

The bottom edge and lower left corner are extensively damaged and reconstructed. A small loss is found in the red flower at center. Moderate abrasion overall has exposed darker underlayers, altering the tonal balance. The painting was lined in 1969, prior to acquisition.

Provenance: Viscount de Beughem, Brussels; by inheritance to Mr. and Mrs. William D. Blair, Washington.

THIS DECORATIVE STILL LIFE is one of the few signed works by this relatively unknown Amsterdam painter. The execution is fairly broad, and the colors are deep and rich. Van Kouwenbergh has displayed his floral arrangement around an elaborate earthenware urn situated at the edge of a stone ledge. The composition is organized along a diagonal that is not embellished with intricate rhythms of blossoms or twisting stems. In this respect the artist belongs to the tradition of late followers of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (q.v.): Elias van den Broeck, who may have been his teacher, and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750), with whom his still lifes are sometimes confused.¹ None of Van Kouwenbergh's few known paintings are dated, which means it is impossible to establish a meaningful chronology for his work. Nonetheless this painting should probably be dated early in his career because of its stylistic similarities to paintings by Van den Broeck.²

Van Kouwenbergh includes here many of the plants found in paintings by Jan Davidsz. de Heem

and his followers, including roses, poppies, morning glories, white lilacs, and stalks of wheat. He also incorporates insects: a banded grove snail, two centipedes attacking each other, and a butterfly. In De Heem's still lifes, for example, *Vase of Flowers*, 1961.6.1, flowers, wheat, and insects are often imbued with symbolic meaning related to the cycle of life or Christian concepts of death and resurrection. The philosophical concepts underlying De Heem's carefully conceived compositions may have been understood by Van Kouwenbergh, but too little is known of his oeuvre to be able to judge this with certainty. In this painting the rather whimsical sculptural element surmounting the urn would seem to set a tone quite contrary to the weighty messages De Heem sought to convey.

Notes

1. See Meijer 1988a, 319. Meijer has been able to assemble an oeuvre for the artist of fewer than twenty still-life paintings.

2. Van Wagenberg-Ter Hoeven 1991, 253–254, has proposed a date at the end of the seventeenth century on the basis of the palette and the appearance of the wheat. She expressly compares this painting with another undated still life at Stourhead House, Wiltshire (National Trust) (her fig. 2).

References

- 1985 NGA: 217, repro.
1991 Van Wagenberg-Ter Hoeven: 252–255, color repro.

Judith Leyster

1609–1660

JUDITH LEYSTER was born in Haarlem and baptized there on 28 July 1609. Her father, Jan Willemsz., was the owner of a brewery called the “Leyster” (*lodestar*), from which the family took its surname. Little is known of Leyster's early training, but she clearly made a name for herself at a very young age: she is mentioned as an active artist in Samuel Ampzing's description of the town of Haarlem, which was published in 1628 when she would have been just nineteen years old.¹

Not long thereafter, Leyster's family moved to Vreeland near Utrecht, and many have speculated that at this time she came under the influence of the Utrecht *Caravaggisti*. Nevertheless, the dramatic ef-

fects of indirect, artificial lighting that these painters typically employed are not entirely paralleled in any of her canvases. It seems more likely that the superficial similarities to the style of the Utrecht *Caravaggisti* came by way of Frans Hals' circle of painters in Haarlem. By September 1629, Leyster's parents had moved to Zaandam, near Amsterdam, although it is not clear how long she remained with them there before returning to Haarlem. She was certainly back in her native town by November 1631 when she was a witness at the baptism of one of the children of Frans Hals (q.v.).

No records survive to prove that Leyster studied with Hals in his studio, but a number of her works

show her to have been one of his closest and most successful followers. Furthermore, other comparisons suggest that she was also influenced by the work of his brother, Dirck Hals (1591–1656). Should Leyster have been in either of their studios, it would seem that she would have been there prior to 1629, the year she starts to sign and date her paintings, and probably before 1628, when Ampzing implies that she was working as an independent artist.

In the years following her return to Haarlem, Judith Leyster achieved a degree of professional success that was quite remarkable for a woman of her time. By 1633 she was a member of the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, the first woman admitted for which an oeuvre can be cited, and in 1635 she is recorded as having three students. One of these, Willem Woutersz., subsequently defected to the studio of Hals, presumably without adequate warning, for Leyster went before the Guild of Saint Luke in October 1635 to make a (successful) demand for payment from Woutersz.'s mother.

In 1636 she was married to Jan Miense Molenaer (c. 1609/1610–1669), a fellow artist and at times close follower of Hals. The couple subsequently moved to Amsterdam, where they lived until 1648. She painted very little after her marriage. In October of 1648 the couple bought a house in Heemstede, near Haarlem, but continued to make regular visits to Amsterdam, where they had another house, and also to Haarlem. Leyster died in 1660 and was buried in Heemstede on 10 February.

Stylistically, much of her work resembles that of Frans Hals. Her brushwork is quite free and spontaneous, and she favored the same types of subjects and compositions, notably energetic genre scenes depicting one or two figures, often children engaged in some kind of merrymaking. In addition to these compositions, Leyster also painted still lifes. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between her early works and the works of her husband, a problem that is aggravated by the fact that they often shared studio props and models, and may even have worked on each other's pictures.

Notes

1. Ampzing's text is known to have been written prior to 1 February 1627. His discussion of Judith Leyster occurs in the context of his comments on the artistic achievements of the De Grebber family. Hofrichter 1989, 14, raises the possibility that he placed Leyster here because she was at that point studying with Frans Pietersz. de Grebber (1573–1649).

Bibliography

Ampzing 1628: 370.
Schrevelius 1648: 290.
Harms 1927.
Hofrichter 1975.
Philadelphia 1984: 233–235.
Hofrichter 1989.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 226.
Haarlem 1993.

1949.6.1 (1050)

Self-Portrait

c. 1630

Oil on canvas, 72.3 x 65.3 (29³/₈ x 25⁵/₈)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss

Technical Notes: The support, a plain-woven fabric with numerous slubs and weave imperfections, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. A large horizontal rectangle of original canvas is missing from the bottom left in an area corresponding to the red skirt, and has been replaced with a fine-weight, tightly woven fabric insert. The x-radiograph (fig. 1) shows cusping along all edges except the insert, which is also bereft of original paint or ground layers.

A smooth, thin, white ground layer was applied overall and followed by a gray brown imprimatura layer. Paint handling varies from fluid paint applied in loose liquid strokes in the black peplum, to thicker pastes blended wet into wet in the flesh tones. White cuffs were applied wet over dry above the thinly scumbled purple sleeves, and red glazes laid over opaque pink underpaint in the original passages of the red skirt.

Infrared reflectography reveals a major change in the easel painting, which originally showed a woman's head, with parted lips, turned slightly to the left, now partially visible as a pentimento. With the exception of the loss in the lower left, actual paint losses are few: small losses in the top at center and in the proper left cheek. The paint surface, however, is in poor condition, with minute pitting throughout of the type caused by superheating during a lining procedure, exacerbated by moderate abrasion overall, and flattening. The unfinished violin player on the easel is heavily abraded.

The painting was treated in 1992 to remove discolored varnish layers and old retouching. The later insert was retained.

Provenance: E. M. Grainger, Hastings, Sussex. (Sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 16 April 1926, no. 115, as Judith Leyster); private collection or art market, Paris, 1927. (Ehrich Galleries, New York, in 1928); purchased 1929 by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, Washington.

Exhibited: *A Century of Progress Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, Art Institute of Chicago, 1933, no. 64 (as Frans Hals). *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, 1937, no. 22 (as Frans Hals). *Frans Hals Tentoonstelling ter gelegenheid van het 75-jarig bestaan van het gemeentelijk Museum te Haarlem*, Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, 1937, no. 9 (as Frans Hals). *Paintings by Frans Hals:*