Two Male Portraits
by Dutch Artists

Carina Fryklund, Curator, Old Master Drawings and Paintings

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum
Stockholm

Volume 23

nationalmuseum
**Portraiture established** itself as an important specialisation in the prosperous Dutch Republic of the 17th century. For countless painters, commissioned portraits were the main source of income, and they produced few if any other works. The very large number of clients – the greatest concentration of them to be found in the major cities of Amsterdam, Leiden and The Hague – was related to the rise of trade and the structure of government. National, regional and local administrative authority in the country was vested in the governing bodies of 57 cities with voting rights, over 1,500 men who elected delegates to the provincial assemblies, which in turn appointed deputies to the States General. Members of city councils were potential clients for portrait painters, as were senior officials of various branches of government, representatives of the nobility, officers in the army and navy, wealthy merchants, ministers of religion and professors, and members of their families. Group portraits of civic guardsmen, boards of governors of charitable institutions and syndics of guilds were painted for public or semi-public buildings. Private portraits were sometimes commissioned to celebrate special events,

---

Fig. 1 Isaack Luttichuys, *Portrait of a Young Man Holding a Pair of Gloves*, 1661. Purchase: The Rurik Öberg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7311.
most commonly a marriage, but often the mere fact that someone with sufficient means felt the moment had come to have themselves immortalised was reason enough to enlist the services of a painter. The demand seems to have been almost insatiable, and there flourished a far greater number of excellent portraitists than is indicated by the handful of prominent artists who acquired enduring international fame.

Among these popular but today somewhat lesser-known artists was Isaack Luttichuys (1616–1673), whose beautifully painted portrait of a pleasant-looking Young Man Holding a Pair of Gloves, signed and dated 1661, was recently purchased by the Nationalmuseum at auction in Stockholm (Fig. 1). Isaack Luttichuys belongs to the category of portrait painters who make their mark not so much through originality of ideas, but by being closely attuned to the trends of the day and the tastes of clients whose wealth and new-found self-confidence found expression in portrait commissions. Throughout his career, he employed just a few standardised compositional types, which he managed to vary by introducing a repertoire of gestures and motifs derived from a broad range of contemporary artists, the individual choice of which presumably depended on the preferences of his clients. Apart from a small number of full-length portraits in outdoor settings, such as the fine pendant of a married couple from 1654 in the collections of the Nationalmuseum (Figs. 2, 3), the overwhelming majority of his sitters from 1650 onwards are portrayed as in the present painting, life-size and in three-quarter length. They are typically positioned in the front plane of an interior and sharply silhouetted against a background formed by the base of a monumental pillar, producing a certain flatness of appearance. The unidentified young man in the present portrait wears a dark coat or jacket (called an “innocent”) over a costume “à la Rhingrave” decorated with ribbons. His head and body are turned slightly to the left, and in his raised left hand he holds a pair of soft kidskin gloves. Judging by his elegant dress, we are here in the milieu of fashionable Amsterdam society. Based on identified sitters in Isaack Luttichuys’s portraits from the 1650s and ’60s, it has been established that his subjects came principally from within a circle of prominent merchant families of German extraction settled in Amsterdam.

Isaack Luttichuys and his older brother Simon, both painters, were born in London, their parents having moved there from Amsterdam shortly before 1604. Their father, Bernard Luttichuys, a textile worker, originally came from Münster in Westphalia. During the war of independence against Spain, and before a truce was signed in 1609, many towns in the northern Netherlands came under siege and numerous craftsmen and merchants saw an opportunity to improve their financial situation, or seek religious freedom, by moving to England. The registers of the Dutch Reformed Church of Austin Friars in London show that Isaack was baptised there in March of 1616. Both Simon and Isaack later moved to Amsterdam, where the younger brother is first recorded as a painter, at age 23, in a legal document of 1639. His first dated painting is from the year before and, judging by its style, was probably painted in Holland. Isaack may have moved there and been trained as a painter at the beginning of the 1630s, in the years when Rembrandt rose to absolute supremacy in the Amsterdam portrait market. The remainder of his life was spent in Amsterdam, where he was active, primarily as a portraitist, until his death in 1673.

Isaack Luttichuys’s most successful and productive period as an artist was from the early 1650s to the late 1660s, after which his style of portraiture changed very little. The Stockholm Young Man bears a compositional or stylistic resemblance to a number of signed portraits from the same period. Mature works such as these show fashionable Flemish influences, as represented in Amsterdam in those years by Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670), the city’s leading portraitist after the waning of Rembrandt’s influence towards the end of the 1640s. Above all, it was the courtly style of the London-based Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), his elegantly dressed sitters with their graceful poses and refined gestures, and the grand palatial backgrounds with columns and draperies that came to dominate over the earlier tradition of Dutch portraiture. Solid forms and outlines, a cool tonality and clear daylight now replaced Rembrandt’s more painterly manner, warm colours and chiaroscuro effects. Although Isaack Luttichuys generally adhered to the smooth, linear style of Van der Helst, his figures are less massive and more reserved, recalling those of Cornelis Janssens van Ceulen the Elder (1593–1661), who had returned to Amsterdam from London in 1643.

Among the immediately recognisable traits of Isaack Luttichuys’s portraits from his period of artistic maturity is the delicate modelling by areas of light and shadow of the sitter’s typically oval face, lit from the upper left, with the prominent, softly rounded chin outlined with reflections of light. The carefully blended brushstrokes of pale yellow in the flesh tones of the face create a flawless, enamel-like surface. Also typical is an emphasis on the eyes, using sharp contour lines and light reflections with, along the lower lid, a white or light bluish stroke imitating the shiny surface of the eyeball. The large mouth with sensuous lips was designed with well-defined curves ending in straight dark lines at the sides. When slightly raised at the corners, these give the face the hint of a smile which, together with the piercing and questioning gaze, lends the features a curiously indefinite expression. The finely painted locks of brown hair falling to the shoulders are viewed against the semi-transparent lace
collar. Like his early portraits, Isaack Luttichuys’s mature works are characterised by exquisite attention to detail in rendering the patterns and textures of fine fabrics in the costumes, although a certain tendency towards a new economy of means is now in evidence. In the Stockholm portrait, for example, the intricate pattern of the starched collar and cuffs of Brussels lace, painted with fine gradations from light to dark, was created by scratching fine lines into the still wet white paint, allowing the dark underlayer to shine through (Fig. 4). The abundant angular folds in the sleeves of the crisp white linen shirt, on the other hand, were rendered by applying just a few broad and free strokes of pastose lead white over a contrasting greyish underlayer, achieving a textured effect without a detailed rendering of the fabric (Fig. 5).

An artist of a younger generation is Hieronymus van der Mij (1687–1761), to whom a recently acquired Portrait of an Unknown Man (Fig. 6) has been attributed. Born at Leiden in 1687 as the son of a bronze caster, Philip van der Mij, the 22-year-old Hieronymus was enrolled in the city’s Album Studiosorum in February of 1710. Sometime in the second decade of the 18th century he was apprenticed to the Leiden fijnschilder Willem van Mieris.
13 Most of his clients were members of the ruling elite of Leiden. Perhaps best known is his series of portraits of professors painted on commission for Leiden University.

14 The Portrait of an Unknown Man differs somewhat from Van der Mij’s standard repertoire in the fluent, lively manner of its execution as well as in the easy,
confident pose adopted by the aristocratic sitter. The subject is portrayed at bust length in a graceful contrapposto, as if leaning against the inside of the painted oval framework, over which the cloak falling from his right shoulder spills into the space of the viewer. The composition was adapted from the elegant portrait idiom of Willem van Mieris, who transposed the type, the roots of which lay in the work of Raphael and Titian, to a smaller format which, in turn, become a source of inspiration for many Dutch painters. Where Van Mieris’s paintings sometimes look slightly stiff, however, the present portrait, partly because of Van der Mij’s more flowing style, is full of life. The informal, comfortable clothes worn here are unusual, though there can be little doubt that the unidentified sitter was anxious to be presented as both a prosperous and a learned man. The costume combines contemporary and older elements. The burgundyred velvet cloak draped round his shoulders is a conventional device in portraiture, intended to emphasise the noble and timeless character of the portrait. By contrast, the coat of brilliantly flowered brocade worn under it, the white shirt of particularly fine fabric, and the blue silk ribbon hanging nonchalantly loose – its purpose being to tie the shirt collar – were all part of the fashion of the day, as was the powdered, knotted wig.

This portrait is an excellent example of Van der Mij’s style around 1720. It shows the same careful treatment of the painted surface, particularly in the sitter’s vivacious, precisely modelled facial features, the high forehead, almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, well-defined curves of the mouth and dimpled chin, as in a signed portrait of Pieter Teding van Berkhout (1688–1729) (private collection). The pinkish white flesh tones of the face and hands, with greyish scumbles for the shadows, were applied wet-into-wet in a single smooth layer of opaque paint, leaving no visible signs of brushwork.

Fig. 6 Hieronymus van der Mij, Portrait of an Unknown Man, 1720s. Purchase: Axel and Nora Lundgren Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7337.
Yet for all their definite kinship, Van der Mij displays in his best works greater fluidity of style than his master, the *fijnschilder* Van Mieris. Although executed in oil on a prepared wood panel, a support of exceptional smoothness ideally suited to a sophisticated and painstakingly precise painting technique, the painting is, at least partially, done in a surprisingly loose style. Oil paint is a medium rich and deep in colour; the saturated burgundy red of the magnificent velvet mantle worn by the sitter being particularly striking here. In the velvet cloak, the swirling floral pattern of the brocaded coat and the white shirt, Van der Mij presents us with a virtuoso display of his talent for painting fabrics of all kinds with tangible realism. With swift brushstrokes, over a warm ochreous ground, he recorded the folds, the shadows and the highlights of the velvet cloth in shades ranging from a deep reddish brown to a light salmon pink. To describe the soft transitions between light and shadow that are peculiar to velvet, these have been slightly blurred, and a deep red glaze has been applied to enhance the depth of colour in the shadows.

The Nationalmuseum owns a number of representative portraits by artists of the northern and southern Netherlands from the 16th and 17th centuries, combining the work of some of the truly great masters with that of their highly competent contemporaries who, although less celebrated by posterity, have all contributed in their own way to the history of portraiture. The portraiture of 18th-century Holland, on the other hand, has been seriously underrepresented in the collections. Thanks to these recent acquisitions, we now have a fascinating view of representative examples of an elegant and fashionable approach in Dutch portraiture from the 1660s through to the early 18th century, with Hieronymus van der Mij presaging the courtly style that would develop in France some years later.

Notes:

1. Oil on canvas (unlined), 91 x 71 cm (cut slightly along the bottom); signed and dated at upper left: “I. Luttichuys Fecit/ano 1661”, followed by a short, wavy line. The Christian name of the artist occurs on a part of the canvas along the left side that was folded over the stretcher at the time the support was remounted. Provenance: Coll. Van de Waele (according to cat. of sale, Brussels, Giroux, 12 March 1927, no. 48, as “Simon Luttichuys”); (Gösta Stenman, Helsinki); (sale, Stockholm, Bukowskis, 25 September 1929, no. 42, as “Luttichuys, Isaac”); (sale, Stockholm, Bukowskis, November 2002); (sale, Stockholm, Bukowskis, 3 December 2015, no. 1061, as “Isaac Luttichuys”). Bibliography: Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner, “Isaac Luttichuys: A Little Known Dutch Portrait Painter”, in Art Quarterly, 1, no. 3 (1938), pp. 151–179; at pp. 155, 178, no. 22, fig. 3; Léon Krempel, Studien zu den datierten Gemälden des Nicolaes Maes (1634–1693) [Studien zur internationalen Architektur- und Kunstgeschichte], Petersberg 2000; Bernad Ebert, Simon und Isaac Luttichuys: Monographie mit kritischem Werkverzeichnis, Berlin/Munich 2009, no. Is. A90.


3. According to Ebert, this compositional type originated with the three-quarter-length portrait of a 27-year-old man, dated 1651 (whereabouts unknown); see Ebert 2009, no. Is. A15.


6. For a biography of the artist, see most recently Ebert 2009, pp. 33–44, 51–58.

7. Isaac Luttichuys is first mentioned in Amsterdam on 2 September 1639, as a witness in a legal document in which he is referred to as a “painter” (“schilder”); see Ebert 2009, pp. 678–679.

8. Swedish private collection; see Ebert 2009, no. Is. A1. Cf. also the Rembrandtesque “tronie” of a Laughing Boy, signed and dated “1648”, Zurich, private collection (formerly attributed to the Rembrandt pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten); see Valentin 1938, p. 177; Ebert 2009, no. Is. A6. The warm brown tones of Isaac Luttichuys’s paintings from the 1640s still point to the Rembrandt manner: However, if Isaac was actually taught by Rembrandt, as Valentin (1938, p. 156) surmised, the master was not his first teacher, and the influence he exercised was only of a passing nature.

9. For examples, see Ebert 2009, nos. Is. A53; A58, fig. 181; A65; A68; A72, fig. 182; A83, fig. 208; A98, fig. 179.


11. Oil on oak, 74 x 58.5 cm. Provenance: Coll. Ermanno Lucini; (sale, Stockholm, Stockholm’s Auktionsverk, 8 June 2016, no. 2168, as “Hieronymus van der Mij, attributed to”). For a biography of the artist, see Antoinette J. M. Krikke-Frijns, “Hieronymus van der Mij: Een achttiende-eeuws Leidse schilder”, in Leids jaarboekje, 81 (1989), pp. 84–103.


15. Oil on oak, 38 x 29 cm, signed and dated “17[1]/[7]”, private collection (RKD no. 29865).