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## **Big-Bellied Women: Portraying Pregnancy in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century England**

*The Isabel and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Art*

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### **SPEAKERS**

Suzanne van de Meerendonk, Karen Hearn

### **KEYWORDS**

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### **TRANSCRIPT**

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** Welcome, everyone, to today's program, the Isabel and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Arts given this year by Professor Karen Hearn. We're grateful for the continued support of Bader Philanthropies for making this program possible. My name is Suzanne van de Meerendonk. And I am the Bader Curator and Researcher of European Art here at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University.

Before we begin this conversation tonight, we would like to take a moment to acknowledge the land on which we work study and live. Queen's University is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. It is also to acknowledge this territory significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon it, peoples whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the lands and continue to develop in relationship to the territory and its other inhabitants today. The Kingston Indigenous Community continues to reflect the area's Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee roots. There's also a significant Metis community and there are First Peoples from other Nations across Turtle Islands present here today. I would like to express gratitude for the ongoing stewardship of the lands which makes it possible for all of us to gather here today. I am myself a somewhat recent settler of Indonesia and Dutch heritage coming here from the Netherlands by way of what is now the United States. And it's not lost on me that this parallels the path of arrival of Dutch and other European settlers during the same period that we will bring our focus to today. As we do so, I reflect on the opportunities afforded to me as a result of violent colonial histories and realities and a privilege I have to work and build a new life on these lands. And I would like to encourage our online participants joining from other locations to consider their own position with regards to such histories and the land where they find themselves. And we will post a few links in the chat that may be helpful for that.

Today, I am pleased to welcome both our in-person audience and those joining us live over Zoom. We also have live captioning provided by Max and ASL interpretation provided by Ashley

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and Christy. Thank you all very much for being here. If you have any questions during these lecture events, please hold those until the end. We will have a period for questions and conversation following the lecture. And both our attendees here in the room and those online will have an opportunity to participate in this Q&A. And finally, for those of you who are joining us in person, following this lecture around 7:30, we'll have a reception with food and drinks.

It's now my distinct pleasure to introduce art historian, curator and renowned scholar of British and Dutch Art, Professor Karen Hearn. We are particularly relieved that she is joining us in person today as we have planned to welcome Karen already in the now infamous month of March of 2020. Within days of travelling to Kingston to deliver her lecture that year, the lecture event unfortunately had to be canceled due to a global pandemic that has impacted all of our lives since. So, I am grateful that we are able to meet here with her and all of you today. And we can also -- and that we can also share the lecture with an even larger audience now due to hybrid organization of today's program. Karen Hearn travelled to us from London where she's currently an honorary professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University College London. She was also the long-time curator of 16th and 17th Century British Art at Tate Britain from 1992 to 2012. Her scholarly record counts numerous publications and major exhibitions on early modern European art, particularly within the genre of portraiture. Her research interests range from the impact and significance of refugee and immigrant artists in 16th and 17th century England, gender and self-fashioning, women's patronage and the work of artists Anthony van Dyck and Cornelius Johnson. Her lecture tonight draws from just one of these various research interests, the representation of pregnancy in historic European art. This led her to organize the exhibition "Portraying Pregnancy: From Holbein to Social Media" which was shown at the Foundling Museum in London in 2020. And we actually will have a couple of copies of the exhibition catalogue for sale at our reception today if you're interested. The run of this ground-breaking exhibition was unfortunately cut short by pandemic-related closures. So, therefore, it gives us all the more joy to be able to introduce Karen as our speaker on this exciting topic. Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to Professor Karen Hearn.

(Applause)

**Karen Hearn:** Thank you very much, Suzanne. And it's such a pleasure to be here. As you've heard, the lecture was originally due to take place two years ago but the pandemic struck and changed all our plans. I'm absolutely delighted to be here tonight in person and also with an actual audience present, with you all present. And also knowing that so many friends and colleagues are watching, tuning in online, some of them way past their bedtimes. I'm extremely grateful to Bader Philanthropies for generously making this possible and to Suzanne and her colleagues for all their very hard work. It's been very complicated to make this a reality.

In late January this year, the singer and businesswoman Rihanna announced to the world that she was pregnant by stepping out publicly dressed in carefully chosen clothing that

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unambiguously displayed her baby bump. As People.com stated, "The singer debuted her baby bump while out in New York City over the weekend with her boyfriend." And with the ubiquity of cameras, paparazzi, mobile phones, images of her doing that immediately went global. Rihanna thus chose to curate the precise moment of release of this significant personal news. And from the outset, the online and print media world knew the specific date on which these very public images were made.

Things were rather different in 16th and 17th Century Britain. A portrait results from a series of choices which arrived at through the interaction of the artist, the person who commissions the image, and if they are not the actual commissioner, the sitter, her or himself. It's extremely rare to find evidence of the precise circumstances in which an early modern portrait was commissioned, and thus of the thought processes and decisions that informed its eventual content and appearance. Pregnancy resulting in the production of healthy legitimate children has always been central to the role of noble and royal women. It maintains familial and dynastic continuity. Although both conception and obstetric success could sometimes be extremely problematic and were widely acknowledged as such, many early modern women did spend much of their adult lives being pregnant. Until recently, however, art historians have been surprisingly uncurious about the significance of this for pre-contemporary portraits. As you've heard, for some years, I've been researching and identifying painted portraits of early modern women which were made at a time when they were pregnant, whether that pregnancy is made visible in the portrait as we see here or not. And in this work, I've primarily addressed portraits of British elite women. And as you've heard most recently, this resulted in the exhibition that I curated at the Foundling Museum in London which opened in January 2020 just before the pandemic entitled "Portraying Pregnancy." From Holbein, we had a beautiful Holbein drawing lent by Her Majesty, The Queen. And I'm showing you here an installation shot from that exhibition. And as you've heard, there's also a standalone book of the same title. And I was astonished and delighted when at the weekend, I heard from a number of sources that the New York Times in talking further about Rihanna's pregnancy had actually referenced the exhibition in the book. So, although it happened before the pandemic, it's not forgotten.

While today I shall principally speak about English or British portraits, after 1603, England and Scotland joined together and it becomes Britain, the artists names that you will hear will mostly be Netherlandish ones because many of the leading portrait painters to the English British elite were born and in most cases were trained in the low countries. And they then travelled to Britain sometimes coming as Protestant religious exiles or even refugees or sometimes coming for economic betterment. My own research began with this specific English portrait of about 1595, stylistically and technically clearly by a painter called Marcus Gheeraerts II, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. And he'd been born in Bruges about 30 years previously and had been raised in London. His father who was an artist, too, Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder had moved to Protestant London in 1568 with his children as a religion-motivated migrant. The identity of the sitter is unknown. But as you can see, she is unambiguously depicted as visibly pregnant. And

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this may seem to be an unusual even anomalous form of presentation, but it was one that turned out to have been surprisingly common in Elizabethan and Jacobean Britain. And that is from around 1562 until about 1635. The term pregnancy did not in fact have its modern-day meaning during this period. So, words like bearing, breeding, teaming and great with child or large with child were the ones that were commonly used. But perhaps the most frequent one was big-bellied which I've used in the title and which is, of course, fantastically accurate. So, I have the opportunity to steer this painting towards Tate Britain where I was the curator at the time. But it set me thinking about all the women who might have been painted at a time when they were pregnant. But in portraits for which the standard Western European default choice was made which was not to indicate the fact -- not to indicate the pregnancy. And the reasons for that default choice seemed to be many an unwillingness to record permanently what was seen as a temporary state, social taboos or bodily outline that resulted from a woman being sexually active. And the perceived role of an early modern portrait to idealize and as it were to improve on reality which obviously with painting, you can make a lot of choices like that. You can improve and make changes. In identifying and interpreting such portraits, it makes a great difference if the sitter unlike this one can be securely identified. While it remains hard to establish biographical facts for so many women of the past, the graying availability of archival information online means that increasingly, we may find specific relevant dates for the lives of at least some women, particularly elite women for whom records have a better chance of surviving, so that we can try to link the record of a birth and thus the pregnancy that preceded it with the time at which a portrait might have been painted. And of course, we must always consider that the painting process itself may have taken place through a number of sittings and possibly over quite a long period.

This is a portrait that we know was painted at a time when the sitter was thought to be pregnant and when she was apparently showing physical signs of that pregnancy. This is Henry VIII's elder daughter, Mary Tudor, who succeeded to the throne of England in July 1553 upon the death of her half-brother, Edward VI. On 25th of July 1554 in Winchester, she married King Philip II of Spain, the son of the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. It was the 27-year-old Philip's second marriage. Mary herself was 37. By September, Mary was already rumoured to be pregnant. And on the 23rd of November, it was reported back to Charles V that, quote, "The Queen is veritably with child because she has felt the babe," that must mean that she's felt the moving of the child, "and there are other likely and customary symptoms such as the state of her breasts." On the 28th of November, Mary sat under her cloth of state in the Great Chamber of Whitehall Palace, quote, "richly appareled and her belly," there we are again, "her belly laid out that all men might see that she was with child." So, a very public performance of her pregnancy which, of course, was of huge dynastic significance. The following day on the 29th of November, the Pope's emissary, Cardinal Pole, presided over the reconciliation of the English Church to Roman Catholicism. And this had been Mary's highest priority the moment she came to the throne to bring England back to Catholicism. And it was reported that when Mary first met Cardinal Pole, she had felt her child move within her. And she had exclaimed

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"exultavit infans in utero pius." And this is a direct reference to the New Testament narrative of and the experience felt at the time by the Virgin Mary's older kinswoman, Elizabeth, when the two women met. So, Mary was pregnant with Christ and Elizabeth with the future John the Baptist. And in pre-Reformation England, The Visitation, this moment had become an increasingly popular theme in religious art. Now, when Protestantism was brought in under Henry VIII and then increasingly under Edward VI, there was a great deal of destruction of religious art. And there was more destruction later. So, these two examples, visitations on the screen are extremely rare survivals on the left-hand side in a church in Cambridgeshire and on the right-hand side a church in Devon. And they happen to escape the iconoclasm. So, we see Mary and Elizabeth meeting together. And we see those words in the banderole on the right-hand side.

As I've said, it's often hard to be able to date an early-painted portrait precisely. But in the case of Mary Tudor's portrait, we can do so. It survives in three versions. And the one on the screen is the one in the Prado in Madrid. The Utrecht artist Anthonis Mor began working for Emperor Charles V in 1549 and had painted Habsburg family members in Brussels, in Portugal and in Spain. Sent to England by Charles the V, Mor was in London by mid November 1554 where he painted Mary in the seated posture that he had often used for portraits of Habsburg royal brides which is what Mary had become through her marriage to Philip. Although Mary was, as we've heard, now thought to be pregnant, Mor has not depicted her as visibly so. She wears a diamond ring and a large pendant jewel which were betrothal gifts from Charles and Philip respectively. And she holds a red rose, a multivalent symbol. It's an allusion to her namesake, the Virgin Mary, while also referencing her appropriate love for her husband. And more politically, the red rose was also an emblem of the Lancastrian Tudor dynasty and had already appeared held in the hand in numerous portraits of her late royal brother, Edward VI. So, that rose is very complex symbol here. In London, a month later on the 20th of December, Philip II signed a royal order that appointed Anthonis Mor as his painter indicating as Joanna Woodall has suggested that he had formally accepted Mor's portraits of his wife, Mary. But in fact, Mary would turn out to have been undergoing a form of phantom pregnancy and never became a mother.

Similarly, turning for a moment to the Northern Netherlands, this portrait of Reynu Semeyns, a young widow depicts her while she was betrothed to her second husband, Jan Huygen van Linschoten as the date 1595. And the inscription at the top left indicate basically saying that she is betrothed. She married van Linschoten on the second of April 1595. And their only child, a daughter was born on the 24th of August. Thus, as Marlies Stoter has pointed out, this portrait appears to acknowledge that Reynu was pregnant when they married. She holds this cloth before her which perhaps is -- relates to that. And Marlies pointed out that the name Reynu contains a word which basically means pure in English. So, there's this interesting kind of dichotomy between the two. But establishing the precise time period over which an early modern portrait was made is itself extremely hard normally. Relevant evidence may include an

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original date inscribed on the portrait itself as we see here or a reference in a document to the making of all or the delivery of a painting. And that's the evidence we have with Anthonis Mor's portraits of Mary Tudor. But references like that are extremely rare.

Often, regrettably, the main piece of evidence for identifying a possibly pregnancy-related portrait, maybe the date on which a female sitter died in or shortly after giving birth, burial records show how many women were the victims of post-puerperal fever, a form of sepsis for instance. So, if a woman didn't die from complications during the actual birth, she might very well die subsequently from this infection. It's been estimated that one in 100 women died as a result of childbed in early modern Britain or an alternative figure that's been given is that one in 100 pregnancies ended in the mother's death at this time. So, the contemporary perception was that the risks were very high both for mother and infant.

I've long wondered, for example, whether Lady Katherine Dormer, the subject of this portrait by the Scottish London-based painter John Michael Wright which is inscribed with her name and the date 1659, whether it might have been intended to have been read as relating to a pregnancy. The gesture with which Katherine holds up the fabric of her skirt over the lower part of her body seems to demand to be read. And it turns out that Katherine did die in 1659, the year inscribed on her portrait, soon after giving birth to her only surviving child on the 7th of May. And we know this because she was buried on the 9th of June 1659. With her right hand, the hand on the left, Katherine points towards a small vase that rests on a stone ledge. And if that vase is meant to be read as a file for capturing tears, a classical symbol of grief. That opens up the possibility that this portrait might have been painted or at least perhaps finished posthumously. If we're seeking to find the precise dates on which sittings for a British portrait took place, we generally have to wait until the 18th century, a period from which the sitter's books and appointment books of some of the leading portrait painters, people like Sir Joshua Reynolds or George Romney have survived. So, once we've got sitter books, we are in a much better at a position to tie those in with known pregnancies or women who were sitting for their portrait.

How should we define visibly pregnant? And by what means is that information conveyed? And the answer includes analysing clothing depicted. Understanding the dress of a period is obviously key to the subject. Is a sitter actually pregnant or is she portrayed wearing a fashion that mimics pregnancy? Misinterpreting historic clothing is easily done. As you will all know, it seems that the female figure who holds the gathered folds of her long fine green wool dress over her stomach in Jan van Eyck's 1434 portrait of probably Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife is not to be read as with child. Lorne Campbell writing in the National Gallery Catalogue, this painting noted that, "Although to modern eye, she might look pregnant, she is not." Van Eyck's "Dresden Triptych" of 1437 here on the right shows the virgin St. Catherine similarly posed and dressed and is precisely comparable in shape. So you can see how really very much the same dress shape is being worn by St. Catherine. However, from the 16th century onwards, people

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who saw the Arnolfini portrait and who knew nothing about mid-15th century Flemish dress conventions and why would they, of course, routinely presumed that the sitter was expecting. And thus when the painting was inventoried in the Spanish World Collection in 1700, the compiler described the group as a "youth and a pregnant German woman," slightly off beam, quote, "and it appears that they are getting married by night." So, fashion can be extreme, can be strange and unusual and can lead us astray.

Returning to the English Elizabethan and Jacobean pregnancy portraits, portraits that do depict visible pregnancy bumps, it seems that they will commission from a range of painters. And as I mentioned, some, many were artists with Flemish names. One of the earliest examples is this portrait by the exiled Flemish painter, Hans Eworth, who is known today in Britain as Hans Eworth. And in fact, there is a very beautiful portrait by Hans Eworth in Ottawa. And he was one of the most prolific painters of the elite of his day. The sitter is the highly educated Mildred Cooke, the wife of Queen Elizabeth's leading Minister William Cecil who was subsequently ennobled as Lord Burghley. Now, the couple's marriage was very much an enterprise of joint minds. Because Mildred is here unambiguously depicted as pregnant, the bump here is presumed to be the couple's only surviving son, Robert Cecil, who was born on the 1st of June 1563 and in fact who was to become a leading minister to Queen Elizabeth in his own right late in her reign. So, this picture probably dates from early to mid-1563. The couple had suffered a tough road as would be parents. For the first nine years of their marriage, there had been no children. In 1554, Mildred gave birth to a daughter, Francisca, who died shortly after birth, and then in 1556 to Anne who lived to adulthood. Mildred's next two pregnancies produced successively two boys, both named William, the first of whom died a few hours after his birth in October 1559, while the second lived for 19 months but died in December 1562. So, we can only imagine the distress that these deaths must have caused the couple. Here, Mildred's loose gown of figured velvet studded with jewels has hanging sleeves and a curved stand-up collar and fashionable scalloped wing shoulders. It's completely unfastened to reveal a black bodice and black skirt over her rounded stomach. And the bump moreover is given visual evidence by those wavy lines of gold embroidery. So, the message is being made very clear. In her hand on the left, Mildred holds a bunch of cherries and they symbolize the state of innocence. And they're thus appropriate to a chaste wife. Now, contemporary viewer would have understood that pregnant Mildred was extending the Cecil family and must that her visibly depicted condition is a heraldic statement. And we see upper left half of the couple's painted arms, a very complicated heraldry of showing, you know, the family going back for some generations. And the portrait may perhaps originally have been paired with a companion portrait of William, of her husband, which seems to have become lost. So, this is suggested, A, by the fact that we've only got half of the couple's arms there at the left-hand edge and that perhaps it was originally meant to visually dovetail with arms on the right-hand edge of a portrait of William. And also because Mildred is posed facing to our left, so that's in the right-hand position, that was generally employed for the woman in a pair of portraits of husband and wife portraits.

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The inclusion of heraldry which we saw also in the portrait of Reynu Seymens reminds us that these portraits are also about bloodlines and about family, about breeding. Now, the question of agency, who made the decision that a woman should be depicted as visibly pregnant? Who made that choice is a key one and one for which specific evidence doesn't survive. And I was grateful to Bert Watteuw for drawing to my attention an early 18th century French document in which the Count de Merode instructed a painter called Rendeux who was painting the family's portrait, a group portrait. He instructed that he wanted his wife's pregnancy to be made visible in it. So, that's very interesting. It's just one piece of evidence out of our period but -- and unfortunately, that portrait doesn't survive. This is so often for this period the survival rate must be extraordinarily low.

We can surmise that there were a number of reasons why the choice might be made to show a pregnancy in early modern English portraits, starting with pride in anticipated dynastic success. So, this whole thing about the family, the dynasty, the succession. Now, the Cecils were firm Protestants in the new Protestant reign of Elizabeth the I. And print Protestant texts intended for women readers repeatedly emphasize the words of St. Paul, "Woman will be saved through childbearing provided she continues in faith, love, holiness and virtue." So, a visibly pregnant woman was both seen to have been favoured by God and to be carrying out God's work. But in addition, at this time with an unmarried queen, Elizabeth I on the throne and widespread interest and increasing concern about whom she might marry, whether she would become a mother and secure the succession, pregnancy had a further national dimension. The later examples of the British pregnancy portraits are appearing just as the so-called Mother's Legacy Texts were gaining a wide currency in print. In 1622, the well-educated pregnant, gentle woman, Elizabeth Joscelyn secretly wrote a manuscript addressed to her husband and to her unborn child. And her husband didn't know this. But it was in case she should not survive childbed. And we find a number of examples. This seems to be understandably a very common impulse. Jocelyn did die and probably of that awful post-puerperal fever because it was a few days after her daughter was born. And her husband found the document. And two years later, he had it published under the title "The Mother's Legacy." And it was to go through many editions. It was quite a best-seller. It really spoke to people. And I'm showing you here on the screen the first edition of it. It's actually kind of a neat little volume, easy to carry, easy to read. So, perhaps a pregnancy portrait should also be seen in relation to the possibility of death, death in childbed.

A printed funeral sermon for a London woman who died in 1626, quote, in the time of her childbed suggested that, quote, "Wherein in for a woman to die," so to die in childbed, "is as for a soldier to die in battle." So, for a man, his role was to fight, fight in war. And for a woman, her fight was in childbed. So, as I mentioned, a number of pregnancy portraits were painted by the Flemish-born Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger and the unidentified pregnant woman of about 1595 so that's late in the reign of Elizabeth I is one of the most powerful ones. Her sumptuous attire with numerous pearls sewn onto it indicates her family's wealth and high status. And



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pearls were the height of fashion in England in the 1590s at the elite level. They were very much seen as symbols of purity. And purity is what society considered essential in a woman. A visible pregnancy might also be seen within a family group portrait. And I've talked about that later French example. But here is a surviving picture, a Habsburg portrait by an unidentified artist of Emperor Maximilian II and his wife Maria and three of their children. And Maria was a daughter of Emperor Charles V. We have a specific dating for this painting because it's after the birth in June 1553 of Ernst who we see in the cradle there, a baby in the cradle and before the birth of Maria's next child in June 1554. So, she's giving birth at yearly intervals. So, she presumably was pregnant again when this one was painted. And although we're not seeing that from the way her body is rendered, she is wearing a jeweled belt. And I think that we can tend to reassociate those jewels -- that kind of jewel belt with pregnancy.

Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, however, did portray visible pregnancy within family groups including in this complex dynastic image of Anne Hopton. Now, Anne had been the widow of Henry II Baron of Wentworth and he had died in 1593. So, she appears here behind the couple's three children. So, from the left, they're Thomas, Henry and Jane Wentworth. And because the little boys are so young, they're wearing skirts as little boys did at this period. And this painting which is dated 1596 on the foot of Henry's chair, not visible at this distance but it's very much there. 1596 was shortly after Anne had remarried to Sir William Pope who later became the Earl of Downe. And Anne is in fact clearly now pregnant and her bump must be the next Sir William Pope. They just kept the name. And he was born as we know in 1596, the year on this painting. So, she and her children gaze out at the viewer. And we might surmise that the viewer is the new husband with whom she's embarked on a second family at the age of about 35. And her clothing, a silver white bodice and sleeves with an open sleeveless black gown. So, what was you're-- what we're seeing here is just really the sort of the gown just strips either side of her shoulders. That very much echoes the clothing worn by the Tate unknown woman. So, these two portraits are roughly, you know, from roughly the same date. And here again, we're seeing those pearls. And in this case, you see that her ropes of pearls rest over her baby bump. And they're actually emphasizing the outline. It's another device to make sure that we get the message. Because a number of examples by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger survived, it looks as if he may have been seen as a specialist in pregnancy portraits.

This portrait of another unidentified sitter is dated 1620. And you can see really how his style has developed, how his approach has changed. It's more naturalistic and with this very beautifully rendered gesture of the hand on the bump. And indeed, into his old age, Gheeraerts was still receiving such commissions such as this portrait of an Arlington Lady Fanshawe of around 1628 and had married Sir Thomas Fanshawe in September 1627 and must have become pregnant almost immediately. The record shows that less than 10 months later, she gave birth to a daughter. But she died and she was buried very soon afterwards. So, accordingly, this portrait must have been made in spring or summer 1628. So, once again, it's the evidence of a woman's death that helps to provide the dating for the painting. Producing healthy children

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was of course even more essential within royal marriages. At her arrival in England in 1625, Charles the I's French Queen Henrietta Maria brought with her different French styles of clothing, fashions that were soon adopted in London. Unlike the narrow lacing of the Jacobean period, they included a bodice design that could accommodate the maternal body as it grew giving the figure an ambiguous outline. And in fashionable coat portraiture accordingly, it became less clear whether a sitter was to be identified as with child or not.

So, for the rest of this talk, I'm going to be focussing on some of the portraits painted by the Flemish artist Anthony Van Dyck during the years that he lived and worked in Britain. So, that's from 1632 to 1641. He made a brief short break back in the low countries between '34 and '35, but 1632 to '41. And I'll be considering how gestures, meaning-bearing objects and especially textiles seemed to be deployed to signal pregnancy in his portrait to be read or to be read in the context of that hope for dynastic success. In spring 1632, when van Dyck arrived in London, he was knighted and appointed, quote, principle painter to Charles I and Henrietta Maria. As the son of a silk trader, van Dyck had a finely tuned understanding of the importance of dress in portraiture as the work of Emilie Gordenker has made clear. Curiously, in a later and somewhat doubtful biographical note, Corneli sde Cornelis de Bie claimed that van Dyck's mother, Maria Cuyper, had been an embroiderer who, quote, "painted with her needle" especially during her pregnancy with van Dyck implying I think that this activity had in some way imprinted her creativity upon the child that she was carrying, a nice kind of fantastical idea. Aided by a team of assistants in his London studio, van Dyck was soon busy producing portraits of the royal couple and their growing family, as well as of many other sitters connected with the court. Excluded by her Catholicism from an official political role, Henrietta Maria's main task was motherhood. Between March 1629 and June 1644, she had nine pregnancies that came to term. And two of those babies were stillborn. Attempts have been made to connect the likely dates of her portraits with her pregnancies. And certainly when the royal couple's collections were inventoried for sale after the execution of Charles I in 1649, one work in the collection was described as, quote, the picture of the Queen when she was with child. And it was valued at five shillings. Sold in April 1650, this painting remains unidentified. In this example by van Dyck, the Queen's distinctive cradling gesture has long been presumed to allude to forthcoming parenthood. It was painted specifically for Cardinal Barberini in Rome to whom in December 1636, George Con, who was the papal agent in London, wrote to say that the Queen was waiting to take leave of him "as soon as the portrait for you is finished." And on 17th of March 1637, just three months after George Con's letter, the Queen gave birth to Princess Anne. And we know that by 1639, this portrait was definitely in Cardinal Barberini's collection, where it was inventoried. Van Dyck very rarely signed or inscribed his English portraits, and he almost never dated them, inconveniently for us. So as a result, it can be unclear when exactly they were painted. And thus, it can be hard to correlate them precisely with events in a sitter's life. And so in this case, with known pregnancies. But as I've shown, van Dyck had come to a court where portraits that made pregnancy visible were widely known, were appearing.

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In van Dyck's same works such as pregnancy, seems to be conveyed by symbolic gestures. A later 17th-century inventory described this portrait, thus, "Mary, Lady Verney, her right hand on her belly within with child of EV, a white gown and blue mantle." The sitter, Mary Blacknall, an heiress, had been married in 1629 at the age of 13. She first gave birth three years later, but to a child who died in infancy. Married to have six further children, only two of whom lived to adulthood. Her eldest son, Edmund Verney or EV, in that reference, was born in December 1636. And thus, it seems that Mary was not only painted by van Dyck while she was pregnant but also that her distinctive gesture and her direct gaze out are a statement of that. And since the inventory tells us that, that was evidently recognized as such at the time. So alerted by this, let's consider the hand gestures in other female portraits by van Dyck. Although it's quite important not to go overboard with this and consider each potential example on a case by case basis because a hand gesture might merely allude to the promise of hope for fertility, as in van Dyck's portrait of Henrietta Maria and Charles I, eldest daughter, Mary, here depicted at the age of nine just after her marriage in May 1641. So the young Dutch Prince William of Orange. And van Dyck's double portrait of the young couple was one of the last works that he produced with his studio team before his death in London in December 1641. So, obviously, that gesture, as I say, is to sort of hope for future fertility in the case of this child.

I'm showing you a black and white image of what's thought to be a portrait of Catherine, the daughter and heiress of Horace 1st Lord Vere of Tilbury, who'd married Oliver St. John in March 1634, and her son, the future Sir John St. John, was born in around 1637, stylistically a plausible date for this portrait. van Dyck was not a painter who used complex or numerous symbolic accessories, but in his female portraits -- but in his female portraits, pink or red roses frequently appear, either graying bushes or presented in baskets, or in glass vases, or as individual cut blooms. As I've already said, roses were rich in associations. Since classical times, they'd been linked with the goddess Venus and, thus, with love and subsequently as in the portrait of Mary Tudor, they were associated with the Virgin Mary, the rose without a thorn. And all these meanings were widely understood. So when van Dyck depicts a sitter ostentatiously holding a rose in front of her womb in the way that Catherine does, it seems likely that this gesture too maybe a signifier of pregnancy.

Another strategy deployed by van Dyck to convey pregnancy may have been the loose mantle that conceals the outline of the sitter's body. It's been suggested that this unfinished half-length portrait of a woman who presses a gauze scarf against her apparently distended body may be Rachel de Ruvigny, the fourth Countess of Southampton, and that it was perhaps painted in around 1639 or 1640. 1640 was the year in which the Countess died in child bed at the age of 37, having given birth to five children in six years. Indeed, from her marriage in 1634 onwards, she had been almost permanently with child. Alice, Lady Borlase, was married on the 4th of December 1637, shortly after which van Dyck painted portraits of her and her husband. In this case, roses are included in it in a glass vase as you see on the left. But more importantly, the gesture with which Lady Borlase draws her mantle, partly across her stomach, seems to

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demand that we recognize it as significant. By the late 1630s, as Emilie Gordenker has shown, van Dyck had invented for his British female portraits, unless specifically fashionable and, thus, more timeless form of attire, which echoed portraits by the 16th-century Venetian painter Titian, whose work was so much admired at the Caroline Court, the court of Charles I. And this sitter is shown here in just such a timeless gown with no lace collar. Lace collars was so time-consuming to paint. So it's time effective if van Dyck doesn't include them in the portraits and persuades the sitters that not including them is a sign of their specialness that they are sort of in the world of Titian. So she wears such a gown and she has a swathe of silk obscuring her bodily outline. So in this portrait, we see both a loose mantle and an emphatic hand gesture. So I'm suggesting possibly indicating pregnancy. And unfortunately, it's not clear who the sitter is. There's a later inscription added upper left, Mrs. Howard, but there were quite a number of Howard women at court. And it's not certain who exactly this sitter is.

And finally, this double portrait by van Dyck, now in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, shows two sisters-in-law and his thought to date from late 1638, early 1639. As Malcolm Rogers pointed out 30 years ago, in early summer 1638, the woman on the right, Katherine Howard, one of those Howard women, the daughter of the 2nd Earl of Suffolk, had secretly married Lord George Stuart, Seigneur of Aubigny. And Lord George was the brother of the woman on the left, Frances Stuart, Countess of Portland. And in order to marry Lord George, Katherine had controversially converted to Roman Catholicism on the 7th of March 1639 and, thus, early in her marriage, she gave birth to a son, Charles, and her cradling gesture here similar to that seen in the slightly earlier portrait of Henrietta Maria in the yellow gown is thought to be an indication of that pregnancy. Frances herself, the woman on the left, meanwhile, gave birth on the 19th of May, two months after Katherine. And so presumably she, too, should be recognized as being pregnant here, though I think we have definitely not actually been shown that. And once again, you see the ubiquitous pink red roses here being gathered, symbolic of Venus, of love being gathered from a bush and being held in the hand. So I'm fully aware that one can get carried away trying to spot gestures that indicate pregnancy in van Dyck's brushes portraits. The hand on the stomach, the hand on the stomach holding an inverted rose, the cradling gesture, the loose textile held in such a way as to obscure the outline of the body. Van Dyck's failure to date his portraits doesn't help. But I would contend that if the gesture in the portrait can be backed up by documented evidence of a pregnancy at a plausible time, it's worth considering the question.

The study of portraiture and pregnancy together offers a fresh lens through which to look at history and at art history. It encourages us to rethink the context in which many past portraits were made, as well as the life experiences of women sitters. If we can establish that a pregnancy was present at the time, whether the choice has been made to make it visible in the picture or not, it can alter our understanding of the intentions behind an image. Once we consider that so many women of the elite conducted busy public lives, lives at court, while repeatedly pregnant, with all the bodily changes and health challenges that that involved,

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especially prior to modern obstetrics, our view of those women's roles and activities needs to be adjusted. And painted portraits can be one route to that understanding. Thank you.

(Applause)

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** OK. Am I on? Yes. Thank you very much, Karen. And I can invite anyone here in the room. If you have any questions, feel free to come and ask them here at this microphone that we've positioned here in the back. And so while everyone's gathering their thoughts, I'm also collecting the questions that people are asking online, and I saw a few were already coming in. But I thought I might sneak in with one of my own questions first. And I was really struck by, you know, that this really presence specter of mortality in a way around pregnancies. And as you were talking, I was really starting to think about this decision to commission portraits, possibly aligning with pregnancy, if one were to think about the risks that were involved in it and sort of the desire to have portraits painted potentially of women. I was wondering if you had ever wondered about that, this sort of relationship between a moment of commissioning and pregnancy even if it's not shown but to -.

**Karen Hearn:** Absolutely. I mean, I do think we can also see them in a way almost as memento-mori images. I think that death is the unspoken constant presence in these portraits. So the portrait records the features of someone who might die in childbed. They also -- more prosaically, it's recording someone who is part of your family. You may have -- you know, these marriages are dynastic. So you've married into a particular family, you know, and an heiress, you might want to record that. And by showing the bump. I think that's what's going on in the portrait of Mildred Cecil that, you know, they've had such a terrible time. These unsuccessful pregnancies and dead babies. So that it's kind of -- the portrait is kind of saying, yes, we can -- you know, we do get pregnant. And here is the evidence. So I think, you know, and I linked them with those mother's legacy texts. I think they -- those really reveal motivation. They are very popular at this period. So, yes, I think death is always an element in these.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** Yeah. If there's no immediate second question and please don't be shy, I have a few questions here that were posted online. So the first one I have is for the Anthonis Mor portrait of Queen Mary I, you mentioned that three exists. Is the original -- if the original is in the Prado where are the other two located? Are they copies of Mor? Or were they also painted by him?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, one belongs to the Marquess of Northampton and is in a British country house. And one is in the Isabella Stewart Gardner. And they're all slightly different, but they're all painted by Mor. This raises what's really quite a sort of hot question, I think, at the moment, which is, for so long, people have assumed if you have multiple versions of an image, that there's an original and then the others are copies. But we're increasingly coming to understand that copies -- that versions were painted simultaneously. There are all sorts of examples

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cropping up of portraits that are virtually the same. And that were clearly being painted at the same time and both have pentimenti. So the sort of question of which is the prime one, I think, in this case, is a difficult one. And probably there wasn't a prime.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** OK, so I have another question. What happened to the pregnancy portraits at and after the restoration that the inability of Queen Catherine of Braganza to sustain a pregnancy have any effects on the popularity of the genre?

**Karen Hearn:** That's a very interesting question. We don't really seem to see examples. Of course, after the restoration, we -- and that's -- we're thinking about the work of Peter Lely, Jacob Huysmans and then Nathalie Nella. And Lely sort of particularly introduces this -- building really on van Dyck's introduction of sort of timeless stress. With Lely, women are wearing kind of very loose garments. So the bodily outline really isn't what you're seeing. You're seeing a lot of shoulders and sort of chest and flesh, and almost kind of they're almost night -- well, nightdresses but that meaning of term for sort of loose informal garments. So I think it's partly a question of the fashion and the fashion used in painting, which is this timeless, and a change of mood.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** So I will just keep going until someone comes and takes this mic away for me. The next one is other than pearls, are there any other jewels that show up frequently as symbols of pregnancy or fertility?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, I'm definitely not saying that pearls are symbolic of fertility. They -- that's -- if that -- if I gave that impression, they do -- pearls are ubiquitous in elite Western European portraiture. And they certainly appear in Britain English portraits. And in the 1590s, they're worn by men as well and there are portraits of men in garments sewn with pearls. So they are to do with status and fashion ability. But I think the lady covered in pearls, I think she's so -- you know, the pearls are so extraordinarily kind of evident that I think making the analogy with the sort of precious pearl of purity idea is worth it but -- is worth making, but pearls are ubiquitous and sourced from a range of sources.

**Karen van de Meerendonk:** And were there any -- just to sort of to go back to the second part of the question, are there any material specifically that could be associated with pregnancy? Or is that not really -- is there not really evidence for that?

**Karen Hearn:** Textiles clothing materials. I don't think so. I mean, what -- you know, there are images -- there are a few images of women holding children in their arms. So that's a later stage. And then you do -- they're quite rare, but the babies are swaddled and they tend to have a red cloth, a bearing cloth -- red cloth with gold thread.

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But in terms of -- basically what these women are doing is wearing the most luxurious textiles that they can afford, most luxurious and fashionable that they can afford. And also because there are sumptuary laws, there are laws which restrict the fabrics that different levels of society can wear. So if you can wear red and if you can wear metal braid because of your elevated position in society, you will be wearing that in your portrait.

**Attendee:** Right, thank you. This talk has been really exciting. My question is about the gesture, which I find really interesting because you were saying that sometimes it could indicate a pregnancy but then sometimes it might not. And I was wondering how much evidence do you need to confirm the pregnancy? Is the gesture enough? Is it the gesture together with the position? Or do you also need evidence external to the painting to confirm that it's actually of a pregnant woman?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, I think if you can get the evidence external to the painting, then it's much more likely. I mean, I -- the key document is that inventory, Lady Verney surviving portrait and a descript -- that's a later 17th century, not much later inventory, which says that it shows her with child. So it was soon enough after the picture was painted and it was made, you know, in the household. So that picture shows her with child. So that really gives us the cue to venture to say -- plus her -- so taken with her expression, which is very direct. But I feel that one does really -- if one can get external evidence, you know, that's the key thing. But because his pictures aren't dated, you know, it's really inconvenient that he didn't date them. So in terms of dating his portraits, we go on the fashions depicted and the way in which his renditions, you know, all artists develop. So we might look and think, "Well, that's really late in his career." And also when we stopped seeing lace, when we -- when the garments become sort of more of this timeless. But I'm very -- I'm -- hope I sort of indicated how sort of cautious I feel we have to be, but I still feel it's worth proposing it you know?

**Attendee:** I'm hoping that this is a fair question to ask. I'm wondering if there are any depictions of pregnancy outside of portraits of known or once known women when they think of some of the literature from the period like Duchess of Malfi or Measure for Measure pregnancy in the -- in those fictions are all about something problematic, something dramatic, something -- information that's withheld because the woman is the sure side. And I wonder if you see that elsewhere in the visual arts.

**Karen Hearn:** Getting back to what I said at the very beginning about -- I mean, that's a very interesting question. I was saying that it's a matter of choices. And I think this is a period in which choices are made within a range of purposes. And I think these portraits are -- I can't see evidence that these are problematic pregnancies or controversial pregnancies, pregnancies outside marriage. I think, you know, these painting portraits are -- they're serving a, potentially a public purpose. So I think it's, you know, it's a normative sort of situation. But yes, I mean, in literature of course, secret pregnancy, secret pregnancies are, you know, that's a kind of key

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theme. And of course, this is a period in which, you know, pregnancies outside marriage intensely problematic. And there are all sorts of women at court who become pregnant, have to go off to the country. And yeah, I mean, this is a period in which there are quite a lot of unexpected pregnancies in the context that people don't want to have them. But I can't see that painted portrait -- a portrait would be painted in that context.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** So I have another question online. This is the issue of the women's gaze interests me. We've seen no special modesty in your examples or other, in fact, frank addresses to the viewer. Do you have an opinion about this aspect of the portraits?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, this portrait -- I mean, I've been -- I've posed sort of number of different reasons for them. And of course, celebrate -- you know, with crossed fingers celebration in a way is one of them. And a pregnancy is an outcome that is looked for. I mean, for women, you know, their roles are limited. And as I said, for Henrietta Maria, it's basically motherhood and pregnancy. So I think the frank dress is, you know, perfectly what we would expect because it's, you know, I am doing, well, God's work, as I said, and I'm doing what my principal role is. So I mean, this isn't a period in which we might think about sort of later Victorian, where pregnancy was, you know, a matter of modesty, of staying at home, of nobody talking about it, that is a later sort of development. And, yes, I think, you know, it becomes something that we might think is associated with -- society associates it with something embarrassing or shameful. That's later. That's not this period.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** And then there is also something that's more of a comment that maybe you would want to comment on. Someone says during the 17th century, puritanism was spreading at a popular -- at the popular level in Britain. This appears to have no influence on the portraiture of the elites.

**Karen Hearn:** Well, I mean, we have -- we do have portraits of women modestly dressed in black with covered, you know, black or -- and with a sort of linen up to the neck and covered hair. I'm showing, you know, the most elite level really. And also, I'm really showing a period before we might say puritanism becomes as it were sort of widespread or becomes widespread expressed in dress.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** Someone wants to know are "baby bump portraits" otherwise similar to other portraits of women in the same era?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, what a good question and basically they are, except that there's a bump. And thinking of Mildred Cecil, she, I'm sure, is wearing -- and I take my cue from dress historians. You know, I've worked with so many really fantastic dress historians. So what she is wearing -- she's not wearing maternity wear. She's wearing the most luxurious, most fashionable garment but different underpinning. I mean, we use the word corset now probably.



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They use the word bodies. But women wore -- they always wore bodies corsets as it were. And you -- in pregnancy, you would be wearing different corsetry, something that was looser, more sort of expanded. So you're wearing your non-pregnancy wear but over a differently shaped body.

**Attendee:** I was interested in the fact that -- anyway, it's been a lovely lecture, I just wanted to say as well.

**Karen Hearn:** Thank you.

**Attendee:** Very interesting. I was interested that the portrait of Mildred Cecil, which was 1563. The next one after that was the woman with pearls all over, unidentified in the 1590s. And then we go forward to Stuart portraiture, which -- in the period that Marcus Gheeraerts was painting. And it's interesting -- I think it may be something to think about the Queen Elizabeth wasn't going to get pregnant, and that perhaps it was unpopular to actually do a pregnancy portrait until the period after she had passed that possibility. And -- anyway, I just was interested that there seems to be a period of about 40 years or so between the two or maybe 30 between the two. And do you notice that in the period following the Stuart period, when there were more royal babies around, that it became more of a thing? Is that --

**Karen Hearn:** Well, I've selected -- I think possibly that gap is a slightly misleading one. So I've selected examples. I've selected the most interesting and beautiful examples for you. So I wouldn't say that there is actually a gap. But so many of the pregnancy portraits that, you know, have come to my attention over the years are of unknown sitters and some are higher quality than others. So what I'm doing is really showing, you know, fine and interesting examples and, of course, if I can, of identified sitters. So that -- you've pointed out a gap that I think isn't actually there accepting the way I've structured the lecture. I do think in the mix of many different motivations, the concern to have a queen on the throne, to have a woman on the throne, and a woman's role is seen as being a mother. And of course, everyone's anxious as to who will succeed Elizabeth. And she -- as you know, right up to the last minute, she won't name a successor. There are, oops, various sort of candidates. And very wisely, she doesn't name them so nobody can sort of accrete around them. So I do think that the very visible bumps could be in the context of having a queen on the throne, who, for a long time, it's hoped will become a mother.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** A really interesting question here. Are there paintings of women who were not part of the elites? And I might add to that, if they're not paintings, are there other media where this experience of the non-elite women is maybe captured?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, painted portraits tend to be of various elites. So royalty and court figures and I -- that I've really been showing you sumptuous portraits of court figures. And then we also

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have, as it were, the middle class, you know, some of whom of very, very rich merchant families and very, very concerned about dynastic matters in exactly the same way and often richly dressed within what's allowed for their status. But lower down the social scale, you're not really getting -- you know, necessarily getting portraits that survive. And I can't think of examples that relate to pregnancy. But so much is a matter of what hasn't survived. I mean, everything we say about paintings -- portraits of this period, we have to qualify that things may have existed that no longer exist. The Visitation, I think, lingers on so that those are representations of -- to pregnant women meeting and embracing or touching each other's stomachs, things like that. And we do find these in a range of media. And it doesn't seem -- it seems to be a theme that is acceptable in books, in book illustrations and things like that. And those women -- those representations can be dressed quite simply. Yeah.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** Someone is also asking a question about the image that's up on the screen right now saying, "Was it common to have two women in the same portrait? Or was it because of their husband's preference or the cost of hiring an artist?"

**Karen Hearn:** Yes, the cost of van Dyck is. That's such an interesting question. And what it actually brings up is the fact that this is something van Dyck -- we have got some examples in Britain before van Dyck of people seated side by side who are not husband -- you know, a double portrait but not of a husband and wife. We have those as well. And so I -- this is something that van Dyck finds but he really introduces in a bigger way to British art, portraits of two men together or two women together. And the women may be different ages, but two men together, very common. So they're known as friendship portraits. Now, these two women are intimately linked by family. So that is the kind of connection that we might see. So double portraits are -- he doesn't completely introduce them but he very much takes them forward. So it's a very van Dyck thing.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** And this might follow up nicely. Someone asks, most of the paintings showed a woman alone, was it rare to include the father?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, husband and wife portraits do tend to be two separate portraits and that's a Northern European, I mean, very much in low countries art husband and wife. And with the woman on the right-hand side and the man on the left-hand side, as I mentioned, when we were thinking about Mildred Cecil. And I do think that it is plausible that she did have -- there was a portrait of William, which is now lost because of the half coat of arms. But I haven't found any examples of paired portraits with the man and with the woman pregnant. But I assume that -- I mean, the lady with pearls, you know, she might have had -- and once again, I think it's a matter of survival so we can't be sure.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** And so someone else is also wondering about a period past the 16th and the 17th century. So would portraits of pregnant women continue? And -- or was this

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a particularly popular time for pregnancy to be depicted? And if so, do you have any theories about why this might be?

**Karen Hearn:** Well, I do think this is a particular period in which we see them, and then fashions change, society changes. And I think there's a wonderful example which was drawn of sort of later 18th century, which was drawn to my attention by a colleague in London, Kate Retford. And it's explored in the book. So it's Teresa Palmer. And she is from quite an -- quite a cosmopolitan international family. And she marries her husband who's a member of the Palmer family, of Saltram in Devon. And there are a number of -- in Joshua Reynolds' sittings book, appointments book, she has a number of sittings over about an 18-month period with him. And she already has -- she and her husband have a son. And so she's sitting for a portrait being depicted with her son. But there's the -- these wonderful letters which survive in which she's writing to her brother and her sister is writing. And -- so Mr. Palmer wants a full-length portrait of her. And he wants it specifically for the Saloon at Saltram, this house, which they've got Robert Adam in to do the decorations. So it's a sort of fashionable upgrade. And he wants a full-length portrait of her to match a full-length portrait of a male ancestor of his. It's very, very interesting and he wants it now. So she writes in her letter, "It may seem an improper time that I should be sitting to Mr. Reynolds, but my husband really wants this picture," and her sister writes the same. It may seem an improper time. So I think that gives us a cue that it's just -- you're not going to see pregnancy in painted portraits in the 1770s. And what's so interesting is that the painting survives. And it's a full-length portrait and she's standing not -- there's a kind of mantle around her. But she looks tall and slender. And she says that -- yeah, she says -- well, it's Joshua Reynolds tells her, "It's fine to sit." And he -- she says something about he will -- you know, he'll deal with that section later. I paraphrase very broadly. But interesting, there's also -- Joshua Reynolds writes to someone and says, again, I paraphrase, something like, "She is at that state in which women don't look so good. "So he's saying one thing to her but, actually, he sees it as a problem and unattractive. So I take it that that society's view. So it's -- many changes have taken place.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** So there are many more questions. I'll pick one last one and we will forward all the questions that we've received to the speaker. So if your question wasn't read aloud, then it will be communicated. But I guess the final question I'll whether or not there are also examples where we know that a woman is pregnant and that the pregnancy or the baby bump was purposefully concealed or not shown in the portrait.

**Karen Hearn:** Sorry, I didn't totally catch the beginning of that.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** Oh, sorry. That's if there are examples of portraits where we know that the woman was pregnant and that there's evidence that the baby -- sorry, the baby bump or the pregnancy is purposefully concealed.

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**Karen Hearn:** Well, that is very much the default position and as it were, the position that Joshua Reynolds -- you know, his solution. And the portraits that show the bump are the anomalous, the unusual ones. And I'm sure that, you know, many portraits in which women are tightly laced into their sort of triangular bodies corsets may -- sittings may have taken place at a time when a woman was pregnant. As I say, it's, you know, in a way, what we need is a precise dating for a portrait, which we can correlate with a precise date of a pregnancy. And that -- you know, that's quite difficult to find. You know, Mary Tudor is gold dust, really, in this kind of research.

**Suzanne van de Meerendonk:** OK. Well, I would like to once again thank Karen Hearn very much for her talk. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

And I would like to invite everyone to the reception which will last until 8:30. And also our galleries will be open until 9:00 so you'll have an opportunity to walk around our exhibitions as well. Thank you very much.