

# Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit



PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO  
FRANS VAN MIERIS THE ELDER  
1635—1681  
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. EDGAR B. WHITCOMB

## A YOUTHFUL SELF PORTRAIT OF FRANS VAN MIERIS

In our collection of Dutch painting the schools of Amsterdam, Haarlem and Delft are quite well represented, but the important school of Leiden has been shown only by an early Rembrandt (loan) and by Jan Steen. It is a matter of congratulation, therefore, that we have acquired an interesting picture of the Leiden school, a *Portrait of the Artist in his Studio*,<sup>1</sup> by Frans van Mieris, the Elder (1635-81), as the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb.

The Leiden School owed its predominant character to Rembrandt, who worked there until the end of the year 1631. The small scale and exact detail of his early compositions was crystallized into a convention by his pupil, Gerard Dou, who came to his studio in 1628 and who continued to paint the same kind of small, finely detailed genre compositions until the late 1660's. But the Leiden school of genre painting only reached its height after 1650 in the work of Frans van Mieris, Metsu and Steen.

Frans van Mieris, called the Elder to distinguish him from his grandson, was one of the last of the twenty-three children of a goldsmith and diamond-cutter of Leiden, who wished his son to follow his own profession. Houbraken says that the boy covered the walls of his father's workshop with such spirited charcoal drawings that visitors encouraged the father to have his son study painting. He was put first with a glass painter, Abraham Toorenvliet, under whom he made such progress that he was sent to study with the famous Gerard Dou. His progress with Dou was so rapid that the teacher called him "the prince of his pupils"; and, in fact, he became

a far better painter than his master. His drawing is more fluent, his color richer and more unified than that of Dou, a result which may be attributed to the influence of a short period of study under the excellent Leiden portrait painter Abraham van den Tempel and, later, to the influence of Vermeer. Van Mieris' first dated paintings are from 1657,<sup>2</sup> the year of his marriage; in 1658 he became a master in the guild of painters in Leiden. His success was immediate and well deserved, both in Leiden and among the princely art patrons of the time, and great prices were paid for his pictures. The Archduke Leopold William, Stadtholder of the Spanish Netherlands and one of the founders of the great Hapsburg collections, offered him a post as Court Painter in Vienna, which van Mieris declined because his wife did not want to leave Leiden. The Grand Duke of Tuscany visited him on his two journeys through Holland (1667 and 1669) and purchased pictures of him, including the famous life size *Self Portrait* in the Uffizi. It is no wonder that Martin in his recent history of Dutch painting chose the *Self Portrait of the Artist in his Studio* in Dresden to illustrate the life of the rich and successful artists in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> The fact that each of his pictures had, so to speak, a buyer waiting for it, produced a certain mannerism in his later works, as such unbounded success has done in the case of more recent artists; this, and the fact that his work presents no special critical problems has led to a certain neglect of him by modern scholars. We are also, perhaps, a little inclined to underestimate the sheer power of the command of reality in van Mieris and the whole group of great genre

painters of the '60's and '70's — de Hooch, Metsu, van Mieris and Steen. Yet the passion for reality, which was so deep and strong in these Dutch painters, was itself an imaginative force. Just as Thornton Wilder in his recent play, *Our Town*, makes one feel the sweetness and beauty of the simple human experiences of home, of family affection, of morning, noon and night, so do these Dutch painters raise the simple domestic life they observed to the height of an intense and richly satisfying experience.

Van Mieris left a number of self portraits, of which this hitherto unrecorded example is the largest and earliest. There is no doubt that the artist has represented himself. The same face, somewhat older, appears in Houbraken's engraving (III,6)<sup>4</sup>, in the small picture in Berlin (834), and in the Dresden picture of the artist in his studio, to name only a few examples. The young painter cannot be here more than twenty years old. On internal evidence I think the portrait can be dated between 1653 and 1655. The form is derived from Gerard Dou. The artist is seen half length within an arched stone window, behind a table covered with an Anatolian rug and loaded with a profusion of still life properties such as the Leiden school loved to represent. Books, papers, celestial globe, candlesticks and skull, were objects which appealed to the taste of Leiden, with its background of university life and its great faculty of medicine. The studio is clearly Dou's studio, which Rembrandt had occupied before him. In the Cook Collection in Richmond is a picture by Dou of Rembrandt in his studio, dated 1628, showing the round column, which the painters liked to work into their compositions. Rembrandt used this column, with the light falling upon it from the left, and

a narrow arched door sometimes showing at the right, in several compositions of the Leiden period; while the same architectural features recur all through Dou's work.<sup>5</sup> The statuette on the window-sill is a plaster cupid by Francois Duquesnoy, called Fiammingo (1594-1643), an artist of whom Dou seems to have been very fond in the 1650's. The same cupid appears, for example, in Dou's *Painter Drawing by Lamplight* (Brussels) (1653) and a relief by Duquesnoy appears in his *Physician* (Vienna) (1653), so that it is safe to assume that van Mieris did this picture sometime shortly thereafter. When he again emerges to light with the Vienna *Physician* of 1657 (or 1659) and the Schwerin *Duet* of 1658 he is quite a different artist, closer to Metsu and Vermeer than to Dou.

The picture also throws a new light upon van Mieris' formative years. Houbraken says that the artist's friends, anxious for him to learn to work on a larger scale than Dou's persuaded him to study for a time with the portrait painter Abraham van den Tempel: "he was directed by the painter Adriaen (sic) van den Tempel to accustom himself to a bold handling of the brush; yet, inclined more toward the fine and detailed painting, he returned again to the teaching of Dou, until he was advised by his friends to practice art by himself." In the exceptional size of this portrait and its unaccustomed breadth of touch (which already surpasses Dou's manner) as well as in the cool shimmer of silvery lights on the painter's buff jacket, there is more than a suggestion of van den Tempel's influence. Our portrait was clearly painted after he had left van den Tempel and was again in Dou's studio, but while the former's style was still fresh in his mind. There is no other picture, to my knowledge;

which plainly exhibits the working of this brief but all important influence. On the easel, also, is a picture of some Old Testament subject in the Rembrandt style; a beautiful drawing of the turbaned man lies upon the table. There is no other instance of van

Mieris' work in this style, yet he must have been quite proud of the picture to have represented it in his first self portrait. It is seldom that a portrait offers so much material for the personal history of the artist.

E. P. RICHARDSON

- 1) Canvas: H. 35 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; W. 30 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (90.88 cm. by 76.76 cm.). Signed on the frame of the globe, *FvM.* Reg. No. 38.29. A hitherto unrecorded portrait from the Dutch art market.
- 2) C. Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der Hervorragendsten Holländischen Maler*, X; W. Stechow, Thieme-Becker.
- 3) W. Martin, *De Hollandische Schilderkunst in de 17e Eeuw*, I, p. 23.
- 4) Houbraken, *De Grootte Schonburgh der Nederlantsche Kunstschilders en Schilderessen*, 1753.
- 5) Cf. Rembrandt's *St. Paul in Prison* (Stuttgart); *Presentation in the Temple* (K. d. K., p. 6); *Supper at Emmaus* (Paris, Musée Jacquemart André); also Dou's *Old Painter* (Munich), *Old Painter in his Studio* (London, Rothschild), *Young Mother* (Mauritshuis), *Woman Peeling Potatoes* (Dessau, Amalienstift), *Cellar* (Berlin).

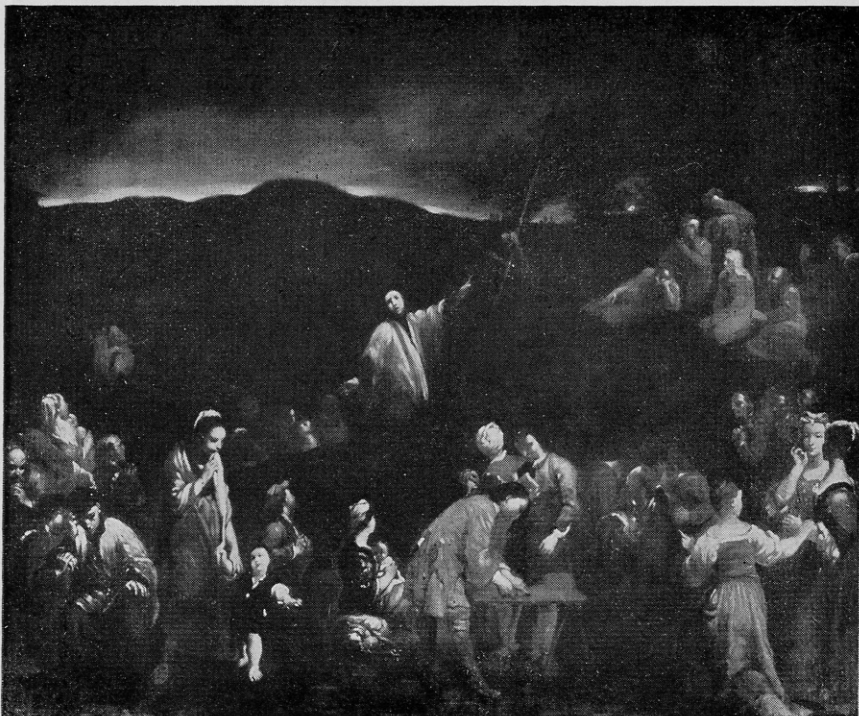
## A JESUIT MISSION BY GIUSEPPE MARIA CRESPI

Among the artists of the Baroque who fell prey to the scorn generated by the aesthetic doctrines of the nineteenth century, none, perhaps, has emerged in this age of broader taste with greater promise of taking a place of importance in the Italian tradition than Giuseppe Maria Crespi of Bologna. Consequently, we are gratified to add a characteristic and delightful painting by the artist to our collection. The picture, which represents a Jesuit Mission, is the gift of Mr. Jacob Heilmann.<sup>1</sup> Placed in the Baroque room at Alger House, it rounds out the small group of paintings of the era heretofore representative only of the schools of Rome, Venice and Genoa.

Painted about 1709 our picture comes from the period most strongly expressive of Crespi's originality. Three years later he was to bring his *oeuvre* to an impressive climax with the splendid series commissioned by Cardinal Ottoboni in 1712,<sup>2</sup> celebrating the Seven Sacraments, which some twenty years ago were brought to light in the Dresden Gallery. *The*

*Mission*, though built upon formal lines, is conceived in Baroque terms of sudden contrasts of light and shade, but handled by Crespi with great freshness and originality. His virtuosity with the human figure enabled him to conjure his forms from the blackness of the landscape by a few telling strokes of his brush.

The picture represents what must have been a familiar sight in Crespi's Italy, the evangelistic gatherings of the Jesuits who were still fighting the battle of the Counter-Reformation. In the midst of a motley circle of charmingly diversified people, a surpliced priest points to an improvised cross and calls his listeners to repentance. The artist's habit of repeating compositional details is found in the center group, where a man appears to scoop up money from a table, a group that closely follows the composition of the card players in the Bargellini Gallery, Bologna.<sup>3</sup> And the peasant mother who hushes her child is similar to a detail of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Dresden Gallery. *The*



A JESUIT MISSION  
GIUSEPPE MARIA CRESPI  
1665—1747  
GIFT OF MR. JACOB HEIMANN

confessor and penitent at the left, painted in brilliant shorthand chiaroscuro, convey more than a hint of the intense character of the Sacraments. Crespi has described the hour and the place with care: the setting is a barren hillside at dawn; the first cool light of day breaks over the distant mountain dispelling the black clouds and spreading a flush of blue along the horizon.

The records of Crespi's life are without romantic incident. Born in Bologna in 1665, he was apprenticed to a series of masters. In the studio of Domenico Maria Cunuti, he af-

fectured the dress of a Spaniard which earned him the sobriquet "lo Spagnuolo". His formal training was with Carlo Cignani and Antonio Burrini, who influenced his taste for stark chiaroscuro. Under all of them, Crespi was rigorously schooled in the academic Bolognese tradition, copying whole cycles of frescoes by the Carracci, painting replicas of works of Guercino and Barocci, and finally emerging towards the end of the eighties with Baroque virtuosity at his fingertips.

While in the atelier of Burrini he fell in with a liberal patron, Giovanni



Ricci, who enabled him to travel and pursue his studies independently. Crespi again copied the works of Barocci at Urbino and Pesaro, but at Parma in the cathedral his eyes were opened to the soaring decorative panoramas of Correggio and the master's engaging figure style. The gorgeousness of Venetian color and the sensuous richness of the Venetian oil technique awaited him in the City of the Lagoons. Of these multiplex influences, Crespi's style was compounded as it matured and ripened during the nineties after his return to Bologna. From this period to the end

of his long life he sought to unbind the shackles of Bolognese academism and to give his very original pictorial gift a free reign. But he experienced the stimulating atmosphere of Venice too late. And although by its inspiration he developed a highly personal style in genre subjects like ours, in which he put behind him the mannered grace of the Baroque, still the unbreakable force of his early training compelled him to move within the limits of academic formulas whenever he composed traditional themes of monumental conception.

PERRY T. RATHBONE

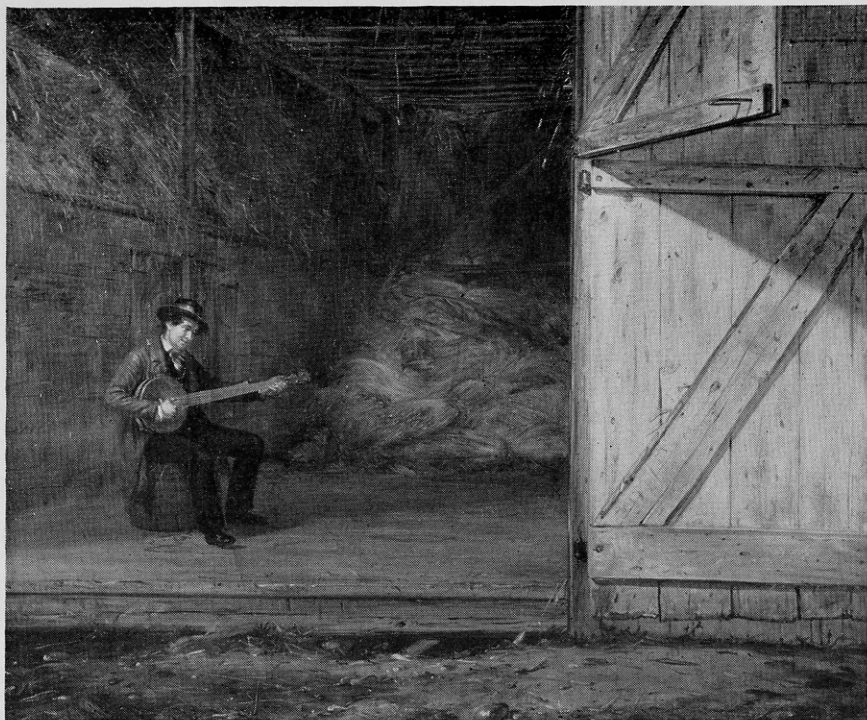
- 1) Oil on canvas. H. 20 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; W. 25 inches. Reg. No. unassigned. Formerly collection Carlo Foresti, Milan. Exhibited Bologna, 1935, Catalogue No. 25.
- 2) Reproduced *Dedalo*, v. I (1921), p. 654.
- 3) Reproduced *Dedalo*, v. I (1921), p. 587.

## THE BANJO PLAYER BY WILLIAM S. MOUNT

Through the generosity of D. M. Ferry, Jr., the Institute has recently acquired a very engaging example of the art of William S. Mount, one of America's most satisfying genre painters. *The Banjo Player*<sup>1</sup> is not only a typical specimen of Mount's subject matter, but an unusually simple and clear composition for its period.

William Sidney Mount was born November 26, 1807, at the farming village of Setauket, Long Island. Until he was seventeen he worked on his father's farm, apparently entertaining no thoughts of an artistic career. In 1824 his older brother, H. S. Mount, who was a sign painter by profession, living in New York, sent for the youth and offered him a position as apprentice in the trade. In those days a sign painter was not merely a designer of letters and layout — a sign

was, if not a work of art, at least a product of high craftsmanship, since it was a trademark, an advertisement, and a decoration combined. The elder Mount was better at his calling than most of his fellows, and in striving to surpass his brother, William achieved considerable technical porficiency. In 1826 he entered the National Academy of Design, and after a short stay on Long Island in 1828, caused by ill health, he set himself up in New York as a portrait painter, with immediate success. Further illness forced him to retire permanently to the country, where until his death in 1868, for lack of adequate portrait subjects, he turned to the unpretending but genial figures about him: Negro workmen; country storekeepers, roustabouts and amiable loafers of every description. His native sympathy for rural life, together with



THE BANJO PLAYER  
WILLIAM S. MOUNT  
1807—1868  
GIFT OF D. M. FERRY, JR.

his curiously commercial-academic training, give to his pictures an attractiveness which is always tempered by a certain formality of design.

The banjo player, an easy, homely figure picking out some country tune for his own enjoyment amid the pleasant disorder of the barn, is counteracted by the large geometrical areas formed by the doors at the right—in a single painting an admirable fusion of the artist's customary later subject matter with the habitual brevity and forcefulness gained in his early

training. The painter Washington Allston recommended that Mount study the Dutch genre painters Ostade and Jan Steen, in order to become "a great artist in the line he has chosen". Indeed, we may be thankful that he did not carry out the advice, for, in imitating no one, in searching nowhere but throughout his own country for things to paint, he succeeded in preserving the most agreeable phases of a style of life now very hard to find, and in a manner altogether worthy of the theme.

PARKER LESLEY

## CALENDAR FOR JANUARY

## EXHIBITIONS

- Jan. 3—Feb. 15: Prints by Dürer.  
 Alger House: Jan. 8 — Feb. 12: Toulouse-Lautrec and the Beginning of Poster Art.

## TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in cooperation with the Archaeological Society of Detroit, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall.

- Jan. 3: *Rembrandt, the Etcher*, by Isabel Weadock.  
 Jan. 10: *Chinoiserie, the Blending of the East and West in the Eighteenth Century*, by Adele Coulin Weibel.  
 Jan. 17: *The Development of Portrait Painting from Fouquet to Cezanne*, by Charles Sterling, Attaché of the Picture Department, The Louvre.  
 Jan. 24: *German Romantic Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, by Parker Lesley.  
 Jan. 31: *Maya Land*, by Dr. Marion Barker.  
 Feb. 3: *Russian Byzantine Architecture*, by Prof. James Conant, Harvard University. (Note that this Archaeological Society lecture is on Friday evening.)  
 Feb. 7: *Work of the Federal Art Projects*, by Helen Appleton Read.  
 Feb. 14: *Landscape in Dutch Art*, by E. P. Richardson.

## LECTURES IN THE GALLERIES

(chairs provided)

- Jan. 5 and 8: *The Gothic Style in Italy*  
 Jan. 12 and 15: *Italian Art of the early Renaissance, I*  
 Jan. 19 and 22: *Italian Art of the Early Renaissance, II*  
 Jan. 26 and 29: *The High Renaissance in Italy*  
 Feb. 2 and 5: *The First Oil Paintings*

## SPECIAL TALKS BY THE CURATORS

Friday afternoons at 3:00

- Jan. 6: *Italian Figured Silks and Velvets*, by Adele Coulin Weibel.  
 Jan. 13: *Dürer, Master of Copper and Wood Engraving*, by Isabel Weadock.  
 Jan. 20: *Italian Romanesque Art*, by Parker Lesley.  
 Jan. 27: *Flemish Primitives*, by E. P. Richardson.  
 Feb. 3: *Brocades of the Eighteenth Century*, by Adele Coulin Weibel.  
 Feb. 10: *Nanteuil, Engraver and Historian*, by Isabel Weadock.