workshop. She belonged to an artistic family; she did not need to establish herself an artistic identity or an independent workshop. Whereas Leyster was born in a non-artistic family, she must work to achieve the status of a master painter at the Haarlem's Guild of St. Luke to become a professional painter and to establish her own workshop – a "membership in the guild was a prerequisite to establishing oneself as an independent painter" for both women and men.[25] With that said, it is reasonable to argue that Leyster was a self-made painter.

Lastly, I would like to suggest the idea that Leyster could have established a legacy of artistic family identity with her husband painter Jan Miense Molenaer. As mentioned previously, it was common for painters to transmit their artistic craft to their descendants – as in the case of Maria de Grebber. The practices of transmitting a specific skill/occupation from one generation to the next within a middle-working-class family would ensure a family's economic, social, and professional prosperity. As Margaret Haines explained:

> "Consolidation of professional activity over more than one generation permitted the development of a shop reputation and the elaboration of family strategies of advancement. If widows and heirs extraneous to the artist's shop found themselves saddled with partly paid, unfinished works and were bound to suffer losses, a shop's passage […] could take place almost imperceptibly."[26]

In the case of Leyster and Molenaer, they failed to establish an artistic identity for their family legacy. When they got married in 1636, they moved to Amsterdam and established a workshop with students and assistants. In spite of the couple's artistic talent, their works and workshop weren't as acclaimed nor renowned as their contemporaries such as Rembrandt's or Frans Hals'. The couple still made a decent living as painters but were deprived of a wealthy life due to never-ending financial difficulty caused by several complex court issues they experienced from their marriage to their death. As Frima Fox Hofrichter stated, Molenaer appeared often in court as both defendant and plaintiff, "financial difficulties plague the couple throughout their married life, because Molenaer was in the habit of not paying his bills."[27] If the couple didn't suffer from financial difficulties, and if they didn't die when their children were still young aged, they

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24. Els Kloek, "The Case of Judith Leyster: Exception or Paradigm," 62.

25. Ellen Broersen, "Judita Leystar: A Painter of Good, Keen Sense," 20.

26. Margaret Haines. "Artisan Family Strategies: Proposals for Research on the Families of Florentine Artists," in *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 167.

27. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age*, 17.

could have started an artistic family legacy since they are both well-trained painters from the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke.

Leyster's Self-Fashioning as an Artistically Intellectual and Virtuous Painter

Portraits were everywhere, commissioned for various purposes, and presented in different settings. Beyond the vivid depiction of a person's likeness, portraiture entails the complex histories, identities, social status, desires, memories, and ambitions hidden behind the carefully crafted visual representation of the sitter.[28] It was common for both female and male painters to paint a self-portrait of themselves as an artist at work in front of a painter's easel with a painter's palette. Self-portraits were a method for painters to showcase the mastery of their artistic craft and to demonstrate their artistic intellect and virtuosity.[29] Through an iconographical and art historical analysis, it is possible to interpret Leyster's 1630 and 1653 *Self-Portrait* as her carefully crafted artistic construction of herself. In both self-portraits, Leyster boldly acknowledges and celebrates her identity as a woman portrait and genre scene painter who mastered the artistic intellect and virtuosity – two qualities that a well-establish painter should have.

First, Leyster's *Self-Portrait* of 1630 captures the fleeting moment of an artist's momentary pause from her canvas to engage personally with her audience. Her expression, posture, and movement are portrayed in a natural, casual, and spontaneous manner. However, plausibly, everything in her self-portrait is carefully staged by Leyster herself. In both Leyster's *Self-Portrait* of 1630 and 1653, she is dressed in formal and fashionable clothing. For instance, in her 1630's *Self-Portrait*, she fashions herself with a red voluminous dress with a luxurious black doublet pinned tightly against her torso; her wrists are decorated with airy white ruffs, and her neck wears an enormously large white ruff while her hair is tied neatly with a white headgear. She appears as a woman of the bourgeoisie. The ensemble of Leyster's substantial and formal clothing is very unlikely to be her daily attire – particularly when she is painting in her studio. Perhaps, Leyster's choice of fashion is a gritty statement – a poetic visual narrative – about her social status and her financial success as a high-profile young female painter of the seventeenth-century male-dominated Dutch art scene.

In Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait*, she also fashions herself by posing fully at ease with her paintbrushes, her palette, and her easel painting. She seems to showcase to her audience her self-assured mastery in both portrait and genre scene paintings – a popular genre that generally depicts scenes of everyday day and ordinary people, such as the young male violinist on Leyster's canvas, that was loved by the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie and middle-class. In her 1630 painting, Leyster's right-hand raised with a paintbrush conforms similarly to the violinist's bow painted on her canvas. Both Leyster and the joyful young male violinist gaze directly and smile warmly at us

28. Ann Jensen Adams, "The Cultural Power of Portraits: The Market, Interpersonal Experience, and Subjectivity," in *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland: Portraiture and the Production of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-5.

29. Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Introduction: The Social Status of the Artist in the Renaissance," in *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-13.

– their audience – in a similar manner. Their hands also similarly hold their artistic tool, with poise and equanimity. The artist and her painted subject are proud of their identity and confident about the virtuosity – the mastery – of their art. Given the visual similarities between the two, Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* could also be regarded as a casual genre scene of Leyster's everyday life as a painter in her artist's studio, thus evoking her mastery at both portrait and genre scene painting.

Second, Leyster's glowing face and radiant hands contrast strongly with her dark clothing, sombre painter's palette, and blurry background in her 1630 *Self-Portrait*. The color composition and contrast in her self-portrait effectively guide her audience to view immediately her confident gaze and her artistically gifted hands. In her 1653 *Self-Portrait*, Leyster also presents her hands as artistically trained hands. She precisely staged her hands with the painter's palette and brushes in a momentary manner; her right-hand holds a brush and applies paints on her palette in a confident manner. I suggest Leyster's careful portrayal of her hands can be understood as her artistic statement about her artistic intellect and mastery as a professional painter. Building on the Italian Renaissance's artistic philosophy, the Renaissance artistic communities stressed an important emphasis on the painters' hands. They believed that one's talent in the art cannot be learned; rather, "the inborn talent or creative power needed to conceive the work in the first place."[30] As Joanna Woods-Marsden explained in her book *Renaissance Self-Portraiture* (1998):

> "The hand was to be understood as an *extension* of the mind, as in Alberti's claim that his objective in his treatise was to 'instruct the painter how he can represent with hand [*mano*] what he has understood with his talent [*ingegnio*]… Vasari sustained that only a 'trained hand' could mediate the idea born in the intellect, or, as Michelangelo put it in a famous sonnet, 'the hand that obeys the intellect' (*la man che ubbidisce all-intelletto*) – in other words, the 'learned hand' (*docta manus*)...."[31]

On the same note, Leyster's artistic intellect can also be understood by her visual construction of herself as an artist at work in front of a painter's easel with a painter's palette in her 1630 and 1653 *Self-Portrait.* This type of pose was commonly used by artists, particularly portrait painters, to assure and allude to "the intellectual activity of the sitter, especially in the case of the artist, creative thinking and inspiration."[32] Some painters would portray themselves uniquely with their painter's palette and brushes without showing what they are working on, such as in Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* and Rembrandt's 1660 *Self-Portrait at the Easel* (Fig. 7), which could simply be understood as a self-fashioning method that explicitly evokes their artistic identity as a painter. Some other artists would portray themselves with a work-in-progress imagery of their choices that could evoke several meanings. In the case of Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait,* she decided to portray herself with an image of a joyful young male violinist painted on her canvas; it might be a reference to her well-celebrated genre scene painting *Merry Company* that was also painted

30. Joanna Woods-Marsden, 4.

31. Joanna Woods-Marsden, 4.

32. Cynthia Kortenhorst-Von Bogendorf Rupprath, "Self-Portrait," 163-164. You will have to correct all of the notes. It should be just last name and short title with pages.

in 1630 (Fig. 8).[33] On the other hand, compared to Sofonisba Anguissola's 1554 *Self-Portrait,* Anguissola depicted herself with a painted image of the Virgin Mary kissing her child; it might be her artistic statement to showcase her religious and feminine virtuosity as a noblewoman.[34] Indeed, as a noblewoman of the Italian Renaissance, Anguissola did not practice painting as her occupation; rather, the artistic craft of painting was practiced by noblewomen to showcase their domestic, feminine, and intellectual virtuosity as an idealized and well-learned woman of nobility.[35] Whereas for Leyster, she depicted herself as an artist at work to showcase her mastery of portrait and genre scene painting – thus evoking her artistic intellect as a professional painter.

Third, resting on the theme of idealized femininity and virtuosity, it is interesting to note that an infrared photograph of Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* "reveals that Leyster originally painted a portrait of a girl or a woman on the canvas" before replacing it with the image of a joyful young male violinist (Fig. 9).[36] What did Leyster originally try to convey? I suggest, either with the originally intended portrait of a girl or the current replaced genre scene of a joyful violinist, Leyster aimed to define and manifest her artistic identity as a professional and skilled painter within the male-dominated Dutch art scene. If Leyster did fashion herself as an artist painting a portrait of a woman, it can be interpreted as her capability to personify her canvas as the *Pictura;* a poetic tool that showcases her capability to achieve artistic virtue (which was a quality attributed to male painters) and artistic domination as a professional painter – despite being born as a woman who was supposed to be subordinated by men according to the social and cultural norms of the Dutch Republic. In fact, "the theme of love as a principal source of artistic creativity was commonplace in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish literature as a whole, an idea expressed in the popular motto 'Love brings forth art'…. The painting was personified by the female figure of *Pictura*… [Male] painters were frequently said to 'love' painting and sometimes even said to have 'married' her."[37] Hence, in male painters' self-portraits, they often depicted themselves with their wife or with an imagery of their wife that evokes an artistic embodiment of the *Pictura* to demonstrate their artistic virtue as a painter and their male virtue as a husband – such as portrayed in Rembrandt's 1636 *Self-Portrait with his wife Saskia* (Fig. 10), and Adrianen van der Werff's 1699 *Self-Portrait of His Wife and Daughter* (Fig. 11). As Erin Griffey explained:

> "The morality of conjugal love [underlined] the artist's social status as a worthy member of Dutch society. As a way of celebrating this

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33. Cynthia Kortenhorst-Von Bogendorf Rupprath, 165.

34. Mary D Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1994): 556–622.

35. Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Part IV The Self as *PICTRIX CELEBRIS*," in *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 187-224.

36. Cynthia Kortenhorst-Von Bogendorf Rupprath, "Self-Portrait," 165.

37. Erin Griffey, "Pro-Creativity. Art, Love and Conjugal Virtue in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Artists' Self-portraits," *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* 28, no. 1 and 2 (2004): 28-34.

> relationship, artists are presented – and [increasingly] present themselves – not only as lovers but also as husbands and family men in their portraits... Art literature encouraged the artist's love of art, even his figurative marriage to *Pictura* and the procreation of exemplary works of art. These self-images play on the artist's professional role as a creator of paintings because love was considered the ideal basis of artistic and natural production… [painters' participation in the discourse of conjugal love in their self-portraits] allowed the artist to participate metaphorically in both the heroic male virtue of artistic creation and the traditionally female virtues of procreation."[38]

All things considered, Leyster's original intended portrait of a girl on her canvas can be interpreted as her artistic embodiment of a masculine identity as a virtuous and skilled painter. As a woman, Leyster plausibly wanted to prove her professional capacity to produce an ideal artistic craft as perfect, virtuous, and skillful as a male painter. If we visually compared the artistic choices in Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* to other female painters', such as Anguissola's 1554 *Self-Portrait* or Maria Schalcken's 1680 *Self-Portrait of the Artist in Her Studio* (Fig. 12), it is possible to argue that Leyster fashions herself in a rather masculine manner compared to other female artists of her era. Leyster, Anguissola, and Schalcken all confidently pose themselves as an artist at work in front of their easel with their hands holding a painter's palette and brushes; however, Leyster chooses to fashion herself with an image of a young joyful male violinist rather with a feminine imagery (that evokes feminine virtuosity) such as the portrait of Virgin and Child in Anguissola's self-portrait, or the landscape painting in Schalcken's self-portrait. Hence, Leyster fashions herself with a masculine artistic intellect and virtuosity to celebrate her successful mastery as a professional painter despite being a woman; Leyster's artistic choices demonstrate a visual narrative of her capability to produce art as competent and trained as her male contemporaries.

Old-Aged Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait*: A Bold Statement on Her Life-Long Artistic Mastery

In 2016, the London art auction house Christie's discovered a second self-portrait of Leyster dated to around 1653, eight years before her death in 1660. This later self-portrait allows for an important re-evaluation of how Leyster presented her own artistic identity. As Paul Crenshaw stated in *Women, Aging, and Art* (2021), "even though Leyster had largely relinquished her career for family, the recently discovered self-portrait of the 1640s affirms that she did not stop painting entirely and that her skills did not wane."[39] Building on iconographical and art historical analysis, I suggest interpreting Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* as her artistic statement about her life-long and continuous mastery as a painter despite becoming a wife and a mother. In spite of her old aged and retrieval from the Dutch art scene as an independent painter, Leyster continued to fashion herself as a confident portrait painter who mastered her artistic craft with great intellect and virtuosity.

Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* is a three-quarter length oval and small size portrait, measuring 30,9 x 21,9 cm. As in her 1630 *Self-Portrait*, Leyster still depicts herself with bright-

38. Erin Griffey, 27.

39. Paul Crenshaw, "Frans Hals's Portrait of an Older Judith Leyster," 68.

blushes cheeks direct gaze; she still portrays herself as a painter at work who holds firmly her painter's palette and brushes – thus evoking her artistic intellect and virtuosity. Yet, compared to her joyful, welcoming, and casual pose in her 1630 *Self-Portrait*, Leyster portrays herself in a rather distant, serious, and matured manner in her 1653 *Self-Portrait.* I suggest approaching the later self-portrait with the concept of *Tranquillitas* – a seventeenth-century Netherlandish philosophy that was often evoked in portraitures of rulers and nobilities. Throughout the seventeenth-century Holland, "men and women were conscious of the body as an eloquent vehicle for personal expression and an indicator of social distinction."[40] Even one's facial expression needed to be carefully crafted in portraiture. A ruler, a nobleman, or a noblewoman would have a little facial expression to demonstrate their "rational self-control."[41] For instance, "for male elite, the ability to control one's emotions was a sign that one had the ability to govern others," such as the restrained expression portrayed in Antonia Moro's *Portrait of Willem of Nassau, Prince of Orange* (Fig. 13).[42] This artistic phenomenon to portray a sitter with minimal expression came from the philosophy of *Tranquillitas*. As Ann Jensen Adams explained,

> "The emotional calm and detachment conveyed by a tranquil face and impassive body displayed in portraits of the elite classes across Europe were associated with the neo-Stoci ideal of *tranquillitas*... these portraits defined for their viewers the concept of *tranquillitas* as a private discourse of self-mastery available to all for the containment of their emotions."[43]

Hence, referring to the artistic and philosophical concept of *tranquillitas*, I suggest Leyster might have deliberately fashioned herself in a more restrained and sober manner in her 1653 *Self-Portrait.* The older Leyster might have consciously chosen to portray herself with an impassive gaze and to fashion herself in dark clothing, thus evoking a similarity to the common Dutch imageries of noble sitters such as portrayed in Thomas de Keyser's *Portrait of Frans van Limborch* and *Portrait of Geertruyd Bisschop* (Fig. 14). I suggest Leyster's artistic choices in her 1653 *Self-Portrait* can be interpreted as her artistic statement about her 'rational self-control', her 'discourse of self-mastery', as an old-aged woman and artistically trained painter even after years of 'disappearance' in the professional Dutch painters' art scene.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* is painted with oil on panel, whereas her 1630 *Self-Portrait* and most of her surviving works were painted with oil on

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40. Ann Jensen Adams, "The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland: The Cultural Functions of *Tranquillitas,*" in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 167.

41. Ann Jensen Adam, "Portraits of the Individual: Physiognomy, Demeanor, and the Representation of Character," in *Public Faces and Private Identities in Seventeenth-Century Holland: Portraiture and the Production of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 81.

42. Ann Jensen Adams, "The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland: The Cultural Functions of *Tranquillitas,*" 167.

43. Ann Jensen Adams, 167.

canvas. I suggest Leyster's 1653 *Self-Portrait* can be understood as evidence of her continuous mastery of portrait painting. In spite of her inactivity within the Dutch art scene as a wife, a mother, and eventually, as an old woman, it was plausible that she continued to learn, to perfection, and to master the artistic craft of portrait painting. In fact, the craft of oil portraiture on canvas versus on wood panels were two distinct types of community at the Painters' Guild of St. Luke: "*schilders* and *cleederscrivers.* The first term was applied to artists whose primary occupation was the painting of panels… *Cleederscrivers,* on the other hand, […] is used in the guild registers to refer to artists known to have worked on cloth."[44] Therefore, when Leyster was trained at the Guild as a master painter in her early twenties, she was most likely trained in the *Cleederscrivers* communities given the fact of her early works – and most of her current surviving oeuvres – are oil on canvas paintings. With that said, the recent discovery of Leyster's 1653 oil on panel *Self-Portrait* demonstrates that Leyster did not only master the craft of oil on canvas painting, she also fabulously mastered the craft of oil on panel portrait painting skills and technics.

Conclusion

Judith Leyster is a worthy-to-be-recognized woman painter. Most women of her time "often made art as an amateur rather than as professional", "middle-class women were not expected to work for a living", and "the expensive training required by the guilds of an aspiring professional painter would have been deemed quite unnecessary for a daughter."[45] Despite being born as a woman in a non-artistic family, she impressively established an artistic identity for herself independently by achieving the status of a master painter at the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke. Through iconographical and art historical examinations of her 1630 and 1653 *Self-Portrait,* we can learn and investigate more about Leyster's life and how she presented her own artistic identity. In both self-portraits, Leyster boldly fashions herself as a professional painter who mastered the craft of portrait and genre scene painting. Until her death, she claimed her artistic identity as a bold female painter who succeeded with a perfect artistic intellect and virtuosity. As the feminist art historians Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollack stated in their book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (1981):

> "Women's relation to artistic and social structures has been different to that of male artists. To see women's history only as a progressive struggle against great odds is to fall into the trap of unwittingly reasserting the established male standards as the appropriate norms. […] The sex of the artist matter. It conditions the way art is seen and discussed."[46]

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44. Diane Wolfthal, *The Beginnings of Netherlandish Canvas Painting, 1400-1530* (Cambridge, CB: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

45. Elizabeth Alice Honing, "The Space of Gender in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism* Reconsidered (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 31.

46. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981): xviii, 50.

For further investigation on Leyster's self-fashioning and artistic identity as a professional painter, it would be interesting to question why most female painters –such as Leyster, Anguissola, and Maria Schalcken – generally portray themselves as an artist at work in front of an easel with a painter's palette and brushes, whereas male painters don't necessarily produce self-portraits of themselves in this specific kind of self-portrayal – such as Albrecht Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 15) and Frans Hals' 1640 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 16). I suggest the disparities between female and male painters' self-portraits could be interpreted as the gendered inequality presented in the male-dominated art scene. Women painters needed to explicitly fashion themselves with painter's objects and symbols to claim/manifest their artistic identity as a painter. Whereas for male painters, their gender identity as male evokes their 'given' artistic intellect and virtuosity. They did not necessarily need to explicitly fashion themselves as a painter to prove their identity as an artist. As male painters, they had 'more liberty' to fashion themselves variously. Hence, one of the methods to approach this investigation is to consider the different societal and artistic expectations between a man and a woman, and the gendered hierarchy of the arts.

Appendix

Figure 1. Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1630. Oil on Canvas, 74.6 x 65.1 cm.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

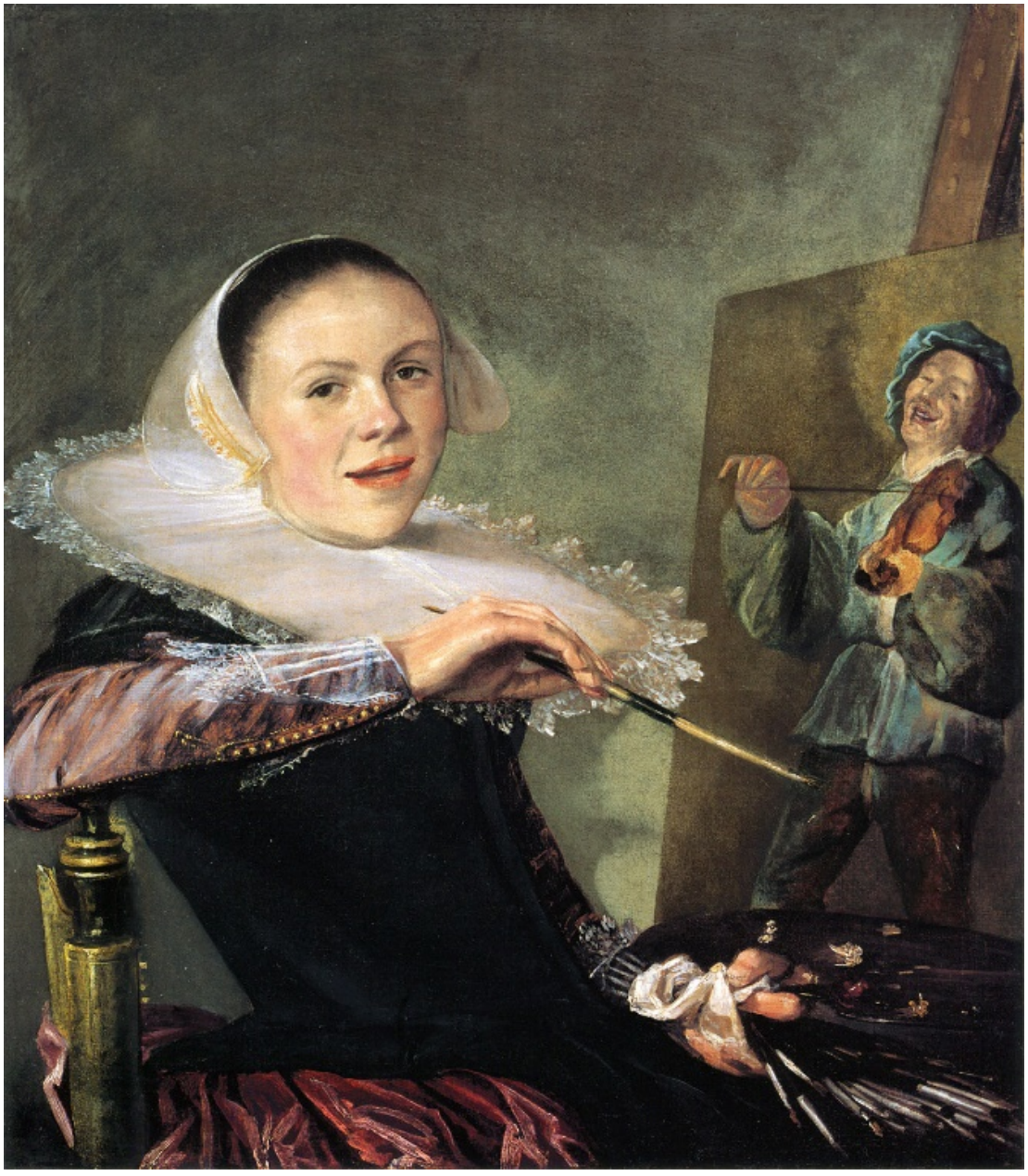


Figure 2. Judith Leyster, *Carousing Couple*, c. 1630. Oil on Canvas, 68 x 54 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

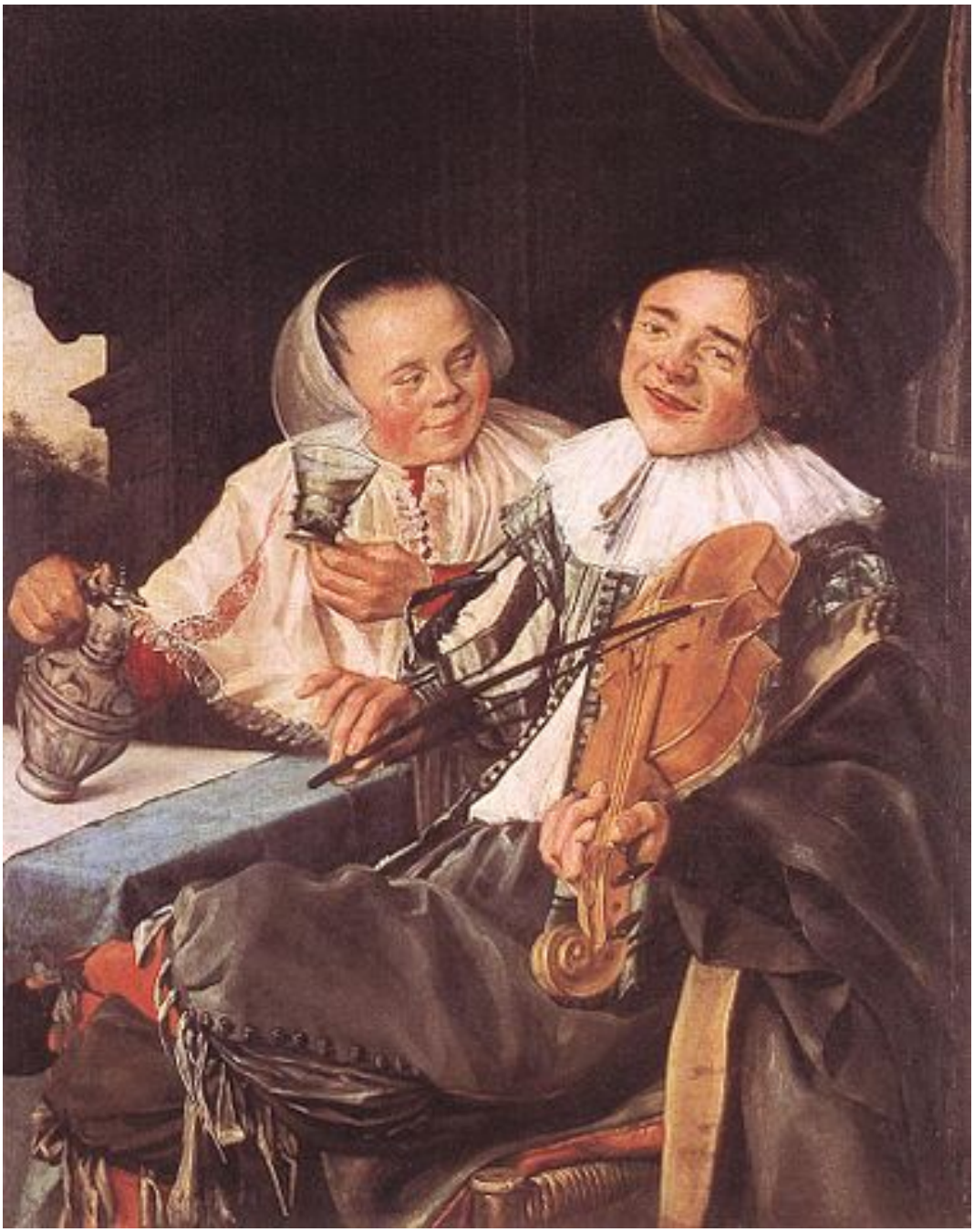


Figure 3. Judith Leyster, Monogram. Detail of *Carousing Couple*.

Figure 4. Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1653. Oil on Canvas, 30.9 x 21.9 cm. Christie's, London.

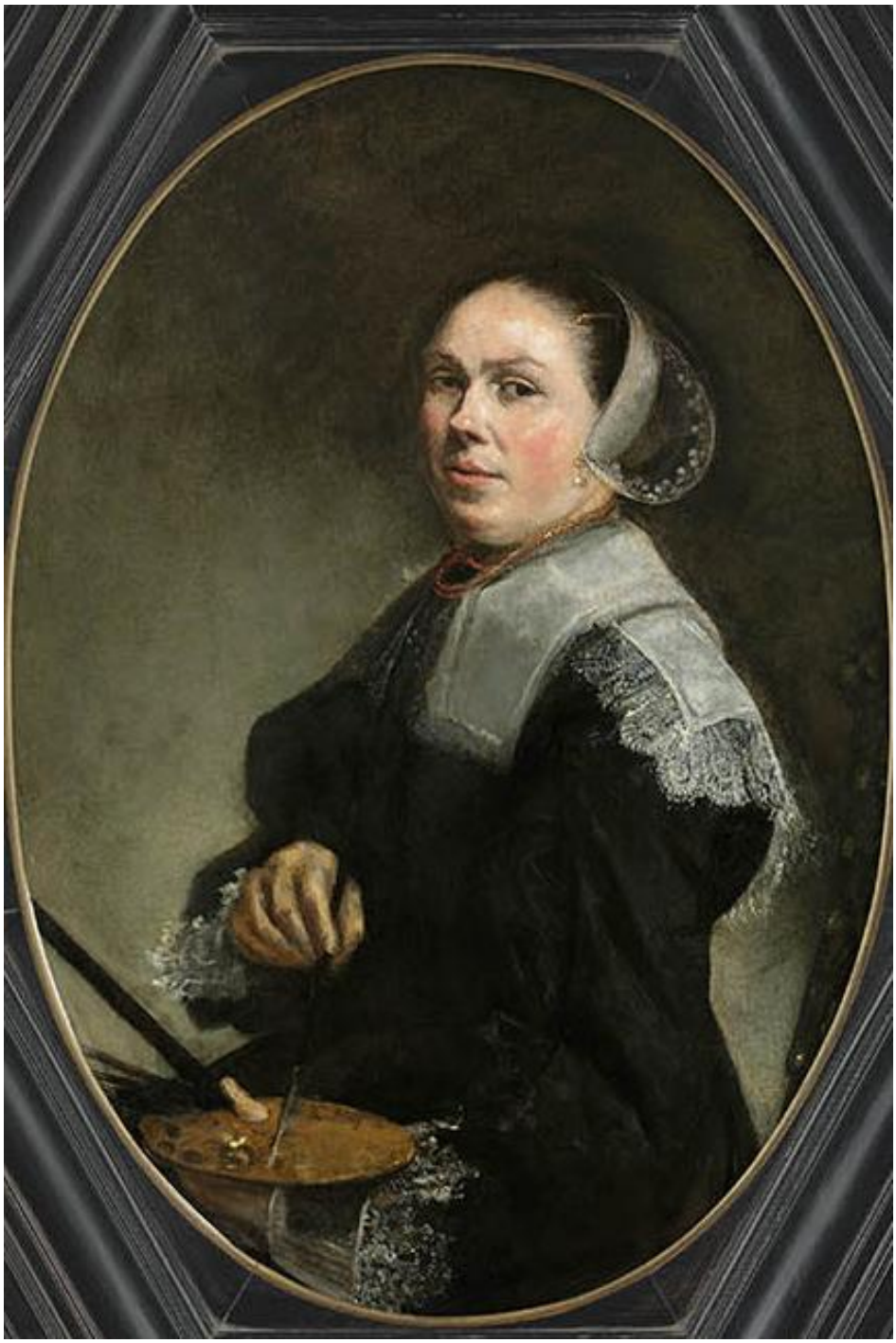


Figure 5. Katharina van Hemessen, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1548. Oil on Oak, 30.8 x 24.4 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland.

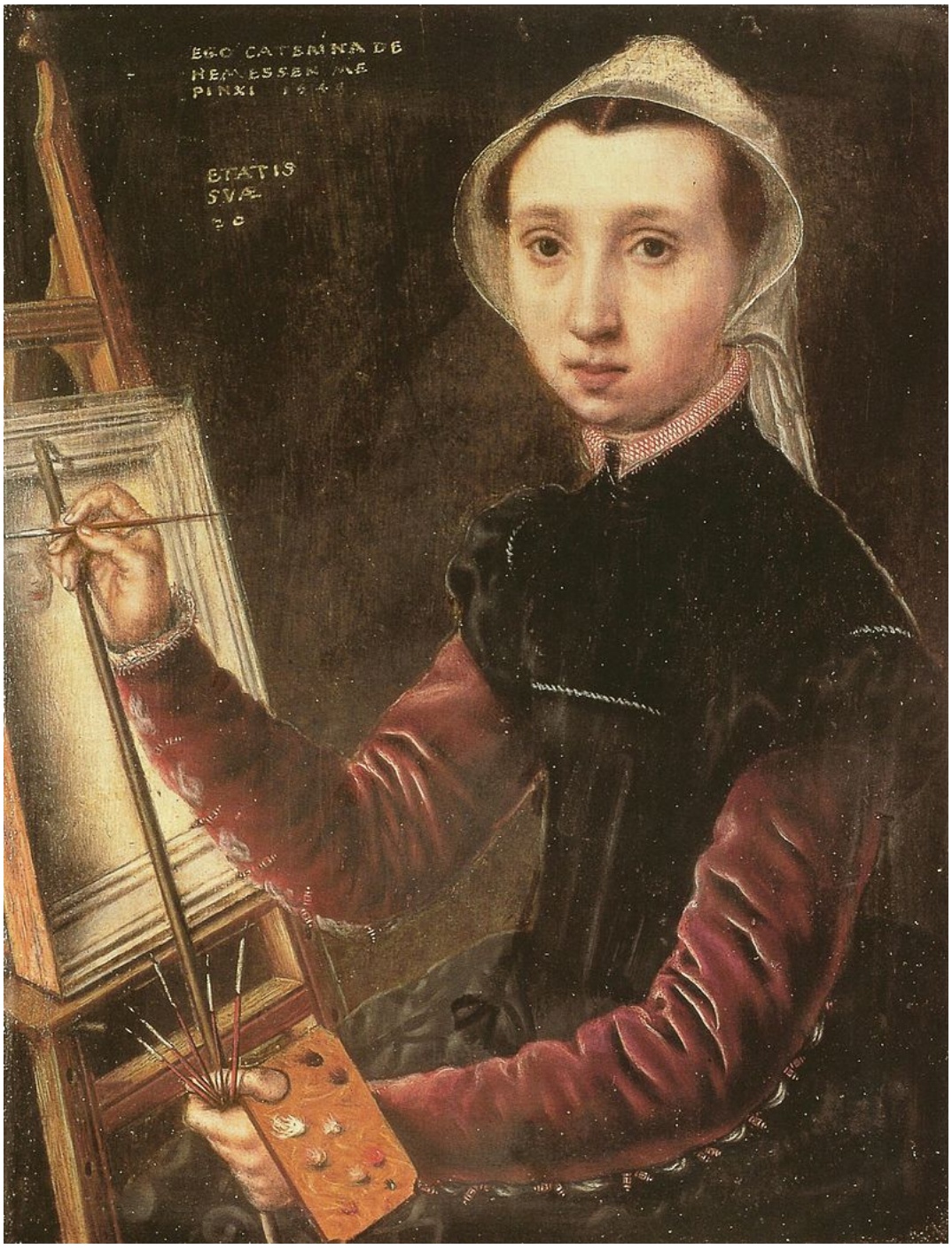


Figure 6. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1556. Oil on Canvas, 66 x 57 cm. Lancut Castle, Poland.

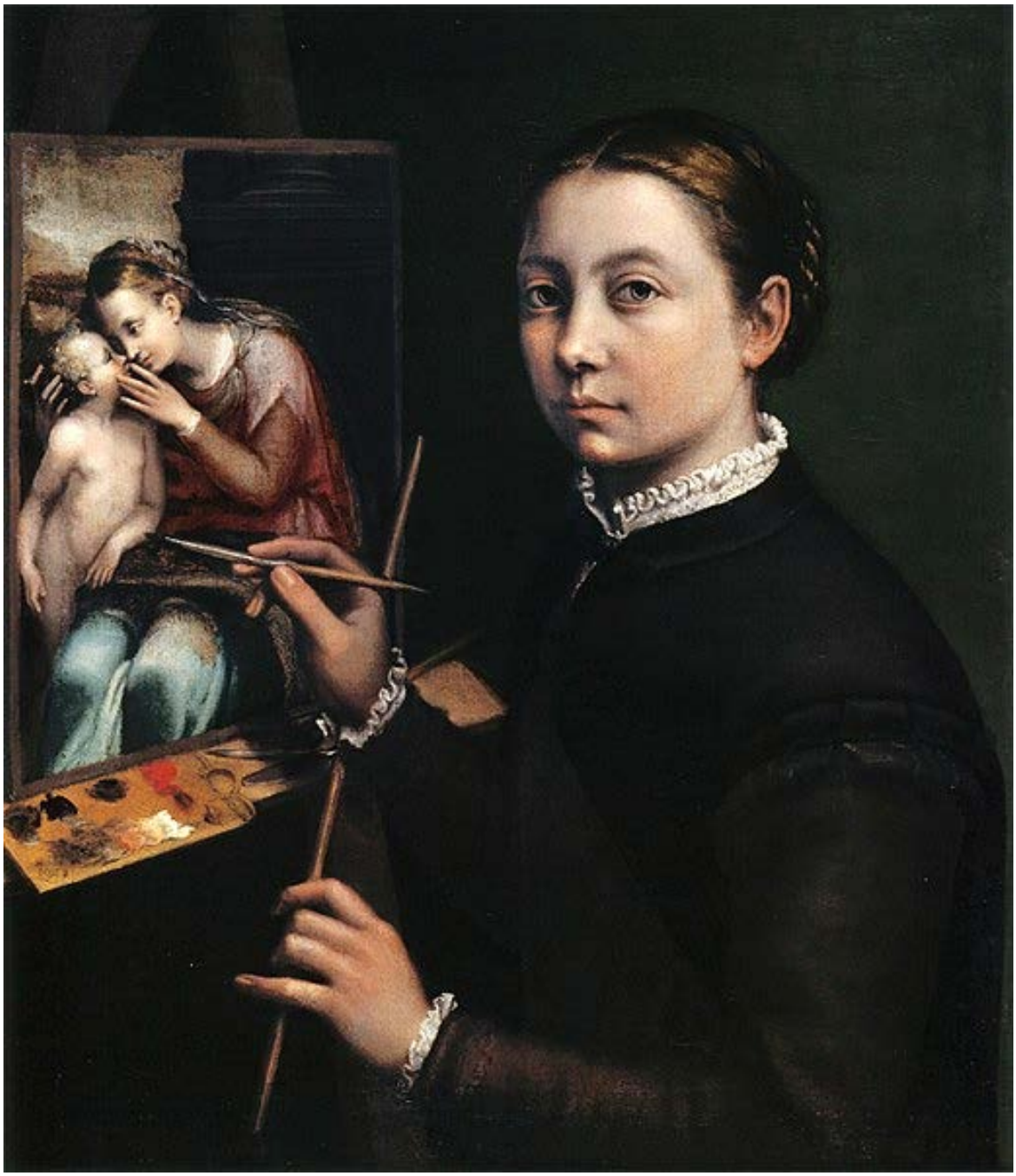


Figure 7. Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1660. Oil on Canvas, 111 x 85 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 8. Judith Leyster, *Merry Trio*, c. 1629. Oil on Canvas, 35 x 28.9 cm. Private Collection.

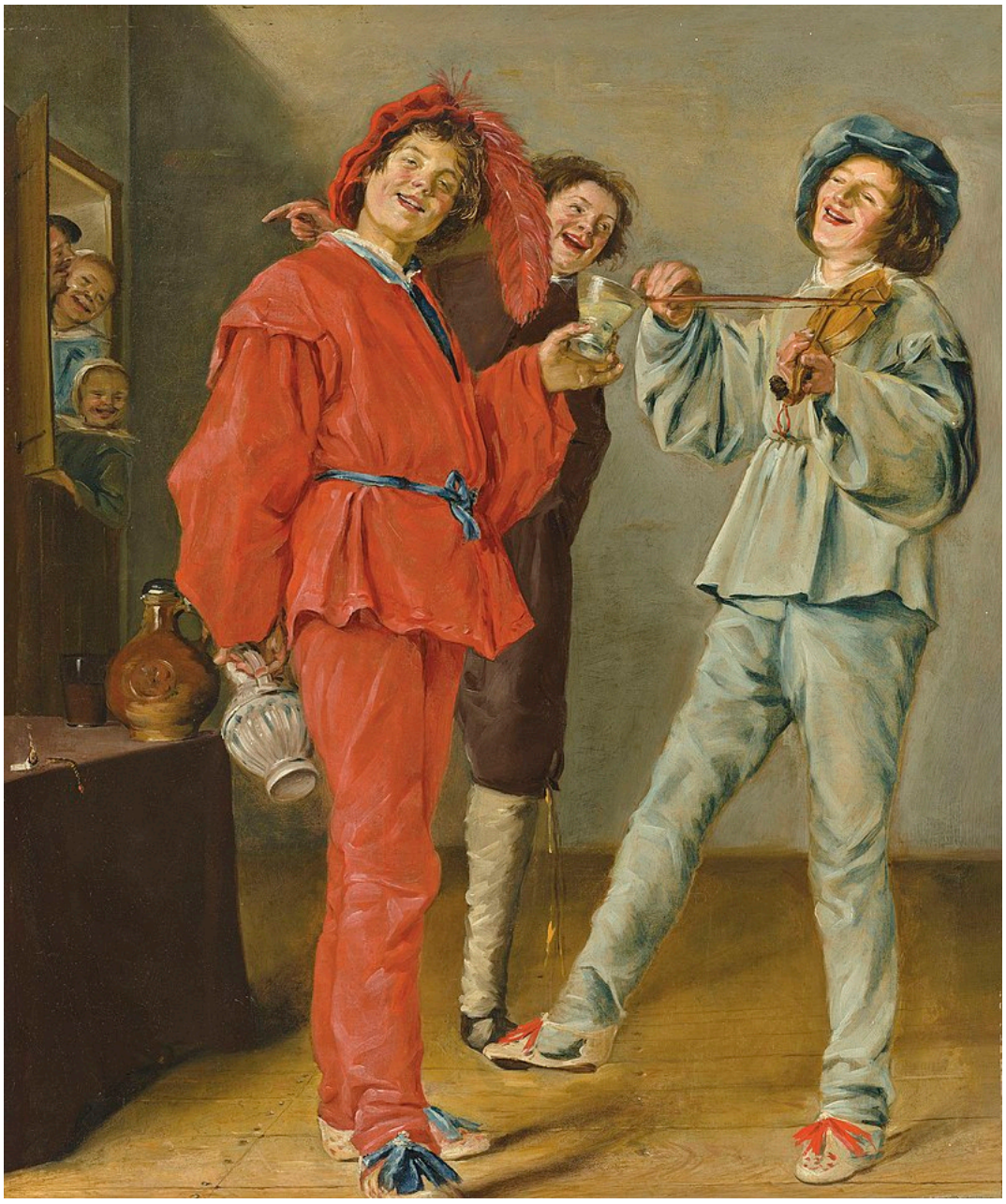


Figure 9. Infrared photographed of Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1630. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 10. Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait with his wife Saskia,* c. 1636. Etching, 10.4 x 9.5 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge UK.

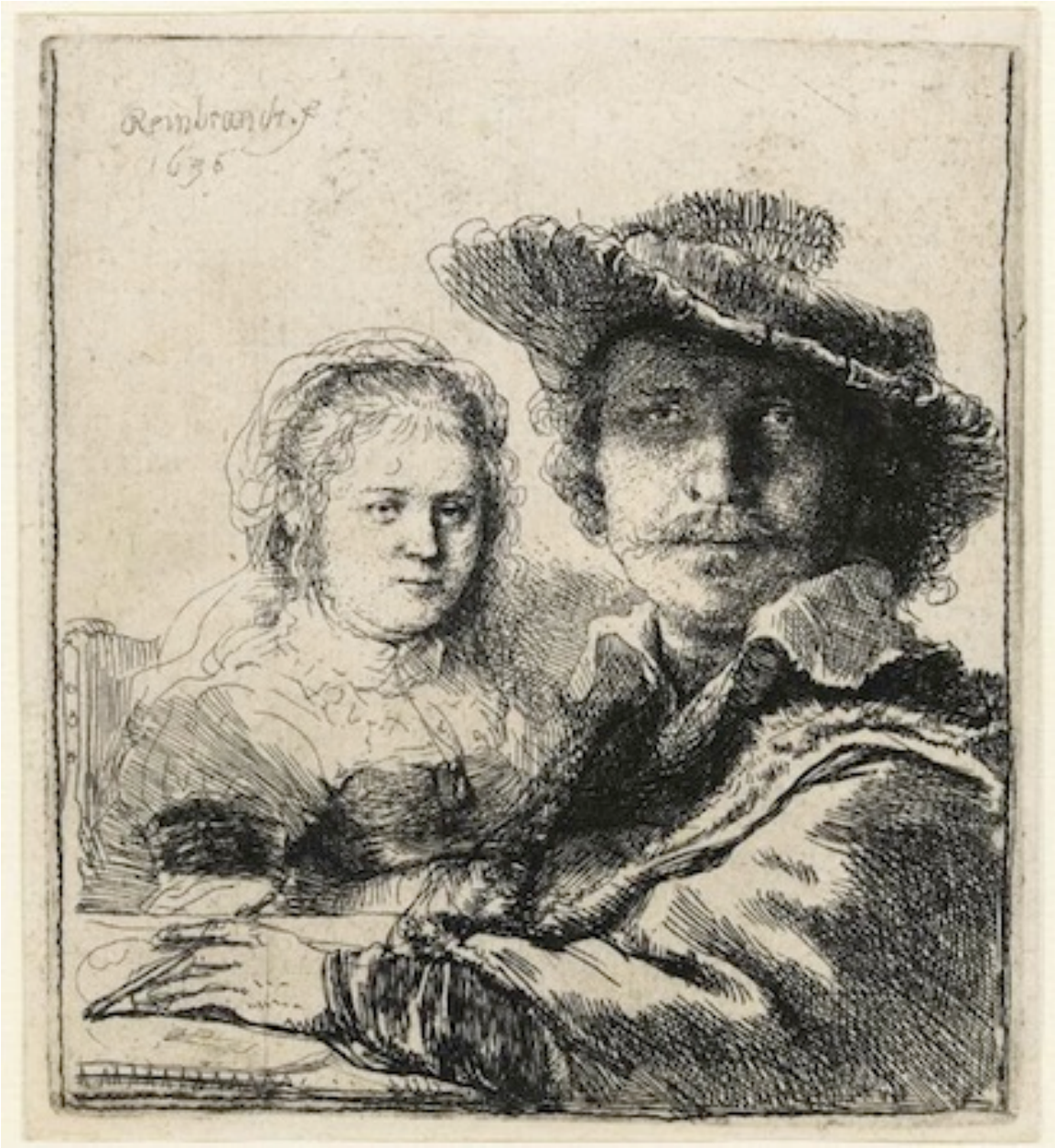


Figure 11. Adrianen van der Werff, *Self-Portrait,* c. 1699. Oil on Canvas, 31.8 x 65.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

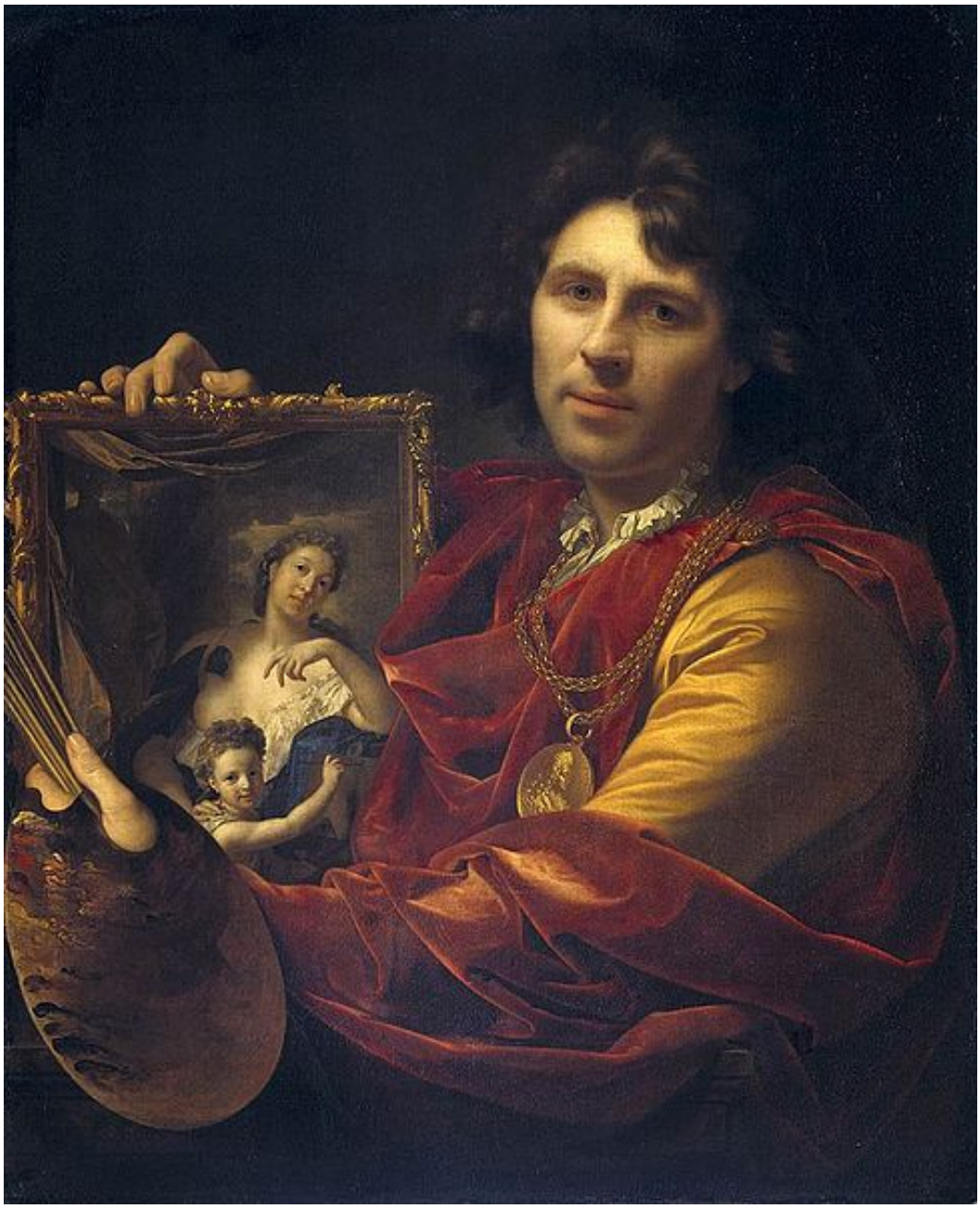


Figure 12. Maria Schalcken, *Self-Portrait of the Artist in Her Studio,* c. 1662/99. Oil on Panel, 15.5 x 12.4 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

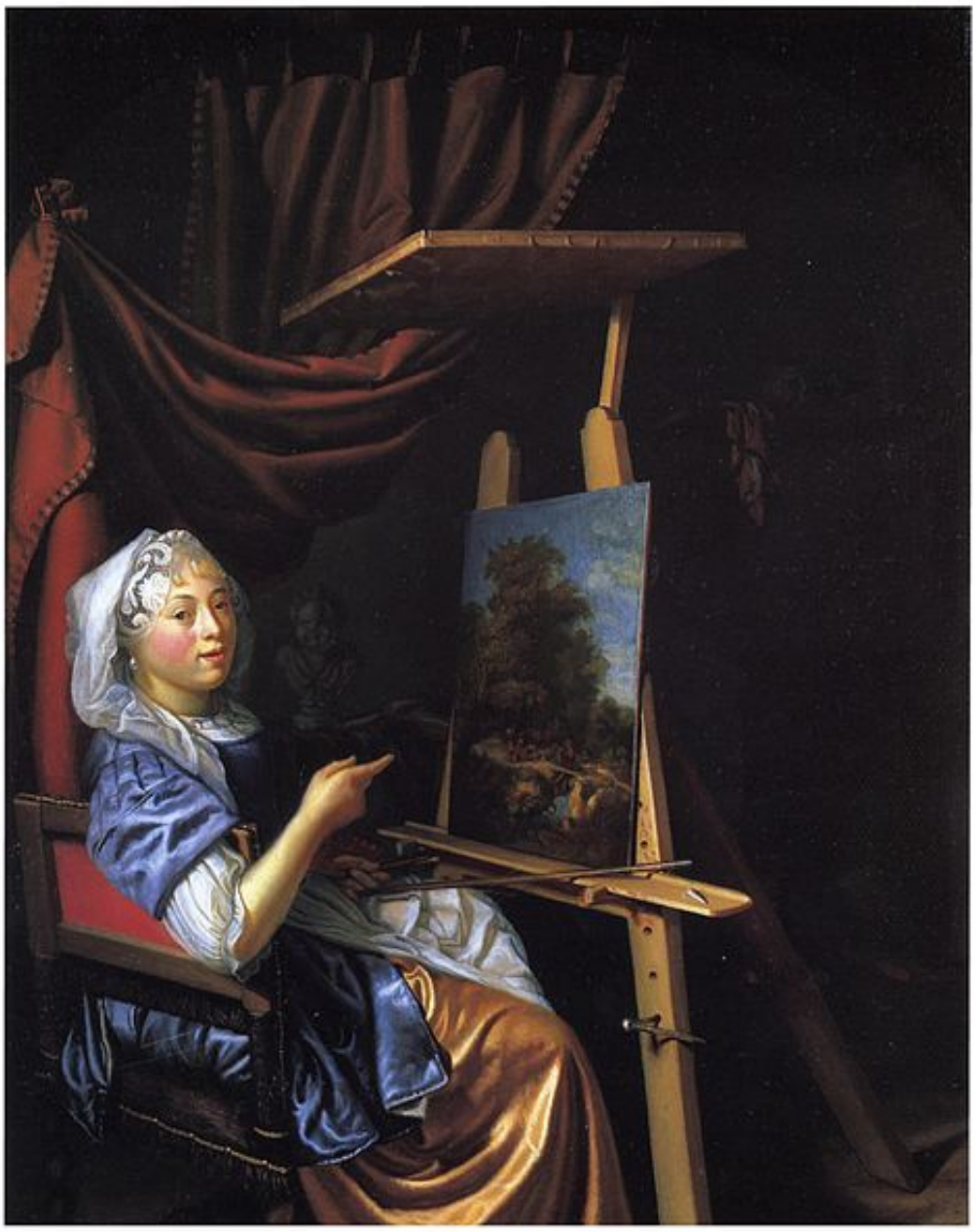


Figure 13. Antonia Moro, *Portrait of Willem of Nassau, Prince of Orange*, c. 1555. Oil, 45.2 x 32.2 cm. Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Germany.

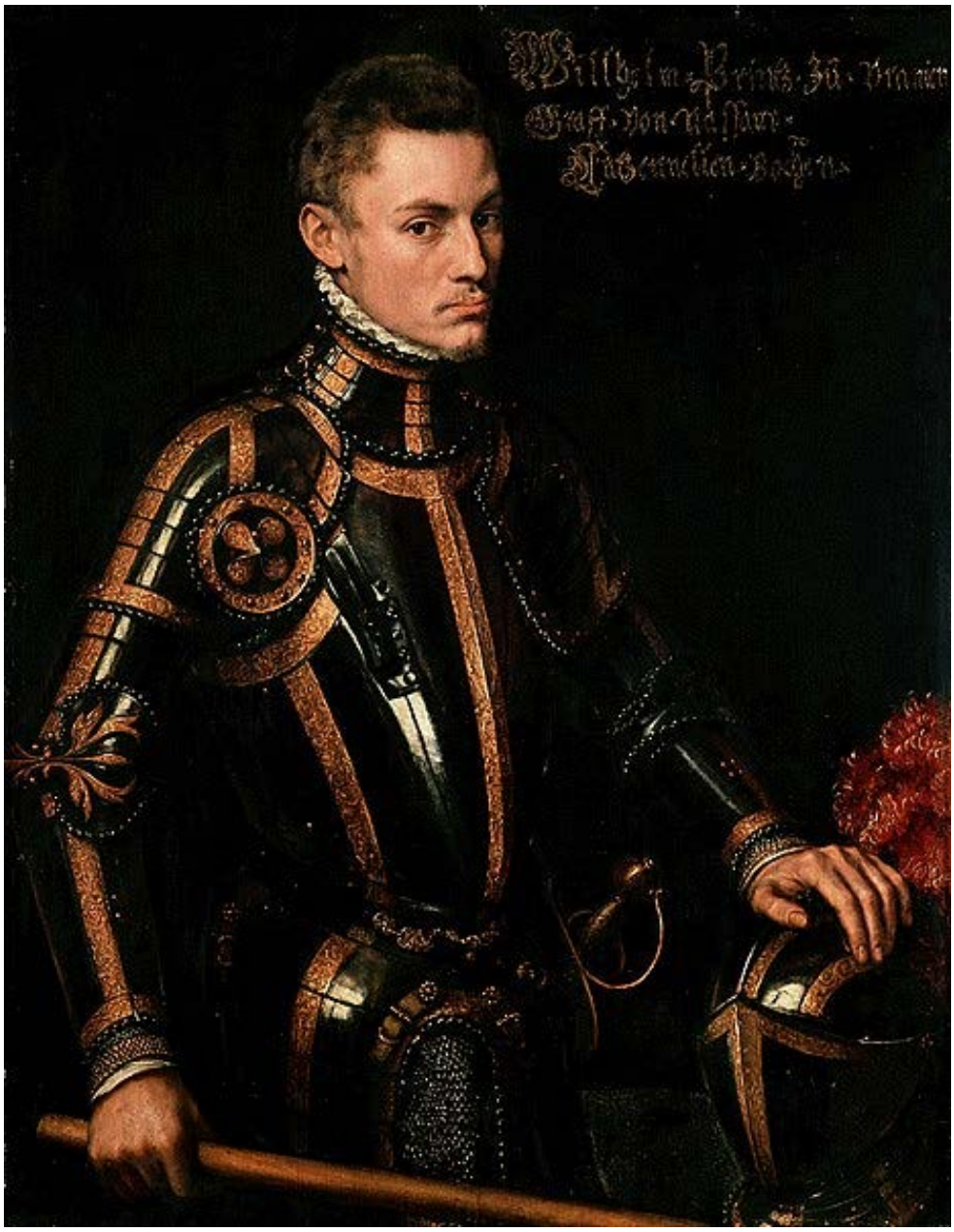


Figure 14. Thomas de Keyser. *Portrait of Frans van Limborch* (Left) and *Portrait of Geertruyd Bisschop* (Right).
Oil on Canvas, 117 x 87 cm; 118.4 x 89.6 cm.
Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Galleries (Left); Brooklyn Museum (Right).

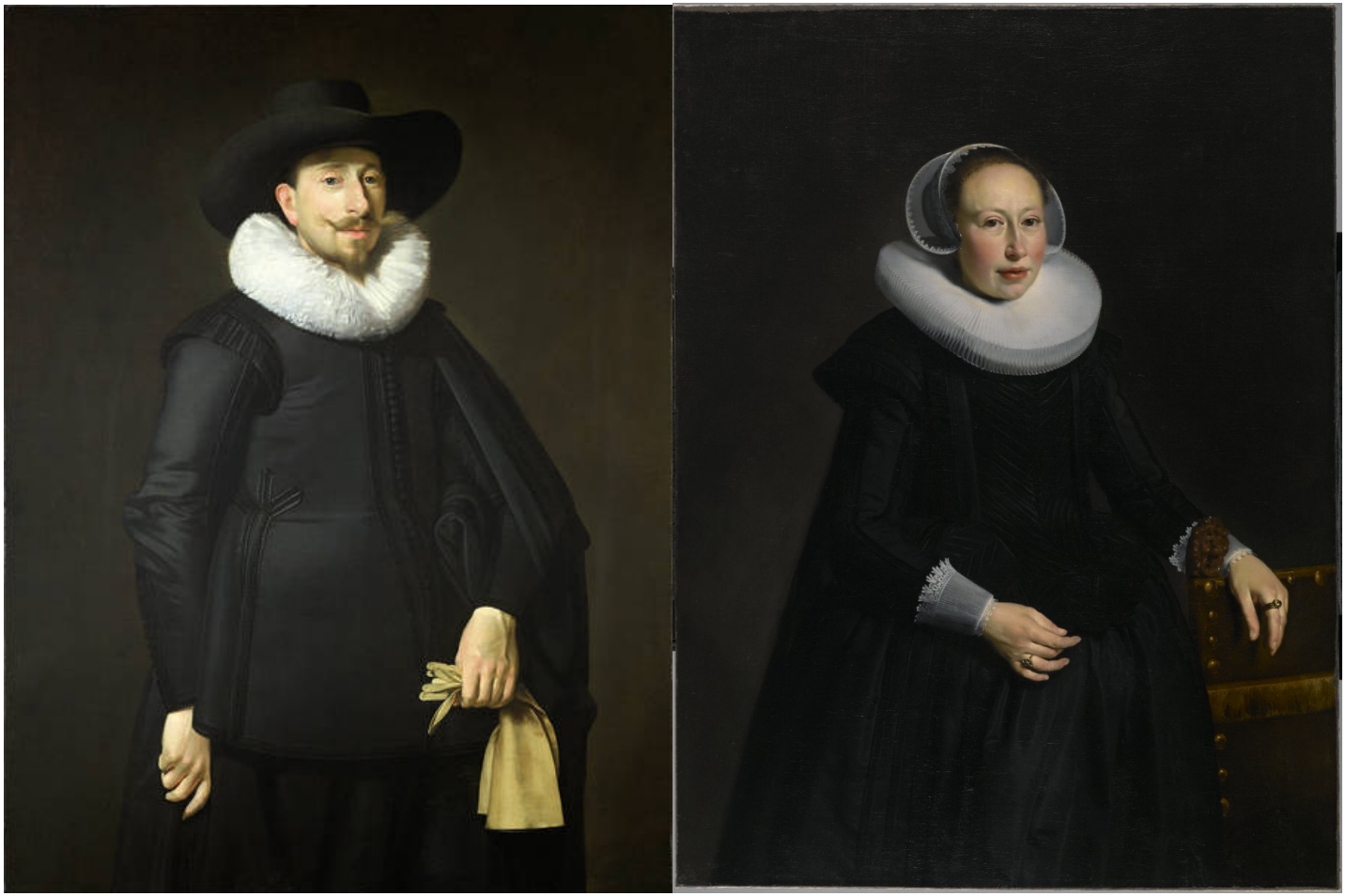


Figure 15. Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait,* c. 1550. Oil on Panel, 26.4 x 19.3 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

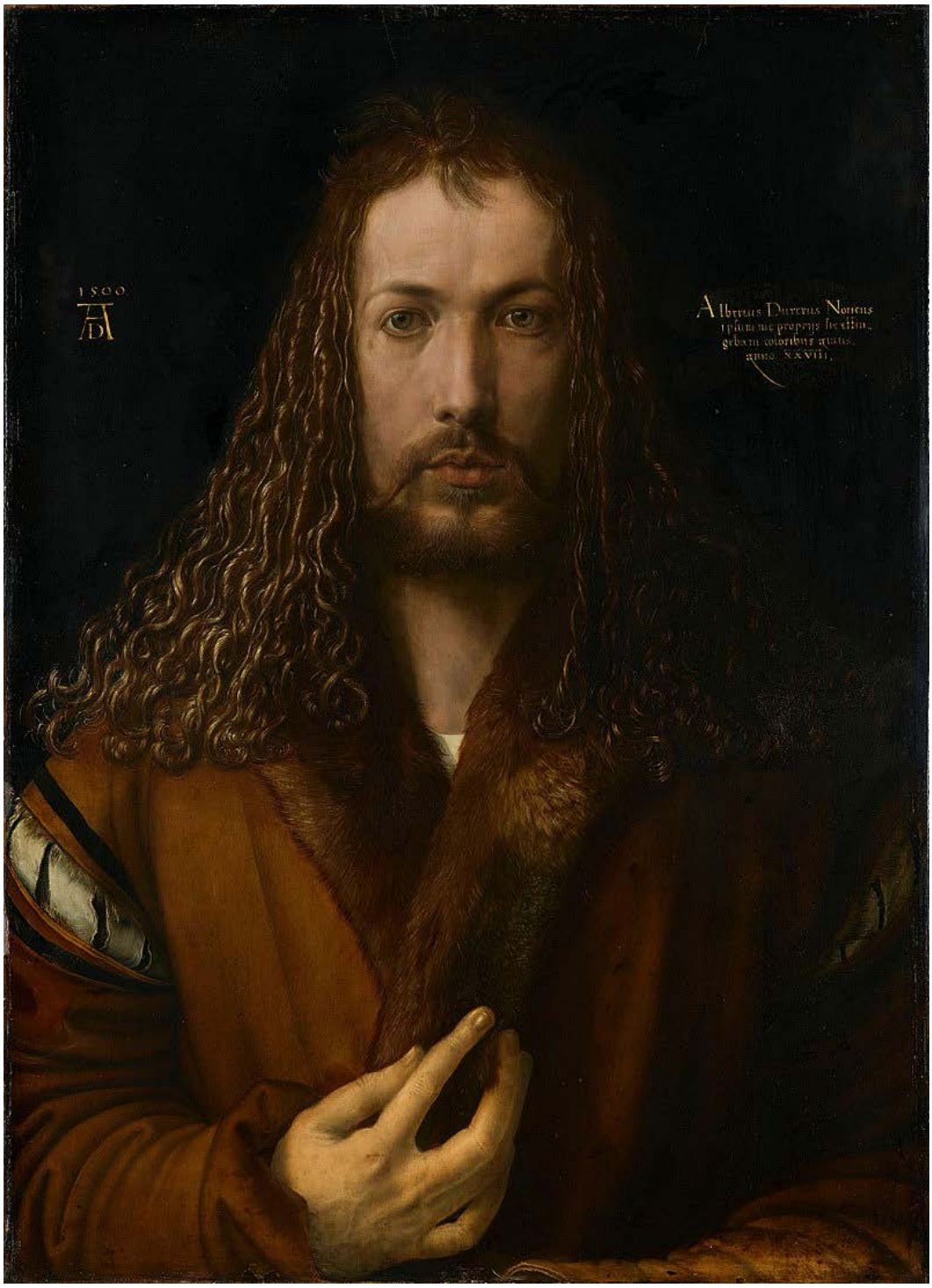
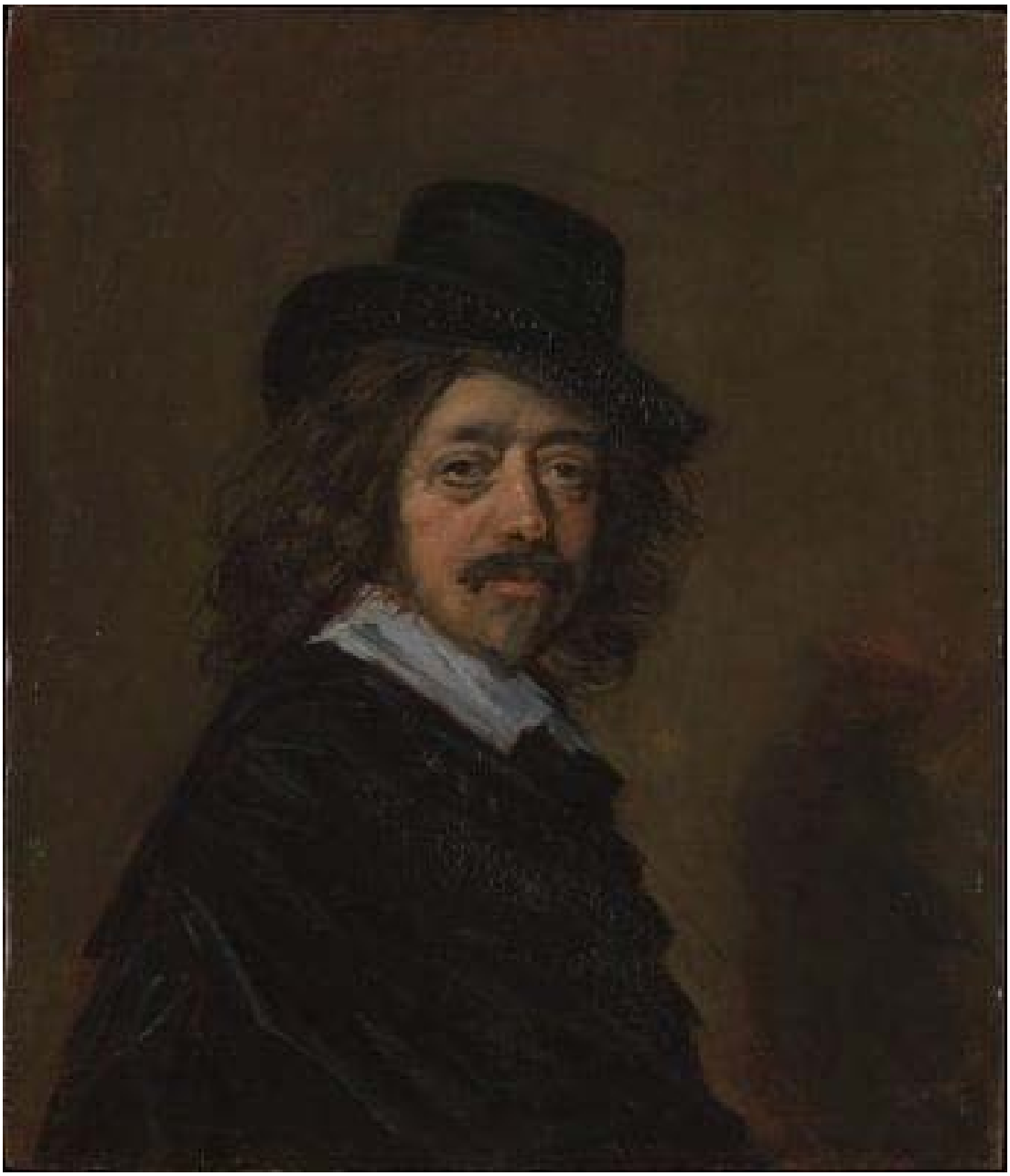


Figure 16. Frans Hals, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1650. Oil on Panel, 32.7 x 27.9 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



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