



Online Press Kit

Release Date: June 3, 2009

Press Release

[Order Press Images](#)

[Checklist \(PDF\)](#)

Audio:

Judith Leyster, 1609–1660 Press Event

[Listen](#): (7:03 min, 3.2 MB)

[Arthur Wheelock Bio](#)

[Online Resources](#)

Press Contact:

Anabeth Guthrie
(202) 842-6804
a-guthrie@nga.gov

Chief Press Officer
Deborah Ziska
ds-ziska@nga.gov
(202) 842-6353

JUDITH LEYSTER'S 400TH BIRTHDAY TO BE CELEBRATED WITH EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON JUNE 21 THROUGH NOVEMBER 29, 2009



Judith Leyster (Dutch, 1609 - 1660)

Self-Portrait, c. 1632-1633, oil on canvas.

National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, 1949.6.1

Judith Leyster's 400th birthday will be celebrated at the National Gallery of Art with an exhibition of ten of her most engaging paintings, joined by some 20 works by 17th-century contemporaries, including her presumed teacher Frans Hals and her husband Jan Miense Molenaer, as well as musical instruments of the period depicted in the art. **Judith Leyster, 1609–1660** will be on view from June 21 through November 29, 2009, in the Dutch Cabinet Galleries in the Gallery's West Building.

"Leyster's oeuvre consists only of about 20 known works, yet her use of bold colors, dramatic lighting, and vigorous brushwork have established her as one of the foremost painters of her generation,"

said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Gallery is delighted to celebrate Leyster's 400th birthday with this selection of her works—our *Self-Portrait* as the centerpiece—paired with loans from American and European collections."

The Frans Hals Museum in Leyster's hometown of Haarlem will be hosting a European version of this exhibition, to include many of the works seen at the National Gallery of Art, as well as additional works in both private and public European collections. The exhibition will be on display from December 2009 until May 2010.

Exhibition Support

The exhibition was made possible by the generous support of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Saunders III.

Exhibition Highlights

Leyster's dynamic *Self-Portrait* (c. 1632–1633) may have been her presentation piece for entrance into the artist's Guild of Saint Luke of Haarlem. She created a composition that emphasized her talents in two areas: portraiture and genre scenes. In the self-portrait, she sits as a dignified member of society, in a pose reflective of Frans Hals' informal manner, as she turns toward the viewer with her arm over the chair, her warm and open expression revealing happiness. The figure on the easel is a study of the fiddler from her painting *Merry Company* (c.1630–1631), also included in the exhibition.

Men and women in intimate or humorous circumstances are the subjects of a number of Leyster's genre scenes, images that reflect broader 17th-century concerns. In *The Proposition* (1631), a woman focused on her sewing is approached by a man who offers her coins as he touches her shoulder. This private scene, lit only by the light of an oil lamp, depicts the moment when a sexual offer has been made; however, the woman's modest dress and body language convey that she is unwilling to participate. A more humorous nighttime encounter is depicted in *A Game of Tric-Trac* (c. 1631), where Leyster has created a dynamic amorous interplay among the three elegantly dressed figures. In another night scene, *The Last Drop* (c. 1630–1631), a skeleton holding an hourglass hovers over two joyful drinkers, providing viewers with a warning about the transience of life.

The theme of music is frequently seen in Haarlem paintings from the 1620s and 1630s, particularly by artists in Hals' circle, including

Leyster and Molenaer. *Young Flute Player* (c. 1635) reveals Leyster's use of natural light to enliven her subjects within their environments. In other scenes of music-making, such as *Merry Company* and *Concert* (c. 1632–1633), Leyster captures the lightheartedness of revelry and good fellowship.

Two small panel paintings by Hals may have been part of a series depicting the five senses, now lost, with one image representing sight, in *Singing Girl* (c. 1626–1630), and the other representing hearing *Boy Playing a Violin* (c. 1626–1630).

Music serves as a central theme in Molenaer's *The Violinist* (c. 1630–1635), *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* (c. 1640), and *The Duet* (c. 1635–1636). The lute player in the last two paintings is the artist himself; in *The Duet*, his wife Judith strums a cittern. A 17th-century flute, a recorder, a lute, a violin, and a dance master's fiddle on loan from private collectors, the Library of Congress, and Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington will be installed nearby.

Although no dated oil paintings are known from her later years in Amsterdam, Leyster likely painted *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit* around 1640. The only dated work from this period is a silverpoint and watercolor depiction of a tulip that she painted for a tulip catalogue in 1643.

Judith Leyster (1609–1660)

The eighth of nine children born to a Haarlem mother and a Flemish father, Judith Leyster was baptized in Haarlem's renowned Saint Bavo Church on July 28, 1609. Her father, Jan Willemsz, was a silk and linen weaver who in 1601 bought a house called De Leystar, a name that he added to his own; the family then spelled it Leyster. A pun was made on this name by a contemporary historian of Haarlem, who described Judith Leyster as a "leading star in art." After several unsuccessful business ventures, the father became bankrupt in 1628 and moved the family to Vreeland, near Utrecht, where, it appears, Leyster was influenced by the candlelit scenes of the Utrecht Caravaggisti, particularly Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1629) and Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656).

Leyster returned to Haarlem where it is likely she spent some time as a student to the great Haarlem painter Frans Hals (c. 1582/83–1666). Leyster's style closely reflects the dynamically painted images of Hals, who possessed a remarkable ability to capture the vibrant

youthfulness of children, a quality found in many of her works.

Membership in the organization of professional artists known as the Guild of Saint Luke of Haarlem was not restricted to men in the 1600s; however, she was one of only two women recorded in the guild as painters in the 17th century. Leyster entered the guild in 1633. Membership in the guild provided Leyster with a professional status and allowed her to establish her own workshop.

Most Dutch artists painted for the open market, which meant that they had to create a style and type of image that was appealing, innovative, and recognizably their own. Other than for her commissioned portraits, Leyster would seem to have painted primarily for this open market, selling her paintings at lotteries and fairs, or through art dealers or personal connections.

Soon after Leyster and Jan Miense Molenaer (c. 1610–1668) married in 1636, the two moved to Amsterdam. During their Amsterdam years, it seems that Leyster primarily cared for their five children and managed the family's business ventures. Although she continued to paint, only two known works date from these years (several still lifes, now lost, are listed as from her hand in the 1668 inventory of Molenaer's estate). She may have assisted her husband in his work, but documented commissions after their marriage only mention his name. After returning to Haarlem in 1648, they also purchased a farm in nearby Heemstede, where they lived during the summers, and where Leyster was eventually buried.

Leyster was held in high esteem by her peers; however, after her death in 1660 her career as an artist was nearly forgotten. By the end of the 19th century, the correct attribution of every one of her paintings had been lost, either identified as anonymous or given to another artist. One possible reason for Leyster's obscurity is that her independent artistic career ended in 1636 when she married Molenaer. Another reason may be that Leyster signed her works only with her initials and a star—JL*. The monogram—a pun on her last name (meaning leading star, pole star, or comet)—was the key to Leyster's rediscovery in 1893, when an art historian identified her as the artist whose monogram appeared on a number of paintings.

Curator, Publication, and Related Activities

The exhibition was organized by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque painting, National Gallery of Art, Washington, in

consultation with Leyster scholar Frima Fox Hofrichter, professor, history of art and design, Pratt Institute, New York. Hofrichter is the author of a sixteen-page exhibition booklet, available free at the exhibition entrance. Funding for the booklet was made possible by Mrs. Henry H. Weldon, with additional support from Mrs. George M. Kaufman.

On Sunday, October 25, 2009, at 2 p.m. Wheelock and Hofrichter will present a lecture on the exhibition. A series of gallery talks on the exhibition will be given June 21, 22, 23, 26, and 29 at 12:00 p.m. by Gallery lecturer Eric Denker.

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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. 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 x 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

Deborah Ziska
Chief of Press and Public Information
(202) 842-6353
ds-ziska@nga.gov

If you are a member of the press and would like to be added to our press list, [click here](#).

[Subscribe to Our Free E-mail Newsletters](#)

Stay up to date with the National Gallery of Art by [subscribing to our free e-mail newsletters](#): Web, educators, family programs, fellowships/internships, films, lectures, music programs, and teen programs. Select as many updates as you wish to receive. To edit your subscriber information, please go to our [subscription management page](#).

National Gallery of Art, Press Office

[home](#) | [general information](#) | [exhibitions](#) | [image lists](#) | [recent announcements](#)
[press archives](#) | [RSS](#) | [contact us](#) | [national gallery of art](#)
[Copyright ©2008 National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC](#)



Press Office

[Judith Leyster, 1609–1660](#)

June 21 through
November 29, 2009

[Pride of Place:](#)

[Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age](#)

February 1 through May
3, 2009

[Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered](#)

October 26, 2008,
through January 11, 2009

[Jan de Bray and the Classical Tradition](#)

March 13 through August
14, 2005

[Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits](#)

January 30 through May
1, 2005

[Gerard ter Borch](#)

November 7, 2004
through January 30, 2005

[Small Wonders: Dutch Still Lives by Adriaen Coorte](#)

June 29 through
September 28, 2003

[Aelbert Cuyp](#)

BIOGRAPHY: ARTHUR WHEELOCK CURATOR OF NORTHERN BAROQUE PAINTINGS

Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1973. He came to the National Gallery of Art in 1973 as the David E. Finley Fellow, after which he was named research curator. At the same time, he began his teaching career at the University of Maryland, where he is professor of art history. He was appointed curator of Dutch and Flemish painting at the National Gallery in 1975.

Wheelock, who has lectured widely on Dutch and Flemish art, has written a number of books such as *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists around 1650* (1977); *Jan Vermeer* (1981); *Vermeer and the Art of Painting* (1995); and the National Gallery of Art catalogue, *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century* (1995). He has written articles and essays such as "The Story of Two Vermeer Forgeries," in *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive* (1995); "Rembrandt Self-Portraits: The Creation of a Myth," in *Rembrandt, Rubens, and the Art of their Time: Recent Perspectives* (1997); "The Queen, the Dwarf, and the Court: Van Dyck and the Ideals of the English Monarchy," in *Van Dyck 1599-1999: Conjectures and Refutations* (2001); and "The Appreciation of Vermeer in Twentieth-Century America" (co-author with Marguerite Glass), in *The Cambridge Companion to Vermeer* (2001).

Wheelock has organized major exhibitions at the National Gallery, such as *Gods, Saints & Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt* (1980); *Anthony van Dyck* (1990); *Johannes Vermeer* (1995); *Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller* (1996); *A Collector's Cabinet* (1998); *From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art* (1999); *Gerrit Dou: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt* (2000); *Aelbert Cuyp* (2001); *Gerard ter Borch* (2004); and *Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits* (2005). He also organized *The Public and Private in the Age of Vermeer* at the Osaka Municipal Museum, Japan, in 2000.

October 7, 2001 through
January 13, 2002

[Gerrit Dou \(1613-1675\):
Master Painter in the Age
of Rembrandt](#)

April 16, 2000 through
February 25, 2001

[Vermeer's The Art of
Painting](#)

November 24, 1999
through February 6, 2000

Press Contact:

Anabeth Guthrie
(202) 842-6804
a-guthrie@nga.gov

Chief Press Officer
Deborah Ziska
ds-ziska@nga.gov
(202) 842-6353

In 1982, at the time of the Dutch-American Bicentennial, Wheelock was named Knight Officer in the Order of the Orange-Nassau by the Dutch Government. The College Art Association/National Institute awarded him its Conservation Award for Distinction in Scholarship and Conservation in 1993. He received the Minda de Gunzburg Prize for the best exhibition catalogue of 1995 (*Johannes Vermeer*); the Johannes Vermeer Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Dutch Art, which was presented by the Johannes Vermeer Stichting; the Bicentennial Medal from Williams College; and the Dutch-American Achievement Award, presented by The Netherlands American Amity Trust. In 2006 Wheelock was named Commander in The Order of Leopold I by the Belgian government.

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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. 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 x 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


Deborah Ziska
Chief of Press and Public Information
(202) 842-6353
ds-ziska@nga.gov

If you are a member of the press and would like to be added to our press list, [click here](#).

[Subscribe to Our Free E-mail Newsletters](#)

Stay up to date with the National Gallery of Art by [subscribing to our free e-mail newsletters](#): Web, educators, family programs, fellowships/internships, films, lectures, music programs, and teen programs. Select as many updates as you wish to receive. To edit your subscriber information, please go to our [subscription management page](#).

National Gallery of Art, Press Office

[home](#) | [general information](#) | [exhibitions](#) | [image lists](#) | [recent announcements](#)
[press archives](#) |  [RSS](#) | [contact us](#) | [national gallery of art](#)
[Copyright ©2008 National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC](#)