



Isaac Brachy
1920

‘As a Token of Appreciation for her Dauntless Struggle ...’: The Many Portraits of Aletta Jacobs by Isaac Israels

• MINEKE BOSCH* •

Between October 1919 and the summer of 1920, Isaac Israels¹ painted a ‘state’ portrait, commissioned by the women’s suffrage movement, of the feminist Aletta H. Jacobs, today the most renowned figure of first-wave feminism in the Netherlands.² Fifty years had passed since Jacobs became the first woman officially admitted to a Dutch university in 1872. On 8 March 1879, she completed her medical studies in Groningen with a doctorate. In Amsterdam, Jacobs set up practice as a physician specialized in the treatment of women and children. In one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the centre of the city, she began offering a free consultation hour. She also provided information on physical hygiene and childcare, and introduced the diaphragm as a contraceptive. Additionally, she engaged in discussions with colleagues who were critical of her activities regarding birth control.

Jacobs’s first informal involvement in the women’s suffrage effort occurred in 1883, when making an attempt to register as a voter in the Amsterdam municipal elections, an endeavour that proved unsuccessful despite her being an eligible tax-paying citizen. Circa 1900, she became more active in the women’s movement, and in 1903, she accepted the presidency of the *Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht* (Women’s Suffrage Association, henceforth *vvvk*),

< *Detail of fig. 5*

founded ten years before. In a desire to devote her time fully to the suffrage struggle, Jacobs closed her medical practice in 1904. She remained president of the *vvvk* until after women in the Netherlands obtained the active and passive right to vote. On 27 September 1919, this victory in the history of women’s suffrage was celebrated in grand fashion in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. It was on this occasion that Jacobs was ceremoniously recognized for her efforts on behalf of the cause and presented with gifts. She received a unique *Jus Suffragii* medallion in white enamel and gold.³ There was also an album informing her that, as a token of appreciation, a painted portrait was to be made in her honour, paid for by more than two thousand female and male contributors who had placed their signatures on the album’s pages.

For the women and men who had contributed to the making of a portrait, it was a way to demonstrate their gratitude for what Jacobs had meant to women and the nation and a means to ensure her efforts were remembered for all posterity. Their aim was for the portrait to be admitted to the collection of a (national) museum, i.e. the Rijksmuseum. The portrait of Aletta Jacobs thus reflects a conscious attempt by feminists to honour the memory of prominent figures in the women’s movement with some kind

of monument or artwork, preferably displayed on the (national) public stage.⁴ In this endeavour, those who commissioned the painting had stepped into a tradition that, for ‘men of merit’, had existed as early as the Renaissance but which really began to flourish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As early as 1800, national biographical dictionaries were starting to become mainstays in the formation of national history (and national identity). Not long after, portrait galleries were systematically integrated as part of the national heritage, with private institutions and their specific memory cultures later following step.⁵ For ‘women of merit’, by contrast, inclusion in the public ‘national portrait gallery’ was anything but a given.⁶

As was revealed in my 2005 biography on Aletta Jacobs, the Rijksmuseum rejected the Jacobs portrait in 1922.⁷ Many other portraits of prominent women of the suffrage movement ended up in the possession of the sitters’ families, sometimes even kept in house attics. Several portraits were held by private institutions, and a not insignificant number of portraits are almost surely lost and today known only through photographs. In spite of this, it was possible to trace the whereabouts of numerous portraits that were installed in a ‘hall of fame’ at the 2019 exhibition *Strijd!* in the Groninger Museum, in accordance with the tradition of a national portrait gallery.⁸ In the exhibition, a separate wall was reserved for the many portraits of Aletta Jacobs made by Isaac Israels, with five works shown: three oil portraits, one watercolour and one sketch drawing (fig. 1).⁹

In fact, Isaac Israels produced not one, but five painted portraits of Aletta Jacobs, and two additional sketches, i.e. preliminary portrait studies drawn in pencil on paper (see figs. 3-9). In my aforementioned biography,

I was somewhat unclear regarding the number and specifications of portraits Israels made of Jacobs.¹⁰ Art historians were vague about these questions as well, up until circa 2000, when ‘four portraits’ of Aletta Jacobs began to garner broad consensus. Even so, the many catalogues and biographical writings on Israels virtually never specified the portrait or portraits to which they were referring. In those few instances where ‘the portrait’ is mentioned, only from the stated provenance and dimensions (if these are provided) can one determine which portrait is being discussed.¹¹ That ‘the portrait’ was not commissioned by Jacobs herself and instead presented to her as a gift was not known; and at no point did anyone ask the most obvious question: why would Israels have produced so many portraits of Jacobs in the first place?

That Isaac Israels’s portraits of Aletta Jacobs are being examined systematically and in their precise historical context only at this late stage can partly be attributed to the gap that until recently existed between historical and art historical research: in the first field, no more than scant attention was given to material and image, and in the latter field, an eye for text and historical context was greatly lacking. The situation has improved thanks to the influence of the ‘material turn’, which has made its mark on both history and art history. Consequently, historians today are far more aware of visual culture and object history, while art historians delve into the archives with greater frequency. This article, with its focus on research into ‘the portrait’ or numerous portraits of Aletta Jacobs by Isaac Israels, is in line with this trend.

For the historical aspects, I was able to draw on my archival research into Aletta Jacobs and the women’s suffrage movement. As for the art historical aspects, besides several



Fig. 1
 'Hall of Fame' at the
 exhibition *Strijd!*
 in the Groninger
 Museum, from
 20 April to
 12 September 2019.
 Photo: Marten
 de Leeuw

general studies on portraiture, a guiding influence has been the inspiring work of Ludmilla Jordanova, a British historian of gender and science, and an expert in the area of visual culture.¹² In her book *Defining Features* (2000), Jordanova analysed the tradition of portraits of famous physicians and researchers in the fields of natural science and technology, immortalized in paintings or sculptures based on merit rather than (aristocratic) origin. Besides the most obvious aspects – the identity of the sitter, the identity of the artist, the dating and provenance – any of the following factors can impact a portrait's meaning: medium, size, scale ratio of the individual depicted and the portrait's format, pose, section of the body, dress, hairstyle, presence or absence of attributes or symbols, background, framing and presentation history. Also relevant to a portrait's interpretation are elements such as the knowledge of how a work was created, on whose behalf and whether other related images exist. In Jordanova's book, gender is a significant aspect of analysis: in what manner were renowned female scientists – until a century ago, viewed solely as amateurs – depicted in existing traditions based on contemporary notions of social relevance, i.e. historical consequence?

Even in more general studies of the portrait genre, one observes an increased attention to gender as well. Art historian Shearer West's book titled *Portraiture* (2004) reveals that, well into the nineteenth century, (famous) women were depicted in their portraits as allegories or in the role of goddesses, muses, historical or religious figures – quite infrequently as (unique) individuals.¹³ Moreover, 'beauty' was a guiding principle in most of these works. Countless portraits of (nameless) women from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been handed down, based on the artistic value rather than on the sitter's historical merit.

Another key source of inspiration for this research, due to the focus on gender and (self-)presentation, is the book *Portraits and Poses* (2022), edited by Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke van Deinsen, both historians of literature.¹⁴ This publication addresses the many ways in which women highlighted their agency in and with the aid of images. Covering the period circa 1550 to 1850, the articles examine women with backgrounds as diverse as visual artists, writers in every imaginable genre, an opera singer and many others. The strong art historical emphasis on images, in most cases portraits,

in combination with textual sources, provides insight into these women's strategic presentations of themselves.

Generally, the works covered in *Portraits and Poses* were created on the sitter's initiative. By contrast, 'the portrait' discussed here was commissioned by a third party, i.e. the women's suffrage movement. For this research, I focused on the following questions: Why did the suffragists choose Isaac Israels as the artist to portray Aletta Jacobs? What were the portraits that Israels painted of her and which among them was chosen as her official portrait? Why did Israels produce so many portraits? For what reason did he paint the portrait differently each time, and why specifically in these ways? Did Aletta Jacobs or the suffragists have a say in Jacob's portrayal? These paths of enquiry allowed me to devise and present an overview of Israels's various portraits of Jacobs and garner some insight into their background and production.

Isaac Israels: Second Choice

When planning their ceremonial tribute to Jacobs, the committee in charge wished to present her with something tangible, a token of the portrait to be painted. For this purpose, they commissioned the aforementioned tribute album, bound in parchment, containing the signatures of the more than two thousand people who had made a financial contribution to cover the portrait's cost. Besides family members and friends, a majority of the signees were active in the women's suffrage movement. Tine Baanders, a 'decorative artist' as she described herself in the Amsterdam population registry, was responsible for the decoration of the album's interior; Non Donath, 'leatherworker and bookbinder', bound and finished it.¹⁵ Gracing the title page, inscribed in calligraphic letters, were the following words (fig. 2):



Fig. 2
Title Page of the
Tribute Album, 1919.
Parchment,
32 x 40 x 5 cm.
Groninger Museum,
inv. no. 1931.0030.
Photo: RHC Groninger
Archieven

As a token of appreciation for her dauntless struggle in the service of feminism, Dr. Aletta H. Jacobs is presented with a portrait painted by at the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht, of which this album with the names of her many friends from the Association is received in Amsterdam, the fourth [of] February Nineteen hundred and nineteen.¹⁶

The text reveals that the tribute had originally been planned to take place at the vvvk's twenty-fifth anniversary, to be held on 5 (not 4) February 1919. This event was cancelled at the last moment, however, as parliament postponed the announced debate of Henri Marchant's initiative bill aimed to establish women's right to vote in the Dutch constitution.¹⁷ After passing in the House of Representatives on 9 May 1919, the bill was confirmed in the Senate on 10 July. The victory celebration in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw took place on 27 September 1919, on the eve of the day the law took effect.

Perhaps Jacobs was given a say in choosing the maker of her portrait, as implied by the dotted line where the painter's name was left blank. Various artists would undoubtedly have been considered; given the context of the women's suffrage movement, favour would have fallen on a female portraitist. This is supported by accounts of the victory celebration in provincial newspapers across the country, stating that tribute committee chairwoman Geertruida (Truus) Docters van Leeuwen-van Maarseveen, when handing Jacobs the album, announced that a 'portrait in oil paint' was to be produced by 'one of our most prominent female painters'.¹⁸ However, in the *Maandblad van de Vereeniging voor Vrouwen-kiesrecht* (Monthly Magazine of the Women's Suffrage Association, henceforth *MVVVK*), another committee member, C.S. (Kee) Groot, a highly informed source, reported her words as follows:

that the Association would appreciate, that the person of Ms. Jacobs also live on for posterity and [that] the committee was therefore of the opinion that Ms. Jacobs be requested to have her image painted by *one of our great masters* and that a place later be created for that image in the museum [*my italics*].¹⁹

As noted above, it was not a female painter who was chosen to paint Jacobs's portrait but one of 'our great masters', Isaac Israels. Even so, the latter was probably not the committee's first choice. Plausible is that Docters van Leeuwen's announcement at the victory celebration reflected the tribute committee's original plan, previously decided in the summer of 1918 with an eye to the anniversary celebration set for February 1919. As evidenced by the formulation 'one of our most prominent female painters', the women on this committee already had someone in mind, most likely Thérèse Schwartz, a celebrated portrait painter with connections in suffrage feminist circles. For the major exhibition *De Vrouw 1813-1913*, an initiative of the vvvk coinciding with celebratory activities marking the centenary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Schwartz had served as president of the 'Visual Arts' sub-committee. She was also chosen to paint the portrait of exhibition president Mia Boissevain, to whom the painting was presented as a token of gratitude for her efforts (see fig. 12).²⁰ With Schwartz's death in November 1918, however, the question regarding which artist would paint Aletta Jacob's portrait was open.²¹ On the day of the victory celebration, people still perhaps had a female painter in mind; also possible is that Docters van Leeuwen had been misquoted by those reporting on the event. Be that as it may, not long after 27 September (or even before), the decision was made (or revealed) that Isaac Israels was to be the designated painter. With the album now kept at Aletta Jacobs' home,

no one would have thought to fill in Israel's name and modify the date.

Even if, being a man, Isaac Israel was perhaps the second option, he was still an obvious choice to paint Jacobs's portrait, at least equal in standing to Schwartze. Countless examples confirm that the choice of a portraitist commonly arises from personal ties between the painter and the individual portrayed, or a common affiliation in the same network. Indeed, Jacobs and Israel shared a network that extended into the Jewish community, with mutual family ties in Groningen and connections in the women's suffrage movement. For example, one learns from a few of Aletta Jacobs's written notes that, as early as the eighteen seventies, two of Isaac Israel's first cousins, Jacques Julius and Herman Louis Israël, had stayed at the Jacobs family home in Sappemeer. Given the names of their respective mothers, Anna and Esther de Jongh,²² the two boys were also very likely Aletta's first cousins. Years later, Herman Louis would become active (as Henri Louis) in the *vkvk*, working with Aletta Jacobs. A lawyer and journalist by profession, Henri Louis also worked for a time in Paris. There he may have mediated in setting up the exhibition of part of Jacobs's and her husband Carel Gerritsen's feminist library at the world exhibition in 1900.²³ Another connection between Israel and Jacobs occurred via Isaac's mother, Aleida Schaap, whose younger sister, Hendrien Schaap, back in 1872, had written a compelling account telling of 'her friend' Aletta Jacobs's impressive public propaedeutic exam.²⁴ An even more profound link, however, can be observed when turning to Isaac's father, the renowned painter Jozef Israël: not only had he painted a portrait of Samuel S. Rosenstein, the Jewish rector responsible for admitting Aletta Jacobs to university, but he also portrayed male members of the Oppenheim family, including both an uncle and a first

cousin of Aletta Jacobs – respectively, Uri Samuel Oppenheim and his son Jacques, the constitutional lawyer who wrote the foreword to Aletta Jacobs's *Herinneringen*.²⁵ Jozef Israël was quite likely a member of the (international) organization *Mannenbond voor Vrouwenkiesrecht* (Men's Union for Women's Suffrage), founded in 1908. In 1906, he published the image of a mother and child, accompanying his daughter (Isaac's sister) Mathilde Cohen Tervaert-Israël's statement in a special issue of the *MVVVK*, published to mark the *vkvk*'s twelve-and-a-half-year anniversary. Although highly active in the women's movement, Mathilde's involvement in the *vkvk* was initially minimal. Later, in the nineteen twenties, she became a board member of the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Staatsburgeressen* (Dutch Association of Women Citizens), the rebranded *vkvk*, and was subsequently made president in the autumn of 1929. Cohen Tervaert-Israël spoke positively of Jacobs on numerous occasions, describing her as a role model for herself.²⁶

As for the painter himself, Israel had proved himself a veritable lover of 'women' in multiple senses of the word. In his work, he placed many different groups of women in the leading role: working women such as seamstresses or telephone operators, dancing women in cafés and the nightlife scene, public street servants, mannequins and *essayeuses* in the fashion world. He also painted numerous portraits of individual women: anonymous models as well as actresses and other women 'of renown', and also family members and friends. Unquestionably 'one of our great masters' at the time, Israel was in a position to command high fees for his work. Given the more than two thousand donors' signatures in the tribute album, a costly commission to paint Aletta Jacobs's portrait would not have posed a problem.



Fig. 3
ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs Seated in
an Armchair*
(‘*Armchair Aletta*’),
November–
December 1919.
Oil on canvas,
101 x 71 cm.
Amsterdam, Atria –
Kennisinstituut voor
Emancipatie en
Vrouwengeschiedenis,
Collection IAV, object
no. 116, on loan at
the Amsterdam
Museum.

A Succession of Portraits

Shortly after receiving the commission, Israels must have started painting Jacobs’s portrait. Unfortunately, it cannot be confirmed that Jacobs ever had a sitting session with the painter. In any event, a portrait was finished a few months later. At the annual meeting of the *vwwk* on 20–21 December 1919, the first to be held after the victory celebration, the association rebranded itself as the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Staatsburgeressen* (Dutch Association of Women Citizens).²⁷ Shortly after opening the meeting, Docters van Leeuwen announced that the portrait of Dr Jacobs, painted by Isaac Israels, was available for viewing in the hall, as registered in the published account of



Fig. 4
ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Sketch of Aletta
Jacobs Seated
in an Armchair*,
November 1919.
Pencil on paper,
300 x 220 mm.
Amsterdam, Atria –
Kennisinstituut voor
Emancipatie en
Vrouwengeschiedenis,
Collection IAV,
object no. 1796.

this two-day meeting, which appeared in the eponymously redubbed *Maandblad van de Nederlandsche Vereeniging voor Staatsburgeressen* (henceforth *MNVs*).²⁸

The portrait in question, today held in the Atria collection, shows Jacobs seated in a red armchair positioned at an angle, facing the viewer, with her left arm resting on the back of the chair and her right hand resting on her lap, pen in hand (fig. 3). The presence of the chair and a desk suggests Israels visited Jacobs in her home. This portrayal is essentially the same as that of a drawn sketch, kept in the Atria collection as well. Below the sketch is a handwritten dedication ‘Aan mevr Mulder vd Graaf’, signed ‘Isaac Israels’ and dated ‘Nov. 1919’ (fig. 4).²⁹ Besides



Fig. 5

ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs with Hat*
(‘Hat Aletta’),
1920 (?).

Oil on canvas,
92 x 72 cm.
Groninger Museum,
inv. no. 1931.0037.
Photo: Marten
de Leeuw



Fig. 6

ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Sketch of Aletta Jacobs
with Hat*, undated.

Pen on paper,
235 x 305 mm.
Haarlem, Teylers
Museum, inv. no.
KT 2567, Schetsboek I.

being a close friend of Aletta Jacobs, Clara Mulder van de Graaf-de Bruyn was also on the tribute committee. The sketch, presumably made in preparation of this portrait, provides the approximate period in which the portrait was painted, between November and 20 December. In the eyes of the committee, the assignment had been completed. Docters van Leeuwen’s remark ‘that Jacobs would be remunerated the remaining sum [of the amount raised]’, as reported in the account of the annual meeting, indicates as much. This is also implied by her additional announcement that it was now time to move ahead with the plan ‘to create a place [for the portrait] in the museum’.³⁰ The wording ‘the museum’ suggests that, from the outset, the Rijksmuseum had been on the committee’s mind – a fitting choice in light of the vvvk’s aspirations on the national level as well as Jacobs’s own status and renown across the country at this time.

Regardless of the tribute committee’s take on the situation, it appears Israels was nowhere near finished with his subject. In the spring of 1920, he returned to working on Jacobs’s portrait at his studio in The Hague. This we learn from Israels’s letter of 21 July 1920, in which he thanks the artist Jan Veth for loaning him a painted portrait of G.A. Kessler, the director of the Dutch steel manufacturer Hoogovens, completed earlier that year:

Thanks for loaning [me] your portrait. It was not meant as such, yet I still found it to be very useful ... I moved it – for myself – into the studio as an example and made a life-size Aletta head in imitation. It certainly is a chef d’oeuvre – today at least. It just now happened to be that today was a beautiful, grey day and, in any event, that hat-Aletta is certainly hideous by comparison.³¹

In addition to the previously mentioned portrait of Aletta seated in an armchair adjacent to her desk, Israels introduces a bust portrait of Aletta, as well as an

earlier portrait of her with a hat. In Veth and Israels's ensuing exchange (concerning the purchase of a chess set for a mutual friend), the portrait of Aletta Jacobs with the hat is explicitly mentioned again. Veth asked Israels whether writer and (art) critic Albertine Draaijer-de Haas knew anything 'about the evolution of Aletta's image? And of the hat[s] exit?'³² Apparently, Draaijer-de Haas had made a remark about Jacobs's portrait, and after Israels's letter, Veth had assumed that the 'Aletta head', or bust portrait, was now Israels's favourite version of the portrait. In his response the following day, Israels returned to his discussion of the portrait. Almost as an afterthought, he said facetiously: 'Hm. Aletta, what a delightful review she gave!!!'³³ Perhaps Jacobs, upon viewing the portrait, had reacted rather unfavourably and subsequently passed her sentiment on to Draaijer-de Haas. More likely, however, is that Israels had written Aletta's name in error, when in fact it was Albertine who had voiced her opinion of the painting.

From this exchange, one can only conclude that Israels had been wrestling for quite some time with his design for another portrait of Jacobs: a knee-length standing portrait today preserved in the Groninger Museum, showing Jacobs in a red dress and wearing a hat (fig. 5). A preliminary study of the same painting can be found in one of Israel's sketchbooks from 1920, held in the collection of Teylers Museum (fig. 6). Here too, we may assume the sketch preceded the portrait. Judging from his letter, Israels had proceeded to work on another bust or chest portrait, i.e. the 'Aletta head', also now in the Groninger Museum (fig. 7). However, he could also very well be referring to a portrait (probably) in oil, of which only a black-and-white photo survives preserved at the RKD, henceforth referred to as the 'lost portrait' (fig. 8). Unclear is at what point Israels made



Fig. 7

ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs ('Aletta Head')*,
1920?

Oil on canvas,
50 x 40 cm.

Groninger Museum,
inv. no. 1931.0038.

Photo: John Stoel



Fig. 8

*Photo of the Lost
Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs by Isaac Israels
from 1920(?)*.

The Hague, RKD –
Netherlands Institute
for Art History, image
no. 19747.



Fig. 9
ISAAC ISRAELS,
*Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs Seated at
Her Desk*, c. 1920.
Watercolour with
gouache on paper,
508 x 354 mm.
Otterlo, Kröller-
Müller Museum,
inv. no. KM 119.455.
Photo: Rik Klein
Gotink

his watercolour portrait of Aletta Jacobs in the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum (fig. 9). Once again, we see her sitting in the same red chair, though this time behind her desk. Equally uncertain is whether Jacobs herself knew that Israels was working on a second (let alone a third, fourth and fifth) portrait, or whether she posed for him (again) at any point. Among the numerous sources that I, as Jacobs's biographer, have examined, nowhere does Jacobs mention a portrait by Isaac Israels.³⁴ Moreover, no other archival source or documentation exists that could possibly provide insight into the 'evolution of Aletta's image'.

Rejection by the Rijksmuseum

The 'armchair portrait' shown to the members of the *vvvk* at the end of 1919 would not become the official portrait. In January 1921, the association's members were summoned to view the portrait of Aletta Jacobs in the Amsterdam art gallery where Israels frequently exhibited his work, the Buffa gallery on the Kalverstraat. The announcement in the *MNVS* stated: 'It's not the same one that was shown last year at the annual meeting'.³⁵ Indeed, the work on display was actually the one Israels described as 'certainly hideous' in his letter to Veth: the standing portrait of Jacobs with the hat. With the official portrait now completed and approved, exhibiting it at the Buffa gallery was the next stage in the committee's effort to donate the painting to the Rijksmuseum. A letter from Docters van Leeuwen to a fellow member of the tribute committee confirms that Barthold van Riemsdijk, the then director of the Rijksmuseum, was definitely interested upon hearing that the portrait was an 'Isaac Israels'. He was even optimistic that the painting would be accepted.³⁶ But, of course, he would first have to see the painting, and if deemed a good piece, it would have to be submitted for the concerned minister's approval. However, this approval was not given. In a letter addressed to the committee, Van Riemsdijk conveyed that, unfortunately, the minister felt no desire to include the portrait in the collection of the Rijksmuseum: not only was it the museum's responsibility to guard against 'propaganda of any kind', but one also had to acknowledge that 'anyone now famous or well known might no longer be so in thirty years' time.³⁷

That the minister in question, Johannes Theodoor de Visser, was opposed to the idea comes as no surprise, as for more than a decade, he was one of the women's suffrage movement's formidable opponents. In 1909, he became a member of

the CHU (Christian Historical Union) faction in the House of Representatives, coinciding with Theodoor Heemskerk's second 'confessional' cabinet, which for years had blocked the introduction of a constitutional revision for universal (women's) suffrage. When this approach no longer worked, De Visser – in line with Heemskerk – wholeheartedly defended 'huismans-kiesrecht', i.e. the notion that suffrage was reserved solely for the paterfamilias. In this political context, there was no room for the suffrage struggle.³⁸ Not without reason, Aletta Jacobs sought refuge by embarking on a trip around the world in the years 1911-1912. After the 1918 elections, De Visser became Minister of Education, Culture and Science. When, in 1920, he proposed that women in education be employed merely as 'assistant teachers' in nursery and primary schools, he again came into serious conflict with the 'Staatsburgeressen'.³⁹ Unquestionably, De Visser's rejection of the portrait was both personally and politically motivated. Even so, simply placing blame on the most obvious 'culprit' fails to provide a definitive answer. A true understanding of the portrait's rejection(s) will require in-depth research into the collection and acquisition policy of the Rijksmuseum.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the official portrait came to hang, not in the national museum, but on a wall in Aletta Jacobs's home on the Van Aerssenstraat in The Hague. Israels kept both the 'armchair Aletta' and the 'Aletta head' for himself. Van Riemsdijk, who retired in that same year, advised the committee to approach the museum again a few months after the rejection, though this likely went unheeded.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it was possibly on his instigation that Jacobs's final will(s), compiled by the notary Wertheim, stipulated that her heirs be legally bound to offer the portrait to the Dutch government. Upon Jacobs's death in 1929, the portrait, tribute album and several other pieces were

accordingly submitted to David Roëll, the then curator of paintings and later director of the Rijksmuseum.⁴² Once again, the donation was refused, this time likely without ministerial intervention. When it was gratefully accepted by the Groninger Museum in 1931, the official portrait at last found a permanent home in the city where both Jacobs's and Israels's roots lay.⁴³

An Exceptional Case

But why would Israels have painted and drawn so many portraits of Aletta Jacobs?⁴⁴ Perhaps he simply enjoyed experimenting with his brush, continuing even after he had completed the painting commissioned by the tribute committee. Regardless, Israels was not easily satisfied with the results of his efforts in general, even in the case of portraits. Evidence of an urge to ever improve can be observed in his letters to the actress Jacqueline Sandberg (later Royaards-Sandberg) concerning the many times she sat for him as a model, and containing his instructions for her upcoming sessions and remarks about already completed portraits:

When I heard nothing from you, I thought that you found the portraits so offensive that you wanted nothing more to do with them. I also don't think they're any good, I now know what it is, tomorrow we'll do a better job.⁴⁵

Not one but several portraits today survive that Israels completed of Sandberg, as well as of other models, including actress Fie Carelsen (Sophie de Jong). Nevertheless, with five portraits in total – four in oil (one of which is known to us only in a photo) and one in watercolour – Jacobs's case seems exceptional,⁴⁶ certainly as this was ostensibly Israels's sole commissioned portrait of which multiple versions have survived, whereas a painter executing a commissioned work

commonly strove towards finalizing one formal portrait.

Another possible reason that Israels produced multiple, highly disparate versions of Aletta Jacobs's portrait is because she was indeed an extraordinary woman. Jacobs's impact on society was unprecedented. This impact is reflected by the fact that the commission for her portrait was financed by a group of more than two thousand people, including several members of parliament, prominent educated and professional women, and naturally, numerous key players active in the suffrage struggle. It was not just any portrait that Israels had been commissioned to create – it was a work of historical significance. In light of an age-old tradition centred primarily on the portrayal of men of merit, was it perhaps difficult for this impressionist painter to find an approach suitable for portraying Jacobs, being one of the first women who had made her mark in the public sphere of society and politics? Besides women of royalty and nobility, women in the public spotlight – actresses, singers, dancers etc. – had indeed been immortalized in the past; traditionally, however, the emphasis in these portraits lay chiefly on feminine beauty (and/or seductiveness). Historically, as noted above, (famous) women were depicted, not as 'themselves', but in a variety of biblical and mythological roles, or, as Seren Nolan has shown in *Portraits and Poses*, even as Roman *matrone*.⁴⁷ How to portray a leading modern feminist figure like Aletta Jacobs, however, was anything but obvious; for her, such disguises were misplaced and inappropriate. Had the suffrage struggle not been fought on the behalf of women's political right to represent themselves?

How to Portray a Woman of Merit?

In the process of creating the portrait, Aletta Jacobs's attire was certainly one of the first matters of concern.

It was unquestionably inappropriate, for example, to depict her wearing a pleasant evening dress with a plunging neckline, or in a silk dress, i.e. as a 'socialite' in the style of Israels's contemporary John Singer Sargent. Equally unsuitable, however, was the ensemble of 'the new woman' testing gender norms, comprising a skirt, white blouse and tie; in Jacobs's case, even reform clothing would have been unbecoming, as she never wore this. In the officially designated portrait, Jacobs is portrayed wearing an expressive (brown-)red afternoon gown, possibly provided by Israels himself, as he was on good terms with the fashion house Hirsch. Schwartz is also known to have brought her clients to Hirsch: according to her niece, the painter Lizzy Ansingh, 'she dressed them completely to her decorative taste'.⁴⁸ In all his other portraits in colour, Israels portrayed Jacobs wearing a subdued black or dark blue dress, with or without a scarf. Given prescribed dresscodes for women, important aspects when it comes to the choice of clothing are colour, fabric and cut. When Jacobs was preparing for college, she bought 'a piece of black cloth, from which a straight, stiff dress was cut, as simple as possible, without any decoration, even if the fashion in those days prescribed crinolines and layered skirts'.⁴⁹ At that time, the purpose of such attire was undoubtedly to avoid standing out as a woman. For a woman who now possessed a public image, this would certainly no longer have been the intention.

Israels also seems to have been looking for the right pose and portrait form, resulting in the great variation distinguishing each portrait from the others. Various poses and portrait forms express different meanings. According to Jordanova, an oval portrait in profile evokes associations with classical images and the commemoration of powerful and meritorious people on coins and medals.⁵⁰ The armchair pose

has a long tradition when it comes to the depiction of venerable men, as affirmed by the many examples presented in *Defining Features*. The head-to-hand pose (most obvious in Rodin's *Thinker*) refers to scholarship and knowledge, if not wisdom, in addition to respectability.⁵¹ A similar effect can be achieved by presenting the subject, for example, sitting at a desk or standing before a bookcase. Standing portraits are often based on princely models, with powerful men long portrayed with one hand resting on some form of power paraphernalia and the other loosely clasping a sword. Although widely adopted in later portrayals of prominent men, this pose was also sometimes used to portray women.⁵²

Unknown is whether Aletta Jacobs herself held specific notions about how she wished to be portrayed, and if so, whether Israels felt any desire to comply. The latter seems unlikely, given the disparities between the portraits. It does not appear he sought to portray Jacobs as a physician or learned woman, even if the 'armchair portrait' approaches this. The only consistency in all the portraits is the *Jus Suffragii* medallion that Jacobs received as a tribute gift (fig. 10), in addition to the parchment album and portrait. The medallion signifies her role in the suffrage struggle – the equivalent of a badge of honour almost always present in public portraits of men of merit.

Examples from Fellow Painters

When taking a closer look at the different ways in which Israels painted Jacobs, it seems he also consulted with colleagues. The aforementioned exchange with artist Jan Veth is one example of Israels drawing his inspiration from a fellow painter, even if direct evidence is lacking: the 'Aletta head' bears almost no resemblance to Veth's study of G.A. Kessler. However, Israels himself apparently did see something in Veth's work.



Several of the portraits suggest that Israels's good friend Thérèse Schwartz was an important source of inspiration. Besides a substantial number of (female) members of prominent families and the Dutch royal house, she portrayed several feminists and/or their children. Schwartz was close to Isaac and his father, Jozef Israëls. Both men came to her support when, driven by professional envy, fellow artists like Veth tried to denigrate her using gender stereotypes.⁵³ Unmistakable is the fact that Isaac Israels incorporated Schwartz's official standing portrait of Wilhelmina in the background of his portrait of Coenraad Kerbert, director of Artis (the Amsterdam zoo). It is by no means a far-fetched proposition that Schwartz's portraits of the seated Queen Wilhelmina (1911) and the feminist Esther Welmoet Wijnaendts Francken-Dyserinck (1914, fig. 11), both in turn based on a standard pose, might have inspired the pose and framing of Israels's 'armchair Aletta', the artist's first portrait of Jacobs.

Fig. 10
Jus Suffragii Medallion, presented to Aletta Jacobs, 1919. Enamel, gold, diam. 3.6 cm. Groninger Museum, inv. no. 1931.0031. Photo: Heinz Aebi



Fig. 11
THÉRÈSE SCHWARTZE,
*Portrait of Esther
Welmoet Wijnaendts
Francken-Dyserinck*
(1879-1956), 1914.
Pastel on canvas,
80.6 x 64.2 cm.
Amsterdam, Atria –
Kennisinstituut voor
Emancipatie en
Vrouwengeschiedenis,
object no. 117.

Likewise seated in diagonally positioned chairs, the two women portrayed by Schwartz gaze in the direction of the viewer by turning the head slightly to one side. In the armchair portrait, Aletta comes across as a serene woman, radiating a natural ascendancy and tranquillity. Yet, perhaps this version was deemed lacking because it failed to portray her as a leader, or because the pose was too similar to those in Schwartz's aforementioned portraits (like that depicting Wijnaendts Francken-Dyserinck, who continually criticized Aletta throughout their time in the women's movement).

The pose and format of the chosen portrait, the 'hat Aletta', are similar to those of another work by Thérèse Schwartz – her 1914 portrait of Mia Boissevain (fig. 12). This work was also

presented to the sitter by the women's movement, in gratitude for her role as president of the exhibition *De vrouw 1813-1913*. Unlike a head-to-hand pose, the shape of this portrait is more akin to standard depictions of individuals of high social standing or administrative power. The standing pose also emphasizes the active, and perhaps even activist, side of both women. The red colour in Jacobs's portrait can refer to both passion and combativeness. The hat also conveys a certain status, worn as an accessory for women spending a great deal of time outdoors or in public. The richly decorated hat worn by Jacobs is an element of clothing unquestionably associated with the elite class.⁵⁴ Unlike his portrait of Jacqueline Sandberg, it would not have been Israels's aim to depict Jacobs as anything that might be described as 'fairly charming'.⁵⁵ Inevitably, he also turned to sources of inspiration, other than portraits by colleagues.

Photographs as a Source of Inspiration

Art historian Anna Wagner tentatively observes that Israels, like Breitner, may quite possibly have turned to photographs 'on occasion' as a tool for painting.⁵⁶ If I interpret this correctly, Wagner is chiefly referring to the 'copying in paint' of photographs taken by Israels himself, long regarded as 'not done' by artists and art historians, but which Israels in fact 'did'. Around the time of his aforementioned correspondence with Sandberg, Israels purchased a camera, with which he shot numerous photos of her. He was amazed at how these allowed him to see many different sides of his subject, though simultaneously, it would appear they made painting more difficult for him.⁵⁷ There is no clear way to assess whether Israels made systematic use of his own photos in the creation of other portraits.

This by no means diminishes the probability that Israels may have drawn

inspiration from photos taken by others – almost an inevitability given the explosively expanding visual culture of his day. For the Aletta Jacobs portraits, this was almost certainly the case, with a relatively large number of photographs of Jacobs in circulation and published regularly in the media in the period before the painting was commissioned. Israels would undoubtedly have seen these images, perhaps even receiving them from Jacobs herself. Be that as it may, for all painted portraits there are photos that could very well have served as a source of inspiration. The watercolour of Aletta Jacobs sitting behind her desk, painted in 1920, is very similar to her official portrait

photo (fig. 13), taken, as she herself writes in her *Herinneringen*, ‘on the occasion of her 25th Doctor’s anniversary’ in 1904.⁵⁸ Perhaps Israels combined this portrait with his own impressions after visiting the sitter in her home in The Hague. The watercolour shows Aletta Jacobs in the same position seated behind a desk (albeit from a slightly different angle, so as to include the telephone not present on the desk in 1904), with her left hand resting on the desktop. In the photo, Jacobs’s left hand rests on a railing of the chair. In both portraits, she holds a pen in her right hand while gazing at the viewer. The 1904 photo is best known to modern-day researchers because it was printed in her 1924 autobiography. For this reason, the photo was often used in publications, as well on the title page of the first *Jaarboek van het Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging* (Yearbook of the International Archives for the Women’s Movement) from 1937. The 1904 photo may already have been known to contemporaries and Israels through publications appearing around the time of the ‘Doctor’s Jubilee’, held on 8 March 1904. The same photo also appeared in the March issue of the *MVVVK*, accompanying Wilhelmina Drucker’s biographical article on Aletta Jacobs. Israels could very well have had access to that issue through his sister Mathilde. But perhaps he saw it three years later, when in 1907, the photo (full-page) accompanied an article based on an interview with Jacobs, titled ‘Karakterschets’, written by the Hague naturalist and liberal democrat Frans Netscher and published in (his) journal, *De Hollandsche Revue*.⁵⁹ Netscher and Israels moved in the same Hague circles. It is plausible that Israels would regularly have seen copies of the *De Hollandsche Revue*.

Netscher’s ‘Karakterschets’ also included two other portrait photos of Aletta Jacobs – one sitting (fig. 14),

Fig. 12
THÉRÈSE SCHWARTZE,
*Portrait of Maria
(Mia) Boissevain
(1878-1959)*, 1914.
Oil on canvas,
80 x 117 cm.
Private collection.
Photo: Thijs Quispel.
Courtesy of
drs Cora Hollema



Fig. 13

M.H. LADDÉ,
Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs Behind
Her Desk, 1904.
Photograph.
Groninger
Universiteitsmuseum,
inv. no. 000736.



M.H. Laddé.  Amsterdam 57-58 NIEUWENDIJK

Figs. 14, 15

Portrait of Aletta
Jacobs, Seated
and Standing.
Photographs
published in
'Karakterschets', *De
Hollandsche Revue*,
25 February 1907
and 1 May 1919.
The Hague, KB –
National Library
of the Netherlands
(Delpher), T 14031.

KARAKTERSCHETS.

131

Dan echter groeide meer en meer in haar de overtuiging, dat een der hoofdzaken van de bestaande elende in de meeste gezinnen was het overgroot aantal kinderen, na ziel, sleepoud; armoede, verwarlozing, slechte voeding, demoralisatie van den man, vroegtijdige sloeping van lichaamskrachten bij de vrouw, ziekten, huiselijke twisten, drinkenselap. En in het aangezicht van zoveel leed dacht zij meer en meer aan de verwezenlijking van het plan, waartoe reeds haar

HET NIEUW-MALTHUSIANISME.

Zeer leerzaam voor haar inzichten en opvattingen is wat men lezen kan in haar opstel over 'Willekeurige beperking van het kindertal' in haar bundel 'Vrouwvrienden'.
De economische zijde van dit vraagstuk is voor haar van zeer groote beteekenis; deze maakt de stoffelijke welvaart van een volk in zijn geheel omvang en maakt een onderwerp van



DR. ALETTA JACOBS IN HAAR INTERIEUR.

omgang met Annie Besant de eerste kien had gelegd — het plan de leer van het Nieuw-Malthusianisme in Nederland te helpen propaganderen, en de beginselen dier leer praktisch in toepassing te brengen. Na lange en ernstige overwegingen, waarbij de publikatie van Dr. Mensinga te Leipzig haar een krachtigen steun bood, bracht zij haar plan ten uitvoer.
Men leze ook eens wat zij over dit onderwerp zelve geschreven heeft.

stadië uit van alle Staat- en Staatshoudkundigen. Velen onder hen zijn van oordeel, dat het belang der maatschappij medebrengt, dat de bevolking slechts matig toeneemt en slechts zekeren tred houdt met de toename der middelen van bestaan; anderen meenen, dat in de oude landen de bevolking geruimen tijd stationair moest blijven om zoodoende den algemeenen levensstandaard te verhogen, terwijl nog anderen voor dat doel eene daling van het bevolkingscijfer



D^r. ALETTA JACOBS.

and one standing (fig. 15) – which were printed full-page as well.⁶⁰ Besides the influence of the aforementioned portraits painted by Schwartz, these could also have been an inspiration for the ‘armchair Aletta’ and the ‘hat Aletta’. The ‘lost portrait’ resembles the standing portrait photo in the ‘Karakterschets’ in respect to the neckline of the dress. Yet it is also similar to H.C. de Graaff’s photo of Aletta Jacobs taken in Amsterdam circa 1906-1907, printed on a card and accompanied by a short biographical description (fig. 16). In this last photo, Jacobs can clearly be seen wearing a Jus Suffragii insignia badge; in the lost portrait, she wears the Jus Suffragii medallion, i.e. the tribute medallion she obtained in 1919.⁶¹ It seems very likely to me that, when ‘experimenting with his brush’, Israels had in any event seen the three full-page photos in the 1907 interview. What makes this especially probable is that Netscher’s interview with Aletta Jacobs was republished in the very same popular journal in June 1919, again with these three photos. In other words, the images were reprinted one month after Marchant’s electoral law passed in the House of Representatives and only a few months prior to when Israels was commissioned for the portrait.⁶²

Conclusions

By commissioning a portrait to be hung in the Rijksmuseum, suffrage feminists wished to secure Aletta Jacobs’s place in the (symbolic) national portrait gallery. When this objective failed, it appears that neither they, nor the individual portrayed, knew what to do with the painting. Jacobs herself never wrote or spoke about ‘the portrait’ by Israels, nor did she include it in her memoir *Herinneringen* published in 1924, four years after its making. From this, one may reasonably con-



Fig. 16
 H.C. DE GRAAFF,
 Portrait of Aletta
 Jacobs on a Separate
 Card, 1906-07.
 Photograph.
 Groninger
 Universiteitsmuseum,
 inv. no. 000750.

clude that her involvement in the portrait’s creation was minimal. In ensuing years, the portraits were rarely used. The fact that later feminists and art historians spoke almost exclusively of ‘the portrait’ of Aletta Jacobs – never distinguishing the ‘hat-Aletta’ as the official portrait – implies that no one really took notice of the (possible existence of) additional portraits. But it also indicates that they were oblivious to the context in which the portrait was produced and from which it arose: a tribute work commissioned by the women’s suffrage movement to ensure the deeds and actions of Aletta Jacobs be recognized on the public stage, never to be forgotten.

The present research into portraits as art and cultural-historical objects has introduced an overview of Israels’s portraits of Aletta Jacobs. Based on historical sources, it has led to a heightened perspective on the context of the portraits’ making and addressed art historical matters regarding not only why Israels produced so many, but also specifically why *these* portraits.

The answer to this latter question suggests that Israels the artist, in the course of his painting process, sought to find a pose befitting a woman honoured for her public and historical merit by means of a portrait. Anno 1919, there was no tradition governing the depiction of the almost non-existent 'women of merit' whose political and social deeds placed them in 'the public eye'. The way Israels approached his subject sheds new light on his working method, rooted in the broader visual culture. Portraits produced by Thérèse Schwartz, a friend and female painter, have been shown to be one possible inspiration. Israels also appears to have been guided by portrait photographs of Aletta Jacobs in circulation, images used by the media from circa 1904 onwards. No evidence has been found to indicate that there was any input from Aletta Jacobs or the women's suffrage movement itself with respect to how she was to be portrayed.

Hero worship, tribute and canonization, of which painted and sculpted portraits are an expression, were (and are) related phenomena still more commonly reserved for men than for women. Initially, the portrait of Aletta Jacobs failed to achieve its aim,

as it was a strategic move to garner equality in the symbolic power struggle between men and women represented in portraits on the national stage. This is first and foremost evident from the Rijksmuseum's refusal to accept the portrait, but also from the fact that so much time passed before anyone enquired into the background of that portrait, or indeed, of the many portraits that Isaac Israels made.⁶³ Aletta Jacobs's portraits have stood the test of time, not, as was initially hoped, because of her fame and achievements, but ironically, also thanks to the renown of the man who painted them and the simple fact that he produced more than one. Unquestionably, the Groninger Museum's acceptance of two portraits in 1931 was very important. At the same time, however, it underscores the fact that Aletta Jacobs and the women's suffrage movement were denied the platform they deserved given their historical importance. In recent decades, Jacobs's relevance has grown so significantly that one more portrait in the public space no longer makes a difference. Even so... if and when the missing portrait ever comes to light, in my view there can only be one fitting destination: the nation's treasure house, the Rijksmuseum.⁶⁴

ABSTRACT

In this article, Mineke Bosch links art historical objects and interpretations to historical documents associated with the women's movement in the Netherlands. Her focus is on a portrait of the prominent feminist Aletta Jacobs by the impressionist painter Isaac Israels. After the suffrage bill passed in 1919, the portrait was commissioned by the Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht to honour its president, with the implicit objective that the portrait be accepted into the collection of a national museum, i.e. the Rijksmuseum. Israels made five substantial portraits and two sketches of Jacobs, before finalizing one formal portrait. On the instigation of the minister of Art and Sciences, however, the Rijksmuseum turned down the offer, probably for political reasons. Open questions that remain are: why was Israels chosen to paint the portrait of Aletta Jacobs? Why did he produce such a large number of portraits and why in so many different poses? And why was this not noticed until only very recently? A key concept in answering these questions is gender: how notions about women and men have influenced the way in which portraits of women and men were painted, the dissimilarity in how their portraits have been used, and also whether, and if so, in what way(s), a woman like Aletta Jacobs has been integrated into the Dutch collective memory.

NOTES

- * For this article, I am greatly indebted to the following individuals: Chris van Weel, who was willing to share his knowledge of the Isaac Israels collection; Annette Mevis for her invaluable assistance in Atria; Egge Knol for his extensive, in-depth knowledge of all the historical treasures preserved in the Groninger Museum. I also wish to thank Anne-Maria van Egmond, Maria Holtrop and the anonymous peer reviewers for their valuable suggestions and corrections.
- 1 Circa 1890, Isaac Israels began writing his surname without the accent mark; throughout their life, father Jozef and daughter Mathilde retained the traditional spelling: Israëls.
 - 2 Mineke Bosch, *Aletta Jacobs 1854-1929: Een onwrikbaar geloof in rechtvaardigheid*, Amsterdam 2005.
 - 3 See fig. 10 and also note 17. Contrary to what was claimed in the 2023 'women's issue' of *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* (71, no. 1, p. 88), this is in no way similar to the women's suffrage pin (a small flag) worn by many of the association's members, of which two examples are in the Rijksmuseum. Neither is it similar to the common international Jus Suffragii pin that was designed in 1906 and produced in various versions for members of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The gold and enamel medallion, likewise with the Jus Suffragii symbol, that was presented to Aletta Jacobs, was a unique piece, today held in the collection of the Groninger Museum. See Mineke Bosch, *Strijd! De vrouwenkiesrechtbeweging in Nederland, 1882-1922*, Hilversum 2019, pp. 37, 95, 101 and 108. This book was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Strijd! Honderd jaar Vrouwenkiesrecht* in the Groninger Museum (20 April to 12 September 2019), curated by Dr. Egge Knol, curator of History and Old Art at the Groninger Museum, and myself.
 - 4 For the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum's struggle with the portrait bust of Theodora Haver made by Jo Schreve-Ilzerman, see Bosch 2019 (note 3), p. 12.
 - 5 On the emergence and development of national dictionaries, see for example Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 47-65; Ian Donaldson, 'National Biography and the Arts of Memory: From Thomas Fuller to Colin Matthew', in Peter France and William St. Clair (eds.), *Mapping Lives: the Uses of Biography*, Oxford 2002, pp. 67-82; Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2009. For the underrepresentation of women in national dictionaries, see Mineke Bosch, '1001 Vrouwen in perspectief: Traditie en verandering van het biografische woordenboek in Nederland en elders', *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review* 129 (2014), no. 1, pp. 55-76. For (national) portrait galleries, see also Shearer West, *Portraiture*, Oxford 2004 (*Oxford History of Art*, no. 1). Many authors writing about biographies draw parallels to the painting of a portrait and vice versa.
 - 6 As a result of the reigning gender regime that relegated women to a state of public non-existence and invisibility, women were not seen as historically relevant and therefore not worthy of textual or painted portraits. In the United Kingdom, the *National Dictionary of Biography* (NDB) and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), in 2004 and 2023 respectively, each underwent a thorough makeover in order to reduce the large number of 'missing persons', including women, in light of shifting notions of gender and historical relevance. In the case of the NDB prior to this transformation, only 3% were women, in the NPG 35% were women. The difference in this historical (under-) representation can be explained by the larger emphasis on aesthetics in the NPG, rather than on historical importance.
 - 7 Bosch 2005 (note 2), pp. 696, 760. For the sole document providing insight into the portrait's rejection, see Amsterdam, Atria – Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis, Collection 1AV, Papers F.W. van Wulfften Palthe-Broese van Groenou (Mien Palthe), inv. no. 5, Letter Geertruida Docters van Leeuwen-van Maarseveen to Mien Palthe, 17 March 1921.
 - 8 Bosch 2019 (note 3), pp. 12, 35-45. Since then, several of these portraits have found a (more) public destination.
 - 9 For her journalistic description of the various portraits of Aletta Jacobs by Isaac Israel, Jessica Voeten was inspired by the 'wall of fame' dedicated to Jacobs at the exhibition; see 'Die levensgrote Aletta-kop', *De Groene Amsterdammer* 48 (27 November 2020).
 - 10 Bosch 2005 (note 2), p. 612, where I cite three portraits, and p. 696, where I cite four portraits.
 - 11 For example, J.H. Reisel, *Isaac Israels: Portret van een Hollandse impressionist*, Amsterdam (dissertation Universiteit van Amsterdam) 1966, p. 44, writes about 'various portraits of the first Dutch woman

- physician Aletta Jacobs' and subsequently refers to only one of them without further elucidation; Anna Wagner, *Isaac Israëls*, Venlo 1985 (2nd expanded edition), pp. 129-30, also fails to specify in greater detail, describing the portrait with the hat as 'the most spectacular'; Jeroen Kapelle, 'Isaac Lazarus Israëls: Amsterdam 1865 – Den Haag 1934', in Saskia de Bodt et al., *Isaac Israëls: Hollands impressionist*, exh. cat. Rotterdam (Kunsthall) 1999, p. 28, writes that Israëls produced 'four portraits ... among them: seated in an armchair and standing with hat and her hands on the back'; Elsbeth Veldpape and Toos van Kooten, *Isaac Israëls: Chroniqueur van het vlietende leven*, exh. cat. Otterloo (Kröller-Müller Museum) 1999, p. 58, states: 'Of the physician-feminist Aletta Jacobs four portraits do exist, made in 1919 and 1920', without further explanation; Hans te Nijenhuis and Ietse Meij, *Isaac Israëls: Mannequins en mode*, exh. cat. The Hague (Gemeentemuseum) 2002, p. 51, reiterates: 'Of Aletta Jacobs, the renowned feminist, four paintings were made'.
- 12 Ludmilla Jordanova, *Defining Features: Scientific and Medical Portraits 1660-2000*, exh. cat. London (National Portrait Gallery) 2000.
 - 13 West 2004 (note 5). Also relevant is Joanna Woodall (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester/New York 1997.
 - 14 Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke van Deinsen (eds.), *Portraits and Poses: Female Intellectual Authority, Agency and Authorship in Early Modern Europe*, Leuven 2022. Compare my review in *Women's History Review* 33 (2024), no. 2, pp. 304-06.
 - 15 'sierkunstenaresse'; 'leerbewerkster en boekbindster'. Marjan Groot, *Vrouwen in de vormgeving, 1880-1940*, Rotterdam 2007, pp. 455-473.
 - 16 'Als blijk van waardering voor haar onversaagd strijden ten dienste van het feminisme wordt Dr. Aletta H. Jacobs een door geschilderd portret aangeboden bij de herdenking van het vijftiëntigjarig bestaan der Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht waarvan dit album met de namen van haar vele vrienden uit de Vereeniging is ter hand gesteld te Amsterdam, den vierden Februari Negentienhonderdennegentien.'
 - 17 The date 5 February 1919 is also engraved on the reverse of the Jus Suffragii medallion, presented to Aletta Jacobs as part of her tribute. Compare Bosch 2005 (note 2), p. 612. For photos of the medallion's obverse and reverse, see Bosch 2019 (note 3), p. 37.
 - 18 'haar portret in olieverf door een onzer eerste schilderessen te doen schilderen'. Algemeen Handelsblad, 28 September 1919; Nijmeegsche en Geldersche Provinciale Courant, 29 September 1919.
 - 19 'dat de Vereeniging er prijs op stelde, dat de persoon van Mw. Jacobs ook zou voortleven bij het nageslacht en de commissie daarom gemeend had, Mw Jacobs te moeten verzoeken haar beeltenis te laten schilderen door een onzer groote meesters en die beeltenis later in het museum een plaats te doen inruimen'. C.S. Groot, 'Ons Feest', *Maandblad van de Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht* 23, no. 10 (15 October 1919), p. 3. Henceforth *MVVVK*.
 - 20 'Tentoonstelling De Vrouw 1813-1913, De Sluiting', *Nieuws van de Dag, Stadsnieuws*, 1 October 1913.
 - 21 Cora Hollema, *Thérèse Schwartz (1851-1918): Haar klant was koning*, Zutphen 2010, p. 41.
 - 22 Bosch 2005 (noot 2), p. 97. The two boys were sons of one of Jozef's younger brothers, Louis Israëls; see Diewertje Dekkers et al., *Jozef Israëls 1824-1911*, exh. cat. Groningen (Groninger Museum/Instituut voor Kunsten Architectuurgeschiedenis)/Amsterdam (Jewish Historical Museum) 1999. For the suggestion that Esther Israëls-de Jongh was the sister of Anna Jacobs-de Jongh, Aletta's mother, see E.P. Boon et al., *Joodse inwoners van de stad Groningen en omstreken, 1549-1945 en hun begraafplaatsen aldaar; 11: 1870-1945*, Groningen 2007, p. 425, under Louis Israëls. In the reference to De Jongh 4c (p. 240), however, there is no mention of an 'Esther'; while three other (presumable) sisters are indeed mentioned: Eva Israëls de Jongh, who married Ravel Beer Jacobs, a brother of Aletta's father; Anna de Jongh, who married Abraham Jacobs; and Betje de Jongh, married to Uri Oppenheim.
 - 23 Bosch 2005 (note 2), p. 343.
 - 24 Hendrien J. Schaap, 'Ingezonden. Groningen, 7 Oktober 1872', *Ons streven* 3, no. 42 (16 October 1872).
 - 25 Aletta H. Jacobs, *Herinneringen*, Amsterdam 1924.
 - 26 For example, in the interview: 'Vrouwen van den vooruitgang. M. Cohen Tervaert-Israëls. Geen strijdbare feministe. Dochter van een grooten vader', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 18 October 1929. A recently published biography of Mathilde Cohen Tervaert-Israëls presents her in her double role as guardian of her father's and brother's legacies and as a feminist, an active and prominent figure in the women's movement and politics: Chris van Weel, *Voor kunst*

- en vrouwenrechten: Mathilde Cohen Tervaert-Israëls 1864-1945*, Zwolle 2024.
- 27 See *MVVVK* 23, no. 7 (15 July 1919).
- 28 *Maandblad van de Nederlandsche Vereeniging voor Staatsburgeressen* 24, no. 1 (15 January 1920) (Delpher erroneously cites the issue's date as 1 January 1920; in actuality, the *Maandblad* was issued on the 15th of every month). Henceforth *MNVS*.
- 29 Israels was travelling from the end of August until the end of October 1919. During the months of November and December, he was staying in The Hague.
- 30 'dat Jacobs het resterende geld zou worden uitgekeerd'; 'beeltenis ... in het museum een plaats te doen inruimen'. *MNVS* 1920 (note 28). In the account, there is no further mention of the portrait.
- 31 'Wel bedankt voor het leenen van je portret. Het was als zoodanig niet bedoeld, maar ik heb er toch veel nut van gehad. ... Ik heb het – voor mijzelf – als voorbeeld in 't atelier gezet en als imitatie een levensgrote Aletta kop gemaakt. Dat is bepaald een chef d'oeuvre – vandaag tenminste. Nu was het vandaag een prachtige grijze dag en in ieder geval is die hoed-Aletta daarmee vergeleken, bepaald afzichtelijk.' Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-D-1984-40-I.ISRAELS-28, Letter Isaac Israels to Jan Veth, 21 July 1920. For the portrait with a hat and the bust portrait, see also Wagner 1985 (note 11), p. 129.
- 32 'van de *evolutie* van Aletta's beeltenis? En van het hoed exit?' Amsterdam Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-D-1984-40-J.P.VETH-242, Letter Jan Veth to Isaac Israels, 1 August 1920.
- 33 'Hm. Aletta, was nogal lekker met haar recensie!!!' Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-D-1984-40-I.ISRAELS-30, Letter Isaac Israels to Jan Veth, [2 August] 1920. Searches in Delpher (with all possible spellings of Albertine Draaijer-de Haas's name) and in the undigitized *Wereldkroniek*, in which Draaijer-de Haas regularly wrote, unfortunately produced no results.
- 34 The one and only time Aletta Jacobs mentions a painting in her *Herinneringen* is on the very last page, when remembering the celebration of her 70th birthday in 1924. 'Toen ik den volgenden dag dit alles overzag, vroeg ik mij verwonderd af: is het wáár dat gij dat alles hebt gedaan? Toen viel mijn oog op het schilderij dat mij was geschonken, de afbeelding van mijn ouderlijk huis' (When I reflected on all of this the next day, I asked myself in amazement: is it true that you did all of that? My eye then turned to the painting that was given to me, the picture of my parental home); Jacobs 1924 (note 25), p. 318.
- 35 'Het is niet hetzelfde, dat verleden jaar op de jaarverg. werd tentoongesteld'. 'Berichten', *MNVS* 25, no. 1 (15 January 1921). This was the second and last time that the official portrait was mentioned in the *Maandblad*.
- 36 'propaganda van welken aard dan ook'; 'wie nu beroemd was of bekend genoemd wordt, is het wellicht over dertig jaar niet meer'. Letter Geertruida Docters van Leeuwen-van Maarseveen to Mien Palthe, 17 March 1921 (note 6).
- 37 *Ibidem*.
- 38 Bosch 2005 (note 2), p. 463.
- 39 See also the ironical commentary in: 'Minister de Visser als propagandist voor het vrouwenkiesrecht', *MNVS* 24, no. 11 (15 November 1920).
- 40 Searches conducted in the archives of the Rijksmuseum (albeit only digitally) centring on correspondence or other documents related to either of the two rejections have so far produced nothing. A larger and more systematic investigation of gender and the museum's acquisition policy regarding portraits (as an art and historical museum) could perhaps reveal relevant information, including insight into the rejection(s) of the Aletta Jacobs portrait by Isaac Israels.
- 41 See note 7.
- 42 See note 7. Unfortunately, Jacobs's will and testament could not be found in its properly designated place, i.e. in the notarial archives of the Hague City Archives. My thanks to the Hague City Archives.
- 43 An analysis of the various portraits' destinations within the context of the politics of the commemoration of the women's movement in the Netherlands is beyond the scope of the present article. For an initial overview of where the portraits ended up, see Voeten 2020 (note 9), and more recently, Van Weel 2024 (note 26).
- 44 At the present time, there is insufficient in-depth and systematic research into Israels's approach to portraiture to give a final answer to this question. Art critic Dolf Welling is alone in casting Israels as a portraitist, alongside other classifications; see Dolf Welling, *Isaac Israels: The Sunny World of a Hague Cosmopolitan, 1865-1934*, The Hague 1991, p. xxiii.
- 45 'Ik dacht toen ik niets van je hoorde dat je de portretten zoo affreus vond dat je er niets van wou weten. Ik vind ze ook helemaal niet goed, ik weet nu waar 't hem aan ligt, morgen zullen we 't beter doen.' Jacqueline Royaards-Sandberg, *Ik heb je zoveel te vertellen... Brieven van en aan Lodewijk van Deyszel, Emile en Frans Erens en*

- Isaac Israëls*, Baarn 1981, with a foreword and containing annotations, edited by Harry G.M. Prick, p. 475, July 1898. See also Anna Wagner 1985 (note 11), pp. 50-53.
- 46 Anna Wagner writes: 'Van de feministe, de arts Aletta Jacobs, bestaan wel vier portretten [my italics].' (Of the feminist, the physician Aletta Jacobs, there *do* exist four paintings.) Wagner 1985 (note 11), p. 129.
- 47 Seren Nolan, 'Matrona Docta: Elizabeth Carter and Catharine Macaulay in the Guise of the Roman Matrona', in Vanacker and Van Deinsen 2022 (note 14), pp. 231-58.
- 48 'en kleepte ze daar helemaal aan naar haar decoratieve smaak'. Citation from Hollema 2010 (note 21), p. 67.
- 49 'een lap zwart laken en daaruit werd een rechte, stijve jurk geknipt, zo simpel mogelijk, zonder eenige garnering, hoewel de mode in die dagen crinolines en strooken voorschreef'. Jacobs 1924 (note 25), p. 23.
- 50 Jordanova 2000 (note 12), p. 26. West sees the frequent application of the oval with women's portraits as an expression of the very same tendency towards abstraction and beauty likewise evoked by the allegories that denied women to be seen as themselves; see West 2004 (note 5), pp. 148-49. In 1913, Lizzy Ansingh created a pastel portrait of Aletta Jacobs *en profil* on an oval canvas (Amsterdam Museum, inv. no. TA 36779), also on view in the 'hall of fame' in the Groninger Museum.
- 51 Jordanova 2000 (note 12), p. 44. Jordanova speaks of the 'head-on-hand trope of the learned man'. The impressive, but still lost portrait of Wilhelmina Drucker by Truus Claes, known to us only from a photo from *Het Leven*, is a classic example of this pose. Quite conceivably, it was Wilhelmina Drucker who first showed her unusual pose to this female painter. Apparently, it was Drucker's desire to be above all remembered for her intellectual contribution to feminism, as chief editor of *Evolutie* and as one of the movement's great thinkers; see Mark Bergsma, 'Waar is het portret van Wilhelmina Drucker gebleven?', <https://www.wilhelminadrucker.nl/nl/myriam-everard-een-natuurlijke-erfdochter/item/338-waar-is-het-portret-van-wilhelminadrucker-gebleven>.
- 52 A great example demonstrating that women, too, could use this pose to their advantage, is the portrait of the eighteenth-century German prima donna Gertrud Elisabeth Mara, in which she is depicted with her right hand resting loosely on the piano with a 'vengeance aria' resting on the music stand; see Vera Viehöfer, "'It Wasn't Enough for Me Just to Be a Singer': (Self-)Representations of the 'German Prima Donna' Gertrud Elisabeth Mara", in Vanacker and Van Deinsen 2022 (note 14), pp. 323-46.
- 53 Hollema 2010 (note 21), pp. 93-94.
- 54 For many years, (elaborate) hats were worn at international women's suffrage conferences. For the consternation arising from their abolition, see Crystal Eastman Benedict, 'A Comment', *Jus Suffragii*, 15 July 1913.
- 55 Royaards-Sandberg 1981 (note 45), p. 474.
- 56 Wagner 1985 (note 11), p. 53.
- 57 Royaards-Sandberg 1981 (note 45), p. 474.
- 58 Jacobs 1924 (note 25), opposite p. 238.
- 59 [Frans Netscher], 'Karakterschets [Aletta H. Jacobs]', *De Hollandsche Revue*, 25 February 1907.
- 60 In the text accompanying the photos Aletta Jacobs is called C.V. Gerritsen's widow, an Amsterdam city councillor who died in 1905. In combination with the badge, executed in bronze after a design by the Danish woman artist Johanne Pedersen-Dan from 1906, the photos can be dated to c. 1906-1907.
- 61 In the photo collection of Aletta Jacobs, preserved in the Groninger Universiteitsmuseum (GUM), which contains all the photos she herself had in her possession (excepting a few preserved in the Groningen City Archives), there exist other photos that might have provided inspiration for Israëls; among these are, specifically, an armchair portrait also found in her passport in 1915, and the known standing photographic portrait of Jacobs wearing a hat, which she probably had taken in advance of her 1911-12 trip around the world. Jacobs may have shown Israëls the photo during a possible visit to her home in The Hague.
- 62 [Frans Netscher], 'Karakterschets [Aletta H. Jacobs]', *De Hollandsche Revue*, 1 May 1919. When writing my biography on Aletta Jacobs, this revised reprint escaped my attention, which explains its absence from the bibliography of her work I compiled at the time; see Bosch 2005 (note 2), pp. 770-82.
- 63 At no time, incidentally, did the Dutch government bestow a 'ribbon' on Jacobs, despite her being nominated several times for a distinction; Bosch 2005 (note 2), p. 696.
- 64 As also suggested by Jessica Voeten (2020 (note 9)) in the conclusion of her article.

