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Soraya Cartategui

Dutch and Flemish XVI and XVII century art

Dear Friends,

For the month of June, the gallery has chosen to analyze this beautiful and delicate work by Dutch artist Pieter Leermans. Despite its small size, it is a very balanced and complete composition. I hope you enjoy it!

Best,
Soraya Cartategui



Pieter Leermans

(Leiden 1655 - 1706)

Young Woman with Guitar Leaning out the Window Oil on Panel

36,2 x 26,3 cm.

1680 ca.

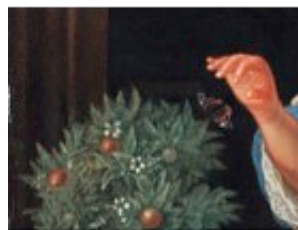
Pieter Leermans is a recognized Dutch artist who specialized in genre scenes and portraits. According to the documents of the time period, it is known that Leermans developed his entire artistic career in the city of Leiden, and appears to have been there from 1649 to 1689. The artist's portraits or genre scenes usually are of a small size, and because of his detail in painting clothes, niches, and other elements, can remind the viewer of pieces by Frans and Willem van Mieris. Leermans has a more elegant style than many of his colleagues. He was a student of Gerrit Dou, and in fact some of his works are very similar to those of his teacher, especially because of the thin brushstrokes that give a delicate finishing touch. G. Dou founded "fijnschilders" in Leiden; this group was formed by a curious group of artists whose main distinguishable technique was the use of thin brushstrokes that allowed for an increased perception of details within the work. Smaller details such as books and music scores can be read by using a magnifying glass. *Young Woman with Guitar Leaning out the Window* has been studied by Professor Fred G. Meijer of Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie of The Hague.



In this elegant genre scene, a young woman holding a guitar with her hand tries to play the instrument like a butterfly. All of this is represented in a niche; this was very typical for genre scene painters (fijnschilders) from the school of Leiden, mastered by Gerrit Dou. There is no doubt that the most striking element within the composition is the woman leaning out of the window. Her face and gesture has been painted so masterfully that her expression is very delicate and calm. The way she is leaning out and holding the guitar seem effortless. During this time period it was very common for artists to depict characters leaning out of a window or balcony. Her main role in this painting is to represent the five senses: touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing. Hearing symbolized by the guitar, touch and sight by the butterfly, smell by the perfume of the plant, and taste by the oranges on top of the rock. The colors of the garments also create a beautiful contrast against the brown and other background. The baby blue outlines the sleeves and neck of the dress while the corset is a pale pink. The creamy white of the blouse compliments the other colors beautifully and adds some softness to the composition. Looking very carefully at the sleeves, the viewer is

also able to see the thin white lace behind the velvet pale blue lining.

After 1640, these types of compositions were enriched by adding diverse decorative elements such as curtains and carpets. This art piece is an example of the artist's quality, which is evident if the viewer looks at the red velvet curtain adorned with golden threads. The folds of the cloth are so realistic that it becomes tangible to the spectator. The deep red color of the velvet also combines beautifully with the wooded windowsill and small orange tree. In the 1600s and 1730s, the guitar became one of the most popular instruments in Europe, and one of the favorites amongst the painters of Leiden. One can assume that the figure is playing the instrument because she is staring at the score.



While one of the woman's hands is holding the base of the guitar, the other is reaching out to a colorful butterfly. The red, black, and blue butterfly is flying close to the small orange tree. The representation of this animal has numerous meanings. In religious symbology, the butterfly is representative of the soul. It also represents the resurrection of Christ. They are such free and elegant creatures that they compliment the woman's femininity perfectly. Other symbolisms associated with butterflies include freedom, joyous times, lightness, and new beginnings. As in most Old Master still lives, there is also the connotation of ephemerality.



The book that is resting in the cornice is filled with detail; the viewer can even get to read its content. As one can see, all the elements that complete the composition are related to beauty and art. Books and music are two key elements that not only served as a leisure activity but also cultivated the soul of human beings. During this time period, the arts were highly regarded and in most genre and still life scenes there are musical elements. Leermans executes this work in a very skillful manner; one can appreciate the dog-eared corners of each page.



The butterfly is fluttering around a small orange tree. There are three small fruits next to the white flowers that seem to have just bloomed. The tree is planted in a very detailed terracotta vase. This is painted with lots of precision and adorned with cherubs. The orange tree symbolizes generosity and wisdom. It can also represent chastity and purity and that is the reason why brides in Middle Ages wore white orange tree flowers in their hair. On the other hand, orange trees are a symbol of love and marriage in many cultures and it is common to find them in Renaissance paintings of married couples. One of the most famous is Jan van Eyck's "Wedding Portrait of the Arnolfini". In the case of Young Woman with Guitar Leaning out the Window the best guess would be that they represent the figure's innocence and purity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- W. Bernt, *The Nethrlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, 1970, Vol. II, pág. 71, plates 668 y 669.
- C. Hofstede de Groot, *Oud Holland IX*, 1891, pág 72.
- E. Benezit, *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, 1999, Tomo 8 pag. 426.

PROVENANCE

Collection of Mrs. Loder, Dencombe, Handscross, Sussex
Collection of Mrs. Frohlish

EXHIBITIONS

Maastricht, Tefaf, Lawrence Steigrad Fine Arts, 2011.

MUSEUMS

Jacob van Oost the Elder's works can be found in many museums around the world including: Amsterdam- Rijksmuseum, Brussels- Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Cardiff- National Museum of Wales, Dresde- Gemaldegalerie, Kassel- Gemaldegalerie.

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