DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
agnes.queensu.ca

Alfred and Isabel Bader Lecture on European Art 2025

With Dr Marieke de Winkel *Threads of Mystery. Dress Code in the Work of Rembrandt Pupil Monogrammist I.S.*
15 November 2025

SPEAKERS
Dr Suzanne van de Meerendonk, Dr Marieke de Winkel

KEYWORDS
Dutch Art, European Art, History of Dress, Monogrammist I.S., Isabel and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Art

TRANSCRIPT

Dr Suzanne van de Meerendonk: Welcome to today's program, the Isabelle and Alfred Bader Lecture in European Art, with Dr. Marieke de Winkel. My name is Suzanne van de Meerendonk, and I am the Bader Curator of European Art, at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre here at Queen's University. Before we begin this conversation tonight-today-I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that Queen's University is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat. There are many Indigenous people from these nations, as well as others from across Turtle Island, who continue to live on and in relation to this land. I would like to recognize them for their roles as stewards and along with the land, as our ultimate hosts, while we gather here today.

Kingston, or Katarokwi, belongs to territories falling under the Dish With One Spoon Wampum, which urges us to peaceably share resources. It is referred to in Treaty 57 as land acquired in the 1783 Crawford Purchase. This is only one dubious event in a longer colonial history that extends into our present moment. As a Dutch citizen, and as a caretaker of a large collection of Netherlandish art, I want to recall also that Dutch settlers concluded a treaty with Haudenosaunee representatives known as the Two Row Wampum in 1613. This meant to agree on basic principles of equality and friendship between our peoples. Today's talk grapples with questions of lost identity--with artistic brilliance going unnamed. Something we find incredibly vexing in art history. So, as we do so, I invite us to reflect on Indigenous names, histories and knowledge that were not passed down when treaty promises were not honoured in the past. I hope such reflections encourage us to work in our own ways to support the recuperation of histories near and far, as well as to combat erasures as they happen in the present.

Then now it is my pleasure to introduce our fabulous speaker, Dr. Marieke de Winkel. Professor Dr. Marieke de Winkel is the Ottema-Kingma Foundation Professor for the History of Textiles and Dress at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Her influential book, 'Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings', which was based on her dissertation research was published by

Amsterdam University Press in 2006. As a former member of the Rembrandt Research Project, she also co-authored Volume 5 of 'A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings', and more recently, she co-authored 'Rembrandt: The Complete Paintings', with Volker Manuth and Rudie van Leeuwen. And so for everyone who has ever been to my office, that's the enormous book that is always nearby somewhere. It's so big, it needs its own little table in my office, and together with Volker Manuth, she's also at work on a monograph of the artist we are all eager to learn about tonight, the mysterious Monogrammist or Master I.S. We are very lucky to have two paintings by this intriguing artist in our Bader collection, which are both currently in Leiden for a landmark exhibition on him, or her, we don't know. That was supported by Dr. De Winkel's research. So this is all very exciting. And we will wait no longer to hear more. Please join me in welcoming Dr. De Winkel.

Dr. Marieke de Winkel: Thank you, Suzanne, for this honour of being here this afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, students, sometimes the work of an art historian can be very tedious. It's only the recording of features describing, classifying, but sometimes, it is exciting, resembling the work of historical detectives, solving centuries-old mysteries. And if anyone loved a good art historical puzzle, it was Alfred Bader. His driving force was to put a name for unsigned paintings, and he was especially drawn to mysteries surrounding Dutch masters of the Rembrandt school. And it is no surprise, then, when he wrote a catalogue of his collection, still housed at the time in his home in Milwaukee. He called it 'The Detective's Eye: Investigating the Old Masters'. Earlier, in 1983, he wrote "there are all sorts of interesting art historical problems. The most common is the identification of the artists. We know some ten small paintings by the same hand, all monogrammed I.S., intertwined, and usually dated in the 1640s to 50s. Who is this Master I.S.? Probably a student of Rembrandt. Perhaps from Scandinavia or Poland? The costumes of the two men in earnest discussion look Polish. It's a puzzle, within a puzzle. The Master I.S., a monogram in search of a name."

Alfred's fascination with the mysterious master has led to a remarkable result. The Agnes now houses two of these incredibly rare works, making it home to the second largest collection of the Master's paintings in the world. And if you're now tempted to see them, you'll have to be patient, they're currently on loan to the Museum De Lakenhal, in Leiden, which is hosting the first-ever monographic exhibition on the artist, titled "Masterly Mystery: Rembrandt's Enigmatic Contemporary" bringing together no fewer than 16 of his paintings. Up-as the title suggests, the entire concept and design of this exhibition focussed strongly on the enigmatic nature of the artist, and in the Gallery the viewer is literally kept in the dark with the paintings dramatically illuminated against deep, cobalt blue walls. The show is accompanied by a catalogue containing three essays, and it's the first monographic publication ever dedicated entirely to the elusive Master I.S.

Leiden is the second stop of the exhibition, which opened earlier this year in the Gosta Serlachius Museum in Mantta in Finland. And in the photo on the left, you can see the curator there, Tomi Moisio, in the exhibition where the works were presented against soft pink walls. A very striking contrast to the blue setting in Leiden. In the upper right, you see the I.S. team at work. On the left, Janneke van Asperen, Curator of the Leiden Museum. In the middle Volker Manuth, Professor of Art History, and on the right you may recognize Dr. David de Witt. I am also part of the team, but I have-somebody had to take the photo, of course. It is no coincidence that Volker was the first-ever Alfred Bader Chair here in Queen's, in the 1990s. And David was the first Bader Curator in the Agnes. Both

had close connection to Alfred, and in this way, Alfred continues to leave a strong imprint on the research. More than anyone, Alfred would have delighted in seeing the works reunited, and hearing what we have uncovered.

So inspired by Alfred's passion, already in the early 1990s, Volker Manuth and I took up the challenge, and began assembling a catalogue of all the works by this enigmatic artist. Now, after 30 years of working on what often felt like our private pet project, it's almost surreal, and honestly a little bewildering to witness the sudden surge of interest in this forgotten Master. You would think that after such a long pursuit, we might have finally uncovered something to identify the artist between the monogram, but I'm afraid I must disappoint you here, because so far, we have failed miserably. For our essay in the exhibition catalogue, we therefore felt compelled to take a different, more honest approach. Art historians are typically expected to provide answers, and in this case, that was simply not possible. And instead, we told the story of our research, the avenues we explored, the clues we followed, and the many paths that ultimately led to nowhere. A story, therefore, of wrong turns, dead-ends, and a considerable amount of frustration.

However, to our surprise, this new transparent way of presenting our quest struck a chord with the public, and critics responded with unexpected enthusiasm. One of the Netherlands' major newspapers, NRC, wrote-no, hang on, I'm going to go back. What's refreshing about this exhibition and the English language catalogue is that the researchers are open about what they don't know. As a viewer, you start thinking along with them, about attributions, subject matter, style, chronology- and you find yourself hoping with them that the gathered clues might one day solve the mystery of I.S.'s identity. Another daily paper added this quest brings a Dan Brown like suspense to the art of I.S., not a "who-done-it," but a "who-made-it." So, what did we discover after all these years? I'm afraid that almost all the assumptions previously voiced by Alfred now have to be revised. Whereas he still believed that only 10 paintings of the Master existed, we now count nearly 40.

Although quite a few are currently untraceable, and known only from old black and white photographs. Even though this quadruples the oeuvre, the works must still be considered exceedingly rare. And while Alfred assumed that the artist was active only in the 1640s and 50s, we argue for a longer period, beginning with the earliest dated work, and that is 1633. This is the first painting we know by him. Now, in Aschaffenburg, in Germany. It shows a young man in a red cloak with fur collar reading at a table laden with books, a globe, and a skull, motifs that recur throughout the Master's work. One of the frustrating aspects of his paintings is that he seems to scatter clues everywhere in the form of scraps of papers and letters, and yet the text on them is always illegible. This painting is clearly dated 1663, with I.S. written beneath it. Here are details. Later, he would always intertwine his initials, which prompted people to ask us, how do we know it reads I.S. and not S.I.? But it is clearly written here, I.S. It appears on a sheet of music, whose melody is equally difficult to identify, but again suggests the promise of a possible clue.

Another painting dated five years later also portrays a young scholar reading in a darkened room, but here the atmosphere is somewhat more dark. The young man looks directly at us, the papers are creased, books and letters, and the familiar red cloak, are tossed carelessly on the floor. The candle is extinguished, his fist is clenched. Why is this young man reading bare-chested? And even more strangely, why is his foot shackled in a large wooden block? Here, you see it in detail. Was he a

student chained to his studies? Frustrated? Or this young man, with his very narrow moustache, dark eyes, dark hair, appears repeatedly in the early work of the Master. So we suspect that he is depicting himself here.

This in turn answers another question. Since from the beginning we kept open the possibility that the Master could have been a woman. What is clear from this painting is that the Master had a slow start. Even five years later, his composition remained tentative, and somewhat awkward. This slow development suggests that he may not have devoted all his time to painting, and likely had another occupation. So, not a professional painter. Perhaps a student? There is an initial direction that begins to emerge, and this points toward Leiden. The university city where several painters specialized in still lives with skulls and books, but also in what could be called a genre of student life. A good example is a painting by the Leiden artist, Jan Davidsz de Heem, showing a student in his room with crumpled books, seemingly frustrated with his existence. Naturally our first step was to search the Leiden University Matriculation Records of the 1630s for a student whose first name began with an I or J, and whose surname started with an S. But that yielded hundreds of names, and with no immediately suitable candidate.

Another aspect that points toward Leiden, is that the artist was evidently inspired by the work of famous Leiden painter, Rembrandt. In one of his few history paintings, he depicted the Baptism of the Eunuch, as a rare Old Testament subject that Rembrandt himself had portrayed in an early work. Here is the Rembrandt paining. The painting by I.S. is clearly a variant of that composition. Until recently, this was considered the only history painting by I.S., but last spring, another work unexpectedly surfaced. One we recognized as an authentic piece by the Master. Here. St. Jerome in His Study. It had been purchased on eBay, by a private collector, for a very modest sum. And of our view, it bears the hallmarks of I.S., including the curious lion, the attribute of St. Jerome, which appears to be clambering up the small step. Here you see him under an arched doorway. Though the perspective is not entirely correct. Not being familiar with real lions, the Master painted a creature that looks more like an oversized cat. But the subject, and even the lion, aligns with Rembrandt, who had a particular affinity for this church father. As a boy, Rembrandt had attended St. Jerome Latin School in Leiden, and Jerome stood for-was a model for the classically educated scholar, a standard of linguistic purity and philological skills. Note, also Rembrandt's own mouse-like lion, and possibly also his source that was Durer's St. Jerome in his study, the small crucifix on Jerome's lectern also appears in a variant by I.S., suggesting he may have known both prints by Rembrandt, and by Durer.

Again, this points towards Leiden and a scholarly milieu. But Alfred's assertion that the Master was a pupil of Rembrandt had to be revised. He was clearly familiar with his contemporary's work, but he was almost certainly never one of his students. The study of the entire oeuvre by I.S. is complicated further by the fact that a relatively large number of paintings went missing during or shortly after the second world war, making direct examination impossible. A painting we would very much like to see features the same young man with black hair and a thin moustache, seated at a table, with again heavy books, letters, chests, and a tall Traubenpokal, or tall goblet decorated with grape clusters. Another missing painting shows what is probably the same man, now wearing a gorget and a tall fur hat. The painting once belonged to the John Paul Getty Museum, but was deaccessioned because they judged that the quality was insufficient for the collection, a decision that now seems

astonishing. It was sold in Sotheby's-at Sotheby's, in 2007, and has since disappeared into an unknown private collection. The Getty must be kicking themselves now, and this example serves as a lesson for museums. Perfect quality should not always be the only criterion. As perspectives shift and narratives change, today's category C objects can become tomorrow's category A masterpieces.

Yet, it is true that the Master still appears to be searching in this painting. The placement of the mouth and the set of the eyes are still not quite right. But something striking does appear here. The clothing. And he shows himself wearing a remarkable tall fur cap and mantle that are certainly not Dutch. Because of this exotic type of dress, both Alfred and his friend, Werner Sumowski, realized quite early on that the key to uncovering the Master's identity might lie in the costume. In 1989, Sumowski in his large work on Rembrandt's pupils optimistically asserted that the artist's origin could certainly be discerned through an analysis of the costumes of his characters. It was this line of reasoning that led me as a dress historian to become involved in the search.

Yet while the detailed costumes undoubtedly play a central role in the depiction of the painter's enigmatic figures, geographical identification has proven far more complex that Sumowski had hoped. The clothing in his work turned out to be a confusing amalgam of northern, eastern, and southeastern European elements, partly mixed with fantastical details. For instance, the fur hat worn by the young man here does indeed point to Poland, and bears a strong resemblance to the one worn by John Casimir II of Poland. It is in the type of the 'tronie', or character head, that the Master truly comes into his own during the 1640s. His style becomes highly concentrated, with great emphasis on the delicate, yet unforgiving rendering of materials such as skin, wrinkles, sunken cheeks, and especially fur. In the majority of his works, mostly tronies of old people, the costume is only partly visible, yet it is crucial for the heads' context and character. These are not portraits, as they are often called. Although they were clearly painted from life.

Fascinated by the lived-in, imperfect faces I.S. celebrated precisely the features that portrait painters so carefully retouched, where others smoothed away imperfections, I.S. highlighted the traces of time and life, wrinkles, blemishes, the marks of experience that gave a face its true character, and this relatively new genre of the tronie provided an ideal vehicle for depicting otherness, through painterly, exotic, or historical attire. Both bearded men, and women with long scarves wrapped around their heads wear cloaks adorned with broad fur collars, a style uncommon in the Low Countries, and his lavish use of what appears to be fox fur is a striking feature that immediately situates the figures in the colder regions of Europe, likely in the north or northeast. The old man displays a deformed cauliflower like nose, and this striking condition known as rhinophyma is a benign consequence of rosacea. Notably, it occurs exclusively in older men, especially those with the lightest skin type, type 1. So people from northern European origins, Scotland, Scandinavia, Baltic region, aside from Ghirlandaio's famous A Portrait of an Old Man and his Grandson, of about 1419, the Louvre, the condition is rarely depicted in art. A rare additional example is the portrait of the Danish school master, Lars Bertelsen, here in the middle, painted by Peter Andersen in Helsinger, in 1687.

One of the finest examples of this sensitive rendering of skin and fur is the head of this man with a blinded eye. This painting resurfaced only recently, last year, in a French private collection and had previously been completely unknown. Despite the Master's fascination with wrinkles, sunken

cheeks, and other imperfections, I.S.'s manner of painting never becomes a caricature. His touch remains soft and precise, as if he wished to preserve the dignity of his models. This suggests an emphatic, engaged observation rather than a clinical taste for oddities. In this rendering of these imperfections, one senses the respect for the hard lives of the sitters, revealing the deeply human dimension of his art. Perhaps he, too, lived on the margins. Most of these deeply lined faces give the impression of people weathered by a lifetime of hard, outdoor labour, farming for example. And this is also the case with the head of a woman, whose dispassionate gaze seems to accept whatever life had to offer. And she would have to, because the small, innocent looking pimple on her eye is, in fact, a sebaceous gland carcinoma, a lethal form of cancer. Neither the sitter nor the painter could have known what we know now. The woman would die from this condition. And this painting was bought earlier this year by the museum in Montreal.

These lived-in faces, every hair, and every pore, rendered with a striking insistence and this gives the figures an extraordinary intensity and authenticity, making them all the more intriguing, and makes the question even more pressing, where did his models come from? It's tempting to assume that the meticulously crafted and detailed costumes depicted by the Monogrammist must have been modelled after existing garments, and this assumption is, to some extent, misleading. For instance, some elements appear again and again in his work, and suggests that he added in elements that were fantastical, such as the archaic, ornate gold chain, with alternating oval, scalloped links, set with oval red stones. And you encounter them in several of his paintings, also in the Montreal painting, so the detail in the middle is in the Montreal painting, so we could recognize, if you see details like that, you think okay, that is our Master. And this is a woman in a private German collection, only resurfaced a few years ago. And I'm showing-look at her red jacket. There you see another detail, and the embroidery. In many embroideries he painted, the Master also shows a similar predilection for incorporating a stylized daisy. The same flower motif appears again and again in the many gold embroidered borders and hems throughout the Monogrammist's later work. It is implausible that this identical floral motif would have appeared on all these various items of dress. Instead, it is likely an invention by the Master, and not the embroiderer's craft. The Monogrammist applied this motif so consistently in his works, that it almost functions as his trademark.

Now, the rooms he depicts, they are a very stark contrast with the costumes. This room shows a strange chair, with a little heart at the back, and it also shows a chandelier, made of antlers. Maybe from a kind of deer-it did not exist in the Netherlands, these kinds of chandeliers, and not these kinds of chairs, these chairs were usual in southern Germany. And I'll show you-from Tirol, I'll show you an interior of the Rathaus in Sterzing, and there, you can see also a chandelier made out of antlers, and you see the same Brettschemel type of chairs. Also, the Traubenpokal, this grape-like goblet, you encounter it again and again. And these origin-they origin from a bit more northern, to places like Nuremberg and Augsburg, so but of course these objects they travel, but the chairs, probably not.

So what happened? It was someone, our Master, who was very familiar with interiors and objects from Switzerland, south of Tirol, very south-south Germany. And we do not know how this corresponds with this more northern kind of costume. In contrast to the interiors, the dress shows similarities to traditional dress of Russians, Hungarians, or Poles. For example, the dress of these

men sitting at tables with still lifes. The hats depicted in his work suggest links with a great variety of hat gear, including the kolpak, which is characterized, here, again, here, with a crown of fabric and fur trimming, and a pointed or hanging top. It's very similar to the hat worn by the man in the fur-lined cloak in Mantta. The kolpak was widely worn both in Russia and Poland. And in this 1652 dated Old Man Standing Next to a Table, whose whereabouts are unknown, since the second World War, the figure is depicted wearing a cap with a fur-lined brim, and a coat cinched by a sash decorated with white horizontal frogging. The coat resembles Caftan like garments, such as the Hungarian mantle or the Polish zupan. The short, pointed boots are similar to Polish yellow-red ankle boots. A further authentic detail is the right side of the coat that overlaps the left side, and this detail is foreign to Western European male dress, and it points to Ottoman origins of the Polish dress. I'm going back one, yeah. This man does not appear to be a nobleman, as he's not wearing a long overcoat or carrying a sabre, which were symbols of nobility, however, it seems that the Monogrammist was familiar with the Polish portrait tradition of full-length depiction of figures standing next to a table draped with a Turkish carpet. You do not find that in south Germany. This convention is exemplified in Polish portraits, such as this portrait by Ossolinski, housed in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, as that is the next slide, here in the middle, and the slide to the right you see also a Polish portrait, Polish nobleman, standing next to a table with a Turkish carpet.

Dutch merchants dealing with Poland were fascinated by this Polish dress, and often had themselves portrayed in such Polish garb, such as the German-Dutch merchant, Martin Gertz [assumed spelling], in his portrait here, to the right. The portrait to the left is an unknown Dutch man in Polish garb. Born in Hamburg, Gertz, to the right, was a fur trader dealing in goods from Sweden, Poland and Russia. Likely as a reference to his trade, he is depicted wearing a 'Poolse rok', a Polish coat, adorned with a braid decoration that was regarded in the Netherlands as typically Polish. Another line of inquiry we considered was the provenance of these works. It was striking that some paintings have an unusually early history, such as the head of an old woman in Vienna, which we discussed earlier, and which is on the front of the catalogue. And she is over here. It can be seen hanging on a wall in the Imperial Palace in Vienna, in 1730. The painting is dated 1651, and is mentioned only a few years later in the inventory of the Archduke of Austria, but unfortunately, without naming the artist.

The same holds true for early collections, other early collections, such as those of the Duke of Braunschweig and Count Johan Gabriel Stenbock in Sweden. All these early owners purchased paintings or had them purchased through agents in Amsterdam. Thus, this attempt to trace the Master's origin ended in another dead-end. Investigating the network of the painter whose identity remains unknown may seem like an impossible task, yet an intriguing potential clue is suggested by a small portrait signed I.S., and dated 1641, and 1649. And this miniature shown, now in a Dutch private collection, has been identified as portraying the Lutheran merchant, Willem Kerckrinck. Willem's father was the influential Godert Kerckrinck from Lubeck, and played a pivotal role in the trade between Amsterdam, Northern Europe and the Levant. He was one of the driving financial forces between the construction of the Lutheran Church in Amsterdam. This circle of German-speaking Lutheran merchants in Amsterdam was very close-knit, and intermarriage within the community was very common. The fact that portraits are exceptionally rare in the oeuvre of the Monogrammist may suggest that he painted a miniature as a favour for someone within his own circle.

A possible further clue appears in the 1674 estate inventory of the Lutheran art collector, Herman Becker, who was a relative of the Kerckrincks, and he lists a flower pot by J.S., although no floral still lifes by the Monogrammist are known, it is not inconceivable given the elaborate still life elements in his composition that such a work could be by his hand. The Riga-born Becker travelled several times a year between Amsterdam and his home town, further linking the Dutch and the Baltic worlds. Could the unknown painter known by his initials J.S. in the inventory have been part of this tightly interconnected Lutheran network with its roots in the Baltic region? In the 17th Century, Riga and Tallinn primarily maintained trading ties with Lubeck, though Dutch merchants increasingly came to dominate. The Dutch economy relied heavily on trade with the Baltic region for bulk goods, such as rye, wheat, and timber, the so-called "mother trade." Further inland, Baltic ports served the vast Russian hinterland, where furs were exchanged, again, against salt.

This map of Reval, and it's now called Tallinn, shows figures in the borders whose dress closely resembles that worn by the man in I.S.'s works. Although the women are unfortunately less clearly rendered. And what we see here is, obviously Dutch merchants here, and they are shipping their goods back to Amsterdam. They are the typical Dutch ships in Riga. And here, you can see also some men in the fashionable wear of the Netherlands. And I'll show you a detail, here it is, oh yeah, so here is a man in Western European fashion, and then here are men with the same kolpak, high hats, and the horizontal frogging that you see in the works of the Master, I.S. Unfortunately, the women here are very much in the shade, and that's a real pity. Similarities in both dress and head gear appear in the depiction of Livonian men, such as a peasant, portrayed in 'Man from Livonia', by Johann Cristoph Brotze. Even as late as the 18th Century. Brotze's extensive albums compiled while he lived in Reval documented many forms of women's head gear traditionally worn in Livonia. And one of his-no, it will be later on. Yeah, okay, let's move to that. Yeah. So the album documents many forms of women's head gear traditionally worn in Livonia, and that is the historical region comprising modern Latvia and Estonia.

One of his illustrations showing a dance around 70-80 features a man wearing a very tall fur hat, we're now familiar with, and a woman with a pointed cap, and at the left, a girl with a distinctive, round, red cap, with a tassel at the back. A similar cap of red sheepskin with an embroidered border- And tassel, also appears in an intriguing painting of an old woman known only through a black and white photograph. Its current whereabouts are again unknown, sadly. But remarkably, this unique sheepskin cap is still worn in parts of Estonia today. And on the right, I have-we know what colours the dress had, it was written on the photograph, so we know that the cap was red with yellow and that her doublet or jacket was red. So I made a-ChatGPT made a nice image of that to give you an impression. And that kind of cap is still worn 400 years later. Later. And these are all examples of traditional Estonian regional dress. And you have to remember, these strange conical caps. They were very, very exceptional. So remember them, they will come in a later-at the end of my lecture.

Many of the women depicted by I.S. wear scarves wrapped around their heads, such as the old woman in Vienna, dated 1651, one we already encountered in the upholstery wall. The same applies to the woman in a museum in Sweden. Also of note, the decorative frogging on her red jacket. A close look at the textile in this painting reveals that the main body of the fabric is in a plain weave,

with visible horizontal blue stripes, likely weft stripes, and toward the end, the weft stops a few centimetres before the edge, and leaving the warped threads loose to form a self-fringe. Here, the weft is omitted or withdrawn, I don't know really how it works-intentionally exposing the warped threads. I have never seen this technique used in the Netherlands, but it resembles hat scarves still used in Latvian regional dress, which shows similar stripes, open sections, and warped fringes, but in red, not in blue, as in this regional dress from Latvia. It is a bit similar. And-but in the Netherlands, I've never encountered something like it. Perhaps the most detailed and distinctive costume in the Monogrammist oeuvre is found in this 'Old Woman Reading a Letter', in Stockholm, who quite without justification is sometimes identified as an abbess. She wears a black fur-lined cloak, with a broad fur collar, and gold and silver embroidery around the edges. And on her head is a wide kerchief tied at the nape of her neck, over which sits a black horned cap, decorated with metal balls or buttons. The shape of this cap strikingly resembles a Doge's Corno. It is possible, no-is it possible that this very same unique head dress appears in a married Estonian woman illustrated by Johann Christoph Petri's publication on Estonia. Within areas influenced by Swedish rule, similar caps also occur. For instance, in the north of Sweden, a comparable form of regional dress is still worn. This is the illustration from Petri. And this is the regional dress worn in north-the north of Sweden.

To sum up, is it feasible that the Monogrammist found inspiration for the dress of his figures in the northern Baltic region? The composite outlandish character of the costumes in his work, which reveal influences from various parts of northeastern Europe aligns very well with the historical situation of the Baltic states. During the middle ages, these areas were dominated by the powerful Livonian Knighthood, as a branch of the Teutonic Order. Trading cities like Riga, Reval, were part of the Hanseatic League and effectively administered from Lubeck in northern Germany. An although Estonia and Latvia came later on the Swedish crown, their cultural and economic elite remained German-speaking and Lutheran. In Tallinn, the population was ethnically very diverse, and highly stratified, with Germans and Swedes forming around 60% of the urban elite. And the remaining 40% consisted of Estonians, Finns, Livonians, and other groups considered to be 'undeutsch', none German, who lacked the legal and social privileges of Germans and Swedes. Only Lutherans were permitted seats on the city council, and influence within the powerful trade guilds. This German-speaking mercantile elite dressed very differently from other groups within the city. Tallinn estates inventories revealed that among the Undeutschen, both men and women wore cloaks and used furs, such as sable and fox, were very widespread, crossing social boundaries.

A major obstacle in study of the clothing of these un-German classes in the Baltic region, before Brotze's 18th Century illustrations we just saw is the near-absence of visual sources, leaving the precise appearance of garments described in inventories and laws very uncertain, yet cities like Tallinn were crossroads, where diverse European clothing traditions intersected. The strong economic interdependence between Amsterdam and former German trading cities ensured a continual influx of merchants from those regions. These merchants would have encountered, and perhaps been fascinated by the distinctive 'other' sartorial cultures of Prussia, Poland, and Livonia. Might the Monogrammist I.S. have been one of them? So maybe a German-speaking merchant, travelling from the Netherlands, to maybe Lubeck and further up to the Baltic countries? After 1658, the Monogrammist's trail goes cold. We do not know whether he left the Netherlands to return to his still-unknown country of origin, whether he abandoned painting, or whether he died around that time. But after 25 years of activity in which he produced a relatively small but remarkable oeuvre,

the Master vanishes as suddenly as he appeared, leaving the mystery of his identity unresolved. And with that, I would like to thank you for your patience today.

And if you have any questions, I would love to hear them. Are there microphones?

[Inaudible Response]

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Oh [laughs].

Dr Suzanne van de Meerendonk: Well, while we wait for those microphones, thank you so very much for this really intriguing talk, and perhaps I can kick off the first question as we get situated, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about this mix of real elements, fantasy elements, how they're used differently, maybe, in different kinds of paintings? I know you've written about this a bit when it comes to Rembrandt, and I'm sure we're thinking about these relationships. Is it similar, the way that these kind of elements are mixed, or sometimes signify like a different time and place. For viewers who might not recognize those elements, if you could speak a bit about that?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Rembrandt does have the same way of mixing elements, so using a kind of amalgam-so very different, combining very different influences and dress, and adding some fantasy, as well, and that makes it very hard to unravel. Yeah, but I try to-and you still, with every image, you have to remember as with the daisy-like patterns and the chains that he added things, probably from his fantasy. Although they look very authentic, and that's difficult how to on what was real, and what not-and it is still a problem. And with Rembrandt, it was a problem as well. It still is. It is similar, so the way he uses-he combines these elements from fantasy, and maybe things observed from life, because Rembrandt also is always, because his wrinkled old ladies, they look so realistic, that people think oh, everything must have been observed after life, and Rembrandt was of course-they said Rembrandt can only do things after life, and that's certainly not true, because he saw a lot in other prints, and he borrowed from that. And the same is-the way he works is a bit like the Master. Does that--?

Audience Speaker 1: Hi, thank you for a great talk. I was wondering about the people with various-you know, the nose condition, and then the eye, the cancer, if there's possibly some kind of medical connection, and a student as well, that that might be linked somehow to a hospital or an asylum, or something like that, and then if there is any kind of Jewish connection with the eastern clothing as well, which could also be connected to the medical profession? I don't know-

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Uh, many Jews in Amsterdam were doctors because there were only a few academical-they could only study medicine, I believe, obviously not theology, they did not do that in Leiden. They did--very often the Jews in Amsterdam were a doctor. We thought about that, maybe that he was, that this interest was a professional one. And this very, very acute observations, almost clinical observations of the conditions. We wondered about that, that he might be a doctor, or even a surgeon, because doctors in the 17th Century were trained more in the very theoretical, more still-Aristotle, and no, the surgeons were more-they were more experienced in looking at different conditions than doctors. We looked at doctors who studied in Leiden, and could not find one. We looked at people from Hungary, from Poland, who studied in Amster- in Leiden, in the same time-

and found about 120 names. So it's also, but people, again and again say now maybe he was a surgeon or doctor. There was also one-oh no, there was a woman who wrote to the newspaper saying that maybe the S in the I.S. is maybe a sign of being a doctor, but it is a very-that was speculation. We looked at it, and thought no, maybe not. But it is possible that he had this professional interest. Whether he was a Jew, I do not think so. I mean, there were many doctors who weren't Jews in the 17th Century, and surgeons alike, so no-that didn't, that was also a dead-end, in the end. Yeah. Other questions? Oh-there.

Audience Speaker 2: It's very intriguing as a mystery. Thank you very much. Two thoughts I had were, is there any examination of the chemistry of the paints, or of the fibers of the canvases, to give some hints to geography? And the other one is, a lot of modern murder mysteries now were solved by DNA, is anyone-like does a painter lick his brush when he paints? Or is there any signs of a DNA trace in the paints? And the final comment was, many of the subjects looked like they could not afford to commission a portrait, so it looks like he is independently wealthy, like he can afford to spend money on paints and canvases that he's not going to be remunerated for.

Dr Marieke de Winkel: The first of-hang on, oh yeah, examination-no. They-these paintings are not very systematically researched. No technical art history has been applied to them. We know of some of the panels and-all his paintings which were examined, or we saw with our own eyes, they were oak. And the ones in Stockholm were on Baltic oak, but that doesn't say a thing, because in Holland, they also use Baltic oak. What I can say is that, for instance in Scandinavia, or in Austria, or southern Germany, they used pine for panels. So he probably did not make them there. It is very probable, if you look only at the oak panels that he painted either in the Netherlands, or in the Baltic regions, which is the same conclusion. So that didn't really say something. No, the canvases were not researched. There is very little research, because the museum collections until now never thought they were worth the examination. Vienna, now, only now, they have this painting in their collection since 1651, they're now going to research, they are doing scientific tests on that painting. No, because the Master had been forgotten, more or less. So that's what we really, really would like, that every painting is systematically researched, so we can compare the facts. DNA-no. Because paintings that are so old are being varnished, re-varnished, so the original varnish layer has every 50 years, they-or so-they have been re-varnished. So the original varnish is gone, and you cannot really access it. Yeah, sometimes, when they are cleaned, you can access the original paint layer, however, no DNA. But sometimes fingerprints. We found that with in Rembrandt paintings, fingerprints. Very rare, but no DNA. No saliva, things like that. Was there another question you had, or did I answer all your-

Audience Speaker 2: You did [inaudible]-

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Oh, I think he was independently wealthy, but you said-and that's very often a misunderstanding, that they are not portraits. Because a portrait is always commissioned by the sitter, and the sitter pays for a portrait. And this type-and it's a very Leiden type of character head-was typically not commissioned by the sitter, but the sitter was used as a model, that the painter found very painterly-so people would long be-with wrinkles, like Rembrandt used. Although they were done after life, after an existing model, the identity was not important. They served as a model, sometimes wearing a turban, sometimes not, and their identity was not an issue. And in a

portrait, it always was. So that's very different. And they were sold on the market in the Netherlands, these kinds of character heads, if you like. So that was different from-it had a very different function from a portrait. People bought them because they found that these-that they recognized these types, 'these types are so typical for foreigners', or--that was the main attraction of these character heads. And it was a type of painting that was really invented by Rembrandt and Jan Lievens in Leiden. But the master, here, while Rembrandt and Lievens often used Turkish, or turbans more of Asian character, this-this master uses another kind of foreignness, so more northern. Also if you're talking about DNA, most of the models here had very light blue eyes. And still in the north, I think that about now, still 70% of the people have those very light eyes. Northern Europe has the highest percentage of blue eyes, still. Okay, any other questions? I hope that has answered your-[chuckles] okay thank you.

Audience Speaker 3: I'm curious about the use of initials, and any speculation? How common is it, first of all, I've never seen it before, and what would be the motivation? I would speculate that perhaps I.M. is a woman who wouldn't perhaps be welcomed in the group of painters? So could you comment a little bit on that please?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Why would you think that women were not welcomed in groups of painters? In the Netherlands, they could be independent Master-women were independent Masters-and just being in a regular guild system, they could enter the guild as a paintress. Um-it could have been a woman. Although we tend to think that young men in those early portraits is a self-portrait. And the other thing you asked was--? So you think it's a woman? It's possible.

Audience Speaker 3: I'm just wondering why someone would use initials-

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Oh! Initials. That was it. The use of initials-that was very widespread during the 15th Century and 16th Century in western art, and you have many monogrammists with their initials. But in the 17th Century it was much rarer, and we solved almost all monogrammists, we solved every puzzle, except for this one. Maybe he did it on purpose? So this was his particular hobby, if you like? And maybe as a merchant or a surgeon, that he didn't want to have this very private hobby of his or hers, that he didn't want to be recognized? So it's almost like Banksy, who doesn't want to be recognized and that adds to the mystery and the appeal of his work as well.

Audience Speaker 4: Thank you. This was really interesting, and it's always an interesting challenge for an art historian to engage with an artist whose identity is, you know, cloaked in mystery, and yet in Finland, they've managed to produce a beautiful show that was clearly well-received by the audience, you know, asking those wider questions of provenance, of artist training, of transparency, and I think the project you're involved in, you know, is also asking those questions right? And now, we're forty years after Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author', but I think it's still the case that, you know, in the art market, in the art-in the museum industry, the Master's identity still very much matters, and it's reflected in the price, in all those blockbuster exhibitions, in visitor numbers. So given the success of that show in Finland, do you think it's some kind of, I don't know, it foreshadows the future of art history perhaps? Where well-known names matter less and less in garnering the public's engagement? Do you think we're experiencing some kind of shift in art

history, you know, away from the great Masters, towards transparency, towards process, towards revealing our own toolkit to the audience-yeah, are we experiencing a shift?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Well you can certainly say that there's a shift away from big names. I mean, he doesn't have a name. Yeah, um...I think this-I mean he is, because he is so different, he's outside of the whole development, he's an outsider basically and that appeals to people, and also that he loves imperfections, that it is not polished, that appeals to people. But also I think it's basically what triggers people, and that it has become such a success, because there wasn't beforehand there was not an extensive media campaign. But now, suddenly, all the international papers, German newspapers, American-the art newspaper, they're all jumping on this. And we really do not know what's happening. It was always our private project, and so something triggers them, and because it's so different. It's fresh. And there is this enormous mystery, and everybody likes to think with the researchers, I think that was also part of the appeal, that the transparency in sharing how we do research. I think that was recognized as something new. We felt that we could not do it otherwise. But people like that, strangely enough. It was a guess, it was not something-it didn't work-we couldn't do it otherwise, we felt. But that appealed to people, they like that, maybe because they like transparency or look how-usually the old connoisseurs said well, that's him, or her, and people said okay, you are the very knowledgeable professor knowing everything about art, and we accept that. And that's no longer the case. And people like to see why and how you think-that's true. Maybe that is a shift. And I was very glad to present it in that way.

Audience Speaker 5: Hi, I wanted to first say that the interest of it is not just like how beautiful the art was, but the story that you told, with discovering the art, was really entertaining. You mentioned a couple hundred students with the initials I.S. in the school. Do you personally think that I.S. is one of those students with the initials?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Um... Well his-the first sort of very early paintings, they are very much-again and again, it's about reading scholarly and the influences, stylistic influence are in Leiden, so it was the obvious way to search there, but we didn't find him, or her, or well, women were not allowed in university anyway, but maybe he was a merchant, living in Amsterdam, not in Leiden at all, only a short time of his life, her life, his life [chuckles], and no, we looked at it. And maybe if we come up ever with a name, we might find one of the students. But again, no-I don't know [chuckles]. So it was an essay with more question marks than exclamation marks. I'm very sorry to say [chuckles], and you always have to be careful and do not jump to conclusions, I think, or well that's the way I was trained. Never to-although you want that very much, to have this Master, but we were honest, and said no, this is not enough. Oh!

Audience Speaker 6: If I'm allowed a second question?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Yes, you are.

Audience Speaker 6: Um-this--paintings were bought and sold by dealers, some of these dealers might be ancient families and left accounting records. Has anyone searched a Stockholm-

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Not in Holland.

Audience Speaker 6: To find someone buying an I.S. painting, or selling an I.S. painting?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: No. No, there's no-there are no, in Amsterdam which at the time was the staple market for paintings, also Italian paintings, and there are no dealer's records, sadly enough. No! I wish it was true. Um, so that is so difficult, I mean, doing this research, the sources are simply no longer there. The sources you want. They have just vanished. So no, that would be an ideal source, but it-they, it's all lost. Yeah, sadly. Yes?

Audience Speaker 7: Thank you. What a wonderful mystery that you've presented, thank you so much for this wonderful talk. I'm almost tempted to follow up on this question, and press you unfairly [laughs] to share who you actually think it is, but actually my question-if you want to do that, please do so-but my question is actually about research methodology, because I think exhibiting this with the monogram is a wonderful invitation for a kind of a citizen-science, almost, that they-that is happening now in scientific areas for engaging the public, and we, you know, as someone who works in and around museums, you just never know what's out there, and in people's closets, and under their beds, and so forth. So that's sort of half of a question. The other half is to pick up on a thread that you sort of mentioned, almost off-handedly, and that was in AI. Is there a possibility to use AI to do some of the kind of research that might uncover the name?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Not yet. We tried, but AI in this-not yet. It's not smart enough now. But if you-speaking about initials, if you look at the Dutch merchants here in the Baltic, this drawing here, you can see on the merchandise here and here, there are also intertwined initials. Merchants did that all the time, to mark their goods. Um, um-painters did use initials, but in the 17th Century it becomes more rare. Painters usually-for instance Rembrandt used initials in his very first paintings, and then began signing with Rembrandt Harmszoon, so the name of his father, then Rembrandt Harmszoon Leidensis, Rembrandt from Leiden, and then eventually like famous sports people, with only his first name. Rembrandt. So that, so only to stick to your initials was quite rare, and it speaks only to his initials for decades, and that's-untypical. He's untypical in everything, so that's why he's maybe not a professional painter. So, more and more, so we looked at professional painters for marriage bands, for instance, who came from the Baltic, and a man who said they were a painter and that-now, I think that's maybe not the right, that's not the right way. What was the other question? You had two?

Audience Speaker 7: Well it was actually-go back to the first question, is there anyone that you think it is? Maybe to follow up-

Dr. Marieke de Winkel: No!

Audience Speaker 7: So really yeah [laughter], just a big question [laughter].

Dr. Marieke de Winkel: No really-[laughing], no, no, I'm not-gatekeeping anything, I'm not. No. No. No. It was a bit frustrating, of course. And especially Alfred, always wanted to know, "Find me my painter! Find out who this is!" and he was always coming up to me, when we met Alfred, he always had piles and piles of photocopies, and photographs, and then you were stuck with him the whole

day saying okay who is this, and then who do you think this is, and can you put a name to that one? Um-so, so [scoffs] that's why he was so intrigued with this very hard nut to crack [chuckling]. He would have loved the exhibition though, to see them all together. And more paintings than he would ever dream of. He thought there were only 10 of them around, and he had 2, but there are more. And-it's the strangest thing, is that so the last two years they pop up, oh, four of them. And I hope, I very much hope, that now people who own the black and white paintings I've shown, that they come forward and say oh, I have one. Especially when they know what museums now pay for the paintings. I know that Montreal paid a lot of money for that painting [laughs]. So this deal on eBay was really worthwhile [laughter].

Audience Speaker 8: This was a wonderful talk, and I'm fascinated by all of the hats and cloaks and frogging, and all of this. And in some of them it seemed that there was very distinctive dress between men and women, but sometimes the women's dress seemed to carry elements from the more common for male dress, or I was just curious about that. How-the frogging, for example, occurred in both. And there was a cloak that seemed to be similar, the one old woman with the Doge-like hat, she almost seemed to have some elements of male dress, and so I was just curious about how much these things were very much gendered or if you see some moving back and forth of the dress.

Dr Marieke de Winkel: The head gear seems very much gendered, as it is in regional dress everywhere. In Holland, in-oh, it's a typical thing for regional dress that the head gear of women is very different from men's dress. As the cloaks are very unisex, do you say that? Yeah, they are very general. And they were not worn in the Netherlands anymore, by women, but they were by these women, and they also wore a kind of jacket, waistcoat, or how do you say-no not a jerkin, a doublet, a doublet-like, women in the Netherlands would typically not wear that. But it was a very different sartorial culture, and the problem is that there are no depictions from the 17th Century of how people dressed in the Baltic region. There-and there are no costume books with depictions. Yes, there are a few. But they are all from the highest classes, and then yeah, typically lower classes are not depicted in costume books. So we have very little. This is just what I think and it depends heavily on 18th Century sources, and how regional dress-because regional dress typically, elements of dress are still fossilized or frozen if you like, not always, sometimes they evolve. And if you, yeah, I mean, you look at regional dress, that's very gendered. And the headdresses are really, so there are no men wearing those turbans, I shouldn't call them turbans, they are head scarves. They still wear them in northern Europe, in Romania, I mean, you have this whole strip of where women wear those head scarves, and that is a strip from eastern Europe, Poland, to Romania. So that's-it is very difficult to pinpoint [laughs].

Audience Speaker 8: I think it's fascinating, the interweaving, if you will, of gender, and all of these different geographic locations, and how you're tracing this complex web of how that shows up in the dress, in the paintings.

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Okay, thank you. Well, bring them on, those questions, I mean I have all the time in the world [laughter].

Audience Speaker 9: Okay, I hope my memory is not fading, but I think I remember one of the paintings, you said that it was depicting a man from Poland, wearing an Ottoman attire, how do you explain that considering the rest of the attire is from the Baltic region? Knowing the Ottoman empire just went to the very south of Poland, do you think that it might have been someone that was doing-that were doing trading and getting that attire from the southern part of Poland? Or do you think that the painter might have travelled to that area?

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Sorry, I can't really understand you, but could you please? Rephrase it?

Audience Speaker 9: Okay. So there was one of the paintings,

Dr Marieke de Winkel: Yes-

Audience Speaker 9: You said that it was depicting a Polish man wearing an Ottoman attire, if I remember well?

Dr. Marieke de Winkel: No, no that's not what I meant. Polish dress was very influenced by Ottoman structure, the structure of Kaftans, and also the other way the dress so left over right, right over left, so one is for women now, and one is for men. And Polish dress, and Ottoman dress, they had the same features, so that it was the other way around, from the way-the garments crossed from the west. A system we still use. So the gendered way of crossing this over, of this. Now, what I meant was that Polish dress was very much influenced by Ottoman textiles, but also by the Kaftan form, cloaks, and also the frogging, the horizontal gold tresses you sometimes see. No, so it's not Ottoman, but influenced.

Audience Speaker 9: Okay. Okay thank you.

Dr Marieke de Winkel: But it had a distinct Polish flavour to it.

Suzanne van de Meerendonk: I think we probably have come to the end of our time, but thank you all very much for your attention. We will have a reception following this. So if you still have burning questions or you want to ask the speaker, you can find her there [laughs], and otherwise, please enjoy food and beverage. So thank you very much.

Suzanne van de Meerendonk: Thank you.