

HIDDEN AND UNREMEMBERED: THE MISATTRIBUTIONS OF
THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY WORKS BY JUDITH LEYSTER,
CLARA PEETERS AND RACHEL RUYSCH

by

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Focusing on the genre painting of Clara Peeters, Judith Leyster and Rachel Ruysch, this thesis will contextualize the misattribution of their works to contemporaneous male painters and explain the ramifications of these misattributions for the field of art history. In some cases, works made by Peters and Leyster, or other female Dutch Baroque artists, are attributed to prominent male artists such as Frans Snyders or Frans Hals. Art connoisseurs and collectors also attributed works by female painters to their husbands or fathers, as was the case for several works by Leyster. Given the likely role of a woman in early modern patriarchal society, I will consider how the gendered subjects of still-life works, which include compositions which feature the interior domestic household, suggest female authorship. To complement the analysis of female artists from northern Europe, this paper also considers some of the gender issues of biography of women, acknowledging figures like Artemisia Gentileschi, an artist whose modern fame derives largely from her biography as a victim of rape. By examining the history of connoisseurship in the seventeenth century—when art dealers cultivated a clientele drawn from the Grand Tour in Europe—my thesis demonstrates that dealers faced increasing motivation to raise the purchase price of paintings by assigning them to well-known male artists, as buyers were both gullible and indifferent to the details of a work’s creation. I then follow connoisseurship practices up to the present, ultimately tracing the connection between connoisseurship and the art historical

understanding of the seventeenth-century women artists' role in history. These three women artists, prominent during their time, are under-explored in scholarship as well as the history of their loss in reputation which this paper examines. Seeking to answer why many of these misattributions took so long to come to light, this paper explores the reattribution process for paintings by Peeters and Leyster, considers the possible catalysts for these reattributions, and shows why it is important to bring long overdue recognition to these women artists.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	8
The European Grand Tour and Connoisseurship	11
Connoisseurship and Deception.....	14
Women Painters in Northern Europe	19
Judith Leyster	26
Rachel Ruysch	33
Clara Peeters	36
Nochlin and Women in the Art Historical Canon.....	44
Modern Attribution	48
Conclusion	53
Appendix.....	55
Bibliography	73

List of Figures

Figure 1. Judith Leyster, <i>The Last Drop</i> , 1639	55
Figure 2. Judith Leyster, <i>The Last Drop</i> , 1639	56
Figure 3. Caravaggio, <i>Still-Life with Basket of Fruit</i>	57
Figure 4. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-Life with Fish</i> , 1611	58
Figure 5. Judith Leyster, <i>The Jester</i> , 1626	59
Figure 6. Judith Leyster, <i>The Jolly Toper</i> , 1629	60
Figure 7. Judith Leyster, <i>The Carousing Couple</i> , 1606-1660.....	61
Figure 8. Rachel Ruysch, <i>Flowers in a Vase, and a Tortoiseshell Butterfly on a Partly Draped Marble Ledge</i> , 1664-1750	62
Figure 9. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-Life</i> , 1612	63
Figure 10. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-Life</i> , 1610	64
Figure 11. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-life with Flowers</i> , 1610s	65
Figure 12. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-life with Fish, Poultry, Vegetables, Kitchen Utensils and a Cat</i> , 1625.....	66
Figure 13. Clara Peeters, <i>Still-life with Fish</i> , 1608-1657.....	67
Figure 14. Clara Peeters, <i>Flowers in a Basket</i> , 1615-1619	68
Figure 15. Rejected Attribution by RKG (Clara Peeters), <i>Still Life with Crab, Shrimps, and Lobster</i> , c. 1635–40	69
Figure 16. Artemisia Gentileschi, <i>Susanna and the Elders</i> , 1610	70
Figure 17. Attributed to Juriaen van Streeck, <i>Still-life</i> , 1632-87	71
Figure 18. Clara Peeters, <i>Table with a cloth, salt cellar, gilt tazza, pie, jug, porcelain dish with olives, and roast fowl</i> , 1611	72
Figure 19. Clara Peeters, <i>Table with a cloth, salt cellar, gilt tazza, pie, jug, porcelain dish with olives, and roast fowl</i> , 1611 (detail).....	72