

PAN

AMSTERDAM

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



Portrait of Florianus Merchijs

Inscribed and dated in the upper right Aetatis fica -7- Anno 1629 (?)
oil on panel
46.85 x 29.53 inches (119 x 75 cm.)
In its original period black and gold frame

PROVENANCE

Commissioned by the family, 1629 - 1630

Probably Cornelia Merchijs, (1614 – 1694), Florianus' half-sister and her husband Johannes Rijckaert, Amsterdam, (1609 – 1679), to their son

Andries Rijckaert, Amsterdam, (1636 – 1716), to his sister

Suzanna Rijckaert, Amsterdam, (b. 1635), by inheritance to

Cornelia Roëll-Bailli, The Netherlands, by inheritance to

Dowager Anna Cornelia Roëll-Collot d'Escury, The Hague, by 1905, by inheritance to

De Geer-Roëll-Bierens de Haan, Utrecht, by inheritance to

De Geer-Roëll, The Netherlands, by inheritance to

Private Collection, The Netherlands until 2023

Florianus Merchijs was the son of Pieter Merchijs (c. 1582 – 1624) and Maria Florianus (b. 1600). Pieter was a spice merchant in Amsterdam following in the footsteps of his father Jacques Merchijs of Rotterdam. Pieter first married Sara Berrewijns who died in 1617. Pieter married Maria, the daughter of Isaaq Florianus on April 27, 1621. In 1622 Cornelis van der Voort, the leading portrait painter in Amsterdam at the time, painted their portraits in all likelihood to commemorate their marriage.[1] These paintings remained in the family, as well as in their original frames, until they were sold by Sotheby's Amsterdam in 2007.[2]

Florianus was baptized at the Nieuwe Kerk on February 12, 1623. In the following years Pieter died, and Maria remarried the merchant Pieter van de Venne from Antwerp on October 31, 1628. The portrait of Florianus is believed to be dated 1629 at which point he would have been 7 years old.[3] Executed very much in the style of Van der Voort, Florianus is viewed in full-length and probably life-size, on a checkerboard floor against a dark background.[4] Fashionably attired Florianus wears a black doublet with sleeves and black patterned breeches that cover the knees. The collar is a flat white ruff of unstarched linen with white batiste linen cuffs trimmed with lace. A cloak covers one shoulder, and a wide sash is tied around his waist. His stockings are green silk tied with black garters fastened with elaborate rosettes. His black round toed shoes have long tongues and are fastened with bows. His left-hand rests on his hip, a gesture often seen in portraits of rulers or those with similar aspirations[5], while his right holds a large, brimmed hat. By doffing his hat, Florianus welcomes the viewer into the room. This was a common courtesy in the seventeenth century and was intended as a show of respect for and obedience to authority. In this context it is also meant as a display of proper breeding. Although little is known about Florianus' life, he is documented in 1645 as a student in Utrecht a Amstelodamensis (the study of languages). His death is recorded on July 22, 1669, in Amsterdam, and it is thought he never married. His passing was characterized as "ongetrouwt gestorven" (died untroubled) [6]

Hendrick Uylenburgh, although a painter himself, worked as an agent for the Polish King but by 1625 had moved to Amsterdam and taken over the now deceased Van der Voort's studio. During the 1620s there was a great demand by the Amsterdam elite for full-length portraits of the format that Van der Voort had popularized. With not enough painters locally to fill the demand, Uylenburgh recruited talent from outside Amsterdam, and the workshop must have held an important place in the Amsterdam market. Before 1631 no individual painter's name can be connected to the workshop.[7] We do know that by 1631 Rembrandt had joined the studio, and it is where he most likely met his future wife Saskia who was the cousin of Uylenburgh.[8]

As both Florianus' parents were painted by Van der Voort it is of little surprise his style was chosen for the painting of their son. As seen in this work, Van der Voort's tradition of placing full-length sitters standing on black and white tiles in front of dark backgrounds can be viewed in other contemporaneous works from Uylenburgh's studio such as the portraits of Banningh Cocq and his wife Maria Overlander which hang in the town hall of Delft.[9]

At this point the identity of the painter that executed Florianus' portrait in Uylenburgh's studio remains unknown. Over 130 portrait painters are recorded as working in Amsterdam between 1590 – 1670. Less than a third of these have been fully researched. Further at least 80 – 90% of their output has been lost over the centuries.[10] All of which complicates the issue of attribution in this work but brings to mind the quote from Shakespeare:

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose

by any other name would smell as sweet”.

This as yet unnamed painter created a vision of a lovely blue-eyed boy with soft brown hair that remained cherished by continuous generations of his family until last year. Costumed in refined splendor and posed for posterity, Florianus is the embodiment of the love all families have for their child. The work's endurance within successive generations of his own family speaks volumes and is quite miraculous.

[1] Biographical information taken from Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, “Portret Florianus Merchijs 1629(?)”, *Doek Art*, November 30, 2021; and “Pieter Merchijs Inventory, 2/17/1625”, on The Montias Database of 17th Century Golden Age Inventories, The Frick Collection, at research.frick.org/Montias/inventory List/578.

[2] The pair of paintings were sold on November 13, 2007, at Sotheby's Amsterdam, lot 49 for \$490,767.

[3] Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, *op.cit.*; and The Montias Database, *op.cit.*

[4] Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, *op.cit.*

[5] Jean Sorabella, “Portraiture in Renaissance and Baroque Europe”, August 2007, on metmuseum.org.

[6] *Utrechtsche Studenten Almanak 1870*, P.W. van der Weijer, Utrecht, 1869, p. 127; De Navorscher, H.C.A. Trieme, Nijmegen, 1897, p. 96; and Wayne Frantis, *Paragons of Virtue, Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth Century Dutch Art*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 158.

[7] S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, “Rembrandt's Surprising Start as a Portrait Painter. Hendrick Uylenburgh's Role in the Production of Portraits in Amsterdam” in *Rembrandt and Amsterdam in Portraiture, 1590 – 1670*, Fundación Colección Thyssen Bornemisza, 2020, pp. 131-132; and Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, *op.cit.*

[8] Ben Broos, “Saskia, Rembrandt's Frisian Bride” in *Rembrandt & Saskia, Love and Marriage in the Dutch Golden Age*, Fries Museum, 2018, pp. 14-15; and Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, *op.cit.*

[9] Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, *op.cit.*

[10] Rudi Ekkart & Claire van den Donk, “Rembrandt and Portraiture in Amsterdam” in *Rembrandt and Amsterdam Portraiture, 1590 – 1670*, *op.cit.*, pp. 69, 70, fn. 5.