



An Amsterdam Couple Reunited

Michiel van Musscher's Portraits of Johannes Hudde and Debora Blaeuw

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A common type of seventeenth-century Dutch portrait is the pendant pair showing a married couple on two identical canvases or panels. In most cases, the husband is meant to hang to the left and the wife to the right, often with the two individuals set on diagonals that converge in the centre. Sometimes such portrait pairs become separated and art historians can engage in one of their favourite sports, the reunification of estranged couples. Of course not all seventeenth-century Dutch portraits were conceived as pairs, and when there is no reason to suspect that a portrait had a pendant, why go looking for one? This was the case with Michiel van Musscher's 1686 *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* (1628-1704), which has been on loan to the Rijksmuseum from the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap (KOG) since 1889 (fig. 2). The portrait was donated to the KOG in the nineteenth century by Jonkheer Cornelis Dedel (1806-1885), a descendant of Johannes Hudde's, as an individual painting, not one half of a pair.¹ Nor does the painting itself lead one to suspect that it was ever accompanied by a pendant of Hudde's wife Debora Blaeuw (1629-1702). Dressed in typical scholar's apparel, a loose silk gown or housecoat known as a *banyan*, Hudde sits at a table covered with books, documents, writing quill and inkwell. In the background there

Detail of fig. 1

is a bookcase and a shelf with three globes. The painting belongs to the genre of the scholar's portrait – a genre that usually did not accommodate female pendants, even if the scholar in question was married. Even more than the genre to which it belongs and the portrait's provenance, Hudde's orientation in the painting, which would necessitate a reversal of the usual left/right hanging of companion pieces, has never given cause to search for a missing pendant. This being the case, it came as a great surprise to discover that a female pendant to Van Musscher's *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* does exist.

The painting in question is in a Dutch private collection and has never been published before (fig. 1). The sitter is a middle-aged woman wearing a floral-pattern dress, seated at a table on which lies a large book. She was identified in an 1858 list of the portraits that Jonkheer Everard van Weede (1834-1893) had inherited from his paternal grandparents as Cornelia Blaeuw (1631-1680), the wife of Henrick van Weede (1631-1700).² According to the 1858 list, the portrait was 'painted by Musker'.³ Examination of the painting itself revealed that this attribution is correct; the portrait carries the signature 'M v Musscher' on the plinth of a column in the background slightly to the right of centre. Also inscribed on the plinth, beneath the signature, is the



Fig. 1

MICHEL VAN
MUSSCHER,
*Portrait of Debora
Blaeuw (1629-1702),*
1687.

Oil on canvas,
57 x 49 cm.
Netherlands,
private collection.

date '1687'. Since Cornelia Blaeuw died in 1680, it prompts the question as to whether she really is the woman in this portrait.

Fortunately, Michiel van Musscher included two clues in the painting that make it possible to identify the sitter beyond a shadow of doubt, but

the viewer has to look at the work quite closely to find them. That the woman was a member of the Blaeuw family can be confirmed upon closer inspection of the vase on the right side of the painting, with a design of two putti holding a coat of arms divided into four fields with rampant lions in



two of them and a chevron and three Saint Andrew's crosses in the other two. The same coat of arms is one of four depicted in a painting that once adorned the Amsterdam municipal orphanage and is now in the Amsterdam Museum (fig. 3). The banner beneath the coat of arms in that painting states

Fig. 2
 MICHEL VAN
 MUSSCHER,
*Portrait of Johannes
 Hudde (1628-1704),*
 1686.
 Oil on canvas,
 57 x 49 cm.

Amsterdam,
 Rijksmuseum,
 inv. no. SK-C-528;
 on loan from
 the Koninklijk
 Oudheidkundig
 Genootschap.



Fig. 3
 ANONYMOUS,
*Two Orphans
 Presenting the
 Coats of Arms of
 the Four Regentesses
 of the Amsterdam
 Municipal Orphanage*,
 c. 1679-88.
 Oil on canvas,
 86.5 x 135.5 cm.
 Amsterdam Museum,
 inv. no. SB 6269;
 on loan from the
 City of Amsterdam.

that it belongs to Debora Blaeuw, who served as one of the orphanage's four regentesses from 1668 until her death in 1702. It was in this role that Adriaen Backer portrayed her in 1683 in a group portrait for the Amsterdam city orphanage (fig. 4), where, as the longest serving regentess, she is given the place of honour on the far left of the painting.⁴ Until now, this has been the only known portrait of Debora Blaeuw, but the inscription at the top of the left hand page of the open book in Van Musscher's painting leaves no doubt that this is the same woman. The large book is – as one would suspect – a Bible, open at the fifth chapter of the book of Judges, which concerns the prophetess and only female Old Testament judge, Deborah, and her defeat of the Canaanites. An intimate knowledge of the Bible is not necessary to know this, as the heading of the relevant chapter, 'Lofzang van Debora', or in translation 'Song of Deborah', is clearly visible (at least with a magnifying glass) above the left column in the book. The sitter in Van Musscher's portrait must be Debora Blaeuw, not her sister Cornelia. Incidentally, the painting is not the only work of art in which Debora

Blaeuw is associated with her biblical namesake; in a poem written at the time of her death by Laurens Bake, Amsterdam is said to mourn Debora Blaeuw's passing just as Israel mourned that of the Old Testament heroine Deborah.⁵

Debora was an older sister of Cornelia Blaeuw. Their father was the Amsterdam merchant Cornelis Michielsz Blaeuw (1591-1638), who figures as the lieutenant in Frans Hals and Pieter Codde's civic guard portrait known as *The Meagre Company*.⁶ Debora Blaeuw married three times. Her first husband was the extremely wealthy cloth merchant Bartholdus Wormskerck (1627-1653), with whom she lived at number 166 Herengracht.⁷ Five years after Wormskerck's death in 1653, she married Joan van Waveren (1613-1670), Lord of Waveren, Botshol and Ruige Wilnis.⁸ Van Waveren is the lieutenant in the company of civic guardsmen portrayed by Bartholomeus van der Helst in his famous *Celebration of the Peace of Münster* of 1648.⁹ Van Waveren would later become captain of a civic guard company. In addition to his military career, he also had a political one, serving as city alderman from 1646 and as burgomaster in 1670.

He died only twelve days after receiving the latter appointment, making Debora Blaeuw a widow for the second time.

Debora Blaeuw's third and last husband was Johannes Hudde, whom she married in 1673.¹⁰ Hudde moved into the house at number 284 Singel where his wife had lived with her second husband.¹¹ As well as his house, Hudde took over Joan van Waveren's title as Lord of Waveren, Botshol and Ruige Wilnis. Like Van Waveren, Hudde served as burgomaster of Amsterdam – but for much longer than twelve days. His first term of office was in 1672, the year before he married Debora Blaeuw, and he would go on to hold this office a total of twenty-one times. A cattle merchant by profession and a director of the Dutch East India Company, Hudde is best known for his scientific interests, which included Cartesian mathematics, optics and water management. He corresponded

regularly with other key figures of the early Enlightenment including Christiaan Huygens, Baruch Spinoza, Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz. Hudde was one of the pioneers in the development of the microscope, passing the results of his experiments with magnifying lenses on to Jan Swammerdam, who refined them further.¹² Swammerdam became a close friend of Johannes Hudde's, and when he died in 1680 he was living in a house on Achtergracht owned by Debora Blaeuw.¹³ Hudde is also known today for the system of water locks, watermills and water level markers (known as 'Hudde's stones') he developed in an effort to prevent flooding in Amsterdam and reduce the stench and pollution of its canals.

None of Johannes Hudde's scientific accomplishments are specifically alluded to in Michiel van Musscher's 1686 portrait of him. Instead, it is Hudde's role as burgomaster that is

Fig. 4
ADRIAEN BACKER,
The Regentesses of the
Amsterdam Municipal
Orphanage, 1683.
Oil on canvas,
193 x 282 cm.
Amsterdam Museum,
inv. no. SB 4844;
on loan from the
City of Amsterdam.



celebrated in this painting. The large open book on the bookstand on the table is *Hand-vesten, privilegien, octroyen, costumen en willekeuren der stad Amstelredam*, which contains the charters, privileges and local laws of the city of Amsterdam. The title of one of the other books on the table, to the right of the *Hand-vesten*, is partially legible on the spine: 'Practyck / ... saeck'. This may well be a Dutch translation of *Praxis rerum civilium*, one of the most important works on civil law, which was written by the sixteenth-century Bruges lawyer Joost de Damhouder. Beneath and to the left of the large open book is a folded letter addressed to the burgomasters of Amsterdam.¹⁴ The city seal appended to it tells us that the large document hanging over the edge of the table upon which this letter rests must have been issued by the city of Amsterdam. The second to last line on this document reads 'doen, en alle oude brieven affte nemen sonder arg, offlist in Oirconde', which was a standard sentence in deeds of conveyance. The property that is changing hands in this case must have been a ship, as the second visible sentence on the document contains the words 'havenen, wateren ende stroomen', which was also part of a standard legal sentence proclaiming that the ship changing ownership was allowed to sail and dock anywhere permitted by international maritime law. Van Musscher signed and dated his portrait of Hudde on the table carpet at lower left, under the seal appended to the document. The date here is simply the year 1686, but the last line of the document contains the more specific date 11 May 1686. It is not known whether this document actually existed. One suspects that it did not, as 1686 was not one of the years in which Johannes Hudde served as burgomaster. The date 11 May 1686 may refer to when the painting was commissioned or completed, and it may even be the case

that Van Musscher chose to include a deed of conveyance for a ship as a kind of joke; after all, the city's seal on the document shows two men in a cog, a type of medieval ship.

Van Musscher has portrayed Johannes Hudde in his role as burgomaster, although he did not hold that post in the year in which the painting is dated. The year 1686 was not an anniversary in Hudde's political career, nor in his personal life, and it seems therefore that the portrait was not painted to commemorate a special occasion. Van Musscher's *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* perhaps pleased the sitter and Debora Blaeuw so much that they decided to commission the companion piece. That it was indeed conceived as a pendant to Hudde's portrait, despite being dated a year later, is evident in the first place from the identical sizes of the two works, a format, it should be noted, that is unique in Van Musscher's oeuvre. The figure size and the compositions of the two portraits are also identical. Both sitters are seated diagonally at a table with a book or books, and a curtain partially obscures the background in both paintings. Another feature the two works have in common are the sculpture groups in mirror image positions in the background, at the upper right in the case of Hudde's portrait and at the upper left in the case of his wife's.

Inspection with a magnifying glass and good lighting reveals that the sculpture group in Hudde's portrait is made up of two main figures, the Maid of Amsterdam holding the city's coat of arms in one hand and an olive branch symbolizing peace in the other, and Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, holding the freedom hat on a pole. The lower section of the sculpture group includes a putto holding a cornucopia, a fasces, the symbol of power and authority, and Hudde's own coat of arms. While the sculpture group in Hudde's portrait stands for

the city he served as burgomaster, the sculpture group in Debora Blaeuw's portrait is a reflection of the sitter herself. The central figure is a hooded woman holding a sceptre in her left hand and keys in her right. At her feet two putti hold a stone tablet and an open book. The central figure in the sculpture group in Debora Blaeuw's portrait was most likely derived from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a handbook on iconography first published in 1593 that was translated into Dutch in 1644 and 1657. According to Ripa, Authority or Power (*Autorita o Potesta* in the original Italian version; *Aensien of Ontsaigh* in the Dutch versions) is represented by an older woman holding a sceptre in her left hand and keys in her right.¹⁵ Citing Cicero and Plutarch, Ripa explains that an older woman is used to represent Authority or Power because wisdom and acuity come with age. She is shown seated on a throne because this is the prerogative of princes and magistrates. The keys symbolize authority and divine power because it was with the keys to heaven that Christ bestowed supreme authority upon St Peter. Books are also included in Ripa's description as they represent the authority of the written word and of scholars, just as the sceptre represents worldly authority and power. The central figure in the sculpture group in Debora Blaeuw's portrait is accompanied on the right by a younger woman with her right hand covering her heart and a chalice in her left. Such a figure is also described in Ripa's *Iconologia*, where she represents Universal Faith (*Fede Catholica; Catholiek of algemeen Geloof*), a quality of Debora Blaeuw's also alluded to in the painting by the large Bible on the table.¹⁶ Behind and to the left of Authority or Power in the sculpture group is the figure of a woman holding a child, the personification of *Caritas*, Charity, an obvious quality in someone who had devoted so many years caring for the city's orphans. Of the three

personifications represented in the sculpture group, Authority or Power is the most obscure. Van Musscher's inclusion of it in Debora Blaeuw's portrait, however, was not only appropriate – the sitter was 58 in the year the painting was executed – but, of course, also very flattering. In 1688, the year after he portrayed Debora Blaeuw, Van Musscher once again made use of this allegorical figure for a portrait drawing of Johannes Hudde's cousin and fellow burgomaster, Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717) (fig. 5). In Witsen's portrait, however, the personification is not meant as a reflection of the sitter, but is instead one of four allegorical figures surrounding the Maid of Amsterdam, and therefore represents a quality of the city itself.

Fig. 5
MICHEL VAN
MUSSCHER,
*Portrait of Nicolaes
Witsen (1641-1717)*,
1688.
Pencil and brush on
paper, 462 x 335 mm.
Koninklijk
Oudheidkundig
Genootschap,
inv. no. KOG-0000157.



Debora Blaeuw and Johannes Hudde's union did not produce offspring, and Debora Blaeuw did not have any children from her previous marriages. The inventory of Johannes Hudde's possessions drawn up on 12 August 1705 lists as one item portraits of the deceased and his wife Debora Blaeuw, also deceased.¹⁷ These may very well have been the two portraits of the couple by Van Musscher, although the name of the painter was not recorded. The inventory does not mention who was to inherit the portraits and the other paintings, but from other documents we know that Johannes Hudde's cousin Anna Maria Hudde (1649-1718) and her only son Willem Gerrit Dedel (1675-1715) were his only heirs.¹⁸ As he was the great-great-grandfather of the Cornelis Dedel who donated the painting to the KOG, it was presumably Willem Gerrit Dedel who inherited Van Musscher's *Portrait of Johannes Hudde*, either directly or by way of his mother. Van Musscher's *Portrait of Debora Blaeuw* would have gone to one of the three surviving children of Debora Blaeuw's sister Cornelia and her husband Henrick van Weede. These three children,

Johan (1658-1724), Wijnanda Cornelia (1663-1727) and Hendrik Maurits (1668-1776), are mentioned, among others, as beneficiaries in documents concerning Debora Blaeuw's personal estate and the estate she had jointly owned with her second husband, Joan van Waveren.¹⁹

Van Musscher's portraits of Johannes Hudde and Debora Blaeuw have been separated for more than four centuries. They were an unconventional pair to begin with. The *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* was obviously commissioned first as an independent work, the *Portrait of Debora Blaeuw* being an afterthought that led to the reversal of the usual left/right hanging of such companion pieces. One wonders whether this deviation from the norm made it easier for the couple's heirs to separate the paintings. Whatever the case may be, Johannes Hudde now has his wife back; the woman in Van Musscher's 1687 portrait is not Cornelia Blaeuw, but her sister Debora. The two paintings are now also physically reunited, albeit temporarily, in the Michiel van Musscher exhibition on view at Museum van Loon.

NOTES

- 1 For the provenance of this painting see P.J.J. van Thiel, 'De schilderijen van het KOG', in Voor Nederland bewaard. *De verzamelingen van het Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap in het Rijksmuseum (Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek x)*, Baarn 1995, p. 56.
- 2 Het Utrechts Archief (hereafter as HUA), archive no. 201, Archief van de Familie van Weede, inv. no. 5-3, fols. 985-86, 28 October 1858.
- 3 'Het portret van Cornelia Blaauw overl. A° 1689 [sic!] vrouwe van Henrick v. Weede Generaal der Infanterie overl. 1700 Grootmoeder van Everard v. Weede Heer van Lutteke Weede (geschilderd door Musker)'.
- 4 For the identification of the sitters in this portrait see A. Blankert and R. Ruurs, *Amsterdams Historisch Museum, schilderijen daterend van voor 1800. Voorlopige catalogus*, Amsterdam 1975/79, p. 18, no. 17.
- 5 'Ter Lykstatie Van de Wel Edele Vrouwe Debora Blaauw, Echtgenoot van den Ed. Groot Achtb. Heere Johannes Hudde; Regerend Burgermeester en Raad der Stad Amsterdam', in Laurens Blake, *Mengel-poëzy*, Amsterdam 1737, pp. 130-32.
- 6 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-C-374; on loan from the City of Amsterdam. For Cornelis Michielsz Blaeuw's biography see J.E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795*, 2 vols., Haarlem 1903-05, vol. 1, p. 104.
- 7 For Bartholdus Wormskerck's biography see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 125. His father Herman

- Jacobsz Wormskerck was one of the civic guardsmen portrayed by Rembrandt in the *Night Watch*.
- 8 For Joan van Waveren's biography see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 509.
 - 9 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-C-2; on loan from the City of Amsterdam.
 - 10 For Hudde's biography see Elias, *op cit.* (note 6), pp. 528-29, and C. de Waard in P.C. Molhuysen et al. (eds.), *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 10 vols., Leiden 1911-37, vol. 1, cols. 1172-76.
 - 11 The house had been commissioned by Joan van Waveren's father from the architect Philips Vingboons in 1639.
 - 12 On Hudde's contribution to the development of the microscope see G.A. Lindeboom and I.H. van Eeghen, 'Jan Swammerdam (1637-1680) als Amsterdammer', *Jaarboek Amstelodamum* 73 (1981), p. 60, and E.G. Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic. The Shaping of a Discovery*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 22, 30-31, 61, 148.
 - 13 Lindeboom and Van Eeghen, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp. 67-68.
 - 14 The inscription reads: 'Aan de Ed. Gr. Agtbaere Heeren Burgermeesteren der Stad Amsterdam'.
 - 15 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia of uytbeeldingen des Verstands*, Dirck Pietersz Pers (transl.), Amsterdam 1644, pp. 19-20.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.
 - 17 'De portraiten van d'Heer burgemeester Hudde en Vrouwe Debora Blaau zaliger'. Getty Provenance Index, inv. no. N-413, Inventory of the estate of Johannes Hudde, burgomaster and councillor of Amsterdam, 18 May 1716.
 - 18 For the document mentioning Anna Maria Hudde as Johannes Hudde's heir see HUA, inv. no. U110a008, Notary archive, notary H. van Hees, doc. no. 105, 5 November 1708. In a copy of his will dated 1706, Johannes Hudde bequeathed his manuscripts relating to Amsterdam, except for those concerning mathematics, to Willem Gerrit Dedel. Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Particulier Archief 728, Archief van de Familie Dedel, no. 37.
 - 19 HUA, archive no. 201, Archief van de Familie van Weede, inv. no. 5-3, fols. 712-14, Will of Debora Blaeuw, January 1702; Getty Provenance Index, inv. no. N-724, Division and apportioning of the paintings etc. of the late burgomaster Joan van Waveren and his wife Debora Blaeuw, 18 May 1716.



Detail of fig. 1